A Critique of Western Buddhism

Ruins of the Buddhist Real

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BLOOMSBURY

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well, *real*.

Preface

A ruin is a curious thing. Imagine the Acropolis or Borobudur, Ephesus or the Great Wall of China. Magnificent structures erected on the foundation of a society's most advanced technologies and its most sophisticated sciences. Constructed from raw materials—wood, metals, stone, lime mortar, marble, glass, turf, and soil—quarried, excavated, transported, and formed by the labor—the debilitating, depleting sweat and toil—of flesh and blood men, women, and children. But a ruin is more than the material out of which it is fashioned. It in infused with the longing of a people; longing for meaning and order; longing for fellowship and community; longing for the reign of beauty on earth. More than mere material, a ruin is saturated with culture. It is a culture's loftiest aesthetic imagination manifest in the light of day in all of its sensuousness. But a ruin is more than the designs and desires of a people. A ruin is nature. Its very matter is fired in the furnace of the elements. And once in place, the edifice is eternally embraced by earth, fire, wind, and water. As Georg Simmel wrote in 1907, "a ruin is fused into the surrounding landscape and, like tree and stone, grows into and is integrated in that landscape." As much as it tries, a thriving cathedral or a bustling office building cannot achieve this integration: its relationship to its natural surroundings is one of artificiality at best, domination at worst. Its atmosphere is charged by an ordering of its own making. By contrast, "an atmosphere of peace emanates from the ruin; for, in the ruin the contrary

aspirations of both world potencies [the energies of nature and the conceptions of society] appears as a calm image of purely natural being." What has wrought this change in the charge of the structure's atmosphere is *time*. A ruin, finally, is time. It is transhistorical time, "ruin time," the steady chroniker of past glory and decay, present cause and effect, and future promise and peril. "Ruin time unites," says Florence Hetzler. It suffuses the "biological time of birds and moss" with the immemorial "synergy" of all of living beings—human, animal, bacterial, microbial—whose bodies have touched, however fleetingly, however gently, the ruin.[1]

Western Buddhism is not a ruin. It is a sprawling estate, operating daily at peak capacity. Western Buddhism is a prodigious ancillary of an ancient edifice that, as Simmel says of palaces, villas, and farmhouses, "even where it would be best to fuse with the atmosphere of its surroundings, always originates another order of things, and unites with the order of nature only in retrospect." Why should it "be best" to do so? Western Buddhism itself provides the answer: because there is no real division between culture, society, person, and "nature." The Buddha has taught us that it is nature all the way through. He also taught us that the very nature of nature inexorably impels our—the world's—very ruination. Ruin is ruin because our desires and actions, however exalted, cannot withstand the nonnegotiable consequences of impermanence, dissolution, and emptiness. And yet, somehow, the edifice that is Western Buddhism does not merely remain in place: it stands fortified against the consequences of its own self-acknowledged insights into our "natural" condition. In doing so, it originates an order, both for itself and for its practitioner, that is at odds with

these very insights. For, “to fuse with the order of nature only in retrospect” is to create the illusion that it does not fuse with nature at all. It creates the illusion that the object of Western Buddhism’s fusion—the object of its most abiding desire—is of an altogether different order from nature’s ruin. It is, rather, of a higher order that somehow enables escape from the raw contingencies of nature—the very ones that Buddhism itself articulates—leaving the subject ultimately unscathed.

The term for “nature” that I use in the subtitle and throughout the book is “the Real.” Like Western Buddhism’s “emptiness” or “no-self,” in the history of Western thought, “the Real” names some profoundly productive a priori, awareness of which is a sine qua non of human awakening and of the liberation that such awakening is said to entail (however variously those consequences might be understood). Paradoxically, the Real is as evasive as it is productive, eluding capture by our strategies of linguistic and symbolic communication. Of course, it is we creaturely humans who enable this evasion by constructing obfuscating, at best, symbolization around the nonetheless fecund Real. In his twentieth-century masterpiece of literary criticism, *The Origin of the German Tragic Drama*, Walter Benjamin wrote that “in the ruins of great buildings the idea of the plan speaks more impressively than in lesser buildings, no matter how well preserved they are.”[2] For Benjamin, it is precisely the ruin’s proximity to “creaturely nature” that infuses it with its “uncontrollable productivity.”[3] Of what, then, does the well-preserved building speak? Of what is it productive if not of the very idea that saw it rise from the dust in the first place? In proximity to what would this construction be, if not to the passion and pain coursing through the veins of

earthly creatures? Such questions merely postpone my conclusion: Western Buddhism must be ruined.

This, at least, is the belief animating this book. I have come to this belief after forty-some years of actively surveying the Western Buddhist landscape. At turns figuratively and literally, my exploration has taken me from the tropical forests of the *achans* to the austere rusticality of the *roshis* to the stark mountainous terrain of the *rinpoches*. It has taken me from the temple to the practice center to the university classroom. It has enveloped me in the exertion of several practices, each of which is deeply contemplative in the degree of steady concentration involved: still, silent meditation; laborious reading of Pali, Sanskrit, and Tibetan texts; and, the most difficult of all, sustained and unflinching critical thinking. Why is critique so difficult? Well, it is not only philosophers who fall in love with their subject. That love will ensure that the critique that follows does not obliterate, does not grind back to dust, the finely wrought edifice of Western Buddhism. And if I do succeed in my plan, it is only to view the ensuing ruin in the glow of a stranger, more creaturely, light.

I have learned a lot about ruin from the people I mentioned earlier. Another teacher not mentioned is the Persian Muslim poet Jalāl ad-Dīn Muhammad Rūmī (1207–1273). Rūmī employed the conceit of ruin as an image of the catalyzing loss required to come in possession of our most potent human quality: love. He doesn't mean love as a commonplace affection. He means love as a ferocious force of ruination: "What care I though ruin be wrought?/Under the ruin there is royal treasure."[4] One collection of his poetry is titled *The Ruins of the Heart.* I have also learned a great deal about ruin from Canadian poet, novelist, and singer-songwriter Leonard

Cohen (1934–2016). A line from his 1992 song “Anthem” has become a kind of cultural cliché, like the Vincent van Gogh painting *Starry Night* that can be had on a tee-shirt or coffee mug, but it nonetheless captures his notion of ruin: “There is a crack in everything/that’s how the light gets in.”[5] For Cohen as for Rumi, ruin is a question of igniting the “furnace of the spirit,” whose ardent issue, always, is love.[6]

I first heard Leonard Cohen in 1975 while in the room of my friend, Thomas Adams, who had then borrowed the album *Songs of Love and Hate* from a local library. At that point in our lives, Thomas and I were drinking from the trough of Alice Cooper, the New York Dolls, and Black Sabbath. Yet, we sat in rapt silence as the black vinyl turned, slowly secreting the passionate, melancholy ambience that is Leonard Cohen—his voice, his guitar, his verse. One of those verses, from the first song on the record, “Avalanche,” could be the Universal Beloved inciting Rūmī to ecstatic embrace. Or is it Shams, the mysterious dervish perpetually wandering in search of a beloved friend, someone with whom he could speak of secret things? It’s impossible to say. Both masters wield double entendre as a weapon of ruination. After admonishing his wavering lover not to feign such passion in the face of doubt, the singer intones (or cautions?): “It is your turn, beloved/It is your flesh that I wear.”[7] It is a disturbing, almost ghastly, line. But can you conceive of a more direct and unadorned image of union born of annihilation? Imagining that ruined building once again, I picture it obliterated as an edifice for narrow worldly concerns (commerce, service, bureaucracy) because it has become clothed in the flesh of nature.

Thomas and I intravenously ingested Leonard Cohen’s

intoxicant. At the same time, together with my brother Damon, we began imbibing the violent metallic hootch of the Stooges' Vietnam War–contaminated *Raw Power*: "I am the world's forgotten boy/The one who searches and destroys."[8] The three of us began imperceptibly to mix the dark elixir of Leonard Cohen and the volatile firewater of the Stooges with a form of music that would come to define our lives: punk rock. Like so many young people in search of an expression for their still nascent superpowers, we formed a band. Joined by like-minded insurgents of the moribund American middle class, we unleashed our Dionysian energy, power, passion, and heat on the Philadelphia (and beyond) underground from 1981 to 1987. The name of our band is Ruin. (Present tense: like an alcoholic, you are never cured of your band.)

With love and with inexpressible gratitude, I dedicate this book to the members of Ruin: Damon Wallis, Thomas Adams, Cordy Swope, Richard Hutchins, and Paul Della Pelle.

Part One

Recognition

Introduction: Raise the Curtain on the Theater of Western Buddhism!

What are we to make of Western Buddhism? It presents itself as the treasure house of ideas and practices that were formulated by an enlightened teacher who lived in India 2,500 years ago. Followers of Western Buddhism tell us that this man's teachings accurately identify the real conditions of human existence. If true, that is quite a remarkable achievement. It would mean that an ancient diagnosis of human experience still pertains in our hyper-accelerated, ultra-technological modern society. Is such a correspondence possible? Western Buddhism might, conversely, be made out to be less of an unchanging universal account of human reality and more of a contemporary ideology. In its basic sense, an ideology is a strategy that "represents the *imaginary* relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence."[1] To recognize Western Buddhism as an ideology is not to view it as an instance of false consciousness or nefarious deception. It is rather to acknowledge it as being uniquely productive of a quite particular subject, one that imagines his or her relation to the world in quite particular ways. If we view Western Buddhism as an ideology, as, that is, a form of life, an apparently natural way of being within any given social formation, we could certainly better explain the incredible diversity among its forms throughout time and place. For, unlike an idealist timeless teaching, "ideology has a material existence."[2] Its dictates are

always enacted within the presently existing social arena and realized as a practice by real people therein. Invoking the prospect of an imaginary relation to one's world suggests a third, altogether different, possibility. Western Buddhism might be understood as a strategy for *engaging* with the dominant ideology of a society. In this case, it would be a practice of critiquing and possibly even improving the social formation in which its practitioners find themselves currently embedded.

My observation of Western Buddhism leads me to the conclusion that it itself is unsure which of these three characterizations best describes it. By "it," I mean, of course, the combined effect of the people—the formulators, teachers, and practitioners—who act in the name of "Western Buddhism," or really of "Buddhism" in the West today. Their accumulated record is an expression of adamant faith in the universal veracity of their teachings. Somewhat paradoxically, they are equally willing to perform operations on those same teachings, to adjust and alter them, in ways that suggest that they are aware of the time- and place-dependent ideological nature of the teachings. More puzzling, these same people regularly invoke concepts that caution, *watch your head! radical critique of self and society underway!*

One contention driving this book is that Western Buddhism functions in all three of these modes, but to varying degrees of explicitness. I see Western Buddhism as a critique subsumed within an ideology subsumed within a faith. I am almost tempted to apply to Western Buddhism, along with a grain of salt, Freud's famous topography. *Faith* is Western Buddhism's superego. It internalizes and echoes back society's sense of morality, righteousness, and goodness. It aims to produce the ideal

subject, one who spontaneously conforms to the social law. The superego-faith of this subject compels him or her to eschew expression of aggressions that are forbidden by decorum. The faithful Western Buddhist subject is thus adept at channeling aggression into affirmation. *Critique* is Western Buddhism's id. The critical drive bound up in certain Western Buddhist postulates (e.g., emptiness, no-self, impermanence) are primitive and instinctual. This drive impels the subject's visceral desire to be unbeholden to subjugating norms, to be free of society's (and of faith's) self-serving moralistic constraints. It thus tends to produce a subject who takes up conceptual arms against the deceptively polite policing of those norms and thrusts them into a controverting chaos. The critical Western Buddhist subject is adept at flushing out repressive sleeper cells within the doctrinal and communal compound. *Ideology* is Western Buddhism's ego. It is the "I" of the subject, the "we" of the community. It is motivated by the demands of society (and of faith) and is thus acutely sensitive and responsive to "reality," to, that is to say, society's status quo. The ideological Western Buddhist subject seeks, above all, some form of wellbeing. Happiness would be optimal; but, short of that eternally elusive goal, certainly the reduction of stress and tension isn't too much to ask for. After all, Western Buddhist ideology, as Freud says of the ego, "serves three severe masters and does what it can to bring their claims and demands into harmony with one another."[3] Ideology-ego's "tyrannical masters" are, of course, reality, faith, and critique. Western Buddhist ideology thus paradoxically produces an *anxious* Western Buddhist subject, one who is able to minimize conflicts with the pious demands of faith only by repressing and shoring up against the primal aggressive force circulating

within the concepts of that very faith.

As the title suggests, one aim of this book is to give voice to the critical unconscious, to stay with our psychoanalytic metaphor, of Western Buddhist discourse. I will give the details of my approach later. Here, just a brief word about the general purpose of critique. Marjorie Gracieuse sums up this purpose when she speaks of "wresting vital potentialities of humans from the artificial forms and static norms that subjugate them."[4] That is a generous definition of the task. It allows at the outset that the object of critique has something of value to offer us. At the same time it suspects that this value comes embedded in a system of thought and practice that has superfluous, and problematic, elements. These elements constitute a symbolic surplus value that functions to capture the desire of the practitioner. It is reasonable to think that it is in this surplus that we discover features that limit and coerce the subject's agency. Advertising gives us the most obvious examples of the value/surplus differential. It pitches item after item that relates to the fulfilment of some basic human need—food, clothing, hygiene, mating, transportation, security, relaxation, and so on. Yet it should not be difficult to discern how an ad for, say, a Prius SUV or a pair of Aéropostale ripped skinny jeans elicits desires that far exceed fulfillment of basic transportation and clothing needs. In addition, advertisement is produced by, and further reproduces, quite particular social relations (economic, gender, racial, political). Symbolic surplus value is easily discernible when it comes to such goods as a pair of pants that, beyond the basic need of covering the flesh in cold weather, inscribe their young female wearer into "consumer society's colonization of youth and sexuality through [selling her] 'freedom' ... to do whatever

she wants with her body."[5] It becomes more difficult to discern in the cases of the "vital potentialities" that Gracieuse alludes to. At what point, for example, does education cross over from being the practice of developing the human potential for thinking and knowing into a means of social inculcation? Paulo Freire, for instance, holds that all people possess the potential to become aware of the forces (social, political, cultural, linguistic, psychological, etc.) that constitute "the logic of the present."[6] An educational program can facilitate that end, he says, by training students in "the practice of freedom," whereby they learn to discern the operations of these forces on their own sense of identity, as well as on the ways in which these forces serve to replicate and perpetuate "the logic of the present." An educational program can just as likely be put in the service of a political agenda that precisely wants to hinder such awareness of that logic. To do so, it does not deny "the vital potentiality of the human" that is the capacity for creative critical inquiry. Rather, it perversely directs this potential into a stultifying framework (forms and norms) of preordained outcomes. Another example, one familiar to readers of the present book, is meditation. Let's assume for a moment that sitting still, silently, and attentively serves, like education, the vital potentiality of the human for a certain type of creative critical self-inquiry. At what point does this ostensibly neutral, natural inquiry become a node in an ideological system? Is it not curious that meditators virtually always happen to discover in their meditation the very claims of their community's doctrine? What does such "validation" tell us about the relationship between the vital human potential affixed (possibly) to silent sitting and the apparently overdetermining forms and norms that frame such a practice?

I leave those questions hanging for now. The point here is that critique is a practice that attempts to "wrest" vital value from subjugating surplus. It is a practice that allows us to make explicit the operations of a system of thought and practice that the system itself, in order to remain whole, keeps implicit—its unstated assumptions; its unspoken values; its relationship to existing social, economic, and political formations; and, perhaps most importantly, its tacit formation of individual actors in the world. Without a practice of critique, we cannot distinguish a catalyst for a vital human potentiality from a self-serving prescription of a covertly ideological program, however well-meaning that program may be. The wager of this book is that, in distinguishing between the two types of practice, we are dealing with a difference that makes a world of difference. But what might that difference be? I will deal with this question in depth later. For now, just to give the reader some initial orientation, we can consider the purpose of the "wresting" that Gracieuse recommends. In brief, it has to do with something that will sound familiar to readers of Buddhism, namely, a certain unbinding from violence, delusion, and fugitive desire. We might call this unbinding *freedom*, *liberation*, or even *nirvana.* If these terms sound grandiose in the present context, they may nonetheless name a genuine vital potentiality of human beings. If so, this unbinding will require, like the Buddha besieged beneath the *bodhi* tree, a ferocious struggle against "the world under the sway of death."[7] For, in naming coercive structures, in speaking of subjugation, stasis, and dissemblance, Gracieuse is giving voice to nothing if not the necessity of a kind of human insurrection against the existing world. I believe that Western Buddhism understands this struggle. The crucial question

is whether it provides arms in solidarity with the struggling human or whether it performs a kind of spiritualized *Dolchstoß* in the very heat of battle. Or perhaps we will discover another potent image to characterize Western Buddhism in our time. First, however, we must explore many criticisms and refutations and propose many new ideas, concepts, and claims.

Why Western Buddhism?

Why *Western* Buddhism? The title of this book surely suggests that I am treating a quite specific variety of Buddhism: that which exists in the West. It would follow that this western variety has *something*—texts, doctrines, teachers, practices, beliefs, communities—that differs significantly from its eastern relatives. Otherwise, why would it be necessary to add the modifier? At the same time, though, the reader will notice that I often use "Buddhism" interchangeably with the modified form "Western Buddhism" and, indeed, rarely differentiate between the two usages. I will have more to say about this matter later. Here, I would like to highlight what I mean by the term "Western Buddhism."

Western Buddhism originated in the East, in Asia. I am not referring to the obvious fact that Asia, specifically India, is the wellspring of all subsequent international forms of Buddhism. Rather, from its core values to its high aspirations, Western Buddhism is the result of an articulation and self-understanding that initially took shape in Asia. According to the German Indologist Heinz Bechert, the lineaments of what we now think of as Western Buddhism were first drawn in Sri Lanka. This

origin should not be surprising. As Bechert points out, since 1517 the coastal areas of the island had been occupied by, first Portuguese, then Dutch, and finally British, forces of merchants, militaries, and missionaries. At that time, too, the Buddhist Kingdom of Kandy (1521–1818) was rising in the land's interior, preserving the ancient domination of Buddhism in daily affairs. This hotbed of East–West proximity led to encounters such as the spirited public debates between Buddhist monks and Christian missionaries, where opposing worldviews could be aired, evaluated, critiqued, and defended. It is thus also not surprising that Asian Buddhists were subjected to a long and ultimately far-reaching exposure to "European ways of thinking."[8] The movement of the arrow, though, was turning in the other direction as well: the colonizing Westerners were showing a sustained interest in Buddhism. However scheming and skeptical this newfound interest may have been on the side of the colonizers, it created, in turn, an equally new self-consciousness among Buddhists concerning their own tradition. "Thus," writes Bechert, "an essential presupposition for the development" of what would become Western Buddhism was this "intensive encounter between western and Buddhist thinking."[9]

By the early nineteenth century, under British rule, Buddhism in Sri Lanka was, Bechert writes, "exhibiting serious signs of decay."[10] Significantly, at the same time "the influence of Christian schools and missionaries on the country's educated classes was rapidly increasing."[11] By mid-century, members of this new Anglophile elite feared that Buddhism would disappear altogether from the island by the end of the century. Precisely the opposite occurred: Buddhism underwent radical reforms, eventually

birth, possessed supernatural power, performed miracles, and attained transcendental cosmic wisdom, was now converted into a rational, empirically minded scientist. Buddhism consequently no longer had on offer the cosmological vision—gods, heavens, hells, rebirth, karmic retribution, and all—that grounded its "total cure, opening to the unconditional beyond space and time."[15] Rather, it now offers "optimism and activity"[16] on behalf of society and society's engaged, creatively expressive, if neurotically divided, individual. The practice of Buddhism itself is now seen as predominantly lay rather than monastic. Even here, though, it is no longer realized in the community celebrations and ritual participation that marked superstitious "folk" Buddhism, but rather in the "privatized and internalized" psychological sphere of "one's mind or soul."[17] It should be obvious by now that the terms I used earlier—Enlightenment, Romantic, and Protestant—are fitting monikers for this new articulation of Buddhism; and indeed they have been from time to time suggested in place of "modernist." Thus, we can summarize as follows. Western Buddhism is a progeny of the Enlightenment: it implicitly values, for instance, reason and rationality, progress, equality, empiricism, and the primacy of science. It is the spiritual kin of Romanticism: it valorizes personal emotions, creative imagination, intuition, nature, the exemplar of the heroic figure, and the primacy of the subject. It is a guardian of Protestantism: it reflexively values laicization, individual effort and personal achievement, psychologized internalization, ritual simplification or outright elimination, return to scriptural sources, and the primacy of "self-culture."[18] Finally, this modernized and Westernized Buddhism, far from being confined to the West, is international in scope,

transcending as it does “cultural and national boundaries, creating ... a cosmopolitan network of intellectuals, writing most often in English.”[19]

What I have sketched here is, of course, an idealized type of Buddhism. No single instantiation of Buddhism, East or West, fulfills the ambitions of its modernist reformers. And, for that matter, neither do the most fervent devotees of the Enlightenment, Romanticism, and Protestantism live up to their cults’ lofty expectations. If we were to sift carefully through the values I just mentioned and compare them to how people behave historically in real life, would we not find self-delusion, contradiction, and outright dishonesty at every turn? So, let’s bear in mind Max Weber’s warning that “to speak in terms of ideal types” is “in a certain sense doing violence to historical reality.”[20] As Weber further reminds us, however, without this little act of violence we will not get very far in our investigations. So there it is. Whether in Tokyo or Toledo, you now know how to spot a Western Buddhist.

Some readers may still wonder why I am limiting my critique to this *Western*, albeit internationalized, Buddhism. Isn’t Western Buddhism too easy of a target, with its facile prescriptions for happiness and its Pollyannish affirmationism? Wouldn’t this be a much more substantive critique if it addressed Buddhism as a whole, taking into account, for instance, the serious ancient and medieval philosophical traditions? If we dwell on the first point for a moment, we will discover an additional characteristic of Western Buddhism. It is, in fact, a feature that is to a great extent *definitive* of Western Buddhism. I should also admit that it is a feature that strengthens my imaginary interlocutor’s argument against making Western Buddhism the sole target of my critique. I am thinking here of the

widespread application of the "Easy-Easy Principle" in Western Buddhist discourse. This principle is a concept of the logician and argumentation theorist John Woods. In brief, the principle states that if a human activity is easy, so is, or so should be, the theory informing that activity. In *The Death of Argument*, Woods offers these definitions:

> A task is easy when a human being can perform it competently without formal tutelage, and without noticeable effort ... An easy theory is similarly one that can be understand by an arbitrarily selected competent individual without tutelage and without noticeable effort. Easy theories include common sense theories, but are not restricted to them.[21]

Elsewhere, Woods says that the theory of such a practice "must likewise be free of technical or theoretically abstruse content."[22] Western Buddhist rhetoric, of course, is more prone to speaking of the "simple" nature of Buddhism, its practices, and its corresponding theories. The principle, however, still holds, as does the condition that Western Buddhist thought and practice is, according to its rhetoric and unlike "hard" theories and techniques, largely available "without formal tutelage, and without noticeable effort." As a prominent figure sums up this feature of Western Buddhism: "Practice: you can't do it wrong."[23] In fact, simplicity is a trope burrowed within the very marrow of the tradition. Alexander Wynne provides some insight into this trope in *The Origins of Buddhist Meditation.* His intent and context are admittedly different from mine; but what he says is nonetheless instructive. Wynne argues that the simplicity of a particular canonical account of the Buddha's awakening "likely" proves that account to have greater veracity over another, more complex, variant.

Wynne acknowledges that "simplicity is not necessarily an unambiguous sign of the historical authenticity of any Buddhist text," and yet his acceptance of the simpler account in this case exceeds the old-text critical principle of *lectio brevior*.[24] As is all-too-common in Buddhist studies scholarship, Wynne the scholar is indistinguishable from a devout practitioner when he argues that the "simplicity in the account [of the Buddha's first encounter with a passer-by after his awakening] suggest the possibility that it is a description of liberating insight, i.e. 'an immediate verbalisation of (a conceptualisation of) an actual experience,' rather than a theory." Wynne, perhaps unintentionally, broadcasts his faith-driven assumptions at work here:

> We can assume that the Buddha's own accounts of his awakening would have been "immediate verbalisations of an actual experience," rather than secondary theories. If any trace of the original account of the Buddha's awakening is to be found in the early Buddhist sources, we should expect to find it in a simple description, and not a complex theory; the simpler the description the better.[25]

Unless we subscribe to such values in advance, why we would assume that a "description of liberating insight" would necessarily be simple and untheoretical? In any case, Wynne is giving voice to a widespread rhetorical premise of Buddhism, East and West; and that premise is perfectly congruent with the Easy-Easy—or, in this case, the Simple-Simple—Principle. Another leading figure of Western Buddhism offers a somewhat cruder version of this principle: "*sutras* and *sastras* are treated by Zen as mere waste paper whose utility consist in wiping off the dirt of the intellect and nothing more."[26] *Sūtras*and,

34 See Glenn Wallis, “Criticism Matters: A Response to Rick Repetti,” in *Handbook of Mindfulness: Culture, Context, and Social Engagement*, ed. Ronald E. Purser, David Forbes, and Adam Burke (Basel: Springer, 2016), 502.
35 Laruelle, “Summary of Non-Philosophy,” ¶1.3.1, 138–9.
36 Laruelle, “Summary of Non-Philosophy,” ¶1.3.1, 138–9.
37 This and the following quotes are from Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, trans. Anthony M. Ludovici (London: Wordsworth Editions, 2007), 19–21.
38 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, trans. Judith Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 20.
39 Nietzsche: *Beyond Good and Evil*, 49.
40 Last two quotes, Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 19.
41 Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, 21.
42 Last three quotes, Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, 21. Nietzsche uses *wirkliche Welt* in this instance. Generally, however, he uses *scheinbare Welt*, the “apparent world,” the world as known through our senses, and opposes it to the *wahre Welt*, or an ostensibly “true world” posited ideally, in thought. We will revisit this point later on.
43 Katerina Kolozova, *Cut of the Real: Subjectivity in Poststructuralist Philosophy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 60.
44 Laruelle, *Dictionary*, 56, *s.v.* Philosophical Decision.
45 This “whatever” is a placeholder for an enormous cache of historical, cultural, doctrinal variety and contingency. Later I introduce the neologism *x-buddhism* to capture this “whatever.”
46 Laruelle, *Dictionary*, 56, *s.v* Philosophical Decision.
47 Laruelle, *Dictionary*, 56, *s.v.* Philosophical Decision.
48 In addition to the task at hand, I hope to impress on the reader that “x-buddhism” is not pejorative. Timothy Morton exemplifies this misunderstanding when he comments that the project of non-buddhism “claims to be above (and superior to) the sectarianism of what it patronizes as X-buddhism”; see Boon et al., *Nothing*, 187–8. Hopefully, the reader will come to understand the term as no more patronizing than Jay Garfield’s view that “the Buddhist tradition, although vast and diverse, is unified by a strong set of joint broad commitments that define a position as Buddhist”; see Jay L. Garfield, *Engaging Buddhism: Why It Matters to Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 1. This sameness-in-difference rhetoric is, in fact, endemic to Buddhism’s self-understanding. It is present from the Buddha’s “single taste” to Joseph Goldstein’s “One Dharma.” Morton himself invokes it when he refers to “Buddhisms” in the plural as comprising an essentialized singular. For instance, “The critique of mindfulness is immanent to Buddhisms. So much so that [to engage in the critique] is ... to be a Buddhist” (189; the three dots are in the original). Morton could have just as well said “immanent to x-buddhism.” For, like his “Buddhisms,” x-buddhism is a neutral term intended as a shorthand for the proliferation of a particular type. But, I find that the “x” functions in a way that better captures the *singular* type or identity of Buddhism’s many modifications.
49 Laruelle, *Principles*, 235.
50 Laruelle, *Dictionary*, 57, *s.v.* Philosophy.
51 Sangharakshita, *What Is the Dharma? The Essential Teachings of the Buddha* (Birmingham: Windhorse, 1998), 6.
52 See Monier Williams, *A Sanskrit English Dictionary*, 510, *s.v.* धर्म (*dharma*). I write it as “The Dharma” in order to capture the absolute, nonnegotiable, universal import of the term within Buddhist discourse.
53 Batchelor, *After Buddhism*, 2–3.
54 See Williams, *A Sanskrit English Dictionary*, 510, *s.v.* धर्म (*dharma*).
55 Laruelle, *Dictionary*, 33, *s.v.* Mixture.
56 Narada Thera (1898–1983), who is in many ways a prototypical fashioner of Western Buddhism—native Sri Lankan; educated at St. Benedict’s College and Ceylon University College; ordained as a Theravadan monk at age of eighteen; writer in, and translator into, English—sums up the general Buddhist position on faith when he says, “Buddhism does not demand blind faith from its adherents. Here mere belief is dethroned and is substituted by confidence based on knowledge, which, in Pali, is known as *saddha*,” *Buddhanet*, www.buddhanet.net/nutshell03.htm (accessed October 6, 2017). The phrase “confidence based on knowledge” is an excellent description of science-thought.
57 Laruelle, *Principles*, 232.
58 Laruelle, *Principles*, 4.
59 The Dalai Lama, for instance, refers to *pratītyasamutpāda* as “the entirety of Buddhist teaching.” See Jay L. Garfield, *Engaging Buddhism: Why It Matters to Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 25.
60 See *Saṃyuttanikāya* 2.1.10, *Gotama Sutta*, in Wallis, *Basic Teachings*, 40–44.
61 See Bhikkhu Bodhi, “Transcendental Dependent Arising: A Translation and Exposition of the *Upanisa Sutta*,” *Access to Insight*, www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/bodhi/wheel277.html (accessed May 20, 2017); translation slightly modified.

62 I say "Western Buddhist" because the more traditional understanding of *pratītyasamutpāda* seems to indicate only cognitive (including affective) conditioning. The Western Buddhist sense of its indicating the entire "flow of reality" as a mental-physical "web of mutual causality" is most apparent in Buddhist environmentalism, where it is equated, by Joanna Macy and others, with the "deep ecology of all things." See, for instance, Daniel P. Scheid, *The Cosmic Common Good: Religious Grounds for Ecological Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 154–5. For a compelling, and very interesting, theory about the traditional understanding of the term, see Eviatar Shulman, "Early Meanings of Dependent-Origination," *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, vol. 36 (2008): 297–317.

63 Laruelle, *Dictionary*, 57–8.

64 See Brassier, "Axiomatic Heresy," 26.

65 Laruelle, *Dictionary*, 58.

66 As I mentioned earlier, in the text that I have been mainly citing, Nietzsche distinguishes *die wahre* (true) *Welt* from *die wirkliche* (real) *Welt*, and glosses the latter as being *eine scheinbare* (an apparent) *Welt*. See Friedrich Nietzsche, *Götzen-Dämmerung oder Wie man mit dem Hammer philosophirt*, Kapitel 6, *Spiegel Online*, http://gutenberg.spiegel.de/buch/-6185/1 (accessed May 20, 2017).

67 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, paragraph 584, https://archive.org/stream/TheWillToPower-Nietzsche/will_to_power-nietzsche_djvu.txt (accessed May 21, 2017). On Nietzsche's ambivalent but ultimately "positive" attitude toward science, see John Richardson, "Nietzsche's Psychology," in *Nietzsches Wissenschaftsphilosophie*, ed. H. Heit, G. Abel, and M. Brusotti (Berlin: de Gruyter-Verlag, 2011), 311–28.

68 This phenomenon is nowhere more apparent than in the presentation of the Western Buddhist schools organized around the moniker "Mindfulness." Mindfulness proponents claim that the simple cognitive capacity of being "mindful"—in, of course, the particular manner prescribed by the various Mindfulness ideologies—impacts a prodigious sphere of human and nonhuman activity, such as sex, giving birth, dying and death, parenting, cooking, eating and weight loss, creativity, sports performance, dog training, education, therapy, the environment, addiction recovery, etc. See, for example, Per Drougge, "Notes toward a Coming Backlash: Mindfulness as an Opiate of the Middle Classes," in Purser, *Handbook of Mindfulness*, 167–79.

Chapter 5

1 Laruelle, *Principles*, 12.

2 Ludwik Fleck, *Genesis and Development of a Scientific Fact*, trans. Fred Bradley and Thaddeus J. Trenn (Chicago: Chicago University Press, [1935] 1979), 142.

3 Fleck, *Genesis and Development*, 142, emphases in original.

4 Fleck, *Genesis and Development*, 39, 41.

5 Fleck, *Genesis and Development*, 99.

6 Ludwik Fleck, "The Problem of Epistemology," in *Cognition and Fact—Materials on Ludwik Fleck*, ed. R. S. Cohen and T. Schnelle (Dordrecht: Reidel, [1936] 1986), 85.

7 Paul Feyerabend, *Against Method* (London: Verso, 1978), 30.

8 Feyerabend, *Against Method*, 46–7.

9 Like "to" and "into" and "of" and all other prepositions and genitives, "before" obscures the immediacy of our relationship to "the law" or to the Real. It is for this reason that Laruelle employs his peculiar notation, and places such terms in parentheses, with hyphens, as prefixes or suffixes, etc. For example, force (of) thought, immanent (to) itself, other (of the) void, and so forth. See Laruelle, *Anti-Badiou*, 142, and Smith, *Laruelle*, 52–4.

10 François Laruelle, "On the Black Universe: In the Human Foundations of Color," 1–2, *Recess*, www.recessart.org/wp-content/uploads/Laruelle-Black-Universe1.pdf (accessed June 1, 2017). This text is accompanied by the original French, "Du noir univers: dans les fondations humaines de la couleur," first published in *La Décision philosophique*, vol. 5 (April 1988): 107–12. I have taken some minor liberties in my translation.

11 Laruelle in *From Decision to Heresy: Experiments in Non-Standard Thought*, ed. Robin Mackay (Falmouth: Urbanomic, 2012), "Introduction: Laruelle Undivided," 29.

12 Anthony Paul Smith, *François Laruelle's Principles of Non-Philosophy: A Critical Introduction and Guide* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 80.

13 On this parallel, see Laruelle, *Principles*, 207, and Smith, *François Laruelle's Principles*, 12–13.

14 Laruelle, *Principles*, 208.

15 I am assuming that Garfield has in mind Heidegger's substantive neologism *Existenzial* rather than the adjectival form that would give us the feminine declension *existentiale*. The former is transliterated as *existential* in English translations. See, for instance, Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, [1927] 1967), 55.

16 Jay L. Garfield, *Engaging Buddhism: Why It Matters to Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 9.

17 See Sigmund Freud and Josef Breuer, *Studies on Hysteria*, trans. Nicola Luckhurst (New York: Penguin Press, [1895] 2004), 306.
18 Quoted in Bruno Bosteels, *Marx and Freud in Latin America: Politics, Psychoanalysis, and Religion in Times of Terror* (London: Verso, 2012), 244.
19 Garfield, *Engaging*, 2.
20 Laruelle, *Dictionary*, 57–8.
21 Garfield, *Engaging*, 11–12.
22 Thanissaro Bhikkhu, quoted in McMahan, *Buddhist Modernism*, 248. While it is true that modern traditional Buddhists permit themselves countless lifetimes of detours in *saṃsāra*, the merit they are thereby slowly accumulating must, to remain coherently *Buddhist*, have as its end this ultimate goal.
23 See, for instance, Wilhelm Halbfass, *Tradition and Reflection: Explorations in Indian Thought* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), and John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon, eds., *Transcendence and Beyond: A Postmodern Inquiry* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007). For a historical and cross-cultural overview of the two concepts in relation to one another, see also Iveta Leitane, "Transcendence and Immanence," in *Encyclopedia of Sciences and Religions*, ed. Anne L. C. Runehov and Lluis Oviedo (Dordrecht: Springer Reference, 2013), 2275–85.
24 Wallis, *The Dhammapada*, verse 282.
25 Gordon, *Continental Divide*, 2.
26 Laruelle, *Dictionary*, 5, *s.v.* (Epistemic, Non-Philosophical) Break.
27 Laruelle, cited in Katerina Kolozova, "The Project of Non-Marxism: Arguing for 'Monstrously' Radical Concepts," *Cultural Logic*, vol. 10 (2007): 5.
28 Thomas H. Johnson, ed., *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1960), 339, poem #686.
29 Rocco Gangle, *Diagrammatic Immanence: Category Theory and Philosophy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 3.
30 Gangle, *Diagrammatic Immanence*, 3.
31 On this point, see Kolozova, "The Project of Non-Marxism," 10.
32 See Kai Dreschmitt, *Animal symbolicum oder Mängelwesen? Eine Annäherung an die Ansätze Ernst Cassirers und Arnold Gehlens* (Norderstedt: GRIN Verlag, 2011), 3.
33 On Kant's contribution to our current understanding of "immanent and transcendent" as a binary, see Johannes Zachhuber, "Transcendence and Immanence," in *The Edinburgh Critical History of Nineteenth-Century Christian Theology*, ed. Daniel Whistler (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 164–81.
34 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. and ed. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 385–6.
35 Kant, *Critique*, 386.
36 A popular internet meme attributed to Pope Francis.
37 *Cāḷamālukya Sutta; Majjhimanikāya* 63, in Wallis, *Basic Teachings*, 6–7.
38 Batchelor, *After Buddhism*, 24.
39 Robert Aitken, trans., *The Gateless Barrier: The Wu-Men Kuan* (*Mumonkan*) (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1991), 137.
40 Laruelle, *Principles*, 27, emphases added.
41 Aitken, *The Gateless Barrier*, 137.
42 Aitken, *The Gateless Barrier*, 138.
43 Aitken, *The Gateless Barrier*, 140. The final sentence refers to the *bodhisattva* Maitreya's descent to earth as the Buddha of some future time, replacing the current "reign" of Śākyamuni Buddha.
44 Aitken, *The Gateless Barrier*, 140.
45 Aitken, *The Gateless Barrier*, 139. Aitken says he wrote this verse during the Second World War while imprisoned in a Japanese internment camp: "I was awed by the vitality of the sump of our night soil, ripening for use in the garden."
46 T. Griffith Foulk, "The Form and Function of *Koan* Literature: A Historical Overview," in *The Koan: Texts and Contexts in Zen Buddhism*, ed. Steven Heine and Dale S. Wright (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 15.
47 Nick Srnicek, "François Laruelle, the One and the Non-Philosophical Tradition," *Pli: The Warwick Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 22 (2010): 194.
48 "330 Million Gods," from the BBC series on religion *The Long Search*, released 1977.
49 Brassier, "Axiomatic Heresy," 26–7.
50 Paul Reps and Nyogen Senzaki, eds., *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones: A Collection of Zen and Pre-Zen Writings* (Boston: Tuttle, 1988), 19.
51 Laruelle, *Principles*, 20.

52 Laruelle, *Principles*, 27.
53 Laruelle, *Principles*, 21.
54 Laruelle, *Principles*, 20.
55 Laruelle, *Dictionary*, 10, *s.v.* Determination-in-the-last-instance.
56 See John Bussanich, "Plotinus's Metaphysics of the One," in *Cambridge Companion to Plotinus*, ed. Lloyd P. Gerson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 45.
57 Freud, *Civilization*, 1.
58 François Laruelle, *General Theory of Victims*, trans. Jessie Hock and Alex Dubilet (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015), 21.
59 Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: Verso, [1965] 2005), 113.
60 Laruelle, *Dictionary*, 4, *s.v.* Being-in-One.
61 Laruelle quoted in Smith, *A Non-Philosophical Theory of Nature*, 4, emphasis added.
62 Robert G. Brown's home page, http://webhome.phy.duke.edu/~rgb/Philosophy/axioms/axioms/node27.html (accessed January 23, 2018).
63 Of course, my speculative *ur-axiomatic* positing is found only in compromised or amphibological forms in actual x-buddhist materials. Nāgārjuna, for instance, employs this concept, among other reasons, to refute the charge that he is "contradicting fundamental Buddhist tenets." For, "Only with the simultaneous realization of the emptiness, but conventional reality of phenomena and the emptiness of emptiness, argues Nāgārjuna, can suffering be wholly uprooted." See Jay Garfield, *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way: Nāgārjuna's Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 313–14. In the *Heart Sutra*, too, a text much beloved by Western Zen Buddhists, the author abstains from encyclopedic evangelization *about* emptiness, and endeavors instead to think *from* emptiness, that is to say, to *perform* emptiness. In doing so, she was acting in solidarity with Laruelle's most civil and democratic approach to knowledge. But, alas, the work was once again dutifully weaponized by whomever saw fit to tack on at some point in time the all-too-Buddhist "most illuminating *mantra*, the highest *mantra*, the *mantra* beyond compare, the *mantra* that puts an end to all suffering": *gate gate pāragate pārasamgate bodhi svāhā*.
64 Abe, *Buddhism and Interfaith Dialogue*, 79–80.
65 Thomas Cleary, *Instant Zen: Waking Up in the Present* (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 1994), 4.
66 Laruelle, *Principles*, 14.
67 Laruelle, *Principles*, xii, in "Translators' Introduction."
68 Laruelle, *Principles*, 13.
69 Adapted from François Laruelle, "Theorems of the Good News," trans. Alexander R. Galloway, *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities*, vol. 19, no. 2 (2014): "A City of Heretics: François Laruelle's Non-Philosophy and Its Variants": 41–3.
70 Georges B. J. Dreyfus, *The Sound of Two Hands Clapping: The Education of a Tibetan Buddhist Monk* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 189.
71 See, for instance, *Majjhimanikāya* 70, *Kīṭāgiri suttaṃ:* Nāhaṃ bhikkhave ādikeneva aññārādhanaṃ vadāmi. Api ca bhikkhave anupubbasikkhā anupubbakiriyā anupubbapaṭipadā aññārādhanā hoti. *Sutta Central*, https://suttacentral.net/pi/mn70 (accessed August 22, 2017).
72 *Aṅguttara Nikāya* 1.6.51: Pabhassaramidaṃ, bhikkhave, cittaṃ. Tañca kho āgantukehi upakkilesehi upakkiliṭṭhaṃ. *Sutta Central*, https://suttacentral.net/pi/an1.51–60 (accessed August 22, 2017).
73 *Aṅguttara Nikāya* 1.6.52: Taṃ sutavā ariyasāvako yathābhūtaṃ pajānāti. *Sutta Central*, https://suttacentral.net/pi/an1.51–60 (accessed August 22, 2017).
74 Pepper, *The Faithful Buddhist*, n.p.
75 For references to relevant texts, see Bhikkhu Bodhi, ed., *In the Buddha's Words: An Anthology of Discourses from the Pali Canon* (Somerville: Wisdom, 2005), 21–3.
76 Dainin Katagiri, *You Have to Say Something: Manifesting Zen Insight* (Boston: Shambhala, 1994), Google Books, n.p.
77 Mark G. Williams, John D. Teasdale, Zindel V. Segal, and Jon Kabat-Zinn, *The Mindful Way through Depression: Freeing Yourself from Chronic Unhappiness* (New York: Guilford Press, 2007), 54, emphasis in original.
78 Williams, *The Mindful Way*, 46.
79 François Laruelle, "Is Thinking Democratic? Or, How to Introduce Theory into Democracy," in *Laruelle and Non-Philosophy*, ed. John Mullarkey and Anthony Paul Smith (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 230.
80 Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling (London: Lawrence and Wishart, [1867] 2003), 167–9.
81 See Laruelle, *Dictionary*, 13, *s.v.* (Non-autopositional) Drive, where "drive" is another "name for the force (of) thought as organon of the One and for its action of a pragmatic nature on the World or philosophy-material."

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