

# Intercultural Philosophy and the Nondual Wisdom of ‘Basic Goodness’: Implications for Contemplative and Transformative Education

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*Radical personal and systemic social transformation is urgently needed to address world-wide violence and inequality, pervasive moral confusion and corruption, and the rapid, unprecedented global destruction of our environment. Recent years have seen an embrace of intersubjectivity within discourse on educational transformation within academia and the public sphere. As well, there has been a turn toward contemplative education initiatives within North American schools, colleges and universities. This article contends that these turns might benefit from openness to the ontologies, epistemologies, and ethics of the ‘wisdom traditions’ from which many contemplative practices are drawn. To illustrate this point, we discuss the value of intercultural philosophy of education, and introduce Eastern philosophical ideas, specifically, the Shambhala Buddhist notion of the nondual ground and wisdom of basic goodness and related teachings. We detail how awareness of basic goodness and its holistic expression in the ground, path, and fruition of Shambhala teachings can open vital questions regarding intersubjectivity, challenge and reinvigorate aspects of current engagements with contemplative practices, and provide significant insights and educational paths for transformational endeavours in neoliberal times. Informed by our learning from Shambhala, we conclude with a deepened understanding of intercultural philosophy of education.*

You probably know more than I do, that this world needs tremendous help (Trungpa, 2004a, p. 214).

## INTRODUCTION

By all accounts, today's world is plagued with widespread violence and violation, pervasive moral confusion and corruption, the normalisation of greed, and the rapid, unprecedented and traumatising global destruction of our natural environments. Contemporary North American socio-environmental justice, peace, global citizenship, and similar educational fields and public movements focused upon social transformation have taken up the daunting challenge of identifying, addressing, and overturning past and contemporary grammars of aggression and dis-ease. They have given considerable attention to deconstructing prevailing hegemonies and to reconceptualising ways of engaging self, other, and environment that might counter damaging modernist legacies. In recent years, and with increasing support from the sciences (Barash, 2014), they have emphasised the interdependence of life and more relational senses of self in ways that are challenging dualistic worldviews (Pike and Selby, 2000; Schattle, 2008).

This article brings intercultural philosophy to bear upon recent emphases on the 'intersubjective turn' (Gunnlaugson *et al.*, forthcoming) and its implications for social transformation. As we discuss more fully elsewhere (Bai *et al.*, 2014), intercultural philosophy engages with ontologies, ethics, methodologies, and epistemologies of diverse cultures. In so doing, it illustrates that there are plural and sometimes radically different traditions and possibilities of constructing and interpreting experience. Appreciating this plurality as a resource is consistent with a key tenet of many traditional worldviews, which is that the universe offers more than can be grasped within any one conceptual scheme. We undertake intercultural philosophy as a corrective to the academy's preoccupation with modern 'Western' ideas and to the limiting belief that one single story can address the complexities of contemporary social and environmental dis-ease (Adichie, 2009; Mall, 2000). A case in point is faith in the worldview of scientific materialism, which accepts explanations only within the terms of an impersonal, inanimate, and meaningless cosmos. Like Arthur Zajonc (2010), we expect that adequate solutions to the kinds of complex challenges we face today will only emerge from openness to the rich abundance of ontological perspectives that intercultural engagement affords. In this context, we invite readers to join us in considering the contemporary relevance of ideas, values, and worldviews that have guided individuals and communities since ancient times. We have come to believe that North American transformative education will benefit from respectful while discerning engagement with the world's many wisdom traditions. In what follows, we draw from Eastern philosophical ideas and practices, such as Vedic, Buddhist, Taoist/Daoist,<sup>1</sup> and Confucian teachings, in which we have been variously immersed over these last two decades, and learn what they recommend for the means and purposes of education in the face of widespread suffering and aggression. In order to balance breadth with depth, we will focus mainly upon one tradition with which we are familiar; namely, how the Shambhala Buddhist<sup>2</sup> account of 'basic goodness' informs education oriented to social transformation. Having learned from Shambhala teachings,

we conclude with a deepened understanding of intercultural philosophy of education.

### THE NONDUAL GROUND OF BASIC GOODNESS

By way of a very brief historical and philosophical background, several of the wisdom traditions of the Axial Age understood the universe to be animated by an undifferentiated creative energy that, although producing, suffusing, and uniting all existence, cannot be adequately named, categorised, or conceptualised. The Indo-Aryan collection of Sanskrit hymns known as the *Rig Veda*, one of the four sacred Vedas, poetically captures the paradoxical nature of this awareness: ‘Him with fair wings though only One in nature, wise singers shape, with songs, in many figures’ (Griffith, 1992, p. 624). The compelling heart and teaching of the *Upanishads*, which are commentaries on the *Vedas*, and among the oldest wisdom texts in the world, is of an underlying ineffable reality (*Brahman*, in Sanskrit) that is boundless, imperishable, indivisible, and infinitely generative. This reality is not godlike in common parlance (although gods and goddesses were generated from it) and not separable from creation. Rather, it encompasses the root and flourishing of the entire universe; its internal essence and activity, although it is beyond ‘essence’ *per se*. Moreover, this reality is not only transcendent but also immanent; it permeates and can be experientially realised within the individual, in the context of which it is often referred to as *Atman* (a Sanskrit word connoting ‘breath’) or *Self* (with a capital S). The *Chandogya Upanishad* specifically tells the story of the boy Shvetaketu whose journey for wisdom leads him repeatedly to learn the lesson of *Tat tvam asi*, or ‘thou art that’. ‘That’ references undifferentiated cosmic energy, and ‘thou’ references not finite personality but rather underlying pure nondual consciousness (Easwaren, 1987, p. 25). In sum, the ancient wisdom of the *Upanishads* holds that while undifferentiated creative energy generates and embraces infinite multiplicity and diversity, all is one.

Although there are significant distinctions among the Eastern wisdom traditions that emerged after the *Upanishads*, Daoism, Buddhism, Confucianism among them, many share its profound reverence for and commitment to an understanding of *Tat tvam asi*. For example, the Theravada, Mahayana, Vajrayana and Zen traditions of Buddhism similarly affirm a nondual ground of wisdom that is both ‘empty’—free of and unstained by conceptual categories, names, binaries, and all other divisions and fixities—and simultaneously full of potentialities, possibilities, and radiant, potent, primal energies.

There are ethical as well as ontological resonances among these Eastern wisdom traditions. The purpose of teachings on ethics and moral regulations in nondualistic worldviews is typically to help human beings individually and collectively align their perceptions, feelings, thoughts, and actions with this primordial ground of creative existence and energy. Intrinsic to our being, this energy is experienced as unconditioned awareness and, consequently, the source of profound wisdom. As primordial, it is prior to any conceptual distinctions between good/pure/moral, on the one hand, and

bad/evil/immoral on the other.<sup>3</sup> Daoist philosophy describes this unconditional ground of virtues, the *Dao* or Way, in order to designate freedom from conventional notions of good and bad, better and worse. In Mitchell's (1999) translation of the *Dao De Jing*, a foundational text of Daoist philosophy: 'The Tao is infinite, eternal. Why is it eternal? It was never born; thus it can never die. Why is it infinite? It has no desires for itself; thus it is present for all beings' (Chapter 7). Zen Buddhist teachings likewise point to this primordial state of humanity. For example, Gateless Gate Case 23 (Reps and Senzaki, 1957), a 13<sup>th</sup> century Zen text, presents the story of a monk who became aware of his jealous personality and received the teaching from his master who urged him, not to think good or not-good, but to get in touch with the 'true self' (also known in Zen as the Original Face).

In the teachings of Shambhala Buddhism, this primordial ground of wisdom is known as Basic Goodness.<sup>4</sup> While a contemporary tradition, Shambhala teachings are deeply rooted in Vajrayana Buddhism as practiced in Tibet. One key feature of this tradition, and one reason why we focus upon it here, is that it joins the Buddhist aspiration for personal liberation or awakening with a socio-political commitment to the betterment of society as a whole (Gimian, 2004, p. ix-x). For example, in his recent book, *The Shambhala Principle: Discovering Humanity's Hidden Treasure* (2013), the *Sakyong*, or 'earth protector', Mipham Mukpo discusses how Shambhala teachings on and practices for creating enlightened society can help us meet the complex challenges we face in the modern world, returning again and again to the central theme of developing and expressing confidence in basic goodness. Basic goodness is *basic* because it is 'unconditional': as nondualistic, it is prior to concepts and so 'free from good and bad, better and worse' (Trungpa, 2004a, p. 211). Concurrently, it is *good* because it is the natural law and order of things that makes all else possible—'good in the sense that it's sound, it's efficient, and it works, always' (Trungpa, 2004a, p. 236).

Echoing the teachings of the *Upanishads*, Shambhala emphasises that basic goodness is not something we as human beings come to acquire; rather, it is our fundamental nature. Indeed, as the primordial ground, 'it is before we ever conceived of *I* and *am* at all' (Trungpa, 2004a, p. 211, *emphasis his*). However, basic goodness is obscured to human beings as a result of what in the Buddhist traditions is known as the five aggregates<sup>5</sup> that comprise the processes of ego formation that give us a sense of a solid and separate self/personality, an 'I' that stands in contrast to 'Other.' Experiencing an ontological crisis upon momentary glimpses of what Trungpa (1971) describes as the 'open, fluid, and intelligent quality of space', the ego becomes interminably preoccupied with proving its own projection of a solid existence and develops strategies of dualistic sensation, feeling, and thought that will justify its craving for separateness, concreteness, and sovereignty. These five aggregates are all in service of supporting a fantasy narrative of 'me' and 'mine' and shielding us from insubstantiality.

According to Trungpa (2004a), human beings inevitably have momentary experiences of basic goodness despite the ego's machinations. He describes these flashes of experience as 'a dot' arising abruptly in any given situation

in which we are uncertain (p. 211). Encountering a fork in the road, for example, opens a gap in which the dot occurs, before the thought of a decision, or choice. This dot cannot be studied scientifically, or explained logically, and yet it is experienced very directly and very personally, before we dualistically identify something as hot or cold, good or bad. Shambhala Buddhism also teaches that as human beings we come into contact with basic goodness whenever we experience the natural elements—a fresh rain, for example—because in that moment we connect with our origins. Mukpo (2013) writes, ‘basic goodness is not abstract, it is alive and runs throughout our whole being. The world is fresh and full of warmth and love, and humanity is gifted at experiencing it’ (p. 142). These flashes of nondual experiencing are the basis of the Shambhala path of awakening to and alignment with the wisdom of basic goodness. Other Buddhist traditions similarly affirm that all human beings have an indestructible potential for awakening. As Thich Nhat Hanh (1998) affirms: ‘There is no one who does not have the capacity to be a Buddha’ (p. 188).

In keeping with much perennial wisdom (both East and West, see Smith, 2008; Eppert, 2013), at Shambhala’s heart, therefore, is direct, personal experience of the ineffable energy that interpenetrates and animates the universe and all beings. As the source of existence and of the potential for awakening, basic goodness is considered the foundation or *ground* of the Shambhala Buddhist tradition. Again resonating with the ancient *Upanishads*, this ground, as innate, unites all beings at the same time that it generates and celebrates infinite diversity. Moreover, by virtue of basic goodness, humans are understood within Shambhala to be inherently healthy and complete. Why is this important?

One reason to engage with wisdom traditions in the context of intercultural philosophy of education are the perspectives they afford from which both to question the foundational assumptions of modern societies, and to consider what kind of ontological-ethical vision might support transformative education in the face of contemporary suffering. We hope readers unfamiliar with Shambhala Buddhism are beginning to appreciate how its view of interdependence and of transformative potential contrasts to purely scientific or materialistic understanding of interconnectivity and intersubjectivity. Moreover, in philosopher David Loy’s (2002) reading, those of us immersed within the mainstream West<sup>6</sup> individually and collectively might be plagued by a pervasive sense of groundlessness or lack, which expresses itself as a feeling of never being full or good enough. He describes how much of European and American societies—ideas and institutions of freedom, progress, romance, fame, civil society and capitalism, for example—have been built upon attempts to compensate for such lack rather than look deeply into it. The Shambhala vision consequently challenges all of us with a mind-set of ‘not good enough’ to radically reconsider lack in ourselves and the world, and also the basis for understandings of intersubjectivity. It further invites us to explore what historical, philosophical, socio-cultural and intercultural inquiry we can undertake within Western traditions that might support alternatives to regarding self and society as deficient.

We have come to endorse the view that how we contemplate ourselves and our societies makes a deep difference to whether and how individual, societal, and environmental healing and transformation can take place. As Naomi Klein (2014), in her recent book on climate change, observes:

Because if we are to have any hope of making the kind of civilizational leap required of this fateful decade, we will need to start believing, once again, that humanity is not hopelessly selfish and greedy—the image ceaselessly sold to us by everything from reality shows to neoclassical economics (p. 461).

What will effect positive personal and social transformation is not, however, just adopting alternate beliefs, and ‘fitting’ them into over-arching Western currencies and investments. Rather, in our view, especially in these times, transformational initiatives are challenged to be considerably more radical. Not only is it imperative that they question and deconstruct destructive governing investments of being-in-the-world, currencies of greed and complacency, for example, but they should also translate alternate insights and potential into concrete action. We, therefore, now turn to consider elements of Shambhala teachings on the ‘sacred path of the warrior’. This path is a kind of curriculum through which, or so Shambhala maintains, its goal of enlightened society may be gradually realised.

#### **SHAMBHALA TEACHINGS ON WARRIORSHIP: LEARNING TO ABIDE IN BASIC GOODNESS**

To suggest that basic goodness is the fundamental nature of human beings is not to assert that we are good at basic goodness! Becoming skilled at something takes effort over time, perhaps many years. As contemplative practitioners discover, even breathing is a subtle and vast domain with infinite room for learning through practice. How deeply and constantly human beings can dwell within basic goodness has all to do with sincere and serious cultivation of skilfulness: the very topic of interminable inquiry for contemplative practitioners. As such, the Shambhala Buddhist tradition emphasises a ‘curriculum’ of sacred warriorsip focused on the cultivation of basic goodness through study and through practices such as meditation, calligraphy, and art. Although warfare is virtually synonymous with aggression in the modern world, warriorsip within the Shambhala tradition is paradoxically the path of fearlessness, nonviolence, gentleness, and elegance. As Trungpa (2004b) explains, ‘[h]ere, the word *warrior* is taken from the Tibetan *pawo*, which literally means one who is brave. . . . Shambhala vision teaches that, in the face of the world’s great problems, we can be heroic and kind at the same time’ (pp. 19–20).

While Trungpa (2004b) deploys the language of cultivation, he also cautions that this way of speaking is somewhat misleading. Basic goodness, as ever-present and indestructible, is not something that needs to be cranked up or manufactured. Basic goodness is always already there to be experienced when human beings attend, not to the contents of thought, but to the intelligent space in which thoughts and feelings arise. On the Shambhala path,

then, ‘training yourself to be a warrior is learning to rest in basic goodness, to rest in a complete state of simplicity’ (p. 55). This emphasis on resting is significant, because it presents transformation less as a journey of going out and attaining something external in the world, and more as a practice of renunciation—of letting go. The warrior bravely renounces his/her inner psychic and also outer worldly battle for ego-based security, sovereignty, and supremacy, and acquires skill in connecting with and abiding in his/her true nature. However, letting go, or surrender, is not as straightforward as it might sound. Modern human beings everywhere have been deeply educated to be focused upon acquisition, possessions, and production. Particularly those of us who are embedded within a modern Western ethos of neoconservative and neoliberal economic agendas are simply not very accomplished in letting go. Within this context, the idea—much less the experience—of mindfully touching and connecting with basic goodness ‘on the dot’ can be quite alien and highly difficult. But, even in traditional pre-modern societies, human beings seem to have found it difficult to dwell in basic goodness; hence, contemplative practices such as sitting meditation are essential components of most Buddhist traditions, including the Shambhala path. The intention is that, through training in letting go while on the cushion, meditators become increasingly able to bring mindfulness, sensitivity, gentleness, precision and elegance into the details of everyday living. Shambhala Buddhism, following the Zen tradition that fostered a myriad of contemplative arts, accelerates the potential for athletic and artistic pursuits of all kinds to ‘synchronise body and mind’, thereby connecting practitioners with the nondual wisdom of basic goodness—a Now that is free from past, present, and future preoccupations and neurosis. Indeed, as both traditional and contemporary Zen interpreters commonly suggest, all activities can be undertaken as forms of contemplative practice, even such mundane tasks as sweeping the floor. When Trungpa described Shambhala as a *secular* path, he proclaimed a tradition in which spirituality is conceived as inseparable from all aspects of personal, domestic, cultural, artistic, political and economic dimensions of human living. On this view, relaxing into the fearlessness and gentleness of ‘on the dot’ warriorship is a 24/7 affair.

Somewhat paradoxically, at the same time that connecting with basic goodness involves relaxation and letting go, it also requires exertion or effort. Such paradoxes are found in manifold Eastern wisdom teachings, as these teachings seek to attend not to division but rather to the integration and balancing of dualisms such as body and mind, work and play, contemplation and action, in cognizance of their nondual origin and ultimate nature. Trungpa (2004b) thus often spoke of renunciation and also the need for discipline, while characteristically distinguishing his understanding from conventional uses of the term: ‘by discipline we do not mean something unpleasant or artificial that is imposed from outside. Rather, this discipline is an organic process that expands naturally from our own experience’ (p. 48). Warriorship thus refers to the bravery and leadership of practitioners who venture out of their comfort zones of habitual thinking and action, and renounce all forms of self-preoccupation. This need not be an arduous

discipline. As long time practitioners assert, abiding in basic goodness is experienced as expansive, blissful, and liberating.

So, what does the path of warriorship mean for transformative education, and intercultural philosophical engagement, for that matter? For one, Shambhala Buddhism reveals the importance of practicing calm, loving-kindness, and equanimity within all aspects and moments of day-to-day life, as the expression of basic goodness. For example, while some scholars variously advocate expressions of anger as acceptable in contexts of socio-political struggle (Humes, 2008; Oxfam, 2006), Shambhala and other Buddhist traditions emphasise expressions of anger as counter-productive to the illumination of a more enlightened society. Anger appears everywhere these days, perhaps a result of a society being increasingly defined by immediate wants and possessions. Mukpo (2013) observes that, '[a]t times, it seems that anger has become our most valid form of communication: When people are expressing anger, they are said to be expressing their true feelings' (p. 68). Anger is problematic first because, as Geshe Kelsang Gyatso (1999) maintains, '[i]t robs us of our reason and good sense' (p. 144). Moreover, anger breeds anger: its expression serves to produce further negativity and, ultimately, violent conflict. Or, as Trungpa (2004a) puts it, '[a]ggression has a tendency to become so intelligent, and it begins to spread and split into further levels of aggression' (p. 274).

According to Kipling (1962), 'anger is the egg of fear' (p. 297). In other words, readiness to anger is a symptom of deep states of insecurity—of living in a fearful social context that variously condones and supports aggression toward self and others (Nhat Hanh, 2012, p. 156). Shambhala Buddhism, as do other Buddhist and also yoga traditions, includes numerous specific teachings and contemplative practices for working with fear, anxiety, and conflicting emotions or *kleshas*—that Trungpa describes as 'hangups'. Key in this instruction is not the denial or repression of anger and negative emotions. Indeed, it is vitally important to be deeply in touch with one's experiences of anger, shame, or grief, and all the more so when these emanate from grave injury, trauma, and injustice (Eppert, 2012). From a Buddhist perspective, healing resides in bringing mindful, gentle, and compassionate awareness to these feelings and emotions. The warrior's educational challenge is to learn to discern the sources and grammars of the arising and falling away of anger, to remember his/her inherent goodness, and to acquire capacities to practice loving-kindness. Moreover, as practitioners become more in tune with their basic nature, they are more able to help others: '[c]aring for others means that you have to be very stable within yourself' (Trungpa, 2004a, p. 244). To walk the path of warriorship, therefore, is to practice the ideal of staying grounded—gentle, calm, and precise—no matter what arises in a practitioner's experience, and also being gentle and compassionate with oneself when this proves (too) difficult. Practice is connected with being mindful of action in whatever sense. Action includes action of body, of speech, and of mind (Nhat Hanh, 2006). In sum, actions promise to be more skilful when emanating from a peaceful mind with deep awareness and equanimity, and equanimity naturally flows from cultivated capacities to rest in basic goodness.

In a similar vein, toward the end of the *Bhagavad Gita*, Lord Krishna remarks: ‘Free from self-will, aggressiveness, arrogance, anger, and the lust to possess people or things, he is at peace with himself and others, and enters into the unitive state’ (Easwaren, 1985, p. 210). Equally, for Daoists, ‘When there is no desire, all things are at peace’ (Mitchell, 1999, Chapter 37). ‘Open yourself to the Tao, then trust your natural responses; and everything will fall into place’ (Mitchell, 1999, Chapter 23). Here, Daoists and Buddhists share a point that if we are open to something unfailing beyond the ego, whether named as ‘basic goodness’ or ‘the Tao’, and come to trust in it, then our actions may be more peaceful, responsive, and fruitful because they are no longer grounded in fear, arrogance, greed, or hatred. Although suffering may still be occurring in the world, (some) people can still give peace to each other because they can actually relate to the source of peace in themselves here and now.

Shambhala, as well as other traditions of engaged Buddhism (Jones, 2003), thus make clear that some genuine discipline of inner mindfulness and cultivation must complement engagement and activity with the world at large. Moreover, to be a truly positive praxis, this cultivation must emanate from and manifest the ground of basic goodness. Educational theorist Robert Hattam (2004) holds a complementary idea in his term ‘awakening-struggle’: ‘Awakening-struggle demands that politics be considered not as always ‘out there, outside of self, exterior’, but that politics be simultaneously about both inner and outer transformation, both about self and society, both mind and social structure’ (p. 275). That said, actions—outer work—conventionally understood within the Western tradition as actions in the world, are also vital when working toward socio-environmental justice and transformation. Indeed, those working within the public sphere, especially in leadership roles, have responsibilities not only to pursue ‘inner cultivation’ but also to help create institutional and cultural conditions hospitable to the realisation of a well, peaceful and sustainable society. Conversely, the current emphasis on contemplative practices as means for individual stress reduction devoid of attention to the social service and social transformation dimension is imbalanced. In its curriculum, Shambhala Buddhism continually and deliberately emphasises both inner and outer world, and relationships between the two. This is manifest even in its instructions to keep eyes open during mindfulness-awareness meditation, so the practitioner can attend simultaneously to what is happening ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ him/herself, eventually realising their inseparability.

### **THE FRUITION OF SACRED WARRIORSHIP: TRUST AND CONFIDENCE IN BASIC GOODNESS**

We have introduced the ground and path of nondual wisdom as articulated with Shambhala Buddhism. Finally, there is its fruition; namely, the embodied realisation of enlightened individuals and society. This is full trust and confidence in basic goodness grounded in an embodied cognizance, and, by implication, the flourishing of sentient and nonsentient life. The more often human beings connect with basic goodness, through becoming mindfully

aware of it, and practicing skilful resting in it, the more we come to have confidence in it. This *confidence* or *trust* is not dogmatic faith or mere intellectual assent. Rather, it is a relaxation of egoistic fixations arising from personal experience, such that attachment to conditional reference points is unnecessary. Annette Baier (1986) maintains that trust is not a concept much discussed in philosophical discourse. In the Shambhala teachings, however, lack of trust is named as one of the secondary *kleshas* or mental afflictions; while trust is celebrated as '[t]he absence of neurosis, and . . . the epitome of well-being' (Trungpa, 2004a, p. 237). According to the Shambhala vision, a better society cannot emerge if we do not trust the basic goodness of each of us and the basic goodness of society. As the confidence that enables relaxation, it frees us from the constant attempt to distract ourselves from a sense of lack or inadequacy and from the corresponding search to find fulfilment in externalities. Confidence in basic goodness gives rise, not only to the positive motivation to act, but also to the insight that enables human beings to work skilfully toward transformation. As Mukpo (2013) asserts, 'Slowing down to self-reflect and feel our worthiness, and to feel confidence in it, creates space. Then we have the actual intelligence to know which way to go (pp. 18–19).

Trust and confidence in basic goodness, realised through warriorship, enables the fulfilment of the Shambhala vision of the Great Eastern Sun. Trungpa deploys the metaphors of the setting and rising sun to distinguish between a human outlook that is fearful and increasingly destructive and one that is uplifting, embracing, and abundant. According to Gimian (2004), the setting sun 'represents the depressed and degraded aspects of human existence, which lead to an aggressive and materialistic outlook' (p. xxxii). Because it is grounded in fear and anxiety, the setting sun view attempts to deny death—or, at least, delay it at all costs—and to engineer security from threats of all kinds. As Trungpa (2004b) put it, 'The setting sun world is afraid of space, afraid of the truth of a non-reference point. In that world, people are afraid to be vulnerable' (p. 127). In contrast, the Great Eastern Sun world is 'based on human wakefulness and the celebration of life' and 'shines continually even when temporarily covered by clouds' (Gimian, 2004, p. xxxii).

What is essential to realise here, for the purposes of this article, is the full transformational power of trust and confidence in basic goodness. At first glance it might seem quite contradictory that, as we have come to learn, Shambhala Buddhism emphasises that human beings and society are already good and, as such, already enlightened. If that is the case, why, then, work to create an enlightened society? Insofar as we understand it, the point is that processes of ego formation and (our ego-based attachment to what in Buddhism is identified as the three poisons of greed, aggression, and ignorance) engage human beings in an interminable cycle of inner and outer battle in which we seek to establish and solidify ourselves in space and time. In order to secure ourselves, we divide the world into 'me versus you' and 'either/or', which creates suffering and trauma. Doing so is a mark of our ignorance. Shambhala Buddhism invites us, as individuals and societies, to become aware that we do not need to secure ourselves, do

not need to compensate for our perceived 'lack'. Why? Because we are *already established*, not in ego, but rather in interdependent ineffable basic goodness. As Loy (2002) emphasises, 'the final irony of our struggles to ground ourselves—to make ourselves feel real by filling up our sense of lack—is that they cannot succeed because we are already grounded in the totality' (p. 214).

Hence, the educational process of creating more just, compassionate, and sustainable societies is about individual and collective awakening (or revelation) and gradual unfolding to what already is, but has been obscured. Society has become destructive because it mirrors our own inner egoistic machinations and attachments: certainly we can see this in how we have separated ourselves from the environment and how our greed has systematically altered the earth's atmosphere. To awaken to our own basic goodness, therefore, is to awaken to the basic goodness of society—no easy feat by any means, especially given long and entrenched histories of suffering, violence, and destruction. Moreover, what awakening centrally implies is that personal and social transformation is not about 'fixing' ourselves and societies, which again assumes there is something wrong or lacking in us, but rather about a natural unfolding. In other words, with trust and confidence in basic goodness, healing and transformation happen organically. This emphasis on acting without fixing, controlling, dominating—this emphasis, in other words, on active 'nonaction'—is quite different from how social action and transformation are commonly regarded within the modern West (see Eppert, 2009).

#### **FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS FOR CONTEMPLATIVE AND TRANSFORMATIVE EDUCATION**

The ground, path, and fruition worldview of Shambhala Buddhism has been briefly discussed in very general terms. This is not only because it is a very personal process and admits of much variation. It is also because our intent is not to convince readers that they must sign up for Shambhala programs. As noted previously, we refer to the Shambhala tradition in order to illustrate ideas we are presenting. We could have as easily employed the *Upanishads* or Zen as our main illustration of the value of intercultural philosophy of education. Intercultural philosophy offers an educational space for societies, globally, to question their ways of being-in-the-world. As David Smith (2008) has emphasised, engagement with wisdom traditions provides a means for identifying, challenging, and overturning our cultural pathologies. That said, in our view, the wisdom tradition of Shambhala presents a very positive and uplifting vision for personal and social transformation based in its own unique cultural expression of the ancient Upanishadic insight of 'thou art that'. It is challenging to critique such a vision, because it is experiential; any such critique could only emerge from sincere and long-term contemplative practice. Our article has been focused upon inviting reconsideration of transformative and contemplative education initiatives within governing North American society. To that end, in what follows, we offer some further compelling and reinforcing considerations of the

potential value of a worldview based upon the wisdom of basic goodness for readers to contemplate.

First of all, certainly, Shambhala Buddhism challenges character education initiatives promising a more virtuous world. Although it is the ground of virtue, basic goodness is not the outcome of character education, nor the same as the conceptions of the moral good learned through enculturation and socialisation. Rather, being primordial, basic goodness 'is free from the stains of habitual patterns, and it is free from our educational training. It is free from our childhood upbringing, and it is free from the trials and errors of our everyday life struggles' (Trungpa, 2004a, p. 211). As we have learned, because it is our true nature, prior to any self-concepts that our socialisation provides, basic goodness is always there as a source of insight and inspiration. According to Shambhala Buddhism, then, the more human beings can be in touch with nondual basic goodness in ourselves and in each other, the more easily and expansively we can manifest wisdom and compassion. This contrasts significantly from character or moral education beliefs in an autonomous self, not to mention character education programs and curricula that advocate the acquisition of predominantly traditional Western values (see Eppert, 2008).

Furthermore, in accord with many of the wisdom traditions of the Axial Age, Shambhala Buddhism challenges neoconservative and neoliberal instrumentalist logics of education and progress. The contemporary world is still in the tight, if not further tightening, grips of materialism. In the context of Shambhala Buddhism, materialism refers primarily to the assumption that the accumulation of things—not only material objects, but also credentials, ideas, and experiences—will bring us happiness (Trungpa, 1987, pp. 5–11). Trungpa and Mukpo are quite critical of the current hyper-materialistic culture, and identify it as the source of much dis-ease and destruction. Mukpo (2013) argues:

At this time, materialism and its consumeristic influence over every aspect of our lives is an invisible totalitarian regime. However, unlike previous totalitarian regimes, this regime is omnipresent, and we are all participating. If we think it's impossible to create enlightened society, that's a sign we've been so thoroughly convinced by this system that we can no longer visualize an alternative (p. 42).

Materialism of this kind can find justification in the more philosophical sense of the term; that is, the view that only matter exists and all phenomena result from material interactions. The prejudices of materialism and positivism currently haunt schools, the academy, and the public sphere, contributing to the view that traditional teachings only have validity when 'confirmed' by scientific research. In our eagerness to participate and meet normative societal expectations of what counts as knowledge, we must be wary that we do not reinforce unwarranted ontological-epistemological assumptions that put 'spirit' beyond the pale. Indeed, Shambhala Buddhism demonstrates how a societal vision embedded within a holistic commitment to and relationship with the ineffable and non-conceptualisable offers much

intelligence and wisdom. Moreover, contemplative practices that lack attention to their ontological, epistemological, and ethical embeddedness run the risk of being coopted and consumed by neoconservative and neoliberal marketplace logics (Vokey, 2014).

On the positive side, we can lend support to worldviews other than from those that underwrite a poverty mentality and its corresponding all-versus-all competition. Here we are informed by Eknath Easwaren (1987) who writes, ‘our economic thought operates, as social historian Ivan Illich put it, “under a paradigm of scarcity.” The fundamental assumption is that there is not enough to go around; so we are doomed to fight one another (and an unwilling nature) for material, human, natural, resources; each person or group for itself’ (p. 206). In contrast, he continues, ‘Spiritual economics begins not from the assumed scarcity of matter but from the verifiable infinity of consciousness’ (p. 206). Easwaren quotes Ghandi: ‘There is enough in the world for everyone’s need; there is not enough for everyone’s greed’ (p. 207). On this view, greed has its origin in the belief that one is a separate individual who has to compete and fight for things to satisfy individual needs in a world of scarcity. We have seen how, in such a setting sun social context, insecurity drives discontent and senses of ‘never enough’.

Trying to solve the problem of insecurity through working harder and winning more does not work. In a world of competition and scarcity, insecurity can never be removed because each individual is up against all others every time; and, as the saying goes, ‘you are only as good as your last success’. Perhaps a truer way to address ontological insecurity and greed, therefore, is to reconnect with the ground of basic goodness (Bai, 2001, 2012). In our present intellectual, institutional, and social contexts this is a radical view. A key question facing educational theory and practice thus is whether and to what extent our educational institutions and cultures of learning are grounded and cultivated in setting sun or Great Eastern Sun philosophies and experiences of being-in-the-world. As previously indicated, this foundational question is rarely posed within mainstream North American curriculum reform initiatives—or, for that matter, in academic programs. So much of our curriculum is knowledge-driven rather than oriented toward larger explorations of our nature. Do we, as educators, want students of all ages to have opportunities to learn about and experience their basic goodness? If readers debate and recognise value in the nondual ground of wisdom being at the centre of all education, the subsequent question would be: how can we help shape intellectual and institutional contexts where this is a real possibility?

Along these lines, Shambhala Buddhism additionally challenges piecemeal and human-dominated approaches to social transformation. Contemporary Western societies are very fragmented, and rarely invested in long-term considerations. Shambhala teachings detail an integrated and holistic worldview, continually attending to the relationship between the parts and the whole, and also to an understanding of re-birth. Moreover, many current transformational initiatives send an overt or subtle message that it is up to us human beings alone, and certainly scientists and engineers, to remedy

the world. While we do bear great responsibility, the Shambhala Buddhist and other wisdom traditions that revere nature as sacred alternately indicate that we are part of the cosmos and not its primary or sole agents. In other words, nature itself is enormously restorative, and our purpose is to not to master or solve or fix but more to honour and get back into alignment with it.

Shambhala Buddhism and Eastern (as well as Western) contemplative traditions generally, are cognizant of the root meaning of transformation, as a crossing or passing beyond form—that is, beyond essences, conceptualisations, and representations (Blom, 2014). As Blom (2014) observes, modernity—with its secular, mechanistic, scientific, and rationalist emphases and market logics—has not only fragmented life but also flattened it. Lost are senses of multidimensional awareness and experiences of reality (Nakagawa, 2008). Our bodies, souls, and spirits are largely unaccounted for. Imagination and heart lack nuanced understanding and holistic embrace. Time and space require continual 'development' and colonisation, in the perpetual chase to resolve lack. Is it any wonder that rates of anxiety, stress, loneliness, suicide, and depression are currently so high among youth the world over? In the face of our current societal and ecological crises, cries for no more 'business as usual' are increasingly clear and abundant in recent protest movements. However, recalling Gadamer's (1996) critique of scientific materialism, we wonder if, within modern paradigms, only *change* can happen (as the rearranging of parts and increased or alternate modes of production), not real *trans-formation* or *rest-oration* (as in prayer of rest, with reference to the remembrance of and resting in basic goodness) for that matter. Perhaps only differing relationships to and multiplications of *information* (as in, *within form*). The wisdom traditions we have discussed in this article emphasise that transformation requires something considerably more radical; namely, the deconstruction of ego and the inner-outer heart-mind awareness of Atman or emptiness or Dao or Buddha nature.<sup>7</sup>

Finally, especially in today's climate, humanity is challenged to come together and identify global possibilities of solidarity, as well as to acquire concrete skill in being and working with one another in and across difference in order to create a more sustainable world. Shambhala and other Buddhist understandings of basic goodness support the destabilising of Eurocentric attachments to notions regarding the autonomy or sovereignty of the self. As previously indicated, according to Axial Age understandings, ranging from Vedic philosophers through to Buddhism and Daoism, 'Self' does not exist independently. On the contrary, the self of each individual human being is interconnected, therefore, interdependent with and interpenetrated by all other selves and life. Each of us is involved with the entire universe. In this regard, the Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh (1997) would say that we cannot 'be', but we 'inter-are' (p. 3). From this stance, we could conclude that the belief that we are 'sovereign or superior selves' is an illusion. We are *beyond* what we can conceptualise because we are a part of the nothingness-yet-everythingness, which is unnameable. In other words, according to Nhat Hanh (2006) '[w]hen we look at any phenomenon

(*dharma*), we should be able to see unity in the diversity, and diversity in the unity' (p. 28).

Perhaps people tend to seek uniformity in diversity because they may equate diversity with separation. The American writer, Baird Spalding (1924), in his spiritual book series 'Life and Teaching of the Masters of the Far East, Volume 1', contends, '[t]hat which is diversity has been misconceived from the personal, or external viewpoint, to be separation' (p. 40). He affirms:

Separation is only an appearance for, in reality, there could be no such thing. If the Universe is a single Unit and all things within it are eternally united into a single system, how and where could any separation exist? (1948, Volume 4, p. 142).

On this foundation, instead of *seeking* for the universal and hence unity, the challenge is to look deeply into ourselves and the universe to see the non-duality between any seemingly opposite pair of concepts, and rest in it.

In the context of social transformation, we the authors can see that basic goodness works to avoid a separationist ethos in global citizenship and social/environmental justice education that identifies others as in need of help and 'uplifting' (Nguyen, 2013). From the viewpoint of each of us, a separationist ethos is not the way social transformation works. Instead, if people were more significantly connected, and individual and social well-being consequently enhanced, basic goodness may open a new dimension of learning for us to view self and others with an awareness of interdependence and interpenetration of all beings. With this awareness, it follows that people would naturally relate to each other with more love and compassion. Moreover, by the process of Batesonian deutero-learning (Bateson and Bateson, 2005),<sup>8</sup> lifelong students of basic goodness would find themselves increasingly embodying basic goodness. In Buddhism, this is called the bodhisattva path, or path of the enlightened being. This understanding of selfless engagement contrasts to the more usual understanding of moral action that relies upon an external prescriptive moral standard, that is, establishing a set of rules for compassionate conduct and imposing them upon people to make them live ethically and peacefully together. This latter approach not only does not work but also, more problematically, it may, if adopted globally, perpetuate the mind-set behind colonialism. In this regard, as Dower (2008) observes:

Those who accept a global ethic and work toward realizing it are in effect attempting to impose their values on others. They may or may not realize that they are doing this but that is what they are doing (pp. 46–47).

In the midst of the seeming darkness of alienation and separation, and the futile effort to find a global ethic to (re)connect people together for a better world, teachings of basic goodness may bring some hope of radical transformation. Indeed, we the authors see that, from a Buddhist worldview, radical transformation is quite possible, because, when we trust the basic

goodness of self and others, we would not have to act from fear, aggression, and greed. We would not have to compete against others in the pursuit of our security. Rather, we would think and act with virtue, generosity, and dignity, not because we *ought to* but because we are *naturally* inclined to be this way. What other wisdom traditions might shed additional insights on the possibilities of social transformation in today's world?

### **CONCLUSION: INTERCULTURAL PHILOSOPHY AS A WAY AND PRACTICE OF LIFE**

Worldviews matter. Without minimising their differences, the traditions we have invoked offer a profoundly different understanding of the nature and realisation of human potential than scientific and neoliberal materialism.<sup>9</sup> Shambhala Buddhism, like many wisdom traditions, teaches that we are unconditionally healthy, physically and psychologically. At the fundamental level of our basic nature, society is already enlightened. The problems that exist, while real and colossal, are secondary and workable because the nondual ground of wisdom and compassion is always available. With such a perspective, we are less likely to seek escape through fantasy and all forms of affliction in which current civilization is mired. To continue with economic and educational business as usual is absurd, and we could justifiably say that this is mental illness in the extreme. What is the sense of learning algorithms or alliteration if all of sentient existence is at stake? Most urgent is that we get deeply in touch with suffering and come diversely together to enact healing. MacIntyre (1987) has argued that the modern liberal university is largely irrelevant to the key disputes of the age because its structure and priorities preclude the possibility of presenting, much less examining, alternative worldviews in a systematic way. Let's change that. We are not asking that any such teachings be accepted on authority; indeed, that would be against the emphasis upon direct personal experience within those teachings. We are calling for engagement—more openness to and conversations across diverse traditions. Moreover, following from our learning of the nondual wisdom of basic goodness, we emphasise intercultural philosophy not as an overriding, static 'conceptual framework', as this runs the risk of categorising and formalising what we instead understand as a *spirit* and *practice* of being-in-the-world. In other words, we embrace intercultural philosophy as part of a holistic way of life, intimately connected with the love of learning and wisdom (Hadot, 2002). Intercultural philosophy is challenging, no doubt, as it invites us to protect ourselves and our 'territory' less, and become more vulnerable. Contemporary suffering and love, two great teachers, address us to deep humility, a derivative of the Latin *humus*, meaning 'earth',<sup>10</sup> and to genuine interconnection, understood in the mystical song and rhythm of the universe (*uni-verse*). We can understand intercultural philosophy as a re-becoming in touch with the earth and cosmos, and re-engagement with rich possibilities of transformation, healing, and solidarity-in-diversity.

In conclusion, this article has sought both to introduce teachings from the perennial wisdom traditions, and to illustrate intercultural philosophy of

education. It offers for consideration our thoughts on what these traditions offer education for social-environmental justice and similar transformative initiatives. Our additional hope is that we have scratched the surface enough that the focus within contemplative education upon mindfulness meditation will expand to include the rich philosophical and pedagogical resources of the living traditions in which the full scope and potential of such practices can be realised. *Sarva mangalam*.

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## NOTES

1. Taoism is the Wades-Giles translation, while Daoism is the Pinyin system of translation. We will use Pinyin throughout, except in quotations that follow Wades-Giles.
2. As is well known, there are many schools and traditions of Buddhist thought and practice. The history of Buddhist Dharma (teachings) transmission across many continents and countries, including the North American continent, is, to be expected, extremely complex. For readers interested in following this history, we recommend Peter Harvey's (2012) *An Introduction to Buddhism: Teachings, History and Practices*.
3. Intriguingly, contemporary research in infant psychology seems to validate, at least partially, this view of what we are calling the nondual or primordial goodness. Alison Gopnick (2009) states: 'Literally from the time they are born children are empathic. They identify with other people and recognize that their own feelings are shared by others. [...] Three-year-olds . . . behave in genuinely altruistic ways. Three-year-olds have already developed a basic ethic of care and compassion' (p. 204). There seems to be a foundation of goodness that is unconditionally built into us and thus is not a product of social conditioning, enculturation, language-learning, and education, all of which are contingent processes.
4. Chögyam Trungpa, who first introduced Shambhala teachings to North America, coined the term 'basic goodness' to communicate some appreciation of the primordial, all-pervasive ground of wisdom that ultimately defies conceptualization.
5. These five aggregates, also known as *Skandhas* (Sanskrit) or *Khandhas* (Pali), are matter, sensation, mental formation, and consciousness.
6. Today's world is globalised through various historical epoch-making streams of events and trends, such as modernisation, westernisation, technicisation, militarisation, and so on. Through such streams, Western values and worldviews have spread throughout the world, and came to be adopted, out of survival necessity, by many non-Western countries. Thus, today, 'West' and 'East' are not so much geographical designators as modes of being and doing, which include values and worldviews.
7. We follow Hattam and Baker (this issue) here in their insightful Foucauldian and Buddhist discussion of transformation within the context of the doctoral studies. If immersed within Cartesian logics and lacking immersion in and practice of alternate 'worldviews', what indeed is the qualitative nature and depth of transformation that students are called upon to experience? And, what also, about university 'missions'?

Perhaps here too we find connections with Sharon Todd's article in this issue. While Todd acknowledges the many radical differences between Levinasian and Buddhist philosophy, we can add to her interests in bringing these in important dialogue with one another in the observation that both philosophies—and we can contemplate this in the context of historical and contemporary

- trauma—emphasise the breakage of conceptual frameworks as the practice of responsive and responsible witnessing. In other words, Buddhist compassion and Levinasian obligation can both be recognised as constituting ethical possibilities for the just and mindful hearing of testimony of the unimaginable and incomprehensible in their emphasis on the necessary deconstruction of the egocentric 'I' and their embodied cognizance of the ineffable, or in Levinas' language, the 'saying'. Both gesture to transformation as an ethical passage from form, and also as the nonrepeating of the past, or, phrased alternately, of the samsaric cycle of the same, with all its aggression and violence (see Eppert, forthcoming).
8. Deutero-learning is defined as 'learning in which the learning capacity of the system is modified' and is in contrast to the more simple type of learning in which 'the organism is changed without an alternation in learning capacity' (Bateson and Bateson, 2005, p. 209).
  9. For a nice discussion on the difference between science and scientific materialism, or 'scientism', see Bonnett, 2013.
  10. Our thanks to Robert Piazza for pointing this out, in correspondence.

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