T. J. Chösang
Stony Brook, N.Y.

INTERFACING PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGION

A Borderline Issue in Religion Studies

Interface means : "A surface forming a common boundary between adjacent regions."[1] That surface in my paper will be the problem of mirroring as a specific instance of the issue of representation which constitutes the common boundary between the adjacent regions of philosophy and religious studies. But I will translate that problematic of the surface into the problematic of an appropriate philosophical methodology. Clearly, to conceive of that which interfaces between two regions, i.e. philosophy and religious studies, as a surface, a representation, a mirror image, commits us implicitly to an ontology quite different from one implied by thinking of it as method in the sense of the Greek *methodos* or way (from *meta*: in accordance with, *hodos*: way). Or, to draw on a tradition elaborated later on in this paper, Tibetan Buddhism, for a path, *mādhyama pradhipa*,[2] for example, to have the power to conjoin two different regions, it must do so via a depth dimension that remains inaccessible to an inquiry which maintains its locus on a surface, within a system of representations, or the mere play of signifiers or, for that matter, which maintains a conception of method as representation or mirroring along with its specific tools: description and analogy.[3] A path, a *methodos*, can maintain its power to conjoin only from within an ontology of radical change and a critical attitude which thoroughly undermines the conception of eternal essences, self–sufficient entities, or autonomously existing objects, traditionally believed to be the objects of mirroring and representations. It is precisely a conception of representations as mirroring eternal essences which irremediably(within that conceptual universe)separates method from content in

---

1. *The American Heritage Dictionary* of the English, Language, (Boston: 1981)
2. The middle path between *samsāra* (cyclic existence) and *nirvāna,* nihilism and funda-mentalism. This was first made explicit by Nāgārjuna in the 1st century A.D. in the *prājna pāramitā* literature in India. See Jeffrey Hopkins, *Meditation on Emptiness,* (London: 1983), p. 399.
3. In *The Mirror of Production* Jean Baudrillard deals with the same problematic but from the point of view of production and re-production.

such a way that the representations or signifiers no longer refer to anything real, because the representations themselves, or a system of them, are taken as real. Whenever mirroring of eternal essences or the sacred, or some milder, more faded, version thereof is assumed as a central methodology for mediating understanding, the unreal is necessarily mistaken for the real because the signified, meaning, or the referent is collapsed into the signifier or representation and hence, the language of representation (even when they are called symbols), mirroring, and surface here falls within the domain of the unreal. This is so because when the central methodology becomes this descriptive enterprise, often disguised as so-called hermeneutics, there is no room for criticism. The claims to completeness and totality for eternal essences and the universal aspect of their representations,[4] as well as an extension of this conceptual model : the universal God, or absolute spirit, as world–historical consciousness or activity[5] effectively repress any possible critical dimension. Truth becomes conformity to an *a priori* system whose parts are primarily connected by *analogia*[6] and which advocates a priority of literalness in such a way as to limit the system to only one differential criterion to pick out right from wrong : exclusion/inclusion based on conformity/non-conformity on all analogical levels (i.e. psychological, political, social, physical, spiritual) of the structure, measured against precisely that literalness of substituability. Thus the system is tautological, and the extent to which it refers only to its own representations as real, it is unreal and empty with respect to that which purportedly is represented by the representations.

The way this conceptual strategy usually gets expressed in the domain of religious studies is by the analogical structure of macrocosm and microcosm, where the individual is seen to mirror the structures of the cosmos.

---

4. The Cartesian model where the *ego cogito* has to be turned into a representation, i.e. from thinking to thinking thing at the end of the second meditation.

5. The Hegelian model which is still today the primary one for Protestant theologians and is becoming so even for liberation theologians as well. See Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, (New York : 1973), p. 153 ff.,

6. *Analogia*: there have been two different ways this tool was used in the history of philosophy. Aristotle used it mainly as abstract, mathematical relation of proportionality, but the Scholastics used it as, often not very well justified, means of substitution on the basis of abstract likenesses. Here I am referring to the latter use. For an interesting treatment of this problematic see "The Origins of the Doctrine of the Analogy of Being" by Pierre Aubenque, *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal*, Vol. II, 1, New York 1985. I might add that this substitution theory of *analogia* presupposes an ontology of autonomous things which can be known in their entirety so that they qualify for substitution.

Examples of this formulation of the problematic abound in the literature of religious studies. I will limit myself here to a few excerpts from Charles Long in which are excellently summarized the position of the extremely influential Chicago School of Mircea Eliade and which show how this conceptual model of simple isomorphism between micro and macrocosm has become the exclusive, and thus dominating, one–implicitly conforming to the Western scientific demand for universality, and complete objectivity of methodology — for describing the mytho/conceptual strategies of immensely divergent cultures :

"The generalizing and integrative function of the cosmogonic myth may also be seen in the manner in which the basic structure of the myth provides a model for architectural forms and social organization. Mircea Eliade discusses this aspect of myth in **The Myth of Eternal return.**"[7]

"Among the Navahos the cosmological symbolism is assimilated in the form of a system of correspondences which relate directions, colors, mountains, plants, parts of the body. . ."[8]

". . . correlation of myth and social order are to be found among Winnebago and Omaha Indians and the tribes of central Brazil."[9]

"H. Frankfort arrives at the same conclusion regarding the relationship between cosmogonic myth and social structure in Egypt and Mesopotamia."[10]

In the Dogon myth "we are able to see how it is possible for man to mirror the cosmic order in his biological structure."[11]

And referring to Eliade's book on Indian yoga: "The elaboration of this cosmo–biological ordering reaches its peak in the Indian discipline of yoga. In this discipline the biological organs become symbols of the universe. . ."[12]

---

7. Charles Long, *Alpha : The Myths of Creation,* (Chicaco : 1963), p. 25.
8. *Ibid.,* p. 25.
9. *Ibid.,* p. 26.
10. *Ibid.,* p. 26.
11. *Ibid.,* p. 27.
12. *Ibid.,* p 27.

Similarly, Tibetan Tantric Buddhist *mandalas* which have the above mentioned, extremely rich Indian heritage as one of their cultural backgrounds, were conceived by early European interpreters like Guiseppe Tucci, Anagarika Govinda, Detlef Ingo Lauf etc. as "maps" of the universe, the macrocosm mirrored in the microcosm of an individual human being who has become a Buddha. Unfortunately, this artificial Western conceptual framework has become the unquestioned constituent of the academic tradition which interprets texts from these traditions in accordance with such mis-representations and which, moreover, claims to have privileged access to them by way of their universalistic methodology.

I want to show now by means of a concrete example of an actual situation the problems which arise from assuming a univocal position with regard to a methodology believed to be universally applicable to all intellectual traditions and all cultures at all times. I do not claim to have a solution to this problem, but by assuming a critical stance from within Mahāyanā Buddhism of the Tibetan Kadampa tradition[13] I hope to show how that tradition must necessarily escape the kind of universalistic method based on systems of representations. This actual situation I am referring to is a religious studies seminar at a large north eastern university in the United States, spring 1985, which focused on the subject of macrocosm and microcosm in the major religious traditions. The framework for the seminar was outlined as follows :

Hypothesis : Religious traditions that discuss cosmology, whether in the context of myth, theology, or philosophy, consider the human being and the universe as mirror images. "Man is a small world, the world a great man".

---

13. Founded by Atisha Dipamkara (d. 1054) and elaborated on by Tsong Khapa (1357–1419), then called the Gelugpa tradition. This is the tradition of the great Tibetan monastic universities Gaden, Drepung, Sora, and Tashi Lhunpo and also of the Dalai Lamas. It claims to teach emptiness, the central Mahayana Buddhist notion of reality, exactly in accordance with Nāgārjuna and his lineage of disciples. Critical stance means something radically different in this tradition than in the Western academic one, since criticism means first and foremost self-criticism. One cannot legitimately criticize another's position without being actively engaged in a systematic critique of one's own possible and actual misconceptions concerning knowledge of the way things are. But this is a complicated topic with which I will deal in a separate paper.

Questions to be considered :   Do microcosm and macrocosm embrace the whole of reality? In other words, to what extent does a "metacosm" have to be taken into account?

In what sense do the individual things that exist in the macrocosm also exist in the microcosm?

How many "worlds" or "levels of being" are found in the macrocosm, and how do they correspond to what is found in the microcosm?

Why is the microcosm "central" in the universe, other things being "peripheral"?

In what sense does knowledge of the cosmos imply knowledge of the self and vice versa?

What is the "epistemological relationship" between the microcosm and the myriad creatures of the macrocosm?

How does human knowledge differ from other kinds of knowledge?

How is the specific nature of the human will connected to the microcosm's centrality?

How do the special characteristics of the microcosm open the door to salvation, deliverance, enlightenment, etc.?

What privileges and responsibilities does human centrality entail?

In what sense must the microcosm "serve" other creatures?

How are the "conquest" of nature and the "ecological crisis" related to the microcosm's centrality?

To what extent can all these questions be reduced to the same question?

This framework is a very clear example of how *the way* the problematic is articulated, or *the way* the question is phrased already commits the inquirer to a whole set of assumptions. Here the emphasis on mirroring as the central axis of the universe, so to speak, carries a tacit commitment to things as essences which permits them to be reflected by representative structures.

To expand here a little on the questioning process itself, it was Heidegger who most recently reminded us of the different kinds of questions that can be asked on a fundamental level, and who pointed out the epistemologi-

cal and onthological consequences of the different *ways* of posing a question. He says that "Why is there something rather than nothing?"[14] is *the* metaphysical question posed by Western intellectual life. I suspect that this question could have become dominant only against a cultural background that has made the belief in *creatio ex nihilo* universal, and where this universalistic belief has become an unconscious cultural sedimentation. One of the consequences of asking this metaphysical question is a preoccupation with fixing beginnings and ends, with "things" and their whatness, their essences — to which our history of ideas (or should I say representations?) bears ample witness. In the process of fixing beginnings and ends the emphasis gets placed on static essences as the real in things which requires that they be delineated and fixed absolutely, and this requires a systematic denegration, forgetting, suppression of change. Change here becomes a formal calculable relation externally connecting autonomous objects, rather than a more fundamental existential field which testifies to the impossibility of delineating or fixing absolutely any object whatsoever. It seems that the language of essences and mirroring cannot adequately account for change in the non-formalistic sense as elaborated, for example, in the Chinese philosophy of the I Ching and in Taoism.[15]

This question "Why is there something rather than nothing?" could never have been asked in a Buddhist culture, for example that of Tibet from the 8th century A.D. onwards. In that culture, generally speaking, the universe, existence, mind, life are seen as beginningless. The universe does have a beginning in time, but it was not created out of nothing. Nor was it created by one being. It came into being in dependence on a multiplicity of factors and causes. Its creation, existence, degeneration, and extinction are ongoing from beginningless time. In other words, there is a multiplicity of universes going on simultaneously, all at different stages of development. This conception of the universe has its roots in the ancient, very rich Indian Hindu tradition, and there is a modern correlate in the 'big bang' theory. Universes come into and go out of existence according to

14. Martin Heidegger, *Einfuhrung in die Metaphysik*, (Tübingen : 1973), p. 1.

15. *I Ging, Das Buch der Wandlungen*, transl. by Richard Wilhelm, (Düsseldorf: 1956), see especially the commentary *Da Dschuan* or *Hi Tsi Dschuan*.

Hellmut Wilhem, *Eight Lectures on the I Ching*, transl. by Carry F. Baynes, (Princeton : 1960), pp. 13–23.

Henry Wei, *The Guiding Light of Lao Tzu*, (Wheaton: ILL. 1982), especially pp. 129, 157, 160, 181 etc.

Buddhist 'cosmology' in a way parrallel to an individual's being born, living, growing old, and dying, and going through subsequent cycles of embodiment of one form or another.

From the perspective of the surface, or the locus of representations in the Western academic tradition one could say that this is a kind of mirroring between microcosm and macrocosm. But from the depth perpective of emptiness* that account can neither be true nor real. If that non–linear parallelism between the cycles of the universe and the individual can be called mirroring at all, it is of a peculiar kind, since it is emptiness which is the central axis here — if it can be metaphorized this way — around which the Buddhist universe revolves, or upon which it rests (depending upon which perspective is employed in discourse).

So the question "Why is there something rather than nothing?" is inconceivable to a Mahayana Buddhist, because there is always already something and existence is beginningless. Rather, the question asked from within the particular Tibetan cultural context I am speaking of here would be, "Is it possible to achieve enlightenment?"[16] This can only be answered by an experience of emptiness, a direct intuitive cognition of it, and not merely by a systematic conceptual schema or a system of representations of it. Nor can it be answered with the "one essence" of all things, since that too testifies to a mere conceptual understanding, not yet imbued with direct insight. But a direct insight *does* depend on a conceptual understanding of it, and that depends on an incredible intellectual agility which requires long years of hard work of a study and training. And it is still very difficult, then, to sort out the real from the unreal or rather, to put it into more Buddhist terms, not mistake the unreal (i.e. the system of signifiers) for the real (i.e. the dependently arising nature of signifier and signified)**

But I should point out that most Buddhists would pose as their most fundamental existential question not this one, but one that points in a different direction: namely, given that we are already embodied and have problems and fears, knowing that we will get old and have to die, given the whole gamut of wordly dissatisfactions, because things do change and can therefore never yield lasting satisfaction, how can I escape this constant pain

---

16. See the Seraje textbook on madhyamika by Jetzün Chökyi Gyaltsen (untranslated).

* For a more detailed account of the Mahayana Buddhist notion of emptiness see this paper pp. 328–330.

** what is real in our context is things seen in their empty nature, see pp. 328–330.

and dissatisfaction? The answers to this way of asking the question are numerous methods. By themselves they will not yield direct experience of emptiness. But without the experience of emptiness one is firmly locked into the dissatisfactions of cyclic existence. Only a direct experience of emptiness has the power to break out of the cycle of mechanical–like repetitive existence. So this is the slow path, since all that these combined methods can do is generate the massive energy needed to ask the question with the greater risk.

Few dare ask the above question "Is enlightenment possible?" from within the Buddhist cultures. In the Tibetan tradition those who do ask it are considered to be of sharp mind (intellect) and embarking on the dangerous and fast road.[17] If this question does not generate constant doubt with respect to one's habitual way of looking at things, remembering that things are not what they seem to be, it will not bear fruit, namely, the understanding of things, people, concepts etc. as empty of fixed identities, or that they are not other than appearances. Thus the extent to which the question is kept alive and fresh — where fresh means unanswerable by an essentialist position — to that extent enlightenment is possible, because the doubt, or the critical attitude, is what epistemologically connects eventually with the wisdom of emptiness. In some of the Korean and Japanese Zen traditions living authentically in the *koan* or existential question is simply called "the great doubt."[18]

But those who have really embarked on the fast road are rare. Since they are few, they are seen as an élite by others. Since ignorance, for which an understanding of emptiness is the proper antidote, lacks the discernment of the real, many people aspire to the path of those few without proper pre-

---

17. Usually it is the Tantric vehicle within Mahayana Buddhism that is seen as the fast and dangerous one. This is indeed the case. But to practise Tantra without a direct experience of emptiness will never yield the desired results. To practice Tantra without the proper prerequisites, one has recourse only to a simple isomorphism of the kind criticized in this paper. It is the slowest way to go. Training in the understanding of emptiness is to be seen as a preparation for Tantric practice neither of which can be successfully accomplished by a complacent, non-critical mind. See Tsong Khapa, *Tantra in Tibet* (with an introduction by the present Dalai Lama), George Allen & Unwin, London : 1977), especially p. 141.

18. See Stephen Batchelor, *The way af Korean Zen* (Weatherhill, Tokyo 1985) and Keiji Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, (University of California Press, Berkeley), p. 16 to give only two examples.

requisites, and take pride in possessing this profound insight. Thus they institutionalize that path by simply copying or attempting to mirror the real élite, which does not claim to be an elite, of course. Mirroring in this context comes out of intellectual dishonesty and laziness. This happens in any culture. But what happens to the questioning process is that the original question comes to be forgotten, and along with it the ontology of change. Subsequently, they become suppressed and then inquiry becomes mechanical, a mere manipulation of signifiers.

Some questions, then, belong to their respective cultural configurations and it makes no sense to raise one set of questions of one culture in a totally different cultural context in the same way. It is from the way the questions are posed that often we can discern whether or not they merely reflect the dominant ideology of its culture and historical period or whether indeed, the question has the power to break through the tyranny of the dominant/dominating ideology and re-connect with what is real.

It must have become clear by now — perhaps disconcertingly so — that I am moving backwards and forwards in this paper and not in a straight line. There are very precise reasons for this though which, I hope, will become clear in the course of reading and thinking about what is being said here. But to a summarize in advance, the main reason for this different strategy is the Mahāyanā Buddhist understanding of truth. Truth is neither understood as an *a priori* structure to which to conform, nor as a single comprehensive whole or oneness. Truth is neither one, nor many, according to Nāgārjuna, whose philosophy of the 'middle path' is accepted by all Tibetan Buddhist traditions. This gets elaborated in theory as the notion of two truths,[19] conventional truth, or the dependently arising nature of all phenomena, and ultimate truth, or the emptiness of inherent existence of everything including emptiness, which is the final mode of being of all conventional truths. Although the two truths are essentially inseparable, they cannot be reduced to one another, that is, from the 'point of view' of a *mādhyamika*. The mis-representations of the Western academic tradition have made a nihilistic nothingness out of the Mahāyanā Buddhist notion of emptiness when, indeed, emptiness properly understood, signals the very fullness of being. But true to the Western methodology, primarily employed

---

19. For a clear summary exposition of it see the present Dalai Lama's book : *The Buddhism of Tibet and the key to the middle way*, (Tenzin Gyatso, London, 1975), p. 31 and pp. 60–62.

in religious studies, of systematic representations, the Buddhist non–dual mind is interpreted as blank–mindedness which mirrors pure nothingness. But this is not at all what emptiness in the Buddhist sense means. This conception of pure nothingness is rather one of the crudest and most primitive misconceptions of nihilism, an extreme to be abandoned on the middle path which must stay clear of nihilism and fundamentalism (or literalism) for it to be a path at all.

The meaning of emptiness is that phenomena are dependent arisings,[20] are event–like structures with a radically temporal ontology. Emptiness means that all things are empty of fixed identities and so can become who and what they are through proper understanding of emptiness as dependent arising. Since understanding plays such an important role here, because the proper understanding of emptiness is seen as the best way of benefiting self and others, it becomes necesssary to see that emptiness also means that conceptual systems are empty of categorical limits of rationalistic models, so they can become the objects of a deeper than a mere surface understanding. This kind of understanding is necessary for teaching (benefiting) others. Since it is only through teaching others, appropriate to each individual's needs, that the truth of a radically temporal universe can be affirmed—and this affirmation is necessary, if one wants to stay clear of one of the kinds of nihilism which would obstruct the path—understanding of all the ramified connections of a conceptual system (of how to benefit others) becomes the field for the wisdom of emptiness to play out the articulation of the multiplicity of skilful means appropriate to each temporal situation. 'All' in this context does not mean a numerical totality present now, but 'each and every' in the sense of one after another, whoever and however it presents itself (or him/herself). 'Oneness' and wholeness' in this context mean the unifying activity of the path which is the newness of each moment, because it actively refuses to get stuck on either extreme, a nihilistic or a constructivistic one.

Thus the two truths can be understood on many levels, that is, as conventional and ultimate truths they are considered the basis of the path; as method and wisdom they costitute the path, where emptiness is seen as the ultimate mode of being of the relative, or skilful means, (which means that a method is constitutionally non–universalizable, other than as a thought experiment); or, in the language of the Tantras, the illusory play of the truth body (dharma-kāya) is seen as the result of the path. But this paragraph of a descriptive

---

20. See Jeffrey Hopkins, *Meditation of Emptiness* (London : 1983), pp. 53, 161, 659.

account of the two truths should not give rise to the thought that what cons-
titutes the difference between the two truths can be literalized; it cannnot.
This cannot be captured in descriptive discourse, since even an authentic
intellectual understanding of the two truths, let alone 'intellectual intuition'
which, unlike for Kant, is possible in Mahāyanā Buddhism, depends on an
active involvement of the individual examining his/her particular way of
(mis) understanding this problematic of self and others. Thus path and
method, as seen from within the Mahāyanā Buddhist tradition, are insepara-
ble from 'individual' understanding as well.

Subsequently in this text, whenever I have marked a term with an*, I
am asking the reader to recollect the meaning of emptiness in the above way.
Each of the terms, however, is connected to a different level of subtlety of
the meaning of emptiness, so if this method seems confusing, it does not
necessarily testify to its inferiority. One should remember that it is not
possible to keep in mind (that is, conscious memory) all conceptual levels of
the meaning of emptiness simultaneously. And when this process of recollect-
ing seems to become repetitive, it is probably because the meaning and the
signified have become collapsed into the system of signifiers in one's own
mind. But here we should remember that to do the 'method' for under-
standing emptiness justice, we cannot reduce the two truths one to another;
we cannot reduce the meaning of emptiness, i.e. dependent arising or multi-
plicity, to the unity of the path which is emptiness. Emptiness is neither
oneness, nor possesses one literal meaning. Thus we have to think each
constellation of dependently arising meanings of terms anew as empty of fixed
categorical limits. But this is the task of the individual which can, initially,
only be signalled.

By now I might have given rise to the impression that I deny any value
or function to representations altogether and would rather do without them.
But from within the *mādhyama pradhipa* this would be a nihilistic move
bound to result in getting stuck. It is getting stuck unrealistically which is
the problem of the *mādhyamika*. Representations accompanied or held by a
view of emptiness have the power to induce deep understanding, but repre-
sentations which are not so endowed refer only to each other, hide change,
hide what is real. So a straightforward denial of any possible function for
representations is an untenable position. Rather, in reconnecting represen-
tations with the deeper meaning of emptiness, they gain a transformative
power on the surface too.

There are also a number of traditions within Mahāyanā Buddhism that focus more on the surface phenomena or the representational character of things without necessarily being connected with the deepest of understanding emptiness. I am thinking particularly of the Tibetan versions of the Yoga-chara and other mind–only–schools, Chinese Hua–Yen, and some of the Zen schools, for example.[21] In some of their practices these schools emphasize the "mirror wisdom" of the mind which for them even becomes equated with what they take to be emptiness. But all of these schools claim that the mirror wisdom of the mind reflects things as empty of, at least, self-sufficient autonomous existence — some of the cruder and more basic misconceptions concerning the way things are than is true existence or inherent existence —which become the "object to be refuted" in the analysis of emptiness.[22] Hence the mirror wisdom does not reflect eternal essences, but the play of ever changing phenomena which come and go.

We have already seen to which dominating ideology of Western thought the questions of macro/microcosm which constitute the framework for this seminar belong. Do we then still expect that these questions can be answered for our Buddhist tradition in a formal way in terms of a systematic whole? How are we to treat the subject/object split explicit in the way the hypothesis of that framework, stated on p. 326, is phrased? Such abstract opposition is non-localizable in an ontology of radical change and therefore cannot be found thematized in *that* way in most aspects of Tibetan Buddhist traditions. Or, if it is, it is an "object to be refuted" by the analytic endeavour that inquires into the meaning of emptiness.

Nevertheless, if we were to do the abstract problem of macro/microcosm justice we would have to look at the following three points in detail:

1. Obviously we have to ask, "What is doing the mirroring?" if we were true to the way the questions are posed.

---

21. See Geshe Sopa and Jeffrey Hopkings (transl.), *Practice and Theory of Tibetan Buddhism*, (London : 1976), pp. 105 ff.
   and Garma C. Chang, *The Buddhist Teaching of Totality*, The Philosophy of Hwa Yen Buddhism, (University Park, 1971), p. 172 ff.
   and an example from Soto Zen, Shunryu Suzuki, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*, (Tokyo, 1972).

22. See the Dalai Lama's answer to the question: "Of what is it that a phenomenon is empty ?" *Key to the Middle way*, p. 57.

2. How do the things mirrored in a universe conceived as static, as a system of representations, and hence based on a linear notion of time with an absolute beginning and end differ from those mirrored in a universe based on a cyclical and returnning notion of time.

3. The problem of the whole :

    if one's cosmology is based on cyclical, i.e. beginningless time, then what kind of cosmology can one legitimately articulate, given that 'cosmos' means the universe as an ordered whole. But ordered whole has come to mean an explanation of a *conceptually* ordered whole that is based on a systematic repression of change in Western history of thought. On the other hand, whole does not at all mean the same thing in the Buddhist tradition I am talking about here. There is a notion of unity of course, but unity emphatically does not mean whole in the above sense of 'cosmos'.

So what is the connection and difference between an individual and the universe in the Buddhist tradition of Tibet? Let us first of all ask whose universe, or whose world, are we talking about? This question is legitimate because we are not God or Buddhas. If we were, we could not exclude the possibility of talking about the universe from an absolute point of view. But since we are not, we cannot possibly as from an absolute position, i.e. God's. We can only ask from our own embodied, limited perspective. Presumably, the Buddha's is going to look different from ours, but at this stage in our historical development we cannot quite grasp a Buddha's perspective of the universe, nor exhaust it with our categories. Because in discourse our world and that of a Buddha are given different names, it seems as though there are two separate worlds. Of course, they are not separable in reality.

Our world is traditionally understood as conditioned by actions performed under the tyranny of delusions and their consequences. Tibetans (that is, Mahayana Buddhism) represented it graphically as a circular configuration of three layers held in the jaws and four fangs of a monstrous apparition: the lord of death.[23] Such a world out of control is characterized by the so-called three poisons, ignorance, greed, and hatred, symbolized in the central circle by a pig, a cock, and a snake, respectively. These three gross delusions are concomitantly held by the far more subtle grasping for inherent existence

---

23. Reproductions of such paintings can be found in most books on Tibetan traditional art.

for which the only counter-measure is the wisdom of emptiness, it is asserted, and which is not immediately or unproblematically accessible. It is this subtle grasping the wrong things (i.e. fixed identities) as real which causes suffering states of existence. But on the visible level of the world, on the level of ostensibly real appearances, the "three poisons" are believed to constitute the power that throws living beings into undesirable states of existence. These resultant undesirable states of existence are classified into six domains: gods, demi-gods, humans, animals, hungry and tortured spirits, and hell beings — to use the traditional terminology. They are to be understood as social/psychological environments, not as regions closed off from one another.

An example of a godlike social environment could be that of a Rockefeller who can buy up a whole valley upstate New York, force out the poor farmers, legislate the housing code, so nobody can build anything cheap and ugly, and legislate the number of occupants per ten acres. With old buildings restord to their original beauty, a private plane and landing strip, pure water and only friends from the same social class as neighbours, this environment will yield whatever one demands of it. It is characterized by a psychological state of continuous unobstructed enjoyment.

A demi-godlike environment might be that of the upper Westside Manhattan Yuppies. They have wealth, health, beauty, but are driven psychologically by unceasing competition to succeed even more. Never satisfied they crave more, because they allow only people like Rockefellers, who have so much more than they, to exist in their psychological horizon.

Humans are characterized by the rare gift of understanding and coming to terms with all these different levels of existence, without locking themselves into one, and hence can achieve enlightenment directly, while animals are too dense and stupid to do directly. Their limited mental capacities let them fall too easily under the control of others and so they suffer terribly. Whole species get wiped out at the whim of a social trend or a certain group of people who use the animals' leather, furs, and teeth for decoration and social status.

Hungry and tortured spirits suffer from such intense hunger and deprivation, there is hardly a spark left of them. The suffering of starving children in Ethiopia, Bangla Desh, or Biafra comes to mind, where intense poverty seems to be a relentless condition. Hell beings, on the other hand

are those who have to suffer in the midst of intense violence, sufferings like those of Iraqi and Afghani soldiers hit by chemical war weapons, or of those blown up in Lebanon, or of those caught in the nightmarish experience of jungle guerilla warfare in South America or South East Asia.

These domains then are of the world seen in terms of psychological and social suffering situations. Most beings in them are stuck in the perpetuating activity of their immediate situation. Only human beings, who have some distance on this, can see the interdependent character of these states and what gives rise to them *as* suffering states. Only they can, indeed, recognize the possibility that each being has, and will, embody each of these conditions at one time or another.

A godlike existence, to be sure, is not desirable in this context, because built into it is the blindness towards all other states of existence. One could simply not live in perpetual pleasure on Park Avenue, if one were not totally blind with regards to the bag ladies, the homeless and hungry a few blocks away. But this kind of blindness prevents us from generating the wisdom of emptiness which is seen as the real source of joy and satisfaction. Beings of the other five domains have to be born human, before they can embark on the path to enlightenment, for if one cannot embrace all beings in one's attitude to become enlightened for their sake, to actively work for them on the basis of seeing and understanding their difficulties, one tacitly affirms an unreal state of being, namely, one's own artificial isolation from all others.*

Around the circle portraying the six realms of existence runs another showing *the way* in which cause and effect operate dependently in this understanding of the world. Traditionally they are called the twelve links of dependent arising: ignorance, habit formations, consciousness, name and form, sense source, contract, feeling, attachment, grasping, becoming, birth, old age and death.[24] They show how things come into and go out of existence on this level, along with the impossibility of anything to arise in isolation or from nothing.

This, then, is the universe under the control of repetitive forces such as those of a mechanical kind. It is the universe of things, where people are taken as independent things, exclusive of the values that make them unique.

---

24. See *Meditation on Emptiness*, p. 275.

* Emptiness also means empty of not having any conection with other living beings.

It is a description of the problematic states of cyclic existence, full of pain and dissatisfaction, that comes into being under the control of deluded egocentric activities. Everything is distorted by one of the "three poisons", ignorance, greed, and hatred, and so things must look differently under their control than it does from a Buddha's perspective which is characterized by an absence of grasping and deluded activity.

The reason why I am going into such detail with this is, one : to make clear that the Buddhist world of dependent arising can never be articulated in the objective fashion which is common in Western traditions of thought, i.e. separable from an individual's intellectual, psychological, social etc. perspective who describes it; and two : because the only way to get at emptiness (which connects and separates individual and universe) in a non-reductionistic way is by attempting to account for the fieldlike character of the universe, the world, the individual, mind, and reality by showing the way in which each depends on the others for its existence. Boredom here serves as the best criterion for having failed the test of the thought exercise of dependent arising.

On the level of what the Tibetans call the "wheel of life" (the above portrayal of our world as suffering states) we do not yet have *an* individual in his or her uniqueness, that is, in that uniqueness which is the condition for the interconnectedness of all life, since that depends for its existence also on an awareness of it, even though we do have concrete living beings. The beings in the world thus portrayed are out of touch with their own transformative powers at any level and, unless that transformative power is put into action, it cannot be said to exist, nor can it be said not to exist.* Rather, having succumbed to their beliefs in things as absolutely real, they are moving under mechanical – like constraints, similar to the mechanical action of the proverbial rat pressing the proverbial pleasure button. They are not able to move with the deeper, natural flow of their being. This is not a romantic notion, but rather something quite precise : unobstructedness.

Unlike the Hinayana tradition which sees *nirvāna* as the goal of human spiritual endeavours, understood as a final resting place separable from the world, the Mahāyanā tradition sees *that* understanding of *nirvāna* as another obstruction to enlightenment. The Mahāyanā tradition, in which all living beings can and must achieve enlightenment, considers *nirvāna* a *reversal* of

---

*Emptiness of production is estalished by Nāgārjuna's four-cornered reasoning.

cyclic existence that becomes the condition for actualizing a so–called Buddha field. Enlightenment in this tradition is understood as constitutive of, and non–separable from, the middle path which stays clear of the extremes of cyclic existence out of control on the one hand, and quietistic *nirvāna* on the other.[25]

A reversal of cyclic existence is an extremely complex process of transforming the configuration of the five aggregates, which include the psycho/physical constituents of an individual, into the *mandala* of a Buddha field. The classification into the five aggregates subsumes all of the non–static phenomena there are, since they include the objects to which the aggregates refer. This is seen as unproblematic because the referents are ultimately non–separable from an individual's ability to perceive, conceive, think, feel, accomplish, etc. But 'individual' is neither to be understood as a concrete, empirical individual, nor as an abstract subjective principle, much less as a Hegelian synthesis between abstract and concrete. An individual, or the self, the "I", is to be understood in this context as neither abstract nor concrete, but in a way whereby the obstructive projection of such an abstract split or abstract synthesis, generated by some of the most subtle levels of grasping for inherently existing meaning, has successfully been rendered inoperative. Hence, the individual is empty of inherent existence which means that the individual or the "I", is dependently imputed on the five aggregates.[26]

The first step in this transformative path is initiated by an understanding of how the three poisons operate in one's *own* life, formed by the twelve links of dependent arising, to condition suffering results in the manner explained in the "wheel of life". This understanding, then, develops into knowledge of what is helpful or harmful to one's project at each step. But to successfully transform the five aggregates into a Buddha *mandala* the person must already be endowed with the three principal aspects of the path,[27] a commitment to actualize the path towards enlightenment for the sake of all living beings, a discernment of what helps and hinders such a project, and an experience of emptiness which combine into the transformative power which makes such an endeavour possible. But now we are

25. See the distinction between Hinayana and Mahāyanā in Jeffrey Hopkins, *Compassion in Tibetan Buddhism*, (London : 1980), p. 172 ff.

26. *Meditation of Emptiness*, p. 170.

27. *Life and Teachings of Tsong Khapa*, "The Three Principles of the Path", transl. Robert Thurman, (Dharmsala : 1981), p. 57 ff.

speaking of Tantric Buddhism which is esoteric Buddhism and hence, an articulation of the path from the Perspective of Tantra becomes even more difficult. If the Mahāyanā Sutra tradition is practised as a cause vehicle and the Mahāyanā Tantra tradition as a result vehicle, as it is in the Tibetan Kadampa tradition,[28] then the result can be taken as the path. Based on a direct experience of the meaning of emptiness, time moves no longer in a fixed uni-directional and linear manner.[29]

But to summarize the transformation process: when the five aggregates of form, feeling, discernment, compositional factors (i.e. changing or non-static phenomena that are neither from nor consciousness, such as time, impermanence, area, number, collection, groups of words, letters, continuity distinction etc.), and consciousness become purified of even the most subtle obstructive conception of inherent existence, they become transformed into the five Buddha wisdoms of the mirror wisdom, the wisdom of equality, discriminating wisdom, the all accomplishing wisdom, and the wisdom of the great unification, respectively. This latter central wisdom of the great unification is a unification of the wisdom of emptiness which is a non-affirming nagation (since it negates something which never existed to begin with, i.e. inherent [existence) and the *bodhicitta*, or the awakening mind, which is a positive mind or attitude, the will to benefit all living beings by actualizing enlightenment. *Bodhicitta*, depending on the stages of the path an individual has traversed and created in his/her mental continuum, is also called skillful means, or sometimes the great compassion[30] which is the most powerful motivating force to act for the sake of others. A Buddha *mandala*, then, is characterized by these five wisdoms. It is active in the world, but is not of the world as we know it now. The Buddha's activity is a spontaneous play of wisdom and compassion or skilful means within the field of reality, responding spontaneously to the needs of living beings who perceive that very same force field as exhaustible by a rigid set of calculable forces, externally related by universal laws and principles.

I will now outline the practice of transforming the five aggregates into a Buddha *mandala*. Again, I am going into such detail because I hope to preserve the non-linear parallelism of the process in this way and show that

28. *Tantra in Tibet*, p. 105.
29. This is too complex an issue to unravel here. I hope to deal with it in a separate paper. But from this perspective time can move backwards and forwards.
30. For the three main kinds of compassion in Mahāyanā Buddhism see *Compassion in Tibetan Buddhism*, p. 116 ff.

the temporal dimension always escapes the method I am criticizing, the
Western method which juxtaposes two regions of knowledge and assumes
this to be a sufficient explanation of how human beings are related to their
universe.

In the practice of transformation the daily cycle of the human being is
taken as the life cycle and transformed into a Buddha *mandala*. Thus going
to sleep is taken as paralleling death, since the absorptions of the grosser
levels of consciousness into the subtler and subtlest ones at the time of
falling asleep parallel the absorptions at the time of death.[31] The dream
state is taken as paralleling the *bardo*, or the state in between life and death.
Here the main aim is keeping conscious of *that* one is dreaming in order to
eliminate fear of, possibly monstrous, apparitions (in dreams or at the time
of the death processs) and nightmares by knowing that they are merely
appearances, projection of mind. Waking up parallels rebirth, where the
aim is awaking with the perfect motivation to perform each activity only for
the sake of enlightening all living beings and not excluding even one from
one's love and compassion. The waking state parallels one's life span.

Death is then transformed through specific practices into the clear light
(the empty nature) of the mind, the *bardo* into the illusory body (which
manifests skilful means for the sake of others), rebirth into the Buddha's
embodiment visible to all, and the waking state transforms into the full
Buddha activities. Seen in terms of the four Buddha bodies, the result of the
path, clear light manifests the truth body (dharmakāya), *bardo* becomes the
enjoyment body (sambhogakāya), rebirth the manifestation body (nirmana-
kāya) and waking life becomes the nature body (svabhāvikakāya) of a fully
enlightened Buddha. With continuous practice, when habits finally become
transparent as habits, by means of the wisdom of emptiness and all pheno-
mena become what they are and shine forth in their suchness, the *mandala*
of a Buddha field gets actualized.

But a *mandala* also gets generated, exists for an epoch, gets absorbed,
and rests in a state of union. This process then parallels the generation,
existence, degeneration, destruction, and non-existence of the universe on
the one hand and the in–between–state, re-birth, life, and death of an indi-
vidual on the other, and it can be said that these processes go on simul-

---

31. Lati Rinpoche, *Death, Intermediate State and Rebirth in Tibetan Buddhism*, (London:
    1979), p. 32 ff.

taneously and interrelatedly, yet on different levels. And since there is a multiplicity of universes, individuals and levels of manifestations of Buddha fields, they are in different stages of evolution. Time here is calculated in aeons.

When Tibetan *mandalas* are graphically represented they are usually as a complex structure of a square in a circle divided into four quarters with a central region used for the purpose of practice. It is not understood as a map of some fictitious universe that exists in and of itself somewhere in space, but rather as a depiction of a complete path out of suffering states of existence or, more precisely, of the reversal of possible suffering states into Buddha fields. *Mandala* means circle, circumference, globe, sphere, or disc. Knowledge of all the profound and extensive aspects of the path is circumscribed by a circle — not to be conceived of in Euclidean space, however — which means that the Buddha field depends on (the reversal of) cyclic time. The square in the circle means space or directionality which in the context of Mahāyanā Buddhism always depends on (in the sense of inseparable from) embodiment. Space, which shares with emptiness the defining characteristic of unobstructedness, means here that the human/Buddha embodiment is at the centre of the four cardinal directions, since we have a body only in virtue of directionality. There is, then, no disembodied spirit or disembodied Buddha possible in this tradition.

Even though the symbol looks abstract and Euclidean to us, in fact, in the Tibetan tradition it is not at all experienced in that way. Space is the front and back, the left and right of our bodies that give us a sense of orientation. This understanding of space as directionality preserves the interrelatedness with other embodied beings which would be impossible for disembodied spirits or directionless monadic units. Thus the four sides of the square in the circle signify human/Buddha embodiment in the centre of the *mandala.* Space and time become united in the *mandala* in such a way that they become the condition for transforming a world.

The graphic depiction of the *mandala* is not at all an abstract schema since the visualization practices connected with it are not at all merely conceptual exercises. A visualization of a *mandala* is an evocative activity which generates forms out of light because when all forms within one's horizon are exclusively seen as made from light, at that moment the power of the misconception of substantial entities and fixed identities lose their hold completely.

•

A three–dimensional *mandala* or a visualized one is entered through its main gate which is usually in the east where the aggregation of forms transforms into the mirror wisdom.   The south, where most human beings live, is ruled by the wisdom of equality.   The west, with its seductive power of speech, is ruled by the discriminating wisdom (which becomes the wisdom of emptiness), and the north where wealth is acquired effortlessly, accomplishes and completes all activities.   The centre is inhabited by wisdom and compassion embracing in union the eternal play of male and female.

In traditional terms there are three transformative levels of the *mandala*: the outer *mandala* symbolized by Mount Meru[32] as the central axis surrounded by the four continents; the inner *mandala*, where Mount Meru becomes the central energy channel of the psycho/physical constituents, and the four continents the four limbs of the body; and the secret *mandala* which is the union of wisdom and compassion 'or entering all the most subtle energy forces into the central channel.   These are the different 'loci' for the process of generation, existence, degeneration, and absorption in its various dimensions to occur.

All in all, when the transformation is completed — is it ever ? yes, because there is a stage of nothing more to learn, i.e. Buddhahood, and no, because there are always more living beings who need to be helped in their transformation process; and since no one is ultimately separate from all others, including the Buddhas, it has to be an ongoing process, of course — but when we can label this transformation process as completed, a Buddha field is created, so that whoever happens to come in contact with it in one form or another, knowingly or not, is touched by joy.   From that perspective then, when the obstacles which projected the universe as absolutely separable from us have been removed (i.e. belief in inherently existing separateness, or unity) and their root (namely, grasping for inherent existence) is cut, then it makes no longer any sense to talk about microcosm/macrocosm in the framework set for the seminar.

To return from the elaboration of the critique of method to the initial problem of mirroring: so what does the mirroring? Nothing, since that is

---

32.   Mount Meru is the mythical centre of the universe interpreted differently on different levels.   Geographically it is said to be Mount Kailas, located in the Western Tibetan region of the Himalayas, an almost perfectly round mountain with a lake in the shape of a sun and one in the shape of a crescent moon.

the way things are in their ultimate nature. empty of fixed identities, of separable thingness. The most serious problem is that if we make a "thing" out that which mirrors, we will be unable to achieve or account for real unity. So yes, there is mirroring going on, but only on the level of things, on the level of matter/form which have never been essentially separated in most of the Eastern traditions of thought. Mirroring is passive and cannot be separated essentially from the other four wisdoms. If we give the central role to mirroring, as the framework for this seminar and the Western academic methods demand, then that which mirrors is limited to only this one function, when it also discriminates, unifies, equalizes, and completes or accomplishes in an active way. Thus we have made a thing of that which mirrors by limiting it, or we are limiting it because we have made a thing out of it, if we give it the exclusive role in our method.

One of the consequences of having made a thing of that which mirrors would be that we could not account for the following in the Buddhist tradition. In Buddhist "cosmology" time speeds up towards the end of the aeon of existence before the disintegration or destruction of that ·particular universe.[33] Things will be reflected differently then, and if the mirror has become reified (i.e. made into a thing, however subtle), it cannot handle the objects moving at a different speed; it cannot reflect them.[34] From the *madhyāmaka* perspective the mirror and the mirrored are dependently arising which means that neither can be reified or attributed with any sort of fixed, independently existing identity, or inherent existence, since the mirror and the mirrored are both empty of all of these.

During that historical period when time speeds up, objects will lock different. They will appear as even more grossly distorted, only living beings are even less able to recognize it. Objects will appear as ever larger

---

33. Discursed for example in the mchim. mdzöt commentary to the Abhidharmakōsa.

34. This is a similar problem as that of shifting from a Newtonian framework of forces as inertia to an Einsteinian one of a gravitational field, or from a coordinate system under a notion of absolute time to a notion of force fields as discussed, for example, by Albert Einstein and Leopold Infeld in *The evolution of Physics*, New York 1966.

The reason why I have not pursued an elaboration of this extremely interesting parallel between Mahāyanā Buddhism and twentieth century physics is that I believe such a comparison would not reveal anything new and, moreover, would hide what is unique to both of those domains of knowledge. Most important to my endeavour in this paper, however, would be that I would make the same mistake which I am criticizing : the uncritical analogical structure between two regions of knowledge.

and people in their human dimension as ever smaller. This is based on the estrangement from their natural interrelationship with each other. Or, in other words, the fact of "natural" interrelatedness, or dependent arising, a sense of social mutuality or reciprocity become more and more suppressed, and nature and other seen as objects to be conquered, controlled, and mastered. Mahāyanā Buddhists say that it is the wisdom of emptiness alone which can expose the fears for what they are and remove the mistaken view that projects the fearful appearances onto existing phenomena and which, in turn, perpetuates the cycle of mechanical-like repetitiveness: fear generating attack and violence, generating resentment and revenge, generating more violence and fear, and so on *ad infinitum*.

The discussion of how the "wheel of life" and the five aggregates are transformed into a Buddha *mandala* might have given rise to the impression of a split ontology in talking about the world of, mechanical-like repetitive existence that is held together by adhering to the *status quo* or, from the Tibetan Buddhist perspective, the wheel of life on the one hand and the universe as a transforming/transformed Buddha field on the other. A split ontology of the kind that separates the intelligible from the visible, the ideal from the embodied, understanding from sensibility in a categorical way is appropriate only for a system of rational models committed to a non-temporal ontology. To impute such an opposition onto the Buddhist tradition obscures thoroughly what is most important and what is really at stake in the Buddhist world. The full view, however, of the sense in which we do not end up with a split ontology is accessible only to direct experience of emptiness. Such an explanation is seen as a cop-out mostly to those who do not live their intellectual lives within horizon of a temporal ontology.

The elaboration of a *mandala* of a Buddha field makes no sense in isolation or essentially separable from the "wheel of life". A Buddha field is not an ideal, nor merely a condition for the possibility to become enlightened — however enlightenment may be understood or conceived of—but the full-blown transformative power inseparable from wisdom and compassion which precisely and appropriately goes into action in concrete finite situations in which individuals are bound by mechanical-like habitual existence. It is the power to break through that kind of a addictive being stuck on a pleasure that turns into pain by mindless repetition. It is the power to reverse statically frozen situations into a discovery and enactment of ever new possibilities.

The peculiar duplicity in this account which so easily gives rise to an interpretation of a split ontology or, even further off the mark, a Hegelian dialectical progression in Buddhist thought, is neither separated by an absolute distinction, nor is the Buddhist universe discussed here as one universe in the way David Bohm seems to want to maintain for his explanation of implicative order.[35] The "wheel of life" is not collapsible into the *mandala* of a Buddha field where everything would blend into one big undifferentiated soup. Again, such interpretations can only be maintained

---

35. In *Wholeness and The Implicative Order*, London 1980, David Bohm discusses mind and matter and all there is as "different aspects of one whole and unbroken movement." p. 11. Especially in the chapters on "Fragmentation and Wholeness" and "The Enfolding-unfolding Universe and Consciousness" we can find numerous examples of how this basically analogical thinking between the spiritual and physical domains does not allow him to be radical enough, since he imputes an "undivided wholeness onto the flowing movement", p. 11, which constitutes everything in the universe. Or, one of the many examples of a hypostatization of the Whole, ". . . wholeness is what is real, and fragmentation is the response of this whole to man's action, guided by illusory perception, which is shaped by fragmentary thought." p. 7. What should really make us think is that the main mechanism of this wholeness is order, ". . . consider the possibility that physical law should refer primarily to an order of undivided wholeness of the content of a description similar to that indicated by a hologram rather than to an order of analysis of such content into separate parts indicated by a lens." p. 147. Where is there room for critique in this account of order and wholeness? "To generalize so as to emphasize undivided wholeness, we shall say that what 'carries' an implicate order is the holōmovement, which is an unbroken and undivided totality." p. 151. How is movement possible at all if there is not presence through absence in a non-totalitarian way? But this seems unthinkable in Bohm's schema, since he claims what quantum theory and relativity theory have basically in common : "This is undivided wholeness." p. 176.

I wholeheartedly agree with Patrick Heelan's critique of David Bohm in "Space as God's Presence" in Journal of Dharma, 1983, summarized as follows : "The conceptual model used is, I claim, more the construction of a certain metaphysical fantasy of a higher but ironically Cartesian sort, than an attempt, as he also claims, to understand the relationship between human objectivity and human subjectivity." p. 76, and ". . . he still wants to posit an uninvolved spectator mind that surveys in one comprehensive glance the total inter-contextual enfolding of the "implicative order". Such a knowledge could not be an experiencing, and such a mind could not be a human mind, at least not one functioning normally." p. 78. I had intended to extend this critique of Bohm to one from the Mahāyanā Buddhist perspective which he, on occasions, claims to represent and include it in this paper. But a point by point critique of Bohm's treatment of (inherently existing) oneness from a Buddhist point of view would only facitly re-affirm his conceptual framework. I hope that my paper, as it stands now, is a more effective, even if only an implicit, critique of this metaphysical approach to spirituality and science.

on the basis of a belief in inherently existing oneness which necessarily
excludes a certain dimension of reality brought about the way the individual
participates in his/her world. If one can really participate in "the whole"
the way in which we have attempted to inspire the reader of this paper to
participate in this problematic, then it becomes impossible to equate "the
whole" with a rationalistic model of a certain order, or unity with oneness.
Such a limit is completely unreal. Perhaps an interpretation of the universe
as one whole, positively asserted, would not be criticized as severely by a
proponent of one of the mind-only-schools of Mahayana Buddhism, but a
mādhyamika would criticize this position on the ground that nothing, not
even emptiness, or mind, or the Buddha, has inherent existence. The universe
is therefore empty of a categorical limit of such a rationalistic model of one-
ness and hence, a oneness or wholeness of the universe cannot be positively
asserted.

The most important point I have tried to bring out — and I am not
sure if I have been successful in this — is that emptiness yields union, but
not a totalizing abstract conceptual unity outside of which nothing else
supposedly can be conceived. Rather, the unity which is emptiness is a
unity in the sense that there is nothing to interfere with the way things are.
It is an absence of obstructing fixed identities, such that there is unhampered
ongoing Buddha activity for concrete, finite living beings withont exception.
Thus, rather than closing oneself in into a total circumscribed, yet neces-
sarily static universe of conceptual abstraction (of however subtle a kind)
believed to be real, the unity which is emptiness is the non–separateness of
actor, action, and acted upon. It can only be negatively defined. Moreover,
in this context there is always openess towards the future, because different
kinds of real living beings come and go incessantly in dependence on whom
the Buddha activity works incessantly and unobstructedly.

On the surface this paper is about how two different regions interface.
If Religious Studies connects the individual and the universe by mirrored
images and structures, Philosophy has fixed those images into representa-
tions and connected them systematically on the basis of rational models into
conceptual wholes. In the one case the origin of the mirrored images is
problematic and cannot be known by human cognition, while in the second
case the referent other than another representation is problematic, in part
because of claims to exhaustive knowledge. It is my criticism that neither
can refer to or evoke anything real.

The deeper issue is that I have tried to interface the regions of philosophy and religion by showing that their concerns and issues are dependentiy arising and thus empty of fixed limits of rationalistic models. My perspective allows the two regions to be understood as a common human field of inquiry in which method guided by emptiness can and ought to be precise, but cannot become standardized.

The standard Western academic methods, on the other hand, using the language of mirroring and representational hermeneutics, where a text is read in terms of *a priori* meanings from another context, are not only incapable of revealing meanings appropriate to the intellectual traditions from non-Western and intellectually non–colonized cultures, but seem even destructive of those meanings by creating a worldwide hegemony of conformity to standardized methodology which breeds non–critical intellectual laziness and dishonesty.

These are very strong words, indeed; they are not meant as labels to be pinned on individuals and academic departments. They are meant to annoy and jar us into an *appropriately* critical attitude towards Western intellectual life and methods.