

Radical Acceptance as a Pathway to Peace

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The European Conference on Ethics, Religion & Philosophy 2018
Official Conference Proceedings

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.¹

¹ 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.²

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

² 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.³

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)

³ 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.⁴

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 Heideggerian 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.

⁴ 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 nihilism by a total acceptance of nihilism as nihilism and meaninglessness as meaninglessness and by going deeper and deeper into nihilism 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.⁵ 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-

⁵ 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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