

Phenomenological Distinctions and the Buddhist Doctrine of Two Truths (ver. 9.2b)

Tze-wan Kwan

關子尹

The Chinese University of Hong Kong

Abstract

This paper attempts to put two separate issues into contrast: “phenomenological distinctions” and “Buddhist doctrine of two truths.” Why should we precisely compare these two? This is because they are the most fundamental distinctions with important bearings on the ultimate concerns respectively of phenomenology and Buddhism, and a parallel treatment of them might reveal theoretical subtleties that are otherwise not readily manifestable. Instead of being a comparison of contents, what is at stake in this paper is a comparison of forms. The paper starts with a brief account of the various attempts of the Buddhist distinction of Two Truths. It is shown that the distinction itself is mainly of heuristic value, the purpose of which is to lead people to the expedient insight that the two truths, if understood separately, could easily fall prey to the two “extremes”; the two truths should rather be combined to yield the “first truth of the middle way.” The paper then proceeds to a brief discussion of major conceptual distinctions put forth by Kant, Hegel, Husserl, and Heidegger, or four “phenomenologists” in a very broad sense of the term. By comparing the different strategies behind these distinctions (and by way of the formal comparison with the Buddhist distinctions), this paper argues that while the strongly subjectivistic philosophies of Hegel/Husserl on the one side and the “tautological” thinking of the late Heidegger on the other might constitute two “extreme” philosophical positions, it is the more modest Kantian approach of empirical-transcendental dualism that manages to approximate most closely the philosophical position of the “middle way.” On this ground the author argues for the sustained value of the Kantian program in the face of criticisms launched by his influential epigones.

I. Introduction : Comparison of form versus comparison of content

Conceptual distinctions can be drawn according to form or to content. Formal distinctions have to do with the way how distinctions are made, for example, whether we are talking about bifurcation, tripartition, tetra-division, and so forth, or whether the distinguished items are relationally parallel, subordinate, opposing, or mutually dependent, etc. In regard to content, conceptual distinction always presupposes a subject matter for the distinction.¹ When in this paper we are relating

¹ Some classical examples of such distinctions would be Plato’s distinction between different capacities of the human soul, Aristotle’s distinction between different kinds of movements, or Kant’s distinction between different types of theologies,

phenomenological distinctions to the Buddhist doctrine of two truths, we must point out at the outset that the focus of our comparison lies mainly not in content but in form. Why is it like that?

As far as content is concerned, phenomenology and Buddhism do exhibit certain important themes of common interest, as, for instance, consciousness (*viññāna*) and being (*bhāva*). Yet, in regard to basic concerns, phenomenology and Buddhism are very different. Despite its breadth of scope, phenomenology barely touches upon the main concern of Buddhism in providing ways of deliverance (*mukti*) for the common walks of life. For example, Buddhist realms of discourse such as meditative deliverance (*samādhi*), emptiness (*śūnyatā*), nirvana (*nirvāṇa*), supra-mundane wisdom (*śrāvaka*), and what Buddhism called *asaṃskṛta dharma* (無爲法)² were basically foreign to phenomenology. Consequently, the remaining themes apparently common to phenomenology and Buddhism are in fact quite incommensurable. Furthermore, although the various Buddhist schools have different doctrinal emphases, they do share one common, uncontested goal, namely, the attainment of the state of “spiritual awakening or enlightenment”, which is precisely the root meaning of the notion Buddha or *bodhi*. But within the phenomenological tradition, it is much more difficult to single out a common goal. In fact, among the leading phenomenologists, even the meaning and reference of “phenomenon” were highly controversial. This again renders a comparison of phenomenology with Buddhism in regard to content difficult as well as pointless.

On the contrary, a comparison of forms would be much easier, because we only need to focus on the formal relation of the concepts or the structure of the respective theories being compared. For example, when comparing phenomenological distinctions to the Buddhist doctrine of two truths, we only need to see if the two sides exhibit certain isomorphisms so as to infer that they might be employing similar theoretical strategies, even though in respect of content they are utterly different.³

In the following pages, we will show that both Buddhism and modern ‘phenomenologists’ put much emphasis in making bifurcations on the highest theoretical order, these bifurcations are so fundamental that are shown to have important bearings on the ultimate concerns respectively of phenomenology and of Buddhism. For Buddhism, we will focus on the so-called doctrine of “Two truths”,

² *Asaṃskṛta dharma* has been rendered into English as “unconditioned or non-phenomenal elements.” Translation by William Edward Soothill and Lewis Hodous, *A Dictionary of Chinese Buddhist Terms*, Web version provide by Charles Muller (<http://www.hm.tyg.jp/~acmuller/soothill/soothill-hodous.html>), accessed 15 August 2006).

³ At this point we must immediately clarify that, even when we are aiming at formal comparison, it does not mean that we can totally do away with contents. Just as in language, in natural entities, and in human knowledge form and content are inseparably bound to each other, our theoretical comparison is also “hylomorphic”. In other words, in our comparison of forms, we also have to rely on contents although our focus is on the form, otherwise our comparison will have no way to unfold itself.

with its various formulations. Regarding phenomenology, we will understand the term in a broader sense that covers, besides Husserl and Heidegger, also Kant and Hegel, for these four leading figures since modern philosophy have precisely made “high-level” bifurcations related to the issue of “phenomenon”.

II. The Meaning of the “Doctrine of Two Truths” for the Theory and Practice of Buddhism

Among the many Buddhist terminologies, that of “two truths” (*satyadvaya*) distinguishes itself as a doctrine of the utmost importance, both in theory and in practice. Text-historically speaking, the notion of *satyadvaya* was already implied in the *Middle Agama* (*Madhyamāgama*), and actually mentioned in the *Miscellaneous Agama* (*Samyuktāgama*) and the *Nirvana Sutras* (*Mahā-parinirvāṇa sūtras*), etc., although only in a piecemeal and unsystematic fashion. But if we grasp the very meaning of “two truths” sufficiently enough, we could readily become convinced that many major sutras including *Diamond Sūtra*, *Heart Sūtra*, *Sandhinimocana sūtra*, or *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa sūtra* do convey the doctrine of “two truths” in some way. Because of the importance of the doctrine of “two truths”, many basic teachings of Buddha such as “Four Noble Truths” or “Twelve Links in the Chain of Existence” (twelve *nidānas*) can also be reformulated in terms of this doctrine.⁴ In the subsequent development of the *abhidharma* canon, the doctrine of “two truths” was thematically expounded, first of all by Nāgārjuna (龍樹).⁵ After the influx of Buddhism into China, discussions on “two truths” became increasingly popular and sophisticated. Great Buddhist monks including, Fayun (法雲, early 6th cent.), Zhiyi (智顛 538-597 CE) of the Tiantai School, Jizang (吉藏 549-623 CE) of the San Lun (Mādhyamika) School, and Kuiji (窺基 632-682 CE) of the Dharmalakṣaṇa (Yogācāra) School, etc. have all expounded the doctrine of “two truths” in great details. They also proposed their own hierarchical interpretations leading to multi-layered two-truth structures. The tradition of learning thus formed has been well remarked by Zhiyi as follows: “The term ‘two truths’ can be found in many sutras, but its meaning is subtle and has been understood differently leading to many controversies.”⁶ As far as social influence is concerned, the doctrine of “two truths” has had a profound influence on the laypeople as well, the most remarkable example being Crown Prince Zhao-Ming of Liang Dynasty (梁昭明太子), who, being an expert of the doctrine himself, has issued a decree asking all

⁴ See Yin Shun (印順), *Xingkongxue Tanyuan* 《性空學探源》, 1973, Taiwan, pp. 121-129.

⁵ In the later development of Mādhyamika in India, Jñānagarbha (智藏, 8th cent.) and Śāntarakṣita (寂護, 705-752 CE) further elaborated on the doctrine of two truths.

⁶ Zhiyi, *Profound Meaning of the Lotus Sutra*. 智顛：《法華玄義·卷二上》(T33:702a): 「夫二諦者，名出眾經，而其理難曉；世間紛紜，由來碩諍。」 English translation is mine.

abbots, princes and nobilities to submit essays in reply to his queries over the doctrine.⁷

Most roughly expressed, “two truths” in Buddhism refer to “worldly truth” (世諦, 俗諦, *saṃvṛti-satya*) and “real truth” (勝義諦, 真諦, *paramārtha-satya*); while the former refers to the truth as perceived by the ordinary people, the latter refers to truth in the eyes of the enlightened sage. However, taking note of the different ways how the “two truths” have been distinguished, and the controversies that came from them, it becomes unmistakable, that the different versions of “two-truths” in history were serving different or at least nuanced purposes. This makes it necessary for us to identify the various facets of the doctrine before we can meaningfully compare them to phenomenological distinctions.⁸

1. **“Two truths” as objective distinction for realities:** Since the original meaning of *satya* is “true, real actual, genuine...”, some early Buddhists, especially those of the Sarvāstivāda School (說一切有部) tried to employ the “two-truth” distinction precisely to differentiate what they understood as real from what they understood as unreal. According to this understanding, everyday phenomenal experiences such as a vase or a man are only illusive beings with no separate existence; they “are” only due to “unreal names” (假名 *saṃmuti*) assigned to them. On the contrary, realities are believed to be made up of the “minutest” atom-like beings (極微 *paramāṇu*) and the briefest unconcatenated moments of consciousness (剎那 *kṣana*). This way of distinguishing between the two “truths” left its traces in as early works as Vasubandhu’s (世親) *Abhidharmakośa*⁹ and Saṃghabhadra’s (眾賢) *Abhidharmanyāyānusāra*.¹⁰ In short, in Sarvāstivāda or Hīnayāna Buddhism in general, the “two truth” distinction is used mainly in establishing a cognitive-objective demarcation between the unreal and the real

⁷ See Dao-Hsüan (596-667 CE), *Guang Hong-Ming-Ji*, Book 21, 道宣：《廣弘明集·卷二十一》·〈令旨解二諦義·并答問〉(T52:247c ff).

⁸ Since the aim of this paper is to compare the Buddhist doctrine of two truths with phenomenological distinctions, and not to delve into the over-complexities of the historical development of the doctrine of two truths itself, I will in the following focus mainly on the version of the doctrine as expounded by Jizang, and will refer to other versions only if appropriate and necessary. In this regard I benefited particularly from Liao Minghuo, *Jixiang Jicang Xue Shuo* (廖明活：《嘉祥吉藏學說》) Taipei, Xuesheng, 1985).

⁹ *Abhidharmakośa* was Vasubandhu’s main work before his conversion to the Yogācāra school. The influence of Sarvāstivāda on the *Abhidharmakośa* can be seen in the latter’s placement of rūpāṇi or material existence in the first position of the five groups of dharmas. On the contrary, in Vasubandhu’s later work *Sastra on the Door to Understanding the Hundred Dharmas*, rūpāṇi was moved to the third position, namely, behind cittaṃ (mind) and citta-saṃprayukta-saṃskārāḥ (mental qualities). One thing notable is that according to the famous indologist Erich Frauwallner, the author of the *Abhidharmakośa* and that of the *Sastra* were two different persons having by chance the same name.

¹⁰ Regarding Saṃghabhadra’s treatment of worldly and real truth in the *Abhidharmanyāyānusāra* see Chen Yan-Zi, *Studies on Dignāga’s Ālambana parikṣa* (Hong Kong: Chilin Nunery, 1999), pp. 34ff [見陳雁姿：《陳那觀所緣論之研究》·(香港：志蓮淨苑，1999)]·

among worldly existences. From the point of view of later Buddhist masters, this conception of “two truths” is of course too simplistic. Jizang, for example, has in his works *Meaning of Two Truths* (二諦義) and *Profound Meaning of the Three Śāstras* (三論玄義)¹¹ discussed and criticized extensively these earlier receptions of the doctrine. Jizang’s own important contribution was his distinction between two different approaches to the “two-truths” doctrine: For him “two truths” can be understood as “for-truths” (於諦) or as “teaching-truths” (教諦).

2. **“For-truths”, or “two truths” as the steadfastness on two perspectives:**

Reflecting on the general notion of “two truths,” Jizang readily reiterated that these two truths are in fact meant to be truths seen from the perspectives of the ordinary people and of the supposedly enlightened or awakened. Being namable as “truths”, they so to speak must be valid “for” the two parties respectively, who in fact take their own views seriously. So, for laypeople, the world’s being is “certain”, which explains why they strive for it; but for the enlightened sages, the world is “illusive” and “empty”, since worldly phenomena appear to them as nothing more than the concatenation of various conditions and causes (*hetu-pratyaya*) by sheer chances, and the insight into this underlying emptiness reveals itself as a “truth.” This approach to “two truths” is what Jizang called “for-truths,”¹² which he described as follows : “*Satya* means truth, as **being** is true for the layman, and **emptiness** true for the sage, both carrying the meaning of truth.”¹³ For-truths involve perspectives, but perspectives inevitably entail biases, which need to be transcended in the long run. For laypeople, one good opportunity for such transcendence is the contrasting view of the enlightened in respect of the impermanence or emptiness of the world, for what appears to laypeople as “being” could appear to a sage as “empty.” By way of such contrast, as suggested by Jizang, there is the possibility “to convert laypeople opinion from being to emptiness.”¹⁴ But this need of the layman’s view for transcendence does not imply that the opposing view of the supposedly enlightened that the world is “empty” is final and unbiased. In Mahāyāna Buddhism, the thought of emptiness or *śūnyatā* can be multi-faceted, and some views of *śūnyatā* could be trapped in biases of their own.¹⁵ Therefore, Jizang made the overall judgment that “for-truths are erroneous.”¹⁶

¹¹ Jizang, *Meaning of the Three Śāstras*, 吉藏：《三論玄義》(T45:3b)。

¹² Jizang, *Meaning of Two Truths*, hereafter *MTT*, 吉藏：《二諦義·卷上》(T45:79ab)；Jizang, *Profound Discourse of the Mahāyāna Doctrine*, hereafter *PDMD* 《大乘玄論·卷三》(T45: 23b)。

¹³ Jizang, *MTT*, 吉藏：《二諦義·卷上》(T45:78c):「諦是實義，有於凡實，空於聖實，是二皆實。」

¹⁴ Jizang, *MTT*, 吉藏：《二諦義·卷中》(T45:93b):「令眾生轉有入空」。

¹⁵ See *Treatise on the Eighteen Emptinesses* (十八空論), previously ascribed to Nāgārjuna but now considered questionable, translated by Paramārtha (真諦, 499-569 CE) into Chinese. (T31:861a-867a).

¹⁶ Jizang, *MTT*, 吉藏：《二諦義·卷上》(T45:78c):「於諦是失」。

3. **“Two truths” are mutually dependent** : For Mahāyāna Buddhism, it is a basic insight that when we are distinguishing between two truths, it must be borne in mind that the two truths are in fact inter-dependent and can not be appropriately conceived when separated. In more practical terms, enlightenment can not be manifested without reference to worldliness, and must be achieved through unveiling the illusive nature of the latter. This is a basic insight common to the various Mahāyāna teachings, examples of which are so numerous! In the Yogācāra doctrine of the “three self-natures” and “three null-natures”, we see that in both cases, the third item is defined not on its own, but as a distantiating from the first two. So, the “perfect true nature” (*pariniṣpanna-svabhāva* 圓成實性) is described as “always staying far away from the previous nature” (常遠離前性)¹⁷, and “ultimate null nature” (勝義無性) is depicted as “the subsequent is yielded by staying far away from the earlier” (後由遠離前).¹⁸ When trying to explain what the “fifth group of dharmas” (i.e. *asaṃskṛta*) really means, Vasubandhu told us that rather than definable by itself, *asaṃskṛta* acquires its meaning precisely with reference to the previous four groups of dharmas, namely, through “what the four [collectively called *saṃskṛta*] reveal themselves to be”. In short, *asaṃskṛta* is the realization of the illusion of *saṃskṛta*.¹⁹ By the same token, nirvana as the zeal of Buddhist practices should not be understood as a separate state totally cut off from worldly life-death (reincarnation); on the contrary, nirvana must be achieved through a positive coming to terms with this worldliness, through taking its challenges, through transcending it and being settled with it. Consequently, some lapidary, but apparently contradictory and oxymoronic statements in Buddhism such as that of “Life-Death is Nirvana” (生死即涅槃)²⁰, “affliction (*kleśa*) is awakening (*bodhi*)” (煩惱即菩提)²¹, or the well-known dictum “form is void and void is form” (色即是空，空即是色)²² are arguably all conveying this basic

¹⁷ Vasubandhu, *Thirty Verses on Consciousness-only (Trimśikāvijñaptimātratāsiddhi)*, verse 21.

¹⁸ Vasubandhu, *Thirty Verses on Consciousness-only (Trimśikāvijñaptimātratāsiddhi)*, verse 24.

¹⁹ 世親：《百法明門論》Vasubandhu, *Sastra on the Door to Understanding the Hundred Dharmas*.

²⁰ A search for the dictum 生死即涅槃 in the Taisho Tripitaka returned 124 matching texts (each could contain multiple matching strings), among which Jizang’s dictum can be found in his *PDMD* 見吉藏《大乘玄論·卷三》(T45:47c).

²¹ A search for the dictum 煩惱即菩提 in the Taisho Tripitaka returned 103 matching texts. In the *Platform Sutra* of Hui Neng, there is a refined expression of this thought: “The ordinary person is a Buddha. Vexation is bodhi. One moment with a deluded mind you are an ordinary person; the next moment with the mind enlightened you are a Buddha. Clinging to sense-objects this moment is vexation; detaching oneself the next moment is bodhi.” 「凡夫即佛，煩惱即菩提；前念迷即凡夫，後念悟即佛；前念著境即煩惱，後念離境即菩提」(T48:350b). English translation adopted from <http://www.ctzen.org/sunnyvale/enChineseZenMasterLec2.htm>. Zhiyi even combined the two dicta about nirvana and bodhi and said: “Realizing the sameness of life-death and nirvana is *samādhi*, attaining the sameness of affliction and bodhi is wisdom.” 「體生死即涅槃名為定，達煩惱即菩提名為慧」。See Zhiyi 《法華玄義·卷九》(T33:790a). English translation is mine.

²² While the dictum *rūpaṃ śūnyatā, śūnyataiva rūpaṃ* 色即是空，空即是色 has become well-known

insight of the mutual dependence of the two truths.

4. **Two Truths doctrines as provisional and expedient strategies for heuristics:**

The emphasis of the heuristic value of the doctrine of “two truths” was first made by Nāgārjuna.²³ Following the Mādhyamika master, Jizang further expounded this aspect of the doctrine and maintained that “two-truths” are to the last analysis “teaching-truths” (教諦).²⁴ He even maintained that “[the two truths are] only doors leading to the doctrine, and have nothing to do with the theoretical horizon.”²⁵ But to what extent are the two truths valuable as heuristics? Jizang’s answer is that it is because people have different states of mind in regard to world perception and depending on the way how biased these states of minds are, corresponding strategies of distinction could be helpful. Jizang therefore diagnosed that “while the ordinary people hold steadfast to being, the two yānas (*dviyāna*) tend to hold steadfast to emptiness.”²⁶ And because of these biases, there is the need “to speak about emptiness to those who are perplexed by being, and speak about being to those who are perplexed by emptiness.”²⁷ By the same token, Hui Neng, the sixth patriarch of the Chinese Chan School, also taught that: “In case someone asks you about the meaning [of the doctrine], reply with nothingness if he asks about being, reply with being if he asks about nothingness; reply with the sacred if he asks about the lay, reply with the lay if he asks about the sacred. The two ways are interrelated in such a way that we have as a result the middle way.”²⁸ This strategy of Hui Neng also suggested the main concern of the issue to be mainly therapeutic in nature, as Jizang himself so aptly puts it:

even to the laypeople mainly due to the popularity of the *Heart Sutra*, a search of the dictum in the Tripitaka returned as much as 102 matching documents.

²³ See Nāgārjuna, *Mādhyamika śāstra*, 見龍樹：《中論·觀四諦品》。The complete text was: 「諸佛依二諦，為眾生說法；一以世俗諦，二第一義諦。若人不能知，分別於二諦，則於深佛法，不知真實義。若不依俗諦，不得第一諦；不得第一諦，則不得涅槃。」 In his *Meaning of Two Truths*, Jizang has clearly indicated that the “bodhisattva” mentioned in the *Mādhyamika śāstra* who supposedly has preached the doctrine of two-truths referred in fact to Nāgārjuna himself. See Jizang, *MTT* (T45:83a). This is a clear indication that Jizang’s own theory of two truths is following the Nāgārjuna line.

²⁴ Jizang, *MTT*, 吉藏：《二諦義·卷上》(T45:78c)。

²⁵ Jizang, *PDMD*, 吉藏：《大乘玄論·卷一》(T45:15c)。Original text: 唯是教門，不關理境。

²⁶ Jizang, *Commentary on the Vimalakīrti sūtra*, 吉藏：《維摩經義疏·卷二》：(凡夫滯有，二乘偏滯空) (T38:928b)；See also Zhiyi, *A Short Commentary of the Vimalakīrti sūtra*, abridged by Zhanran (711-782 CE) 智顛說·湛然略：《維摩經略疏·卷一》(T38:572a). The so called “two yānas” or *dviyāna* refer to the first two of the three yānas, namely *śrāvaka* (聲聞) and *pratyekabuddha* (緣覺) who still fall way short of final enlightenment. In Mahāyāna Buddhism, members of the third yāna (*bodhisattvas*) are supposed to differ from those of the first two yānas (*śrāvakas*, *pratyekabuddhas*) precisely in their remaining mindful of the world’s sufferings even after their own enlightenment.

²⁷ Jizang, *PDMD*, 吉藏：《大乘玄論·卷一》(T45:23a) Original text: 「為著有者說空，為著空者說有」。See also Jizang, *Commentary on the Mādhyamika śāstra*, 《中觀論疏·卷七》(T42:108c). In 《法華玄論·卷一》，Jizang has put this as: 「為滯空者說有」, (T34:361b).

²⁸ Hui Neng, *Platform Sutra*, 惠能：《壇經·付囑品》：「若有人問汝義。問有將無對。問無將有對。問凡以聖對。問聖以凡對。二道相因。生中道義。」

“Two truths as doors leading to the doctrine are nothing but the medicine for the sickness of sentient beings.”²⁹ This again testifies to Jizang’s basic judgment that despite its seminal role in the development of Buddhism the doctrine of two truths “has nothing to do with the meaning of the doctrine itself”, but is merely a matter of “temporary expediency” (權宜方便).

5. **Two truths should be combined to yield the “first truth of the middle way”** :

As a kind of distinction, the doctrine of two truths is of course destined to distinguish between the worldly and the enlightened, or between the lay and the sacred. But after clarifying the provisional, expedient, and therapeutic character of the distinction, we realized that, to the last analysis, the talk about the two truths was introduced only to prevent us from falling into the two extremes of holding steadfast to being or to nothingness. Such an insight eventually leads one back to the fact that in Buddhism, the doctrine of two truths is only a strategic way of presenting the “first truth of the middle way” (中道第一義諦), which is the central teaching of Mādhyamika Buddhism. Although Jizang has discussed the doctrine of two truths in great details, he reflectively limited the validity of the doctrine as follows: “with regard to what can be expressed, there are two truths; but with regard to what is to be expressed, there is only one truth.”³⁰ This apparently paradoxical attitude of the “middle way” in fact teaches us that worldly truth or real truth should never be understood without taking the opposite side into consideration, and that we should avoid to fall on either side of the two extremes (遠離二邊). This emphasis of the “middle way” has great bearing on the Buddhist way of living. It suggests that Buddhism has to be practiced inside the world and not outside of it. It means that while the Buddhist should detach himself from worldly aggregation, this detachment should not be achieved through seeking refuge in the realm of nothingness. On the contrary, it suggests that the truly enlightened should not abandon the world altogether but should be capable of handling worldliness with “expedient skills” (*upāyakauśalya* 方便善巧).³¹ Regarding this, Hui Neng made his point succinctly as follows: “The Kingdom of Buddha is in this world, within which enlightenment has to be sought. To seek enlightenment by leaving this world is as absurd as to search for a rabbit’s

²⁹ Jizang, *PDMD*, 吉藏：《大乘玄論·卷五》(T45: 73a): 「二諦教門，只是眾生病藥」。

³⁰ Jizang, *PDMD*, 吉藏：《大乘玄論·卷一》(T45: 16b): 「能表為名，則有二諦；若從所表為名，則唯一諦。」 As the main descendent of Mādhyamika Buddhism in China, Jizang remained loyal to the “eight negations” (八不) of Nāgārjuna, and declared that the “middle way” is “neither enlightened nor worldly.” 「不真不俗」(see *PDMD* T45: 16c). In some even more reflective contexts, Jizang further declared the “first truth of the middle way” to be transcending even the distinction between the extremes and the middle itself. See *MTT*, 《二諦義》(T45:91a): 「二是偏不二是中。偏是一邊中是一邊。偏之與中。還是二邊。二邊故名世諦。非偏非中乃是中道第一義諦也。」

³¹ “Expedient skills” as akin to true enlightenment was an idea emphasized in the entire sutra/sastra tradition. A search of the word 方便善巧 in the Tripitaka returned 567 matching documents.

horn.”³² Following this line of thought, Hui Neng arrived at his most profound but practical maxim for his followers: “dwell in phenomena while detaching from them.” (於相而離相)³³ The convergence of the two truths into the middle way exerted a profound influence on the subsequent development of Chinese Buddhism. It is totally understandable why contemporary Chinese Buddhism is proposing the ideal of “pure land on earth (人間淨土)”, which is in line with the traditional Buddhist dicta of “affliction is bodhi” and “life-death is nirvana.”

6. **All linguistic distinctions in Buddhism are to the last analysis a matter of temporary expediency:** After clarifying the expedient nature of the doctrine of two truths, we can readily understand why in various Buddhist schools there was the need to further elaborate on every possible distinction between the two truths. In the subsequent development of Buddhism in China, there were, for example, a four-fold distinction both in the Mādhyamika School (Jizang) and in the Dharmalakṣaṇa School (Kuiji), and even a seven-fold distinction in the Tiantai School (Zhiyi). Although these manifold two truth distinctions are of great significance for those who are making the distinction, they should not be taken as absolute so easily, because whatever distinctions are occasionally made, they are meant to be for heuristic purposes only, the final aim is to reveal the middle way between various possible extremes. In *Meaning of Two Truths*, Jizang therefore remarked that, in regard to the doctrine of two truths, “non-distinction (不二) is the essence, while distinction (二) is for application” only.³⁴ To explicate his point, Jizang employed the famous parable of the finger and the moon (指月) and elaborated: “The two truths are meant to express the principle of non-distinction, just like the finger pointing at the moon; the intended is not the finger, which only helps to point at the moon. This is the same as with the teaching of two truths, which is meant to express non-distinction; the intended is not distinction itself, which only helps to attain non-distinction. That is why non-distinction is the essence of two truths.”³⁵ With the same token, we witness that when Jizang was

³² See Hui Neng, *Platform Sutra*, 惠能：《壇經·般若品》(T48:351c):「佛法在世間，不離世間覺；離世覺菩提，恰如求兔角」。English translation adopted from *The Sutra of Wei Lang*, transl. by Wong Mou-Lam (Westport, Connecticut: Hyperion Press, 1973, reprint of 1944 London edition), pp. 37-38.

³³ See Hui Neng, *Platform Sutra*, 惠能：《壇經·定慧品》(T48:353a).

³⁴ Jizang, *MTT*, 吉藏：《二諦義·卷下》(T45: 108b):「不二爲體，二爲用」。English translation is mine. Please note that here 不二 and 二, which mean literally “not two” and “two” respectively, are rendered as “non-distinction” and “distinction”; the notions 體 and 用, usually translated as “substance” and “function”, are here rendered as “essence” and “application” respectively. Please also note that “non-distinction” is a term which is comparable to “*advaita*” in Sanskrit.

³⁵ Jizang, *MTT*, 吉藏：《二諦義·卷下》(T45: 108b):「二諦爲表不二之理，如指指月，意不在指，指令得月。二諦教亦爾，二諦爲表不二，意不在二，爲令得於不二，是故以不二爲二諦體。」Using the same parable of the finger and the moon, Jizang suggested elsewhere in the same work that the doctrine of the two truths is meant to enlighten the “child” (小兒) and not the “grown-up” (大老子). The heuristic role of the doctrine is further manifested. See *MTT*, 《二諦義·卷上》(T45: 90a-b).

expounding his four-fold distinction of two truths, the general rule was that an upper level of distinction (eg. Level B) would regard the previous level of distinction (eg. Level A) *in toto* as worldly (relative) truth, while taking its negation or transcendence (i.e., ~ Level A) as the real truth of this current level of distinction (Level B). And for a possibly still higher level of distinction (level C), the worldly and real truths are Level B distinction and ~ Level B respectively. But in order to avoid infinite regress, he depicted the real truth of the fourth and for him final level of distinction to be a state of “the forgetfulness of speech and extinction of thought (言忘慮絕).”³⁶ In this way, Jizang’s manifold distinctions of two truths lead us back to the notion of *acintya* or the “surpassing of words and thought” (不可思議)³⁷ or the state of “the destruction of speech and the extinction of all thoughts and intentions of the mind.”³⁸ It is also along this line of thought that we touch upon the most paradoxical role Buddhism assigned to language. While basically a bundle of “unreal names” (*sammuti*), language itself is still a very important means for man to disentangle himself from biases of all sorts and to elevate himself to a higher and higher state of enlightenment, although the final aim of such language activities is nothing but the cancellation of language itself.

Up to this point, we can conclude our discussion so far as follows: The Buddhist doctrine of two truths can be assessed both from the theoretical and the practical aspects. Theoretically speaking, the doctrine has left a legacy of the most refined and structured conceptual distinctions within the Buddhist tradition. But whatever the distinction, each of the two distinguished truths should never be assessed and accepted on its own, because by itself, it only reflects a biased “for-perspective”. Therefore two truth distinctions must always be understood *in toto*, as schemes of demarcations, which are always meant to lead one from certain extremes back to the

³⁶ See Jizang, *PDMD*, 吉藏：《大乘玄論·卷一》(T45:15c). The expression used here was 言忘慮絕, which differed slightly from 言亡慮絕, as has been usually found in the sutra-sastra tradition. See also Jizang’s *Commentary on the Mādhyamika śāstra* 《中觀論疏·卷一》(T42:12a-19b). Furthermore, Zhiyi’s seven-fold distinction of two truths (七種二諦) is not only more complex than Jizang’s four-fold version (四重二諦), it also touches upon the gradual transition from the Pīṭaka (Hīnayāna) School, through the Intermediate and the Differentiated Schools (Mahāyāna) to the Complete or Perfect Mahāyāna School (藏、通、別、圓). When Zhiyi was talking about the “two truth” distinction on the seventh level of the Complete Teaching, the supposed “worldly truth” refers to the very distinction of the void, the unreal, and the middle (空、假、中), whereas the finally real truth refers to the “perfect combination” of the above three moments (三諦圓融). See Zhiyi, *Profound Meaning of the Lotus Sutra*. 智顓：《法華玄義·卷二下》.

³⁷ 「不可思議」or *acintya* refers to the impossibility of the highest truth to be conceived by the mind or to be articulated by speech. In his *Commentary on the Meaning of the Lotus Sutra*, Jizang quoted Nāgārjuna and explained that *acintya* is only an issue in Mahāyāna, not yet in Hīnayāna. (T34: 480b).

³⁸ 「一切言語道斷，心行處滅」is cited from *Pusa benye yingluojing* 《瓔珞經·下》. Similar views can be found in many other Mahāyāna texts, such as *Avatamsaka-sūtra* (T9: 424c), *Mahāprajñāpāramitā-śāstra* (Nāgārjuna, T25: 96c), *Mohe zhiguan* (Zhiyi, T46:27a, 54b), etc.

middle, i.e., to the one. In this regard, I consider the following summarizing remarks made by Song monk Fa Yun (法雲 1085-1158 CE) extremely revealing: “As said by earlier sages, if the worldly and the real both disappear, the ‘two truths’ eternally remains; if nothingness and being both perish, the teaching of the one still prevails. From this we learn that steadfastness of either of the two sides leads to failure, while mutual fusion of the two brings success.”³⁹ Then on the practical side of the issue, the deeper we delve into the waters of the two truths, the more will we realize that two truths distinctions are to the final analysis mainly of practical interest. It turns out that the varied and manifold distinctions of two truths are nothing more than expedient strategies that help prevent the practising Buddhists from holding steadfast to different kinds of extremes in their way of seeking final enlightenment. Therefore, although all distinctions are meaningful at some point, they are to the last analysis only heuristic in nature and are meant to be lifted once certain biases have been overcome. Since biases of the human mind are manifold, the Buddhist patriarchs found it necessary to have layers and layers of two truth distinctions **instilled** at various junctures (so that the biases can be spotlighted) in order to have them **transcended**, one layer after the other... (邊說邊掃，隨立隨破).

As linguistic formulations, two truth distinctions should never be understood too verbally. In Buddhism, language is considered as basically illusive in nature; yet, language is employed strategically to undo its own spell. This scenario is described by the Chinese Buddhist tradition as “using language to solace language” (以言遣言).⁴⁰ But in order that this heuristic process can come to a stop, the practicing Buddhist must aim at attaining a state where all expedient distinctions are transcended and all thoughts and actions are unified in an undifferentiated and unmotivated middle ground of what could be called nirvana. This realm of enlightenment where human language finds its limit can best be exemplified by the legendary reaction of Vimalakīrti to Mañjuśrī, which is subsequently depicted in the Chinese Buddhist tradition as “using silence to solace language” (以默遣言).⁴¹

III. “Phenomenology” and Its Various Distinctions

³⁹ See Fa Yun (1085-1158 CE), *Fanyi Mingyi Ji (Translation of Terms and Meanings)*, 法雲, 《翻譯名義集》 (T54:1176b). Original text: 「又先德云。真俗雙泯。二諦恒存。空有兩亡一味常現。是知各執則失。互融則得。」

⁴⁰ See *inter alia* the works of Hui Yuan (慧遠 523-592 CE) and Cheng Guan (澄觀 738-838 CE).

⁴¹ See Hui Yuan (523-592 CE), *A Chapter on the Meaning of Mahāyāna* 《大乘義章·卷一》(T44:482b), also his *Notes on the Meaning of Vimalakīrti sutra*. 《維摩義記·卷六》 (T38:492c).

This paper attempts to compare the Buddhist doctrine of two truths with “phenomenological distinctions.” Here I understand under “phenomenological distinctions” those distinctions which are crucial for the theoretical basis of the respective phenomenological doctrines. But before these distinctions can be handled, let me first clarify what I mean by phenomenology in this paper. In our common understanding, phenomenology refers to the school of thought founded by Husserl and further developed by Heidegger and others. However, in this paper, I am proposing to broaden the conception of phenomenology to include two major figures of Western philosophy, namely, Kant and Hegel. There are two kinds of reasons for doing this, external reasons as well as internal reasons.

External reasons: It is well-known that Kant went through a decade long “meditative period” before he finally published his magnum opus *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*. Yet, we learn from Kant’s correspondence that at the beginning of or even before this period he was planning to write a major work on the topic “The Boundaries between Sensibility and Reason” (*Die Grenzen der Sinnlichkeit und der Vernunft*). From the overview described by Kant, we see that if the book were to finish as planned, it would have been structurally equivalent to a combined volume of all three *Critiques* he subsequently published. Under the first, “theoretical part”, Kant planned to include “phenomenology in general” and metaphysics.⁴² From this we can reason that the so-called “phenomenology in general” refers in fact to what Kant subsequently called “transcendental analytic”, that part of the first *Kritik* which is supposedly the epoch-making and most important part (at least in the eyes of the Marburg School). From this we can justifiably argue that putting Kant’s work under a broader concept of phenomenology is at least not against Kant’s own will. As with Hegel, the mere fact that he named his first major work *Phänomenologie des Geistes* makes it rather safe for us to refile the same claim. However, if we feel uneasy to blur the concept of phenomenology by including these “pre-phenomenological” doctrines, then all we need to do is to mention the fact that taking such a broad understanding of phenomenology was also in line with Husserl. In a letter written to Dietrich Mahnke, Husserl pointed out that phenomenology is in fact “the first entelechy of German philosophy, the philosophy of ‘German Idealism’.”⁴³

⁴² See Kant’s letter to Marcus Herz on 21 February 1772, *Kants Gesammelte Schriften (KGS)*, Band X, p. 129; here the term “phaenomologie überhaupt” was different in spelling than later usages. And in another even earlier letter to J.H. Lambert dated 2 September 1770, Kant also used the concept “phaenomologia generalis” to express the same thought, see *KGS*, Band X, p.96 [note also the spelling of the word “phaenomologie”]. At last we should note that Kant eventually gave up using the term phenomenology on such a high theoretical level, but in his late work *Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Naturwissenschaft* (1786), he still employed the term “Phänomenologie” to refer to problems related to natural motion under the category of modality, see *KGS*, Band IV, pp. 477, 558-560.

⁴³ Husserl’s original wordings were to relate phenomenology as “echte Entelechie der deutschen Philosophie, der des ‘deutschen Idealismus.’”. See *Edmund Husserl: Briefwechsel*, Band III, hrsg. von

Internal reasons: The first and foremost reason is that both Kant and Hegel have made extremely important conceptual distinctions on the highest theoretical level which are comparable both to distinctions made by Husserl and Heidegger and to the Buddhist doctrine. Secondly, their inclusion allows us to have more samples for our comparison so that the isomorphisms in theoretical strategies we are looking for will be more readily visible. Thirdly, this inclusion allows us to identify cardinal issues of the phenomenological movement which are more long-lasting in their significance.

With the inclusion of Kant and Hegel in to our comparison, a question arises: If we take the doctrine of “two truths” as the major conceptual distinction of Buddhism, is there any phenomenological distinction of comparable importance that we can single out? As we have hinted at in the outset, it is indeed difficult to spot out one common conceptual distinction which is generically accepted as cardinal throughout the phenomenological tradition. In fact it was because of this “shortage” that we have resorted to the present attempt of cross cultural comparison. Consequently, what we can do in the following is to scrutinize the four main figures separately, to see what conceptual distinctions were cardinal to their work, in the hope that some isomorphic relations which are philosophically significant might eventually pop up.

A. Kant’s Distinction between “Phaenomena” and “Noumena”

- a. In Kant’s philosophy, there are many important distinctions, but if we are to name the most cardinal one, then I would no doubt opt for the distinction between “phaenomena and noumena”, which has its origin in Plato. It is commonplace that, due to Parmenides’ influence, Plato showed a preference for the transcendent world of ideas to the sensible world of experience. In his famous “simile of the divided line” (*Republic*), Plato proposed a tetra-division of being and knowledge. In this tetra-division, the lower two were collectively described as sensible world (kosmos horaton, ὁραόμενον) and the upper two “intelligible world” (kosmos noeton, νοούμενον).⁴⁴ What Plato called sensible world can also be called “phenomenon”, a famous example being Aristotle’s attempt of the “rescue of phenomena” in the face of Plato’s relative neglect of it. For Kant, the reiteration of this distinction of old is of the greatest theoretical importance. This can be judged by the fact that the chapter bearing the title “The Ground of the Distinction of all Objects in general into Phenomena und Noumena” was made the concluding chapter of the “Transcendental Analytic,” which is that part of the First *Critique*

Karl Schumann (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1994), p.432., cited in Rudolf Haller’s review of *Husserl’s Briefwechsel* [...], *Grazer Philosophische Studien*, volume 52, 1996-97, pp. 227-236. For more discussion on this point, see Tze-wan Kwan “Periodization and Nomenclature in the Historiography of Western Philosophy”, in 《現代哲學》(*Xiandai Zhexue*), No. 81, (No. 2, 2005) Guangzhou, Zhongshan University, 2005.04, pp. 69-90.

⁴⁴ See Plato, *Republic*, Book VI, 508c, 509d etc.

that corresponds by and large to what Kant depicted earlier as “phenomenology in general.” From the theoretical point of view, the most important thing is that in reiterating his distinction of old, Kant clearly declares that it is phenomena which are to be regarded as “real”, whereas noumena are only “problematic.”⁴⁵ From a philosophical-historical point of view, this maneuver of Kant amounts to a drastic and conclusive rehabilitation of the experiential or phenomenal realm two millennia after the Platonic legacy. This I think will have a lot to do with the emphasis of and high regard for the terms *Phänomen* and *Phänomenologie* in the subsequent development of Western philosophy.

- b. Besides the above distinction, Kant also introduced another distinction which is at least of comparable importance, the “empirical—transcendental” distinction. This second distinction differs from the first greatly because the two distinctions are not parallel to each other and are addressing two different orders of theoretical questions. Whereas the first distinction deals with an “assignment of reality”, the second distinction deals with the transcendental “justification” of that kind of reality Kant is now arguing for. Strategically speaking, the purpose of distinguishing between the empirical and the transcendental is to give justification for the realm of “phenomena” or experience. Kant’s position is that we have to stand firmly on the “fruitful Bathos” of empirical fact, and then follow the “clues” (*Leitfaden*) provided by the “combinations” (*Verbindungen*) as shown in our experience to retrospectively argue for the necessity of a “transcendental realm”, which is nothing other than the *a priori* “conditions of possibilities” of the “combined” experience as we actually come across in our everyday world. This second distinction can also be elaborated as the distinction between “empirical reality” and “transcendental ideality,” which are in fact a pair of mutually dependent principles that explain how human knowledge comes about. In fact, what Kant calls *Transzendentalphilosophie* is founded basically on this second distinction. Concretely speaking, “empirical reality” and “transcendental ideality” must be affirmed together, i.e., *in toto*. Here, the principle of empirical reality requires that, if we try to assert the reality of experience, what we should be asserting is precisely “things” as they appear to us and not as they are in themselves. In other words, the reality Kant is arguing for is precisely not that kind of transcendent reality conceived by Plato, but the certainty of immediate experience as such. But in order to avoid the impasse of Humean skepticism, Kant supplements empirical reality with transcendental ideality, which accounts from the very start for the conditions of possibility of the synthetic combinations of

⁴⁵ See Tze-wan Kwan, “On Kant's real/problematic distinction between Phaenomena and Noumena”, in: *Tunghai Journal*, (東海學報) Vol.26, 1985, pp.173-209.

experience which Hume found so difficult to deal with. However, in order to avoid the dogmatic assertion of rationalism, Kant declares that the transcendental conditions of possibility of experience (forms of intuition and arguably also the categories of understanding) are only ideal (i.e., not real), in the sense that apart from their role in supplying such conditions for the empirically real, they “are nothing”, i.e., they do not pertain to any independent existence.⁴⁶

- c. Kant’s transcendental philosophy allows us to acknowledge and handle with experience “as such”, i.e., in the way they are presented to us. In order to feel certain about phenomenal experience, we indeed can conceive that it is made possible through various external and internal conditions. But for Kant, these conditions can never be absolutely and exclusively determined, at least not through our own finite intelligence. Therefore, *externally*, Kant only talks about objects as such but not objective existence⁴⁷; *internally*, when Kant talks about the human subject, what he is dealing with are function (*Funktionen*), activities (*Tätigkeiten, Handlungen*), or uses (*Gebräuche*), but never a mind substance or an independently existing subject. Compared with the subjectivists after him, Kant’s philosophical position is a much more humble one.
- d. While Kant was so stringent about objective and subjective existence in his theoretical philosophy, his position in practical philosophy appeared at first glance to be a much looser one, for here he did make allowance for the immortality of the soul, for the freedom of will, and for the existence of God. But these three are for Kant only “postulates of pure practical reason.” In other words, they are not valid as “theoretical dogmas,” but as “presuppositions of necessarily practical import”⁴⁸ of humankind as a moral agent who needs these postulates to deal with his own weaknesses in moral practices. After all, the objectively and subjectively absolute are for Kant what finite human understanding cannot presumptuously determine.
- e. Of the two distinctions mentioned above, while the second distinction between “empirical” and “transcendental” is theoretically more complex, it is the first distinction between “phenomena” and “noumena” which is more fundamental. For without the first distinction, the second would be pointless. This is because the second distinction is in place only to provide justification for the “phenomenal”, which Kant attempts to rehabilitate by drawing the first distinction. As with the “noumenal” side of the first distinction, Kant’s intention seems to be one that assigns it to the realm of “problema”, “projection”, and “postulates”, which are necessitated only from the human point of view as a result of human finitude. This

⁴⁶ Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, A28/B44.

⁴⁷ For Kant, the final origin of manifolds should be left undetermined. See Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, B145.

⁴⁸ Kant, *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*, KGS, Band V, p. 132. english translation by L.W. Beck.

humanistic interest behind Kant's distinctions renders the role he played in the phenomenological tradition unmistakable.

- f. If we use the Buddhist doctrines of two truths as a measuring rod, we can say that Kant's phenomena-noumena distinction is very similar both in form and content to the two-truth distinction of the Sarvāstivāda School. This is because Kant's distinction between phenomena (the real) and noumena (the problematic) is formally speaking a distinction in regard to truth assignments. However, in terms of the outcomes of the distinction, the Sarvāstivāda distinction between the unreal nature of phenomenal experience and the real nature of the "minutest" is much more akin to Plato or even Democritus than to Kant, who in fact turned the truth assignment up-side-down. But with this assignment of phenomena to the real and noumena to the problematic (projected), Kant's distinction proved itself to be much more epoche-making for the subsequent development of modern Western philosophy than what the Sarvāstivāda distinction has been for the subsequent development of Buddhism. Furthermore, although Kant's "phenomena-noumena" distinction resembles the Sarvāstivāda distinction in form, the notion of empirical reality implied by his "empirical-transcendental" distinction conveyed an insight into the "suchness" (如如) of the world of experience which can only be found in Mahāyāna Buddhism. More concretely expressed, although Kant assigned "reality" (being) to the empirical and "ideality" to the transcendental, he showed no traces of any steadfastness on the extremes of either reality or ideality: externally he was not anxious about proving the independent existence of things, internally he did not make any presumptuous attempt to prove the existence of an absolute subject. Rather, he remained content with the grounding of human experience as such and of human intellectual activities as such. This style of philosophizing, according to my opinion, still exhibits certain uniqueness, which Western philosophy and philosophy in general can learn from.

B. Hegel's Distinction between "Consciousness" and "Spirit"

- a. If phenomenon in Kant refers to human experience, phenomenon in Hegel refers to a very different domain, namely, to Spirit (*Geist*). This can be testified by the very title of Hegel's first major work "*Phänomenologie des Geistes*," which according to Hegel's original plan should bear the title/subtitle of "*Wissenschaft der Erfahrung des Bewusstseins*."⁴⁹ Correspondingly, if we are to name a cardinal distinction in Hegel's system, we will have no better choice than the distinction

⁴⁹ In some copies of the *Phänomenologie* printed by Hegel, „*Erster Teil. Wissenschaft der Erfahrung des Bewusstseins*“ was indeed included as a subtitle. Although this subtitle no longer exists in today's versions, the very wordings can still be found in the "introduction." See Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, Suhrkamp-Werke, Band 3, see "Einleitung", p.79.

between “consciousness” and “Spirit.” In Hegel’s philosophy, the relation between consciousness and Spirit has been a very subtle one, for they are in one sense “non-identical” and in another “non-dual”, or they are at once “not the same” and “the same”, which somehow violates the principle of non-contradiction in formal logic. In this cardinal distinction, consciousness refers to “natural consciousness” or that of our everyday existence, and Spirit refers to what Hegel called “Absolute Spirit” (or “das Absolute,” ontologically considered).⁵⁰ Consciousness and Spirit are not the same because while consciousness reflects some particular points of view, Spirit represents the view of “absolute knowledge”. Consciousness and Spirit are on the other hand “the same” (or non-dual, *advaita*) because Hegel thinks that all particular consciousnesses and their views are engendered from and engulfed in the self-sameness of the Absolute according to its “internal purposiveness”. While the Absolute (knowledge) as the summation of all existence and views is capable of viewing the entire existence through its absolute vantage point, it also requires the various stages of consciousness to unfold and display themselves one after the other according to its absolute plan, the purpose of which is to allow the Absolute to enjoy the riches of the whole range of existence from the manifold views which are characteristic of them.⁵¹ This arrangement of the Absolute Spirit to gain self-knowledge of its own entirety by self-degradation into particular consciousnesses is what Hegel called the “cunning of [absolute] reason” (*List der Vernunft*).⁵²

b. This non-duality, or in Hegel’s own word, *Sichselbstgleichheit*⁵³ or self-sameness of consciousness and Spirit, can only be fully understood from the point of view of the Absolute Spirit; from the points of view of individual consciousnesses, however, owing to their bondage to their own perspectives, their self-sameness with the Absolute Spirit is but not immediately transparent to them. However, as Hegel in his *Phänomenologie des Geistes* painstakingly showed, consciousness can step by step free itself from this bondage by gaining insight into its own one-sidedness (*Einseitigkeit*) and by negating it. Although Hegel described this process of self-education of consciousness as full of doubt and even as a “highway of despair”, he did consider consciousness as capable of arriving gradually at a turning point (*Punkt*)⁵⁴ where the programme of Absolute Spirit becomes clear.

⁵⁰ Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, p. 70f.

⁵¹ Jizang shows the same attitude of leaving room for common understanding to hold its own truth. See his word 「於凡是有名俗諦故，萬法不失。」 Jizang, *PDMD*, 《大乘玄論·卷一》(T45: 23b).

⁵² Hegel, *Wissenschaft der Logik II*, Suhrkamp, Band 6, p. 452; 另參見 *Enzyklopädie... (Lesser Logic)*, §209, Suhrkamp, Band 8, p. 365.

⁵³ Hegel, *Wissenschaft der Logik I*, Suhrkamp, Band 5, p. 212; *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, p. 53.

⁵⁴ Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, Einleitung, p. 81. For discussion see Otto Pöggeler, “Die Komposition der *Phänomenologie des Geistes*”, in: *Hegel-Studien*, Beiheft 3, Hegel-Tage, Royaumont 1964, Bonn 1966.

This process of semi-conscious approach to Spirit has been depicted by Hegel with the Kantian notion of “deduction” (*Deduktion*).⁵⁵

- c. A comparison of Hegel’s philosophy with Buddhism shows a lot of isomorphisms, although by definition these isomorphisms are only formal in nature. In the first place, Hegel’s consciousness-Spirit distinction is very similar to the Buddhist distinction between worldly and real truths, especially the more sophisticated versions as expounded in the Mahāyāna teachings. In a sense, consciousness and Spirit represent the two perspectives of the ordinary man and the Absolute, which are very akin to Jizang’s “for-truths.” This juxtaposition of perspectives is what Kant did not emphasize.⁵⁶ The distinction between consciousness and Spirit is a distinction between the ordinary mind and the mind of the sage. In fact, Kojève has precisely used the notion of “sage” (Wise Man) to depict the vantage point of Absolute Spirit.⁵⁷ Furthermore, Hegel’s idea of the “self-sameness” of consciousness and Spirit is also comparable, at least formally, to the Buddhists’ attempt to combine the two truths into the one truth of the middle way.
- d. Besides the cardinal distinction between consciousness and Spirit, there is in Hegel’s philosophy another highly related distinction that deserves our attention. This involves not a bifurcation, but a tripartition, described by Hegel as the “three moments of the logical,” which are nothing but three basic modes of thought. In his *Lesser Logic*, Hegel defined these three moments as follows: “(α) the Abstract side, or that of the understanding: (β) the Dialectical, or that of negative reason: (γ) the Speculative, or that of positive reason.”⁵⁸ From the comparative point of view, this tripartition of the “logical” or modes of thought happens to be very similar in form to the doctrine of the three self-natures (三自性) of the Yogācāra tradition, namely, *parikalpitaḥ-svabhāva* (遍計所執性), *paratantra-svabhāva* (依他起性), and *pariṇiṣpanna-svabhāva* (圓成實性).⁵⁹ As far as the form is concerned, these two schemes of distinction are nearly parallel to each other, for they both have to do with the development of the mind from stages of attachment or bondage to one-sided views, through stages of doubt and self-reflection, to the

⁵⁵ Hegel, *Wissenschaft der Logik*, , Band 5, p. 43. Here Hegel characterized his programme of a *Phänomenologie des Geistes* as „Deduktion“.

⁵⁶ Kant only emphasizes the perspective of the human. The possible perspective of the “noumenal” is not juxtaposed, but only problematically “projected” from the human perspective. According to Kant, despite its “logical possibility”, the perspective of the noumenal has to be “restricted”.

⁵⁷ Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction à la Lecture de Hegel* (Paris: Gallimard, 1947, rep. 1968), p. 449ff.

⁵⁸ Hegel, *Enzyklopädie... (Lesser Logic)*, §79, Suhrkamp, Band 8, p. 168; for more explanation of the three “moments”, see §80-82.

⁵⁹ The three self-natures were extensively discussed in the Yogācāra tradition, the most eminent source being the *Sutra of the Explication of the Underlying Meaning* (Samdhinirmocana-sūtra) 《解深密經·卷二》 (T16: 693b-694a); Vasubandhu, *Thirty Verses on Consciousness-only* (Trimśikāvijñaptimātratāsiddhi) 《唯識三十論頌》 (T31: 61a); and Vasubandhu, *Analysis of the Middle and the Extremes* (Madhyāntavibhāga-bhāṣya) 《辯中邊論》 (T31: 470a), etc.

- final stage of enlightenment of “absolute” knowledge. Another interesting thing is that although the “three moments of the logical” is a tripartition, it is but perfectly compatible with the consciousness-Spirit bifurcation, just as the doctrine of three self-natures is perfectly compatible with the doctrine of two truths in Buddhism. With the same token, Hegel’s dialectics in the broad sense and the manifold two-truth structures of the various Mahāyāna schools are both rich in heuristic meaning, whether for the speculative philosopher or for the Buddhist practitioner.
- e. But as soon as we put these formal isomorphisms of Hegel’s philosophy and Buddhism aside and look closer into their theoretical concerns and contents, we notice immediately that these two systems of thought are drastically different. Basically, despite the discrepancies among the various Buddhist schools, they more or less share the same ultimate aim of final enlightenment or nirvana, which suggests a way of life on earth that detaches human beings from worldly bondage and sufferings. By contrast, Hegel’s philosophy aims at the systematic construction of the entire creation which it professes to summarize from the perspective of the Absolute Mind. In this way, Hegel’s system turns out to be the integration and identification of Thinking and Being, or of Subject and Object, the most paramount project ever undertaken in the history of Western philosophy. This theoretical outcome, however, has become highly controversial, and the most important query has been whether the absolutized objective idealism of Hegel would not lead to a closed system which would be a restriction for the future development of philosophy. Among many of such criticisms, we found voices from leading figures such as Gadamer and Ricoeur.⁶⁰

C. Husserl’s distinction between the mundane-natural and the transcendental-phenomenological

- a. Husserl’s thought has seen many changes. But if I have to name the most important conceptual distinction for his entire legacy, I would focus on his later position and name his distinction between “natural” and “phenomenological” as his signature idea. Since a related distinction is that between “mundane” and

⁶⁰ Gadamer’s and Ricoeur’s skeptical attitude towards Hegel can be seen from the following dialogue between the two. See Paul Ricoeur, Hans-Georg Gadamer, “General Discussion: The Conflict of Interpretations”, *Phenomenology: Dialogues and Bridges*, edited by Bruzina and Wilshire (Albany: SUNY Press, 1982), pp. 299-320. Here I am quoting the most relevant passages: 1. Gadamer: “About Hegel, I have my reservations, but in my contribution here I tried to find a way of overcoming the Hegelian end-point [...]” (p. 314). 2. Ricoeur: “I am entirely on the side of Prof. Gadamer when he says that we have to do without a philosophy of absolute knowledge. This is in fact the lament of modern philosophy, that we have to raise Hegelian problems without the Hegelian solution. Each time we speak of negation, of dialectics, we are in fact the heirs of the system in ruins. In a sense, I perceive phenomenology, existential philosophy, and hermeneutics as an attempt to do the promised rational job in this situation of the impossibility of the system, and with the limiting idea not of there being something an sich, but simply agreement.” (p. 319)

“transcendental,” so we can conjoin the two distinctions and speak of a juxtaposition of “mundane nature” and “transcendental phenomenology” in Husserl. This distinction is so important that nearly all of Husserl’s central ideas are derived from it, as, for instance, the “transcendental reduction,” the “noesis-noema” distinction, transcendental subjectivity, constitution, etc.

- b. With our earlier discussion of the Buddhist doctrine of two truths as a backdrop, we can say that Husserl’s cardinal distinction between “mundane nature” and “transcendental phenomenology”⁶¹ is higher in order than Kant’s “phenomena-noumena” distinction or “empirical-transcendental” distinction. To use Jizang’s words, Husserl’s distinction is one drawn between two “for-truths”, i.e., between two “attitudes” (*Einstellungen*), between which a tension is formed. More importantly, for Husserl, the main task of transcendental phenomenology is to first stand on the grounds of “mundane nature”, but then perform a “change of attitude” (*Einstellungsänderung*) in order to get at the realm of “transcendental phenomenology”, from which vantage point the meaning of mundane nature is revealed as being “constituted” by the transcendental subject. In this regard, we can argue that Husserl’s cardinal distinction is much closer to Hegel than to Kant, the difference is only that in Husserl we don’t find the dialectical-speculative flavours characteristic of Hegel.
- c. Regarding the theory of “constitution”, it must be clarified that although this word is derived from Kant, Kant’s position is totally different from that of Husserl. In fact Kant has used the word mainly in the adjectival form: “constitutive”.⁶² “Constitutive” is used by Kant to depict those principles of the human mind which are “determinate” either for theoretical knowledge or for practical morality.⁶³ Although Husserl started using the word *konstitutiv* and *Konstitution* following the Kantian legacy, his subsequent usage of the word, especially in his “genetic” phenomenology, focused more and more on the verbal forms such as “*konstituiert*”, “*konstituieren*”, and even “*konstituierend...*”⁶⁴ (present continuous tense) with the clear intention to use the word to signify the power of the transcendental subject. A good example is the mention of the subject as “life and achievement that constitute totality” which was in German “*das Ganze*

⁶¹ Of course this pair of terms are my own constructions based on Husserl’s terminologies.

⁶² This applies at least to all his three *Critiques*, in which the abstract noun *Constitution* was never used, not to mention the verbal forms of the word such as *constitui(e)rt*, *constitui(e)ren*, or even *constitui(e)rend*, which later filled up Husserl’s main work. Although Kant’s later works do contain such verbal constructions, they are used in various context like politics, law, material nature, theology etc., and never explicitly as a predicate for the human subject. But we also need to note that Kant did use the related notion of *bestimmend* and *reflektierend* in the verbal form.

⁶³ See Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, B296, 537, 647, 699; *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*, KGS Band V, p. 135.

⁶⁴ See *inter alia*, Husserl, *CM*, p.100; *FTL*, p. 253.

konstituierende Leben und Leisten.”⁶⁵ Furthermore, while Kant is supplementing and limiting “konstitutiv” with “regulativ”⁶⁶, which has only a reflective and not determinate role, Husserl makes no distinction of this kind, resulting thus in the predominance of the theory of constitution as described above.

- d. Husserl’s phenomenology started with a descriptive phase, yet after the so-called transcendental turn, which is very different from Kantian transcendentalism, Husserl became more and more inclined to establish a philosophy based on the constituting activities of the transcendental subject. Although Husserl showed no tendency to follow Hegelian speculation, his attempt to establish an “ultimately functioning-accomplishing subject”⁶⁷, or some sense of “absolute subject”⁶⁸, is still unmistakable. This explains why in his *Formale und transzendente Logik* he even made the following overtly idealistic statement about his programme: “Absolute grounding of cognition is possible only in the all-embracing science of the transcendental subjectivity, as the one absolute existent.”⁶⁹ As an aftermath of the Cartesian tradition, Husserl’s theory of transcendental subjectivity has brought Western philosophy to a new height, but in the eyes of those subsequent thinkers, Heidegger in particular, who became convinced that the theory of subjectivity might bring about serious consequences, this programme of the later Husserl unavoidably has to face revision and criticism.
- e. If we go deeper into Heidegger’s criticism of Husserl, we see that this criticism was directed not so much at the concept of subjectivity itself, as at the over-estimation of man’s place in nature, which Heidegger thought was implied in the Husserlian theory. This intricate relationship between Husserl and Heidegger was succinctly described by Eugen Fink, who was in close contact with the two masters in the middle of their conflict. Fink related that Husserl’s and Heidegger’s ways went more and more asunder because while Husserl was aiming at the “infinite”, Heidegger tried by all means to abide by the “finite”, in order not to “deify humanity.”⁷⁰ Against this backdrop, we can more readily understand why

⁶⁵ Husserl, *Krisis*, p.209

⁶⁶ Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, B222, 644, 699; *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, KGS, Band V, pp. 375ff, 396f, 401, 453.

⁶⁷ Husserl, *Krisis*, p.185, note especially the present-continuous constructions in German: “letztlich fungierend-leistende Subjekt(e).”

⁶⁸ See Husserl’s Wiener Vortrag on “Die Krisis...”, *Husserliana*, Band VI, pp. 346-7.

⁶⁹ Husserl, subtitle of §103 of his *Formale und transzendente Logik*, 1929, p.240; engl. Cairns, p.271; *Husserliana* Band XVII, p.278. The German text is: “Absolute Erkenntnisbegründung ist nur in der universalen Wissenschaft von der transzendentalen Subjektivität als dem einzigen absolut Seienden möglich”. In the following passage of the same section, Husserl even mimicked Hegel by describing “transcendental subjectivity” as “alone [...] exists ‘in itself and for itself’” (Sie aber ist allein “in sich und für sich...” p.241; Engl. Cairns, p.273). Consequently, it was precisely this attitude that has aroused Heidegger’s all-out criticisms. See Heidegger, *Zur Sache des Denkens*, p. 70.

⁷⁰ See Eugen Fink, “Welt und Geschichte”, *Husserl et la Pensée moderne*, *Phaenomenologica* 2 (Den Haag: Nijhoff, 1959), pp. 155-156. see also Dorion Cairns, *Conversation with Husserl and Fink* (The

after the “shipwreck” (*Scheitern*) of “Being and Time” Heidegger turned to Kant (because of his finite attitude) to find his “refuge” (*Zuflucht*)⁷¹ to the extent that he even tried to “desubjectify”⁷² Kant in order to fit Kant into his evolving programme, and why Husserl was so disappointed after reading Heidegger’s *Kant-Buch*.⁷³ It also explains why Heidegger in his late work put Husserl and Hegel together in the same basket while launching his severe criticism on their theories of subjectivity.⁷⁴

D. Heidegger on “Urphänomen”—From “Two Truths” to “One Truth”

- a. Well-known for his neologisms, Heidegger was mocked by Husserl for playing with word magic (*Wortzauberei*).⁷⁵ Already in *Sein und Zeit*, Heidegger has introduced a host of important conceptual pairs which were crucial for the understanding of his thought: *Sein-Seiendes*, *ontisch-ontologisch*, *phänomenal-phänomenologisch*, *eigentlich-uneigentlich*, etc. But if I am now to single out the most fundamental conceptual distinction for Heidegger, then none of the above mentioned distinctions would seem suitable, because without detriment to their relevance and importance in various theoretical contexts, they simply fall short of that kind of characteristicum which might sufficiently distinguish Heidegger’s unique position from that of his great phenomenological predecessors.
- b. In comparison to his earlier thoughts which were usually described as “hermeneutical phenomenology”, Heidegger’s later thoughts exhibited a strongly mystical tendency. To characterize this phase of his thought, Heidegger himself has suggested the term “tautological thinking”, which he depicted as “the original

Hague: Nijhoff, 1976), p.25.

⁷¹ See Heidegger, *Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik*, preface to 4th edition.

⁷² For Heidegger’s changing attitude of Kant, see the following two papers: 1) Hansgeorg Hoppe, „Wandlungen in der Kant-Auffassung Heideggers“, in: *Durchblicke. Martin Heidegger zum 80. Geburtstag*, (ed.) Vittorio Klostermann (Frankfurt/Main: Klostermann, 1970), pp. 284-317. 2) Daniel Dahlstrom: “Heidegger’s Kantian turn: Notes to his Commentary on the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*”, in: *Review of Metaphysics*, Vol. 45, 1991, pp.329-361.

⁷³ Heidegger’s position in the *Kant-Buch* was so different from Husserl’s that after reading the *Kant-Buch*, Husserl on his part has expressed his strong disapproval with the following words written on the margins of his own copy: “... Die 'Geworfenheit' des Ich ist nicht seine Endlichkeit, seine Nichtabsolutheit. Das Absolute ist das *Weltkonstituierende*, und sich selbst immanent *Konstituierende* etc.” [italics are mine]; and also: “Was ist die Unendlichkeit gegenüber der Endlichkeit. Warum überhaupt die Rede von Endlichkeit... was aber ein Widersinn ist.” Quoted from Iso Kern, *Husserl und Kant. Eine Untersuchung über Husserls Verhältnis zu Kant und zum Neukantianismus* (Den Haag: Nijhoff, 1974), pp. 130-131.

⁷⁴ Martin Heidegger, “Das Ende der Philosophie und die Aufgabe des Denkens”, *Zur Sache des Denkens* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1976), p. 61ff., p.70. Here, Heidegger remarked clearly: “Und welches ist die Sache der philosophischen Forschung? Sie ist für Husserl wie für Hegel gemäss der selben Überlieferung die Subjektivität des Bewusstseins.” For further discussion, see Tze-wan Kwan, “Hegelian and Heideggerian Tautologies”, *Analecta Husserliana*, Vol. 88 (Dordrecht: Springer, 2005), pp. 317-336.

⁷⁵ Cairns, *ibid.*, p. 107. If we believe in Cairns’ report, Husserl could have even criticized Heidegger’s work as leading to “verbal decadence” (*Wortentartung*).

meaning of phenomenology”.⁷⁶ Bearing in mind such emphasis Heidegger has invested on the term “tautology” as an etiquette for the final outlook of his thought, should we look into this very term for our “answer” to the question concerning the most fundamental Heideggerian distinction?

- c. If the basic purpose of phenomenology is to allow “phenomena” or “*Sachen selbst*” to show themselves, what phenomena or what “*Sachen selbst*” are supposed to be the most important? Regarding this question, there seems to be great discrepancies among the major phenomenologists: for Kant, it should be “phenomenal experience”, for Hegel “Absolute spirit”, for Husserl “transcendental subjectivity”, and for Heidegger, it should arguably be “Being”. While Heidegger at the time of *Sein und Zeit* was still not very sure about how “Being” should be handled and has shifted his focus to the problem of *Dasein* instead, the later Heidegger became readily convinced that “Being” as “appropriation” (*Ereignis*)⁷⁷ is in fact that all encompassing wholeness, which simply “is” as the primal event that evades any reasoning (*ohne Warum*, without why). Being in this sense has been described by Heidegger as *Sach-Verhalt*⁷⁸, as *Ur-Sache*⁷⁹, or, following Goethe, as *Urphänomen*.⁸⁰
- d. In order to emphasize the comprehensiveness and uniqueness of such a holistic *Urphänomen* of Being as Appropriation, the later Heidegger consistently used notions such as “simple oneness” and “singularity”; or, if “singularity” is not strong enough to offset multiplicity, he even employed the word “only” (*einzig*) to underline the exclusiveness of this very singularity⁸¹, which is the Same (τὸ αὐτό) and the only thing being talked about. Likewise, when Heidegger talks about the *Sach-Verhalt* or about *Ereignis*, he refers to them (or better put, it) as “absolutely singular” (*das schlechthin Singuläre*)⁸², or as *singulare tantum*⁸³, which is a Latin word which already entails the notion of “only”. In the following citation, we see how all these work together when the cardinal concept of *Ereignis* is discussed: “The word appropriation (*Ereignis*) here no longer means what we would otherwise call a happening, an occurrence. It now is used as a *Singulare*

⁷⁶ Heidegger, *Vier Seminare* (Frankfurt/Main: Klostermann, 1977), p.137. “...das Denken, dem hier nachgedacht wird, nenne ich das tautologische Denken. Das ist der ursprüngliche Sinn der Phänomenologie.”

⁷⁷ See Otto Pöggeler, “Sein als Ereignis”, *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung*, Band 13 (Meisenheim/Glan: Hain, 1959), pp. 597-632.

⁷⁸ Heidegger, *ZSD*, p. 20.

⁷⁹ Heidegger, *ZSD*, p. 72.

⁸⁰ Heidegger, *ZSD*, p. 72. In Goethe’s *Werke*, the word “*Urphänomen(e)*” appeared no less than ten times

⁸¹ See Heidegger, *Beiträge zur Philosophie*. Here Heidegger speaks of “the uniqueness of *Seyn*” (*Einzigkeit des Seyns*), Gesamtausgabe, Band 65, p. 73; *ID*, p. 29.

⁸² Heidegger, “Der Spruch des Anaximanders”, *Holzwege* (Frankfurt/Main: Klostermann, 1972), p. 318. Young and Haynes have translated the term as “singular as such”, which is also fine.

⁸³ *Identität und Differenz*, p. 29, 54.

tantum. What it indicates appropriates only in the singular (*Einzahl*), nay, not even in terms of a number any longer, but the only (*einzig*).”⁸⁴ Heidegger’s preference for the one, the singular, and the only reminds us of Parmenides’ characterization of Being (εἶναι) as τὸ ἓν (the One), and the Parmenidean dictum τὸ αὐτό acquires in Heidegger a completely new presence.⁸⁵

- e. In Heidegger’s tautological phase, one remarkable linguistic feature of his thought was his extensive use of what I have elsewhere described as a “tautological formula”, which is nothing but the strategy of defining a term simply by converting the definiendum from substantive to verbal form to make it the definiens.⁸⁶ So when Heidegger has to say something about “thing”, “world”, “language”, “space”, or “Being”, he actually resorted to put them as “*das Ding dingt*”, “*die Welt weltet*”, “*die Sprache spricht*”, “*der Raum räumt ein*”, “*das Seyn west*” (“*wesen*” being described as the verb of Being).
- f. Heidegger’s tautological thinking is in one respect very similar to Hegelian philosophy, for both try to reflect upon a primal, all encompassing and ultimate being or event. What is different is that while Hegel considers this primal event as guided by an internal purposiveness which can become transparent from an absolute point of view, Heidegger on the contrary is convinced that this primal phenomenon is to the last analysis not accountable by reason. While Absolute Spirit is for Hegel the pinnacle of infinitude, Heidegger reflected not only upon human finitude, but finitude of Being itself.⁸⁷
- g. Being himself a great master in making conceptual distinctions, Heidegger in the final phase of his thought gave up making distinctions altogether and opted for the “one truth”, which, according to him, can only be “apprehended” or “*erörtert*”, but not rationally explained. Heidegger’s restriction of the role of language is very similar to the Buddhist’s notion of the “forgetfulness of speech and extinction of thought.” Simply in regard to the form, the tautological thinking of Heidegger gives us at first glance the impression, that it is comparable to the “first true of the middle way” in Buddhism. But is this comparison really a justifiable one? This is a question for which I have a lot of doubts, but I will explain later.

IV. Conclusion: Between “Two Truths” and “Two Extremes”

⁸⁴ *Identität und Differenz*, p. 29. “Das Wort Ereignis meint hier nicht mehr das, was wir sonst irgendein Geschehnis, ein Vorkommnis nennen. Das Wort ist jetzt als Singulare tantum gebraucht. Was es nennt, ereignet sich nur in der Einzahl, nein, nicht einmal mehr in einer Zahl, sondern einzig.”

⁸⁵ For more discussions, see Tze-wan Kwan, “Hegelian and Heideggerian Tautologies”, op. cit.

⁸⁶ This strategy can be found roughly in *Sein und Zeit* in the dictum “*Zeitlichkeit zeitigt sich...*” (*SZ*, pp. 328ff.), but extensive use was obviously made only in the late Heidegger. For more discussion, see Tze-wan Kwan, “Hegelian and Heideggerian Tautologies”, op. cit.

⁸⁷ Regarding the finitude of Being, see Heidegger, *ZSD*, p. 53.

—Satya-dvaya or Anta-dvaya?

We have explained at the outset that the kind of comparison attempted in this paper is a very difficult one. This is because the basic concerns of phenomenological distinctions and the Buddhist doctrine of two truths are so disparate, that any pretentious claim on their relations could appear artificial and far-fetched. The main reason why we nonetheless have involved ourselves in such a comparison was our conviction that despite such disparateness in content, the “form” of arguments or the “form” of the construction of theories in phenomenology and in Buddhism could exhibit “isomorphisms”, which are nothing but similar theoretical/practical *strategies* in bringing forth what the two parties really concerned about. Now after the above brief survey of the traditions, we might draw a tentative balance sheet as follows:

- 1) The Buddhist doctrine of two truths and phenomenological distinctions are in the first place conceptual distinctions of the highest order. They serve to bring out the basic concerns of their respective traditions in the most pregnant manner. By comparing the Buddhist doctrine of two truths with phenomenological distinctions we must conclude that, *strategically* speaking, the former has been much more successful in focusing on the basic concerns of the Buddhist tradition, than has the latter for phenomenology. We see that the Buddhist tradition has over a span of two millennia maintained the one common, basic concern, namely, the ultimate enlightenment and deliverance of man in the midst of a world of interdependent origination. But in a much shorter span of about two centuries, the phenomenological tradition has produced utterly disparate conceptual distinctions addressing utterly different basic concerns. Of course, “phenomenon” remained the core of phenomenology in the broadest sense, but precisely, what does “phenomenon” mean? Which phenomena are the most fundamental ones? These are questions that remained controversial throughout. Therefore, even if we want to compare the phenomenological tradition to a big family, we must admit that the ties between members of this family are much looser than we might suppose.
- 2) Within the historical framework of this paper, Kant was the great-grand father of the family. It was in Kant that the status of phenomena was successfully rehabilitated. It was also in him that the relationship between external knowledge and the role of the human mind has been appropriately arbitrated. Kant was mindful of the inviolability of the boundaries between the various constitutive domains of human activities, but was flexible enough to make allowance for the possible fusion of such boundaries through the use of reflective-regulative judgment.
- 3) However, for Kant’s theoretically ambitious epigones, Hegel and Husserl in particular, Kant was too humble with his philosophical programme, and was complaint for being not radical enough to fathom the final sources of phenomena.

Therefore, it was not accidental that both Husserl and Hegel were, for different reasons, unhappy with Kant's treatment of "*Dinge an sich*." Hegel criticized Kant together with Hume the skepticist⁸⁸ because for Hegel Kant's theory was simply not "transparent" enough.⁸⁹ Unlike Kant, Hegel was determined to traverse all conceptual boundaries. In this regard, Hegel's dialectical-speculative system did show some similarities to the layered "two-truth" distinctions of Buddhism. However, despite these superficial similarities, we must point out that for Buddhism, the ascending schemes of two-truth distinctions are destined merely to relieve the practicing Buddhist from various sorts of biases and afflictions, and the final outcome should be a state of total freedom from such biases. But in Hegel, notwithstanding the dialectical movement of consciousness as supposedly a process of transcendence of one-sidedness, the final stage of the movement leads to the assertion of an Absolute being, which is from the Buddhist point of view the greatest "steadfastness on being" ever imaginable.

- 4) As with Husserl, while admitting his own work to be rooted in German Idealism, the final outcome of his transcendental phenomenology fell back on the footsteps of Hegel in an attempt to absolutize subjectivity. It was in this regard that Husserl and Hegel were most akin to each other. It is therefore perfectly understandable why Kojève asynchronously depicted Hegel's philosophical method as "phenomenological in Husserl's sense of the term,"⁹⁰ the only difference being that Husserl's method was without the speculative flavour. This affinity of Hegel and Husserl, as already mentioned above, induced Heidegger to criticize them together for their alleged frenzy for the infinite.
- 5) Heidegger has performed thorough reflections on some of the most fundamental questions of Western thought and culture. In so doing he has shown the greatest readiness to hook up with wisdoms of the East, including Taoism and Buddhism. Heidegger's subsequent abandonment of making distinctions for the sake of the "singular", unique, and "only" truth was the clearest indication of his "Eastern" connection.⁹¹ No one who has read the late, "tautological" Heidegger can mistake the fact that behind his mystical and somewhat misological thinking there is a claim to sublime wisdom, if not true wisdom itself.
- 6) In point of comparison, I said earlier that Heidegger's tautological thinking was

⁸⁸ In the *Lesser Logic*, Hegel put Kant and Hume together and criticized them in one move. See Hegel, *Lesser Logic*, §37f, §40f.

⁸⁹ In fact, Hegel has often used "*durchsichtig*" or even "*vollkommen durchsichtig*" to depict his own speculative system, which are expressions never used by Kant. See Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, Werke (Suhrkamp), Band 3, pp. 180-181, 321, 497; *Wissenschaft der Logik, II*, Band 6, pp. 214, 550.

⁹⁰ Kojève, *op. cit.*

⁹¹ For more discussion on Heidegger's Eastern connection, see Tze-wan Kwan, "Heidegger's 'Tautological Thinking' and Taoist Philosophy" (海德格的「同一性」思維與道家哲學), in *Phenomenology & the Human Sciences* 《現象學與人文科學》, Taipei, Vol. 2, 2005.12, pp. 211-259.

similar in form to the Buddhist teaching but was no comparison with it in spirit. Let me now explain why. As we have explained earlier, the Buddhist “middle way” is meant to prevent us from holding steadfast to either of the two extremes (whether to being or to emptiness) and to handle worldliness with expedient skills while remaining unattached to it. Against this measuring stick, we see precisely the shortfalls of Heidegger’s late thought. Generally speaking, the late Heidegger was trapped in the “tautological” deadlock. In this deadlock, he taught us to abide by the apprehension (*Vernehmung*) of the unspeakable, singular, but all encompassing truth (*Urphänomen*). In the name of “tautology”, Heidegger advocated the attitude of “thinking Being without beings.” This attitude, notwithstanding its intrinsic wisdom, could do harm to human understanding if over-exerted and unchecked. For the late Heidegger, “Being” became as rich and as empty in meaning as “Nothing.” Unlike the Buddhist ideal of “middle way”, which teaches us to be expedient with worldliness, Heidegger’s teaching of the “singular truth” is in a sense trapped in the extreme of holding steadfast to “emptiness”. In point of theory, I find it particularly lamentable that Heidegger’s criticism of the subject, though justified to some extent, was so much overdone that many positive and indispensable functions of the human subjectivity (including distinction making and responsibility taking) were left in jeopardy. In point of practice, Heidegger obviously fell short of that kind of expedient, worldly wisdom, which could have prevented him from making such wrong political judgments as what he has committed in his relationship with the Nazis.

- 7) As a historically bound system of thought, Kant’s philosophy unavoidably has its limitations. In terms of theory, Kant did not show that kind of ambition as Husserl’s attempt of *Letztbegründung* through transcendental subjectivity. He did not provide us with the dialectical-speculative vigour as did Hegel. His philosophy also appeared less charismatic and overwhelming than that of Heidegger (hermeneutical as well as tautological). As far as theory construction is concerned, Kant’s philosophy might seem more “primitive” than that of his epigones. But through the above comparison with the Buddhist doctrine of two truths, we discover in Kant’s philosophy a kind of poise which we miss in his successors. By this I mean Kant’s philosophy was so well-postured that it managed to free itself from those historical bondages, which troubled many of his contemporaries and epigones. Concretely speaking, although Kant was an important figure of modern philosophy, his thought exhibited the least “modernity”. Although strongly influenced by the enlightenment movement, he was able to keep “enlightenment reason” at arm’s length and to show deep reflections on reason’s functions and limits, and on its role in the midst of other intellectual powers of humankind.

Although Kant did talk about the “subject”, he did not over-exert its power, as did other members of the subjectivistic tradition. This is so because Kant acknowledged and abided by the basic fact of human finitude. But on the other hand he did not give up doing justice to the human subject and its functions despite its finitude. Therefore, in the subsequent waves of counter-enlightenment, of post-modernity, and of anti-subjectivity, which lingered until nowadays, Kant’s basic position remained the least vulnerable. All in all, in the whole course of the development of modern Western philosophy, Kant has occupied an irreplaceable *Sonderstellung*, a kind of poise or elegance of thought that I think has not been surpassed by any subsequent masters of the phenomenological tradition.

- 8) This *Sonderstellung* of Kant makes the attempt to map theoretical merits and “improvements” to historical sequences questionable. Compared with his epigones, the legacy of Kant did appear at first glance more “primitive”, or more Hīnayāna like. But on second thoughts, the Kantian system with its well-balanced poise is probably that very system of thought which is best comparable to the doctrine of the “middle way” characteristic of Mahāyāna wisdom. On the contrary, the overtly ambitious subjectivity theories of Hegel and Husserl on the one hand, and the inexpedient, tautological thinking of Heidegger on the other seem rather to have fallen prey precisely to the two extremes of ‘steadfastness’ on being and of nothingness. The distinction between “two truths” (二諦, *satya-dvaya*) belongs to the highest wisdom of Buddhism; the danger of the “two extremes” (二邊, *anta-dvaya*) is but the greatest threat to it. However, two truths and two extremes are theoretically so closely related and mutually transitional that for the Buddhist practitioner they are only separated by a hair’s breadth. With these lessons, we can say that the century old dictum “*Zurück zu Kant*” is probably still not outdated.
- 9) In the history of Buddhism, the doctrine of two truths has served as a means for founders of the various schools to better understand their own historical position in relation to their predecessors, as well as for reconciliation with them.⁹² Today we borrow this means for the better understanding of the various stages of the phenomenological movement as well as of their interrelationship. By tracing back to Kant emphasizing his *Sonderstellung*, I have not the least intention to render obsolete the achievements of Hegel, Husserl or Heidegger, whose contributions to philosophy are not to be questioned. Hegel’s insight into the dialectical and fluctuant nature of experience, Husserl’s concepts of horizon, intentionality, and

⁹² This is what has been known among Chinese Buddhist as *panjiao* (判教), or making judgment on the various schools of the Buddhist teaching. See also Yao Weiqun, “The Buddhist Doctrine of Two Truths and Its Historical Meaning” in *Religious Studies* 姚衛群：〈佛教的「二諦」理論及其歷史意義〉第四節，《宗教學研究》，1999年1期。Downloaded from 《國學網站》
<http://www.guoxue.com/www/xsxx/txt.asp?id=722>. (10 Sept. 2006)

life-world, and Heidegger's analysis of human Dasein und its temporality, etc. are all ingenious operative conceptual resources, or "open elements", which are indispensable for any future reiteration of phenomenology or even for philosophy in general. What we need to beware of is only that their philosophical programmes might lead to "extremes", which are to be avoided. These extremes might not be so conspicuous if our scope of attention is limited to the more recent developments. By reaching further back to Kant and by learning from Buddhism, we reveal before our eyes some lasting debates which are far from being settled, as, for instance, the role of the subject, its relation to the object and to the world, the dialectics of finitude and infinity, constitution and/or regulation, so on and so forth. These open questions prompt us to rethink the basic concerns of phenomenology and its future direction. It requires us to assess if we need to resume in a more focused manner discussions we have left behind long ago.

- 10) But while saying all these, we should not lose sight of the fact that from the Buddhist point of view, the entire phenomenological tradition is dealing mainly with the realm of *saṃskṛta dharma*. What are known to Buddhism as *asaṃskṛta dharma* are seldom touched upon by the West. For Buddhism, true enlightenment is much more a matter of real life practice and day to day struggle with biases than the contemplation of a theory which is complete in itself. From the Buddhist point of view, phenomenology has still a lot of biases to overcome before the right path to enlightenment could be found. With this word, I do not mean that Western people should necessarily accept the ultimate concern of Buddhism, i.e. deliverance towards nirvana. Nor am I suggesting that Buddhism itself is to the last analysis free from all biases. The comparison above would have fulfilled its role, if by way of mutual contrast (whether only in form or also in content) Buddhism and phenomenology can throw light upon each other leading to a more expedient understanding of our issues that are not as easily penetrable when seen from either side alone.

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