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***“Baby-Hatches” in Japan and Abroad: An Alternative to Harming Babies***

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The European Conference on Ethics, Religion & Philosophy 2018  
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**Abstract**

A “baby hatch” system is prevalent worldwide. Mothers or parents, who cannot bring up a child by themselves, leave their baby in a safe space, which is contentious in Japan as well as in many other countries. Its modern origin is found in the German “Babyklappe” and the Japanese baby hatch was set up on this model. While it is multiplied in Germany, Japan has still the only one since the starting. The aim of the system is to prevent abandoning or killing a baby, but at the same time, it is regarded as a last resort to protect baby’s life and to help out a mother or parents in a difficult situation. Several measures are therefore taken to prevent parents from actually using the baby hatches. The radical criticisms for the system are that it endangers the life both of a baby and a mother tolerating private childbirth and that it does not ensure the child’s right to know of its origin. The system of “confidential childbirth” is considered one of the most effective alternatives to overcome these limitations, in which mother’s information is kept sealed up until her baby grows up. Germany has legalized this system and the Japanese hospital where the sole baby hatch is set up has started to seek to adopt it. We examine thus the context around Japanese baby hatch system comparing the German, and insist that it should be developed complemented with other systems to prevent terminating the life of a baby.

Keywords: Baby hatches, Japan, anonymous childbirth, confidential childbirth, newborn adoption

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## Introduction

A “baby-hatch” is an arrangement that has appeared in various countries worldwide<sup>1</sup> in which mothers or parents who cannot bring up a baby themselves leave their baby—in most cases a newborn—in a safe space set up outside a hospital or similar institutional building. The aim of the system is to prevent the parent from abandoning or killing the baby, which is an issue in many countries, including Japan. However, in contrast to most countries with baby-hatches, where these arrangements have become systematic, there is still only one baby-hatch in all of Japan, established in the city of Kumamoto in 2007.<sup>2</sup>

One common criticism of baby-hatches in Japan and factor discouraging the establishment of more of them is the concern that they could promote the abandonment of babies. Their supporters, on the other hand, focus on the difficult and urgent situation of many new mothers or parents and the necessity of shelter for newborns who are at risk of parental abuse<sup>3</sup>. According to them, baby-hatches are an effective and necessary alternative to baby abuse, abandonment, and killing by mothers or parents in distress. Parental distress caused by undesired childbirth, which is frequently followed by abuse, is nevertheless so socially invisible that it tends not to be viewed as a largescale problem.

In this presentation, we will address the issue and situation of baby-hatches in Japan, focusing on mothers’ or parents’ conflict around whether the child will be born and how it will be cared for, which tend in Japan to be considered as private affairs, rather than viewed from a broad or institutional perspective. We will see that baby-hatches can be a viable alternative to abandoning or killing a baby, as long as they are closely interconnected with other systems like anonymous/confidential childbirth and newborn adoption and are reserved as a last resort for mothers or parents in need.

## Baby-hatches in Japan and Germany

While the baby-hatch has a long history in Europe, going back to the Middle Ages, its modern origin is found in the German “Babyklappe.” The first baby-hatch in the world was set up in Hamburg, Germany, in 2000 by a private social welfare organization to help address the problem of abandoned babies, of whom there were around a thousand every year in Germany. Its purpose is to secure the life of the baby, preventing it from being deserted or harmed<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> There are similar systems, for example, in Germany, Italy, Austria, the Czech Republic, India, Latvia, Poland, Switzerland, the United States, China, South Korea, Russia, and South Africa. cf. the *Mainichi Shimbun*, May 17, 2018, Tokyo, Morning, p. 15; Saegusa 2008.

<sup>2</sup> It was reported in February 2017 that a group was going to set up a baby-hatch in Kobe, which if realized would have been the second one in Japan. However, this group reportedly abandoned the plan in the end, as they could not secure a doctor to be permanently stationed at the maternity home where the baby-hatch was to be placed, while assigning a permanent doctor was a requirement of Kobe city for administrative approval of the baby-hatch. That group later started a hotline service in place of the baby-hatch, but is still working toward the establishment of a baby-hatch in the area. *The Mainichi Shimbun* 2017, February 7; *The Asahi Shimbun* 2018, June 5.

<sup>3</sup> There occur over 70 deaths as a result of child abuse a year these days in Japan. About 60 % of them, excluding murder-suicides, are reportedly under 1-year-old. *The Asahi Shimbun* 2016, September 17.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Hasuda, & Kashiwagi 2016, Chap. 2; Tagiri 2016, Chap. 2.

The director of the Jikei Hospital in Kumamoto, Taiji Hasuda, inspected the Hamburg Babyklappe and shortly thereafter set up the first Japanese baby-hatch, named Crandre of Stork (*Konotori no Yurikago* in Japanese), commonly known by the name of Baby-Postbox (*Akachan-Posuto* in Japanese) at his hospital, in 2007, adopting some devices of the German system: keeping a proper temperature in the container to protect newborns, a door that is only openable from inside once it is closed by the depositor, a letter left in the box addressed to the mother or other depositor urging them to leave some remembrance or information about the baby, and so on<sup>5</sup>.

Both the German Babyklappe and the Japanese Baby-Postbox are regarded as a drastic resort to protect the baby's life and to help out a mother or parents in a difficult situation. These facilities are therefore accompanied by several measures to prevent parents from actually using the baby-hatch, in particular counseling services for pregnant women and their partners who are experiencing conflict. Jikei Hospital also has a 24-hour hotline service, and counselors can reassure mothers in conflict about seeing an obstetrician at the hospital or can introduce them to the adoption system<sup>6</sup>. In addition, many Germany institutions with Babyklappen are practicing anonymous childbirth, in which a mother can give birth without revealing her identity.

As a result of these practices, in many cases mothers or parents in trouble have other resources as alternatives to leaving their babies in a baby-hatch, which nevertheless remains as not only a safety measure but also a means to connect these parents to support. It is of course desirable for people managing the baby-hatch that it be used as little as possible. Even after a baby is left at a baby-hatch, the staff try to identify and contact the baby's parent(s), not to accuse or penalize them but to urge them to reconsider and to offer alternatives. In Germany, once a baby is left, the Babyklappe puts a personal ad in the paper to appeal to the depositor to contact the facility. The baby-hatch in Kumamoto is designed such that an alarm sounds to allow hospital personnel to rush to it after the baby is deposited and ideally intercept and speak to the depositor before s/he goes away. Of course, the depositor's will to remain anonymous is prioritized most, but at the same time, staff try to assess and be sensitive to the depositor's hopes, fears, and situations. Through such efforts, quite a few depositors abandon their anonymity, having found a safe and reassuring alternative. As a result, cases in which depositors remain completely anonymous are much rarer among users of baby-hatches than the public often imagines—about 25% in Kumamoto. Indeed, in Germany, about 50% of mothers go back to pick up their child after seeing the ad in the newspaper<sup>7</sup>.

Anonymous and confidential childbirth, are also growing trends in Germany. In the former, mothers can give birth with full anonymity, while in the latter they leave their and their baby's sealed up information to facilities for future reference of former babies. It is reported, however, that even in the former about 90% of mothers who practice anonymous childbirth ultimately relinquish their anonymity as a result of care and counseling during their stay before and after childbirth in shelters for mothers and infants in need<sup>8</sup>. In contrast to confidential childbirth, which is established in law in Germany, baby-hatch systems and anonymous childbirth are situated in a legal gray

<sup>5</sup> Tagiri 2016, Chap. 2, 3.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Tagiri 2016, Chap. 4; Tagiri 2017, Chap. 6.

<sup>7</sup> Tagiri 2016, Chap. p.63; Hasuda, & Kashiwagi 2016, p.121, 123.

<sup>8</sup> Takahashi 2009, p.88-90; Kashiwagi 2013, Chap. 3.

zone in both Germany and Japan. In contrast, some countries in Europe and most states in the US have legalized them<sup>9</sup>.

The largest contrast between the German and Japanese baby-hatch systems consists in their extent, which is also related to the degree of administrative commitment. In Germany, Babyklappen now exist in all parts of the country—around 100 in all. While Babyklappen are run by private institutions, the German government supports them financially and has supplemented and supported their work with the legalization of confidential childbirth. In Japan, in contrast, no second baby-hatch has appeared in the 10 years since the establishment of the first, and the Japanese government continues to refrain from being actively involved in the issue. The hospital has received so far 137 babies at the baby-hatch<sup>10</sup>, and they were supposed to be brought from all over the country, since it is an only baby-hatch in Japan, although Kumamoto is situated at the southern end of Japan. However, this does not mean that there is no movement or development. In the nongovernmental sector, hotlines for pregnancy conflict and facilities for receiving (prospective) mothers and infants in need are gradually increasing in Japan. Moreover, it was reported in December 2017 that Jikei Hospital is considering introducing confidential childbirth, which it discusses with government, because the plan will require the cooperation of health authorities, including new legislation<sup>11</sup>.

### **From Anonymous Childbirth to Confidential Childbirth**

As suggested, leaving a baby anonymously at a baby-hatch is viewed as a last resort for a mother or parents who have no choice. Among conditions that might affect the matter of anonymity, the most significant are the child's right to know his origin and the security of both the mother's and the baby's life. These have given rise to interest in establishing some form of anonymity for parents in law outside the baby-hatch system, which has been done in Germany with the legal establishment of confidential childbirth arrangement<sup>12</sup>.

This issue has always been a core criticism of baby-hatches, worldwide, as a movement in favor of the child's "right to know" even against the parents' wishes has gathered momentum and as inquiries and appeals by former "hatch babies" have multiplied; in France, for example, this became a large organized political movement<sup>13</sup>. It is frequently reported that children who do not know who their parents are experience a lack of secure identity. Even some nurses involved in the baby-postbox in Kumamoto show anxiety about lack of information of an abandoned baby to provide to the former babies or foster parents and doubt the legitimacy of maintaining full anonymity of depositors. Hasuda, the founder of the Japanese baby-hatch and director of Jikei Hospital on the other hand, insists that the life of a baby should be prioritized over its right to know its origin, since naturally one cannot appeal one's rights if one is not living in the first place.

<sup>9</sup> *The Asahi Shimbun* 2018, April 25; *The Asahi Shimbun* 2007, August 31; Kashiwagi 2013, Chap.5; *The Mainichi Shimbun* 2011, August 13; Saegusa 2008.

<sup>10</sup> As of March 31, 2017. *The Asahi Shimbun* 2018, May 28.

<sup>11</sup> *The Asahi Shimbun* 2017, December 15.

<sup>12</sup> Hasuda, & Kashiwagi 2016, Chap. 2; *The Asahi Shimbun* 2016, March 9.

<sup>13</sup> *The Asahi Shimbun* 2007, August 26.

The second main criticism regarding the safety of mothers and babies is more pressing. Most mothers who leave their baby at a baby-hatch have not had checkups in hospital during pregnancy, and quite a few of them give birth at home or in a hidden place like a car by themselves. This is obviously dangerous for both mother and baby. Therefore, contacting these women before their give birth and offering them a safer environment for childbirth is important.

These are salient reasons why establishing some level of anonymity in the childbirth system may be seen as better than using the baby-hatch approach, as noted. With regard to the child's right to know its origin, however, confidential childbirth is a better approach than fully anonymous childbirth. It was this recognition that pushed Germany to introduce confidential childbirth into law in 2014, while fully anonymous childbirth is still kept for mothers who wish keenly their anonymity for the reasons like rape or adulterous relationship. The precise difference between the two is that in anonymous childbirth, a pregnant woman can give birth in a hospital and leave the baby in hospital with total anonymity. Of course, hospital personnel will talk with her during her stay to suggest alternatives such as adoption or bringing up the baby by herself with support;<sup>14</sup> that is one benefit of anonymous childbirth as compared to the baby-hatch. In confidential childbirth, on the other hand, a mother leaves her own and her baby's information only at a pregnancy conflict counseling center, which keeps it sealed up until the child has reached a specific age (16 in Germany) and only if the child demands its disclosure. In this way, a person's right to know his or her origin is assured. That is why confidential childbirth is more desirable than anonymous childbirth, and concerned institutions in several countries (for example Switzerland and South Korea<sup>15</sup>) are considering a transition from anonymous to confidential childbirth, as is the Jikei Hospital in Japan, as noted previously. The Japanese approach begins with the same principle as the German, the child's right to know its parentage.

### **Newborn Adoption**

As seen above, a baby-hatch system is intrinsically interconnected with that of anonymous or confidential childbirth—and both are part of a series of supports for mothers or parents and infants in need. If we expand our scope to consider child-rearing environment, we can add one more important system to that series: newborn adoption. A safe, pleasant, homely environment is the best place for babies to be placed and grow up. However, there is a remarkable contrast in this regard between Germany and Japan. In Germany, most of all babies left at Babyklappen are handed over to adoptive parents while still babies, after being placed with temporary foster parents for 8 weeks to allow the depositor to reconsider their decision<sup>16</sup>. In Kumamoto, in contrast, most hatch-babies are once entered in infant home after child consultation centers took over them from Jikei Hospital, and only a few months or years later, some of them are taken in by adoptive or foster parents. However, more than 20% of them are forced to remain in a children's homes, not with individual

<sup>14</sup> In Germany, 20% of women hoping to give birth at facilities with Babyklappen relinquished their anonymity because of hospital personnel's support before giving birth and 70% of women did so after giving birth. Tagiri 2017, p.141.

<sup>15</sup> *The Mainichi Shimbun* 2018, May 17; *The Asahi Shimbun* 2018, April 25.

<sup>16</sup> Ochi 2008, p.62-63; Kashiwagi 2013, Chap. 4.



adoptive parents<sup>17</sup>. Newborn adoption, which does not go through children's home, is still rare in Japan, although some child consultation centers<sup>18</sup> or non-governmental groups,<sup>19</sup> including Jikei Hospital, have promoted and supported newborn adoption, especially in the cases where they are consulted by pregnant women who got pregnant with undesired babies.<sup>20</sup> In the background, there are Japanese customs or policies which have been children's home-oriented. Indeed, among the left children in Japan in general, about 90% of whom grow up in a children's home, as compared to only 50% in Germany<sup>21</sup>. Nevertheless, the government has recently changed policies to promote fostering and adoption in preference to placement in a children's home<sup>22</sup>.

## Conclusion

Baby-hatches, implemented in combination with interconnected systems surrounding baby-hatches such as anonymous/confidential childbirth and newborn adoption, baby-hatches can be an effective and necessary means to address the issue of abandoned babies. Certainly, despite the undeniable downsides of baby-hatches, there are certain cases where only a baby-hatch can save a baby's life, due to the mother's wish for full anonymity or to various difficult external circumstances or maternal mental or emotional distress. This fact also shows us that it is necessary for Japanese baby-hatches' future development to also support the development of interlocking systems, especially confidential childbirth and newborn adoption, and to elaborate closer connections among them, like in Germany, given that these other systems are currently scarcely present in Japan.

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<sup>17</sup> *The Asahi Shimbun* 2018, April 25.

<sup>18</sup> The child consultation center of the Aichi prefecture leads this trend. The model of newborn adoption developed there is known as the "Aichi Style". cf. Yamanta, & Yorozya 2015.

<sup>19</sup> Concerning the increase and the problems of non-governmental groups dealing with Newborn Adoption, see *The Asahi Shimbun* 2017, September 5.

<sup>20</sup> Tagiri 2017, Chap. 8. As for hatches-babies, newborn adoption is more difficult due to the lack of biological parents' consent, which is legally required. However, this requirement is reportedly going to be revised in the near future. *The Asahi Shimbun* 2018, May 25.

<sup>21</sup> Tagiri 2016, p. 123; *The Asahi Shimbun* 2016, March 9.

<sup>22</sup> *The Asahi Shimbun* 2017, August 3; *The Asahi Shimbun* 2017, January 21.

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## ***Can Science and Religion Ever Have Anything in Common?***

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### **Abstract**

The Age of Science, Darwinian evolution and methodological naturalism have created an understanding about our world, in which it is understood to have come about through purposeless, material processes. Some believe this has pitted Science squarely against the things of faith and religion. But new scientific discoveries and the reinterpretation of existing phenomena by some scientists have upended traditional views on both sides of the argument. This is due to the discovery of a possible “informational” or even digital nature to our world. Prominent scientists and philosophers such as Max Tegmark (MIT), Nick Bostrom (Oxford University), Brian Green (Columbia) and James Gates (University of Maryland) just to name a few, have written and spoken about such findings, causing consternation for many. Indeed, Dr. Bostrom even imagines a future in which post humanoid beings run ancestor simulations on unimaginably powerful computers of the future and that we might inhabit one of these. In such a case, there would be no material, and we would find programming and mathematics governing everything about our universe. What does all this mean? Such findings completely change the discussion about Science and Religion and the dialogue between them. This paper explores these changes and the evidence responsible for this astonishing reinterpretation of the nature of reality. The implications for our identity as human beings are enormous and are explored in this paper.

Keywords: Informational universe, digital, physics, science, religion, evolution, computers

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## Introduction

Early in the Twentieth Century, the first quantum scientists such as Albert Einstein, Neils Bohr, Ernest Rutherford and many others made the most extraordinary of discoveries. Their findings began to upend common assumptions about the nature of reality in ways never before dreamt of. Such shocking concepts included things like – everything solid is mostly empty space; or that subatomic particles could be both waves and particles at the same time; or that they could simultaneously be in two places, or that all matter is simply made of energy. Or worse yet, that two photons could travel in opposite directions and be separated by very great distances, yet simultaneously respond to a stimuli on applied to only one of them, as if they were invisibly connected, as if distance did not matter at all. Such things were too fantastic to be believed. They also violated the Laws of Physics as people understood them, then and now, because such things were and are physically impossible. So the laws of Quantum Physics were assumed to apply only to the subatomic world and not to the macro world in which humanity inhabits. They were too weird and impossibly strange to have anything to do with our world and reality. Some have pointed out that we are made of things from that level, so we cannot separate them. Yet separation seems the easiest way to handle the discrepancies, so that is how these things are still handled today.

As the Twentieth Century progressed, this strange science was not dismissed but strongly reinforced. Furthermore, it was found that the mathematics of Quantum Physics and the understanding thereof, were absolutely necessary in order to make the computers and other small electronic devices of the late Twentieth Century. With the invention of computers came new ideas about reality. This is because all those impossibilities of the subatomic world are not at all impossible at all if the world is computer –like. Indeed, various scientists such as Ed Fredkin of Princeton University, Seth Lloyd of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and others began to propose that that is the nature of reality. Science fiction writer Isaac Asimov wrote popular novels based on this concept, such as “I, Robot,” (Asimov) in which he imagined a world filled with intelligent machines. He envisioned a world in which the nature of reality was computer-based long before computers were even commonplace. With the advent of the Twenty-first Century came even more theories and discoveries that showed our reality to be strongly informational or even digital in nature. But what if it were true? What does that portend for us? This is where science and the things of faith have a strange collision.

## Background

Ernest Rutherford conducted an experiment in which he shot electrons at gold foil, that showed that everything that we perceive of as solid is really 99.99% empty space. This was completely unexpected. It also cast an odd light on the nature of reality. Since gold is heavy and dense, he expected that as electrons hit the foil surface, some or maybe all of them, would bounce off. Instead most of them passed through as if nothing were there. This was due to the fact that each atom’s electrons are at such a ginormous distance from their incredibly tiny, dense nucleus. While the main takeaway was about the nature of the nucleus, the enormous distance between it and the electrons resulting in vast quantities of empty space in everything is just as

relevant to the nature of reality. We cannot detect the empty space, because of its dispersal is at such a small level. But reality in this case, is not what we think.

Niels Bohr also discovered odd things that further challenged the “normal” nature of reality. As he discovered that electrons travel around the atomic nucleus in clouds, called orbitals, he also found them to be strictly “quantized.” That means that an electron can be at certain levels only, in their atomic orbits. They can change levels, but are never observed to be transiting between them. This is physically impossible. Imagine yourself being transported from the airport to your home, without traveling to get between these two locales, and that it happened instantaneously. A great idea, which might be wonderful in concept but does not fit within the construct we have for how the world works. He famously said of his findings, put in modern English, “Anyone who has studied Quantum Physics and is not completely blown away by it, has not understood it.” (Bohr, 1913) The tight conformity to specific mathematics showed how dependent reality is upon them.

Erwin Shroedinger is famous for his thought experiment about a cat, which also upended the staid, stable image of our universe. Imagine that a cat and a bottle of poison are placed into a box and it is closed up. The stopper on the bottle of poison has been loosely placed, so if it were knocked over by the cat, its contents would spill out, killing the cat. So the question is, is the cat dead or alive? The answer is yes, simultaneously, for both possibilities. This thought experiment portrays truths about the electron. When forced to go through a gate, either to the left or the right, the electron will be found on both sides. (Gribbin. 2011) This is something known as superposition. Impossible, but not, because it happens. So they can in two places at the same time, something else physically impossible.

Albert Einstein is famous for many things, many of which shook the nature of reality. In one case, he and two other researchers, Nathan Rosen and Boris Podolsky showed that two particles of light (photons), could leave a light source traveling in opposite directions and could be “entangled,” or connected at the quantum level. Imagine these particles are one hundred kilometers apart. Yet if one of them was deflected, with say a strong magnet, the other one would also deflect as if they were invisibly connected, as if distance did not matter. (MIT Technology Review) Again, this is physically impossible, but not, because it happens. How could it be? He called this “spooky action at a distance.” But another thing he was famous for was his reflection on the nature of reality. He said, “It seems as though we must use sometimes the one theory and sometimes the other, while at times we may use either. We are faced with a new kind of difficulty. We have two contradictory pictures of reality; separately neither of them fully explains the phenomena of light, but together they do.” (Harrison, 2002) Einstein later derived what is probably the most famous equation of all time,  $E = mc^2$ , in which he correctly related Energy to mass times the speed of light squared. In this model, matter and energy are completely interchangeable.

These are just a few historical examples from Quantum Physics, which could be said to have a common thread – they describe the things, which we, and our world are made of, yet all of them are physically impossible. These things remained a mystery and a paradox until the Age of Computers dawned. For many the mystery remains. For others, the resolution comes perfectly if ones accepts the findings that there is a

digital or informational nature to our universe. Because, such things as the discrete mathematics of the electrons' energy levels are not a problem in a computer.

A few years before the quantum scientists made their amazing discoveries, Charles Darwin published his revolutionary book, "On the Origin of the Species," (Darwin, 1959). In it he proposed the theory of evolution through common descent and natural selection. This book upended the religious perceptions of a universe created through Divine means. It also released a firestorm of controversy which roils through Western and world societies to this day. It pitted the things of faith against the things of science, as if they were somehow enemy combatants over the nature of reality.

Darwinian evolution evolved into neo-Darwinian evolution in which the universe and all things in it happened through purely material, mechanical means, without any need for divine intervention. Little particles must surely have bumped together by chance, becoming ever more complex, acted upon by the laws of gravity and other physical and chemical laws, and then acted upon by natural selection. Through many small changes or mutations over billions of years, voilà, here we are. No God is needed in this scenario because none is required would be the ten words or less version of this theory. This theoretical and philosophical bent, known as methodological naturalism, materialism or neo-Darwinian evolution has ruled science and scientific academia for many years. But in the ensuing thirty or so years, some major problems have cropped up, because of the informational nature of reality.

### **Current theories**

As science progressed, new theories came to light in Quantum Physics. In the 1970's, plans were made to smash atoms together to see what happened to them. Powerful "atom smashers revealed that sure enough, atoms broke down into a veritable zoo of other smaller particles. Things like quarks, leptons, muons, gluons, bosons, and others for a total of 28 different kinds, were identified. Some of these subatomic particles did odd things. They would pop up and suddenly disappear, then show back up again. Where did they go? This and other experimental work led researchers to the concept that the subatomic world must consist of more dimensions than just the three of space, and time, also known as "spacetime." Although people in Einstein's time first theorized it, finally there was evidence.

Today, there are many who think that our universe is highly multi-dimensional and for that matter, not the only one. Evidence has emerged showing that in order to support life, it appears that our universe is "finely tuned" to support life. (Gonzalez and Richards, 2008) To counter this idea because of its theological implications, and perhaps also to help deal with the universe's other dimensional nature, many researchers have supported the Multi-verse theory (M Theory). It could be possible that new universes are popping into existence throughout the black emptiness of space. Some of them could be interwoven with our own or intersecting it in various ways. Or they could be shadow, anti-matter or parallel to our own. (Greene, 2011) But whichever happens to be the case, things like this could not be said to rule out concepts from religion and faith. That is, that there seems to be an extra-dimensional nature to our own existence. And that there could be other-dimensional places, things and entities. The scientists do not claim this, but almost all religions do. But it would not be implausible at this point, just taking the scientists at their own word about these



other universes interacting with our own. And, all of these theories require mathematics and equations so precise that a mathematical structure to the universe could not be denied.

Another theory, which contributed to the idea that mathematics undergirded everything was String Theory. In this model, all the subatomic particles that make up protons, neutrons and electrons, which make up all of matter have an underlying level in which everything is made of vibrating strings and or membranes of energy. At this level, Einstein's equation,  $E = mc^2$  takes on complete reality. That is, all matter resolves into nothing but energy. But it does so according to tight regulations and mathematics. So matter does not even exist at all, being only energy. Where did this energy come from?

Theories like this find their best resolution in a mathematically constructed, even programmed for existence. In other words, all the equations do not just describe the things of the universe they could actually be said to generate it.

Ed Fredkin, the first computer professor at Princeton University, believed that the universe must certainly function as a super enormous computer of some sort, because of the mathematics. He recognized that all the quantum weirdness issues could only be possible if things were the result of computer algorithms. This is perhaps a strange way of reconciling the quantum world with our reality. But he is joined in this opinion by a growing body of other researchers.

One scientist, Max Tegmark of MIT, has theorized for years that our universe is made of mathematics. Indeed, he has written a book entitled, "Our Mathematical Universe, My Search for the Ultimate Nature of Reality." (Tegmark, 2014). Every year in June, as part of the World Science Festival, a panel of august scientists is assembled for the Isaac Asimov Annual Debate. In 2016 the topic was. "Is the Universe a Computer Simulation?" As one of the panelists, Dr. Tegmark likened our existence and our reality to a computer game. As he put it, "Imagine you were Mario in the Super Mario video game. If you started to poke around at your world you would discover that it is entirely made of mathematics. That's what we find when we look at our reality. So how do I know that I am not in some sort of video game?"

Another panelist in the same event went on to say something even more extraordinary. Dr. James Gates, a theoretical physicist from the University of Maryland, discussed the finding of what he termed, "error correcting codes" which he found embedded within the equations for the super-symmetry of subatomic particles. (Lewin, 2016) He also discussed their implications. He went on to discuss the fact that computer codes such as these would be unlikely to just form randomly, but are a type of very specific digital data. He then speculated about the idea that if we are in a simulation, then if the computer [of the universe] were not damaged, then things like resurrection, and eternal life were possible because the programming could be re-run. Furthermore, he added that, "This begins to break down the wall between science and religion..."

Other scientists looked to the cosmos and saw that a graininess permeates all the background of space. The best explanation proposed was that our universe might be "pixelated." Indeed, experiments have shown that scientists could not rule out the

possibility that we exist in a holographic world, created by, for lack of a better term, through programming. In other words, it feels real, but its facets only show up when we are looking at them. As Dr. Brian Green of Columbia University put it, we could exist in a flat, two dimensional world that has the appearance and feel of being three dimensional, but is nothing more than a type of virtual reality. (Greene, 2014) A virtual reality would be similar to a computer simulation or game even.

## **Implications**

Indeed, at this point one can see that if the universe is computer-like, happened to be the case, it poses a number of problems for both clerics and scientists alike. For one thing, in such a model there is no material. So the scientific idea that purely material processes were responsible for the creation of our universe, would be decimated. No material, no materialism, one could say. Rather, it would be the case that our world was and is the deliberate creation of some programmer(s).

On the faith side, this idea completely upends what people in any religion, think of as God. In the Judeo-Christian version of things, God is seen as this all powerful, super intelligent spiritual being, often thought of as perhaps wearing a flowing white robe. But in this scenario, one would have to acknowledge him as being a master-programmer as well. This is not what we are accustomed to thinking. He is old, predating the formation of the universe, but he programs?

If such a digital reality were the case, the issues multiply almost exponentially here. One must grapple with issues like, who is this (are these) programmer(s)? Is the programmer a post humanoid hacker, three hundred years into the future, running an ancestor simulation? This would be consistent with Dr. Bostrom's philosophical paper. (Bostrom, 2006) Or, would he be the God of the Bible, having created this thing we call reality out of pure energy and perhaps programmed it to come into existence in a certain way? Does the computer of the universe, in either scenario, have memory? Most major religions hold with the idea of an after-life and a judgment, after exiting this reality. Indeed, Christianity holds that God came into the world he created, as the Son of God, then allowed himself to be the atonement for all of us, and for our sins by dying on a cross. If one believes this, and accepts Jesus as a personal savior, they are said to be freed from consequences of those sins at the judgment. So an existence outside of this one is clearly identified.

Then there is the question of what are we after all, anyway? Are we spiritual beings inhabiting a created existence that seems real to us, but is actually a simulation meant to test us in some way? Or if the hacker dude scenario were the case, would we just shut off at the end of this life, our program having run and finished? So one can see that the complications, and sticky issues are many and complex. And more than that, people like the way their own reality seems to them, so this would represent a huge shift in thinking for many people, if they chose to believe it. Sometimes people cling to beliefs even when there is very substantial evidence to the contrary. So rocking people's reality boat could be cause for a lot of resentment and angst.

And finally, if this were true, then neo-Darwinian evolution, methodological naturalism and material explanations are out, because all the material is the result of programming and mathematics. This would overturn many commonly held constructs

in the science world. Imagine that the programmer made the simulation to have the appearance of history, but in fact that was an illusion? Or perhaps, set the programming in place and let it run, as things evolved, but according to a program?

## **Conclusion**

There is an old saying that goes like this, “Men are like waffles, but women are like spaghetti.” This means that for men, everything is “waffle-ated,” or that everything is in boxes and categories. For women, all things are part of one whole. This has implications for the ways in which science is done. Science tends to be male dominated and so it is set up in waffle form. Each group of scientists in each specialty and subspecialty pursue knowledge, discover things and give scant heed to what others are finding in different other fields. They are in their own “box”, drilling down to find out the truth in their area. However, questions about the true nature of reality demand that all fields look together to find it. That would be a very female approach, if the saying has any merit. If science findings really do support a digital, computer of the universe, simulation like reality, it would seem that everyone should be concerned about this. Because who is the programmer? What kind of relationship or knowledge should we have about who they are, what is their nature, etc. Where could we get such knowledge? This is where science and religion collide, and really do share common ground. How can we tell how it is really? Some have suggested that by looking at prophetic references in holy texts, that they should provide answers. Did the things predicted pan out? Indeed, Bible scholars have devoted much energy to identifying hundreds of things, which have happened as written and predicted. On an individual basis, everyone must make their own assumptions and decisions. Ultimately, searching out the nature of the reality we inhabit should be of the highest priority. Is it how we think it is? And how can we tell? These are essential but enormous questions, which people have been trying to answer for all millennia. But to say that science and the things of religion have nothing to do with each other can no longer be said to be true.

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***Radical Acceptance as a Pathway to Peace***

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**Abstract**

Dialectical behavior therapy (DBT) was designed in the 1990s for the treatment of Borderline Personality Disorder. Central to DBT is the belief that “reality is interrelated and connected, made of opposing forces, and always changing. (Rizvi et al,2013,p.73). DBT pivots on the concept of “radical acceptance”, wherein a client is encouraged to accept herself as she is in the present moment without shame, and to accept responsibility for her actions without either descending into catatonic dejection or lashing out at others in frantic attempts to preserve an ego-ideal. “Therapeutic change can occur only in the context of acceptance of what is, and the act of acceptance itself is change.” (Heard and Linehan, 1994, p. 62) The client develops a sense of stable, authentic autonomy and agency, by strategies that require the maintenance of divergent points of view in dynamic and creative tension. As the client becomes better able to accept and tolerate different perspectives, she finds freedom from internal pressures and conflicts, and achieves stability and growth in interpersonal relationships. In the spirit of the conference theme, “Surviving and Thriving in Times of Change”, this paper explores how the dialectical process utilized in DBT intersects with philosophical and religious inquiry in the pursuit of peace.

**Keywords:** Acceptance, Borderline Personality Disorder, Buddhism, Dialectical Behaviour Therapy, DBT, emptiness, Nishida, Nishitani

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## Introduction

The philosophical roots of DBT are deep and extensive; this paper will only provide a very brief introduction. I will focus here on the concept of emptiness as articulated in Mahayana Buddhism and interpreted by two members of the Kyoto School, Kitaro Nishida (1870 – 1945) and Keiji Nishitani (1900 – 1990). From this perspective, radical acceptance of reality has to begin with a consideration of the ground of that reality as emptiness.

### I. The radical acceptance of emptiness as the ground of being

The philosophy of emptiness is central to Buddhist teaching, and it is nearly impossible to comprehend rationally. The formal logic of rationalism has a binary framework. But the ontological structure of the Mahayana tradition understands reality as one unity, devoid of any conceptual binary distinctions. So, for example: “The gradual transformation of what is into what ought to be is dissolved in the contemplation of the eternal truth reflected equally in every moment.” (Abe, 1983, p. 53). The elimination of distinctions evacuates the categories of both form and content. Being and not-being co-emerge in one seamless unfolding.

Nishida articulated emptiness as the concrete universal from which...individual differences emerge in their unmitigated particularity. This emptiness, the ultimate *eidos*, was a *topos* in which beings emerge, exist, and evaporate...Nishida's emptiness is neither nothing nor the suffocating void of limitless expansion in which things are at best desolately scattered. Rather, it is the ultimate foundation of reality that transcends ideas of ‘being’ and ‘non-being.’ (Baek, 2008, p. 62.)

Nishida asks us to move away from the traditional categories of formal logic towards

the awareness of a horizon where the confrontation between being and nonbeing is transcended in favor of their co-emergence. Because of this dependence of being on nonbeing and eventually on emptiness, Nishida endorses the principle of impermanence, while rejecting the self-sufficiency of being itself. (Loc. Cit.)

In this understanding, whatever exists does so *only* by virtue of distinction. Nothing has any intrinsic existence. If emptied of the qualities provided by form and content, a phenomenon or event becomes a matter of temporal or spatial location. “Physical events bear temporal relations (befores and afters) to each other, and there is nothing more to occurring at a certain time than having certain of these relationships to other things...a spatial/temporal position is simply a locus in a field of spatial/temporal relations. That is, it has only a relational existence.” (Priest, 2009, p. 468)

If one accepts the fundamental premise of universal interconnectedness, then whatever exists, exists only as a matter of relation.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This statement brings to mind Kant’s *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*.

To have self-existence, in this interpretation, is to exist independently of anything else. By contrast, things that have relational existence are simply loci in a field of relations, and are individuated by that location.(Priest, 2009, loc. cit.)

The implication is that, like everything else, the condition of human existence is both fundamentally both empty *and* relational. This presupposition will be very significant in the context of DBT.

Nishida's refutation of the self-sufficiency of a being is [also] relevant to the issue of identity. The identity of a being is determined not by what is believed to be existent within itself but by its dialectical relationship with the opposite... The entity and its opposite are intertwined through the principle of inverse correspondence... (Baek, 2008, p. 38)

The existence of any one aspect of being is established through its interrelation with other aspects of being. Both for Nishida and for DBT, the tension between these aspects of being is part of the dynamic play of ongoing co-arising. This assumption is reinforced by the relational facet of enlightenment: "the understanding of Emptiness is not an event outside time, but a continuous emptying in which moral action plays a significant, indeed a crucial, part." (Abe, 1983, p. 54) I will explore the moral aspect more fully in a moment.

Knowledge of emptiness is considered the gateway to enlightenment; emptiness of self is both the method and the end result. Experience of emptiness entails an embodied and all-encompassing awareness of an unending process of interconnected and interdependent co-arising that comprises all phenomena, including thoughts, feelings, persons, and conditions. Because this process includes every possible event and every possible observer of/participant in every event, its occurrence permeates existence even as it simultaneously destroys any delimiting determination or categorization. Thus, it is not possible to speak of being inside or outside of the process, or of being either a perceiver thereof or an object perceived.

When Gautama Buddha preached dependent co-origination, he emphasized that everything in the universe without exception is co-arising and co-ceasing; nothing is self-existing or unchangeable; this mundane world is in *samsara*, in the endless process of transmigration...(Abe, 1983, p. 55)

What it is possible to say about emptiness in Buddhist terms is that it is the most fundamental way to conceive of existence, that out of which everything else arises and into which everything returns. The argument begins with the premise that nothing which exists has any permanence, but is instead in a constant process of change from one state to another, whether this is considered as a movement from potentiality to actuality, or from material to spiritual substance, from absolute to relative, from universal to particular, or on any other conceptual continuum. According to this paradigm, no event or phenomenon has no more substance or value than any other. All states/events/phenomena are equal, and are equally empty of permanence. Thus, emptiness is conceived of as the real (or structural) condition of being.



Does this statement reflect an epistemic or an ontological perspective? Buddhist scholars are divided on this question. We shall see later that even this categorical distinction is somewhat beside the point in terms of the internal effects of the concept of emptiness. If such a question has meaning at all, it would seem that a rather equivocal (or at least ambiguous) answer is the most helpful:

Even the object of the most sincere devotion is to be regarded as 'empty,' for if every object of apprehension (and desire) is a constructed entity, then one's 'god' is also constructed in part by mental fabrication and is an illusory 'absolute foundation' based on one's own views. Thus every structure of apprehension is denied validity in itself and granted 'dependent validity,' i.e., empty, phenomenal validity. (Streng, 1967, p. 165)

This is not to say that all knowledge is relative. Rather, all knowledge is dependent (or rather, interdependent):

Human understanding is not simply the preferring of statements judged to be true. It also involves prior experience and insights into experience. It is not enough to demolish viewpoints with the hammer of emptiness. One must also understand the genesis of viewpoints from differing patterns of experience and culturally engendered sets of basic ideas. (Keenan, 1996, p. 61)

Knowledge, like everything else, is part of the ceaseless flow of being. The dynamic activity of being cannot be essentialised or reduced, for example to the status of either an object or a subject. Rather, all phenomena are continually shifting their status, appearing as objects or subjects, phenomena or events, at different times. Since nothing is fixed, knowledge becomes a matter of experiential awareness, which can be approached, but never fully achieved. This is a non-teleological process; Buddhist scriptures such as the Heart Sutra are seen as ontologically descriptive: this is how things are.

Tucked within the description, however, is the answer to a second and equally fundamental question: how should things be? Or, as one might ask: how should *I* be? For enlightenment necessarily leads to action to reduce the suffering of others.

Buddhist ethics is established in the realization of true Emptiness...Buddhist Emptiness is not merely an ontological ultimate reality devoid of practical commitment. The insight into Emptiness is always inseparably connected with ethical action. (Abe, 1983, p. 56ff.)

As the self becomes aware of the actual nature of reality, it is freed from the illusions of desire which are the cause of all suffering. Instead of being enslaved to the satisfaction of desire, hope, and will, one is able to see events and phenomena in their proper perspective, as part of the shifting cloud-scape of being. The Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path outline a comprehensive life-system for facilitating this process by focusing all one's attention on emptying oneself of desire in order to transcend an egocentric perspective on life.

Renunciation of desire, however, does not mean emptying life of meaning; on the contrary, as awareness of the illusory nature of desire arises, need and desire are replaced with peace (the absence of desire), wisdom (the absence of the need for certitude), and compassion (the absence of the need for satisfaction of ego drives). *Sunyata* (the Sanskrit noun describing the condition of “emptiness”) is simultaneously the journey and the destination.

In this awakening to true Emptiness, the relativity or distinction of everything is most clearly and definitely realized without attachment to it. The dependent co-arising and co-ceasing of everything in the universe is fully realized just as it is, without attainment and suffering. (Abe, 1983, loc. cit.)

By this logic, enlightenment is a necessary outcome of emptiness: as the self transcends the bounds of the ego, it is no longer trapped in the need to be *an-und-für-sich-selbst*, striving overagainst otherness. Rather it becomes, for the first time, truly *für sich*: for itself. The liberated self can now experience itself as it always fully was: within and a part of everything else.

In its positive and affirmative aspect, in which Emptiness empties itself, ultimate truth expresses itself in the form of ethics and ethics is thereby reestablished in light of Emptiness. ..In Nagarjuna the ontological realization of Emptiness is always connected with practical and soteriological concerns. (Abe, 1983, p. 58)

One must be empty even of the desire to achieve Nirvana. For enlightenment

is not a quiet and static state of mind beyond the flux of *samsara*... but rather a dynamic function of moving freely back and forth between so-called *samsara* and so-called Nirvana as seen in the case of the Bodhisattva. The perfection of wisdom...is not realized in Nirvana *beyond* *samsara*, but in the *midst* of *samsara*, in which compassionate activities are going on through the abandoning of Nirvana. (loc. cit.)

Understanding the way things are enables the liberated self to be as it should be, or rather, to express itself in greater alignment to how things actually are. Enlightenment results in compassion, which has to be expressed in the world of (seemingly) other people.

In Nirvana...true wisdom and true compassion are not two but one. Buddhist ethics and history are established in this dynamic movement of true Nirvana. Nirvana in Mahayana Buddhism is therefore not merely the goal of the Buddhist life but also the point of departure from which the Buddhist life properly begins. (Abe, 1983, p. 59)

In Nishida's terms, the emptying out of self is only positive, both for the 'self' and for 'others':

The impermanence of one's self should be understood not as the deprivation of identity but as one's openness and capacity to accept the

other as one's own self, the basis of deepest empathy. For Nishida, the deepest form of empathy is devoid of conditioned feelings and emotions; consequently, it is open to fully accept what is offered by the world. (Baek, 2008, p. 38)

The clinical implications of this concept will become apparent when the goals and methods of DBT are introduced. I will now turn to a second, equally important aspect of emptiness: embodied dialectics.

## **II. The dialectic of opposites, holding contradictions, reciprocity as full subjectivity**

There would be little value in talking of self-emptying if one were dealing with mere abstractions. Drawing on insights from existentialism and phenomenology as well as Zen, Nishida maintains that the emptiness of enlightenment can only be realized through the body. He speaks of this as 'immersing oneself in the bodily subject', of coming to apprehend the unity of all things through the limits presented by an individual body.

Sensation is concerned not with measuring outside phenomena based on predetermined concepts, ideas, and values but with unconditionally accepting phenomena as one's own self. For Nishida, this was a form of knowing superior to reflective judgment...This type of sensational immersion, when the capacity of one's self to accept what the world offers reaches a limit, is creative. (Baek, 2008, p. 39)

With echoes of Fichte, Hegel, Levinas and Badiou, Nishida offers an understanding of the self that emerges through the body as it perceives and experiences the world. It seems that one is always already transcending the world even in the activity of passing through it.

In fact, the sensational immersion of the 'pre-I,' in which the 'I' in confrontation with the world has not yet emerged, is not an unreceptive, static union with the environment but, according to Nishida, already a higher form of activity. In each immersion, the perceiver faces a test of capacity in terms of being united with what the world offers in abundance.<sup>2</sup>

As self and world undergo this intermingling process, (not of sublation, in Nishida's understanding, but rather of mutual transformation), both change and are changed. The process is equally catalytic on all sides:

The reciprocity between what the perceiver can take in and what the world offers activates movements of the body toward the creation of things into which the surplus is invested. The work created in this fashion is not a representation of the concept of the author but... an extension of the bodily subject that accommodates the surplus that the

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<sup>2</sup> Baek, loc. cit. One might think, in this context, of Fichte's 'self-positing I' and Hegel's *An und für sich*.

sensing body alone cannot fully accept. Through its sensational capacity and through its act of creation, the body actively engages with the atmosphere of a setting and as such actively knows it.<sup>3</sup>

The ‘knowing’ is a creative phase of being, through which the self-as-sensing-body finds points of intersection and divergence with the world in which it is immersed, becomes aware of them, and makes certain choices with regard to them – all the while noting and relating to the desires to which they give rise, without being caught up in them.

For Nishida, it is precisely through this process that identity is formed, within emptiness, as the play of opposites. The elegance of Nishida’s thought provides a beautiful bridge between idealism, phenomenology, and Zen.

Emptiness as the profound phase of the ‘I’ is a concrete universal that allows the emergence of the particular ‘I’ in dynamic resonance with the environment. This twofold structure of the ‘I’ presents a unique relationship between the universal and the particular. One’s identity emerges *not through the intentionality of the ego* but...through the self-delimitation of the infinite and eternal emptiness into a finite and temporal content. The non-differentiation of emptiness is articulated into the palpable sense of the ‘I’ in codependent origination with its opposite. (Baek, 2008, p. 39)

Following the tradition of Mahayana and Nagarjuna, emptiness is utterly relational; not only is it perceptible only through the self/world, its existence is dependent upon it, and completely independent of the ego.

Nishida’s concrete universal does not have its own independent reality “apart from the particular entities in which it manifests itself.” Therefore, it is Absolute Nothingness, “a total lack of reality in and for itself.” Thanks to this nature of the universal, the ideal, such as eternity or infinity, is felt only through the real, while the real emerges as the function of self-individuation of the ideal. (Baek, 2008, p. 40)

This formulation sets the Western traditions of self/other, subject/object, being/nothingness, universal/particular to naught, and provides a completely new and liberating framework for development. Again, the therapeutic implications should be readily apparent.

In accepting unconditionally what a setting offers, the body actualizes one’s emptiness, the deepest phase of self. This body is the very agent for an experience that is ineffable, numinous, and awesome. (Baek, 2008, p. 41)

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<sup>3</sup> Baek, loc. cit. Here I am reminded of Levinas’ concept of subjectivity as being achieved through one’s becoming subject to the other, and Badiou’s idea of the event through which the subject is constituted.

The encounter with the other-as-self-and-world becomes not a struggle for mastery, but rather an invitation to ecstatic union, which takes place in the eternally unfolding now.

At the moment when incomprehensible types of phenomena such as extreme atrocity, love, and religious experiences are presented, ego has no choice but to disintegrate because of its incapability to apprehend them in an emphatic union... the truest form of emphatic union takes place only when one opens up his or her selfhood to fully accept what the setting offers. This acceptance is anything but a passive submission; behind this acceptance is the highest form of will to renounce one's ego, not the will to impose one's egoistic value upon the world.<sup>4</sup>

Keiji Nishitani extended and deepened his teacher's thoughts on emptiness and ontology, with a particular interest in the positive potentialities latent in nihilism. Like Nishida, Nishitani wanted to see how the threads of existentialism, phenomenology, and Heideggerean thought might be meaningfully woven together with Buddhist insights.

In Nishitani's own words: "On the one hand, nihilism is a problem that transcends time and space and is rooted in the essence of human being, an existential problem in which the being of the self is revealed to the self itself as something groundless." (Cited in Shoto, p. 142)

Like Nietzsche before him, Nishitani did not consider nihilism as a completely negative phenomenon, but rather as a window onto a new horizon of understanding, or as a catalyst for growth. While Socrates taught that philosophy begins in wonder, for Nishitani, it begins in the encounter with finitude, which is a source of sorrow and existential angst. At the very least, the idea of a limit gives rise to the desire to transcend it. Nishitani speaks of this desire as the source of both philosophy and religiosity.

The idea of emptiness is a space that opened up by philosophy penetrating into religion, going right through it, and exploding religion from the inside. The space of freethinking and wisdom, opened up within religion by passing through religion, is precisely emptiness.

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<sup>4</sup> Baek, loc. cit. By emptying oneself of will, then, one attains the deepest possible transformation. As an aside (to be followed, I hope, in a subsequent paper), the philosophers of the Kyoto School are not the only 20th century scholars to approach the same ideas. One could follow a similar thread through the work of some later phenomenologists and post-modern theologians. "For instance, in his idea of a 'saturated phenomenon,' Jean-Luc Marion redefined the subject into a receiver from the world rather than the transcendental 'I' who constitutes the world before himself or herself. In this redefined status of authorship both by Asian and by Western thinkers, the subject exists not as the 'I' of the manipulative master but as the 'pre- I' of empathy who is open to what is offered by the world. The creation of a work conducted by the 'pre-I' compensates for the limitations of the self through its boundless emphatic capacity."

Since there is nothing that can obstruct it, this space of thinking has infinite width and depth. Nishitani then calls this freethinking, which advances while overcoming everything that could obstruct its view, *butsukojo* (going beyond the Buddha). (Shoto, 1999, p. 144)

The same process must be undertaken in healing from suicidal despair; as the poet Robert Frost said, the only way out is through.

What is closed in within itself can be opened only from the inside. And to open a thing from the inside becomes possible only by reaching the very own-reality of the thing. Emptiness is the path to that self-reality of things. (Shoto, loc. cit.)

Transcendence of horror, of despair, of the lack of meaning which seems to be the end result of nihilism, can be achieved only by going through the very heart of emptiness: going to the core and finding that it is empty. That is to say: there is no way “out”, only acceptance of what is.

There then lies the reason why the overcoming of nihilism is said to be effected in emptiness. The transcendence worked in emptiness does not consist in offering being over nothingness, life over death, meaning over meaninglessness. To the question, “When the three worlds are without Dharma, where to look for the heart-mind?: emptiness does not answer by presenting the heart-mind somewhere. It answers, “The heart-mind is unobtainable,” and thereby finds the answer and peace of mind within the question itself. (loc. cit.)

The answer lies in acceptance of the impossibility of reaching an answer, and finding peace therein, letting go of the need to know and to master, transcending the needs of the ego (as we saw earlier) by realizing the true nature of reality.

Precisely therein lies the standpoint of emptiness, says Nishitani. It is the path of escape from meaninglessness and nihility by a total acceptance of nihility as nihility and meaninglessness as meaninglessness and by going deeper and deeper into nihility and meaninglessness. Faced with the question, “Where to find a reason to live?” emptiness truly finds the reason to live and salvation in the place of “*ohne warum*”: in order to heal loneliness, it “goes into the desert; it finds the “point of no heat” in the very midst of heat. (loc. cit.)

The road to emptiness, then, becomes the road to transformation. At the coincidence of all opposites, the goal is for the self to accept the play of opposites and its own empty nature, transcend the ego, and so step into freedom.

### **III. The fundamental principles of Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT)**

At this point I would like to present a very brief introduction to the treatment modality known as Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT). Marsha Linehan began to organize this modality in the early 1990s for the treatment of a notoriously difficult population: women with Borderline Personality Disorder, many of whom had considered or

attempted suicide.<sup>5</sup> Over the past twenty years Linehan's work has been widely extended to treat many other conditions, and is now considered a mainstream modality, alongside cognitive behavioural therapy, traditional 'talk' therapy, and psychoanalysis.

Linehan describes DBT as a "principle-based treatment with protocols...The principles, from which the strategies and protocols flow, are derived from the three paradigms underlying DBT: acceptance, change, and dialectics." (Swenson, 2017, p. 2) While DBT originated as an offshoot of behaviourism, the population for whom it was developed was often too reactive and volatile to tolerate rigid intervention strategies aimed at changing self-destructive behaviour. Linehan realized that in order for behavioural techniques to be effective, they needed to be grounded in compassionate and non-judgemental acceptance (of symptomatic behavior) by the therapist, coupled with awareness, tolerance, and acceptance (of those same behaviours) by the patient. "The cultivation of acceptance and awareness was grounded in the principles and practices of mindfulness." (Swenson, 2017, p. 22)

In response to clinical demands, Linehan realized that a third paradigm was also necessary. To supplement and balance change and acceptance paradigms, Linehan began to incorporate a a third set of interventions into the treatment. "These interventions, which helped to counter rigidity, impasse, and opposition with flexibility, movement, and synthesis, were based in dialectical philosophy and practice." (loc. cit.) The clinician is encouraged to use her judgement to 'flow' between the three paradigms, following the patient's lead as to which one is most useful in any moment. That being said, despite the overarching goal of psychotherapy, in DBT

the acceptance paradigm should nearly always remain present and influential, even if in the background when pushing for behavioral change. A pervasively validating environment is valuable in countering the client's pervasive self-invalidation, facilitating attachment and the leverage it provides, and supporting change-oriented work. (Swenson, 2017, p. 29)

Of necessity, this paper will only be able to provide a very cursory glimpse into this primary paradigm. In DBT, acceptance is understood as being composed of five interrelated principles:

1. Present-moment awareness
2. Nonattachment
3. Interbeing
4. Impermanence
5. "The world is perfect as it is."

Taken together, these insights provide the foundation for the entire treatment modality. Present-moment awareness encourages the client to focus on the here-and-

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<sup>5</sup> It is beyond the scope of this paper to describe why persons suffering with BPD present significant clinical challenges. Suffice it to say that the condition is not treatable through medication alone, and its pervasive symptomatology includes severe resistance to change. For more information, see Choi-Kahn et al, 2017.



now, rather than either ruminating on the past or perseverating on the future. Mindfulness exercises are utilized to foster attention on one's own internal process, observing feeling states without judging or interpreting them, and learning to tolerate distressing emotions.

The concept of nonattachment is clearly derived from traditional Buddhist teaching; the First and Second Noble Truths remind us that alleviation of suffering is attainable only through coming to peace with suffering. Nonattachment has the specific value in DBT of helping the client to maintain some measure of objectivity towards the emotions that are triggered by events or people in her environment. Nonattachment, thus understood, can be extremely helpful in reducing reactivity to stressful situations. A painful emotion must first be acknowledged (by attention to and awareness of the present moment). Only then can obtain a perspective on that emotion, and then perhaps move on to releasing one's attachment to it.

Apperception of interbeing is also a result of mindfulness practice, through which one can begin to sense the interconnected nature of reality and the delusion of the individual ego. In this principle we find a very clear point of intersection between traditional Buddhist teaching and DBT:

The concept of *mine* dissolves into the recognition of *interbeing*, of profound interdependency. For Buddhist teacher Thich Nhat Hanh, this leads to an understanding of the term *emptiness* in Buddhism: As he explains, "In fact, the flower is made entirely of non-flower elements; it has no independent, individual existence. It 'inter-is' with everything else in the universe...*Interbeing* and *emptiness* go hand in hand. (Hahn, 1975, cited in Swenson, 2017, p. 39)

The notion of interbeing allows the client to gain a new self-understanding: not as someone who has disordered thoughts or violent tendencies, but rather as someone in whom such thoughts arise. Disidentification with the illness can be the beginning of healing.

Interbeing has another crucial salutary effect. Breaking down the boundaries of self may allow the client to see the therapist in a different light, as someone in whom similar thoughts may arise. Many people with BPD have difficulty making and maintaining relationships. They lack empathy, and have difficulty perceiving the effects that their actions have on others. Taking the perspective of interbeing, they may become capable of reciprocity, perhaps for the first time.

Many who suffer from severe mental illness – whether primarily depressive or anxious -- experience feelings of hopelessness because their emotions are so overwhelming as to seem intractable. In such cases, the Buddhist understanding of impermanence can be extraordinarily therapeutic. Taking in the idea that each moment creates a new reality which offers new opportunities for change gives the patient new cause for hope, and so may motivate the client to accept new interpretations and try new strategies.

The final principle of the acceptance paradigm is that "the world is perfect as it is." While at first glance this may seem more akin to Voltaire's *Candide* than to

Buddhism, in essence this declaration is simply a restatement of the principle of karma. Everything is as it is now because of what has gone before. It could not be any other way. This means that one's actions have consequences which result in new conditions.

For persons with mental illness, who often feel a lack of agency in the face of their internal state, the idea that they can actively change their future by making different choices is nothing short of revelatory. Thus, to say that "the world is perfect as it is" is to affirm that reality operates on a system of cause and effect *in which they can play an active part*. The principle of impermanence means that everything is always changing; the perspective that reality is structured to shift in response to one's actions can provide a stimulus for taking control of one's own life.

I must leave aside discussion of the (therapeutic) change paradigm of DBT, but will conclude with mentioning the dialectical paradigm which is so closely aligned with the first two sections of this paper.

Dialectical thinking – thesis and antithesis coming together to create a new thought (synthesis) -- is grounded in the principles of the acceptance paradigm. Both thesis and antithesis must be brought to awareness in the present moment, acknowledged and accepted without attachment from the standpoint of an empty ego [the Buddhist 'no-self self'], and recognized as impermanent and capable of being changed. "Reality is made up of inevitable oppositions; the 'truth' is found through synthesis of the valid kernels of opposing positions." (Swenson, 2017, p, 249) Reality is composed of conditions which are continually giving rise to their opposites: life/death; light/darkness; good/evil. In order to bring the self into alignment with the way things are, the patient must learn to accept and tolerate contradictory positions. This work flows from an understanding of reality as interrelated and inherently relational, as embodied in both client and therapist.

## **Conclusion**

I hope that this brief introduction to DBT inspires further thought about the points of convergence between Buddhist philosophy and psychotherapeutic theory. Both, after all, share the same goal: the alleviation of suffering. For both streams of thought and practice, acceptance provides a pathway to inner peace and lasting change.

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