

Skill-In-Means, Fusion Philosophy, and the Requirements of Cosmopolitanism

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At various junctures in its history, Buddhist thought has adapted in inventive ways to accommodate important ideological features of the new cultural spheres with which it came into contact. The concept of “skill-in-means” (upāya-kausalya) played an important role in most of these syncretistic developments by facilitating critical reflexivity, doctrinal flexibility, and expositional creativity. It is surprising that a principle that has favored cross-cultural dialogue, co-integration, and hybridization throughout Buddhism’s history should elicit little interest amongst contemporary philosophers wishing to syncretize Anglo-American philosophy with precisely those Indian (and Indo-Tibetan) Buddhist philosophical traditions in which skill-in-means qua meta-doctrine features most prominently, that is, the various traditions falling under the broad banner of Madhyamaka. In this paper, I argue that failure to give due consideration to skill-in-means in “fusion philosophy” methodology and hermeneutics is expressive of lingering metaphilosophical parochialism in what ought to be—and may yet become—a more reflective and cosmopolitan field of research. I further argue that paying heed to skill-in-means makes it clear that, if “fusion” with Madhyamaka philosophical traditions really is the goal, then philosophers engaged in this project will have to expand their metaphilosophical horizons such as to respect and accommodate these traditions’ irreducibly therapeutic orientation.

Key words: skill-in-means; Indian Buddhist philosophy; Madhyamaka; fusion philosophy; cross-cultural philosophy; cosmopolitanism; philosophy as therapy; metaphilosophy

At various junctures in its history, Buddhist thought has adapted in inventive ways to accommodate important ideological features of the new cultural spheres with which it came into contact. This in turn allowed it to leave lasting imprints on various cultural *milieux* through processes of reciprocal co-integration and hybridization.¹ The concept of “skill-in-means” (*upāya-kausalya*)—which has been central to several Buddhist traditions’ philosophical praxis, self-understanding, and hermeneutics from the Buddha’s days onwards (Gombrich 2006, 2009; Keown 1998; Pye 2003; Visigalli 2016; Wynne 2010)²—played an important role in most of these syncretistic developments by facilitating critical reflexivity, doctrinal flexibility, and expositional creativity (Pye 2003: 125ff., 159).³

The concept of skill-in-means in the sense that interests us here⁴ covers three different albeit mutually supporting ideas. (1) As a *principle of pedagogical pragmatism*, skill-in-means justifies taking certain liberties with the way Buddhist doctrine is taught and discussed with respect to both form and content. (2) As *praxis-oriented meta-doctrine*, it states that Buddhist teachings ought to be conceived of as carefully tailored interventions designed to help members of their target audience break free from delusion and self-bondage. (3) As a *hermeneutical principle*, finally, skill-in-means highlights the importance of considering the pedagogical-*cum*-therapeutic context in which a theoretical claim is made, argument deployed, or concept put forward when interpreting a given Buddhist teaching.

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philosophers wishing to syncretize Anglo-American philosophy and precisely those Indian (and Indo-Tibetan) Buddhist philosophical traditions in which skill-in-means *qua* meta-doctrine features most prominently, that is, the various traditions falling under the broad banner of Madhyamaka.⁵ Indeed, the concept of skill-in-means is conspicuously absent from Mark Siderits' inaugural discussion of *fusion philosophy* in the introduction to a book in which he engages heavily with the Madhyamaka doctrine of emptiness (*śūnyatā*) (2003),⁶ plays no role in Siderits' more recent methodological meditations on the program of fusion or "confluence" philosophy (2015),⁷ and has failed to receive attention in his fellow travelers' work⁸ at the time of writing.

What, I ask, might this tell us about the fusion project as it has been conducted so far? And how might giving due heed to Madhyamaka Buddhist thought's self-understanding as skill-in-means affect its future directions?

In this paper, I argue that failure to give due consideration to skill-in-means in fusion methodology and hermeneutics is expressive of lingering metaphilosophical parochialism in what ought to be—and may yet become—a more reflective and cosmopolitan field of research. I further argue that paying heed to the principle of skill-in-means makes it clear that if "fusing" Anglo-American and Madhyamaka philosophy really is the goal, then philosophers engaged in this project will have to expand their metaphilosophical horizons such as to respect and accommodate the latter's irreducibly therapeutic orientation.

My discussion proceeds in three steps. In section 1, I examine such primary source texts as the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra*, *Saddharmalaṅkāvatārasūtra*, Pāli Nikāya materials, Nāgārjuna's *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (henceforth: *MMK*), and Candrakīrti's *Prasannapadā* to get a clear sense of what thinking of philosophy as skillful means (*kuśala upāya*) involves and implies. Skill-in-means, I argue, expresses Buddhist thought's irreducibly therapeutic orientation. The point here is not merely that Buddhist thought has soteriological aims, but that its very methods are shaped by the diagnoses that underpin it, and especially by the observation that unhealthy attachment to "theoretical views" (*dṛṣṭi*) is one of the primary mechanisms of self-bondage. I further argue in this section that, though it is tacitly present in the earliest extant Buddhist text, the skillful means conception of Buddhist thought—which construes it as a set of therapeutic interventions, the fossilization of which *qua* "pure, view-from-nowhere theory" would only aggravate the malady it seeks to cure—reaches full reflective awareness and self-actualization in early Madhyamaka philosophy. In section 2, I draw from Raymond Guess's work on Frankfurt School epistemology (1981)⁹ to propose that we model Buddhist philosophical theories *qua* skillful means in *critical theoretical* terms. I connect this to Buddhist circumspection towards mere belief-revision and any naïve over-estimation of the "value of truth," to use an apt Nietzschean phrase (2001[1886]).¹⁰ In section 3, I explore the prospects, in light of the foregoing, for the emergence of a genuinely cosmopolitan fusion or confluence of Anglo-American and Madhyamaka Buddhist philosophical traditions. To begin, I argue that fusionists' neglect of skill-in-means represents a failure of cosmopolitanism in need of redress. "Philosophy as therapy" and "philosophy as theoretical problem-solving," I further argue, are by no means irreconcilable, let alone incommensurable. Nevertheless, generating a template for a truly bilateral dialogue between Anglo-American and Madhyamaka thought will require contemporary professional philosophers to overcome their unreflective commitment to certain metaphilosophical postulates.

1 Skill-In-Means as Pedagogy, Meta-Doctrine, and Hermeneutics (All-In-One)

It is in the turn of the era *Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra* (literally, *White Lotus of the True Dharma Sūtra*; henceforth, *Lotus Sūtra*) that we find the most detailed discussion in Indian Buddhist literature of the

notion of skill-in-means in the technical sense that interests us here, i.e., as a principal at once pedagogical, meta-doctrinal, and hermeneutical.¹¹

Among the skillful means listed at the beginning of the eponymous second chapter of the *Lotus Sūtra*, we find “philosophical theorizing (*jñāna-darśana*), reasoning (*hetu*), arguments (*kāraṇa*), definitions (*nirdeśanā*), categorization (*ārambaṇa*), semantic analyses (*niruktī*), and theoretical instruction (*prajñāpti*)” (Vaidya 1960a: 21).¹² Note that this list includes all of the technical procedures used in the classical Indian Buddhist philosophical disputation or, as later Buddhist doxographers would call it, *yukti* (“rational inquiry”). What we find in the *Lotus Sūtra*, then, is a claim about what is going on when an advanced Buddhist master—here Siddhārtha Gautama himself—propounds philosophical teachings.

The Sūtra explains that the Buddha makes use of such philosophical tools “in order to release beings that are attached to one point or another” (*tasmimṅ tasmimīl lagnān sattvān pramocayitum*) (Vaidya 1960a: 21). Commenting on this text, Michael Pye explains that skill-in-means as expounded in the *Lotus Sūtra* is “about the way in which the goal, the intention, or the meaning of Buddhism is correlated with the unenlightened condition of living beings,” with a view to “separat[ing] them from their attachments” (Pye 2003: 1–2).

Taking a closer look at what comes next in *Lotus Sūtra* makes it possible to be clearer on precisely what type of attachment is at stake here. As the chapter enters its verse section, it quickly becomes clear that the purpose of using skillful means is not merely a matter of uprooting attachment but more positively of promoting the development of wisdom: “The Buddha (*svayaṃbhū*) employs these means (*upāya*) to awaken Buddhist insight (*baudhasya jñānasya prabodhanārtham*)” (Chapter II, verse 47a–b; Vaidya 1960a: 30). A few lines further, we are told that various types of people are mired in delusion as a consequence of their adherence to some strongly held belief concerning existence and/or non-existence (Chapter II, verses 65–67; Vaidya 1960a: 33). The spirit here is very close indeed to that of second-century Buddhist philosopher Nāgārjuna’s critique of the existence/non-existence (*astiti/nāstiti*) dyad at MMK XV.7–11 (Vaidya 1960b: 117–22).¹³ In these verses, Nāgārjuna points to a Nikāya text, the *Kaccānagottasutta*, in which the Buddha laments that “people as a rule are hung up on the binary ‘existence vs. non-existence’” (*dvayaṃnissito kho ’yaṃ [...] loko yebhuyyena atthitañ ceva natthitañ ca*) (MN I, 17). Granted, the above-mentioned *Lotus Sūtra* verses appear to be referring instead to the more detailed discussion of this problem in the *Brahmajālasutta*, where “sixty-two views” (*dvāśaṣṭi dṛṣṭīh*) (Vaidya 1960a: 33) are discussed and critiqued (DN I, 1–46), but the idea is much the same: attachment to theoretical views (*dṛṣṭi*) articulated in terms of the existence/non-existence dichotomy is a core mechanism of self-bondage. As the *Lotus Sūtra* makes clear, it is with a view to awakening insight as to how these sorts of cognitive derangements manifest in the troubled minds of those whom he happens to be addressing that the Buddha will make skillful use of appropriately adapted philosophical teachings. It is insight into and liberation from unhealthy *cognitive attachment*, then, that philosophical intervention *qua* skillful means seeks to promote.

Understanding the context in which this is set out in the *Lotus Sūtra* will help us get a better sense of what exactly is going on here. Bluntly stated, the *Lotus Sūtra* advances views on ethics and metaphysics that fly in the face of early Buddhist teachings. *Pace* the word of the early teachings, as recorded in Nikāya texts, for instance, it claims that the attainment of *nirvāṇa* is not the true goal of Buddhism. Rather, the goal is to strive for Buddhahood out of boundless compassion towards all beings.¹⁴ Putting a curious twist on the kinds of views propounded in many a *Prajñāpāramitā* text and aptly summarized by Nāgārjuna with his infamous “*saṃsāra = nirvāṇa*” equation (MMK XXV.19–20; Vaidya 1960b: 234–5), the *Lotus Sūtra* further claims that *nirvāṇa* could not be the true goal of Buddhist practice because all things already bear—and have always borne—the properties of *nirvāṇa*, i.e., all things are “eternally withheld” (*nitya-nivṛta*) and “pacified from the beginning” (*ādi-praśānta*)

(Chapter 2, verses 67–8; Vaidya 1960a: 33). A particular breed of Mahāyāna metaphysics, in other words, is supposed to constrain what *genuine* Buddhist ethics can conceivably consist in. The *Lotus Sūtra* seeks to account for what appears to be a radical shift in Buddhist doctrine, finally, by insisting that the teachings traditionally attributed to the historical Buddha should be understood as provisional instructions designed to get a certain group of people with specific proclivities (viz., the self-regarding motivation to free themselves of suffering, hand-in-hand with a certain conservatism with respect to metaphysical questions) started on the Buddhist path. Attachment to these teachings as the expression of truth (viz., concerning what “exists” versus what “exists not”) would thus be misguided. To discard or prevent such attachment, the early teachings need to be recognized as mere skillful means.

It is worth noting, in this connection, that the fourth century CE *Saddharmalaṅkāvatārasūtra* would make use of exactly the same strategy to deflate the *tathāgata-garbha* or “[universal] Buddha-nature” teaching which had by then come to play an important role in certain Mahāyāna circles. It insists that this teaching was merely one of the skillful means the Buddha devised to guide disciples to insight into the “selflessness of [all] factors of existence” (*dharmā-nairātmya*), and thus that it does not entail the existence of a universal or cosmic self nor any other kind of a “self-doctrine” (*ātma-vāda*), as some Buddhists, it would seem, wrongly held (Vaidya 1963: 33).¹⁵

As a brief survey of these Sūtras materials makes clear, skill-in-means concerns Buddhist pedagogy, metaphilosophy, and hermeneutics all at once. As a pragmatist pedagogical principle, it tells us about the motives, tactics, and end goals that underpin Buddhist philosophical instruction. As meta-doctrine, it tells us how Buddhist philosophical discourse ought to be conceptualized, i.e., as context-sensitive therapeutic intervention. As hermeneutics, it makes therapeutic context and strategy a key principle of philosophical interpretation.

It is important to note, at this juncture, that the principle of skill-in-means is not hostage to the kinds of Mahāyāna doctrinal positions advanced in the *Lotus Sūtra* and other such texts.¹⁶ There is indeed strong evidence that the *practice* of skill-in-means as meta-doctrinal pragmatism is already in display in Nikāya texts, even though the *concept* of skill-in-means had yet to be developed (Gombrich 2006, 2009; Keown 1998; Wynne 2010).¹⁷

The *Tevijjasutta*, for instance, reports that the Buddha, in conversation with the Brāhmin Vāsetṭha, misleadingly presents “union with Brahmā” (*brahma-sahavyatā*) as the outcome of *brahma-vihāra* meditation practices (the true goal of these being the somewhat less exciting cultivation of benevolence, compassion, empathetic joy, and equanimity) (*DN* I.250–251). This happens after a lengthy dialectical back-and-forth between the Buddha and Vāsetṭha, at the end of which the latter acknowledges that Brāhmin teachers’ claims to knowledge of the path leading to union with Brahmā are foundationless (*DN* I.237ff.). The Buddha’s argumentation, hand-in-hand with his (false) claim that *brahma-vihāra* meditation practices lead to union with Brahmā, look like a context-specific attempt to challenge, then co-opt Vāsetṭha’s former teachers’ authority with a view to bringing the young Brāhmin into the Buddhist fold. The Buddha, in short, is employing what later Buddhist authors would dub skill-in-means.¹⁸

I would further argue that the pragmatist spirit of skill-in-means shines through in those Nikāya texts where the Buddha refuses to answer certain questions, either because he anticipates that his answer will confuse or mislead his interlocutor¹⁹ or because he considers these questions to be irrelevant to addressing human beings’ existential predicament.²⁰ The dispensing of teachings ought to be guided by practical considerations relating to what effects these will have, and there are certain topics—matters relating to space, time, the relation between a purported mental substance (*jīva*) and the physical body (*sarīra*), etc.—concerning which it is simply beside the point to inquire, let alone to pronounce oneself, precisely because nothing good can be expected to follow from doing so. Such

second-order normative views about philosophical instruction anticipate the Mahāyāna meta-doctrinal developments that would crystallize in the form of the principle of skill-in-means.

The principle of skill-in-means, then, bears no necessary connection to Mahāyānist views. What it does bear a necessary connection to is the practical and more specifically therapeutic orientation of Buddhist thought. Indeed, if skill-in-means allows for important expository flexibility, it is because the goal of Buddhist philosophical instruction is to assist people in healing themselves, and that what may help one type of person might set another type of person back, and vice versa. As metaphilosophy, then, skill-in-means is expressive of the irreducible therapeutic character of Buddhist philosophy.

I would further submit that skill-in-means is theoretically related to a diagnostic claim that is central to Buddhist praxis. Speaking in very general terms, the delusional disorder Buddhist thought and practice is meant to cure manifests in a threefold manner: it manifests cognitively as erroneous views (*mithyā-dṛṣṭi*) and nescience (*avidyā*), affectively in the form of harmful attachments (*upādāna*) and thirsting (*trṣṇā*), and behaviorally in the form of harmful (*akuśala*) and demeritorious (*pāpa*) action. These three types of manifestations of delusion are mutually reinforcing and, together, result in self-inflicted mental suffering.²¹ Accordingly, Buddhists regard the now common distinction between the “cognitive” and the “affective” as permeable: “attachment to theoretical views” (*dṛṣṭy-upādāna*) or “to doctrines concerning personal identity” (*ātmavāda*), after all, are two amongst four of the principal forms of attachment (*DN* III.230); conversely, Buddhist psychology suggests that most of a person’s beliefs merely serve to rationalize her attachments. This is why Buddhist therapeutics involves a combination of critical philosophical reflection, meditation practice, and ethical training, which together are intended to combat delusion on the cognitive, affective, and behavioral fronts in a coordinated fashion (Panaïoti 2015).²² Philosophical critique alone, in short, just won’t do. An even stronger claim, however, is in order here: giving rational inquiry too much weight on the path to gaining transformative insight carries important risks, for attachment to views—even to *Buddhist philosophical views*—only aggravates the malady that Buddhism seeks to cure. It is thus best to *deflate philosophical theory* to avoid this pitfall and promote the cultivation of genuine wisdom (cf. erudition or mere argumentative skill).

My claim is that skill-in-means is a meta-theoretical implication of precisely this thought. The pedagogically supple and hermeneutically flexible approach to Buddhist doctrine that skill-in-means warrants is grounded in the psychological view that *attachment to theory* constitutes a powerful mechanism of self-bondage. This is why, like a raft used to traverse a river, Buddhist teachings—as mere “means” (*upāya*)—ought to be left behind once the “other shore” is reached (*MN* I. 134–5; *Sn*, p. 56). Skill-in-means, in sum, is a principle that not only speaks to Buddhist thought’s irreducibly therapeutic character; it is also a principle that bears a profound relation to one of the central diagnostic claims that underpins the entire program of Buddhist critical inquiry.

Though, as I have shown, skill-in-means bears no *necessary* connection to Mahāyāna doctrinal positions, a strong case could nevertheless be made that it is in early Madhyamaka philosophy—and particularly its take on the metaphilosophical implications of the *Prajñāpāramitāsūtra*’s concept of emptiness (*śūnyatā*)—that its “spirit,” as Hegel might have said, achieves full self-realization. On what may be called the “standard metaphilosophical model” developed in the Vaibhāṣika-Sarvāstivāda Ābhidharmika tradition, and which Nāgārjuna vigorously rejects in his *MMK*, *sensu stricto* theoretical truths (or “ultimate truths,” *paramārtha-satyāni*) are statements that correspond to the facts concerning substantially existent (*dravya-sat*) entities endowed with “intrinsic nature” (*svabhāva*).²³ The absence of such a nature in any conceivable object—i.e., the universal “emptiness of intrinsic nature” (*svabhāva-śūnyatā*), which most of the *MMK* seeks rationally to establish—therefore leads to the implosion of the

theoretical edifices based on said “standard model” (and removes the ground for the erection of any new such edifice). What is more, in Madhyamaka thought, the Vaibhāṣika Sarvāstivāda “model” or any other like it (and let us note in passing that there are *many* in the history of philosophy) is regarded—in line with what was previously discussed in this section—as the expression of lingering egological attachment (*svabhāva* being to “things” what *ātman* (ego) is to “living beings”).²⁴ Note, moreover, that Nāgārjuna was adamant that such attachment not be transferred to the teaching of emptiness itself. This idea finds its clearest expression at *MMK* XIII.8: “The Victorious taught emptiness as a remedy (*niḥsaraṇa*) to get rid of all views. But those for whom emptiness is a view have been designated as incurable (*asādhya*)” (Vaidya 1960*b*: 108).²⁵ Teaching and rationally defending emptiness, in other words, is skillful means—and not the propounding and establishing of a “standard” philosophical theory (Loundo 2016).²⁶

Small wonder, then, if the eminent sixth-century Madhyamaka philosopher Candrakīrti figures as one of the chief proponents of skill-in-means *à la Lotus Sūtra* amongst those Classical Indian Buddhist philosophers whose texts are extant.²⁷ In his *Prasannapadā*, he invokes this principle to explicate verses in which Nāgārjuna attributes seemingly contradictory teachings to the Buddha.²⁸ *MMK* XVIII.6, for instance, reports that the Buddha taught that the self (*ātman*) exists, that it doesn’t exist, *and* that it neither exists nor doesn’t exist.²⁹ For Candrakīrti, recognizing that the great teacher was but making use of skill-in-means allows us to see that the Buddha was not actually contradicting himself: to materialist fools with no sense of moral or prudential concern, the Buddha taught the existence of an enduring self to which the fruits of harmful and beneficial actions accrue; to those whose deluded sense of identity and self-attachment hinder progress on the Buddhist path, he taught the inexistence of self; and to those on the verge of attaining supreme insight, he “goes meta” and reveals that neither “self” nor “no self” are, in the final analysis, appropriate (Vaidya 1960*b*: 152). Candrakīrti makes use of a similar strategy to explicate *MMK* XVIII.8, which states that the Buddha taught that all things are real (*tathya*), unreal, both real and unreal, as well as neither real nor unreal (Vaidya 1960*b*: 157–8). And in his commentary on *MMK* XXII.11, he asserts, applying the same principle (albeit in a more directly reflexive manner), that any talk of emptiness must be understood as being “for the sake of instruction [alone]” (*prajñāpty-artham*) (Vaidya 1960*b*: 192–3).³⁰ The Buddha’s and Nāgārjuna’s teachings (as well as his own), Candrakīrti suggests, are adapted to the audience he is addressing and ought to be understood as contextual therapeutic interventions with no pretense of being the “final word” on question *x*, *y*, or *z*. They are, in sum, but skillful means.

2 Metaphilosophical Implications

Because of its therapeutical orientation, it has become fashionable of late to compare the Buddhist approach to philosophy to the Hellenistic.³¹ Amongst the Stoics, Epicureans, Cynics, and Skeptics of the Graeco-Roman world, philosophical theorizing presents itself as a cure for the maladies of the soul; here, philosophical instruction and reflection, even on such seemingly abstruse topics as metaphysics, logic, or warrant for belief are subservient to the eminently practical end of promoting human flourishing (Hadot 1995).³² Though it is certainly possible to establish enlightening metaphilosophical parallels between the Buddhist and Hellenistic traditions, the sorts of second-order issues which our discussion of skill-in-means has brought to the fore are very rarely explicitly thematized in the Hellenistic schools.³³

We should thus explore other philosophical analogues, which promise to throw light on precisely those features of Buddhist metaphilosophy with which we are concerned. Closer to home, twentieth-century Frankfurt School critical theorists like Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, and

Jürgen Habermas developed an epistemologically sophisticated conception of philosophical reflection as oriented towards liberation from delusion and self-bondage. Buddhist conceptions of philosophy as skillful means, as I shall argue, bear important structural similarities to critical theories as means of emancipation.

Consider Raymond Geuss' authoritative definition of a critical theory: "A critical theory is a reflective theory giving agents a type of knowledge which is inherently productive of enlightenment and emancipation" (Geuss 1981: 2). Substantively, Marxist historical materialism, de Beauvoir's existentialist feminism, and Freudian psychoanalysis share very little in common, but they share the same critical theoretical *structure*. Indeed, the views on offer in these theories are *reflective* in a twofold sense: (1) they are views about my condition of unfreedom that specify the ways in which I am deluded about my nature and condition, particularly (though not only) as a result of confusion surrounding epistemic norms; (2) they include second-order views about the theory itself, its epistemic grounds, and its emancipatory *raison d'être* and potency. If critical theories come with the sad news that I am in large part responsible for perpetuating my own suffering,³⁴ the happier upshot is that I can be empowered, thanks to an appropriately reflective theory, to set myself free.

Critical theories have two peculiar metatheoretical features. First, they blur the line between descriptive and normative claims. The views they propound are at once about what my initial situation consists in and about how I ought to act (in a broad sense of "act") *vis-à-vis* said situation. Second, their epistemic status is firmly distinct from that of so-called "objectifying knowledge," i.e., knowledge which is taken to result from the relationship between two firmly separate entities, namely a "subject" and an "object" (Geuss 1981: 62). A critical theory does not address a disincarnate epistemic subject, precisely, but an "immersed subject." Its aim is not to produce knowledge of some separate "other"—the so-called "object"—but rather a liberating form of *self*-understanding. A critical theory, then, does not aim to yield knowledge that any and all would deem true irrespective of their context and condition; rather, one of its key goals is to reveal how numerous everyday beliefs about oneself are "reflectively unacceptable," i.e., would not be accepted as legitimate by agents in a state of enlightenment and freedom.³⁵ Critical theory's epistemology thus acknowledges that there will exist a gulf between the views to which people who have attained enlightenment and freedom assent and the views to which benighted people assent. And it insists, importantly, that this gulf doesn't result from differences in access to information or epistemic-*cum*-rational competence *per se*, but rather from differences in the degree of reflective self-understanding.

Returning to Buddhism, I submit that there is an important sense in which the "theory" on offer in a Madhyamaka-inspired philosophical tradition in particular is, structurally speaking, very much like a critical theory as defined by Geuss. In fact, from a Madhyamaka perspective, this is true of a great variety of important Indian Buddhist philosophical views, such as the early Ābhidharmikas' claims concerning the constituent factors in which a so-called "individual" breaks down under analysis and the relations of dependent-co-arising between these, the Madhyamaka commentators' idea that the notions of "intrinsic nature" (*svabhāva*) and "substance" (*dravya*) are projections of the more primitive concept of "ego" (*ātman*), the Yogācāra's inquiry into the metaphysical delusions caused by the *kliṣṭa-manas* or "defiled mind," the Pramāṇavādins' critical epistemology "as ethics" (to use Carpenter's (2014)³⁶ phrasing), as well as, more generally, the "two truths" (*dvaya-satya*) doctrine in most of its forms. Indeed, from the skill-in-means perspective, these views are reflective *in the critical theoretical sense of the term*. They are grounded in diagnostic views (together with attendant prognoses)—what, if anything, is at once descriptive and normative if not diagnoses?—about my condition of unfreedom that teach me about how *I* perpetuate such unfreedom through, amongst other things, confusion concerning my access to (and conception of) "knowledge," and about how I am alone in having the power to liberate myself. Their purpose is to help me overcome a kind of false-

consciousness (the ego-delusion or *ātma-moha*,³⁷ fossilized in various views about self, world, agency, substance, causation, knowledge, etc.) and with it a kind of unfreedom (being imprisoned in the cage of egotism) with an eye to eventually attaining a state of enlightenment (*arhatship*; *bodhi*) and emancipation (release from all of the cognitive, affective and behavioral flaws that grow out of egotism and cause *duḥkha*).

Buddhist theories, under this skill-in-means conception, offer liberating forms of self-understanding, not the kind “objectifying knowledge” that may result from a strictly neutral cognitive stance. Many of the everyday views ordinary people hold to be true, they teach, are but fetters to be gradually removed. And they have, from the standpoint of those who are free and enlightened, no purchase whatsoever.

Conceiving of Buddhist philosophical teachings as skillful cognitive therapeutics brings into relief the broadly critical theoretical nature of Buddhist thought in general. Having said this, the Madhyamaka conception of Buddhist philosophy as skillful means suggests a more radically deflationist view of the epistemic status of Buddhist theoretical claim and constructs than what is found in most classical critical theories.³⁸ Many of the beliefs—and, in some very influential traditions of Buddhist philosophy, *all of the beliefs*—that will assist me in liberating myself from delusion and self-perpetuated unfreedom have but provisional validity or utility, run the risk of turning into fetters once their utility is outlived, and end up being “left behind” when enlightenment and freedom are attained. In the language of critical theory, these beliefs are “reflectively unacceptable” to those who have attained the pinnacle of insight. Crucially, however, as *means* they are contextually useful. Expressed in terms of the two truths distinction, much of Buddhist philosophical instruction belongs, from this standpoint, to the domain of “conventional/transactional truth” (*saṃvṛti-/vyāvahara-satya*); once the ultimate insight—or “ultimate truth” (*paramārtha-satya*)—is reached, it is to be left behind in the manner of a raft used to cross a river.³⁹

This is closely related to the importance in Buddhism of the distinction between what Miri Albahari calls “theoretical knowledge” and “insight knowledge” (Albahari 2014).⁴⁰ On the Buddhist view, revising my belief is one thing, gaining insight quite another. The former only involves a shift in cognitive assent from one proposition to another; the latter involves deeper psychological changes in one’s affective stance, conative dispositions, and overall attitude towards life. Acquiring theoretical knowledge concerning a given subject might be necessary to gain true insight concerning this matter, but it is not sufficient. Thus, a person might assent to the view that the “ego” is a fiction even while remaining fully under the grip of the ego-delusion at the deeper level of affects and behavioral dispositions (Albahari 2014).⁴¹ The goal of Buddhist thought is to assist people in progressing toward such deep realizations, not merely in revising their surface-level wrong beliefs.⁴² But what skill-in-means brings to the fore is more radical yet: When I gain deep insight, *I shed theoretical knowledge* and see it for what it always was, i.e., a mere means tailored to contextual needs.

This leads us directly to the question of what Nietzsche famously called the “*value of truth*” (2001[1886]: 5–7) on the therapeutic conception of and approach to philosophy championed in early Madhyamaka thought. Full-heartedly endorsing the principle of skill-in-means, in short, invites one to join with Nietzsche in questioning the notion that truth is intrinsically beneficial.⁴³ A two-pronged evaluative framework is instead needed: the *accuracy* of a teaching—as context-independent correspondence to how things really stand (which, for Buddhists, may broadly be cashed out in terms of the conventional/ultimate truth distinction)—is one standard of value; the *upāyic appropriateness* of said teaching—as contextual conduciveness to insight in a specific inter-personal and therapeutic setting—quite another.

When philosophical instruction is looked upon through the prism of skill-in-means, some inaccurate statements will, in a context-relative manner, appear as rungs on the ladder to genuine insight. This is because, in this form of philosophical praxis, the two types of evaluative properties I have just distinguished—“accuracy” and “appropriateness”—often come apart. *Contra* the rationalist conviction that accuracy and conduciveness to insight imply each other, the doctrine of skill-in-means recognizes no such natural or necessary connection. Undiluted accurate statements may be conducive to insight for a very small minority of (very wise) recipients, but they may confuse or reinforce delusion and unfreedom for most. Conversely, statements that are conducive to insight amongst a particular set of recipients will appear inaccurate to people who are at a different stage of development, be they less or more advanced on the path to enlightenment and freedom. As with Nietzsche’s “free spirits,” truth does not have unconditional value in this type of Buddhist philosophical praxis.

3 Consequences for Fusion, or The Requirements of Cosmopolitanism

In this concluding section, I begin by critically appraising Mark Siderits’ inaugural discussion of fusion philosophy (2003), and argue that fusionists’ neglect of skill-in-means represents a failure of cosmopolitanism. I then explore the prospects, in light of the foregoing sections, for the emergence of a genuinely cosmopolitan fusion of Anglo-American and Madhyamaka Buddhist philosophical traditions. Generating a template for a truly bilateral dialogue, I conclude, will require Anglo-American philosophers to overcome their unreflective commitment to certain metaphilosophical postulates.

Siderits introduces the term “fusion philosophy” in the introduction to his 2003 *Personal Identity and Buddhist Philosophy: Empty Persons* (republished in 2015), a book which substantively engages with Madhyamaka philosophy. Siderits presents fusion as the successor to comparative philosophy.⁴⁴ Moving beyond the comparative philosopher’s primarily descriptive aim of drawing enlightening parallels and contrasts between debates in western and non-western philosophical traditions, it is with a view to philosophical “problem-solving” that the fusion philosopher engages in cross-cultural dialogue.⁴⁵

Siderits warns that Buddhist thought runs the risk of remaining “sealed in the museum of the history of ideas” unless certain misconceptions about the appropriate role of research on Buddhist philosophy are overcome. He explains:

It is doubtless true that those of us who wish to understand Buddhist philosophy need to see how a given concept or theory connects up with the full range of issues and themes in the tradition. What is not clear is that the only legitimate employment of such concepts or theories is to help represent the total context of their origin. (Siderits 2003: xiii)

Considering the context in which a given concept or theory emerged might be a necessary step along the road, but problem-solving should be the final destination. This, for Siderits, is a matter of *treating Buddhist philosophy as philosophy*, not just as an entry in the encyclopedia of global intellectual history.⁴⁶

Anticipating over-cautious reactions to his work, Siderits seeks to reassure his readers that “what is here presented as Buddhist philosophy does have its genesis in the Buddhist tradition. [...] [I]t is a rational reconstruction that begins with that tradition” (Siderits 2003: xiii–xiv). Buddhist philosophy as he will present it, Siderits acknowledges, might not look anything like what is found in Buddhist texts, but this is inconsequential.

An important concern here is whether engaging ideas and theories that look nothing like what is found in Buddhist sources meets the criteria for fusion. Are we really letting the “other” speak when

we thoroughly repackage his/her/their message? Failure to do so, after all, would preclude the merger or confluence of “Self” and “Other.” The answer one finds in Siderits is simple: So long as a philosophical project takes up concepts and theories that have been rationally reconstructed on the basis of Buddhist texts, fusion is effectively at work.

A critic might object that this places very weak constraints on what may be said in the Buddhist tradition’s name. Whatever the standards of “rational reconstruction” may be, it is unreasonable to think that they alone would have the power to check biases or idiosyncrasies that may easily lead to severe distortions in what is dished out as “Buddhist philosophy.”

A more charitable interpretation of Siderits is available, however. Recall his insistence that it is important for fusionists not to lose sight of “how a given concept or theory connects up with the full range of issues and themes in the tradition” (Siderits 2003: xiii). If Siderits thinks fusion philosophers must be attentive to the broader framework in which a given Buddhist idea or theory is embedded, it is presumably because he recognizes that the work of rational reconstruction must be guided by their understanding of the historical, cultural, and theoretical context in which said idea or theory was initially developed.⁴⁷

What this in turn suggests is that it is important for fusionists to mark the difference between merely “borrowing” ideas/theories/arguments from a separate tradition and the actual “confluence” of distinct philosophical traditions. This distinction can be drawn out in the following terms:

Borrowing is a unilateral operation that entails no real engagement with the tradition that an idea or theory is borrowed from. Here, a concept or theory is simply integrated into the borrower’s work, who is under no special obligation to consider the context out of which said concept or theory has been lifted. Borrowing, then, can be unashamedly parochial; it need not pay attention to the possible differences between the broader cultural framework that informs the borrower’s project and that which informs philosophical praxis in the tradition from which she is borrowing.

Fusion, in contrast, requires a cosmopolitan approach that precludes such unreflective assimilation and respects the distinctness of the traditions with which it seeks to enter into confluence. Hence the importance of historical awareness and sensitivity to context as well as “a degree of immersion in another culture” (Siderits 2015: 84) for this type of project.

But adopting the kind of cosmopolitanism required for “fusion” to run smoothly requires more than just historical awareness. If confluence is the goal, then one needs to adopt both a certain attitude towards the other and a certain attitude towards the self.⁴⁸ Such cosmopolitanism, more specifically, requires (1) curiosity towards and openness to those distinctive aspects of the foreign tradition that may be relevant to entering into dialogue with it, and (2) a willingness critically to reflect on whatever biases or culturally contingent preconceptions *within one’s own tradition* might get in the way of genuine exchange.

These two components of cosmopolitanism make more arduous demands than practitioners of fusion between Anglo-American and Madhyamaka philosophical traditions realize. Component (1) requires them to (a) identify what resources the Buddhist tradition/s they are engaging may have deployed in the context of prior cross-cultural encounters, and (b) take seriously these traditions’ self-understanding and overall metaphilosophical orientation. Component (2), for its part, requires them to (c) gain awareness of what they are bringing to the table by way of biases and unreflective assumptions, and (d) show themselves attentive to differences in metaphilosophical framework and self-understanding between the Anglo-American and Buddhist traditions under discussion. These

differences would then have to be negotiated with a view to creating a discursive space in which genuinely bilateral dialogue—or fusion—can take place.

My contention is that, because fusionists fall short of these requirements, they have failed to initiate anything like genuine fusion.

In defiance of requirement (2), fusionists simply assume that “philosophy” is a natural or historically invariant concept, the meaning of which is not up for debate. Demanding, as Siderits does, that problem-solving be recognized as the paramount goal of cross-cultural philosophical research and, indeed, as a matter of finally treating Buddhist thought “as philosophy” (rather than as intellectual history) may sound like a plea for cosmopolitan open-mindedness, but it assumes Buddhist traditions conceive of “philosophical problems” in broadly the same terms as do today’s professional Anglo-American philosophers.⁴⁹ This parochial assumption is, for many of the Buddhist philosophical traditions that fusionists engage, plainly false. This can have surprising and (from a Buddhist standpoint at any rate) disappointing consequences; for instance, when Siderits shifts from his discussion of (Ābhidharmika) “Reductionism” *à la* Parfit to that (Madhyamaka) “Global Anti-Realism” in chapter 6 of *Personal Identity and Buddhist Philosophy* (2003), the transition in Classical Indian Buddhist philosophy from a broadly realist to a thoroughly antifoundationalist program is presented as a strictly theoretical development, and attention is paid to the way in which the Madhyamaka’s critique of *svabhāva* is inseparable from their *diagnosis* of Vaibhāṣika-Sarvāstivāda Ābhidharmikas as mired in delusion and lingering attachment. Such a shortcoming is not only a matter of concern for the historian; rather, it forces us to look more closely at what is actually going on when we engage in “cross-cultural” philosophy. The issue, to be clear, is not strictly speaking one of *misinterpretation*, but rather of *excluding* an important dimension of Buddhist thought on the putative (albeit implicit) grounds that it is philosophically irrelevant. The unasked (and thus unanswered) question here, of course, is “Who decides what is philosophically ir/relevant?”

Moving on, in defiance of requirement (1), fusionists have failed to inquire into what resources may already exist in Buddhist philosophy to support cross-cultural syncretism and hybridization. As discussed above, Buddhism harbors an influential “second-order” doctrine, which states that Buddhist teachings ought to be regarded as skillful means—where “skillfulness” tracks efficacy in helping members of a specific audience overcome unhealthy attachment and delusion. In addition to facilitating tradition-internal hybridization and syncretism amongst Buddhist schools of thought,⁵⁰ the concept of skill-in-means has contributed to Buddhism’s self-reinvention and adaptiveness in various cultural *milieux* as well as to its capacity to alter the terms of the debates and interrogations in which it integrated itself. Equipped with an immersed principle of meta-doctrinal pragmatism and hermeneutical creativity, Buddhist thought’s pliability has also been one of its greatest strengths in various cross-cultural encounters (Pye 2003: 125; 159). Siderits’ neglect of skill-in-means is all the more surprising as this doctrine could easily be invoked to provide tradition-internal warrant for some very serious repackaging of Buddhist concepts and theories. But skill-in-means, as should now be clear, is not just an immersed mechanism for cross-cultural adaptation; it is also intimately related to Buddhist philosophy’s self-understanding as *cognitive therapeutics*, especially (though not exclusively) in Madhyamaka-inspired philosophical schools. And this is where things get hairy. For if many of the most eminent Buddhist thinkers that fusionists engage regard their philosophical theories, arguments, and concepts as “skillful means,” then it is far from evident that they conceive of philosophy as merely (or even mostly) a matter of “problem-solving” in the sense in which today’s professional Anglo-American philosophers understand the term.

My charge, then, is that Siderits’ and his successors’ neglect of skill-in-means represents a failure of metaphilosophical cosmopolitanism,⁵¹ and thus also a betrayal of the very ideal of fusion. If fusionists are serious about bringing Madhyamaka Buddhist and Anglo-American philosophy into

confluence, the skillful means conception of philosophy must be taken seriously. And while endorsing the skill-in-means principle may make it possible to legitimize profound stylistic changes and even theoretical innovation in fusion work, it will also require the negotiation of some sort of metaphilosophical truce between what we may call the “theoretical problem-solving approach” and the “therapeutic problem-solving approach.”

Now, we should be clear on what lesson ought *not* to be drawn from the foregoing exploration of skill-in-means, namely that fusing Buddhist and mainstream Anglo-American philosophical traditions is infeasible.

Consider, in this connection, John Schroeder’s work on skill-in-means. Schroeder aptly points out that skill-in-means expresses the irreducibly therapeutic character of Buddhism, but he errs in taking this to imply that Buddhism is uncompromisingly anti-theoretical, anti-intellectual, and anti-philosophical (Schroeder 2000, 2001, 2011).⁵² He argues that what might look to an uncritical eye like Buddhist analogues to “philosophical theory” as it is understood in the west actually advance no theoretical claims whatsoever. Thus, for Schroeder, the Madhyamaka doctrine of emptiness does not purport to say anything about how things are (i.e., “empty” (*śūnya*)) or are not (i.e., “possessed of intrinsic nature” (*svabhāva*)), nor does it have any implications as regards the cognitive status of everyday beliefs about persons and medium-size objects. Nāgārjuna’s point was *not* to target a well-nigh universal delusion with pernicious cognitive and affective effects. Instead, the teaching of emptiness is just a skillfully adapted discursive tool designed to guide a very specific kind of person—namely turn-of-the-era Ābhidharmikas seduced by the theoretical appeal of realist ontological taxonomy—to awakening (Schroeder 2001: 150ff.). Conceiving of Buddhism as therapy, Schroeder insists, is antithetical to conceiving of it as philosophy.

If this were right, then there could be no such thing as western-Buddhist fusion philosophy for the simple reason that Buddhism eschews theory entirely.

Schroeder’s reading suffers from two important flaws. First, he puts tremendous weight on a very narrow and uncritically essentialist conception of “theory.” On this conception, it is presumed that to count as “theory” proper, a given account must be separate from any practical or ethical considerations, that only the most abstract models and schemata merit the label “theoretical.” But who says practically or therapeutically motivated cognitive interventions cannot be “theoretical”? Why presume that theory must be entirely divorced from practical or ethical considerations? Are “philosophy” and “therapy” really mutually exclusive domains? Schroeder’s case, in short, rests on the reification of a particularly rigid, historically and culturally contingent conception of “philosophical theory.” Conceptualizing Buddhist theories in critical theoretical terms, as I suggested we do in section 2, allows us to steer clear of Schroeder’s black-and-white thinking.

What is more, Schroeder’s conception of Buddhism as “purely practical” is arguably incoherent. Indeed, it is far from obvious that any tradition can engage in “practice” and “therapy” without being committed to some sort of “theory” that spells out what is wrong with our “initial condition” and how certain types of interventions will help us overcome it. Buddhist traditions, insofar as they target delusion, will thus advance some theoretical claims (however revisable, provisional, and/or self-deflating) of what delusion consists in, how it manifests, what causes it, and how certain practices and interventions can help us overcome it. Certainly, the diagnoses, views, and cognitive interventions on offer in certain (if not most) Buddhist traditions might challenge not just the value but the meaningfulness of the very notion of “theorizing” as it is understood in much contemporary western philosophy, but to conclude from this that Buddhist thinkers have nothing to contribute to discussions in metaphysics and epistemology is entirely unwarranted.

In brief, the therapeutic character of Buddhism evidenced by skill-in-means does not *a priori* preclude cosmopolitan philosophical dialogues with Anglo-American philosophers on such subjects

as self, substance, reference, truth, knowledge, and so on. More generally, as Christopher Gowans has recently pointed out, it is far from obvious that we need to choose between engaging Buddhist philosophy as a “way of life” versus focusing, as is done in the Anglo-American reception, on the “problems and arguments” in Buddhist texts. The push towards a greater appreciation of Buddhist philosophy’s therapeutic orientation, writes Gowans, “should not be seen as diminishing the overall importance of rational arguments for these philosophies, but as urging that we assess these arguments in the context of their larger practical aim” (Gowans 2018).⁵³ Having said this, sensitivity to practical or therapeutic context is especially crucial for fusion: here, “philosophy as therapy” cannot be dismissed as pseudo-philosophy or para-philosophical, lest talk of “fusion” be reduced to empty verbiage.

A key upshot of my inquiry, then, is that doing justice to Madhyamaka Buddhist philosophy’s self-understanding as skillful means will require fusion philosophy to become far more metaphilosophically reflective and creative than it has been so far.⁵⁴ Methodological bilateralism, critically reflective cosmopolitanism, hermeneutics sensitive to pedagogic-*cum*-therapeutic context, and openness to negotiating differences in metaphilosophical frameworks are required for fusion genuinely to come to the fore.

To get a sense of what the challenges ahead might involve, it is important to identify the basic methodological or metaphilosophical commitments that underpin the Anglo-American philosophical tradition’s self-understanding and mode of philosophical praxis.

Although the tradition is home to some (controversial) outliers, the overwhelming tendency in professional Anglo-American philosophy is to delimit the discipline’s scope by way of a sharp distinction between “empirical” and “philosophical” questions. This turns on a putative (and, as it turns out, by no means theory-neutral) opposition between, on the one hand, disputes that may be settled by appealing to empirical evidence and, on the other, disputes that can (in principle) be settled by examining abstract, purportedly historically invariant concepts alone. Call this *metaphilosophical conceptualism*.

Professional Anglo-American philosophy also places a very strong emphasis on the value of belief-revision as the end-goal of rational inquiry. The ambition here is to uproot all false beliefs and to endorse only those that are tried-and-true. Precisely this, and this alone, is supposed to be the goal of rational inquiry. For most (barring a few anti-realists), the hope (or faith?) is that—in addition to its intrinsic value—such reason-guided cognitive hygiene is the royal road to individual and collective flourishing. Call this *metaphilosophical cognitivism*.

Madhyamaka Buddhist philosophy as therapy-oriented skillful means cannot smoothly enter into confluence with a tradition that remains unreflectively committed to such metaphilosophical postulates. Indeed, Buddhist philosophical programs in general are set out not on the basis of conceptual claims, but of empirical-*cum*-experiential claims about what we in the west would now call human beings’ “existential situation,” “lived experience,” and “psychology”—and the focus is even more strongly set on these matters in Madhyamaka traditions. As alluded to above, invoking the principle of skill-in-means *qua* pedagogical principle may certainly come in handy when it comes to legitimizing the so-called “naturalization” of certain domains of Buddhist thought⁵⁵ in order to facilitate dialogue with empirical research programs in cognitive neuroscience, moral psychology, and transcultural psychiatry—“if I can get more westerners to embark on the path by eliding talk of reincarnation,” a modern-day *bodhisattva* might think, “then so be it!”—but as far as professional philosophy is concerned, skill-in-means is a stark reminder that, *from the conceptualist standpoint*, Buddhist philosophical traditions have for their fundamental starting point and pervasive horizon of concern something altogether different from “real philosophy.” From this standpoint, the “therapy” in “philosophy as therapy” is “extra-philosophical” or “supra-philosophical”—and it is expressly *not with*

diagnostic claims, but with claims and theories that have been appropriately isolated through “conceptual retrieval” from this morass that philosophers ought to concern themselves.⁵⁶

When it comes to metaphilosophical cognitivism, critique runs in the other direction. Indeed, from the standpoint of the psychological and diagnostic views that underpin skill-in-means, metaphilosophical cognitivism appears naïve at best, and symptomatic of delusional logocentrism and epistemic hubris at worst. One can thus easily imagine a Madhyamaka Buddhist philosopher diagnosing, in her western interlocutors, precisely the kinds of delusions and “attachment to views” Buddhist thought targets, as evidenced by the great confidence they place in language, the presumed autonomy of reason, and (mere) belief-revision as the royal road to human flourishing.

My examination of skill-in-means thus puts into sharp relief a deep misalignment between a highly influential Buddhist conception of the ground, nature, function, and appropriate scope of philosophical reflection and the contemporary Anglo-American understanding of what counts (or ought to count) as “real philosophy.” This has so far remained unacknowledged in fusion philosophy literature. The different “background assumptions” underpinning Anglo-American and Madhyamaka Buddhist (in particular) conceptions of the nature, role, and promise of critical reflection and reasoned argumentation have not been made into the object of methodological reflection. Indeed, it has been assumed that what distinguishes the “philosophical” from the “extra-, supra-, or non-philosophical” is *not* open to contestation, that “real” Buddhist philosophy can and must be “conceptually retrieved” from the extra-philosophical framework in which it is embedded, and that this is what it means to treat Buddhist philosophy *as philosophy*. Parochialism, in short, has been parading as cosmopolitanism. What is more, from the standpoint of skill-in-means, the presentations of Madhyamaka Buddhist thought in this body of work are deeply *unskillful*, for not only do they occlude this tradition’s irreducibly therapeutic goals, but they also serve to reinforce some of the most pernicious forms of attachment which it is designed to help us overcome.

Let us end on a more positive note. At its best, Anglo-American philosophy is a dynamic, non-dogmatic, and open-ended tradition with a strong capacity for self-reinvention. Its commitment to metaphilosophical conceptualism is being weakened by the ever-stronger inroads phenomenology, cognitive neuroscience, and moral psychology are making into the discipline. What is more, there is a long and healthy history of therapeutically oriented philosophical traditions in the broader tradition of western philosophy (including such epistemically and metaphilosophically sophisticated developments as critical theory). Anglo-American philosophers should be encouraged to draw from these to develop genuinely cosmopolitan, hermeneutically sophisticated, and metaphilosophically reflective forms of “fusion” with Madhyamaka Buddhist thought. As I’ve made clear in this paper, if Anglo-American philosophers really wish to “merge” their tradition with that of Nāgārjuna and his followers, they need to cultivate greater critical self-awareness, respect for Buddhism’s self-understanding as skillful therapeutic intervention, and willingness to negotiate some sort of template for a genuine fusion of metaphilosophical frameworks in which “philosophy as therapy” and “philosophy as rational analysis” blend harmoniously. With a good dose of imagination, good will, and creativity, this can certainly be achieved.

Abbreviations

- BSB* *Brahmasūtra Śāṅkara Bhāṣya with the Commentaries Bhāmāti, Kalpataru, and Parimala*, ed. Ananta K. Shastri, Second Edition (Bombay: Pandurang Jawaji, 1938).
- DN I* *Dīghanikāya, Volume I*, ed. Thomas W. Rhys Davids and Joseph E. Carpenter, Third Edition (London: Pali Text Society, 1995).
- DN III* *Dīghanikāya, Volume III*, ed. Joseph E. Carpenter, Third Edition (London: Pali Text Society, 2016).

- MN I *Majjhimanikāya*, ed. Carl W. Trenckner, *Volume I*, Second Edition (London: Pali Text Society, 1993).
- MMK *Madhyamakāśāstra* [or *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*] of Nāgārjuna, with the Commentary: *Prasannapadā* by Candrakīrti ed. Paramsurama L. Vaidya (Darbhanga: Mithila Institute, 1960a).
- SN II *Samyuttanikāya*, *Volume II*, ed. Léon Féer, Third Edition (London: Pali Text Society, 1994).
- SN IV *Samyuttanikāya*, *Volume IV*, ed. Léon Féer, Second Edition (London: Pali Text Society, 1990).
- SN I *Samyuttanikāya*, *Volume I*, ed. Léon Féer, Second Edition (London: Pali Text Society, 2006).
- Sn *Suttanipāta*, ed. Dines Andersen, Third Edition (London: Pali Text Society, 2017).

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- ¹ Examples include the emergence of Buddho-Taoist syncretism from the first centuries of Buddhism's expansion into East Asia onwards, Buddhist Modernism in nineteenth-century Burma and Sri Lanka, and the Kyoto School's hybrid of Zen and existentialist thought in twentieth-century Japan.
- ² Richard Gombrich, *How Buddhism Began. The Conditioned Genesis of the Early Teachings* (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, 2006); Richard Gombrich, *What the Buddha Thought* (London: Equinox, 2009); Damien Keown, "Paternalism in the *Lotus Sutra*," *Buddhist Ethics* 5 (2008): 190–207; Michael Pye, *Skillful Means: A Concept in Mahāyāna Buddhism*, second edition (New York: Routledge, 2003); Paolo Visigalli, "The Buddha's Wordplays: The Rhetorical Function and Efficacy of Puns and Etymologizing in the Pali Canon," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 44, no. 4 (2016): 809–32; Alexander Wynne, "The Buddha's "Skill in Means" and the Genesis of the Five Aggregate Teaching," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain & Ireland* 20, no. 2 (2010): 191–216. But cf. Asaf Federman, "Literal Means and Hidden Meanings: A New Analysis of Skillful Means," *Philosophy East and West* 59, no. 2 (2009): 125–41. I defend the view that the *spirit* of skill-in-means as pedagogical-cum-meta-doctrinal-cum-hermeneutical principle was at work in pre-Mahāyāna Buddhism well before it became explicitly thematized in Mahāyāna traditions in section 1, below.
- ³ Paul Williams might be right to argue that Pye's study on skill-in-means relies too heavily on Japanese Buddhist sources (Williams 2009: 336), but this does not imperil Pye's insight that the principle of skillful teaching played an important role in allowing Buddhism smoothly to adapt to changing circumstances across the centuries and will likely continue to play this role well into the future. See: Paul Williams, *Mahāyāna Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundations* (New York: Routledge, 2009).
- ⁴ In some Mahāyānist texts, "skill-in-means" refers to a concept distinct from (though not unrelated to) what we are concerned with in this paper. In the *Upāyakaṇṣālyasūtra*, for instance, skill-in-means is a normative ethical principle entailing no-holds-barred consequentialism (albeit as the special reserve of exceptional moral agents, viz., *bodhisattvas*). See: *Upāyakaṇṣālyasūtra*, trans. Mark Tatz, *The Skill in Means Sūtra* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers), 1994. (For a discussion of how skill-in-means as normative ethics is distinguishable from skill-in-means as pedagogy, see Keown 1998). The *Aṣṭasāhasrikāsūtra* and *Ugraparipṛcchāsūtra*, for their part, make use of the phrase "skillful means" to denote devices and strategies a *bodhisattva* may use to (a) progress on the Buddhist path and, more specifically, (b) avoid *arhatship* and continue to advance towards *bodhicitta* proper. (For a discussion of how this contrasts with the notion of skill-in-means as a pedagogic-cum-meta-doctrinal concept, see Jan Nattier, *A Few Good Men: The Bodhisattva Path According to the Inquiry of Ugra (Ugraparipṛcchā): a Study and Translation* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2003), 154–6). On the attempt in the *Mahāprajñāpāramitāsāstra* (attributed to Nāgārjuna) to present a unified account of skill-in-means according to which it has both a self-directed and an other-directed component, see

- Ludovic Viévard, *Vacuité (śūnyatā) et compassion (karuṇā) dans le bouddhisme Madhyamaka* (Paris: Édition-Diffusion de Boccard, 2002), 70.
- ⁵ This includes the traditions of early Madhyamaka (whose most prominent figures include Nāgārjuna, Āryadeva, Buddhapālita, Bhāvaviveka, Candrakīrti, and Śāntideva), the later Yogācāra-Pramāṇavāda-Madhyamaka hybrid of Jñānagarbha, Śāntarakṣita, Kamalaśīla, the later yet tāntrika Madhyamaka of Atiśa, as well as its various offshoots in the Tibetan scholastic traditions (particularly the dGe-lugs-pa and Kar-ma-pa).
- ⁶ Mark Siderits, *Personal Identity and Buddhist Philosophy: Empty Persons* (Burlington: Routledge, 2003).
- ⁷ Mark Siderits, “Comparison or Confluence in Philosophy?”, *The Oxford Handbook of Indian Philosophy*, ed. Jonardon Ganeri (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 75–90. In this paper, Siderits uses “fusion” and “confluence” interchangeably.
- ⁸ Important book-length studies that, though few of them self-describe as “fusion,” carry out the sort of project Siderits delineates in the introduction to *Personal Identity and Buddhist Philosophy* (2003): Dan Arnold, *Buddhists, Brahmins, and Belief: Epistemology in South-Asian Philosophy of Religion* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005); Christian Coseru, *Perceiving Reality: Consciousness, Intentionality, and Cognition in Buddhist Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Jonardon Ganeri, *The Concealed Art of the Soul: Theories of the Self and Practices of Truth in Indian Ethics and Epistemology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Charles Goodman, *Consequences of Compassion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Graham Priest, *One: Being an Investigation into the Unity of Reality and its Parts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), and Graham Priest, *The Fifth Corner of Four* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019). As Siderits writes in his follow-up piece on the fusion versus comparativism distinction, the fact that the term “fusion philosophy” “has not caught on” is of little consequence; what matters is that philosophers have been engaging in the kind of post-comparativist work he had called for in his 2003 study (Siderits 2015: 76). Cf. Jay Garfield, who describes fusion as the project of “merg[ing] streams,” specifying that, as a “cross-cultural” philosopher, he instead merely wants to “build bridges” (Garfield 2015: 18). In his concluding remarks, however, Garfield describes his task as that of “mov[ing] both [the Buddhist and western] traditions along the increasingly broad and pleasant path they tread together” (Garfield 2015: 380), which sounds more like merger than bridge-building. This exemplifies the fuzziness of the boundary between fusion and other (though not all) cross-cultural philosophical enterprises. Having fuzzy boundaries, however, should not be allowed to diminish the value of a metaphilosophical concept (lest few would be left standing). In this paper, I work from the assumption that “fusion” or “confluence” between Anglo-American and Buddhist philosophy is possible, and inquire into what its genuine actualization would require. See: *Engaging Buddhism: Why it Matters to Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).
- ⁹ Raymond Geuss, *The Idea of a Critical Theory: Habermas and the Frankfurt School* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).
- ¹⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil. Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, trans. Judith Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001[1886]).
- ¹¹ I briefly touch upon other conceptions of “skill-in-means” in note 4, above. Skill-in-means as it is set out in the *Lotus Sūtra* plays an important role in such important Mahāyāna Sūtras as the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśasūtra*, the *Saddharmalaṅkāvatārasūtra*, the *Tathāgataguhyasūtra*, and the *Samdhinirmocanasūtra* (only the first two are extant in the original Sanskrit).
- ¹² Parasurama L. Vaidya, *Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtram* (Darbhanga: Mithila Institute, 1960a). All translations from Sanskrit and Pāli in this paper are my own.
- ¹³ Parasurama L. Vaidya, *Madhyamakaśāstra of Nāgārjuna, with the Commentary: Prasannapadā by Candrakīrti* (Darbhanga: Mithila Institute, 1960b). Unlike Vaidya, in this paper I refer to Nāgārjuna’s magnum opus by its most well-known title, *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (abbreviation: MMK).

- 14 As is well known, the “bodhisattva ideal” is met with in many a Mahāyāna text, but what is distinctive about the *Lotus Sūtra* is that this is supposed to be the “single vehicle” (*ekayāna*), not just a “high(er) vehicle” (*mahāyāna*) relative to lesser, but nevertheless real and in some sense legitimate “low(er) vehicle” (*bhīmayāna*) leading to *arhats*hip. See chapter 2, verses 73–74 (Vaidya 1960a: 34–5).
- 15 Parasurama L. Vaidya, *Saddharmalañkāvatārasūtram* (Darbhanga: Mithila Institute, 1963).
- 16 Asaf Federman would disagree. He argues that skill-in-means is an apologetic hermeneutical strategy developed in Mahāyāna circles to promote important doctrinal change whilst ducking the charge of heresy (Federman 2009). This might be an apt characterization of the *use* to which skill-in-means are put in the *Lotus Sūtra*, but as a claim about skill-in-means in general, it is in my opinion grounded in an underappreciation of the practical orientation of all Buddhist teachings, including those recorded in the Nikāyas. For a response to Federman complementary to that which I am about to put forward, based instead on the careful analysis of puns, imaginative etymologizing, and the non-literal use of language in Nikāya texts, see Visigalli (2016).
- 17 To be clear, the term “skillful means” (*upāya kusala*) does make two passing appearances in the Nikāyas (Oldenberg and Pischel 1966: 22; *Sn*, 56) and seems, on both occasions, to refer to the Buddha’s teaching. Nevertheless, it is only several centuries after the composition of these texts that the concept of skill-in-means gets theorized as such. See: Hermann Oldenberg and Richard Pischel (eds.), *Theragāthā and Therīgāthā*, second edition (London: Pali Text Society, 1966).
- 18 For further discussion, see Pye (2003: 123–24). Something similar occurs when the Buddha presents the Brāhmin Sigālaka with a revisionary account of the old Vedic ritual of worshipping the “six directions” (*DN III*, 180–93).
- 19 See, for instance, the *Ānandasutta* (*SN IV*, 400), where the Buddha refuses both to assert that the self exists and to assert that it does not, then explains his (pragmatic) reasons for doing so. Michel Hulin rightly suggests that Candrakīrti had this episode in mind when composing his commentary on *MMK XVIII.6* (Hulin 1978: 45). See: Michel Hulin *Le principe de l’ego dans la pensée indienne classique* (Paris: Diffusion E. de Boccard, 1978).
- 20 See, for instance, the *Cūḷamāluṅkiyovādasutta* (*MN I*, 426–43), which famously suggests that lending oneself to vain speculation when mired in suffering is tantamount to refusing to take medical action after being struck by a poisoned arrow before getting answers to a large number of inconsequential questions concerning the arrow’s constitution, the identity of the bowman, etc.
- 21 That Buddhist enlightenment does not preclude the experience of physical pain but of mental anguish is made evident in such texts as the *Sakalīkasutta* (*SN I*, 27–9).
- 22 Antoine Panaïoti, “Mindfulness and Personal Identity in the Western Cultural Context: A Plea for Greater Cosmopolitanism,” *Transcultural Psychiatry* 502, no. 2 (2015): 501–23.
- 23 On Vaibhāṣika-Sarvāstivāda thought, see, in particular, Collett Cox, “From Category to Ontology: The Changing Role of ‘Dharma’ in *Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma*,” *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 32, no. 5/6 (2004): 543–97; Bhikkhu K. L. Dhammajoti, *Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma*, fourth edition (Hong Kong: The Buddha-Dharma Centre of Hong Kong, 2009); and Jan Westerhoff, *The Golden Age of Indian Buddhist Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), chapter 1.
- 24 On this crucial insight and the fascinating discussions it gave rise to in Indian Madhyamaka philosophy, see, in particular, Donald S. Lopez Jr, “Do *Śrāvakas* Understand Emptiness?,” *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 16, no. 1 (1988): 65–105.
- 25 Consider, in a similar vein, *MMK XXIV.11*: “Badly understood, emptiness destroys the dim-witted, as would a mishandled snake or a miscast spell” (Vaidya 1960b: 216).
- 26 Dilip Loundo, “The ‘Two Truths’ Doctrine (*satyadvaya*) and the Nature of *Upāya* in Nāgārjuna,” *Kriterion* 133 (2016): 17–41.

- 27 The conventional view is that though the *Lotus Sūtra* looms very large indeed in East Asian Buddhism, it had but a marginal impact on Classical Indian and Indo-Tibetan Buddhist philosophy. See, e.g., Jonathan Silk, “The Place of the *Lotus Sūtra* in Indian Buddhism,” *Journal of Oriental Philosophy* 11, no. 1 (2001): 89–107. This view is in the process of being firmly debunked. See, in particular, Kaie Mochizuki, “How Did the Indian Masters Read the *Lotus Sūtra*?” *Journal of Indian and Buddhist Studies* 59, no. 3 (2011): 1169–77, and regarding Candrakīrti’s engagement with the *Lotus Sūtra* more specifically, James B. Apple, “Candrakīrti and the *Lotus Sūtra*,” *Bulletin of the Institute of Oriental Philosophy*, 31, no. 1 (2015): 97–122.
- 28 Though he cites it elsewhere, Candrakīrti does not cite the *Lotus Sūtra* in the *Prasannapadā*. But this does not preclude the *Prasannapadā*’s making use of the *principle* of skill-in-means as it is set out in the *Lotus Sūtra*, which it evidently does. To wit: the *sūtra* Candrakīrti cites in connection to skill-in-means is the *Tathāgataguhyasūtra*, which brings the same concept of skillful means into play.
- 29 MMK XVIII.6: *ātmety api prajñāpitam anātmety api deśitam / buddhair nātmā na cānātmā kaścid ity api deśitam //* (Vaidya 1960b: 152).
- 30 Candrakīrti elsewhere speaks, in this connection, of the “emptiness of emptiness” (*śūnyatāśūnyatā*) (*Madhyamakavatāra* VI.186; ed. Xuezhū 2015: 27). See: Li Xuezhū, “*Madhyamakavatāra-kaṛikā* Chapter 6,” *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 43, no.1 (2015): 1–30, 27. The idea is that Nāgārjuna’s basic teaching is a self-dissolving therapeutic intervention, the relevance and appropriateness of which is contextually dependent on sentient beings’ unhappy proclivity to hypostatize and reify what is given to them in the world of experience. Emptiness, in short, is not really a view, but a *corrective*.
- 31 Indeed, Christopher Gowans’ suggestion in his 2003 monograph that Buddhism is philosophy in the same sense as Ancient Stoicism or Epicureanism are philosophy (Gowans 2003: 42–6) has not gone unheeded. Christopher Gowans, *The Philosophy of the Buddha*, first edition (New York: Routledge, 2003). See, in particular, David Burton, “The Therapeutic Method in Buddhism and Hellenistic Philosophy,” ed. Martin Owens, *What is Comparative Philosophy?* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, forthcoming); David Burton, “Curing Diseases of Belief and Desire: Buddhist Philosophical Therapy,” *Philosophy as Therapeia: Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement*, ed. Jonardon Ganeri and Clare Carlisle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 187–218; Christopher Gowans, “Buddhist Philosophy as a Way of Life: The Spiritual Exercises of Tsong-kha-pa,” *Buddhist Philosophy: A Comparative Approach*, ed. Steven M. Emmanuel (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2017), 11–28; Matthew T. Kapstein, “Stoics and Bodhisattvas: Spiritual Exercise and Faith in Two Philosophical Traditions,” *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Ancients and Moderns—Essays in Honour of Pierre Hadot*, ed. Michael Chase, Stephen R. L. Clark, and Michael McGhee (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013b), 270–89; as well as the essays collected in *Buddhist Spiritual Practices: Thinking with Pierre Hadot on Buddhism, Philosophy, and the Path*, ed. David V. Fiordalis (Berkeley: Mangalam Press, 2018).
- 32 Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, trans. Michael Chase (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995).
- 33 Pyrrhonian Skepticism, which was perhaps the most reflexive and “psychologizing” of these schools, is where Hellenistic philosophy comes closest to Buddhism as regards metaphilosophy. Having said this, though reminiscent of what happens in some Buddhist texts, Sextus Empiricus’ attempts to deflate the Skeptics claims (e.g., “All is false”) as merely “ways of expressing one’s feeling or *pathos*” (cf. dogmata) is less revisionist (or deflationist) than the skill-in-means teaching as regards the epistemic status of philosophical discourse and instruction. See: *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, trans. Robert G. Burry (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1933), 107–25. (I set aside here the debate surrounding the possible influence of Pyrrhonian Skepticism on Buddhist thought, or vice versa.)
- 34 On suffering as the basic problem of thought, see in particular Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialektik* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1966), 17–8.
- 35 On this key feature of critical theory, see Geuss (1981: 62ff). The important debate between Habermas and Adorno on the conditions of warrant for a critical theory’s positive claims is one which I chose to

- tiptoe my way around here by emphasizing the negative or “deconstructive” component of critical theories. Having said this, it seems clear to me that skill-in-means as meta-doctrine entails something closer to Adorno’s (1966)—and Geuss’ (1981)—contextualism.
- 36 Amber Carpenter, *Indian Buddhist Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 2014), chapter 8. For further discussion of the “spiritual” dimensions of Pramāṇavāda (which has often been misconstrued as a rare case of unadulterated “philosophy” in Buddhism), see Matthew T. Kapstein, “‘Spiritual Exercise’ and Buddhist Epistemologists in India and Tibet,” *A Companion to Buddhist Philosophy* ed. Steven V. Emmanuel (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013a), 99–115.
- 37 This phrase is Śāntideva’s (cited in de la Vallée Poussin (1901: 491)). See : ed. Louis de la Vallée Poussin, *Bodhicāryāvātaraṇṅikā* of Prajñākaramati (London: Asiatic Society, 1901).
- 38 Max Horkheimer arguably comes very close to a skill-in-means standpoint in the conclusion of his essay, “The Problem of Truth,” where he argues that it can be counterproductive to insist on “sober truth” (here contrasted to potentially expedient religious fictions). The essay concludes as follows: “It is a utopian illusion to expect that the strength to live with the sober truth will become general until the causes of untruth are removed” (Horkheimer 1982 [1935]: 443). See: Max Horkheimer, “The Problem of Truth,” *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, eds. Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt, trans. Maurice Goldbloom (New York: Continuum, 1982), 407–43.
- 39 On this aspect of conventional truth, see Chapter XXIV, verses 8–10 and 18 in Nagārjuna’s *MMK*, as well as Candrakīrti’s equation of “transactional truth” with “means” (*upāya*) and “ultimate truth” as “that which is aimed for” (*upeya*) at *Madhyamakāvātara* VI.80 (Xuezhū 2015: 14). For a detailed discussion of the relation between the two truths doctrine and skillful means in Nagārjuna, see Loundo 2016.
- 40 Miri Albahari, “Insight Knowledge of No Self in Buddhism: An Epistemic Analysis,” *Philosopher’s Imprint* 21 (2014): 1–30.
- 41 Derek Parfit hits upon similar results. He points out that most people continue to be implicitly committed to something like their own existence as a soul or Cartesian Ego even though they have shed any such belief at what turns out to be a surface level (Parfit 1986: 834–6). See: Derek Parfit, “Comments,” *Ethics* 96, no. 4 (1986): 832–72. Theoretical resources to make sense of puzzling cases such as these in contemporary epistemology include the dispositional account of belief developed by Eric Schwitzgebel (“A Phenomenal, Dispositional Account of Belief,” *Nous* 36, no. 2 (2012): 249–75) and Tamar Gendler’s alief/belief distinction (“Alief and Belief,” *The Journal of Philosophy* 105, no. 10, (2008): 634–63).
- 42 In his *Satyasiddhiśāstra* the third century CE Indian Buddhist philosopher Harivarman distinguishes between wisdom (*prajñā*) that arises through “listening” (*śruta*), through “thinking” (*cinta*), and through “meditation” (*bhāvanā*), where each of these three steps is regarded as building upon and going beyond the former (ed. Shastri 1975: 510ff.) See: Natesa A. Shastri, *Satyasiddhiśāstra of Harivarman* (Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1975). On my model, change in belief or theoretical knowledge concerns steps one and two (listening and thinking), while insight knowledge is achieved through meditation.
- 43 Nietzsche writes: “We do not consider the falsity of a judgement as itself an objection to a judgment; this is perhaps where our new language will sound most foreign” (Nietzsche 2001 [1886]: 7).
- 44 For more recent articulations of this idea, see Chakrabarti and Weber (2016: 235); Coseru (2012: 37); Gowans (2015: 70–1); and Siderits (2015: 75–6). See: Arindam Chakrabarti and Ralph Weber, “Afterword/Afterwards,” in *Comparative Philosophy Without Borders*, ed. Arindam Chakrabarti and Ralph Weber (New York, Bloomsbury, 2016), 227–41; Christopher Gowans, *Philosophy of the Buddha: An Introduction*, second edition (New York: Routledge, 2015). For a more general discussion of recent attempts (including Siderits’) to move beyond comparative philosophy, see Tim Connolly, *Doing Philosophy Comparatively* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2015), chapter 11. For a critique of the “fusion” project’s pretensions as a *successor* to comparative philosophy, see Michael Levine, “Does Comparative

- Philosophy Have a Fusion Future?”, *Confluence: Journal of World Philosophies* 4, no. 1 (2016): 208–36. In this paper, I will sidestep this issue, which arguably turns on a moot question: too much hangs on how “comparative philosophy” is defined. This complements my point in footnote 8, above, about the (in my view unproblematic) fuzziness of the “fusion” concept.
- 45 Siderits puts it this way: “To those who see problem-solving as central to philosophy, and who also believe that the counterpoising of distinct traditions can yield useful results in this endeavour, the name ‘fusion philosophy’ seems appropriate” (Siderits 2003: xi).
- 46 Garfield similarly distinguishes between “doing Buddhist philosophy” and “developing an account of the history of Buddhist philosophy,” and pushes for the latter (Garfield 2015: 320). In a recent article, Jan Westerhoff likewise insists that we need to “move from Buddhist philosophy as *history of ideas* to Buddhist philosophy as *philosophy*” (Westerhoff 2019: 28–30). See: Jan Westerhoff, “Some Suggestions for the Future Directions of the Study of Buddhist Philosophy,” ed. Rafal Stepień, *American Philosophical Association Newsletter on Asian and Asian-American Philosophers and Philosophies* 19, no. 1 (2019): 28–30.
- 47 Siderits’ more recent meditations on the ways in which fusion work can “go astray” (Siderits 2015: 80–4) support this interpretation.
- 48 The account of cosmopolitanism I am putting forward here builds off of David T. Hansen’s characterization of the “cosmopolitan orientation” as a “fusion of reflective openness to the world and reflective loyalty toward the local” (David T. Hansen, “Dewey and Cosmopolitanism,” *Education and Culture* 25, no. 2 (2009): 126–40, 128). I take “reflectivity” to imply a constructively critical (and self-critical) stance.
- 49 Another way to put this point is to question, with Michael Levine, “(1) whether different traditions even try to solve the same problems, and (2) whether or not they understand these apparently identical problems in the same way” (Levine 2016: 213).
- 50 See, in this connection, Śāṅkara and his commentator Vācaspatimiśra’s critique of Buddhist attempts at presenting Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma, Vijñānavāda and Madhyamaka systems as gradual *upāyic* steps towards true realization at *BSB* II.2.18 and Vācaspatimiśra’s *Bhāmati* commentary on this text. See *BSB* (1938: 523–4).
- 51 For a(n incomplete) list of said successors, see note 8, above.
- 52 John Schroeder, “Nagarjuna and the Doctrine of ‘Skillful Means,’” *Philosophy East and West* 50, no. 4 (2000): 559–83, *Skillful Means: The Heart of Buddhist Compassion* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2001), and “Truth, Deception, and Skillful Means in the *Lotus Sūtra*,” *Asian Philosophy* 21, no. 1 (2011): 35–52.
- 53 Christopher Gowans, “David V. Fiordalis (ed.), *Buddhist Spiritual Practices: Thinking with Pierre Hadot on Buddhism, Philosophy, and the Path*,” *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews* (2018). <https://ndpr.nd.edu/news/buddhist-spiritual-practices-thinking-with-pierre-hadot-on-buddhism-philosophy-and-the-path/>
- 54 In a recent paper, Jessica Frazier asks whether “doing philosophy across cultures is [not] always implicitly a matter of metaphilosophy” (Frazier 2020: 32). Like her, I think the answer is that it is indeed. In the case of the kind of fusion philosophy with which this paper is concerned, however, metaphilosophical questions must be raised *explicitly*. See: “‘The View from Above’: A Theory of Comparative Philosophy,” *Religious Studies* 56, no.1 (2020): 32–48.
- 55 For a bold effort in this direction, see Owen Flanagan, *The Bodhisattva’s Brain: Buddhism Naturalized* (Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 2011). Flanagan, surprisingly, does not invoke skill-in-means, though this would no doubt have helped him preemptively to shield himself from the salvos of Buddhist traditionalists.
- 56 This language is Jonardon Ganeri’s. See: Ganeri (2012: 2).