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THE PROBLEM OF THEODICY IN THE

AWAKENING OF FAITH*

The present paper tries to trace the particular contours that the problem of theodicy assumes in the Chinese Buddhist text the *Awakening of Faith in the Great Vehicle* (*Ta-sheng ch'i-hsin lun*). It analyses the beginning section of the main body of text – the section, that is, that outlines the major theoretical structure of the work¹ – in terms of a problem that has been of particular concern in western theology. I believe that taking such a tack is especially valuable for highlighting the central Problematik around which the text is organized. The paper will thus use the problem of theodicy as a means of exploring some of the philosophical implications of the *Awakening of Faith*.

Let me introduce the text, and my approach to it, with a quote from the beginning of the ‘Shem the Penman’ chapter of *Finnegans Wake*:

> A few toughnecks are still getatable who pretend that aboriginally he was of respectable stemming... but every honest to goodness man in the land of the space of today knows that his back life will not stand being written about in black and white. Putting truth and untruth together a shot may be made at what this hybrid actually was like to look at.²

Which can be glossed as follows. *A few toughnecks are still getatable who pretend that aboriginally he was of respectable stemming*. There are still some scholars left – mostly in Japan – who maintain that the *Awakening of Faith* was, as it purports to be, an Indian Buddhist treatise written by the venerable Aśvaghosa and rendered into Chinese by the great translator Paramārtha. *But every honest to goodness man in the land of the space of today [the enlightened reader] knows that his back life will not stand being written about in black and white.*

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¹ The paper will focus on that portion of the text contained on p. 576a 3–c4 of volume 32 of the *Taishō Daizokyo* edition. For easy reference, *Taishō* page references will be given in parentheses within the main body of the paper. See pp. 31–40 of Yoshito S. Hakeda’s English translation, published by Columbia University Press in 1967.

Most scholars today are agreed that the *Awakening of Faith* is an apocryphal text that was probably written in China some time during the third quarter of the sixth century, although who the author(s) may have been is a matter of conjecture. Putting truth and untruth together [my methodology] a shot may be made at what this hybrid actually was like to look at. This is what I will try to do in the paper and, as we shall see, whatever else the text may or may not be, it is surely a hybrid.

Whatever the provenance of this hybrid of questionable pedigree, no history of East Asian Buddhist thought would be complete without devoting significant attention to it, as the *Awakening of Faith* is certainly one of the most influential texts in all of East Asian Buddhism. It served as one of the central doctrinal bases upon which what was perhaps the greatest of all Chinese Buddhist philosophical traditions, the Hua-yen, elaborated its system. It also played a significant role in the development of early Ch’an discourse, as even a cursory reading of the Ch’an treatises from the seventh and eighth centuries will show. It occupied an equally important place in the thought of Chinul (1158–1210), whose grand synthesis of Hua-yen (Hwaom) and Ch’an (Son) was formative in defining the course of Korean Buddhism. And in Japan, it provided the cornerstone for the articulation of the so-called ‘thought of original enlightenment’ (hongaku shisō), which modern scholars, most notably Tamura Yoshirō, have argued is the doctrinal matrix out of which the great medieval reform movements of Pure Land, Nichiren and Zen emerged.

I. DOCTRINAL PROBLEMATIK

The ninth century Ch’an and Hua-yen figure Kuei-feng Tsung-mi (780–841) used the *Awakening of Faith* as the principal basis from which he interpreted Hua-yen teachings and justified Ch’an practice. He especially valued this text for answering two opposite, but integrally related questions: ‘What is the origin of enlightenment (given the deluded state in which men find themselves)?’ and ‘What is the origin of delusion (given the reality of man’s intrinsically enlightened nature)?’ And the text does this, or at least tries to do this, by combining together two very different conceptions of Mind.

1 The sheer volume of the literature on the authorship of the *Awakening of Faith* is daunting. In a recent study of the text, Kashiwagi Hiroo lists 46 references; see *Daijōkishinron no kenkyū* (Tokyo, Shunjūsha, 1981), pp. 498–501. The issue has most recently been taken up by William Grosnick in his ‘Cittaprakīrti and *Ayonis’omanaskara* in the *Ratnagotravibhāga*: precedent for the *Hsin-Nien* distinction of *The Awakening of Faith*, *The Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* VI, 2 (1983), 35–47.


4 See, for example, Tamura’s *Kamakura shinbukkyō shisō no kenkyū* (Kyoto, Heirakuji shoten, 1965).

The first, which I will refer to by its technical name of *tathāgatagarbha* ('embryo or womb of the Tathāgata'), sees the Mind as the fount of enlightenment because it is, in its true nature, intrinsically enlightened to begin with. The second conception of the Mind, the *ālayavijñāna* ('store consciousness'), sees it as the source of that activity by which beings construct the web of deluded conceptions by which they become bound in suffering. The importance of the first conception of the Mind, as I will be treating it in my argument, is that it provides a solid ontological basis for Buddhist soteriology, while that of the second is that it offers a coherent epistemological explanation of the process by which delusion unfolds and is perpetuated. Since some understanding of these two conceptions of Mind is crucial for clarifying the dialectical structure of the *Awakening of Faith*, let me try to characterize them schematically.¹

Both conceptions can be seen as developing out the *Problematic* of the revolutionary Mahāyāna teaching of emptiness as it had been proclaimed in the Perfection of Wisdom (*prajñāpāramitā*) scriptures and elaborated philosophically in the Mādhyamika treatises. At the same time, each can be seen as assuming a diametrically different stance in regard to the questions raised by that tradition. One of the central problems that the teaching of emptiness brought to the fore was that of explaining the relationship of enlightenment and ignorance. Although often articulated in highly technical discourse, this was, of course, more than just a philosophical problem; as it bore on the heart of Buddhist soteriology, it had far-reaching practical implications as well. Traditionally, Buddhism had always conceived of itself as a Path (*mārga*) which, if followed, led out of the bondage of ignorance to the liberation of enlightenment. And any attempt to articulate such a path involved specifying, even if only implicitly, how the two key soteriological categories of ignorance and enlightenment were related. With the radical apophasis of the Mādhyamika interpretation of the meaning of emptiness, however, it became difficult to say anything at all about how the two were related, and this situation had disturbing implications for Buddhist practice.

The particular force that this problem had can be seen by looking at the Mādhyamika theory of the Two Truths. According to this hermeneutical principle, there are two kinds of truth: ultimate (*paramārtha*) and conventional (*samvrtti*). The problem as it arises in Mādhyamika is that all language, no matter how hallowed or profound, ultimately falls within the realm of conventional truth. That is to say, it is only true within a commonly accepted frame of reference, which is ultimately arbitrary, and has nothing to do with the way things really are. It is part of that world of discrimination which leads us to posit a self, as separate from everything else, and which,

¹ The following characterization was inspired by Robert Gimello's discussion of these two Buddhist conceptions of the Mind in his *Chih-yen and the foundations of Hua-yen Buddhism* (Columbia University Ph.D. dissertation, 1976), pp. 212–77.
accordingly, is at the root of the grasping that sustains the whole cycle of suffering. Thus, however exalted its intention, all religious language, including that of the Mādhyamika dialecticians, is ultimately false. This, of course, means that ultimate truth, being altogether beyond the ken of language, is ineffable.

The absolute disjunction between ultimate and conventional truth in the Mādhyamika formulation of the Two Truths thus left unexplained the relationship between ignorance and enlightenment. If it were unclear how one could move from the realm of conventional truth to that of ultimate truth, then it was equally unclear how one could effect a transition from a state of ignorance to one of enlightenment. Given the state of ignorance in which sentient beings find themselves, how was enlightenment possible? At the same time, Mādhyamika asserted the identity of bondage and liberation without, however, offering any explanation of how, if this is so, beings suffer in ignorance of this fact. If the condition of sentient existence (bondage) is no different from the final goal of religious practice (liberation), then how do beings become deluded in the first place? Whereas the doctrine of the tathāgatagarbha can be seen as arising in response to the first question, that of the ālayavijñāna can be seen as arising in response to the second. That is, while the tathāgatagarbha doctrine provides an explanation of how enlightenment is possible, that of the ālayavijñāna provides an explanation for how ignorance is possible.

While each of the conceptions of Mind answers one horn of the Mādhyamika dilemma, it does so by shunting the other one. That is, although the tathāgatagarbha doctrine successfully addresses the problem of the possibility of enlightenment, it does so by side-stepping the equally vexing problem of the origin of ignorance; and although the ālayavijñāna doctrine gives a systematic explanation of how ignorance operates, it does so by making the very possibility of enlightenment problematical. Since the two doctrines complement one another in such a way, it would seem inevitable that some attempt would be made to integrate them. And this is precisely what the Awakening of Faith attempts to do. The text, of course, is not unique in this regard. Its position evolves out of the mainstream of Chinese Buddhist speculation in the sixth century. It is especially noteworthy, however, because it becomes the orthodox formulation of this relationship.

In addition to the complementary relationship that obtains between the tathāgatagarbha and ālayavijñāna as both can be seen as qualifications of the doctrine of emptiness, there is also another dynamic at work that needs to be emphasized within the context of this paper, and that has to do with the relationship between the tathāgatagarbha and emptiness doctrines in regard to the question of the nature and function of religious language. The Mādhyamika formulation of emptiness, as we have already noted, leads to a position of thoroughgoing apophasis. That is to say, since the nature of
reality as revealed in Buddhist gnosis is beyond all determination, any attempt to express it in language is doomed to prove utterly inadequate. Thus, symbolically, Vimalakirti’s thundering silence is ultimately the only position that one can take.¹

While the Mādhyamika critique of language is surely one of the most trenchent ever devised, the relentless rigor and consistency with which it was applied created an affective void for the many Buddhist practitioners who needed a positive symbol to serve as the focus for their devotional piety and faith, and the tathāgatagarbha doctrine can be seen as answering such a need. The early scriptures in which it was first propounded claim that this doctrine represents the true meaning of emptiness.² They assert that the earlier teaching of emptiness as expounded in the Perfection of Wisdom scriptures and Madhyamika treatises was incomplete because it merely said what reality was not. The tathāgatagarbha doctrine, however, went beyond this partial teaching to reveal that ultimate reality (the tathāgatagarbha in its true form) is not only empty of all defilements, it is also not empty of all the infinite Buddha qualities.³ This meant that a series of positive attributes could be ascribed to the Absolute, such as permanence (nitya, ch'ang), bliss (sukha, le), selfhood (ātman, wo), and purity (subha, ching),⁴ and the use of such positive language, as we shall see, is integrally related to how theodicy arises as a problem in the Awakening of Faith.

2. THE PROBLEM OF THEODICY

Such is the doctrinal Problematik in terms of which the Awakening of Faith formulates its own position. Let me now, in turning to the problem of theodicy, begin by noting the opinions of three scholars which bear on it and its place—or, rather, its lack of place—in Buddhism. The first is that of Max Weber who, in his essay ‘Theodicy, Salvation, and Rebirth’, claims that the Indian doctrine of karma represents ‘the most complete formal solution of the problem of theodicy’.⁵ Weber goes on to state: ‘Only Buddhism has

³ See Pu-¨t-su chien ching, T 16.457 a 20-1: ‘The merit and wisdom of the Tathāgata are not separate from, detached from, cut off from, or different from the inconceivable Buddha-dhammas, which are more numerous than the sands of the Ganges.’ This passage is quoted in the Ratnagotravibhāga, T 31.821 b 2-3 (cf. Takasaki Jikido, A Study of the Ratnagotravibhāga (Uttaratantra), Serie Orientale Roma xxxii (Rome, 1966), 144) and, in slightly altered form, repeated in the Śrīmālā-sūtra (see T 12.221c 17-18; cf. Wayman, p. 99).
⁴ See, for example, Śrīmālā-sūtra, T 12.222 a 21-5 (cf. Wayman, p. 102). These four qualities, here attributed to the Absolute, are often referred to as the ‘four upside-down views’ and were traditionally taken as a hallmark of heretical teachings. They figure prominently in the Nirvā¨ṇa-sūtra corpus and also appear in the Awakening of Faith, 579 a 16-17.
⁵ The Sociology of Religion (Boston, Beacon Press, 1964), p. 145. Peter Berger, who uses Weber’s discussion of theodicy as the starting point for his own treatment of it in the third chapter of The Sacred Canopy (Garden
deduced from the doctrine of the transmigration of souls [sic] its ultimate consequences. This is the most radical solution of the problem of theodicy.1

In an effort to expand Weber's treatment of the issue, Gananath Obeysekere makes the even stronger claim that Buddhism cannot, in fact, be said to offer a 'solution' to the problem of theodicy because the problem cannot even be formulated within the framework of Buddhist karma theory. Rather, Buddhism forecloses the very possibility of the problem arising.2

The third opinion is that of Arthur Herman. He begins his book The Problem of Evil and Indian Thought with the observation that, while western and Indian thought, for the most part, share the same general philosophical concerns, the one particular issue that was of pressing concern for western theologians and philosophers and that was never posed by their Indian counterparts was the problem of evil. Herman claims that the problem of theodicy does not occur in Indian thought because of the presence of the doctrine of rebirth and goes on to argue that the Indian doctrine of rebirth does, indeed, provide 'an acceptable philosophic solution to the problem of theodicy'.3

This is not the occasion to evaluate these claims or to discuss the complex issues that they raise. I cite them here to make the point that there seems to be a fairly prevalent opinion that theodicy is not a problem for Buddhism. Whatever their ultimate merit, these claims certainly seem to make sense within the context of Indian Buddhism as a whole. I would argue, however, that theodicy does become a full-blown and serious philosophical problem for Buddhists with the emergence of the tathagatagarbha doctrine, especially when the ontological implications of the early tathagatagarbha scriptures were spelled out in more radical terms by those Chinese Buddhists who composed the Awakening of Faith, wrote commentaries upon it, and used it as the starting point for the elaboration of their own doctrinal systems.

Before proceeding any further, however, it is first necessary to define theodicy and show how it arises as a problem in Buddhism. In its traditional formulation within the context of Christian theology, a theodicy is the vindication of the justice of God given the reality of evil. Simply put, the problem is this: if it is true that God is good, then He should not want there to be evil. If it is also true that God is omnipotent, then He should be able to eliminate evil. There thus seems to be a contradiction between God's goodness and His omnipotence. If, moreover, God is omniscient, then He should be able to foresee the possibility of evil before it even occurs and so

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1 Ibid., p. 147.
prevent it from ever arising in the first place. While this bald statement of
the problem slights the forensic subtlety with which it has been argued by
theologians for almost two millennia, it should, nevertheless, suffice to bring
out the point that I want to emphasize for this paper. That is, the problem
turns on the attributes of God – and the question of divine attributes is related
to that of the nature of religious language. If God had no attributes, there
would be no problem. If it did not make any difference, for instance, whether
or not God were good, then there would be no need to vindicate His justice.
But, if God had no attributes, or if they were a matter of irrelevance, then
the universe would have no moral undergirdings – and this would obviously
have dire consequences for any theologian concerned with justifying the basis
for moral and religious action in a world where evil all too often seems to
pay.

The point of view from which I would like to discuss theodicy has to do
with its relationship to the attempt to provide an ontological basis for moral
and religious action. Stated in its most general philosophical terms, the
problem of theodicy could then be said to arise out of the attempt to reconcile
a monistic Absolute Being or Principle with ethical categories that are, by
their very nature, dualistic. On the one hand, the positing of an Absolute
Being or Principle is necessary in order to provide an ontological foundation
for a universal ethic. It is by being able to claim an ultimate source for their
prescriptions that ethical assertions assume their imperative character.
Psychologically, the fact that a certain course of action is believed to be
divinely ordained or in accord with the ultimate nature of reality allows one
to maintain a sense of confidence in the rightness of his actions in the face
of the apparently disconfirming experiences of life. In other words, this link
with the Absolute, whether conceived as a Personal Being or Impersonal
Principle, is an important ingredient in any recipe for moral or religious
motivation. On the other hand, the acknowledgement of the reality of evil
(or sin, suffering, or imperfection) is an equally important ingredient.
Without the individual’s acute awareness of the gap between his own state
of sin or suffering and the possibility of an ideal state in which sin is redeemed
or suffering extinguished, he would have no motivation to act so as to
transform his present state. Yet, this very recognition poses the question of
why such imperfection exists in the first place. While I shall be dealing with
the problem of theodicy in theoretical terms, we should not lose sight of the
fact that the practical stakes behind the metaphysics bear directly upon the
whole structure of moral and religious motivation which animates the life of
the religious person. To put it in other terms, the theological problem of
theodicy is only the most rationalized expression of the existential need for
meaning.

How does this apply to Buddhism? Because Buddhism has no concept of
a Supreme Being who created the universe and ordained moral laws for
humankind to follow, the problem of evil, with its specific theological connotation of sin, does not arise. Yet, this is only one dimension of what is meant by evil. Beginning with Leibniz, the distinction has often been made in western discussions of theodicy between three types of evil: moral, natural, and metaphysical.1 ‘Moral evil’ refers to evil committed by man, in short, sin. ‘Natural evil’ refers to those evils visited upon man, such as earthquakes, floods, droughts, etc., in other words, evil which originates independent of man’s actions. The third category, with which I shall be most concerned, that of ‘metaphysical evil’, refers to the basic fact of imperfection, the fact that we live in such a world that there should be moral and natural evil. What in a Christian context are referred to as moral and natural evil are, in the case of Buddhism, answered by the doctrine of karma. Man’s evil actions in this world are merely the result of past evil thoughts and deeds. The ‘natural’ evils which befall man in this life — and which appear so unjust — are merely retribution for evil committed in a past life. The force that drives this unremitting wheel of karmic retribution, however, is ignorance. The problem of metaphysical evil in Buddhism thus translates into that of the origin of ignorance.

The problem of the origin of ignorance was left unanswered in early Buddhism, which saw itself as offering a pragmatic prescription for salvation and eschewed such metaphysical questions as not being conducive to liberation. Such a question was like a man wounded by a poison arrow seeking to determine why he had been shot, while the poison worked its deadly effect, instead of pulling it out.2 The cycle of birth and death, samsāra, was said to be beginningless. Although the suffering of samsāra was ultimately based on ignorance, the question of the origin of that ignorance, and, consequently, the fact of suffering, was not seen as lying within the domain of soteriologically relevant inquiry and was, therefore, not addressed. Rather, for early Buddhists, the empirical reality of ignorance and the concomitant fact of suffering were taken as givens whose significance served as the existential starting point for the religious life. This, in fact, could be one way of formulating the first Noble Truth, that of duḥkha, suffering.

Nevertheless, I think that we have to consider the metaphysical question of the origin of ignorance as posing the problem of theodicy at its most fundamental ontological level. While early Buddhists did not account for the fact of samsāra, and, therefore, did not answer the problem of theodicy on this level, they did offer a systematic and coherent explanation of the way in which samsāra operated — and this is the level on which Weber, Obeyesekere,


and Herman claim that Buddhism furnishes a convincing solution to the problem of theodicy, or does away with it altogether. In other words, Buddhist karma theory does give a satisfactory explanation of the injustices so evident in the world. It does not, however, explain why we should live in such a world to begin with.

In order to clarify how theodicy emerges as a serious philosophical problem in Buddhism, it is thus helpful to distinguish between two different levels upon which it can arise: the first is what we could call the metaphysical or ontological and would encompass the problem of metaphysical evil; the second, the epistemological or psychological, which would encompass that of moral and natural evil. While early Buddhism does not provide an answer for the origin of ignorance (i.e., it does not deal with the problem on the first, or ontological, level), it does offer an explanation for the way in which ignorance operates (i.e., it does deal with it on the second, or epistemological, level).

Given the particular soteriological orientation of early Buddhism, it would perhaps be unfair of us to expect an answer to the problem of theodicy on the first level. For, while the problem may still lurk somewhere in the shadows of Buddhist theory, it clearly falls outside of what Buddhism had demarcated for itself as its legitimate sphere of concern. And this, perhaps, holds for Buddhist philosophy as long as it remains within the domain of epistemology. Once, however, it begins to develop in the direction of a monistic ontology, as was implicit, at least, in the early Indian tathāgatagarbha tradition, then it begins to run into problems that parallel those that have so confounded a monotheistic theology such as Christianity, and it becomes incumbent upon it to provide an answer to the problem of theodicy on an ontological level. In other words, it has to take up the question of the origin of ignorance.

3. THEODICY IN THE AWAKENING OF FAITH

The question of the origin of ignorance is, in fact, the central philosophical problem for the tathāgatagarbha tradition. It becomes even more troublesome when phrased within the monistic ontology presupposed by the Awakening of Faith. Whether or not the tathāgatagarbha doctrine was ontological in intent, its formulation in such early texts as the Śrīmālā-sūtra or the Ratnagotravibhāga was certainly open to ontological interpretation. While such a reading may have represented a move that most Indian Buddhists would have been reluctant to make, it was one that came naturally to many of their Chinese counterparts.

The problem of theodicy as it is manifested in the Awakening of Faith can be traced back to a basic paradox at the very heart of the tathāgatagarbha

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1 The Śrīmālā-sūtra, for instance, claims that the tathāgatagarbha is the basis (mitropa, i), support (ādhāra, ch'ih), and foundation (pratiṣṭhā, chien-li) of samsāra (see T 12.222 b 5-15; cf. Wayman, pp. 104-5).
doctrine: the *tathāgatagarbha* is at once intrinsically pure and identical with the *Dharmakāya*, or Absolute Reality, and yet it appears to be defiled. These two aspects of the *tathāgatagarbha* are referred to in the *Awakening of Faith* as the Mind as Suchness (*hsin chen-ju*) and the Mind which is subject to birth-and-death (*hsin sheng-mieh*) – or what we could call, following its major commentator, the Absolute (*pu-pien*) and conditioned (*sui-yüan*) aspects of the Mind.1 The question, then, is: how are these two aspects of the One Mind related? The question could be rephrased: how does the Absolute become conditioned? Or, to put it in more conventional *tathāgatagarbha* terminology: how does the intrinsically pure Mind become defiled? In other words, how can the *tathāgatagarbha* be both transcendent and immanent at the same time? In order for the *Awakening of Faith* to have a viable theodicy it is thus going to have to vindicate the intrinsic purity of the *tathāgatagarbha* given its defiled appearance in the phenomenal world.

The relationship between these two aspects of the Mind as it is outlined in the *Awakening of Faith* seems to presuppose the logic of the Two Truths and, when seen in these terms, the *Awakening of Faith* seems to offer a ‘solution’ to the problem of the theodicy by using the doctrine of emptiness to deny the reality of the defilements. That is, the theodicy would take the following form: while sentient beings, in their delusion, perceive the *tathāgatagarbha* as being defiled, when they see it from the perspective of Ultimate Truth, then they will realize that it is none other than the *Dharmakāya*, Absolute Reality, which is empty of all defilements. In other words, the defilements which seem to cover over the *tathāgatagarbha* are illusory, the result of a fault in the way in which we perceive the *tathāgatagarbha* and have nothing to do with the *tathāgatagarbha* in itself.

Although the *Awakening of Faith* does not explicitly employ the rubric of the Two Truths, there are numerous places throughout the text where it is clearly implicit. The true nature of the Mind (*hsin-hsing*), for instance, is said to be beyond all predication. Since it is ineffable and inconceivable, ‘all locutions (*i-ch'ieh yen-shuo*) are provisional designations (*chia-ming*), lack reality (*wu-shih*), and are merely used in accordance with deluded thinking (*tan sui wang-nien*). The term ‘Suchness’ (*chen-ju*), therefore, does not designate anything at all but is only a device used to put an end to discursive discourse (*yen-shuo chih chi yin yen ch'ien yen*) (576a8–15). The implication is clear: any language that can be constructed to talk about ‘reality’ must be taken provisionally. At best it can do no more than function as an expedient device to point beyond itself and, the text seems to be warning us, we must be careful not to become trapped in our own constructions, including those offered by the *Awakening of Faith* itself.

The emptiness of the *tathāgatagarbha* as the Mind as Suchness thus points to its intrinsic purity, the fact that it transcends all defilement. But, we may

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1 See Fa-tsang's *Ta-sheng ch'i-hsin lun i-chi*, T 1845.
then ask, if the defilements are wholly extrinsic to the tathāgatagarbha, whence do they arise? Yet to say, as the *Awakening of Faith* does, that they are merely the results of deluded thoughts is not a real solution. The claim that the defilements are merely illusory does not dissolve the problem, but only *seems* to shift it from an ontological to an epistemological level, for the question re-emerges in slightly altered form: Whence, then, does delusion arise? This question is only *apparently* epistemological, however, because the Mind from which delusion arises is the intrinsically enlightened pure Mind and this Mind, in the context of the *Awakening of Faith*, is the fundamental ground of phenomenal reality.

It is at this juncture in the argument that the *Awakening of Faith* introduces the concept of the ālayavijñāna, a move which holds the promise of a more successful theodicy, especially if we can see the ālayavijñāna doctrine as having been developed within the early Yogācāra tradition of Indian Buddhism as an explanation for the epistemological and psychological mechanisms by which ignorance operates to distort perception. As it is used within the *Awakening of Faith*, the ālayavijñāna refers to the dynamic aspect of the One Mind as it appears in the midst of phenomenal conditions and thus seems, prima facie, to offer a solution to the problem of theodicy precisely as it is phrased within the context of the text. The *Awakening of Faith* defines the ālayavijñāna as

the interfusion of that which is not subject to birth and death [i.e. the Mind as Suchness] and that which is subject to birth and death in such a way that they are neither one nor different (576b8–9).

Just as the tathāgatagarbha has two aspects, so too does the ālayavijñāna, aspects which the *Awakening of Faith* refers to as enlightened (chueh) and unenlightened (pu-chueh). The enlightened aspect, moreover, is said to be grounded on the Dharmakāya and is therefore said to be intrinsic, pen (576b11–14), a term which, in the context of the *Awakening of Faith*, I think we are fully justified in interpreting as meaning ontologically grounded. The question of the relationship between the two aspects of the One Mind is thus recapitulated in the question of the relationship between the two aspects of the ālayavijñāna. Since, however, the enlightened aspect of the ālayavijñāna is grounded on the Dharmakāya, our seemingly epistemological rephrasing of the question turns out to be ontological after all: How can delusion arise if the fundamental ground of phenomenal reality is the intrinsically enlightened Mind? In other words, what is the origin of ignorance?

While the *Awakening of Faith* seems, at first, to offer a solution to the problem of theodicy by identifying the tathāgatagarbha with the ālayavijñāna, it only ends up running aground at the same point that it did with the two aspects of the One Mind. For the ālayavijñāna is identified with the Mind which is subject to birth-and-death. Thus the doctrinal question of how the
ālayavijnāna can be identified with the tathāgatagarbha boils down to our earlier question of the relationship between the two aspects of the One Mind – and this is nothing but a rephrasing of the basic problem.

The introduction of the ālayavijnāna thus does not avoid the ontological problem of theodicy, but only raises it in an altered guise. Moreover, the kind of theodicy put forward in the section dealing with the ālayavijnāna reiterates the basic mode of analysis which was used in the earlier section dealing with the two aspects of the One Mind. In discussing the enlightened aspect of the ālayavijnāna, the Awakening of Faith distinguishes between intrinsic enlightenment (pen-chüeh) and experiential enlightenment (shih-chüeh). Experiential enlightenment, moreover, is contrasted with unenlightenment (pu-chüeh). In fact, the text states that it is only in the context of unenlightenment that we can talk about experiential enlightenment. Experiential enlightenment constitutes the process by which we realize the ultimate source of the Mind (chüeh hsin-yüan) (576b 14–17), which is intrinsically enlightened. When we do this, however, we will realize that all of our defiled states of mind, what the Awakening of Faith refers to as thoughts (nien), are nothing but a manifestation of the Mind as Suchness, which transcends thoughts (li-nien) and is intrinsically pure. There is, therefore, nothing that is not enlightened. Enlightenment and unenlightenment are thus relative terms which only have meaning when talked about from the perspective of unenlightenment.

The underlying mode of analysis used in the section discussing the ālayavijnāna can thus be seen as falling within the framework of the logic of the Two Truths, as was also seen earlier in the case of the two aspects of the One Mind. Perhaps our analysis so far is enough to reveal a basic pattern in the mode of thought which, I think, can be found throughout the text as a whole, a pattern which could be characterized as consisting in the tension generated by a basic duality between a monistic first principle (i.e., the One Mind) and a dualistic second principle (i.e., its two aspects: the Mind as Suchness and the Mind which is subject to birth-and-death). There are two levels of dualism within this pattern. In the case of what we could call the explicit level of dualism (as exemplified in the two aspects of the One Mind) we have a pair which conform to the basic pattern of the logic of the Two Truths: on the one hand, we have a monistic first principle (i.e., the One Mind) as seen from the perspective of ultimate truth (the Mind as Suchness) and, on the other hand, as seen from the perspective of conventional truth (the Mind which is subject to birth-and-death). This explicit dualism constitutes what could be called the dualistic second principle which, itself, forms a further duality with the monistic first principle (the One Mind), and this implicit dualism can also be seen as operating within the framework of the Two Truths. Moreover, there is a dialectic progression at work, the terms within what, in any given context, constitutes the dualist second principle generating, in turn, a further duality, which operates in accordance with the
logic of the Two Truths. Thus the Mind as Suchness is unqualifiable when considered from the perspective of ultimate truth, whereas it is qualifiable from the perspective of conventional truth. As it is qualifiable, it can be seen as empty and not empty. This process can be represented schematically as follows:

```
One Mind
  /\   /\    
Mind as suchness Mind subject to birth and death
  \   \  
Unqualifiable Qualifiable
     \   
  Empty Not empty
     \  
    Empty Not empty
     \  
      Alayavijñana
```

From the point of view of the monistic first principle not only is the duality that operates on an explicit level illusory, but the implicit duality between the two levels themselves is also illusory. Yet in order for the system to provide an ontological basis for religious practice, the duality between the two levels cannot be obliterated. Without the tension between the actual state of affairs and the ideal state of affairs, that is, without the tension between ignorance and enlightenment, the whole system would collapse into a static monism that would undermine any motivation for religious practice. Yet, as I have suggested, we can see the tathāgatagarbha doctrine as having been developed, at least in part, to provide a ground for religious practice and thereby counter the antinomian implications of the thoroughgoing apophasis of the Madhyamika articulation of the doctrine of emptiness. Thus the *Awakening of Faith* cannot do away with the duality between these two levels. Moreover, it is precisely the tension between these two levels that defines the philosophical form that the problem of theodicy takes within the context of the *Awakening of Faith*.

So, what kind of theodicy are we left with? The kinds of ‘solution’ that we have examined so far are certainly not philosophically satisfying ones. The *Awakening of Faith* seems to be asserting two basic positions which alternate in uneasy tension with one another. The first follows the logic of the Two Truths and wants to deny the ultimate nature of the problem by saying that it arises out of the structure of human thought as it takes form in language and therefore has nothing to do with reality-as-such. But, as we have seen, this move only generates the further question of how the Mind, which is intrinsically enlightened, can give rise to delusion in the first place. Moreover, within the doctrinal framework of the tathāgatagarbha, this move also leads to an unacceptable consequence. For, when this position is taken to its logical conclusion, then we have to end up saying that the Absolute is ultimately unqualifiable. But this is precisely what a text such as the *Awakening of Faith*
cannot admit, given its reliance on the \textit{tathāgatagarbha} as the ontological ground for religious practice. In order to serve as a basis for faith in the Buddhist path, the Absolute has to be qualifiable, and it is the consistent position of the \textit{tathāgatagarbha} tradition that the Absolute is endowed with infinite excellent Buddha qualities.

The strategy that the \textit{Awakening of Faith} assumes towards the problem of theodicy could thus be characterized as follows: when the problem comes to the fore, the text tries to shift it to an epistemological level by falling back on the logic of the Two Truths. Not only does this move not work, it also has unwanted consequences, and we find the text slipping back into an ontological mode in order to affirm a ground for religious practice, only to have the problem arise once more. If we then try to reconcile these two positions, we are left with statements to the effect that, when the Absolute is said to be Pure, the word ‘pure’ does not denote the relative purity of ‘pure’ as contrasted with ‘impure’. But what kind of purity are we talking about then? And how can we understand such language?

From the point of view of the Mādhyamika critique of language and the whole mode of conceptualization that it embodies, it could be said that it does not really make any difference whether such language makes sense because all philosophical language falls within the domain of conventional truth, has only relative validity within a circumscribed realm of discourse, and is ultimately false. In fact, since language is, at base, an expression of the dichotomizing mode of conceptualization that is the very nature of delusion, we should be surprised were it to make sense when it is used in regard to the Absolute, which is undifferentiated. On the other hand, the very problem may also be seen as an impetus for religious practice. That is, such language may be soteriologically efficacious in that it may cause us to realize the ultimate and intractable paradoxes to which human thought eventually leads. The use of language to invalidate the mode of thought embodied in our linguistic structures thus paradoxically revalidates the positive use of language as a teaching device, \textit{upāya}, because such language paves the way for us to shift our basic cognitive orientation and see the problem from a fundamentally different standpoint. And when we do that, the problem will dissolve.

The \textit{Awakening of Faith} does not resolve the problem of theodicy on a philosophical level. Its ‘solution’ – if that is what it can be called – is to call into question the whole project of attempting to resolve it on that level. The solution to the problem thus does not consist in resolving it philosophically, but in transcending it through a radical transformation in the structure of consciousness. But what is critical to note is that in order to get to that point, the problem must first become focused in consciousness.

The corollary to the Two Truths ‘solution’, therefore, is the admission that the problem of theodicy is irresolvable philosophically and the concomitant
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Declaration that it is a mystery that can only be understood from the perspective of enlightenment. As the *Awakening of Faith* states:

The Mind has always been intrinsically pure, and yet ignorance comes into being. Defiled by ignorance, the Mind becomes defiled. The fact that, even though the Mind becomes defiled, it is never affected is something that only a Buddha can understand (577c2-5).¹

For those of us who cannot view the issue from the privileged position of enlightenment, the solution remains the problem, and the fact that the *tathāgatagarbha* is both intrinsically pure and yet appears in a defiled condition is a matter that must be taken on faith.

4. CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

The preceding discussion has suggested that Buddhism, at least with the developed ontology that it displays in its East Asian forms, is subject to the same kind of philosophical problems that the problem of theodicy has posed for a monotheistic religion like Christianity. Yet the problem that such problems posed for each religion is quite different. First of all, the problem is never theologically highlighted in Buddhism in the way that it is in Christianity. This is undoubtedly due to the fact that Buddhism, even in those cases where it comes closest to the ontological monism of Christianity, has a distinctly different conception of transcendence. While the *tathāgatagarbha* is transcendent in the sense that, ultimately, it is intrinsically pure and perfectly enlightened, it is still, at the same time, thoroughly immanent within all sentient beings — indeed, it is their essential nature. Even though it is the ultimate basis of phenomenal reality, and hence could be said to constitute the ground of being, its relationship to phenomenal reality is quite different from that of the Christian God. That is to say, although, in the case of the *Awakening of Faith*, phenomenal reality could be said to arise out of the One Mind, it does not do so as a creative act of will proceeding according to a divine plan. The One Mind is thus not 'responsible' for the created universe in the same way as is God. Such a difference at the most fundamental level of conceptualizing the Absolute means that the problem of theodicy remains relatively submerged in Buddhism. All the same, if my analysis of the *Awakening of Faith* has any merit, it reveals that it is still there — and so only just barely beneath the surface.

While the paper has argued that Buddhism has been no more successful than Christianity in formulating a philosophically satisfying theodicy, it is worth noting that the problem that such a failure posed for Buddhism was significantly different from that of Christianity. For Christians, the problem

¹ See *Śrīmālā-sūtra, T 12.222b26-c1*: ‘That the intrinsically pure Mind is yet stained is difficult to understand. Only a Buddha, a World Honoured One, with his true vision and insight, being the source of Truth (Dharma), being well versed in Truth, and being the refuge of Truth, sees and knows it as it really is.’ (Cf. Wayman, p. 106.)
of theodicy has always been one of the chief stumbling blocks to faith. In the words of John Hick,

This is a problem equally for the believer and the non-believer. In the mind of the latter it stands as a major obstacle to religious commitment, whilst for the former it sets up an acute internal tension to disturb his faith and to lay upon it a perpetual burden of doubt.¹

In the case of Buddhism, however, the focusing of the problem in consciousness could be seen as a crucial step in practitioner’s spiritual development. Not just because it put one’s faith to the test, but because its resolution entailed breaking through the structures of thought in terms of which the problem had meaning. While such a position inevitably results in paradox when stated philosophically, it also opens up the possibility of a radical resolution through practice. It was just such a move that emerged out of the later Ch’an tradition, as witnessed in its use of various devices (such as hua-t’ou or kōan) to precipitate a spiritual crisis. The Sung dynasty Ch’an figure Ta-hui Tsung-kao (1089–1163) called this raising the Great Doubt and went on to claim that the greater the doubt, the deeper the subsequent enlightenment. The problem thus became the vehicle through which spiritual movement could take place.

¹ Evil and the God of Love, p. 3.