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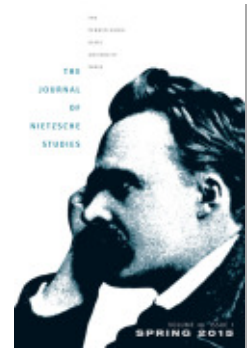
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Buddhism, Tiantai

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# Omnidesire as the Ending of Desire

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*Zarathustra*, Mahāyāna Buddhism, Tiantai

BROOK ZIPORYN

ABSTRACT: Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is a work that bears comparison to Mahāyāna Buddhist literature in more ways than one. Nietzsche was turning against the Schopenhauerian doctrine of the denial of the will, which he read as symptomatic of a larger nihilistic trend swallowing up almost all existing spiritual culture, while the Mahāyāna was turning against the world-denying implications of the doctrine of Nirvana as the ending of desire and samsara that was so central to early Buddhism. In this article, I explore one move made in both of these cases: the move from total negation to total affirmation seen as a convergence of these two apparently opposed extremes. Of central interest here is the "identity of indiscernibles" that applies structurally to these two opposite extremes, "willing nothing" and "willing everything," with the latter effected only through "willing one thing intensely," at once excluding and including all other things, and its liberative potential.

KEYWORDS: world affirmation, world denial, "Drunken Song", Schopenhauer, Mahayana Buddhism, *Lotus Sūtra*

Nietzsche's *Zarathustra* is a work that bears comparison to Mahāyāna Buddhist literature in more ways than one. Like the Mahāyāna sutras, it is a self-conscious creation of a religious scripture in the style of a previous tradition, but one which that against the ideology of its model with a sometimes shocking virulence: as *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is a kind of anti-Bible, Mahāyāna scriptures such as the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa Sūtra* can be read as a sort of anti-*Āgama*. Both are rooted in, modeled on, premised on, and aggressively critical of their predecessors—a kind of self-overcoming in the form of a deliberately mimicked scripture, which at once borrows, with tongue perhaps to some degree but not entirely in cheek, the authority of its ancient model and also, equally ambivalently, savages its every tenet. But I want to suggest that the similarity goes beyond form: it also pertains to content. Both *Zarathustra* and the Mahāyāna sutras of this type address similar philosophical problems, and the convergences and divergences of their response bring both projects into an illuminating and unusual focus.

Nietzsche was responding to and turning against the Schopenhauerian doctrine of the denial of the will. Deeply apprehending and internalizing the justification, profundity, and necessity of this doctrine, he also read it, *and* his own readiness to internalize it, as symptomatic of a larger nihilistic trend swallowing up almost all existing spiritual culture. The Mahāyāna was responding to and turning against the world-denying implications of the doctrine of Nirvana as the ending of desire and of the process of birth and death that was so central to early Buddhism, by which the Mahāyāna Buddhists were likewise deeply convinced but also seemingly deeply troubled. The tendency to revalue all values, making these premises self-overcome to the point of transforming a thoroughly world-denying doctrine into a thoroughly world-affirming one, is most pronounced in sutras like the *Vimalakīrti* and the *Lotus (Saddharma Puṇḍarīka Sūtra)*, which together form the basis of the *ne plus ultra* of world affirmation as the sublation of world denial, Tiantai Buddhism.

The responses against the total repudiation of willing and desiring (not exactly equivalent, as Nietzsche himself had shown,<sup>1</sup> but importantly similar), borrow heavily in both cases on the precise formulations of the targets of their critique: Nietzsche's affirmation of the will relies upon a radical twist on the Schopenhauerian doctrine of will, but one that is unintelligible without that premise; similarly, the Mahāyāna attempts to create a religion of world affirmation rest on early Buddhist presuppositions about the structure of desire and its relation to suffering, and the nature of the world as so constituted. I shall say a few words about both of these in turn, and then raise a few points about what we might learn by regarding them in tandem.

In "On Redemption," close to the end of part II of the book, Zarathustra re-describes the old Schopenhauerian problem of will and suffering in strikingly novel terms:

To redeem that which has passed away and re-create all "It was" into "Thus I willed it!"—that alone should I call redemption!

Will—that is the liberator and joy-bringer: that is what I taught you, my friends! And now learn this as well: the will itself is still a prisoner.

Willing liberates: but what is it called that puts even the liberator in fetters?

"It was": that is the will's gnashing of teeth and loneliest sorrow. Powerless with respect to what has been done—it is an angry spectator of all that is past.

Backwards the will is unable to will; it cannot break time and time's desire—that is the will's loneliest sorrow.

Willing liberates: what does willing itself devise, that it might be free of its sorrow and mock at its dungeon?

Alas, every prisoner becomes a fool! Foolish too the way the imprisoned will redeems itself.

That time does not run backwards, this arouses the will's fury; "That which was"—that is the stone which it cannot roll away.

And so it rolls stones in fury and ill-humour, and takes revenge on whatever does not, like itself, feel fury and ill-humour.

Thus did the will, the liberator, take to hurting: and upon all that can suffer it takes revenge for its inability to go backwards.

This, yes this alone, is what *revenge* itself is: the will's ill-will toward time and its "It was." (Z II: "On Redemption")<sup>2</sup>

This is a radical rethink of the Schopenhauerian problem of willing. The problem here is no longer the blindness and insatiability of the will as such, theorized by Schopenhauer in post-Kantian terms as beholden eternally to its unchangeable essence of restless dissatisfaction, owing to its metaphysical status as thing-in-itself beyond the sway of the phenomenal Principle of Sufficient Reason and thus beyond the time, space, and causality of the principle of individuation, beyond therefore the possibility of ending as a result of (i.e., being satisfied by) any particular temporal action. Rather, Zarathustra gives us not a conflict between the Will as atemporal thing-in-itself and futile phenomenal temporal attempts to satisfy it but rather declares that the will's usual self-defeat lies in its own temporal structure. We are told that *the impossibility of willing backward* is the source of the will's self-conflict and suffering, which are what produce the need for the slanderous claim that all existence *deserves* its suffering, the end of the innocence of becoming and thus the source of the drive for retributive remorse and revenge. Will wills in only one direction: toward the future. It is impotent with regard to the past. Hence it is always structurally doomed to less than total satisfaction, to banging its head against an unmovable wall. Will to power really wants nothing except *more power*; whatever finite goals it may posit are always just temporary proxies for its real goal, which is not to attain X, whatever it is, but to *be able* to attain X, and whatever is beyond X. Once X is attained, and proved attainable, X is necessarily no longer of interest; it must expand to find some other object, must demonstrate ever more and more diverse capabilities. In this way it can never rest finally at any finite attainment. It cannot really be satisfied unless *all that exists* is willed by its own will, is brought to being by its willing it to be so, a demonstration of the limitlessness of its own power. For will only affirms what it can see as "thus-I-willed-it," and unless will to power can affirm universally, or at least affirm itself, its entire life, exceptionlessly, it can never be satisfied: will to power always wants *more*. It craves expansion, the overcoming of limits. But every moment of willing simply arrives too late for it, the will, to have been in charge of forming its entire world and its entire life according to its own image; it is premised on a prior givenness. Will to power is thus always to some degree suffering, always frustrated—as will in general is always, according to Schopenhauer, in need of

redemption. Even the most powerful being, even the most idealized satisfaction of will to power, would be powerless here, unable to change the past. If all is will to power, in this case, all is suffering. It is not just that there is always an indivisible remainder of being, however small, that will can in principle never touch, though this single exception to its power would already be enough to drive it to crazy paroxysms of folly and vengefulness. It is that will itself constitutes its own past as its own deed and yet, as past deed, also not its deed anymore, but rather a limit on all its action. It is trapped, then, in a prison of its own making, constantly willing, since that is its nature, but with no possibility of attaining anything that would really be worth anything, by its own standards: what it really wants is never some specific thing, but rather its own increase of power in attaining that thing, but its power is intrinsically limited and self-conflicted: whatever it attains through its actions limits its ability for action all the more. So willing inexorably wills, but there is nothing really commensurate with its desire for total power of affirmation: it is doomed to posit goal on goal, investing each one with value, only to be frustrated each time with the horrific realization that, since each becomes a past once attained, and thus a limit to what will can do, there is nothing worth wanting and nothing worth doing.

Schopenhauer proposed the possibility of suspending all willing as the only liberation, the achievement of a state of pure contemplation without will that would be able to disinterestedly perceive the worthlessness of things, the inability of finite things to satisfy a constitutively infinite and self-contradictory will, and thus renounce desire for them. He provided a bit of a loophole, though, in his aesthetic theory, detailed in part III of *The World as Will and Representation*, and elsewhere. For Schopenhauer, beauty is a foretaste of redemption: a temporary state of will-lessness brought on by the contemplation of a pure Platonic form, temporarily lifted out of the time-space-causality matrix of the principle of individuation and the Principle of Sufficient Reason, thereby revealing a “pure gradation of the objectification of the Will.”<sup>3</sup> By perceiving the world without will, one perceives only timeless beauty, simultaneously becoming a “pure, timeless will-less subject of knowing,”<sup>4</sup> no longer a particular individual limited to a certain time or space, and no longer driven by the “miserable pressure of the will”<sup>5</sup>—this is liberation from the tyranny of time and will (but, paradoxically, only temporarily). This “transparent eyeball” (as Emerson would later describe an analogous transformation of the experiencer of redemptive beauty) perceives the world aesthetically, and thus, for Schopenhauer, without will. And this, in an odd way, opens the door to a kind of world affirmation in the very heart of the world denial doctrine. For the content of this will-less knowledge is nothing but the will itself, objectified and expressed with maximal distinctness and vividness of detail, and without the phenomenal forms of time, space, and causality. To disinterestedly see in totally clarity the full range of objectifications of the will, fully absorbed in the perception (not conceptualization) of these Ideas which

express the will most fully, most timelessly, most eternally and universally is, it turns out, simultaneously *liberation* from the will: pure will-less knowing. The fullest presence of the will, as object, as Idea, is pure knowing, is liberation from the Will. To fully experience the will in its greatest distinctness and completeness, but only if this experience is specifically in the mode of pure will-less knowing, is beauty.

Zarathustra, however, spoofs and repudiates this view in the chapter “On Immaculate Perception”:

“This would be for me the highest thing”—thus your lying spirit talks to itself—  
“To look upon life without desire and not like a dog with its tongue hanging out:

“To be happy in looking, with a will that has died, without the grasping or greed or selfishness—the whole body cold and ashen, but with drunken moon-eyes!

“This would be for me the dearest thing”—thus the seduced one seduces himself—“To love the earth as the moon loves her, and to touch her beauty with the eyes alone.

“And let this be for me the *immaculate* perception of all things: that I want nothing from things, except that I may lie there before them like a mirror with a hundred eyes”—

Oh, you sentimental hypocrites, you lechers! You lack innocence in your desire, so now you slander desiring itself!

Verily, not as creators, procreators, or enjoyers of becoming do you love the earth!

Where is there innocence? Where there is the will to procreate. And whoever want to create beyond himself, he has for me the purest will.

Where is there beauty? Wherever I *must will* with all my will, where I want to love and go under, that an image might not remain mere image. (Z II: “On Immaculate Perception”)

Admitting, in the same section, that it once tempted him deeply (“Even Zarathustra was at one time fooled by your godlike skins; he never guessed that they were crammed with coils of snakes”), he now sees this moonlit desireless apprehension of the world as pale parody of real world affirmation and real beauty. Beauty is instead just the opposite: “where one must will with all one’s will.” Beauty is not the denial of willing, but the experience of its intensification, exacerbation, totalization, exceptionlessness, inescapability. But this move is itself a fuller expression of the strange paradox already incipiently present in Schopenhauer’s version: in some sense, full immersion in and hyperpresence of the Will is liberation from the Will.

This is of a piece with Zarathustra’s stunning revaluation of the predicament of the will in “On Redemption,” already quoted: the proposition that willing, far from being merely a prisoner in need of liberation, is also itself the great liberator. The creative will liberates. It is to make this proposition

possible that the doctrine of Eternal Recurrence appears. All things are causally interlocked. By accepting past's unchangeability all the more radically, such that it applies deterministically to the future as well, we see a kind of turnaround where the will's time problem is solved, where the exceptionless relevance of the will and its liberation are made possible, where all is now in the desired sense "changeable," that is, susceptible to the will's quest for self-affirming power. This is because, even though it remains undeniable that the past is the cause of the future, and willing is always, by definition, to will the future, yet according to the Eternal Recurrence doctrine the future is also the past's past, and thus the future also causes the past. Thus *to will the future is also to will the past*. To will any one thing is to will that all the past and present be such as to cause that thing to come about; but all the past and present are an effect of the thing willed as well. All things—past, present, and future—are causally inextricable, each serving as cause and as effect of each of the others. Thus to will any one thing is to will all things. But to really be able to will any single thing, to thus will the entirety of often terrible premises and consequences that are entailed in willing any one thing, I have to will that one thing *hard*—with all my will.

To authentically motivate such a will, we need *at least one* transformative experience of joy and beauty deep enough to incite so strong and irresistible a desire. We see this state exemplified, after many twists and turns, in the "Drunken Song," just about four pages from the end of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*:

All joy wants the eternity of all things, wants honey, wants lees, wants drunken midnight, wants graves, wants graves'-tears consolation, wants gilded evening-glow—

—*what* does joy not want? She is thirstier, heartier, hungrier, more terrible, more secret than all woe, she wants *herself*, she bites into *herself*, the ring's will wrestles in her—

—she wants love, she wants hate, she is overrich, bestows, throws away, begs for someone to take her, thanks the taker, she would gladly be hated—

—so right is joy that she thirsts for woe, for Hell, for hate, for disgrace, for the cripple, for *world*—this world now, you know it well!

You superior humans, it is for you that she yearns, this joy, intractable, blissful—for your woe, you that have failed! For failures does all eternal joy yearn.

For all joy wants herself, thus she wants misery too! Oh happiness, oh pain! Oh break, heart! You superior humans, do learn this: Joy wants eternity,

—Joy wants *all things'* eternity, *wants deepest, deep Eternity!* (Z IV: "Drunken Song")

Joy wants eternity—not just its own eternity, and not just all things as ineradicable causes of its eternity, but the eternity of all things: it wants, we are told, the eternity (Eternal Recurrence) also of honey, of lees, of graves, of graves' tears' consolation, of love, of hate, of being taken, of being hated,

of woe, of hell, of disgrace, of cripples, of the world, of failures and pity and disgust with the world. Such is joy and its desire for itself, for its own eternity: it wants the eternity also of all that is not it, all that seems to contravene and undermine it. Zarathustra's joy in that moment, willing the future of his work there with the Superior Human Beings, is deep enough to will without reserve, and thus to will all things, to will the past, to liberate the will from its disgust with the unwilling brute facts of the small man and the failure of the great man, from its enslavement in unwillable pasts, and yet also to liberate it from the will-lessness of immaculate perception.

But this liberation from will-lessness must also be a second-order affirmation of even will-lessness. As Zarathustra says in the chapter "Before the Sunrise," invoking again the cat-and-moon images for immaculate perception,

For I would sooner have even noise and thunder and weather-curses than this suspicious, dubious cat-like stillness; and also among human beings I hate the most all pussyfooters and half-and-halfers and doubting, hesitating, drifting clouds.

And "whoever cannot bless shall *learn* to curse!"—this bright clear teaching fell to me from a bright clear Heaven, this star still stands even on black nights in my Heaven.

But I am a blesser and a Yea-sayer, if only you are around me, so pure! so bright! you light-abysse!—in all abysses I carry my blessing Yea-saying.

A blesser I have become and a Yea-sayer: and for that I struggled long and was a wrestler, that I might one day wrest my hands free for blessing.

But this is my blessing: to stand over each and every thing as its own Heaven, as its round roof, its azure bell and eternal security: and blessed is he who blesses thus!

For all things are baptized at the fount of eternity and beyond good and evil; but good and evil are themselves mere intervening shadows and dampening sorrows and drifting clouds.

Verily, a blessing it is and no blasphemy when I teach: "Over all things stands the Heaven Accident, the Heaven Innocence, the Heaven Contingency, the Heaven Exuberance."

"Lord Contingency":—that is the oldest nobility in the world, which I restored to all things when I redeemed them from their bondage under Purpose.

This freedom and Heaven-serenity I placed like an azure bell over all things, when I taught that over them and through them no "eternal will"—wills.

This exuberance and this folly I put in place of that will, when I taught: "In all things is one thing impossible—rationality!"

A *little* reason, to be sure, a seed of wisdom scattered from star to star—this pinch of leaven is mixed into all things: for the sake of folly is wisdom mixed into all things!

A little wisdom is no doubt possible; but this blessed certainty I found in all things: that they would rather—*dance* on the feet of chance.



O Heaven above me, so pure! so high! That is what your pureness means to me, that there is no eternal reason-spider and-spider-web:—

—that for me you are a dance-floor for Godlike accidents, that for me you are a Gods' table for Godlike dice and dice-throwers!— (ZIII: "Before the Sunrise")<sup>6</sup>

We should notice the two-step back-and-forth here: first to curse *but* then to bless. Cursing as a predecessor to blessing, as its precondition, as the only way to enable eventual blessing: world denial as a means to world affirmation, rationality as a means to folly—wrestling as a means of wresting the hands free for blessing, nay-saying as a means of freeing oneself for yea-saying. This of course recapitulates the last of the three transformations of the spirit in Zarathustra's very first sermon, "On the Three Transformations of the Spirit": from a lion, which denies and destroys, which tears down ideals, denies them along with the value of the world, to a child: "But say, my brothers, what can the child yet do that even the lion could not do? Why must the predatory lion yet become a child? Innocence the child is and forgetting, a beginning anew, a play, a self-propelling-wheel, a first movement, a sacred Yea-saying. Yes, for the play of creating, my brothers, a sacred Yea-saying is needed: the spirit now wills *its own* will, the one who had lost the world attains *its own* world" (ZI: "On the Three Metamorphoses").

Here we see the resolution of a tension that may seem to have existed between Zarathustra's various claims about the eternal will. On the one hand, redemption and beauty lie in willing, in the creative will that must will with all its will: "will liberates" and "joy wills eternity," and this willing of eternity is, because also eternally returning, also itself eternal, hence an eternal will. And yet we are also told that redemption lies precisely in freeing the world from the tyranny of believing "that an eternal will wills through it and in it." But the contradiction is only apparent, pointing us to the deeper implication here. Play, chance, will, creation, redemption: it is not *a* will, a single universal will, God's will, that wills eternally through all things, it is *my* will that wills eternally through all things. Redemption lies not in Gethsemane's "Not my will but thine be done," but in something like: "There is no eternal will in things except the will generated eternally in and for all things, past and future, good and evil, superior and inferior, by my specific momentary experience of this precise joy." The eternal will is thus *my* eternal will, the eternal world is *my* eternal world. Thus "chance"—the freedom from eternal willed rationality—is equated here with "exuberance": the joy that wills all things and wills the eternity of all things.

Joy wills this moment's will deeply enough to affirm the world, every little piece of the world from the best to the worst, from the smallest to the greatest, including not only those moments of world that lead one to deny the world, but even the world-denying minds within the world, affirming even those "inferior" human states that *deny* the world. This means even the affirmation of what Zarathustra himself had repudiated earlier in the book: the affirmation of *revenge*

and of *immaculate perception* and of all the other markers of world denial Zarathustra has been busy denying.

What is crucial to notice here, however, is that the turnaround from negation to affirmation entails also a totalization that brings with it a parallel turnaround: from willing to will-lessness itself. Ironically enough, Zarathustra achieves the equivalent of the original Schopenhauerian goal of nonwilling, not by renouncing will but rather by *willing more intensely*. The key point here is that “not-willing” and “willing everything equally” are *exactly synonymous*. For “to will” is to *prefer* one thing to another, one state of affairs to another, one outcome to another. To will everything equally is thus no different from not willing anything in particular above anything else. To will all is to will none. Yet through the premise of the Eternal Recurrence, Zarathustra has found a way to achieve this goal of nonwilling not by negating his will for the particular small things that he loves and wills, initially at the expense of everything else, but rather as entailing in that very will also the will for everything else. For given the impossibility of *not* willing some particular over another, the only way to achieve the ending of will is to will that thing more deeply, more unreservedly, more thoroughly, such that to will it is equally to will everything else. The will thus wills the original desideratum but no longer in the problematic sense in which it was doomed to limit its own power with every past achievement. Willing no longer limits and frustrates itself, no longer finds itself constrained by and resentful of a past facticity that it cannot embrace as part of its own will, once the *strict equivalence* of willing X and willing everything-other-than-X is established—through the doctrine of the Eternal Recurrence.

Let us turn to the Buddhist case now. Early Buddhism approaches the problem of suffering in terms of desire, but it approaches desire in terms of the problem of self. Selfhood, however, is *defined* here in terms of power: self means a single cause capable of bringing about an effect unassisted, and thus able to sustain its own existence over time independently of other conditions. This self Buddhism emphatically denies, stipulating instead that a single cause never produces a single effect, nor does a single cause produce multiple effects, nor do multiple causes produce a single effect, but rather that all that exists is causal in the specific sense of multiple causes producing multiple effects: dependent-co-arising (*pratīyasamutpāda*).<sup>7</sup> A “self,” as an agent capable of single-handedly producing any effects, as an independent causal power, is thus impossible. But all desire is really desire for selfhood in just this sense. Dependent co-arising means not only multiple causes for each effect, but multiple effects for each cause. Any desire that wants to make things be just one certain way, to the exclusion of other ways, is thus always going to be contravened by this inexorable involvement in otherness. Thus all desire is doomed, and suffering is the fate of every desire.

The only escape from suffering, then, is the escape from this misguided desire, the desire for selfhood embodied in every particular finite desire.

Early Buddhism allowed the desire for liberation to stand as a temporary exception to its stricture against desire; compared to a raft, it was a temporarily necessary means for transcending all other desires, and finally, in a kind of planned obsolescence of self-overcoming, a means of transcending and abandoning *itself* as well. This desire for liberation was the basis for commitment to the Buddhist path, which culminates in the practice of a contemplative method known as *sati*, mindfulness. The classical formulation of this practice is found in the “Four Foundations of Mindfulness”: mindfulness of body, of feelings, of mental states, and of mental objects. The procedure to be applied to these varied objects of experience is perhaps most pithily described in the words of the Buddha in the *Udāna*: “In the seen will be merely what is seen; in the heard will be merely what is heard; in the sensed will be merely what is sensed; in the cognised will be merely what is cognised.”<sup>8</sup> This means experiencing sense-data precisely *as* sense-data, rather than collating them with each other to form a concept of a reattainable object in the world—or rather, to also be aware of this thing-constituting act of cognition itself as another temporal and conditional event enacted by one’s own cognitive apparatus. What is left is a clear real-time awareness of the conditional arising and perishing of all experience as experience, thereby directly apprehending each experience’s (1) multiple causality, (2) lack of self, (3) not being under anyone’s or any single thing’s control, (4) saturation with the other-than-what-is-desired, (5) inherent suffering. By this kind of precise perception, particularly as applied to feelings (i.e., pain, pleasure, and hedonically neutral sensations), desire is disincantized, and eventually withers away. A feeling of pleasure, which is what serves as an incentive for desire in ordinary inattentive experience, is noticed to be no more and no less than just a feeling of pleasure—it implies nothing about a thing that can single-handedly and unconditionally cause that pleasure, that could be reattained to the exclusion of other things and feelings. Indeed, if attended to closely enough, it is found to be always-already saturated with the feeling of displeasure that is intrinsic to it as a conditioned and impermanent sensation: the pleasure of gaining it is always pervaded by the necessarily concomitant and proportional pain of losing that very gain. Feeling pleasure may still lead to a desire to feel it again, but that is a separate fact to be perceived, and no less automatic and conditional than the feeling itself.

Note that this list leaves out one key element of the usual Buddhist analysis of experience: it does not say: “In desire, let there be only desire.” This is a key ambiguity on which the development of Mahāyāna and Tiantai thinking arises. We have in this traditional practice a kind of rough equivalent to the “immaculate perception,” the liberated will-less view of the world, advocated by Schopenhauer. But what if the same method were applied to willing itself? Would it necessarily wither away, or are there other possibilities?

The Mahāyāna accepts these early Buddhist premises without reservation. But it carves out a loophole to their world-denying implications in its doctrine of the bodhisattva: a different kind of desire, called a “vow,” now brings the bodhisattva back into the world, willing to be born again and again, willing to suffer, on the basis of solidarity with other living beings. This solidarity, considered closely, is itself merely a further thinking-through of the dependent co-arising doctrine. Since no cause or effect genuinely stands alone, the goal of individual liberation conceals a paradox. Given the premise of nonself, to will my own future liberation is already to be willing the liberation of someone who is strictly neither myself nor another, and in the absence of any nonarbitrary criterion for where to limit the scope of this willing, this already involves me in the willing of the liberation of any and every putatively “other” being. My clear perception of the interlocking of infinite causes and effects in each moment of experience now *spurs* the will rather than deadens it. My initially “raftlike” desire for liberation from suffering of my own is freed of its arbitrary and erroneous limits; I now will that all experience be freed from suffering, although there is no experiencer of suffering who is either identical to or different from myself, just as I had always willed the end of “my own” suffering, even though my future self was also neither identical to nor different from my present willing self. I continue on this raft for many, many eons. Hence the bodhisattva is elevated above the arhat, that is, the one who has achieved individual nirvana and escaped the world of passion and suffering.

In the *Vimalakīrti Sūtra*, we have a vivid and polemical expression of this idea in the figure of Vimalakīrti, a layman who, in his bodhisattva practice, involves himself in all aspects of suffering and desire—frequentering brothels and pubs, embroiled in messy households and politics, even being bedridden with physical illness—as a way of continuing his engagement with sentient beings of all types, ostensibly to at least *appear* to share their desires and suffering and then, through a cultivated solidarity and communication with them, to show them the way to liberation *from* these desires. The sutra describes this sort of bodhisattva practice as neither the way of the ordinary deluded person, who is a slave to his desires, nor the way of an arhat, who destroys his desires—a further elaboration of the raft of mindfulness that is the Middle Way between desire and nondesire. He is *aware of* his desires, and *makes use of* his desires as part of his bodhisattva path. The sutra sharply disparages the arhat who has destroyed his passions, comparing him to a burnt seed or a lotus flower planted in the air: it produces nothing, it cannot grow, it cannot lead to Buddhahood nor to the expansive interaction with otherness that is the bodhisattva path. Even the ordinary man mired in passions and desires is superior to the perfect passionless Buddhist of old, for he can still give rise to the aspiration for Buddhahood (NB, not for arhatship). Greed, hatred, and deluded views of self are no longer obstructions to enlightenment;

rather, they are the indispensable “seeds of Buddhahood,” for Buddhahood can grow *only* in the mud of desire and the passions:

It is just as lotus flowers do not grow on dry land on the high plateau—these flowers grow in the muddy filth of the lowly marshes. Thus one who sees the unconditioned dharmas and enters the primary status will never be able to generate the dharmas of a buddha. It is only within the mud of the afflictions that sentient beings give rise to the dharmas of a buddha.

Or again, it is like planting a seed in space, where it would never grow—only in nightsoil-enriched earth can it flourish. In this way, one who enters the unconditioned primary status will not be able to generate the dharmas of a buddha.

It is only when one generates a view of self as great as Mount Sumeru that one is able to generate the intention to achieve anuttarā samyaksam bodhi and generate the dharmas of a buddha.

Therefore, you should understand that all the afflictions constitute the seed of the Tathāgata. It is like not being able to attain the priceless jewel-pearl without entering the ocean. Therefore, if one does not enter the great sea of the afflictions, one will not be able to attain the jewel of omniscience.<sup>9</sup>

But the Mahāyāna remains ambiguous on this point, and still seems to hold out *eventual* total overcoming of the passions as the final goal, however indefinitely postponed. World affirmation is here only a means; the end is still a thoroughgoing world denial. Desire, though expanded in breadth into an embrace of all states and all sufferings, and in depth into an active vow, is still a means, a raft, to reach the other shore of desirelessness. It is here that the *Lotus Sūtra* makes a decisive shift, from which the Tiantai doctrine is born. Very briefly, the *Lotus* is taken, at least in Tiantai readings, to establishing the following points:

1. There is no such thing as individual nirvana as the ending of desire; in fact, what looked like the end, the goal, the state of the arhat freed of life-and-death, is itself always no more than one more means. Alleged nirvana of the arhat—freedom-from-life-and-death—is really a part of the bodhisattva path. The ends-means relation is reversed: it is not that desire is a means to the attainment of desirelessness but rather that apparent desirelessness is one more state of desire, is itself a means toward an even more greatly expanded state of vow, of bodhisattvahood, of desire. We may perhaps here recall Nietzsche’s dictum in *GM III*: Man would rather will nothingness than not will—and indeed that thereby the will is saved.
2. There is no end to bodhisattvahood, nor any beginning: Buddhahood is nothing but eternal bodhisattvahood that recognizes that there is never any end to its process of rebirth. A bodhisattva is a bodhisattva who falsely believes that bodhisattvahood is a mere means to the end of reaching Buddhahood, which he or she thus regards as a different state that will put an end to his or her present bodhisattvahood. A Buddha is a bodhisattva who knows, on the contrary, that there is no Buddhahood outside of eternal bodhisattvahood.
3. It is possible to be a bodhisattva without knowing it, and indeed to deny and reject bodhisattvahood—to reject life—is one more way in which one

may sometimes be expressing bodhisattvahood—expressing life. Indeed, “not knowing it” might sometimes be essential to being able to do it.

Zhiyi, the founder of the Tiantai school, expands on these ideas in the following ways:

1. Early Buddhism regarded the ending of the three poisons—greed, hatred, and delusion—as liberation. But according to Zhiyi, a bodhisattva has not less of these than the ordinary person, but infinitely more: great greed, great hatred, and great delusion. Great greed: to live all possible lives, to suffer all possible states, to take to oneself all possible beings, to learn infinite modes of practice and teaching. Great hatred: not just the denial or rejection of some things but of all things: the emptiness of all entities without exception, emptiness, and repudiation even of nirvana itself—a destructive rage that negates any positive datum, denies self-nature and subsistence to all. Great delusion: not just ignorance about some things, but a deep apprehension of the unknowability of all things, that any conceptualization of reality fails, that all things are beyond thought.<sup>10</sup>
2. Inherent entailment, even of evil. All things are causes and effects of each other, nothing is eradicable, all things are essential to the being of all other things, all relations are internal. Since the existence of each thing necessarily depends on all other things, otherness—any otherness, and whatever is other to that otherness, hence all possible entities and states without exception—is internal to the constitution of each thing, and impossible to exclude from any identity. Hence each thing pervades all times and places, is absolute, can never be eradicated. This includes all evils, greed, hatred, and delusions of all kinds, which are not only expanded practically as part of bodhisattvahood but are even essential to, and ineradicable from, Buddhahood, which is nothing but eternal bodhisattvahood that recognizes this very inescapable inherent mutual entailment.<sup>11</sup>
3. How to will all things by willing one thing. The previous point stipulates that each thing inherently includes, and is ultimately identical to, all other things. But also included in each thing being itself is the ignorance of sentient beings that see it as “this” and nothing besides, to the exclusion of all other things, and this deluded-view-of-it too is essential to the being of this thing-which-is-all-things (i.e., this limiting deluded-view-upon-it is another of the “all things” that is inherently included in its own being). In the *Lotus*, bodhisattvahood is accomplished by willing its opposite, nirvana—by willing the end of willing. The parable is told there of a group of climbers seeking a treasure; they grow weary and want to turn back, so their guide conjures an apparitional pleasure-city ahead of them. This lures them forward. But each step toward that illusion is actually also a step toward the treasure that is situated far beyond the illusory city. It is only by *not* knowing that they are heading toward the treasure that they are able to move toward it. Each step is consciously willing one thing—the pleasure city—but actually also, thereby, accomplishing the journey toward something else—the treasure, here denoting the accomplished state of interper-  
 vasion of all things.<sup>12</sup> In the sutra these arhats who learn that they have really been bodhisattvas all along, that they have been practicing the bodhisattva-path, unbeknownst to themselves, precisely by denying it and trying to be arhats, declare: “We attained it without seeking it.”<sup>13</sup> But this means that we did not, as is usually believed, attain what we willed by means of willing it;

nor did we, as in early Buddhism, attain what we really wanted by willing nothing, by putting an end to all willing. It means instead we attained X by willing Y. Willing is after all a kind of imbalance of cathexis, an investing of more energy and attention *here* than *there*. It is the opposite of an even distribution of attention, requiring some sort of wall of tension to prevent free-flow evenly in the totality of awareness: some thing must be focused on and obsessed over, while other things are neglected. To desire nothing means equilibrium, evenness of distribution; but to desire everything equally also means evenness of distribution. Perfectly even distribution of energy and attention, however, is impossible, or rather is literally death. To be alive is to be a partial, finite, contingent being, always off-balance, always preferring one thing to another. Instead of a static evenness, then, what we have here is flow, unobstructed flow: at any given moment, one thing is singled out, but that one thing is always in the process of becoming more, becoming less, becoming other. We are always willing, we cannot help willing, but willing any one thing also brings with it the moreness, the rest, the inescapable otherness that it entails.

It is here that we can perhaps pause for a comparison with *Zarathustra*. In both the Tiantai and Nietzschean cases, we have an attempt to remedy a certain kind of purposivity, and a certain relation to time: that is, the subordination of the present to the future, the present used as a means to attain a future goal, a purpose, or the displacement of value in an otherness, a future, standing over against every present, and with it the unchangeability of the past. In both cases this is seen as something structurally necessary and irresolvable, given the ordinary relation to time: the relation of will and desire. In both cases, too, the obvious first stab at a solution to this—the attempt to make each moment autotelic, a value in itself, freed from subordination to a future, is quickly seen to be impossible: to be free of (future) goals, to live in the moment, to transcend willing, is itself a goal, requiring another moment, and a willing therefore of the future.

So both have a deep and abiding insight into the double-bind of will and will-lessness. This already puts them rather close together in orientation, when contrasted to alternate responses to this problem. More usually, when this double-bind involving future goals and past unchangeableness is recognized, and the obvious solution—to make each present moment its own goal, and seek nothing besides—is seen to be structurally self-contradictory, we have the self-consciously impossible attempt to regain the sovereignty of the present (e.g., Bataille, Zen) pursued down new and often brilliantly convoluted paths of self-reference and self-laceration—itsself possibly also fruitful in its own way. But this also inevitably makes “sovereign moments” or “enlightenment experiences” (which are regarded as some sort of peak experience where, for once, the usual future-orientation is semi-miraculously suspended) into goals to be pursued in the future. This paradox itself can be made use of, and that is where the subtlety and artfulness of these traditions tend to lie. Another approach (Simmel, Heidegger, Sartre?) is to simply accept the desiring, future-projecting, self-transcending structure of time and consciousness as

unavoidable, thus abandoning the notion of autotelic moments as inauthentic or illusory, and working from there to create an alternate ideal.

But the cases of Zarathustra and Tiantai go in another direction. Both offer a solution to the dichotomy of will and will-lessness in the idea of “willing all,” based on two insights: (1) the strict structural equivalence of “willing all” and “willing none,” inasmuch as “will” per se implies a preference of one object over another and is thus constitutively “willing non-all”; and (2) the concomitant impossibility of “willing all” unless we can somehow will all by willing some one thing. In Nietzsche, as I read him, this means the apprehension of a single joy or beauty, a great noontide, that is deep enough to affirm the willing of all the pasts and futures which are causally interlocked with it in the Eternal Recurrence. Knowing this doctrine, it would seem, allows one to will backward in the depth of a moment of joy to affirm one’s entire being, and the eternity of all things, with all one’s will.

In the Tiantai case, we have rather a case of “willing whatever you are already willing”—not a decision to will, but a predisposition to the liking of something. The great Song dynasty Tiantai thinker Siming Zhili said, when challenged about his intention to satisfy his persistent and unjustifiable desire to set himself physically on fire, that he had no reason for this particular obsession other than that the thought kept occurring to him. He therefore supposed it “must be a vow I had taken in a former life, eh?” and straightaway set about pursuing this desire as his main mode of Buddhist practice. The reference to past karma was here invoked not as a justifying ground of the rationality or wholesomeness of the proposed deed (which Zhili admits elsewhere in the same correspondence to indeed be a result of, as his interlocutor charges, “a demonic teaching”), but rather precisely as an instance of *inescapable delusion* that was nonetheless incumbent upon him personally to honor and obey. Zhili explained, “Whatever happens to please you is what is appropriate to you, and it is by cultivating that one thing that you will be enlightened.”<sup>14</sup> Desire is here arbitrary, ungroundable, specific, a brute datum about which we can only surmise an unknowable unconscious prior cause, which in Buddhist mythological terms means that somewhere in my infinite past lives I must have decided, for some reason I now neither know nor have to know, that this was what I would vow to do: in plain English, I happen to like X, not Y. My present strange desire to do it is the sole criterion allowing me to judge it as a manifestation of my forgotten prior vow, and this is sufficient to justify it as my specific mode of practice. But recontextualizing this will with the further knowledge that I am always doing more than I know, and willing more than I know, that otherness leaks into both the subject and object of every act of willing, I find that in willing this one thing and denying all others, I end up also affirming all others: as I accomplish my will, I find that, just as pessimistic early Buddhism promised, it is not what I wanted. It is, rather, also everything else. I need not know this when I will it: in fact, to will it is to



willfully deny explicit knowledge of its nonexclusion of what I do not presently want. The *Lotus* propounds a necessary *rhythm* of nonknowing and knowing: I must not-know what I am doing *for awhile*, and only then can I realize what it was I was formerly unknowingly doing and willing.

Is this functionally the same as Zarathustra's drunken song's desire for graves and despair and failure? I ask this question in particular with respect to the status of knowledge in both cases: Does Zarathustrian joy that wills with all its will have to know about the Eternal Recurrence? Or does it need also to sometimes forget? There seem to me to be some basis for both readings in Nietzsche's texts. We may think here of the second *Untimely Meditation*, "On the Use and Abuse of History for Life," which puts the necessity of forgetting front and center to its reevaluation of the historical consciousness, but even more crucially, we might want to ponder again the third of the three "Transformations of the Spirit" delineated in Zarathustra's very first discourse: from a camel to a lion to a child. The final stage, the new beginning, the source of yea-saying and absolute affirmation, is that of the child, which is explicitly described as a "forgetting, a beginning anew, a play, a self-propelling-wheel, a first movement, a sacred Yea-saying." The camel wants the heaviest burden, says an obedient yes to accepted values and the duties they impose; the lion speaks a destructive "nay" to all that has existed, the holiest as well as the lowliest of values and wills on earth. But the child stands for neither an acceptance nor a rejection, neither a preservation nor a destruction of the putative values of the received world, of the contravening willings of tradition, of history, or even, we may say, given Nietzsche's occasional forays into a mythical cosmology of the will, the entire existent world, both natural and cultural, as an ocean of conflicting wills. Rather, the child is a forgetting, and forgetting is presented here as coextensive with the highest form of affirmation: the creative will. This consideration perhaps provides us with a vantage point from which to reconsider the question of creativity itself in Buddhist tradition, in particular in Tiantai, under the aegis of the notion of *upāya* ("skillful means," including both various teachings and various transformations of oneself, created by a bodhisattva to communicate with and liberate sentient beings), *upāya* as a function not only of knowing exactly what one is doing, as in the majority of normative Mahāyāna presentations of the concept, but with the distinctive Tiantai twist: *upāya* as a responsiveness to and transformation of the preexisting world, both cultural and natural, which derives its effectiveness precisely from *not* quite knowing what one is doing. The idea is perhaps big with implications for any reconsideration of the nature of ethical theory in general—but this is one of those many topics that require more time and space than are available here.

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## NOTES

1. See Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Oxford: Penguin, 1986), sec. 19, for Nietzsche's description of what *more* is involved in the idea of "willing," as opposed to that of desiring as such—most notably, the affects of command and obedience among the constituent parts of the self.

2. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for Everyone and Nobody*, trans. Graham Parkes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

3. Schopenhauer conceives of these Platonic forms, rather obscurely, as "adequate grades of objectification of the Will," and admits Forms only for elemental natural objects, not for manufactured individual objects as such. Architecture, for example, is a way of presenting the Forms not of this house or that tower (for there are no such Forms), but of gravity and stone and metal. As against Plato, however, the apprehension of Forms is the province of perception rather than thought, but perception that sees in the individual only the timeless and placeless universal or "species." See Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, trans. E. F. J. Payne (New York: Dover, 1958), 1:169–212.

4. Schopenhauer, *World as Will and Representation*, 1:195.

5. Schopenhauer, *World as Will and Representation*, 1:196.

6. Schopenhauer, *World as Will and Representation*, 1:143.

7. For the classical formulation of *prafityasamutpāda* specifically as multiple causation, see Buddhaghosa, *Vissudhimagga*, trans. Bhikku Nanamoli (Taipei: Buddhist Educational Foundation [reprint from Singapore Buddhist Meditation Centre edition], 1999), 623, para. 106: "Here there is no single or multiple fruit of any kind from a single cause, nor a single fruit from multiple causes, but only multiple fruit from multiple causes."

8. *The Udāna*, trans. John D. Ireland (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1990), 20.

9. *The Vimalakīrti Sutra*, trans. John McCrae (Berkeley: Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research, 2004), 135.

10. *Taishoshinshudaizokyo* 大正新脩大藏經 [The Chinese Buddhist canon as compiled in the Taishō reign], ed. and compiled by Takakusu Junjiro, Watanabe Kaigyoku, et al. (Tokyo: Taishō Issaikyō Kankō Kai, 1924–34) (henceforth cited as "T"), 34.929c.

11. For a full exposition, see Brook Ziporyn, *Evil and/or/as the Good: Omnicentrism, Intersubjectivity and Value Paradox in Tiantai Buddhist Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 112–98, 240–60.

12. T9.22a.

13. T9.16b.

14. T46.900a. This is not simply an endorsement of unrestrained antinomianism: the key is that "practice"—the application of the specific Tiantai contemplation of the "Three Truths" revealing the local coherence, global incoherence, and intersubsumption of any determinate entity—must be applied to this determinate entity to make it reveal its liberating force. But any determinate entity that engages one sufficiently will serve as the *object* of this practice. For a full discussion, see Ziporyn, *Evil and/or/as the Good*.