

Philosophical Truth and Buddhist Wisdom For a Dialogical Dialogue

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Abstract This essay offers a 'dialogical dialogue' between the philosophical and the Buddhist experiences. The first is represented by the philosophy of pure difference and pure positive, which shows how even truth, which characterises Western thought, is based on axiological assumptions, in particular that of the pure positive. The second is represented by Buddhist wisdom, specifically that explained by M. Raveri in his essay on Buddhism within Japanese society in the first centuries of the last millennium. Contradictions and conflicts, that seem to prejudice Buddhist conception and practice, appear instead, in the gaze of pure difference, as the true path that can lead humans to salvation.

Keywords 'Dialogical dialogue'. Philosophical truth. Buddhist wisdom. Philosophy of pure positive. Amidst Buddhism. Path to salvation.

Summary 1 Introduction: for a Dialogical Dialogue. – FIRST PART: THE PHILOSOPHICAL 'MYTH' AND ITS SOTERIOLOGICAL VALUE. – 2 Truth as 'Purely Positive Difference'. – 2.1 The Value of Truth. – 2.2 The Undeniable Truth and the Problem of Negation. – 2.3 The Pure Difference. – 3 Pure Difference as Answer to Philosophical Questions. – 3.1 Logical-Rational Problems: the Principle of Non-contradiction. – 3.2 Onto-Logical Issues. – 3.3 Axiological and Soteriological Questions. – 3.4 The Philosophical Principle. – 3.5 Passage. – SECOND PART: A DIALOGICAL INTERPRETATION OF A BUDDHIST EXPERIENCE. – 4 Dichotomies and Pure Differences in a Buddhist Experience. – 4.1 Enlightenment and Ordinary Life. – 4.2 Absolute and Language. – 4.3 Absolute and Senses. – 4.4 The Buddha and the Devotee. – 4.5 The Correct Practice. – 4.6 Power and Institutions. – 5 Conclusion: East and West in Face of Salvation. – 5.1 The Paradoxical Character of Solution. – 5.2 Technology and Salvation.

1 Introduction: For a Dialogical Dialogue

The way I have to make a small but heartfelt homage to my colleague and friend Massimo Raveri, a leading teacher and scholar, is to propose a dialogue between two paths of thought that are in some ways so distant but also, at least this is my belief, so close on some fundamental issues. A dialogue, but, more precisely, the idea is that of a 'dialogical dialogue', an expression that I take from Raimon Panikkar, whose *Opera Omnia* is in progress at the Jaca Book, Milan, edited by M. Carrara Pavan. This means a dialogue in which each of the two subjects adopts as his/her own point of view the other's one, and, in this way, he/she manages to achieve a more complete and right understanding of his/her own 'myth' (being the structure of thought that is presupposed by every single action and interpretation belonging to a certain civilization and culture). Such a dialogue, thanks to the fact that it is based on the ability to recognise the truth (and hence the value) of the other's positions, allows each of the two to see his/her own vision of the world from outside and so to really understand it and consequently adjust (correct) and improve it. In addition, this allows each of the two to help the other in giving birth to his/her own truth.

In this case, the dialogue will be between a typically Western philosophical perspective and a typically Eastern sapiential (soteriological, salvific) perspective, to be precise, a perspective of Buddhist matrix. The first will be represented by what I call the philosophy of purely positive difference, the second by some aspects of Japanese Buddhism presented in the important essay by Massimo Raveri titled *Contemplare il Buddha / Pronunciare il suo nome: I sensi dell'Assoluto* (2017).

First Part: The Philosophical 'Myth' and its Soteriological Value

2 Truth as 'Purely Positive Difference'

2.1 The Value of Truth

My 'myth' is the classically philosophical one. That is, according to its most traditional interpretation, a vision based on thought, knowledge, and rationality; in a word: on truth. In this way, traditionally it seems that the philosophical horizon is a logical one. For this reason, we often hear that (roughly speaking) Western thought is characterised by rationality and logic, while the Eastern one is free from this cage. In other words, the first would be logical, while the second would be soteriological, and each of the two would be deprived

of the values (merits) typical of the other. We know that this usual conception does wrong to both subjects. Indeed, it presupposes, on the one hand, that rational discourse cannot be salvific, and, on the other hand, that salvation cannot be rational. In the age of technology, the question takes on particular importance because technology can be seen as the extreme step of the logical, and therefore typically Western, approach. Thus, nowadays our question concerns, in particular, the problem of the salvific value of technology, or, vice versa, its limits from an ethical and soteriological point of view.

I want to present here a singular philosophical view which can constitute, in my humble opinion, a kind of 'magical point' in which the two things (rationality and soteriology) meet and even coincide. Since I am a Western philosopher, I will present this perspective by showing how rationality itself can be realised only on the condition of basing itself on a sapiential ground which presupposes the reign (scope) of values.

If you think about it, truth itself is originally defined in terms of values. Indeed, in the Western perspective truth is certainly considered a value, and not just a value but a value of universal significance: a 'universal' value. Particularly noteworthy is the fact that, as endowed with universal value, truth is affirmed (confirmed, and hence 'posed') by every entity and by every subject.

Therefore, another decisive point is that truth, insofar as it is affirmed by each entity, is affirmed (posed) even by any denial (a refusal which as such entails a negation) in all its forms. In consideration of this, we say that truth is safe (free) from the negative. Indeed, if what we mean by 'negative' is what suffers the damages (offenses) of negation, then truth, in as much as it is affirmed/posed by every entity and even by any negation, is positive even in relation to negation and hence is safe from negative. So, truth is not only (as posed) a positive but also a 'perfect' positive in the sense that, unlike the negative (i.e. differently from this), it is safe with respect to the damage inflicted by negation.

In conclusion, truth not only has a value trait in itself, but even its own value is the 'perfect' value, as it is in fact safe/free from the damages and threats of the negative. If, therefore, salvation consists in being safe from negative, then we could say that reaching truth means reaching salvation. We can hence affirm not only that truth possesses an essentially axiological (evaluative), and therefore ethical significance (that is a trait provided with value or disvalue), but even that in some sense truth and salvation are one. In this sense, at least with respect to what was said above, the West and East are also one; and just for this reason we can define this particular interpretation of truth as a 'magical point' where Western truth and Eastern soteriology are united and combined.

2.2 The Undeniable Truth and the Problem of Negation

However, there is a problem. Within the Western view, we usually express the fact that truth is safe from the negative by saying that it is 'undeniable' (non-deniable). In this way we express this circumstance in a negative way, that is by means of a negation. More precisely still, we understand this term (undeniable) in the sense that truth is the negation of its own negation, that is, of non-truth. So, we assume that the negation of the truth (untruth, non-truth) exists, and that truth is the negation of such un-truth (however we have then to interpret the meaning that must be attributed to the existence of a denial/negation of truth). In this way we are led to say not only that truth is confirmed/safe with respect to every negation, but that it is confirmed/safe by 'its own' negation, and consequently that salvation is obtained through the negation that truth itself operates against untruth.

But this is a very delicate step, which has very important consequences. The first and perhaps most relevant is that if truth takes the form of negation then it negates something which is necessarily its negation (we called it 'untruth'). In this way, however, since even untruth (like everything) confirms truth, we are obliged to say that truth, insofar as it negates something that affirms it, somehow comes to deny itself. So, truth itself is something contradictory and hence in turn negated, and therefore negative.

Moreover, this circumstance – the fact that truth, insofar as it denies (negates), denies itself – is confirmed, in a broader and more general way, by the fact that everything that denies something implies the denial of itself. Indeed, insofar as a whatever thing denies "something" – i.e. damages and destroys it (totally or partially, or at least threatens to destroy it) – it is in turn counter-denied (counter-negated) by the opposite pole, just the one it attacks. As now we will see better.

Negation includes a moment that, with reference to its Latin etymology (*nex*, *necis* = death, killing), I call 'necative' rather than simply 'negative'. Necative is hence what, inside the negative, is harmful. However, keeping in mind that what is harmful with respect to something ('x') is therefore in turn attacked/denied by 'x', we must say that what harms something harms itself too. In short, we can say that the necative is what is harmful and self-harmful, i.e. damaging and self-damaging (damaging and damaged), dangerous and self-dangerous, injurious and self-injurious (injurious and injured), noxious and self-noxious (or even "noxious and 'noxied'", we could say invoking the poetic license, or, better, the philosophical license). Inasmuch as both poles of negation (of 'negative') are attacked (hit and damaged, or even destroyed) by the opposite pole, each of the two poles presents itself as a suffering, painful subject, since it is a 'patient'

subject: 'patient' in an etymological sense, that is a subject who suffers (suffers the offenses of denial).

In conclusion, and in short, we could say: anything (and emblematically a speech, a discourse) that consists of a negation becomes something necative (harmful and self-harmful). So that also the discourse that expresses truth (let us say, for the sake of brevity: philosophy), insofar as it takes the form of negation, becomes in turn something negative (necative and self-necative). I usually summarise this by the formula "The negative of negative is negative". As such, truth (true discourse) disproves the character of the undeniability that defined it: it suffers negation, rather than being safe from negative. In other words, as far as the speech has the form of a negation, truth itself becomes a negative value (a disvalue); therefore, it comes to be defined by a trait opposite to that of the universal and perfect value that should define it.

A relevant consequence is that, in order to be safe from the negative value of the necative (what is harmful and harmed), truth must be something other than a negation, hence different from any negation of whatsoever reality. Therefore - and this point is absolutely decisive - truth must also be different from the negation of the negation itself, as well as of the negative itself (and even of the necative itself). So, truth can be defined as safe from negative only insofar as it is different even from the undeniable, for the very reason that this (the non-deniable) remains something negative (since it is negative towards negative). Well, this is possible only through what I call 'pure difference'.

2.3 The Pure Difference

Let us see better. Truth - always if intended like something safe with respect to the negative-necative - must differ from all that is negative-necative. But since this difference must be different from a negation, it must also be different from what I call 'the difference-negation': the difference which is a form of negation, i.e. which is a 'negative' difference. Therefore, it must also be different from the negation addressed towards negation itself, to negative itself. And this precisely means that it is a pure difference.

But how can we even conceive such a difference? This is possible only if we think of it as a 'completely' (totally) positive difference; a difference that is positive with respect to anything, and therefore fully positive also in relation to the totality of the negative; and precisely for this reason it is 'pure': pure difference. So, a typical feature of this aspect of the difference is the fact that, through it, the two different ones constitute each other (Heidegger: *Zusammengehörigkeit*). I could express this peculiar type of difference by saying that it gives

rise to a bipolarity characterised by the fact that the two poles that constitute it are defined by the fact that each of them, even if separated from the other, would present the same duality within itself.

A question arises here. If truth is different from the negation of the negative, how can we justify the fact that it prevails over the negative? (Pre-vailes, i.e. is worth more than - or else, it has greater value than - untruth). The answer to this question is that being different from any negation not only does not prevent truth from being safe from negative but is precisely what solely frees truth from negative. Particularly interesting, in this context of discourse, is that this confirms the circumstance that the value of truth (its prevailing towards untruth) can be justified only by means of an axiological and ethical discourse. I will now briefly elaborate on this.

How can we, precisely from a logical point of view, establish that truth prevails over its own negation (i.e. untruth)? Well, this can happen only on the condition that truth coincides with the very criterion of value, so that untruth, in turn, coincides with the criterion of that which is a dis-value (that which has a negative value). More precisely, salvation from the negative can happen only on the condition that truth coincides with the very criterion of any preference, that which is with the positive itself. Indeed, truth prevails over non-truth only if it is the positive itself, and if the positive itself is defined as that which, compared to the negative, is worth more (more valid, pre-valent). Otherwise, in fact, we should introduce a *tertium* (a third element) which should act as a judge between truth and untruth, but this would be incompatible with the claim of truth to be the ultimate judge of every question. In other terms, truth can really pre-vail over untruth only if their opposition coincides with the same criterion that discriminates positive from negative, i.e. what is preferable from what is not preferable. Otherwise, the contrast between truth and its denial (which both denies and affirms truth) is unsolved.

It is worth noting that this remains true also if this discourse is opposed not by an opposed (contrary) discourse but by an opposed (contrary) attitude; for example, that consisting in opposing it with an obstinate silence or, in any case, an attitude that excludes the former as (in some sense) negative. This shows that practice itself, whatever it may be, seems to involve some form of an evaluative attitude. So, it is clear that this 'dispute' (contrast) between truth and untruth has a happy outcome only on the condition that the opposition is understood precisely in an axiological-evaluative sense. All this shows that the truth/non-truth opposition is, 'in truth', much more than a mere logical-linguistic question. It is, in fact, the 'magical point' in which the logical-rational dimension and the axiological-evaluative dimension come to coincide.

3 Pure Difference as Answer to Philosophical Questions

A significant confirmation of the value of this “magical point” (the pure difference) is that it is essential in order to give a satisfactory answer to all main philosophical questions, which for brevity we can now articulate in three different groups: 1) logical-rational problems; 2) onto-logical and metaphysical issues; 3) axiological and soteriological questions.

3.1 Logical-Rational Problems: The Principle of Non-Contradiction

On the one hand (that of rationality) the notion of pure difference allows us to correctly define the notion of the undeniable, which characterises truth. Truth can constitute a positive only to the extent that it is something different from all that is negating and henceforth negative; therefore, it is safe from negative only to the extent that it differs also from the undeniable, since this is negative, although towards negative.

Just as truth must be purely different from the undeniable, so it must be different from a discourse guided by the principle of ‘non-’ contradiction, since this too is a ‘negative’ principle, being a denial (negation) of contradiction. Therefore, only pure difference is an experience free from the contradictions that threaten to invalidate the perspective of undeniable and the logic of non-contradiction (Wittgenstein, Gödel, Tarski).

3.2 Onto-Logical Issues

On this basis, classical onto-logical and metaphysical problems also find an analogous solution.

As an example of such problems, we can take the case of the discourse concerning the whole totality (the All) that is Being. Let us think, for example, about the bipolarity between Being, understood as the set that includes all determinations, and a single determination. Well, it is immediately clear that the two elements that make up this bipolarity (Being / determination) are such that each of them carries within itself (involves) the other pole: Being (as distinct from individual determinations) is in its turn a particular ‘determination’; and the single determination is, in addition to its being such, necessarily also Being (it necessarily belongs to Being).

If difference is understood as negation, then that ‘A’ differs from ‘B’ means that there is at least one property that belongs to ‘A’ but does not belong to ‘B’ and vice versa. But, since in our case one of the two poles is the whole (Being), to which any entity belongs, it is

not possible to find any entity that does not belong to it, so that (I repeat: if every difference is a negation) it is not possible to establish any difference between the whole (Being) and the single determinations. And, mind you, not even the determination can differ from Being. This depends on the fact that not even the lack, on the part of the single determination, of a particular property which belongs to the whole can constitute the element differentiating the part from the whole because, in this case, we should say that the whole would lack precisely the lack of a certain property. In fact, even the lack of something constitutes a property, so that even this specific property must belong to the Absolute and therefore cannot constitute the differentiating element between the two subjects at stake.

We have here a confirmation of the fact that only a logic that allows us to think about the reciprocal co-institution of two entities is able to think coherently about the relationship between the whole (Being) and its determinations. And, therefore, we have also a confirmation of the fact that the logic of non-contradiction, which can think of reality only as composed of such determinations that one is 'not' the other, goes here towards an essential limit. Because it can think of the difference between Being and determination only by denying that one is also the other, and therefore it can think of the dimension of Being, essential for philosophical thought, only as a contradictory notion.

Indeed, already in Parmenides' *Poem*, Being is the dimension characterised by the fact that, if it is defined negatively (that is, if the negation is referred to Being), it gives rise to a contradiction. Because, through this kind of negation (not Being / non-Being) comes to be excluded from Being something which instead must, by definition, belong to it (since Being is the dimension that includes and comprehends, or includes, everything).

3.3 Axiological and Soteriological Questions

Finally, the same happens at the sapiential level, that which concerns the difference between the positive and the negative, and precisely that which revolves around the figure of the Absolute, understood as what is perfectly (completely) positive and safe from any negativity. In this sphere, truth is the All-Positive.

In this case too, in fact, if difference is understood as a negation, it happens that the difference between the Absolute and the relative involves a contradiction, since it ends up making the Absolute itself negative, while the Absolute should instead be totally, perfectly positive. Indeed, the Absolute, if it is thought of as 'non'-negative, or even just as 'non'-relative, by this very fact comes to be something negative. After all, if difference is necessarily a negation, then also the

Absolute (the perfectly, totally positive), being by this very fact different from the negative, becomes non-negative (i.e. negative of the negative) and therefore negative in turn. Only if it is 'pure positive', that is, positive which differs by pure difference from the totality of the negative, can the Absolute be perfectly positive.

Hence, even in this circumstance, only pure difference makes possible a thought capable of thinking coherently about the Absolute. And, therefore, only this notion allows us to really think about salvation from the pain of life and evil, as it is the only one that allows us to really think about the positive difference between the first dimension and the latter. In conclusion, the pure difference is the relationship that the positive has with the negative because only in this way the positive can remain such (i.e. positive) even in relation to the negative. And this pure positive is what we can call the complete, total, perfect positive: the All-Positive.

3.4 The Philosophical Principle

For all these reasons we can say, in short, that the truth we are talking about is the one that can be summarised by the following formula: "Positive is op-posed to negative". That means: "Positive is positively, and hence purely, opposed 'with' negative". This truth is undeniable in the sense (above mentioned) that it is affirmed by any negation. Indeed, anyone who should oppose the principle of opposition would thereby confirm it. But, now it is clear that this principle must be understood in a sense that is not only logical or onto-logical, but also - we could say - axio-logical (and hence axio-matic too). So that the positive is what has more value than something else (with respect to which it is therefore preferable), while the negative is what, entailing its own refusal and therefore presenting itself as a dis-value, also implies something (the positive, in fact) which, since is endowed with value, is certainly preferable to it. Therefore, this point is what allows us to combine (com-pose) the two aspects, that of rationality and that of wisdom.

We can now understand better in what sense the pure positive, purely different from the totality of the negative, constitutes the 'magical point' in which onto-logical and soteriological dimensions are one.

3.5 Passage

As a 'magical point' of the coincidence of logical-rational knowledge with axiological-soteriological wisdom, I believe that this notion (the dimension of purely positive difference and pure positive, understood precisely as a place of co-belonging and mutual co-institution of de-

terminations) is a perspective capable not only of bringing to fulfilment the basic requirements (logic, rational, etc.) of Western philosophy but also those strictly metaphysical and soteriological that are typical of Eastern wisdom.

To this end, I will limit myself to making a very brief mention of two fundamental perspectives of Eastern wisdom. The first is the *Hindū* conception of *Advaita*, understood as a duality defined by the fact that any attempt to separate the two poles that constitute it, an attempt operated by splitting the duality into two things such that one is not the other, is doomed to fail, because each element of reality thus divided would carry within itself that same duplicity/duality. Understood in this way, the duality is the relationship through which each of the two poles integrally constitutes the other (co-institution).

In relation to this we could say that pure difference is precisely the 'between' which constitutes the proper nature of all 'things', which, regardless of their co-belonging with other entities (*pratīyasamutpāda*), are devoid of 'their own nature'. We could then speak, exploiting a Panikkarian neologism, of 'inter-in-dependence'. Here, a singular closeness emerges with the Buddhist perspective of the Middle Way, understood of course not as the banal moderation of common sense (without however wanting in any way to despise common sense), but as the essential reciprocal (mutual) constitution of realities, which gives rise to the impermanence that defines the Buddhist doctrine of *anattā* and *anicca*.

For all these reasons I think that the perspective of pure difference and pure positive is the one that allows the opening of a 'dialogical dialogue' between philosophy and other wisdom perspectives, which in our case are represented by Japanese Buddhism, precisely in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries (Raveri 2017, 227).

Second Part: A Dialogical Interpretation of a Buddhist Experience

I believe that the ultimate questions human beings have to face are characterised precisely by the fact that they deal with the dimension we are talking about; in other terms, I believe that all forms of wisdom represent, in some way, just this sphere. As proof of this fact, I will bring just a possible interpretation of the discourse made by Massimo Raveri in his above mentioned essay. I will therefore now show in what sense his writing can be read as an exemplification of the discourse I have suggested; of course, it will be up to him to say whether and to what extent this interpretation is correct.

4 Dichotomies and Pure Differences in a Buddhist Experience

The whole sapiential experience Raveri talks about is interwoven with a series of dualities that, interpreted in a 'negative' way, make the situation conceptually contradictory and practically conflictual. The fact that this experience, nevertheless, is assumed as the correct way to salvation, proves that here the transition to the dimension of purely positive difference takes place. In other words, I argue that all the problems (difficulties and then even real conflicts) we are witnessing are determined precisely by dualities (differences) understood (meant) in a negative (dichotomous-exclusionary) way; and, consequently, that they can be solved only thanks to a position capable to keep together the two different poles, but in a way (dimension) such that they come to be actually compatible (compositive / harmonious).

4.1 Enlightenment and Ordinary Life

Let us consider for example the central question of salvation. Here we have the duality between salvation, on the one side, and 'negative' (pain, suffering, death etc.) on the other side. From a slightly different point of view, we have the duality between the enlightened life (saved) and the life marred by the negative (the damned life, as we could call the experience of the other human beings, all the ordinary ones). This especially concerns the relationship between the experience of the Absolute (which is perfectly positive) and the relative-worldly human experience, marked by the negative (pain and death). The question is therefore "the sense of evil and man's ability to reach salvation" (Raveri 2017, 227), and hence also the practices through which this can happen, with particular reference to the practice of the "pronunciation of Buddha's Name" (Raveri 2017, 227).

Regarding this dichotomy, a main question is: does salvation concern only another life or just our present life? In other words: can we

“achieve salvation here and now” (Raveri 2017, 228)? We see that, within the negative logic for which affirming the truth of one choice implies denying the truth of the other, every answer becomes unacceptable. On the one hand, it is evident that there must be a ‘difference’ between the dimension of salvation and our life, full of pain, from which we have to save ourselves: there must be a difference between *nirvāna* and *saṃsāra*. On the other hand, however, it is clear that salvation must also concern present life in some way. Here we have a duality which, if interpreted in a negative way, still leads to negative results. Furthermore, precisely what should constitute the dimension of salvation, with respect to that of perdition, appears as an element that in turn produces more perdition than salvation.

Another significant duality could be: does salvation concern everyone or only a few elected people? In both cases, major (relevant) difficulties arise. A difference there must be, because otherwise what sense could the devotee’s fatigue and sacrifices have? And why should one follow the path of enlightenment rather than the ordinary way of living? Or why should we say that the former is better than the latter, that the one is preferable to the other? Contrarily, however, it happens that any dichotomy between the two experiences, which determines a contradictory exclusion between the two, ends up determining an *aporia* that ultimately leads to a conceptual explosion (a contradiction). If salvation concerns only a privileged few, then this seems to imply a superiority of these elected people, which opens a scenario of conflict with the others and a rift within the idea of universal salvation, precisely the salvation that Buddha had promised to all by his ‘vows’, especially from 17 to 20 (Raveri 2017, 233). On the contrary, if salvation concerns everyone, then it seems that we can no longer differentiate between good and wicked people, between saints and sinners, between righteous and unjust individuals (Raveri 2017, 251-2).

The central point of this question is precisely the difference between absolute and relative experience. On the one hand, indeed, there must be a difference between the two; on the other hand, however, the dimension of the Absolute must also fully include relative experience, so that it is difficult even to conceive of a difference between the two. Indeed, we shall see that the conclusion will be precisely a kind of identification of the two experiences. This is a clear example of what was said, i.e. that only a purely positive difference can really make the difference between the Absolute and the relative (worldly) thinkable.

4.2 Absolute and Language

Regarding the crucial problem we are dealing with, a particularly significant aspect is that relating to language. More precisely, the question concerns the possibility, for language, to express the Absolute.

Within our discourse, this point has a quite peculiar meaning precisely because it directly concerns negation. Indeed, it is usual to say that the sphere of language remains 'defined' by the presence of negation, and just this is a circumstance which seems to make it impossible for the language to witness a dimension that is precisely defined by the fact that it is fully, totally positive. From another point of view, how is a position that excludes language from the field of the Absolute even imaginable without having itself recourse to some form of language? In fact, every human thought seems to involve a language of some kind. Moreover, any human attitude, even those we can call 'non-linguistic' (whatever it may be), seems to involve some form of denial, as we have already seen above: even the refusal of language should be, just as refusing, in some way 'negative'. Therefore, it seems that the problem of wisdom is that of transcending the negative in general, therefore of transcending negative language rather than language as such. For this reason, a particular task of those who pursue salvation is to create a purely positive language, free from every negative.

I consider particularly relevant the fact that a conceptual dynamic of this type is also present in Western thought, and that even within a rational and logical thought the need to go beyond the language emerges in an incompressible way. An exemplary case of this fact is constituted by the *Proslogion* of Anselmo. In this masterpiece the Catholic monk, on the one hand (chapters 2 and 3), undeniably demonstrates God's real being (what we usually read, perhaps far from a correct interpretation, as the proof of God's *existence*, that is the existence of the Absolute: "id quo maius cogitari nequit"); on the other hand, however, he recognises that the true Absolute absolutely transcends everything we can think and say about It. In short, Anselmo recognises that God is "quiddam maius quam cogitari possit" (chapter 15): something greater than anything one can think of. In addition to this, we are today witnessing, at the top of Western thought (defined as logical and rational), an outcome that we can call 'mystical', thinking for example of Wittgenstein in particular, but also of certain traits of Heidegger's thought and even of Severino's *Oltre il linguaggio* (Beyond language). That is an outcome very close to the form of wisdom that characterises Buddhism.

As we read in Raveri's essay, the Madhyamaka tradition of Mahāyāna thought "resolutely denies that a relationship could be established between language and ultimate truth" (Raveri 2017, 228) because truth can be communicated to men only through particular

modalities and suitable means: *upāya* (228). Just this imposes a ‘dichotomy’ between “a ‘conventional’ and relative truth, *saṃvṛtisatya*” (228) and an absolute, infallible truth (*paramārthasatya*) (229). Within the former experience, truth itself remains always “covered” and “ineffable” (229). Within the latter, where truth is present, this requires, however, the “uprooting of thought and the death of the mind” (229). In short, we see here a sort of *via negationis* – “through a negative way” (229) – which at the end leads to “silence” (229).

But there is another way, the way of esoteric Buddhism (228). It passes through the improvement of language or, rather, leads to a radical transformation of the experience of language. From a certain point of view, absolute language is that in which it is just nature expressing itself through its own being, and, from this perspective, it can be said that everything is a word of the Absolute. This is an “esoteric” way of Buddhism (229), widely derived from previous Buddhist experiences – as that of Kūkai and the Body of the Law, the *Dharmakāya* (229), but also that of *tathāgatagarbha* (230) – that leads to understand the at the end “everything is a *monji*” (229). Further, a deep bond is recognised between the Buddha’s ‘languages’ of truth and reality. At the same time, this means that, just in order to access this experience, human beings must elaborate a specific and quite particular language, a language based on symbols and rites (230), in turn also widely derived by the great Schools of Shingon and Tendai (228). Only this new experience, and this new language, leads to a conciliation of the two worlds, the relative one and the absolute one (230-1); and moreover of all other dualities, as those regarding exoteric and esoteric (231) or even the three Mysteries: body, voice, mind (231). Thanks to this conciliation, we can experience a language able to tell ultimate truth (234). Nevertheless, even this conciliation will become a matter of contention because it will be considered as an extremely sophisticated and therefore essentially elitist form of interpreting salvation.

4.3 Absolute and Senses

Closely connected to this aspect is a further point, one related to the possibility that the senses draw on the Absolute, i.e. that through senses we can achieve the Absolute. Again, if we refuse to admit (and hence if we negate) that it is possible to grasp the Absolute through senses, then it seems that we must somehow exclude sensible experience from the sphere of the Absolute; and, as we have understood, this is a problem. But, as we have seen, the dimension of symbols and rites offers the possibility of somehow grasping the dimension of the Absolute even through the senses (Raveri 2017, 230), and similarly the body also is in some way redeemed within this path of sal-

vation (231). From this point of view, we can say that everything belongs to enlightenment (230).

It is an extraordinary experience that leads to the recognition of a Sixth Element (230), which allows participation in Buddhahood and a re-evaluation of *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine (230). All the same again here we have a kind of reconciliation: the components of reality are neither absolutely empty nor absolutely real (230-1). We can indeed find here an aspect typical of Middle Way.

4.4 The Buddha and the Devotee

In fact, it is an extra-ordinary experience, which for this reason precisely does not really concern 'ordinary' people and their sensitive experience; therefore, only a privileged, particular and exceptional being can see that "the world of illusion is the world of enlightenment" (Raveri 2017, 230) and can experience that salvation is "[h]ere and now, in this very life" (230). In short, all this requires an initiate (230).

However, the dichotomy that seemed to have been overcome, now returns to recur. Basically, it happens that the inevitable difference between the salvific-absolute experience and the relative one, to the extent that it gives rise to a dichotomy, leads to the creation of languages and practices built ad hoc and hence exceptional, extraordinary and difficult to access for 'mere mortals'. In this way, salvation is unattainable for ordinary men, and for this reason it ends up producing a conflict between the caste of the enlightened, who should bring salvation to everyone, and those who should be saved by them. This, the real world, far from being saved, sinks into even greater damnation.

It may be interesting to observe how a sort of Hegelian-type process can also be acknowledged here. Starting from the *kenmitsu* - the "exoteric-esoteric episteme" (227), and therefore from the synthesis between Buddhism and *shintō* - at first (Madhyamaka) we have a clear separation between the individual human experience and the dimension of the Absolute, and therefore of salvation. Later, we witness a sort of conciliation between individual and truth, but this remains an external, 'objective' reality (rites, esoteric wisdom, hierarchy, etc.). Finally, we find a path that leads to the identification of the Buddha Amida with the devotee: Amida's voice is the same as the devotee's (254), and this is precisely the absolute experience, that in which individual existence is one with the being of the Absolute (as we will see better at the end of this writing).

4.5 The Correct Practice

All this is closely connected to another important duality, that between the dimension of salvation (enlightenment), in the proper sense, and the practical one, namely that of human action. Just in relation to the question of practice, we have indeed a very similar contrasting/conciliatory dynamic.

We have a whole series of dichotomies. Particularly relevant then is the fact that a dichotomy appears even within the three *sūtra* themselves – “short”, “extended”, and “meditation *sūtra*” (Raveri 2017, 232) – which reveals some “discrepancy” between the four vows (Raveri 2017, 233), in particular as regards the relation between complex practices and simple faith. One perspective privileges meditation and monks’ ways of life; for the other, on the contrary, faith seems to be sufficient, so that there is even a devaluation of meditation. Since these different ways of thinking became two different or even opposite spiritual paths, this called into question “the very meaning of the monastic choice” (227) and hence even “the spiritual power of the monks” (233). The drastic simplification introduced by the practice of *nenbutsu* (234) constitutes a reaction to the complex and therefore elitist forms of salvific practices proposed in the esoteric way, but, in this way, it leads to a drastic reduction of spiritual practices; even meditation changes its own meaning (233) and in any case loses its centrality (240). This led, in the long run, to the rejection of those complex practices – see, for example, the contrast between meditation and *mandala* (235; cf. 239) – and eventually to an extreme simplification for which the entire salvation can be obtained through the simple pronunciation of the Name of the Buddha also made a few times or even only on the verge of death (233).

The decisive problem of the relationship between faith and law arises here (243); we could speak of a contrast which opposes law and faith (234; cf. 235 and 243), which recalled the question of the “End of the Law” and of the new Buddha – Maitreya (237) and strongly proposed the relationship between sincerity, desire, and faith (241; cf. 249). Here we are moving in a direction that clearly goes beyond the law, therefore in a quite ‘revolutionary’ perspective (237-8). With its psychological and social atmosphere, it is characteristic of the dark ages (238), even then apocalyptic (237), with a typical need for transcendence (see for instance *tarikī*) understood in an absolute sense (238). The contrast affected all spheres and gave birth to clearly opposed experiences that Genshin tried to distinguish but also to reconcile; these being *shōdōmon*, based on wisdom and the study of texts, on the one hand, and *jōdomon*, the gateway to the Pure Land, invoking the Name of Buddha Amida, on the other (Raveri 2017, 239). In the latter perspective, there is “a personal and direct bond of man with the Absolute, based on faith and not on wisdom, a bond which is

free and not mediated by any religious institution” (233). In this regard, it is reasonable to pose the problem of a possible proximity to the phenomenon of Protestantism and its conflict with the Catholic ecclesiastical institution in the European world.

The problem, precisely, is that of the duality between ordinary practice and correct practice, the only fit to achieve salvation. A figure like Genshin (238), through its style far from the esoteric language, emphasised the “novelty of the Amidist discourse” (238) that projects salvation in a dimension (*tariki*) transcendent this world (238). But it was Hōnen who, later, radicalised this process (239-40). His valorising the 18° vow, and in particular the practice of invoking the Name of the Buddha (240), led to interpret *nenbutsu* as a main road capable of leading directly to the Pure Land (240; cf. 232). Up to the point that, being the practice favored by its reference to the traditional conception of *kotodama* (241), it came to talk about it as “the only practice” (*senju nenbutsu*): the only ‘effective’ practice to salvation (240). We can speak, in this regard, of a real magic of the Name: simply pronouncing the Buddha’s Name is able to provide salvation (241-2); it is a practice endowed with a real and extraordinary power.

4.6 Power and Institutions

So, it happened that the “new religious discourse” was “destined to lead to a direct attack on the dominant thought system” (Raveri 2017, 232). Indeed, this spiritual path is, objectively, against monastic power and its privileges. It questioned the political role of wise people (246), and the problem of power became central. As Raveri’s essay also shows, in an effective, concise manner, it is not only a spiritual or theoretical contrast, since it had major implications in practical, social, and political life (227). In particular, the conflict concerned issues related to the sphere of hierarchy and hence, precisely, of power. It is the dimension in which the dichotomies we have encountered, and which could appear to be of an exquisitely and exclusively spiritual or in any case existential-individual nature, actually show themselves as a particular face of a wider sphere of contrasts. This is one which consists of real power struggles and, thus, of conflicts that have an inevitable component of hatred and violence (227).

Moreover, the conflict unleashed by the Amidist practice also called into question the very role of warriors (243). They too, at least in part, were conquered by the Amidist practice of *nenbutsu* (243). But, just for this, a problem arose: how can a man involved in the dynamics of power give up the world? (243). This problem evoked an old difficulty of Buddhist World vision relating to the abandonment of the world. To this problem too an original answer was found: the abandonment is not really about the world but about desire only (244).

However, this solution opened a drift that led (with an expression that evokes Nietzsche) “beyond good and evil” (245) and that, therefore, owned a ‘subversive’ character which sparked a strong reaction from institutional Buddhist Schools (245-6). All this determined a real “antagonism” (246), inevitably characterised by hatred – “Hate” (246) – and conflicts: a real *polemos* (war).

The Western scholar may be surprised to see how religious and spiritual issues have turned into bitter conflicts also in the Buddhist world, not only in the Western one, strongly characterised by the relationship between theological disputes and struggles for power or even real wars. But this circumstance only reveals that the issues we are here dealing with are the truly fundamental ones: they are questions that affect human nature in its deepest essence rather than cultural questions understood in an abstract and superstructural sense.

From the conceptual point of view, particularly interesting is the fact that the ‘negative’ dynamic seems doomed to reproduce itself indefinitely. For instance, the same Amidist ‘simplification’ somehow reproduces, in turn, a sort of esoteric dualism: “Esoteric Amidist discourse” (246), and then also, respectively, (Kakuban), a kind of new conciliation (246). From a historical and therefore more concrete point of view, we face here situations very similar to those we have well known in the West too, albeit, of course, with cultural protagonists other than Amidist devotee and Buddhist monks in general.

5 Conclusion: East and West in Face of Salvation

5.1 The Paradoxical Character of Solution

The way to salvation ultimately turns out to be a paradoxical way. In my view, the core of this paradoxicality is due to the relation between difference and negation: if difference is identified with a form of negation, then the unity of two different objects determines a contradiction. This question also emerges in the discourse we are considering, albeit in a marginal and somewhat covered way. I think for example of the theme of privative α , which, in Sanskrit, was “the sign of the One” which “founded the multiple and the transient”, and since “as it affirmed, so it denied”, it expressed “contradictory realities” (Raveri 2017, 247).

The situation appears to be contradictory, but insofar as it is experienced as ‘the solution’ to the problem of salvation, it is evident that it must be safe from negation and therefore also from self-negation and hence from contradiction too. Nevertheless, it clearly remains quite different from the ordinary world vision, and thus appears as paradoxical. In fact, the paradox affects practically all the points of

what we can call ‘the Amidist solution’. For example, there is a vicious circle between faith and pronunciation of the Name since, to be effective, each of them seems to presuppose the other (248). But also the problem of the transcendentality of evil (248-9) is paradoxical; and, as we well know, this is an issue central in Buddhism, being connected to the problem of pain in the world.

As these paradoxical traits determine a sort of “surrender to the incomprehensible” (250), so that the Absolute is reached through an absolute faith towards an absolute transcendence (250), we can here interpret this as transcendence with respect to the negative and therefore to negation. A kind of utopian vision (250), yet clearly paradoxical, since the culmination of wisdom consists in understanding that just wisdom is an obstacle to salvation (250). Particularly significant symptoms of this paradoxicality are the questions of “wanting salvation” (250-1), and the paradox that one’s salvation requires nothing less than a radical letting go of oneself (251). That is: the fullest and most complete realization of the human individual coincides with its total renunciation of itself. It is no coincidence that the moment of death plays a fundamental role in all this (242). Here we are faced with a new conception of death, as we see for example with regard to the theme of death and rebirth (241).

Connected to this point, and equally paradoxical, is the solution regarding the question of merits earned by actions in this life. In the end, it seems that there is no longer any relationship between merit and virtue, on the one hand, and reward, on the other. At a certain point it seems even that sinners (245) are saved in the same way, or even in a privileged way, with respect to righteous (251). Here we find ourselves placed beyond contradictions and beyond ethics: beyond good and evil (245). This shows that salvation depends on the grace of the Buddha rather than on the action of the devotee or humans (252); in other terms, it depends on a free gift (249) rather than a guarantee linked to the effectiveness of acting. That it is a paradoxically conciliatory experience rather than a negative one is confirmed by the fact that we are witnessing a conciliation of the Buddhist trinity: Śākyamuni, Amida and Dainichi (247); as well as a conciliation between the three esoteric Mysteries and the primacy of the Voice: *ichimitsu jōbutsu* (247).

Furthermore, the paradox is so radical that it cannot help but invest (affect) even the practice of *nenbutsu* (252-3), which ends up being interpreted as a “non-practice” and a “non-good” (253). So *nenbutsu* itself can be seen as a form of *hybris*: “an illusion of one’s pride” because “to stop committing oneself to one’s own salvation is the real commitment” (250-1). Shinran’s word is an act “courageous and provocative” (251) and in some sense a reversal of his Master’s (Hōnen) teaching.

It is precisely in this paradoxical context that the voice of the devotee is identified with the same voice of the Buddha (254), as we have

already said. So, the invocation is simply a thanksgiving (Raveri 2017, 253). The two entities, which initially formed the two poles of an irreducible duality, present now themselves as ‘the same’. The saved and the savior, who in a negative logic constitute two absolutely opposite poles, now reveal themselves to be the same ‘person’. Or rather – since a difference continues to exist – we could say that between them there is just ‘a pure difference’. And just this is the most authentic language of the Absolute (Raveri 2017, 254); that is: pure difference between the Buddha and the devotee is the authentic voice of the Absolute. The concluding passage carries the word “unison” (254): “This unison – the humble voice of man and the voice of compassion of the Buddha that resounds in him – are, for Shinran, the most authentic language of the Absolute” (254). The voice of the Absolute is just the ‘identity’ (unison) of two ‘different voices’.

We could then conclude that it makes sense to interpret Raveri’s text as a discourse that admirably illustrates the transition from ‘via negationis’ to (if we may say so) ‘via positionis’: Shinran – the “stupid baldhead” *gutoku* (248) – does not judge, does not condemn, does not punish (252). He provides a solution to the problem left by his Master Hōnen. His ‘purely positive’ perspective stems from a radical pessimism (248-9): ‘everything’ is evil, and illusion in the human – in ‘all’ humans – and, in this sense, they are all the same, all on the same level. ‘Salvation’, meant as a dimension absolutely other than the totality of negative, is precisely a “gift” from Amida (249). The human individual who saves himself is now Amida himself, an expression of the unique mind (*isshin*) of Buddha (249). The individual is saved to the extent that he/she discovers that “since always he/she has been ‘saved’” (254); therefore, he/she is saved beyond his/her own merits (250). That is, we could say, within the dimension of the ‘absolute positive’.

5.2 Technology and Salvation

We can ask ourselves what a reflection of this kind means for the present time. A time that is characterised by the fact that every human phenomenon, on the one hand, happens within a cultural scenario that is now worldwide, and, on the other hand, has to deal with technology: the final outcome of logical-rational thought, which now presents itself as the subject that claims the right to provide a solution to ‘every’ problem, an answer to ‘every’ question.

We could say that technology is the culmination of the practice that claims to be effective and therefore able to guarantee the satisfaction of human individuals, and thus their salvation in the end. The lesson that we draw from the proposed discourse is that ‘true salvation’ is obtained only when this claim (the pretension to have some-

thing that is able to guarantee this result) is in turn abandoned. It is the paradox of salvation which is truly effective only if it renounces the claim of having a means (a practice) capable of guaranteeing the achievement of the end.

In an extremely synthetic and schematic way, we could say that today we are witnessing the conclusion of what has been called the Axial Age. By this term, we can mean the period in which human conscience (Lao-Tse, Buddha, Socrates, later Jesus and so on) awakens and poses the problem of liberation with respect to existing religious institutions, their 'mythologies', and in general with respect to language and therefore also with respect to power institutions. This liberation should lead humans, as far as possible, along the path of salvation from pain and from the fear of death too. In Western tradition, all this has increasingly taken the path of the affirmation of rational language, which finds now, and more and more, its fulfilment in technological operating. So today, in the so-called age of technology, the problem of the negative (that is, of pain and death) is faced by means of technological tools.

From a practical and historical point of view, we could say that technological action is showing a much higher and widespread effectiveness than that of all traditional forms of wisdom. Humans entrust their health and their salvation no longer to religious or spiritual practices but to scientific-technological instruments and institutions. But, on the other hand, the limits of this attitude become more and more tangible, and, above all, the risk that this path leads human life to an intensification of conflicts and pain is increasingly real. Not only that, but also with regard to the problem of death, the risk is that we shall end up only by shifting this problem is increasingly evident. In particular, the risk that we simply shall transfer that problem from substantially human individuals to forms of life that are no longer classically human but not for that less deadly and less painful; thus re-proposing the questions that are central to every sapiential tradition. The problem of pain and immortality too is today left to technology, but there is a very strong risk that this, interpreted in a negative way, that is as 'negation of necation', will lead to a situation very dangerous for 'normal' human and anthropological experience, for instance, the risk that technological evolution leads to what we can call 'the scrapping of the human', and that in this story the world of techno-scientists constitutes the priestly caste of our times.

From a spiritual point of view, technology presents itself as the complete fulfilment of the path indicated by Parmenides: fragment 8 (Diels-Kranz), verses 21 and 27-28 respectively. He says that, in truth "is becoming extinguished and passing away not to be heard of", and hence "coming into being and passing away have been driven afar, and true belief has cast them away": the overcoming of birth and death. But these are precisely the problems that have always been

at the heart of Buddhist reflection and to which this great experience has provided a whole series of reflections and practices which we can no longer ignore. For both traditions the central point is the positive/negative relationship, and the central question comes to be the relationship between the phenomena of pain, death and the like (suffering, violence, war, oppression, disease, illness, sickness, suicide, etc.), on the one hand, and that of salvation from all forms of negativity, on the other hand. Precisely, the question expressed by the op-position between the positive and negative, and hence by the purely positive (co-institutive) difference between the two.

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