BUDDHISM, MARXISM, AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF EGON BONDY*

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Abstract: This article discusses the thought of the Czech Marxist philosopher, writer, and poet Egon Bondy (1930–2007) and his dialectical interpretation of Buddhist philosophy, which strongly influenced Bondy's "nonsubstantial ontology" with its teaching about the Emptiness (śūnyatā) of all entities, the central concept in the philosophy of the Buddhist monk Nāgārjuna (ca 150–250 AD). The second, shorter part of the article outlines recent developments in the field of philosophy inspired by Marxism and Buddhism.
Keywords: Egon Bondy, Buddhist Philosophy, Nonsubstantial Ontology, the Buddha, Buddhism, Nāgārjuna, Emptiness, Karman, Marxism, Critical Theory

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Today, when we are only beginning to incorporate the history of non-European thought into our historical perspective, we are gradually coming to recognize that works of Buddhist philosophy belong among the most valuable and thoughtful heritages of Eastern cultures and that they provide a permanent and additionally stimulating contribution to human cognition.
Egon Bondy, *Buddha*[1]

This article concerns the thought of the Czech Marxist philosopher Zbyněk Fišer (January 20, 1930 – April 9, 2007), who is most widely known by his pen name Egon Bondy. He was one of the main leaders of Czechoslovakia's "underground"[2] movement and a very prolific poet and writer. Bondy wrote more than sixty books, some of which have been translated into foreign languages.[3] Most of his works were published in samizdat because, during the period of so-called normalization that followed the occupation of Czechoslovakia by the armies of the Warsaw Pact in August 1968,[4] the ruling communist regime labeled him a Trotskyist[5] and enemy of socialism.[6] Bondy could not officially publish until the Velvet Revolution in 1989.

[1] Egon Bondy, *Buddha* [The Buddha], 3rd rev. and completed ed. (Prague: DharmaGaia, 2006), p. 200. Translations from Czech by the author.

[2] The Czech "underground" was defined by its leader Ivan Martin Jirous (1944–2011) as follows: "It is expressed largely through rock music. The underground is a mental attitude of intellectuals and artists who consciously and critically determine their own stance towards the world in which they live. It is the declaration of a struggle against the establishment, the regime. It is a movement that works chiefly through the various art forms but whose representatives are aware that art is not and ought not to be the final aim of an artist's efforts [...] The aim of the underground here in Bohemia is the creation of a second culture: a culture that will not be dependent on official channels of communication, social recognition, and the hierarchy of values laid down by the establishment [...]." See Martin Machovec, "Ideological Orientation and Political Views and Standpoints of Representatives of Czech Underground Culture, 1969–1989 (Underground and Dissidence – Allies or Enemies?)." Online at http://www.esamizdat.it/rivista/2010-2011/pdf/machovec_eS_2010-2011_(VIII).pdf (accessed April 24, 2019).

[3] For a Bondy bibliography, see Martin Machovec, "Bibliografie Egona Bondyho" ["Bibliography of Egon Bondy"], Prague, 2014. Online at http://www.libpro.cz/docs/bibliografie-egona-bondyho_2014_1408367166.pdf (accessed March 1, 2017).

[4] "Normalization" was the restoration of continuity with the pre-reform period before the "Prague Spring." It "entailed thoroughgoing political repression and the return to ideological conformity. A new purge cleansed the Czechoslovak leadership of all reformist elements [...]. Reformists were removed from regional, district, and local party branches in the Czech lands and, to a lesser extent, in Slovakia. KSC party membership, which had been close to 1.7 million in January 1968, was reduced by about 500,000. Top levels of government and the leadership of social organizations were purged. Publishing houses and film studios were placed under new direction. Censorship was strictly imposed, and a campaign of militant atheism was organized." Ihor Gawdiak (ed.), *Czechoslovakia: A Country Study* (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1987). Online at http://countrystudies.us/czech-republic/42.htm (accessed March 19, 2018).

[5] It is true that after "Victorious February" in 1948, when communists took power in Czechoslov-

Bondy had very broad and cross-cultural philosophical interests. One of his principal preoccupations was with Buddhism, which he studied for nearly sixty years and to which he offered very valuable contributions and insights.

This text is divided into two parts. The first, titled "Egon Bondy and his interpretation of Buddhism," has four sections. In the first of these, I will explain the reasons for Bondy's very serious and intensive interest in Buddhism. I will also expound on why and how a Buddhist monk and philosopher, Nāgārjuna, who lived ca. 150–250 AD in India, so attracted and influenced Bondy and his non-substantial model of reality. The second section is about Bondy's monograph entitled *The Buddha* (*Buddha*), which he published in 1968 under his birth name Zbyněk Fišer. Even if it contains some mistakes, this book remains an excellent source of information on the life and teachings of Gautama Buddha (ca. 480–400 BC) and the social context of the period. The third section is dedicated to Bondy's "samizdat phase," which lasted some 21 years. During this time, Bondy, quite apart from producing a huge quantity of prose works, poems, and other writings, wrote his monumental six-volume *Notes on the History of Philosophy* (*Poznámky k dějinám filosofie*). The first two volumes were dedicated to the non-European traditions of Indian philosophy[7] and Chinese philosophy,[8] which have both – as Bondy pointed out – been unfairly neglected by historians of philosophy. Bondy devoted the vast majority of these two volumes to Buddhist philosophy, and he did so with great erudition. The fourth section of the first part this paper concerns philosophical texts of Bondy's that were written after 1989 and published after his death (2007) in the books *Příběh o příběhu* (A story about the story, 2009) and *Postpříběh, příležitostné eseje a rekapitulace* (Post-story, occasional essays and a recapitulation, 2013). The second part of this paper is about recent developments in the field of philosophy inspired by Marxism and Buddhism.

akia, Bondy declared himself a Trotskyist. But according to his later view (written in 1980), in the fifties and sixties Trotskyism was already totally unacceptable and, philosophically, "completely dogmatic." Egon Bondy, "Knížka o tom, jak se mi filosofovalo" [A book about how I philosophized], in Egon Bondy, *Postpříběh, příležitostné eseje a rekapitulace* [Post-story, occasional essays and a recapitulation] (Prague: DharmaGaia, 2013), pp. 187–227.

[6] Bondy noted that the Philosophy Institute of the Czechoslovak Academy of Science, in its internal publication, even "revealed" him as "an originator of the so-called creeping counter-revolution of 1968!" Egon Bondy, *Útěcha z ontologie: Substanční a nesubstanční model v ontologii* [The consolation of ontology: on the substantial and nonsubstantial models], 3rd rev. ed., (Prague: DharmaGaia, 2077), p. 7.

[7] See Egon Bondy, *Indická filosofie* [Indian philosophy], 2nd ed. (Prague: Vokno, 1997).

[8] See Egon Bondy, *Čínská filosofie* [Chinese philosophy] (Prague: Vokno, 1992).

I. Egon Bondy and his interpretation of Buddhism

1.1. Bondy and the Buddhist philosopher Nāgārjuna

In 1980 Bondy wrote that between 1951 and 1957 his philosophy was untamed, and included "disconcerting reading and false speculations."[9] His favorite subjects in these years were Buddhism and Taoism. This was due to the influence of his friend Konstantin Sochor, who was, like Bondy, a lonely, insecure, and irregular individual (as Bondy writes), and who, in a confusing way, combined Buddhism with Yoga. Together, they read and discussed everything that was in some way "related to the Wisdom of the East."[10] It was, however, Buddhism – especially Theravāda Buddhism and *Words of the Buddha* – that directly, even hypnotically, impressed Bondy. As he recounted it, he understood at first sight what was going on in it and felt that it would help him to rediscover his lost ontological certainty. The Buddha's atheism without materialism impressed him very much. At this time, Bondy rejected all other Indian teachings as illusory and from Mahāyāna Buddhism (including Yogācāra Buddhism) accepted only the concept of Emptiness (*śūnyatā*), but wrongly construed it as Kant's "Thing in Itself." It is also noteworthy that Bondy, who was raised as an atheist, was almost completely ignorant of Christianity and only read the Gospels after he turned forty.[11]

Although Bondy was fascinated by the Buddhist refutation of the existence of a soul (*ātman*), he had some extraordinarily strong ecstatic mystical experiences that he was not able to explain in a philosophical way. The most important experience was when he felt himself to be eternal and free from anything, which was a typical experience of Upaniṣadic *ātman*, a right Self who is eternal, permanent, indestructible, and ultimately unaffected. It was a very strange experience for Bondy because he considered himself at that time to be a "Buddhist" and rejected the idea of the soul completely and in every context. However, he wrote that "deep contradictions must be in any serious, and therefore relevant, philosophy" and claimed that a real philosopher had only one task – to accept the contradictions and point them out.[12]

Another, extraordinarily important experience for Bondy's philosophical thinking concerns the Buddhist philosopher and monk Nāgārjuna. It happened to him towards the end of 1957, when he was already studying philosophy at the Philosophical Faculty of Charles University in Prague. While reading Nāgārjuna's main text *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* or *Root Verses of the Middle* again and again, trying to understand the meaning of his paradoxical thesis that Nirvāṇa is *saṃsāra* (this world) and vice versa, he suddenly arrived at the idea of an "ontology without any ontological substance!"[13]

[9] Egon Bondy, "Knížka o tom, jak se mi filosofovalo," p. 191.

[10] *Ibid*.

[11] *Ibid*., pp. 192–193.

[12] *Ibid*., pp. 193–195.

[13] *Ibid*., p. 196.

Even if this ecstatic mystical experience, which, according to Bondy, had a surprisingly visual character, was very short-lived (maybe just a moment), it was sufficient for a true understanding. However, there was still the problem of how this "satori" (insight) could be conceptualized and verbally expressed. Nevertheless, Bondy started to work on it the very next day. His main task was to analyze the mutual relationships between the implications of this non-verbalized experience.[14]

Bondy reflected: "Nirvāṇa is only possible without God, only when there is no God. So for the world also there can exist no God. Equally, however, if in this world (*saṃsāra*) matter were imperishable substance, there could not exist any equation with Nirvāṇa, in which, clearly, no eternal matter can have a place. If Nirvāṇa is not a state of detachment from the world, not something transcendent to the world, but is itself the same as this world, as Nāgārjuna says, then – because there is no eternal, invariable substance in Nirvāṇa – neither does this world have such substance."[15]

Bondy gained a completely new philosophical insight, namely that a nonsubstantial ontological model "eliminates both theistic systems and mechanical materialism."[16] Thanks to Nāgārjuna, Bondy "again found the lost certainty of dialectical materialism, because materialism without any ontological substance can be really dialectical and because with the assumption of eternal, uninhabited, invariant and essentially non-variable matter, materialism is always only mechanistic."[17] Bondy wrote that when he discovered that ontological reality did not rest in or on any substance, his respect for Buddhism grew still further. He was also glad that he was able to return to Marxism and dialectical materialism.[18]

Bondy's reading of Nāgārjuna also influenced his non-substantial model. In his important philosophical work *Útěcha z ontologie* (The consolation of ontology),[19] written under his birth name Zbyněk Fišer, Bondy critically examines the "substantial model of reality," or the worldview that posits a real substance, a "thing," idea, being, or principle that creates, underlies, transcends, or gives meaning to the universe. Bondy here refuted both theistic and mechanical-materialistic versions of the substantial position and argued for a non-substantial model. Bondy was convinced that this model is the

[14] Egon Bondy, "Druhá knížka o tom, jak se mi filosofovalo" [The second book about how I philosophized], in Bondy, *Postpříběh, příležitostné eseje a rekapitulace*, pp. 245–247.

[15] *Ibid*., pp. 196–197.

[16] *Ibid*., p. 197.

[17] *Ibid*.

[18] *Ibid*. According to Bondy's dialectical materialism "material = objectively real (i.e., that which exists objectively, exists independently o[f] our consciousness)." Egon Bondy, *Juliiny otázky a další eseje* (Prague: DharmaGaia, 2007), 2nd corrected ed., p. 370.

[19] Zbyněk Fišer, *Útěcha z ontologie. Substanční a nesubstanční model v ontologii* (Prague: Academia, Prague 1967). English trans. *The Consolation of Ontology. On the Substantial and Nonsubstantial Models*, trans. B. Page (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2001).

only consistent monistic ontology because it lacks the negative consequences of the substantial models and provides a path for human freedom and creativity, as well as social and ethical responsibility.

1.2. Bondy's *Buddha*

During the short period of liberalization and democratization known as "the Prague Spring," Bondy published his monograph *Buddha* (The Buddha), in which he described some similarities between the teachings of the Buddha and dialectical materialism. This included processual ontology, a refutation of substance, eternal entities, the existence of the soul, and so on. For the next twenty-two years, this book was one of only two primary, reliable sources available for the academic study of Buddhism in Czechoslovakia. Even though sops to the regime's Marxist-Leninist ideology occur throughout the book, including references to Lenin and quotations from Soviet philosophical encyclopedias, this book has remained an excellent source of information on the life and teachings of the Buddha, all situated within their social context.

Bondy tried to show that Buddhism had not in any way been an "opium of the people" or an "ideological instrument of the governing classes," as Buddhism had been labeled in the Soviet Union.[20] Because of its ability to go beyond regional boundaries and address currently important issues to people in Europe, Asia, and America, Bondy considered Buddhism to still be very much alive and able to challenge contemporary thinking. He thought that the Buddha's teachings could give meaning to people's individual lives even though life is bound to end, and that they could give people a reason to lead an ethical life.

On the other hand, Bondy did not believe that Buddhism could be transplanted into Europe, either in the present time or in the future. This was because traditional Buddhism (like Christianity, for that matter) was destined to gradually disappear,[21] although it was still possible that Marxist philosophy could integrate some of its positive elements.

In 1985, *The Buddha* was translated from Czech into Danish,[22] and after 1989 Bondy published two modified and supplemented editions that sold out very quickly. *The Buddha* is an original philosophical interpretation of Buddha's teachings and philosophy that was written from the perspective of an open-minded Marxist philosopher. Bondy writes that his philosophical approach enabled him to find in the Buddha's teachings some

[20] Zbyněk Fišer, *Buddha,* 1st ed. (Prague: Orbis, 1968), p. 8.

[21] Egon Bondy, *Buddha,* 3rd ed., revised and enlarged (Prague: DharmaGaia, 2006), p. 204. In a similar vein, Bondy writes about Buddhism in 1980 but prefers the perspective of Taoist philosophy: "However, Buddhism has already closed down and in reality has grown stale. It is an antiquity, but the philosophy of Tao is potentially still alive and is by no means an antiquarian affair." Bondy, "Knížka o tom, jak se mi filosofovalo," p. 198.

[22] Egon Bondy, *Buddha*, trans. by K. Gammelgaard (OKbh.: Politisk revy, 1985).

positions that still challenge contemporary Westerners and Western philosophy. In his work, Bondy tries to identify the core of Buddhism as an all-encompassing philosophy that, even in today's world, remains very much alive.

The main part of *The Buddha* is dedicated to Bondy's interpretation of the Four Noble Truths (*āryasatya*), the essence of Buddha's teaching.[23] Bondy, with considerable foresight, notes: "Sooner or later, European philosophers will come into contact with the intellectual tradition of Buddhism. Among other things, I wanted to show in my work that this contact could be fruitful and that the lessons that *every man of our time* can find in the Buddha's deep intellectual pursuit indicate one thing, which is often the most important precondition for everything else. This is *to see the unsolved problem of the world and man clearly*, without any prejudices, ballast of traditions, or chains of doctrines. At first Buddha's teaching may seem to have a bitter taste, but then we realize that it relieves us from fear, anxiety, and dependency on the illusions that we so often use to defend ourselves against an undistorted view of reality."[24] I think that Bondy was successful in achieving his goal, and that *The Buddha* provides the reader with a credible and original insight into the foundations of the Buddha's philosophy.

The starting point of the Buddha's teaching is that all sentient beings are subjected to suffering (*duḥkha*). This suffering, according to Buddhists, is an indisputable basic fact of all existence, and sooner or later every being in the miserable cycle of rebirth (*saṃsāra*) will encounter it and will have to face it. As Bondy writes, "The Buddha states that suffering is the true taste of life. There are only those who have tasted it and those who haven't yet tasted it."[25] Because Buddhism deals with an analysis of suffering, some conclude that Buddhism is a bleak, pessimistic, life-denying philosophy. However, Buddhists would not agree. Buddhists say that their teaching is, in fact, *realistic* because the Buddha as an awakened being and as the "Physician" of humankind is objectively and accurately telling us how things, the world, and we, are. Moreover, he shows us the

[23] The Four Noble Truths are: (1) "This is the noble truth of suffering (*duḥkha*): birth is suffering, ageing is suffering, sickness is suffering, dying is suffering, sorrow, grief, pain, unhappiness, and unease are suffering; being united with what is not liked is suffering, separation from what is liked is suffering; not to get what one wants is suffering; in short, the five aggregates (*skandha*) of grasping (*upādāna*) are suffering. (2) This is the noble truth of the origin of suffering: the thirst for repeated existence which, associated with delight and greed, delights in this and that, namely the thirst for the objects of sense desire, the thirst for existence, and the thirst for non-existence. (3) This is the noble truth of the cessation of suffering: the complete fading away and cessation of this very thirst – its abandoning, relinquishing, releasing, letting go. (4) This is the noble truth of the way (*mārga*) leading to the cessation of suffering: the noble eightfold path, namely right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration." Rupert Gethin, *The Foundation of Buddhism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 59–60.

[24] Bondy, *Buddha*, p. 205.

[25] *Ibid*., p. 74.

path to freedom through the elimination of suffering. In this sense, Buddhism could also be seen as *optimistic*.[26]

Bondy points out that in Buddhism there are:

> some moments that not only preserve a lasting meaning but perhaps more clearly and more urgently than ever before speak to the spiritual situation of mankind today. In Buddhism questions have been asked which European thought has been coming to acknowledge in the course of its own development and which are gradually becoming, and will, perhaps, become, still more burning questions.[27]

Here Bondy seems to anticipate Mark Siderits' "fusion philosophy." Siderits, the American analytical philosopher and world-renowned scholar of Buddhist philosophy, adapted this term from music.[28] The philosophy of fusion, or confluence, is the new name for a philosophical enterprise that, according to Siderits, should replace so-called comparative philosophy that deals with the comparison of two different philosophical traditions, usually the traditions of the West and Southeast/East Asia. Comparative philosophy emphasizes similarities or differences that might attract those who deal with these respective traditions. The philosophy of fusion, to the contrary, seeks to solve philosophical problems and questions as such, trying to use solutions or ideas from both traditions, combined or even merged into one. Alternatively, it uses the means of one tradition to solve problems and questions from the other.[29]

Siderits thinks that by examining both the Indian and Western philosophical traditions and their disciplines, such as metaphysics, logic, philosophy of language, epistemology, and ethics, we can enrich both philosophical traditions. Seemingly very different philosophical traditions – in his case, Buddhist philosophy and contemporary analytic philosophy – can help us to solve one another's old or current problems and questions through a mutual creative interaction. Siderits' main interest is a creative and mutually enriching *dialogue* between these traditions. Although I think that Bondy would have agreed with Siderits, he was not a philosopher of fusion, as he emphasizes that philosophy approaches some kind of synthesis because it is "unified, and difference lies only in different accentuations of some questions."[30]

[26] P. Williams and A. Tribe, *Buddhist Thought: A Complete Introduction to the Indian Tradition* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 42.

[27] Bondy, *Buddha*, p. 9.

[28] In the case of fusion music, "the musicians involved in such an undertaking (typically including representatives from each of two distinct musical traditions) were making a serious and sustained effort to use elements from one tradition in order to try to solve problems arising in another." Mark Siderits, *Personal Identity and Buddhist Philosophy* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2003), p. xi.

[29] *Ibid*.

[30] Bondy, *Indická filosofie*, p. 9.

Buddhist thought has enjoyed increasing popularity and interest not only among Western philosophers. Western experts and researchers are also very interested in its psychological, ethical or metaethical, ecological, and cognitive aspects. We must also not forget the many individuals around the world who, thanks to the attraction of Buddhism, are taking up the religion and cultivating their practices very seriously. Bondy (see his above-mentioned statements) should be valued because he pointed out the general significance of Buddhism and its "therapeutic" potential to solve pressing contemporary questions and problems.

Bondy writes that the Buddha's Four Noble Truths and simple insights were a result of his "profound philosophical cognition," the meaningful conclusion that resulted from his previous efforts. According to Bondy, the Buddha was an inwardly honest man and thinker as well as a seeker of truth – a truth that seems bitter at first, but is free of all illusions. It seems to me that this is a very compelling and accurate characterization of the Buddha's doctrine. In *The Buddha*, Bondy also very effectively explains in Western philosophical terms why the Buddha cannot be considered an agnostic, a mere positivist, or a pragmatist.

Bondy points out the Buddha's constant pursuit of inner honesty. It did not let him stop "at some intermediate stage, no matter how tempting and consoling it might be, for he always sensed in such stages [...] only the opiate screen for human consciousness that so easily and joyfully accepts inconsistent or even deceptive solutions when they can serve as a source of instant consolation and relief."[31] The "remarkable determination *to achieve the brightest truth without tinsels and without creating illusions* was inherent in the spirit of true Buddhism from the character of its founder."[32] Bondy notes that there were many thinkers and schools that "set out as their goal to achieve ultimate knowledge of reality. But the effort to reveal the truth, even if it is painful, though it would be more convenient and pragmatic to stop somewhere on the unfinished road and leave the remnant to faith, illusion, or agnosticism, causes the convergence of the intentional focus of Buddhism over the centuries with the efforts of today's thinking Marxist."[33]

Bondy's views and insights, even if for those who may not accept them, can be still very valuable and inspiring for anyone who is willing to reflect on these complex matters, which can be very difficult to penetrate, even for scholars. Bondy's *Buddha* is a welcome source of such insights, especially in the form of its second and third revised and completed editions.[34]

[31] Bondy, *Buddha*, p. 71.

[32] *Ibid*.

[33] *Ibid*.

[34] In the 2nd edition, published in 1995, Bondy merely removed the chapter entitled "From the oldest sources of Buddhism," made some corrections and minor cuts, and in some places edited and supplemented the text. He also added the final chapter, entitled "The Problem of Eastern

1.3. Bondy and his *Notes on the History of Philosophy*

From 1977 until 1989 Bondy worked on his six-volume *Notes on the History of Philosophy*. He wrote that he had never even dreamt about doing such a mad project, one that would be beyond his powers.[35] Indeed, at first, he had only wanted to write a relatively brief book that "would fill a terrible gap present at that time because no decent history of philosophy had been published here for many decades (except the illegible and totally idiotic Soviet ones)."[36] He notes: "I was writing these small bundles during the time of a life-threatening situation for Czech culture. The fact that this work on the history of philosophy was written by me was strong proof of this fact. I am not an expert scholar on the subject, but these people had been silent for thirty years due to the fact that censorship did not allow them to publish anything, so the histories of philosophy were printed for us in Moscow and imported here by train."[37]

The whole project was extraordinarily difficult due to the scale and complexity of the topic. It took more than thirteen years and was never completed. "It was just on November 17, 1989 that I spread out in my workroom the first ten books that I had planned to study for Kant, but this part never came about."[38] Bondy writes:

> The detailed study of the entirety of world philosophy was sometimes quite laborious (for instance in the case of Neo-Confucianism), but for me it was fascinating, and of course the questions and answers I found helped me greatly in deepening my own thoughts and solutions. [...] It strongly affected my work *A Story about the Story* and others [...] *The unity of philosophical thought*, existing since its beginnings and all over the world, has been increasingly revealed to me.[39] It was

Philosophy as such – the Buddha" (pp. 207–221), which is more in the nature of a reflection on the wider issue and can be taken as an introduction to the book.

[35] Bondy, "Druhá knížka o tom, jak se mi filosofovalo," p. 265.

[36] *Ibid*.

[37] Egon Bondy, *Středověká islámská a židovská filosofie. Filosofie renesance a reformace* [Islamic and Jewish philosophy in the Middle Ages: philosophy of the Renaissance and the Reformation] (Prague: Vokno, 1995), p. 9.

[38] I still remember how Bondy told me about his intention to describe Kant's philosophy in such a comprehensible manner that every cook could understand it. (Recall that November 17, 1989 was the day when protests broke out that would soon lead to the end of Communist Party rule in Czechoslovakia.)

[39] Bondy strongly emphasizes this surprising unity of seeking after a deeper understanding of the world, which takes place all around the world and seems to aim in the same direction. He writes that "especially ultra-abstract and ultra-rational Buddhist philosophers have arrived at the very threshold of the problem in advance of others. But they also missed our science!" However, Bondy does not mention any names, so unfortunately we can only guess who they might be. Bondy, "Druhá knížka o tom, jak se mi filosofovalo," p. 271.

> wonderful, and I only regretted that I didn't have a hundred years of completely undisturbed time for the study of it.[40]

As I wrote above, the first two volumes of *Notes on the History of Philosophy* deal with Indian philosophy and Chinese philosophy. Despite some shortcomings, Bondy's *Indian Philosophy* was extraordinary – especially given the information vacuum in Czechoslovakia during the time he was writing. He wrote that philosophers in India solved some problems sooner than Western philosophers did.[41] He also notes that the "panhuman nature of philosophical questions is such that even outside of Europe we can only recognize ourselves – human beings."[42] If we overlook some of Bondy's mistakes, he was – from the particular point of view of a Marxist philosopher – able to write a very readable and understandable survey of Indian philosophical thinking.

With great erudition, Bondy depicted in *Indian Philosophy* the philosophical teachings of the most important Buddhist philosophers – including Nāgārjuna (2nd to 3th century), Vasubandhu (4th to 5th century), Dharmakīrti (c. 600–660), and others – for the first time in the Czech language. He was able to describe with considerable insight the basic features of the Buddhist philosophical schools, such as the Sarvāstivāda, Madhyamaka, and Yogācāra. Bondy covered an extensive range of topics, writing about the Hindu scriptural traditions, such as the Vedas, Brāhmaṇas, and Upaniṣads, as well as the ancient Indian philosophy of materialism, and the traditions of Buddhism and Jainism. He also wrote about other (broadly Hindu) philosophical systems and philosophers, including Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika, Sāṃkhya, Vedānta, Yoga, and Śaivism, and about the great Vedāntic theologian-philosophers Rāmānuja (c. 1075–1140), Madhva (c. 1250–1300), and Śaṅkara (c. 650–700).

Admittedly, the sections of Bondy's *Indian Philosophy* that treat Indian theistic systems, and especially Yoga, are substantively far weaker due to his exaggerated criticism on the basis of his materialistic premises. However, the merit of *Indian Philosophy* is the same as that of *The Buddha*. *Indian Philosophy* is not simply a history of Indian philosophical thinking but a very interesting philosophical interpretation from a position of dialectical materialism.[43] This task is not easy because in Indian philosophy there are many conceptual, experiential, and argumentative methods that do not fit into West-

[40] *Ibid*., p. 266. These words were written by Bondy in August 2004, approximately 2 years and 8 months before his death.

[41] Bondy, *Indická filosofie*, p. 229.

[42] *Ibid*., p. 11.

[43] On the problems connected with writing books on the history of Indian philosophy, see the thought-provoking discussion online at https://indianphilosophyblog.org/2016/12/06/book-review-of-an-introduction-to-indian-philosophy-by-roy-w-perrett-reviewed-by-matthew-r-dasti/ (accessed July 2, 2018).

ern categories, concepts, and approaches.[44] The other problem is the very well-known *hermeneutic circle*: as M. Kapstein writes, "our prior philosophical commitments will inevitably color our understandings of the Indian sources we consider."[45]

In *Indian Philosophy*, Bondy makes some insightful connections and contrasts with Western philosophy (for example with Plato, Aristotle, Berkeley, and others). This comparative analysis can be useful for clarifying some perennial philosophical problems that are shared by both the Western and Indian traditions. That being said, one of the serious problems with Bondy's *Indian Philosophy* is the book's lack of bibliographical references and notes. Unfortunately, this is the standard across nearly all of his works.

There are also questions to be raised about the sources and languages Bondy used. It is certain that he did not work with the original texts written in Sanskrit, Pāli, Chinese, and other languages used in the Buddhist world. On the other hand, while writing *Indian Philosophy*, Bondy had access to relatively extensive sources,[46] especially on the Buddhist logico-epistemology tradition of Dignāga (c. 480 – c. 540 CE) and Dharmakīrti. He could study "thousands and thousands of pages of it plus various Indian commentaries,"[47] and only in some cases did he have to use secondary literature.[48]

In *Indian Philosophy*, Bondy provided excellent explanations of the philosophy and metaphysics of the Buddhist system of Abhidharma.[49] This is very important for a correct and comprehensive understanding of Buddhist philosophy because "Abhidharma sets the agenda, the presuppositions and the framework for Buddhist philosophical thought."[50] Bondy also writes about the literature of Perfection of Insight (*prajñāpāramitā*) with

[44] See Christian Coseru, "Indian Philosophy in the Global Cosmopolis," online at http://indianphilosophyblog.org/2017/12/12/indian-philosophy-in-the-global-cosmopolis/ (accessed July 8, 2018).

[45] Matthew Kapstein, "Interpreting Indian Philosophy: Three Parables," in Jonardon Ganeri (ed.), *Oxford Handbook on Indian Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 16–17.

[46] Bondy wrote that thanks to his friends in our country and abroad he did not suffer from a lack of access to literature. And when he didn't know the languages he always found some good friends who were willing to help him. Bondy, "Druhá knížka o tom, jak se mi filosofovalo," p. 265.

[47] Quoted in Bondy, *Indická filosofie*, p. 151.

[48] As far as I am able to tell, Bondy was also working with two important encyclopedias of Indian philosophy edited by K. H. Potter: *Advaita Vedanta to Samkara and his Pupils* (1981) and *Indian Metaphysics and Epistemology* (1977); the key Buddhist text the *Abhidharmakośa* (the *Treasury of Abhidharma*) of philosopher Vasubandhu (c. 400–480); E. Frauwallner, *Die Philosophie des Buddhismus* (1956); W. Ruben, *Beginn der Philosophie in Indien. Aus den Veden. Die Philosophie des Buddhismus* (1955–1956). We should not forget the work of the outstanding Russian scholar Fyodor Stcherbatsky (1866–1942), who helped to establish the academic study of Indian and Buddhist philosophy in the Western world, and whose English works were also available to Bondy.

[49] Abhidharma (Pāli *Abhidhamma*), "higher" or "further" doctrine (*dharma*), is: (1) the set of texts that make up *Abhidharmapiṭaka*, the third basket of the Buddhist Canon, and (2) the very sophisticated system of texts and commentaries (1st BC – 2nd century AD) which is a systematic arrangement, clarification, and classification of the Buddha's doctrine (*dharma*).

[50] Williams and Tribe, *Buddhist Thought*, p. 140.

some excerpts from the texts that show their paradoxical character. This is beneficial because Prajñāpāramitās have been mostly neglected in histories of Buddhist philosophy. Bondy, however, aptly notes that these texts operate mostly on a pre-philosophical level and that it was not until Nāgārjuna, who is properly considered to be one of the foremost philosophical thinkers in history, that their ideas were given real philosophical value.[51]

It is to Bondy's credit that he pointed out Nāgārjuna's philosophical greatness. Nevertheless, the first person who pursued Nāgārjuna in Czechoslovakia was František Drtikol (1883–1961), a mystic and photographer of international renown. Already by 1942 Drtikol (who was, according to Bondy, "the First Czech Buddhist Patriarch") had translated Walleser's translations of Nāgārjuna's main work, *Root Verses of the Middle* (*MMK*), from German into Czech.[52] Drtikol also often used Nāgārjuna's famous concept about the identity of Nirvāṇa and *saṃsāra* and vice versa.[53] According to Bondy, this concept looks like a statement representative of the highest mysticism, but surprisingly we hear it coming from a philosopher.[54] Nāgārjuna "puts into a new light – if not on its head – everything we were used to. But his philosophy turns on its head everything we were used to until that time in India."[55]

Bondy writes that the main ontological category of Nāgārjuna's teaching of a "middle way" (*madhyamaka*) is emptiness (*śūnyatā*). It is the emptiness of substance ("ontological" emptiness) and the emptiness of "values" ("axiological" emptiness). According to Bondy, Nāgārjuna rejects any substantive concept of reality and "carries out a detailed analysis of everything that substantive thinking might capture to prove its ineligibility. However, a simple negation of real existence would lead to the introduction of a category of non-existence and that would be only a hypostasis and a substantial Nothing – non-being as an ontological substance (not to mention that non-existence is just a paired category of being)."[56] Therefore, Nāgārjuna emphasizes that emptiness is not ontologically either being or non-being!

[51] Bondy, *Indická filosofie,* p. 132.

[52] Max Walleser, *Die mittlere Lehre des Nāgārjuna. Nach der chinesischen Version übersetzt von Max Walleser* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1912).

[53] However, this famous citation from Nāgārjuna does not say that "Nirvāṇa equals *saṃsāra*," as it is often misinterpreted as saying by many, along with Drtikol and Bondy, but instead that "the farthest limit (*koṭi*) of the *saṃsāra* is also the farthest limit of Nirvāṇa and there is no[t] any difference between them" (*MMK* 25.20). This statement is sometimes compared to the famous sentence 5.6 of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* that "the boundaries of language are the boundaries of my world." For a closer comparison of Nāgārjuna with Wittgenstein and other Western philosophers see Andrew Tuck, *Comparative Philosophy and the Philosophy of Scholarship: On the Western Interpretation of Nāgārjuna* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

[54] Bondy, *Indická filosofie,* pp. 132–135.

[55] *Ibid*., p. 132.

[56] *Ibid*., pp. 132–134.

But Nāgārjuna does not deny objective lawfulness or *karman* between things. To the contrary, he vehemently emphasized the lawfulness of the universe (*karman*), but he postulates emptiness instead of a material substrate. Things have no axiological determination and ontologically are empty (*śūnya*) of any substance. However, emptiness is not Nihil. Conversely, only emptiness allows the "real existence and the real processes of everything."[57] Bondy aptly points out the great danger of misunderstanding emptiness as real existence. He writes that

> emptiness cannot be fixed, even the category of emptiness is empty, teaching about emptiness is empty (in both the above-mentioned aspects, ontological and axiological), and correctly understanding emptiness means understanding the objective existence and lawful existence of all things [...].[58]

Bondy concludes that Buddhist philosophy is the backbone of the history of Indian philosophy. However, the world of Buddhist philosophy is so different from European philosophy that the European philosopher has to exert great intellectual effort when contemplating it. Only then can he penetrate more deeply into it.[59] On the subject of the philosophy of Sarvāstivāda, which is very sophisticated and philosophically important,[60] Bondy admitted that he struggled to understand its deep and precise meaning. He notes that it would have been easy to pretend that he understood everything, but it is not worth doing so.[61] I strongly agree with his accurate remark that "the lively integration of Buddhist philosophical schools into the wealth of thought that educated humanity possesses would be extremely important, because these schools exhibit philosophical approaches that are unprecedented elsewhere and are not only original but often philosophically inspiring and of contemporary relevance."[62] Besides Nāgārjuna's non-substantial model and the Sarvāstivāda school's ontology, we can mention, for instance, Yogācāra's idealism of Asaṅga (fourth century) and Vasubandhu, Dignāga's and Dharmakīrti's epistemology, Buddhist theories of the non-Self, and Buddhist Ethics.[63]

[57] *Ibid*., pp. 134–135.

[58] *Ibid*., pp. 135–136.

[59] *Ibid*., p. 86.

[60] On Sarvāstivāda, see, for instance, Noa Ronkin, *Early Buddhist Metaphysics* (London – New York: Routledge, 2005), and Paul Williams, "On the Abhidharma Ontology," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 9 (1981), pp. 227–257.

[61] Bondy, *Indická filosofie,* p. 125.

[62] *Ibid*., pp. 86–87.

[63] See Steven Emanuel (ed.), *A Companion to Buddhist Philosophy* (Oxford: Willey Blackwell, 2013). Jay Garfield and William Edelglass (eds.), *Buddhist Philosophy. Essential Readings* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

1.4. Buddhism in *A Story about the Story* and *Post-Story*[64]

Buddhist philosophy plays a very important role in these two later books by Bondy as well.

In *A Story about the Story*, Bondy mentions non-European philosophies only "to point out how the problems of non-substantive ontology have been elaborated elsewhere with greater attention than our Mediterranean spiritual traditions have allowed us to do."[65] His goal is not to solve problems of Buddhist dogma because "it remained at the scholastic level and we have no reason to surrender our own Gilgamesh-Prometheus-Faustian traditions and spirituality that leads us to examine the problem from other points of view."[66] However, I think that we can find in these two books at least inspiration from, or even the direct integration (if not syncretism) of some Buddhist concepts into Bondy's holistic, non-substantive philosophy. These include Nāgārjuna's philosophy and his identification of Nirvāṇa and *saṃsāra*; the Buddha and his doctrine of suffering (*duḥkha*); the key concepts of Mahāyāna Buddhism, emptiness (*śūnyatā*) and compassion (*karuṇā*); the doctrine of "mere consciousness" (*vijñaptimātra*) of the Mahāyāna school Yogācāra; or the Indian concept of a causal lawfulness (*karman*), which Bondy interprets here as a "transfer of information" (see below).

Bondy, quite creatively but also problematically, identifies emptiness with the Chinese principle of Tao, with objective reality, Reality, or the Universe, the Ultimate, Order, and so on, even if he recognizes the great pitfalls associated with this move. According to Bondy, emptiness is "a situation without any ontological preconditions. It contains all possibilities, it always opens the possibility of all possibilities, it is not directed, it is a situation in which nothing is conducted, but which creates its own time as a process [...]."[67] Therefore, emptiness can also be understood as a process, because nothing from it "emanates, nothing is created, it simply changes all the time."[68] This process, which Bondy compares to "a continuous stream of music or a continuous story," is then "the same thing as transformation and Emptiness."[69]

This characterization of emptiness is thought-provoking, but it is not clear at all how emptiness could change or be a process when, in order for something to change, it must have some positive ontological content, which emptiness clearly does not have. Bondy claims that emptiness, under the term *wu* (無), is already understood as a process in Taoism and therefore he characterizes it as a process without any ontological determinations

[64] *A Story about the Story* was written in the years 1998–2001, but the author's last corrections were made in 2006. *Post-Story* was written in the years 2004–2005.

[65] Bondy, *Příběh o příběhu*, p. 149.

[66] *Ibid*., p. 304.

[67] *Ibid*., p. 39.

[68] *Ibid*.

[69] *Ibid*., p. 40.

or assumptions.[70] But Bondy's characterization is quite problematic because *wu* (無) does not mean a process or change in classical Chinese.

In *A Story about the Story*, Bondy deals with Buddhism in three of six "appendices."[71] In the second appendix, called "Axiological Note. The Buddha," he writes that although ethical issues and questions were and still are deeply relevant to people and much literature has been written about them, nothing has been solved. Bondy states that the Buddha thought seriously about love, which played a very important role as a Western ethical category in Greek philosophy in the form of *eros* and in Christianity as *agape*. Nevertheless, because the Buddha found no solid evidence for an articulation of this category, he cautiously and continuously avoided it and later formulated the very important doctrine of all-embracing compassion (*karuṇā*) that became the highest ethical category in Mahāyāna Buddhism.[72]

According to Bondy, the cause and deep grounding of the Buddha's doctrine of compassion (*karuṇā*) was this: "Because we are *all in the same situation*, whether today or in thousand years, *there is really nothing else to do* than most often and most of all relieve our general suffering and help each other with actively committed compassion."[73] Bondy comes up with the attractive and, in my opinion, valid argument that from a philosophical point of view this is simply a matter of systematic conjecture and a completion of the Buddha's great teaching about the need for mindfulness (Pāli *sati*) because "intensified mindfulness can easily lead us to a very sensitive feeling that suffering (*duḥkha*) is truly ubiquitous."[74]

In the fifth appendix ("*Karman* in Buddhism. The Buddhas Category of Perfect Knowledge, or Where has the Author Gotten To?"), Bondy writes that the Buddhist concept of *karman* corresponds to the modern concept of information. Nirvāṇa, which according to Bondy's interpretation the Buddha has identified with Perfect Knowledge (*prajñāpāramitā*) of reality, gnoseologically means the extinction of "all karmic, that is informational, strings and their ends,"[75] which are ontologically associated with *saṃsāra*, the cycle of birth, death, and suffering. However, the Buddha did not comment on this any further, as if it were enough to say "one who knows, understands." Bondy says about this silence: "The Buddha was philosophically very trustworthy; we cannot see him anywhere employing the *petitio principi* [circular reasoning]. When he said something,

[70] *Ibid*., pp. 36–37.

[71] Bondy notes that because these long appendixes are "absolutely non-scientific" he should not have even published them so as to preserve at least a little scholarly respectability. Bondy, *Příběh o příběhu*, p. 343.

[72] *Ibid*., pp. 281–282.

[73] *Ibid*., p. 282.

[74] *Ibid*.

[75] *Ibid*., p. 305.

he knew what it was and he knew what he could not say."[76] The problem was that the Buddha had no conceptual apparatus with which to thematize these difficult matters. According to Bondy, it is quite possible that even now we do not have this apparatus. Nevertheless, we have to work on it.

Bondy writes that when one achieves Perfect Knowledge of reality or Nirvāṇa his individual subjectivity ceases to exist and absurd suffering (*duḥkha*) disappears. Then one can visually and holistically see and understand reality, Tao, the universe, and so on as an "absolutely simple structure."[77] Bondy describes this achievement of the Perfect Knowledge and the functioning of the information string through the "overwhelmingly abbreviated" and "archaic" Buddhist description. Nevertheless, according to him there is no problem translating this into current scientific terminology. This description is extraordinarily important because it is "the key to the problem of a non-substantive answer to questions of eschatology, so-called post-mortality, human destiny, content and the meaning of human life."[78]

Bondy uses examples from Buddhism and Taoism to show that according to his modern non-substantive ontology there is nothing eternal or permanent because everything is essentially transient. Therefore, there is no point in fixing on anything, even one's own Nirvāṇa! However, this does not mean that "an awakened individual cannot actively participate in a changing sequence of transient changes."[79] Here, Bondy follows Mahāyāna Buddhist teaching about the bodhisattva, that is buddha-to-be, who, out of compassion and altruism, sets out on the path to full Buddhahood to help release other beings from suffering (*duḥkha*) in *saṃsāra*.[80]

In the previous appendix, Bondy asked whether the universe and human existence make any sense, and in despair he notes that "reality is really stupid." This urgent problem troubles him in the sixth appendix as well ("'La pensée primitive.' The Category of Meaning. Buddhism. Chinese philosophy. Substantive and Non-Substantive Ontology"). The Buddha (like Bondy) attempted to give a satisfactory anthropological and ontological response to this question. But, according to Bondy, "the projection of the category of meaning into the universe" is extremely problematic. It is "a stone of materialism" and "a crucial point of Buddhism and a non-substantial ontology too."[81]

[76] *Ibid*., p. 306.

[77] *Ibid*., p. 309.

[78] *Ibid*., p. 311.

[79] *Ibid*.

[80] See, for instance, Williams and Tribe, *Buddhist Thought*, pp. 136–139.

[81] Bondy, *Příběh o příběhu*, p. 323. Let's look at how Buddhism is criticized in this matter by the philosopher and foremost Buddhologist Paul Williams: "Of course, if the Buddhist is right in his or her analysis of the nature of things, then they can be portrayed as optimistic in that they at least show a way out of the infinite series of miserable rebirths. But the very idea that this is

Bondy thinks that the Buddha does not mention this category because "to adhere to the idea that the universe has some sense is only softened camouflage on a vague idea that my immortal soul will attain salvation one day."[82] Therefore, the Buddha recommended direct experience and his *way of life* – that is, following the Eightfold Path (*mārga*) – instead of useless speculations and erroneous opinions (*dṛṣṭi*) that inevitably lead to attachment and suffering (*duḥkha*).[83]

Bondy argues that when it comes to the category of meaning we cannot go much further than the Buddha himself if we do not want to return to essentialistically conceived theism. Already in 1980 Bondy wrote:

> But we cannot refute the Buddha's teaching that it is better to cease to exist than to exist if we cannot find out whether the ontological structure is embedded in the *eschatological dimension*. If it is – then our everyday action is meaningful. If it is not – then we stand definitively with our backs to the wall.[84]

However, Bondy believes that we have to try to live without a category of sense, even though this can cause us mental shock.[85]

*

Let us now move on to Bondy's *Post-Story*, which also features many allusions to Buddhism. According to Bondy, being acquainted with the key issues of Buddhist philosophy is crucial because we do not know them as we know our own Greek-Christian-Islamic tradition, and therefore we cannot compare the Buddhist point of departure with our non-substantive ontological model, or find out where our model is more advanced. So, let us look at some of the topics more closely.

We begin with the issue of consciousness, about which we know, according to Bondy, nothing.[86] Therefore, it is a great pity that the fine arguments of Buddhist philosophers

how it is, is pessimistic. If the universe is such that *ultimately* the only thing to do is to escape an infinite series of rebirths (and ultimately to help others do the same), that is pessimistic. I would argue that all this is pessimistic notwithstanding that the Buddhist goals of enlightenment, or Buddhahood, might be depicted as optimistic (and even, perhaps, positively blissful) *for the persons who achieve them*." Paul Williams, *The Unexpected Way: On Converting from Buddhism to Catholicism* (Edinburgh and New York: T&T Clark, 2002), p. 20.

[82] Bondy, *Příběh o příběhu*, p. 323.

[83] *Ibid*., p. 324.

[84] Bondy, "Knížka o tom, jak se mi filosofovalo," p. 218.

[85] Bondy, *Příběh o příběhu*, p. 325.

[86] About the mystery of consciousness, the philosopher Daniel Dennett writes: "Human consciousness is just about the last surviving mystery [...]. There have been other great mysteries: the mystery of the origin of the universe, the mystery of life and reproduction, the mystery of the

about consciousness, which are philosophically difficult to question, are neglected. However, Bondy points out that the Buddhist solutions cannot simply be accepted because they must go hand-in-hand with the development of philosophy and exact contemporary science.[87] This, of course, is true, and it should be noted that there are already regular workshops and conferences on brain and consciousness research that have been held for 25 years under the auspices of His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama with the participation of Buddhists, Western philosophers, Buddhologists, cognitive scientists, neuroscientists, psychologists, and others, under the name *Mind and Life*. Their goal is to understand the human brain and the functioning of consciousness scientifically in order to ease suffering and promote well-being.[88]

Another impressive topic is the Buddhist doctrine of rebirth. Bondy, who interprets Buddhism strictly empirically and scientifically, argues: "The Buddhists had a permanent problem with the complicated hypothesis of pseudo-incarnation" which was "originally the Buddha's compassionate concession to the simple Indian peasants he was turning to."[89] Therefore, this incarnation hypothesis is nonsense and, for the educated Buddhist philosopher, is only an unavoidable metaphor. It may have once had some meaning, but later this meaning was lost.[90] However, Bondy's argumentation is misleading, even though I do not want to argue that rebirth really exists.

It is not true that Buddhist philosophers understood the concept of rebirth only as an "unavoidable metaphor," as Bondy claims. The concept of rebirth (*punarbhava*), which was accepted by most Indian philosophical and religious systems, undoubtedly belonged among the most important concepts of early Buddhism. However, in ancient India, there were also some thinkers who criticized the Buddhist concept of rebirth with strong arguments and attempted to refute it. That's why Buddhist philosophers sought arguments for its defense and support. Among them was Dharmakīrti, one of the greatest Buddhist philosophers, who apparently made the greatest effort to de-

design to be found in nature, the mysteries of time, space, and gravity [...]. We do not yet have the final answers to any of the questions of cosmology and particle physics, molecular genetics and evolutionary theory, but we do know how to think about them [...]. With consciousness, however, we are still in a terrible muddle." Daniel Dennett, *Consciousness Explained* (London: Penguin Books, 1993), p. 21.

[87] Bondy, "Druhá knížka o tom, jak se mi filosofovalo," p. 262. I cannot agree with Bondy that Buddhist arguments about consciousness are hard to question, but, on the other hand, Buddhists have studied these issues very intensively in a practical and theoretical way and quite often came up with notable results.

[88] Online at https://www.mindandlife.org/ (accessed March 19, 2018).

[89] Bondy, *Postpříběh*, p. 14. However, Bondy's argumentation is wrong here because the Buddha's followers were not simple peasants, especially the *kṣatriyas* and *brāhmaṇas*, i.e., noble people from higher classes.

[90] Bondy, *Postpříběh*, pp. 20, 64.

fend the concept of rebirth by means of rational arguments and to disprove the objections and criticisms of opponents.[91] Dharmakīrti's argumentation appears in his main work *Pramāṇavārttika* (*Compendium of True Knowledge*).[92] The concept of rebirth was also seriously examined and defended by the most notable Buddhist philosophers of Asaṅga and Vasubandhu.[93] Surely many other cases could be found, because the concept of rebirth was essential for the Buddhist soteriological project. Buddhist philosophers have consistently argued that what we call "person," "personality," and so on, is only a causally conditioned continuous flow of instant physical and mental events that has an infinite temporal dimension and continues even after the death of an individual due to the moral principle of causality (*karman*; Pāli *kamma*).[94]

Christopher Gowans writes that this rational justification of rebirth is based on the belief that the universe is not chaotic but ruled by a moral order (*karman*). And truthful knowledge of this moral order is the key to Buddhist awakening. "The Buddha believed every human being could achieve enlightenment because he thought human nature and the universe have certain objective features we can know."[95] While modern science usually asserts that the world is morally neutral or meaningless, the Buddha views it as morally organized. However, according to Gowans this does not mean that "the Buddha's teaching is incompatible with modern science, but it does mean the Buddha would regard the world of modern science as incomplete insofar as this world was taken to be morally neutral. For the Buddha, the moral order of the universe is contained first and foremost in the doctrines of *kamma* and rebirth."[96] These teachings were already known and generally accepted before the Buddha, even if they were rejected by the materialists and skeptics. This means that the Buddha did not have to accept the doctrine of *karman* and rebirth, but he chose to do so for ethical reasons.[97]

[91] The main opponents of Dharmakīrti were Indian materialists, who claimed that the destruction of the body means also the final extinction of consciousness, so that there can be no rebirth. Among the significant opponents of Buddhism were the philosophers of the Mīmāṃsā and Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika schools, who accepted the concept of rebirth or reincarnation but claimed it was highly incompatible with the Buddhist doctrine of the non-Self (*anātman*) because reincarnation is possible only on the assumption of a permanent and unchangeable soul or Self (*ātman*). See Eli Franco, *Dharmakīrti on Compassion and Rebirth* (Wien: Arbeitskreis für Tibetische und Buddhistische Studien Universität Vienna, 1997).

[92] It covers a large part of the second chapter entitled *Pramāṇasiddhi* (*Establishing of True Knowledge*).

[93] See Robert Kritzer, *Rebirth and Causation in the Yogācāra Abhidharma* (Wien: Arbeitskreis für Tibetische und Buddhistische Studies, 1999).

[94] Dan Arnold, "Dharmakīrti's Dualism: Critical Reflections on a Buddhist Proof of Rebirth," *Philosophy Compass* 3/5 (2008), p. 1080.

[95] Christopher Gowans, *Philosophy of the Buddha*, (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 29.

[96] *Ibid*.

[97] *Ibid*.

As R. Hayes writes: "And if there is no rebirth, then the very goal of attaining nirvāṇa, understood as the cessation of rebirth, becomes almost perfectly meaningless. Or rather, nirvāṇa comes automatically to every living being that dies, regardless of how that being has lived. If every living being attains nirvāṇa automatically, then no special effort is needed by anyone to attain the goal; in particular, the rigors of Buddhist practice are neither necessary nor fruitful."[98]

According to the Buddha, all sentient beings are morally responsible for their good or bad deeds. Due to them, they are reborn in different spheres of existence. This means that the ideas of *karman* and rebirth are inevitably linked. Of course, it is a significant question whether the universe really works based on moral order (*karman*), as the Buddha thought. Nevertheless, like the old Western philosophers and most Western religious traditions, the Buddha gives a completely positive answer, albeit formulated a little differently.[99]

Of course, how to approach the concepts of rebirth and *karman* is a very difficult question at present because, with the exception of the not-very-successful experiments of some parapsychologists, nobody has scientifically or adequately proven that rebirth occurs. For example, Ian Stevenson attempted to empirically demonstrate the existence of rebirth, but a number of very serious objections were raised against his claims.[100] The problem is that while Indian Buddhism is generally anti-physicalist, contemporary philosophers accept a very strongly metaphysical view of physicalism in which all reality is physical.[101]

According to M. Siderits, the doctrines of *karman* and rebirth have played a very important role in Buddhist cultures, but now they are no longer key to the main Buddhist project. Even if it is believed that physicalism is really true, we are not able to accept the fact of our own mortality. That can lead us to avoid putting off the solution to the problem of suffering until some promised future life and instead to redouble our efforts to solve it in agreement with the Buddhist philosopher Śāntideva: that is, to try and remove suffering no matter where and to whom it happens.[102] If the foundation of the

[98] Richard Hayes, "Dharmakīrti on *punarbhava*," in Egaku Maeda (ed.), *Studies in Original Buddhism and Mahāyāna Buddhism*, vol. I (Kyoto: Nagata Bunshodo, 1993), p. 128.

[99] See Gowans, *Philosophy of the Buddha*, pp. 104–116. For the social context of *karman* in India, see Richard Gombrich, *What the Buddha Thought* (London: Equinox, 2009), chap. 2.

[100] See Ian Stevenson, *Children Who Remember Previous Lives* (The University Press of Virginia, Charlottesville 1987). For the critics of rebirth, see Paul Edwards, *Reincarnation: A Critical Examination* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1996); John Hick, *Death and Eternal Life* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, KY 1994) (chap. 18 and 19).

[101] According to D. Stoljar, those who deny physicalism not only go against science but also against "scientifically informed common sense." See Daniel Stoljar, *Physicalism: New Problems of Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 2010), p. 13.

[102] See the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* 8.105: "If the suffering of one ends the suffering of many, then one who has compassion for others and himself must cause that suffering to arise." Kate Crosby

Buddhist way is cultivation, charity, and sympathy, a human being can follow it even without believing in the doctrines of *karman* and rebirth. Therefore, physicalism is not, at least according to Siderits, a threat to Indian Buddhism (with the exception of the idealistic school Yogācāra). On the contrary, it may bring new possibilities to our lives.[103]

II. Buddhism, Marxism, and Egon Bondy

In 1968, Bondy stated that Marxist philosophy was the first philosophy since that of the Buddha that could fully accept and prospectively solve human problems. Nevertheless, he complained that in Marxist literature there was not any synthetic work on Buddhism that had philosophical value.[104] It seems to me that, 50 years later, Bondy's claim is still valid. As far as I know there is still not any publication of the kind Bondy was calling for.

Nevertheless, we can at least find some promising works regarding the relation between Buddhism and Marxism, even if I doubt they would satisfy Bondy's expectations. In my opinion, one interesting and thought-provoking book is *Nothing: Three Inquiries in Buddhism* written by M. Boon, E. Cazdyn, and T. Morton.[105] These authors hope to open up epistemological and ontological gaps and voids between Buddhism and critical theory.[106] According to them, there are "two kinds of bridges between them: totally nonexistent bridges and burned bridges."[107] They also remind us of what Michel Foucault wrote in 1978 during his dialogue with a Zen monk in Japan, in which he stated that it was "the end of the era of European philosophy. Thus if a philosophy of the future exists, it must be born outside of Europe, or equally born in consequence of meetings and impacts between Europe and non-Europe."[108] This assertion of Foucault's seems to be very similar to Bondy's vision, from some ten years earlier, of one "unified" world philosophy!

The book *Nothing: Three Inquiries in Buddhism* is also meant as a contribution to the contemporary "religious turn" in critical thought (as discussed by Derrida, Barthes,

and Andrew Skilton (trans.), *Śāntideva. The Bodhicayāvatāra* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 97.

[103] Mark Siderits, "Buddhism and Techno-Physicalism: Is the Eightfold Path a Program?" *Philosophy East and West* 51.3 (2001), pp. 307–314.

[104] Bondy, *Buddha*, p. 10.

[105] Marcus Boon, Eric Cazdyn, and Timothy Morton, *Nothing: Three Inquiries in Buddhism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015).

[106] For critical theory, see, for instance, James Bohman, "Critical Theory," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2016 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.) (online at URL = https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2016/entries/critical-theory/ [accessed May 3, 2018]).

[107] Boon, Cazdyn, and Morton, *Nothing*, pp. 1–2.

[108] *Ibid*., p. 2. See Michel Foucault, *Religion and Culture*, ed. Jeremy Carette (Routledge, New York 1999), p. 113.

Foucault, Badiou, Lacan, Agamben, who called himself a Christian philosopher, Eagleton, Žižek, and others), which has emerged in philosophy, but also in aesthetics, psychoanalysis, science studies, and so on. This "religious turn," and a fascination for St. Paul and Christianity in general, is found in Badiou's "Pauline revival" and in Žižek's interpretation of St. Paul as the Lenin of Christianity and his own position as a "Christian materialist."[109]

I do not think that Bondy would share Badiou's or Žižek's sympathies for St. Paul, although he writes that if it were possible to revive Christianity again, he "would be the first to welcome it."[110] The main reason for this assertion is the idea that it would take a long time before the phenomenon that used to be Christianity could possibly be revived.[111] However, according to Bondy we face a great problem now, because we live not only in the ruins of Christianity, but also in the ruins of Marxism.[112]

Nonetheless, there is no difficulty finding some Buddhists who could contribute to these discussions. Therefore, "it is striking that Buddhist thought has not so far played a significant role in this religious turn."[113] Boon, Cazdyn, and Morton ask why it is that there are so few critical theorists who examine Buddhism as compared to those – Agamben, Badiou, Žižek, and so on – who very seriously engage with Christianity. Why is there this gap? Why is there no "Buddhist turn" in critical theory? Why don't Badiou and others turn to the Japanese monk and philosopher Dōgen (1200–1253), the famous Tibetan yogi Milarepa, Gautama Buddha, or, for instance, Nāgārjuna?[114] Moreover, there are surely some striking similarities between Buddhism and contemporary Western philosophy, and "to an innocent onlooker it might seem strange, then, that not one of the philosophers has turned to Buddhism rather than to Christianity."[115]

Moreover, there is a close relationship between theory and practice in critical theory as well as in Buddhism. This strong relationship is "the key component that Buddhism shares with the various subgenres of critical theory."[116] Both Buddhism and critical theory, as theories of society, emphasize their "*practical* intent," trying to promote

[109] Alain Badiou, *St. Paul: La foundation de l'universalisme* (Paris: PUF, 1997); Slavoj Žižek, "Preface," in Elizabeth & Edmond Wright (eds.), *The Žižek Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), p. ix.

[110] Bondy, *Postpříběh*, p. 196.

[111] *Ibid*.

[112] *Ibid*., p. 222.

[113] Boon, Cazdyn, and Morton, *Nothing*, p. 2.

[114] According to Boon we can find striking similarities between Badiou's philosophy and the philosophy of Mahāyāna Buddhism because his mathematical ontology and theory of truth about infinite multiplicities, which develop out of the void/zero/empty set, are "strikingly similar" to the teaching about emptiness (*śūnyatā*) of Nāgārjuna's Madhyamaka school. Marcus Boon, "To Live in a Glass House is a Revolutionary Virtue Par Excellence," in: *Nothing*, p. 80.

[115] *Ibid*., pp. 10–11.

[116] *Ibid*., p. 4.

liberation and happiness and eliminate suffering and pain through a transformation of the individual and society. The key problem for all Buddhists is suffering (*duḥkha*). This *duḥkha* (suffering, unsatisfactoriness, unease of all human beings) has to be eliminated and all Buddhist traditions strive to deeply understand the nature of *duḥkha* and the Eightfold Path leading to its cessation (see above).[117]

The German philosopher and social theorist Max Horkheimer (1895–1973), one of the founders of critical theory, writes that critical theory aims "to create a world which satisfies the needs and powers of men" and works for "man's emancipation from slavery."[118] In his essay "Materialism and Metaphysics" (written in 1933), Horkheimer talks about "man's striving for happiness," which "is to be recognized as a natural fact requiring no justification."[119] Therefore, happiness – and suffering as its counterpart – are very important notions for Horkheimer's materialist social theory.

Egon Bondy was not directly influenced by the first representatives of the Frankfurt School, such as Horkheimer, Adorno, Benjamin, and Marcuse,[120] but his approach to Marxism led to similarities between his thought and theirs.

J. C. Berendzen writes, "No social philosophy that denies the singular import of suffering, and the corresponding desire to overcome that suffering, can properly grasp human social reality."[121] According to Horkheimer, pain and suffering[122] result from the irrational social conditions and organization of capitalistic society. He sees an elimination of human suffering in positive revolutionary social changes and argues that a real social philosophy must strive for the practical reduction of suffering.[123] "But the optimism should not be overestimated, because happiness is construed in a solely negative manner. The oppressed are motivated not by some positive conception of happiness, but by the hope of freedom from suffering.[124] This individual desire for

[117] For the "Four Noble Truths" of the Buddha, see Rupert Gethin, *The Foundations of Buddhism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 59.

[118] Max Horkheimer, *Critical Theory. Selected Essays,* trans. Matthew J. O'Connell and others (New York: Seabury Press, 1972; repr. New York: Continuum, 2002), p. 246.

[119] *Ibid*., p. 44.

[120] Nevertheless, Bondy was in written contact with E. Fromm, who even supported the publication of Bondy's book *The Consolation of Ontology* in English.

[121] J. C. Berendzen, "Max Horkheimer," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2017 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.) (online at https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2017/entries/horkheimer/ [accessed May 3, 2018]).

[122] Horkheimer's thoughts on suffering, etc., were influenced by the "metaphysical pessimism" of Arthur Schopenhauer, in whose philosophy the Buddhist view of essential suffering (*duḥkha*) in the world played an important role.

[123] Berendzen, "Max Horkheimer."

[124] This conception seems to be very similar to a Buddhist one where "happiness" (*sukha*) is sometimes characterized as the non-existence of suffering (*a-duḥkha*).

happiness can further manifest itself as the moral sentiment of compassion (*Mitleid*), wherein we desire the happiness of others."[125]

Let us turn now to Buddhism, in whose theory and praxis suffering (*duḥkha*), happiness (*sukha*), and compassion (*karuṇā*) play key roles. We concentrate on so-called "socially engaged Buddhism," which is a very important and influential part of Asian as well as Western Buddhism. This is a politically and socially very active and powerful form of Buddhism, which emerged in the twentieth century. It aims to reduce the suffering (*duḥkha*) of oppressed and impoverished people by improving their social and economic situation. This form of Buddhist spiritual social activism "engages actively yet nonviolently with the social, economic, political, social, and ecological problems of society."[126] In addition, maybe surprisingly for some uninformed people, "this engagement is not separate from Buddhist spirituality, but is very much an expression of it."[127]

Socially Engaged Buddhism is founded on traditional Buddhist philosophy, values, and concepts, such as the non-self, *karman*, the Four Noble Truths, dependent arising, compassion, loving-kindness (Pāli *mettā*), generosity, non-harmfulness (*ahiṃsā*), and bodhisattva. Socially Engaged Buddhism has tried, actively yet nonviolently (!), to solve many contemporary social, economic, political, cultural, and ecological problems and address crises which developed in Buddhist Asia in the twentieth century – for instance, the aftermath of the Vietnam War, the genocide in Cambodia, contemporary cultural genocide in Tibet, the ecological crisis in Thailand, the repressive regime in Burma/Myanmar, extreme social inequality, bigotry, large-scale poverty, and the inferior status of women in much of Buddhist Asia.[128]

Engaged Buddhism was "motivated by concern for the welfare of others" and "influenced by modern social, economic, psychological, and political forms of analysis of Western origin" but also "by the great example of Mahātmā Gandhī, who pioneered spiritually based, nonviolent social engagement for the entire world."[129] Among the most important figures in Engaged Buddhism are His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama, the spiritual leader of Tibetans, and Thich Nhat Hanh, the Vietnamese Zen Buddhist monk, poet, and peace activist who tried to end the war in Vietnam and coined the term "Engaged Buddhism." We can also name A. T. Ariyaratne (*1931), a pioneer of so-called "Buddhist economics," who set up self-help programs in Sri Lanka that provided an alternative to capitalist as well as Communist economic models, "trying to build a society in which all needs are met – not only the economic, but social, cultural, psychological, political,

[125] Berendzen, "Max Horkheimer."

[126] Sallie B. King, *Socially Engaged Buddhism. Dimensions of Asian Spirituality* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009), p. 1.

[127] *Ibid*.

[128] *Ibid*., pp. 1–3.

[129] *Ibid*., p. 2.

and spiritual needs as well."[130] In Cambodia, it was the Buddhist Samdech Preah Maha Ghosananda (1929–2007), "the Gāndhī of Cambodia," who helped refugees to return safely from the camps after the brutal Khmer Rouge era and who was "one of the major leaders of the international movement to ban land mines."[131] In Thailand, there are many "ecology monks" who help to protect the highly endangered environment, with particular concern for loss of land to deforestation and dams.[132] These are only a few examples of the many currently active engaged Buddhist individuals and movements.

There are also many movements and thousands of engaged Buddhists in the West, even if their number is much smaller than in Asia (due, of course, to the comparatively small number of Buddhists in the West). These political, social, and environmental activists "work to end capital punishment; guard nuclear wastes; challenge racism, sexism, and militarism; and protect the lives and well-being of animals,"[133] and so forth. Among many different activities there are also social and economic development programs that focus on "self-help employment and housing for formerly homeless and poor people; and housing and health services for people with HIV/AIDS"[134] (The Greyston Mandala). Therefore, Slavoj Žižek's notorious sharply-worded criticisms of and hostility towards Buddhism (especially its Western form) seems very unfair.

It is worth noting that Žižek is a very special case among contemporary Marxist thinkers because we can find "countless direct statements of active hostility towards Buddhism" throughout his work.[135] For instance, he writes that even if "'Western Buddhism' presents itself as the remedy against the stressful tension of capitalist dynamics, allowing us to uncouple and retain inner peace and *Gelassenheit*, it actually functions as its perfect ideological supplement."[136] Or: "One is almost tempted to resuscitate the old infamous Marxist cliché of religion as the 'opium of the people,' as the imaginary supplement to terrestrial misery." [137] "'Western Buddhism' thus fits perfectly the fetishist mode of ideology in our allegedly 'post-ideological' era."[138] "The 'Western Buddhist' meditative stance is arguably the most efficient way for us to fully participate in capitalist dynamics while retaining the appearance of mental sanity."[139]

[130] *Ibid*., p. 5.

[131] *Ibid*.

[132] *Ibid*., p. 6.

[133] *Ibid*., p. 7.

[134] *Ibid*.

[135] Boon, Cazdyn, and Morton, *Nothing*, p. 11.

[136] Slavoj Žižek, "From Western Marxism to Western Buddhism," *Cabinet* 2, 2001 (online at http://www.cabinetmagazine.org/issues/2/western.php [accessed May 14, 2018]).

[137] *Ibid*.

[138] *Ibid*.

[139] *Ibid*.

Žižek is probably right in so far as he is referring to some forms of "New Age Buddhism" very popular among certain Westerners. Nevertheless, he does not consider the activities of Engaged Buddhism. Žižek sometimes precisely points out the possible negative consequences to which Western Buddhism or Buddhism may lead, but his understanding of Buddhism is sometimes very superficial, or even wrong. For instance, "Žižek's main reference for his knowledge of Buddhism in *The Puppet and the Dwarf* is *Orthodoxy*, a 1908 apologia for Christianity by G. K. Chesterton."[140] In addition, many of Žižek's views of Buddhism, as well as culture and life in Buddhist countries, are wildly inaccurate.[141]

In his sharp critiques of Buddhism, Žižek never or almost never uses classical Buddhist texts or references to the Buddha or Buddhist thinkers. Instead, he refers to the testimony of his friends who, in his view, are supposed to understand Buddhism. In addition, his quasi-Buddhist ideas are based on highly problematic authors such as British beatnik and writer Allan Watts (1915–1973), who was very popular in the 1960s, or Japanese Zen Buddhist D. T. Suzuki (1870–1966), who wrote that Zen Buddhism could be "wedded to anarchism or fascism, communism or democracy, atheism or idealism, or any political and economical dogmatism."[142] However, Suzuki's interpretations of Buddhism are quite specific, and have been very strongly criticized by many scholars for their extremely controversial militaristic and racist attitudes, and are unacceptable in terms of general Buddhist ethics.[143]

Žižek developed certain ideas about Buddhist ethics from some of Suzuki's militaristic notions, which, from the perspective of mainstream Buddhist ethics, are completely unacceptable.[144] He also quotes a comrade of Pol Pot who was so "struck by his leader's

[140] Boon, "To Live in a Glass House is a Revolutionary Virtue Par Excellence," p. 26.

[141] See, for instance, some very well-informed responses to Žižek's letter on Tibet in the *London Review of Books* entitled "No Shangri-La" (see letters column for June 5, 2008, online at https://www.lrb.co.uk/v30/n08/letters#letter5 [accessed May 14, 2018]). "Not only does Žižek rely on Chinese propaganda for his understanding of Tibet's past, he also interprets the current tragedy through TV images selected and transmitted by the Chinese government [...]. Žižek tellingly remains silent about the gunning down of unarmed Tibetan protesters (more than two hundred were killed), the mass arrests, the flooding of the Tibetan plateau with Chinese paramilitaries, the lockdown of monasteries and schools and the barring of independent foreign journalists from the region." Online at https://www.lrb.co.uk/v30/n11/letters (accessed May 14, 2018).

[142] Daisetz T. Suzuki, *Zen and Japanese Culture (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959)*, p. 36.

[143] See, for instance, Dion Peoples, "Slavoj Žižek's Interpretation of Buddhism," (online at https://www.academia.edu/2321244/Zizeks_Interpretation_of_Buddhism_-_FINAL_VERSION [accessed May 14, 2018]).

[144] Commenting on the very specific Samurai culture of medieval Japan, Suzuki writes, for instance: "It is really not he but the sword itself that does the killing. He had no desire to do harm to anybody, but the enemy appears and makes himself a victim. It is as though the sword performs automatically its function of justice, which is the function of mercy." Quoted in Slavoj Žižek, *Less than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism* (London and New York: Verso, 2002), p. 134. For an original quotation see Brian Victoria, *Zen at War* (New York: Weatherhill 1998), p. 110.

cold demeanor and [...] utter ruthlessness towards their enemies" that he compared him "with a Buddhist monk who had attained" an enlightened state of stoic neutrality.[145] On this Žižek writes: "One should not dismiss this as an obscene false parallel: Pol Pot did indeed come from a Buddhist cultural background, and there is a long tradition of militarist discipline in Buddhism."[146]

Contrary to Žižek, I believe that drawing this comparison is highly misleading and disturbing. It demonstrates an utter ignorance of the sophisticated tradition of Buddhist ethics (*śīla*). Indeed, while the development of equanimous concentration (*upekṣā*) is certainly a feature of Buddhist meditation, this cannot be disconnected from the utter centrality of compassion (*karuṇā*) and other foundational ethical virtues such as loving kindness (*maitrī*) and sympathetic joy (*muditā*). This is to say nothing of the basic elements of the Buddhist path, which strongly prohibit such acts as killing and stealing. I also do not understand why Žižek connects Pol Pot's ideas with Buddhism, when the Khmer Rouge had a plan to liquidate all Buddhist monastic orders, forced young Buddhist monks into marriage or military service, and executed senior monks and those who resisted.[147] Žižek's claims regarding a *long* tradition of Buddhist militarism are, moreover, highly overstated. Peter Harvey offers a much more balanced view:

> Buddhism is generally seen as associated with non-violence and peace [...]. This does not mean, though, that Buddhists have always been peaceful: Buddhist countries have had their fair share of war and conflict, for most of the reasons that wars have occurred elsewhere. Yet it is difficult to find any plausible 'Buddhist' rationales for violence, and Buddhism has some particularly rich resources for use in dissolving conflict. Overall, we can observe that Buddhism has had a general humanizing effect throughout much of Asia. It has tempered the excesses of rulers and martial people, helped large empires (for example China) to exist without much internal conflict, and rarely, if at all, incited wars against non-Buddhists. Moreover, in the midst of wars, Buddhist monasteries have often been havens of peace.[148]

It is true that there was a strong Zen Buddhist involvement in Japanese militarism in World War II.[149] However, this involvement was very specific and ran contrary to general Buddhist ethics.

[145] Quoted from Niall Ferguson, *The War of the World* (London: Penguin Books, 2007), p. 623.

[146] Žižek, *Less than Nothing*, p. 134.

[147] Ian Harris, *Buddhism in a Dark Age: Cambodian Monks under Pol Pot* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2012).

[148] Peter Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 239.

[149] Žižek relies here on the important book by Brian Daizen Victoria, *Zen at War* (Lanham,

Žižek's very negative attitude towards Buddhism might be explained, according to Boon, Cazdyn and Morton, by the influence of G. W. F. Hegel, who misinterpreted Buddhism as a form of nihilism[150] or "cult of nothingness" – an attitude that has been appropriately criticized by contemporary scholars as a "highly Europocentric two-centuries-old philosophy of religion."[151] Žižek's hostile attitude toward Buddhism has been challenged by the economist Vaḍḍhaka Linn in his thought-provoking book *The Buddha on Wall Street*. Vaḍḍhaka Linn worked for a very long time in UK trade unionism and was a political activist before becoming a Buddhist.[152] In a review of this book, Professor Owen Flanagan writes: "Slavoj Žižek has written that Western Buddhism is the 'perfect ideological supplement' to capitalism. Žižek the provocateur thinks Western Buddhism is complacent about the terrible harms of unbridled neoliberal capitalism.[153] Vaḍḍhaka Linn's essay makes the argument for an activist Buddhism that responds to Žižek's challenge."[154] According to David Loy, another expert on Buddhism, "*The Buddha on Wall Street* is an original, insightful, and provocative evaluation of our economic situation today. If you wonder about the social implications of Buddhist teachings, this is an essential book."[155]

Another very interesting book about the relationship between Buddhism and the radical politics of Noam Chomsky (*1928), Howard Zinn (1922–2010), and others is *The Compassionate Revolution. Its author,* David Edwards (*1962), a Buddhist and journalist, writes: "The power of radical dissent to dispel illusions and so combat the horrors of this world lies, I believe, in the compassionate motivation behind it. Buddhism is a two thousand-year-old masterclass in understanding the nature and true power of compassion even in the face of the worst viciousness and self-serving ignorance. Combined, the two – new and old, Western and Eastern – can constitute an irresistible force for good in the modern world."[156]

The engagement between Buddhism and Marxism or communism in Asian societies is a long-running and very complicated issue and, in some cases (for example in China,

Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006, 2nd ed.). This book concerns the support of Japanese Buddhists for their nation's militarism from the year 1868 until the end of World War II.

[150] See Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*: G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion, Together with a Work on the Proofs of the Existence of God*, trans. E. B. Speirs and J. B. Sanderson (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1895).

[151] Boon, Cazdyn and Morton*, Nothing*, p. 12.

[152] Vaḍḍhaka Linn, *The Buddha on Wall Street. On What's Wrong with Capitalism and What We Can Do About It* (Cambridge: Windhorse Publication, 2015).

[153] See Žižek, "From Western Marxism to Western Buddhism."

[154] Online at: https://thebuddhaonwallstreet.com/reviews/ (accessed May 11, 2019).

[155] *Ibid*.

[156] David Edwards, *The Compassionate Revolution: Buddhism and Radical Politics (*Dartington: Green Books, 1998), p. 12.

Vietnam, Cambodia, Mongolia, Tibet), has been very traumatic for Buddhists in these societies. Boon writes that in the 1960s and 1970s there were "extreme attempts to eradicate religion in communist-controlled Asian societies"; but "the absence of any acknowledgment of these events in the work of Žižek et al. seems much more problematic."[157] It is also surprising that contemporary writers who work on engaged Buddhism hardly mention the connection of Buddhism with Karl Marx or Marxism.[158] Nevertheless, according to Boon, now is the right time to think about both of them together, because they have answers to the problem of consumption, the biggest problem of capitalism.[159]

Similar ideas are expressed by Michael Slott, a Buddhist practitioner and, for many years, a political and labor activist, who writes:

> Both Buddhism and Marxism have strengths and weaknesses in helping us to understand human experiences and social problems [...]. Buddhism identifies those understandings and practices, which lead to greater happiness and less suffering in response to existential challenges that we all must face as mortal human beings, irrespective of the particular family, society, or historical era that we live in. Nevertheless, while Buddhism captures certain basic aspects of universal human experience, it does not take account of the interaction or dialectic between humans qua social beings and the relatively permanent social structures that humans both reinforce and challenge in the course of history. The latter is the province of a radical social theory, such as Marxism. At the same time, however, Marxism does not address the ways in which, at an experiential level, life causes suffering and anguish irrespective of the social context.[160]

Moreover, according to Karsten J. Struhl, an American Marxist philosopher, we can find many points of intersection between Buddhism and Marxism.[161] However, Struhl does not offer a simple synthesis of Buddhism and Marxism but argues for their mutual enrichment and support. He writes that both focus on the problem of human suffering (*duḥkha*), the first noble truth, but Marxism concentrates on its historical nature whereas Buddhism concentrates on its "pervasive existential and ontological nature."[162]

[157] Boon, "To Live in a Glass House is a Revolutionary Virtue Par Excellence," p. 77.

[158] *Ibid*., p. 25–26.

[159] *Ibid*., p. 78.

[160] Michael Slott, "Can you be a Buddhist and a Marxist?" *Contemporary Buddhism* 12 (2011), no. 4, pp. 347–363, here 347.

[161] Karsten J. Struhl, "Buddhism and Marxism: Point of Intersection," *Science and Society. A Journal of Marxist Thought and Analysis* (2017), no. 4(1), pp. 103–116. (Online at https://www.researchgate.net/publication/315370491_Buddhism_and_Marxism_points_of_intersection [accessed May 14, 2018]).

[162] *Ibid*., p. 103.

Marxism sees the causes of suffering (the second noble truth) in capitalistic consumerism, exploitation, profit accumulation, oppression, and competitiveness, whereas Buddhism sees them in the illusion of self (*ātman*) and in greed, aversion, and delusion, the three defilements (*kleśa*) of mind.[163] However, both perspectives accept the idea that there is no substantial self[164] and that reality is a dynamic process of interrelations between entities.[165]

Struhl writes that overcoming suffering (the third noble truth) is seen by Marxism as dependent upon embracing communism and building a classless society where class exploitation, oppression, and alienation are abolished. Nevertheless, Struhl writes that this idea is not sufficient, because the illusion of the self and individual greed, aversion, and delusion would still exist. To overcome individual suffering – that is desires, defilements, and illusions (as Buddhism proposes) – people also need to overcome "*social* suffering" (*duḥkha*), which entails abolishing the "economic, social and political causes of suffering."[166] To extinguish the illusion of self, Buddhism offers compassion (*karuṇā*)[167] while Marx offers his vision of communism. Struhl argues that the Eightfold Path (the fourth noble truth) that leads to nirvāṇa should also include the practice of "socially engaged Buddhism," which will involve reforming repressive social institutions, guided by Buddhist social praxis.[168]

It is remarkable that the Dalai Lama, who was very sharply criticized by Žižek as "a kind of Disney figure cheerleading global capitalism,"[169] has spoken about his support for a synthesis between Buddhism and Marxism, and has expressed his sympathy towards Marxism on many occasions.

> Of all the modern economic theories, the economic system of Marxism is founded on moral principles, while capitalism is concerned only with gain and profitability. Marxism is concerned with the distribution of wealth on an equal basis and the equitable utilization of the means of production. It is also concerned with

[163] *Ibid*., p. 106.

[164] For instance, Louis Althusser speaks about the nonexistence of a substantial self and the impossibility of authentic existence. See Louis Althusser, *Budoucnost je dlouhá / Fakta* [*L'avenir dure longtemps, suivi de Les Faits*], trans. J. Fulka (Prague: Karolinum, 2001), p. 87. According to Althusser, a subject only exists as an ideological subject (!), and science is a "process without a subject." Petr Kužel, *Filosofie Louise Althussera* (Prague: Filosofia, 2014), p. 179.

[165] Kevin M. Brien, "Humanistic Marxism and Buddhism. Complementaries," *Journal of Indian Philosophy and Religion* 15 (2010), pp. 63–102.

[166] Struhl, "Buddhism and Marxism: Point of Intersection," p. 108.

[167] This universal compassion (*karuṇā*) has to be demonstrated in the social actions of an engaged Buddhism. *Ibid*., p. 110.

[168] Struhl, "Buddhism and Marxism: Point of Intersection," p. 104.

[169] Boon, "To Live in a Glass House is a Revolutionary Virtue Par Excellence," p. 27.

> the fate of the working classes – that is, the majority – as well as with the fate of those who are underprivileged and in need, and Marxism cares about the victims of minority-imposed exploitation. For those reasons, the system appeals to me, and it seems fair [...].
>
> I think the major flaw of the Marxist regimes is that they have placed too much emphasis on the need to destroy the ruling class, on class struggle, and this causes them to encourage hatred and to neglect compassion [...]. Once the revolution is over and the ruling class is destroyed, there is not much left to offer the people; at this point the entire country is impoverished and unfortunately it is almost as if the initial aim were to become poor. I think that this is due to the lack of human solidarity and compassion. The principal disadvantage of such a regime is the insistence placed on hatred to the detriment of compassion. The failure of the regime in the former Soviet Union was, for me, not the failure of Marxism but the failure of totalitarianism. For this reason I still think of myself as half-Marxist, half-Buddhist.[170]

After the collapse of the totalitarian communist system in Czechoslovakia in 1989, Bondy had to answer questions about his approach to Marxism. He did so in an essay titled "Why I Am Still a Marxist: The Question of Ontology": "Yet now, when the opportunistic, bureaucratic system that called itself Marxist has finally collapsed, people ask me again and again whether I am 'still' or 'really' a Marxist."[171] Bondy resolutely answers "yes" because, in his opinion, "for anyone who tries to understand the universe and human history from a dialectical perspective, things could not be otherwise. Such an approach lies at the very heart of Marxist philosophy."[172] Bondy confesses that even if he is not an owner of the "the Truth" of how the things really are, he still places profound hope in Marxist ontology. According to Bondy, Marxism ("that is, the dialectical approach to trying to understand reality") is "the only way to eliminate [...] alienation, exploitation, and poverty, the dehumanization, injustice, and ecological degradation."[173] We can see here the close connection between theory and practice, emphasized also in the critical theory discussed above. To sum up, Bondy writes:

> I am a Marxist first of all because I have found it to be the best methodological tool for my work in ontology, a tool from whose inner laws follow[s] the necessity

[170] His Holiness the Dalai Lama, *Beyond Dogma: Dialogues & Discourses*, trans. Alison Anderson, ed. Marianne Dresser (Berkeley, Calif.: North Atlantic Books 1996), p. 109–110.

[171] E. Bondy, "Why I Am Still a Marxist: The Question of Ontology," in: Bondy, *Postpříběh*, p. 279.

[172] *Ibid*.

[173] *Ibid*., pp. 280–281.

> of participating in the struggle to create a classless society. Marxism is a more deeply open system than any other in the history of philosophy.[174]

However, Bondy was very pessimistic about the prospects of Marxism and communism in the coming decades, because he thought they probably would not "find a very large audience among intellectuals or anyone else. [...] It is highly unlikely that for the near future anyone will be attracted to Marxism by its ideology or its social or, even less, its economic outcomes."[175] Nevertheless, Bondy argued, there is hope that, after a few decades, the ideas of Marxism and communism will grow again.[176]

According to Bondy, the Buddha's deep humanism is close to the humanism of Marx because it is real and eschews any mystification. But, Bondy says,

> even Marxist optimism caused a great deal of disappointment. The great collective enthusiasm that accompanied the start of the socialistic revolutions vanished and was replaced by a consumerist pragmatism. More sensitive people ceased to feel any guarantee of the sense of life in building such a society [...].[177]

There remains therefore, for Marxists as for Christians, the question of whether life as such has some meaning which is not purely pragmatic (related to momentary utility).[178]

Conclusion

It is to Bondy's great credit that he was the first Czech philosopher who drew attention not only to the historical significance of Buddhist philosophy but also to its importance for contemporary philosophy. He was particularly successful in achieving this in his monograph *The Buddha*, but also in the introduction to Buddhist philosophy he provided in his *Notes on the History of Philosophy*. At that time, these books were able to rectify, to a certain extent, the absolute lack of any good literature about Buddhist philosophy in the Czech language. They are still valuable contributions, particularly

[174] Bondy, "Why I Am Still a Marxist: The Question of Ontology," p. 298.

[175] *Ibid*., pp. 295–296.

[176] Bondy deeply regrets that the Cultural Revolution of Mao Zedong was not successful because "things all over the world would look quite different" if it had succeeded (*Ibid*., p. 296). Bondy's sympathy with the Cultural Revolution of Mao Zedong, whom he calls "a cheerful old man" or "our dear Chairman Mao" (Bondy, *Juliiny otázky a další eseje*, pp. 145, 157), seems very striking and inhumane considering the 1.5 million people who were killed during the Cultural Revolution and the millions of others who suffered due to torture, imprisonment, seizure of property, and general humiliation.

[177] Bondy, *Indická filosofie*, p. 36.

[178] *Ibid*.

because Bondy was a knowledgeable philosopher with an innovative philosophical perspective. They collectively provide a significant philosophical contribution to the study of Indian and Buddhist philosophy.

It is difficult to determine exactly about how much the Buddha and his teachings influenced Bondy himself. Nevertheless, I would like to close with one quotation of Bondy's that says nearly everything there is to say about his relationship with the Buddha:

> If philosophy fails to prove that ontology has among other parameters [...] an eschatological parameter, that is, that ontology contains in itself an integral condition and a guarantee that we can, without reservation, take life positively – that even if we do not have to define its sense with mathematical accuracy it will be enough for us to feel and experience it [...]. So far, we have no legitimate possibility of going further than the Buddha, and so his teaching will still be the highest knowledge and understanding of the reality we have. I would wish with all my heart that this were not the case, but it does not lessen my respect and love for this Teacher whose thought was undoubtedly the most open of all.[179]

There are many differences and similarities between Buddhism and Marxism. For many reasons, it seems that their simple synthesis is not feasible. Nevertheless, I see some possibility for their mutual enrichment and support, as Struhl, for instance, suggests. If "both Buddhism and Marxism are incomplete projects," as Boon writes (paraphrasing Habermas),[180] then great challenges lie before us.

[179] Bondy, *Indická filosofie*, p. 36.

[180] Boon, "To Live in a Glass House is a Revolutionary Virtue Par Excellence," p. 31.