

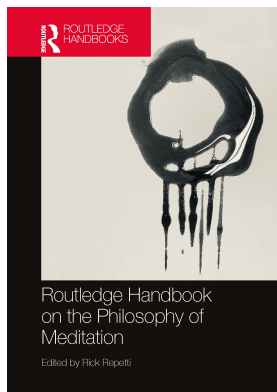
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Publisher: *Routledge*

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: 5 Howick Place, London SW1P 1WG, UK



Routledge Handbook on the Philosophy of Meditation

Rick Repetti

The relation between meditation and analytic philosophy

Publication details

<https://test.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781003127253-6>

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Published online on: 17 May 2022

How to cite :- Marie Friquegnon. 17 May 2022, *The relation between meditation and analytic philosophy from:* Routledge Handbook on the Philosophy of Meditation Routledge

Accessed on: 08 Jun 2023

<https://test.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781003127253-6>

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THE RELATION BETWEEN MEDITATION AND ANALYTIC PHILOSOPHY

Marie Friquegnon

1 Introduction

Analysis and meditation are often considered at odds with one another. There is a *prima facie* difference between, say, attempting to bring about a state of ‘no mind’ in various Zen schools of thought, such that there is no mental activity or thoughts whatsoever, and engaging in the analysis of a complex philosophical treatise – indeed, not merely a difference, but they seem to be mutually exclusive. However, philosophical analysis can provide an entry way to meditation, and vice versa. According to many Indian philosophical traditions, e.g., Advaita Vedanta, Tantra, and various schools of Buddhism,¹ at the end of the sapiential path toward enlightenment, much of which path involves the study of complex philosophical doctrines, philosophical analysis drops out and only meditative practices remain.

In the case of analytic Buddhist philosophers, such as Santaraksita, who are also yogis, analysis is considered an important and excellent preparation for meditation. It involves pulling the metaphorical rug – of worldviews, reality assumptions, and related conceptual constructions – out from under the practitioner again and again until finally one is really groundless. An anecdotal story in Buddhist meditation retreat lore has it that the serious meditation student, experiencing this ‘progress’, appeals to the teacher at the retreat interview: “Master, all my previous beliefs and assumptions seem to be vanishing, so much so that I no longer have my bearings. It feels as if I’m falling”. The master replies, sagaciously, “Falling is ok – landing is the problem”. Or, thinking one has landed, is the problem. Whereas analytic philosophy in the Western tradition might view the master’s advice as unsatisfactory, the response from the meditative traditions is that this advice, if followed, promises to overcome all philosophical, existential, psychological, and any and all other forms of *dukkha*, the unsatisfactoriness that the Buddha identified as one of the marks of all sentient experience, and the condition that the contemplative path culminating in the attainment of nirvana aims to put to an end.

Let us begin, then, to sketch some of the philosophy propounded by Santaraksita. Santaraksita united the ‘emptiness’ school of Nagarjuna with the Buddhist idealist schools. The emptiness schools may be characterized as emphasizing the idea that, simplifying greatly, all conditioned phenomena are metaphysically ‘empty’ of ontological substance, intrinsic nature, or real essences; the idealist schools may be characterized as emphasizing the idea, equally simplified, that all conditioned phenomena are mind-dependent conceptual constructions. Santaraksita believed reality to be beyond conception. Yet, relatively – that is, from within the limited space of unenlightened,

ordinary awareness – reason can provide a means for approaching the ultimate, trans-conceptual state.

To overview his approach, let us note that Santaraksita begins his analysis by revealing a number of paradoxes involved in holding to ordinary belief in the reality of material objects, somewhat reminiscent of the arguments of Parmenides's student, Zeno. Then he claims that an analysis of perception yields similar paradoxes, so that it becomes apparent that perception cannot present us with anything that is truly real, thereby problematizing our common-sense view of the world, as G.E. Moore might put it (1925), i.e., our folk metaphysics. That's an example of losing our ground, or falling, to keep with the earlier metaphors.

Finally, awareness itself is brought under scrutiny. It is shown to be impossible to apprehend a self that is aware, as Hume also famously noted. Awareness is understood to be beyond conception. The self – intuitively, the 'entity' thought to constitute the perspectival center of our cognitive universe – is unraveled as an illusion based on a *process*, not a *thing*, thereby bringing about the final loss of ground. At this point, when one "looks at the looker", one melts into a state of nonconceptual meditation.

Having sketched this approach at a very low level of resolution, let us now fill in some of the more high-resolution details.

2 What enables compatibility between meditation and analytic philosophy?

To answer this question, first, let us remember Santaraksita's take-aways from his Parmenidean paradoxes. Because perception can be shown to be unreliable in apprehending ultimate reality, our stream of experiences cannot be understood as being either inside or outside the mind. Neither can a self or soul be found as an unchanging link between these experiences. Relaxing the mind and observing the flow of thoughts, sometimes described as similar to when an old man watches children at play, without superimposing a duality between self and object, produces an experience of mental freedom, wisdom, and happiness.

From another perspective, about which we will say more shortly, we may compare one's experience of ultimate reality in meditation with our experience of a wise and good person. We may also draw some comparisons between this contemplative phenomenon and Aquinas's ideas about analogical predication, as we shall see.

Analytic philosophy, in the West, attempts to solve philosophical problems primarily by becoming clear about the meanings of the terms used, and by evaluating the coherency of the relations between ideas. For example, in discussing the problem of the existence of God, an analytic philosopher would first try to become clear on what the word 'God' means, and then focus on the surrounding issues, for example, such as whether or not a god, considered to be absolutely unchanging, could relate to a changing universe. One of the most important tools for doing this is the criterion of consistency, which restricts accounts to those that are logically possible, thereby ruling out incoherent ones that fail to meet this adequacy condition. Whether any such accounts are correct is posterior to whether they are logically possible, so analytic philosophers typically begin by mapping out the possibilities in logical space before addressing truth values or evidence in their favor. No need to waste time doing that for impossibilities.

Meditation, however, unlike analytic philosophy, is difficult to even define, which is, importantly, typically a preliminary for analytic philosophy. There are many forms of meditation, and it is hard to pinpoint what they have in common, but not entirely impossible. As Repetti (2020, Abstract) notes:

“Meditation” is a multiply ambiguous term, referring to a broad range of practices and mental states, many of which share common elements, such as heightened, focused, or tranquil awareness. While meditative states can arise spontaneously ..., meditative traditions teach that a practice of engaging in meditative discipline increases the likelihood of bringing about meditative states.²

In general, one can say that meditation is – ideally – an experience of peace. It can be brought about by breathing techniques, visualization, by simply relaxing the mind, or even by a combination of these methods. In one form of Zen Buddhism, for example, an advanced meditative state is said to be achieved by a sudden shock, an experience of groundlessness called ‘*satori*’ – which relates, and perhaps adds meaning to, the master’s remark above about falling versus landing.

Meditation adepts throughout the centuries have had different views on whether analytic philosophy is useful for achieving excellence in meditation. Some Zen Buddhist teachers have discouraged the use of philosophy on the Zen path. It is important to remember, however, that one of the Zen patriarchs is Nagarjuna, a great logician. D.T. Suzuki, writing on Zen philosophy, finds no contradiction between an appreciation of philosophy and achieving *satori* (1994). But philosophy is not *stressed* in Zen, and needs to be given up as one advances in meditation. Quite the reverse is true, however, in most other forms of Buddhism.

3 Buddhist friends: Meditation and analytic philosophy

From the very earliest times in Buddhist history, texts like the *Abhidamma Pitaka* (Pali; Sanskrit: *Abhidharma*, the higher Dharma, the philosophical analysis of the Buddha’s teaching; *Pitaka*, basket [or collection, of texts]) have used philosophy as a tool for advancing on the path to enlightenment, and for achieving mental stability and peace of mind. This method, following Nagarjuna, is continued in the Mahayana Buddhist tradition, many of which traditions developed specifically through debate with the six orthodox and several other heterodox Indian philosophical schools throughout the centuries, each advancing its accounts in response to the others.

Within Buddhism, both the early schools and the later Mahayana schools used analytic philosophy to argue against the Vedic belief in the existence of an unchanging soul or self, the *ātman*, because we can never find anything in ourselves that does not change, and if anything is unchanging, it can neither cause nor be affected by anything else – an objection similar to that against Cartesian substance dualism: If mind is immaterial, it cannot interact with the body. Rather, we, as well as everything else, are interconnected in a web of causes and effects. This is the main idea in the central Buddhist doctrine of interdependent co-origination, aka dependent origination or dependent arising.

Buddhist meditators generally aim at overcoming the cravings that are thought to result from, and propagate the continuance of the belief in, an ontologically substantive self. They wish to achieve a selfless experience – *anātman* – that transcends selfish concerns, and, particularly in the Mahayana, that reaches out to all beings with loving kindness and compassion. One might be concerned, if not argue, that even if one were to overcome selfishness, one might still be concerned with success, pleasure, and worldly activities, such as entertainment. The monastic life was usually considered the best way to limit these concerns. But the monastic life was not without opportunities for advancement and fame.

4 A paradigm case of contemplative and analytic synthesis: Santaraksita

Santaraksita, was born to an 8th-century CE royal family, but renounced his worldly advantages and became a monk. Skilled in philosophy, he entered Nalanda University monastery. Nalanda

has been described as the Oxford of India. It had thousands of students, and colleges of philosophy, medicine, and the arts. An entrance exam was required for admission. All forms of philosophy were studied, Buddhist and non-Buddhist, including Hindu, Jain, and the skeptical Lokavada (the 'world path' school). Santaraksita became professor of philosophy and chief abbot of the school.

In spite of his important position, Santaraksita answered a call from the king of Tibet, Trisrong Detsen, to come to the 'land of the snows' to introduce the Tibetan people to Buddhist thought. Santaraksita came to Tibet in 762, and there he offered a philosophical method for breaking attachment to egoic concerns, beliefs, and the illusory sense of self. Working closely with the yogic saint Padmasambhava, the scholar queen Yeshe Tsogyal, and the king (who wrote a book on logic), he produced some of the most interesting and challenging works of philosophy ever written.

Santaraksita's method is intended to produce an experience of groundlessness resulting from the mind's inability, after going through his arguments, to grasp an unassailable idea about what is real. Step after step, he 'pulls the rug out' from under us, so that eventually we have no place to stand. He does this through logic. According to my understanding, the aim in one form of Zen is to produce a similar groundlessness using *koans*, perplexing questions designed to use rational inquiry to transcend it, such as the by-now fairly well-known question, "What is the sound of one hand clapping?"

Santaraksita argues that it makes no sense to be attached to what does not exist, and precedes to demolish any and all arguments that assert substantive existence to anything whatsoever. He begins with an argument against the coherence of the idea of matter. He uses the following sort of mereological considerations. Matter must be one or many. All matter cannot be one thing, because then nothing would ever change. There would not be anything outside it to bring about a change. Nor can matter be many. It would have to be made up of indivisibly small things. The only thing that would be indivisible would have no extension – an extension of zero magnitude. But zero plus zero equals zero, and there can be nothing with any non-zero extension or magnitude that can be composed of extensionless indivisibles: *ex nihilo, nihil fit*. In other words, if indivisible atoms cannot combine, then nothing compound – nothing perceivable in our daily world of mid-sized dry goods, so to speak – could exist. Further, if indivisible, then particles cannot have different sides, which necessary attribute of indivisibles entails another reason they could not combine: For x and y to combine, they must have combinable boundaries or edges, so to speak, which can interlock somehow (the way electrons of different atoms do, as with hydrogen and oxygen, to form water molecules, which reveals that the word 'atom', which means 'indivisible', does not literally apply to the atoms of contemporary physics). Based on these conceptual analyses and logical arguments, Santaraksita rejects materialism, for we are unable to come up with a coherent view of matter, analogous to the way Parmenides's student, Zeno, rejects concepts like motion.

Santaraksita also criticizes the four idealist schools of his time that can be divided into two groups. The first group considers subject and object to be identical. Like all idealist schools, they deny the reality of atoms and matter. Santaraksita argues against their reification of the rejection of materialism, immaterialism, however, asserting that if there is only mind, and subject and object are the same, then there would be no way for mental experiences to change, for there would be no extra-mental cause outside of them to enable them to change.

The next school distinguishes between mental subject and mental object. There were three forms of this school. The first claimed that our successive mental experiences occur because in each case a single mental event apprehends an object in all its diversity. The picture of multi-colored flowers, for example, is grasped all at once. As Santaraksita points out, however, a sin-

gle mental state could not relate to a diversity without becoming diverse itself. (The Kantian attempt to unify the cognitive manifold comes to mind.)

The second school recognizes this as a problem and argues that there must be as many aspects of mind in a given moment as there are aspects in the object to be apprehended. Santaraksita sees this as a difficulty, too, however, because even a mental object has innumerable aspects, and can be endlessly divided. How could there be enough parts of the apprehending mind to grasp all of them at once in a single instant?

The third school, recognizing these difficulties, argues that a single mental state, in a single instant, apprehends only one aspect of the object. This is followed by another, but happens so quickly that it seems as if the object is perceived all at once. To use a classical Indian example, a torch whirled about seems to be a circle of fire, when in reality there is only the torch in different places. (Discrete cartoon images displayed in rapid sequence, likewise, give the illusion of change and motion.) Santaraksita rejects this theory because this would mean that these single experiences happen at different moments of time, and perception can only be in the present.

Thus, it would seem that these three forms of idealism do not offer a viable explanation of perception. Santaraksita has removed the ground, then, from ordinary perceptual experience, refuting a host of theoretical attempts from his philosophical opponents. So, where could he go from here?

He accepts self-awareness. One needs awareness to even consider if there is awareness – an anticipation, arguably, of the Cartesian *cogito*, “I think, therefore, I am”, a millennium in advance and in another continent, although here it might be described as “If able to question anything, awareness included, then there is awareness”, which, notably, makes no reference to any self, any ‘I’ who is aware.

There is a stream of experiences. Where do they come from? Santaraksita says that the mind is dependent on the power of another, which raises the possibility of an explanation by way of appeal to the idea of cause and effect, another putative ground he intends to nonetheless remove, in due time. Having rejected matter, these mental events are caused by previous mental events, and so on. This is occurring without a substantial self or mind substance, what Descartes would describe as *res cogitans*, a thing that thinks. Santaraksita, it may be said, sees no need for that hypothesis (the ‘res’, the ‘thing’ that thinks).

At this point, and further removing another putative ground, Santaraksita applies Nagarjuna’s classical critique of causality: Either cause and effect are the same, or different. They cannot be the same because, if they were (to use what he thought not to be too graphic an example), then when we eat food, we would be eating excrement because food is the cause of excrement. This would be absurd. If they were different, cause and effect would be in separate moments of time. When the cause was there, the effect would not be, and vice versa. “Father and son will never meet”, as the saying goes in this tradition, the father being the cause, and the son, the result. Thus, ultimately, cause and effect cannot be productive of the flow of experiences. They just happen. Yet not in a random, chaotic way. But this acknowledgment is a demonstration of the absence of an explanatory or cognitive ground, not the presence or identification of one. That is, causality cannot adequately serve as a ground for our philosophical understanding of reality or of our experience of it.

Santaraksita’s method of showing the lack of any ultimate reality of all things was not without its critics. He himself deals with the objection that, if you are willing to use arguments to demolish the coherence of things, then you at least have to admit that the argumentative technique exists and is valid. Quoting his own entertainment of the hypothetical critic’s objection, Santaraksita states,

Thus, it is said [by the opponent]:

If one accepts that all things have no intrinsic existence, since the evidence is not established by oneself by the convention of inference, then is it not the case that inference on the relative level is not established? Thus similarly, the inferer, in establishing a thesis, that all dharmas [conditioned phenomena] are without inherent existence, cannot assert a valid argument. And if there is no reason for this non-establishment [of intrinsic nature] then one cannot establish a meaningful hypothesis. If one asserts this, and there is no valid reason, then the meaning of your assertions is not established. You need a reason. But if its nature is non-existent, you cannot establish it. This would be pointless.

(Santaraksita 2021, commentary to sloka 75,³

Madhyamakalamkaravritti (Ornament of the Middle Way), hereafter, "MAV")

Santaraksita skillfully escapes the trap his hypothetical opponent has set. The opponent claims that Santaraksita is demolishing the reality of ordinary things as understood to be the mid-sized dry goods, so to speak, in common experience (as well as their sub-surface partite constituents), what may be described as conventional reality. But he is not doing this. He is only claiming that, when fully analyzed, nothing can be said to be absolutely real in ultimate reality. But ordinary things are real conventionally, that is, they have a function: They work for us. That is why a chair is conventionally real. We can sit on it. By analogy, a quantum physicist might hold that chairs are conventionally real, but not ultimately real at the heart of what makes a chair a chair. Its chairness, so to speak, is only nominal, convenient, pragmatic, conventional. We cannot even know things to be ultimately unreal without using the conventional conception of reality as a starting point for analysis.

That is why it is said, classically, as well as chanted by millions of Mahayana Buddhists daily, that "emptiness is form and form is emptiness" – all conditioned phenomena are empty of intrinsic or substantive ontological essence, and vice versa. Neither is the argument being used to establish emptiness as ultimately real, as some might consider attempting to do as a final resting point or philosophical ground. Santaraksita never claimed emptiness was a positive 'thing', place, or entity:

As for myself, I never rejected,
those Things having appearances.
Therefore, having established this view of things,
One will not be confused about establishing premise and conclusion.

(MAV, sloka 78)

In his first sentence above, Santaraksita takes as a starting point the epistemic givenness of phenomenologically construed experience. The metaphysics implied by this sort of implicitly phenomenological bracketing is a separate issue, regardless of how one approaches it.⁴ But in the next sentence in his quote above, he asserts that this is enough to afford the ability to discriminate between what is given and what may be inferred on its basis. He continues, stating:

Following this inference, what is proposed by the various philosophical theories which are mutually in disagreement [has] been shown. Thus (they say) for sages, women and children, what appears through eye, nose consciousness etc., logic, the sound of theory [dependent on the logical subject] is shown to be inconsistent and must be given up completely. But what is accepted by sages and ordinary people, like women and children, through sense observation, I am not rejecting [on the conventional level].

(MAV, sloka 78)⁵

Santaraksita is explicitly acknowledging here that various disputants draw different conclusions from the givenness of phenomenological experience, and then point to their disagreement as a premise for the further conclusion that appearances, conventional perceptual experiences, are invalid, but Santaraksita does not draw that conclusion.

To the contrary, as we shall see. Further developing this line of reasoning, Santaraksita adds,

Some say that all inferential reasoning and the conventional objects [of knowledge] inferred by such reasoning must be given up completely [since they depend on] different subjects generated by incompatible tenets.

[But I argue that] eye, ear and nose consciousness, etc. of everyone from masters to women to children (i.e. come to know) [correctly] by relying on subjects which [correspond with] the sound [of the words pointing to] that which possesses the taste [valid sensible qualities] of appearances.

(MAV, commentary to sloka 78)⁶

The claim being developed here is that both the wise and the person on the street, so to speak, are correct in relying on ordinary perception. Santaraksita further states,

We also do not reject things which appear to the eye consciousness and so forth. When we analyze with wisdom knowledge, like the plantain tree, a single essence does not appear. We don't assert things as ultimate truth. If this is the case, through non-attachment, appearances are not a hindrance to the ultimate meaning. Engaging like this in the relative level, one says that all phenomena have no intrinsic nature. How could this be harmful?

(MAV, commentary to sloka 78)

Reason has brought Santaraksita to the point where, having rejected any conventional knowledge as absolutely or ultimately real, he is left with the flow or stream of awareness, which contains the objects of ordinary perception and phenomenological experience. All substantially existing things, including the mind, have been rejected. As a friend of mine, Leo Rauch, once quipped about David Hume's somewhat similar position in the *Treatise* (1978, Book 1:IV, section 6), "No matter, never mind" (1970).

We are left with the question of why the flow of experiences follows the laws of cause and effect, when ultimately there is no cause and effect. The philosopher Rongzom Chökyi Zangpo (aka Rangzompa) suggests an answer (Köppl 2008). He argues that the flow of experiences is divine. He uses the Tibetan word 'lha', which is literally 'god', but it is being used here as synonymous with what Mahayana Buddhists describe as Buddha nature, which is often construed as an innately divine consciousness. The Buddha, in line with this idea, frequently refers to the Buddhist path as the *holy* life, despite rejecting the concept of an omnipotent Creator.

5 Hypothetical constructs and analogical predication

How can we make sense of this? Let us turn back to philosophical analysis to try to find an answer. In a scientific theory, particularly within psychology, a 'hypothetical construct' is an explanatory variable that is not directly observable. For example, the concepts of intelligence and motivation are used to explain phenomena in psychology, but neither is directly observable. In theology, we may find what appears to function, in my view, as a hypothetical construct in St. Thomas Aquinas's third proof for the existence of God, the necessary being needed to account

for the continuity of the otherwise entirely contingent world. Since God is beyond conception, Aquinas ends his five proofs not with “therefore there is a God”, but with either “this all men call God” or “this all men understand to be God” (1948, part 1, p. 11).

Karsten Struhl (2020) has objected to this analogy, pointing out that in science, hypothetical constructs are used to generate testable propositions, which is not the case with God. However, John Hick (1953 pp. 177–8), a logical positivist, argued that the existence of God is not possible to disconfirm for the living, but could be confirmable after death. Some Buddhists claim that primordial wisdom, which they see as divine, is directly confirmable in enlightenment. A notable difference between confirming divinity post-mortem and confirming it post-enlightenment is that the latter can happen to the living – while living (pre-mortem).

In Vajrayana Buddhism, and to some extent in all Mahayana, the related ideas of primordial nature, the *dharmakaya*,⁷ and emptiness (the ultimate) constitute the foundation of the phenomenal world – of time, of space, of interdependent co-origination. The phenomenal world is also known as emptiness, the *dharmakaya*, the primordial Buddha, and the Buddha nature. Santaraksita argues that valid reasoning about time, space, causality, perception, selfhood, mind, and matter all entail paradoxes. We remain clueless about the nature of these basic concepts constituting the world of experience. Nevertheless, experiences are more or less orderly, and we can account for them as the display of primordial wisdom – pointing to primordial wisdom without understanding it. This is what Santaraksita calls “the proximate ultimate”. The reason it is proximate is that from this perspective, all cognition, including the highest wisdom, is nonetheless conventional, not ultimate, but the wisdom that best reflects ultimate reality is most proximate to it.

But why should we care about what Aquinas construes as necessary being or what Buddhists construe as emptiness? Aquinas claims that the necessary being that guarantees the continuity of the world is all-good, all-powerful, and all knowing. But how can one make these conceptually constituted claims if God is beyond conception? Here Aquinas introduces his theory of ‘analogical predication’, which is what I had in mind above when I referred to the notion of a hypothetical construct. When we say, for example, that God is good, we mean that God’s goodness is similar to human goodness in some perhaps inchoate sense. He needs to say this, because otherwise God’s goodness could not be like human goodness at all, in which case we might wind up worshipping something very unpleasant.

Gregory Rocco struggled valiantly with this problem (1991). It is perhaps technically unsolvable because we only know one side of the analogy, namely, human goodness. But if we can say nothing good about God, how can God have any value for us?⁸ Does emptiness present the same problem for Buddhism? If it did, we could mimic Aquinas’s approach, and add to it, by asserting that beings who experience emptiness spontaneously express the virtues of compassion, loving kindness, sympathetic joy, equanimity, and the like. Along the same lines, we could point to experiences in emptiness meditation. We can compare the positively valenced experiences we have in emptiness meditation itself – mental quiescence, abiding calm, bliss, and so on – with our experiences of a kind, wise, powerfully loving person.

Interestingly, this sort of embellishment could work for Aquinas’s problem as well. At the end of his life, as a consequence of a deeply moving contemplative experience, Aquinas is said to have compared all he had previously written – no small philosophical feat – to “straw”, from the perspective of the meditative state he seems to have maintained till the end.⁹ Similar views are expressed in the 14th-century text, *The Cloud of Unknowing* (Anonymous 2009). John Hick made a similar sort of claim when he asserted that the transformative effect experienced by the devoutly contemplative in all religions – manifest ubiquitously as altruism, a sense of saintliness in their mundane activities, perhaps what the Buddha referred to as the holy life – counted as

indirect evidence that they all encountered some ultimate, albeit noumenal Real (1953). Indeed, one such religious experience changed Hick's life (Cramer 2021).

However, for those of us who have had beautiful experiences of emptiness and the like, could they be an illusion, as some, like Nozick (1981, pp. 158–9), have suggested of exceptional meditative experiences in general? I think we can answer that we do have the experience, and that as long as we don't claim it to be something substantial, like a god, there should not be a problem. Experiences of love, etc., are neither true nor false. One either has them or not. As Santaraksita would put it, "You cannot fault me because I do not claim anything to be true".¹⁰

Santaraksita does say in the *Tattvasiddhi* (*The Attainment of Reality/Suchness*) (2017) that the attainment of "suchness" (a term typically used as an attempt to give the most nominal characterization of any reference to reality/enlightenment) is not provable. He argues, however, that it is also not disprovable. Of course, logical empiricists may argue that if a proposition is neither verifiable nor falsifiable, then it is cognitively meaningless,¹¹ but there is a big difference between having an experience and assertions about what the experience is an experience of, as the phenomenologists – I think, rightly – insist.¹² Of course, as noted above, Hick argued that the effects of such experiences on those who have them count as indirect evidence of their validity, something even Nozick implicitly acknowledged when he added that what is difficult to explain away about those who have such experiences is the powerfully altruistic impact they seem to have on them (1981, p. 159).

Further, having argued in the *Madhyamakalamkara* that matter, space, etc., are not existent because our concepts, of what they are, have proven to be incoherent, and that perception when analyzed is shown to be paradoxical if not impossible, Santaraksita settles on "*rang rig*" (self-awareness) as real, yet real in a way that is beyond conception (Mipham 2005). Self-awareness too seems to be functioning as a theoretical construct, granted that, as noted earlier in connection with what I described as a Buddhist analogue of Descartes's *cogito*, we cannot deny awareness without awareness. I would add that awareness in an emptiness meditative experience remains awareness, despite the absence of any conceptual activity or objects of awareness whatsoever.¹³ This awareness is not merely characterized by conceptual proliferation, but as nondual – not following the usual understanding or functioning of awareness in terms of subject, object, and cognitive activity.

Construing awareness in this mode through any conceptual lens would be an incorrect way of understanding self-awareness. There is no subject, object, or activity in this pure awareness. Kamalasila (Santaraksita's student) says, in his commentary to Santaraksita's Folio 192 in the *Tattvasamgraha* (*The Compendium of Suchness/Reality*) (1937), that to try to apprehend the mind generates an infinite regress. One tries to grasp the mind that is trying to grasp the mind and so on, never finding the mind. The idea is that awareness itself is not iterative, involves no second-order meta-function on itself, or is not reflexive.¹⁴

Awareness (unclouded by misconceptions, even about awareness) in Vajrayana Buddhism is itself beyond conception, including conception about emptiness, and the experience of this awareness constitutes enlightenment. It is also understood to be the cessation of suffering, and equated with pure bliss. In Santaraksita's *Tattvasiddhi* (2017), the path to this happiness need not be traversed by way of harsh ascetic practices, but rather as something like the sort of ordinary happiness produced when enjoying music or sexual union, but in a nondual meditative state.

To return to Rongzompa, *lha* – divinity – has no substantial existence. It is not a creator. It does not stand apart from the world. It is a perspective, a way of seeing phenomena, a way that is associated with spontaneous compassion, love, and happiness. As is said in many Mahayana traditions, '*samsara*' (the world – of cyclical, embodied existence) and nirvana are the same: It is

only the perspective that changes (e.g., Lingpa 1992). To return to the issue of testability, we can say with Wittgenstein (1953, pp. 193–208) that perspectives are neither true nor false. We either have them or we don't.

I venture further, from a defense of this perspective to an attack of the opposing view. Once we perform the imaginative act of conceiving of the world as a display, what would be the reasonable way to envision it: as a cloud of electrons, a machine, an expanding balloon, an animal? If we are to think of the world at all, we must think of it in a particular *way*. Now, if we find the world to be creatively self-ordering, then it would be less reasonable to think of it as any of the above types of entities than as something like a kind of person. This is, of course, not in the least to suggest that the world looks like us or that we were made in its image. But, to ascribe to it qualities analogous to those of wisdom and compassion – not unlike the way Aquinas ascribes something analogous to human benevolence to God – is to form a belief about the world which is not unreasonable, provided we are right in judging it to be creatively self-ordered.¹⁵ Of course, belief in the operations of cause and effect, however nominally understood, and which arguably include what Buddhists conceive of as karma, may be thought of as adding to the plausibility of this analogy.¹⁶

To follow consistently, however, with Santaraksita's analysis, we must stick with nonduality. The ultimate – the Buddha nature, pristine awareness – must transcend the difference between self and other. Again, while my focus has been on Santaraksita's tradition within Buddhism, similar perspectives may be found in other Buddhist traditions as well as other Indian non-Buddhist traditions, such as Advaita Vedanta, Tantra, etc. Nonduality arguably is the same ineffable, *qua* trans-conceptual, regardless of the different traditions' ways of conceptualizing it, although I am not pursuing that argument here, except as an analogy for purposes of understanding Santaraksita's philosophy, since it has some parallels in these other philosophical systems with which some readers may be familiar, including Christianity, as with Aquinas.

Is there a form of meditation that brings us into contact with our inherent Buddha nature? *Dzogchen*, the “great completion” or “great perfection” meditation in Vajrayana Buddhism, is designed to do just that. In this form of meditation, one does not exert effort to stop the flow of thoughts. One also does not follow or engage with them. According to meditators well versed in this technique, such as Khenpo Tsewang Dongyal Rinpoche,¹⁷ one simply relaxes into the natural state of awareness, and experiences a pervasion of wisdom and compassion. And through a boosting of our own compassion and wisdom (*bodhicitta*), we are successively more and more able to merge our awareness with the Buddha nature or ‘*rigpa*’. (*‘Rigpa’* in the Vajrayana tradition has the meaning of ‘awareness inseparable from reality’.) Training in this way, one experiences great happiness and becomes increasingly wise and compassionate. Why would this happen?

Looking for an answer, I reflected on a moment in my Catholic childhood, when I asked a nun why no one sins in heaven. She replied that once one experiences the beatific vision of God, one could not possibly sin again. I suspect something similar is happening in *Dzogchen*. (Again, I am not claiming, thereby, anything substantive about the unity of all religions, as mentioned above that Hick has done, although others are free to explore such possible interpretations of these similarities.) Santaraksita was so kind, compassionate, and good that he was called “*Bodhisattva*”. A *Bodhisattva* in the Mahayana tradition is a saintly one who vows to help others no matter what the cost. Yet Santaraksita said that it was better to lose morality than to lose the proper view – of the ultimate. I think he said this for a reason similar to the Catholic view of why one cannot sin in heaven. If one has the proper view, that is, if one relaxes into the Buddha nature, one's experience of wisdom and compassion is so powerful that one can never harm another being.

The experience of the Buddha nature in Dzogchen dovetails exactly with Santaraksita's analysis of perception. He has argued that no form of perception can give us truth, whether or not we think of the object as being in the mind or outside the mind, thereby circumventing the debate between realists and idealists. Rather, the flow of experiences arises as neither. Mipham sees this as similar to the arising of happiness:

The so-called detection of the object (*yul yongs su gcod pa*) is an extraordinary feature of consciousness. This is like the mind's experience of happiness, and so on – which cannot be a feature of external objects. To the extent that something is experienced by consciousness or appears to consciousness, this same experience can only be due to the clarity and knowing of the mind. How can there be an awareness of anything in the absence of clarity and knowing?

(2005, p. 204)

6 Conclusion

I have argued that both analytic philosophy and meditation are essential philosophical and soteriological practices in Santaraksita's understanding of Buddhist philosophy and of the Buddhist path to enlightenment. Santaraksita employs logical argumentation to show how all our cognitive apparatus and our core concepts constituting our conventional view of the world lead to paradox, and thus cannot function as foundations for our philosophical wisdom, much less for our stability in our relationship to the world or to ourselves. Having rendered us philosophically groundless relative to our conventional conception of reality, meditation then provides the experiential encounter with our underlying nondual, nonconceptual, pristine awareness, our Buddha nature.

I have used the concept of a hypothetical construct to explain Aquinas's analogical ascriptions of benevolent human-like qualities to God as an analogy for similar attributions within Buddhism regarding the nature of ultimate reality, which Santaraksita describes as the proximate ultimate, the sort of conventional wisdom most proximate to the ultimate reality, which transcends all conception. Within this philosophical/soteriological (analytic/contemplative) tradition well delineated by Santaraksita, then, the philosophical importance of meditation becomes crystal clear: Meditation is the trans-conceptual *sine qua non* that makes enlightenment, and thus the completion of the highest philosophical inquiry, possible.

Notes

- 1 See Thapliyal (this *Handbook*, Chapter 7) for an in-depth discussion of meditation in Yogācāra Buddhism and Hindu Advaita Vedānta; see Timalina (this *Handbook*, Chapter 20), for an in-depth discussion of Advaita Vedānta and phenomenology.
- 2 Repetti (2020) identifies those elements common to most traditions of meditative practice, while acknowledging that these do not exhaust the extant practices.
- 3 The term '*śloka*' is standardly used in Buddhist scholarship to refer to a stanza or verse, as opposed to page numbers, given that page numbers vary across multiple translations in the several languages in which canonical Buddhist texts abound.
- 4 For an intriguing argument to the effect that the best way to understand the bulk of philosophy in this tradition as analogous to a kind of phenomenological bracketing as well as a deep exploration of the implied metaphysics thereof, see Coseru (2012). For divergent views on the relationship between phenomenology and meditation, see the chapters in Part V of this *Handbook*.
- 5 The phrase in the quoted text, "the sound of theory", suggests the *credibility* or *plausibility* of the theory at issue. The references to "sages, women, and children" in the same passage and elsewhere is meant

- to convey the idea, implicit and often explicit in this tradition, that if a philosophical theory captures valid cognitions, then its articulation of those cognitions must be understood not only by philosophers, yogis, and monastics, but by ordinary people, where the latter are often also referred to, by example, as cowherds.
- 6 The ‘taste’ (of appearances) used in these passages is often used as a metaphor within this tradition to indicate that from the enlightened perspective, all sensory experiences – which constitute the cognitive world – ‘taste the same’ in this regard: It is all conventionally real, equivalent, and thus there is no soteriological difference between pleasure and pain, supramundane and mundane, and so forth.
 - 7 The ‘*dharmakaya*’ is a (somewhat religious) Mahayana concept that refers to the unmanifest, trans-conceptual, nondual aspect of Buddhahood from which it is believed that any actual manifestations of a Buddha emerge.
 - 8 Cf. Terry (this *Handbook*, Chapter 25), who discusses Christian attempts to depict God via apophatic or negative theology, in the sense of proceeding by reference to what God is not, as opposed to attempting to identify positive attributes of what is ineffable.
 - 9 See, e.g., Frye (2021), for a discussion among Catholics about whether Aquinas’s remarks comparing his contemplative experience to his analytic writings (as akin to mere straw) constituted a rejection of his analytic philosophical, theological writings.
 - 10 Cf. Legum (this *Handbook*, Chapter 1), who poses objections based on Nozick’s, but develops them from the vantage of two competing foundationalist epistemologies within analytic philosophy, namely, those of Chisholm and Plantinga.
 - 11 Cf. chapters in this *Handbook* by Kachru (Chapter 5), Spackman (Chapter 8), Fasching (Chapter 9), Gowans (Chapter 10), and Vervaeke (Chapter 12), for alternative takes on this issue.
 - 12 Cf. Part V in this *Handbook*, Meditation and Phenomenology.
 - 13 See Fasching (this *Handbook*, Chapter 9), and Coseru (this *Handbook*, Chapter 23).
 - 14 Buddhist philosophers dispute whether this pure, primordial, or primary awareness is not only other-illuminating, that is, what enables cognition of non-mental or mental objects of awareness, but also self-illuminating, reflexive, iterative, metamental, etc. The two widely used metaphors for the two sides in this debate are that of a lamp, which both makes its own flame as well as objects in its vicinity visible, and that of the blade, which cannot cut itself (or the eye that cannot see itself). See Siderits, Thompson, and Zahavi (2011) for an excellent collection of essays on both sides of this debate.
 - 15 This calls to mind the Pre-Socratic nature philosophers’ impressions that the world is a ‘*cosmos*’ – a beautifully, rationally integrated, ordered whole – that reflects an *arche*, such as *Logos* (Word: Intelligible Meaning) or *Nous* (Mind).
 - 16 This suggests that some forms of Buddhism, far from being nihilistic, as some critics allege, tacitly ascribe to a form of “just world theory”, albeit one not grounded in a Creator (Repetti 2019, p. 108).
 - 17 One of my meditation teachers, and one of the translators of Santaraksita (forthcoming).

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