1B. Can the Nihilist Live Happily with Conundrums?

The Pursuit of Philosophy as a Discipline

Volume III

The Prescience of Philosophy as a Discipline:

Beyond Criticism:

How Should Philosophy
Progressively Perfect an Ongoing Critique of its Discipline,
And,
Through Such Constructive Insight,
Perceptively Appreciate the Nature of the Human Condition??
A Critique of Theory *versus* A Theory of Critique:

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1B. Can the Nihilist Live Happily with Conundrums?*[1]

0. Pre-Introduction

Admittedly, nihilism has had a bad press. So, the first question to ask is 'is such bad press deserved?' Yes, and, no!! For me some forms of nihilism just make no sense. Other kinds are just so miserable that you would have to be depressed, indeed, very depressed to want to be member of that fraternity. Whereas, in contrast, I would like to argue, other varieties of nihilism appear to make admirable sense? All a bit like saying you don't like cheese after only trying one variety and not realizing that 'cheese' comes in a multiplicity of flavours. In this essay, let me survey this topic in order to see the 'lie of the land', discover just how diverse this landscape might be, whether this type of philosophy might have anything to recommend itself, perhaps, as even deserving respect? (0)

1. Introduction

First, I will argue that conundrums, dilemmas, *aporia*s, etc., can be approached on three epistemological levels, namely, 'dialectical', 'soluble' and 'superficial'. To begin this essay, I will explore the dialectical nature of intentional ideation, and define what is meant by the expression 'economic', i.e., the necessity to translate all lived-experience through a relevant tripartite lens as well as treating it as non-indubitable, provisional, prorelational, and progressive; albeit as ever a work in progress when left open to circumscribed forms of critical appreciation. By 'soluble' is meant dividing that which is either problematic or problematized into those *problema* that either possess forms of resolution or have no possible forms of resolution whatsoever. By 'superficial' is meant those puzzles that, if merely read as paradoxical, and are either contradictory or incoherent, should be dismissed as nonsense. That, ideally, a dialectical approach, properly understood, I believe, could well see us 'living happily with conundrums…' (1)

Second, I will explore passive and active forms of nihilism as introduced by Nietzsche. (2)

Third, I will introduce negative and positive forms of nihilism as defined by myself. (3)

Fourth, in analyzing the Buddhist formula '*anitya*, *anatman*, *duhkha*' I will attempt to show that we can interpret these expressions as seemingly expounding a viable form of (religious) nihilism? (4)

* For latest version of this text: www.homestead.com/noelshomepage/noels homepage5.html

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[1] This title is an allusion to a *Postscript* recently added to an essay titled: *Thinking Six More Impossible Philosophical Thoughts After Breakfast*. The Postscript is titled: *How to Live Happily with Conundrums*. The central purpose of this essay is to examine a variety of nihilistic philosophies, assess whether they can be entertained, and, e/valuate the potential philosophical value of those that deserve to be taken more seriously?

Fifth, I will draw these various strands together in order to see what philosophical sense we might be able to make of this topic. In the process I will introduce and dismiss all thorough forms of epistemological and ontological skepticism as a philosophical waste of time. In its place, I will articulate a theory of criticism, albeit as a sketch, that does justice to the non-existential and existential richness of lived-experience. (5)

In the last section of this essay, I outline a series of provisional conclusions questioning and answering 'if a nihilist can be happy..?' (6)

2. Living Happily with Conundrums

In a *Postscript* to a recent essay, as noted in the first footnote, I divided conundrums and our treatment of them under three epistemological headings as noted in the Introduction. This time let me reverse the order of my exposition and start with the dialectical (and 'economic' as defined by myself as 'a trimodal field of experience'). (7)

I have argued that all intentional significance, etc., is engendered in 'economic terms of reference', i.e., as 'relational, dialectical, simulated in an overlapping hierarchy of economies where each and every economy, as a circulation of valuational formation (i.e., defined elsewhere as a mix of value, functionality and identity), is better appreciated through a trimodal lens through which all univocal and bimodal expressions are to be translated (for reasons that have been explored elsewhere)'. (8)

Basically, I am arguing that only through relationships, and their engagement as such, can we make meaningful sense of experience, language, ideation, philosophy, all other disciplines, and so on. That all lived-experience, in intentional terms, needs to be dialectically interpreted as arising through a foregrounded focus on intentional objectivity (Object), as taking place in a backgrounding field of the co-associated intentional field (World) and as reviewed by the co-associated sense of transcendental subjectivity (Ego). That these three dialectical 'moments', as 'poles' or 'polarities', mutually co-define each other, but, can never be defined purely in their own terms of reference. Indeed, the more we home in on one of these dialectical 'aspects' or 'facets' the more they will disappear on us and only produce increasing degrees of nonsense, *aporia*s, intractable conundrums, and so on. In essence, all forms of 'focus' need a 'field' to be focused in as well as finding the 'framing' of that form of focus being inescapably reviewed through a co-associated sense of subjectivity whilst not substantializing such polarities. That all economies, e.g., sensory, intentional, representative, textual, aspirational, critical, narrational, judgmental or e/valuative, etc., must all live by the same (archetypal) rules. However, on this methodological approach of the economic, I do not expect immediate understanding as these things need to be thought through by yourselves. But, let me make this task a little easier in the following paragraph. (9)

To 'walk' we need the ground to walk upon or a floor to walk over. The apparent nature of our walking will reflect the nature of that surface being traveled over. Walking on a sandy beach is one thing, walking on rocky terrain is quite another. Or, walking up

the stairs will reflect the steps on those stairs, and so on. To walk also needs my performing that intention. Hence these three factors (i.e., 'individual footsteps', 'ground' and 'walking') need to come together for me to perform that intention of walking forth, where ever it be. In a similar fashion, all 'economies', as circulations of valuational formation (value, etc.), need to be able to circulate between these three poles in order to simulate the type of engendered relational value being experienced in 'lived-experience'.[2] (10)

The ramifications of this type of tripolar/trimodal positioning/s are profound![3] For, a start nothing can be appreciated non-economically. I.e., nothing can be appreciated in pure univocal terms of reference. Even bimodal term of reference will fail us![4] Try to imagine walking without a floor.[5] Or, even if we were to entertain a bimodal contrast, say, 'bright light *versus* darkness', or, 'red *versus* green', we have to think of these contrasts as taking place in a third medium, say, as differentiated states of energy, or colour, or wavelengths, or a space or surface that can be lit, or similar. The epistemological fact that, apparently, we can think merely of a pure colour, e.g., is predicated on our ability of being able to seemingly concentrate on one feature among many to be collectively entertained in lived-experience. The implication being that lived-experience *per se* can be neither univocal nor bimodal because experiential forms of apparent simplicity are predicated on a refinement of a complex multiplicity of dialectically engendered features upon which a more selective sense of focus is brought to bear, and v.v. But, in each and every instance of such phenomenologically oriented focus that focus cannot be completely and definitive separated from that field in which such focus is selectively directed. Just as a pure point cannot be perceived in the visual field.[6] (11)

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[2] Hence an experiential 'alignment' that can be entertained between 'lived-experience', 'lived-reality', 'life-world/s' (whose possibilities can be represented in intentional experience, etc., and, are encapsulated in the transcendental possibilities as to be found entailed in the archetypal constitution of the Life-World/World-of-Life which, as a working-concept, is to be treated only as a heuristic-metaphysical construct in order to explain why we can intersubjectively experience objectively, subjectively, inter-objectively/inter-subjectively oriented patterns ideation, etc.). The intentional economy attempting to account for its ability to create economically productive forms of valuational formation through phenomenologically oriented (textual) encounters, hermeneutically oriented (meta-textual) recognitions, and (non-systematic) existential (non-textual) engagements (through requisite forms of simulation). But to follow the arguments behind such economic schemes you will have to read closely this still evolving text of *The Pursuit of Philosophy as a Discipline*.

[3] This tri-polarity being reflected modally in forms of trimodal conceptual language. E.g., the intentional/representative economy, as a heuristic construct, invoking phenomenologically oriented textual 'presentations', hermeneutically oriented meta-textual 'representations' (through genres, con-texts, narratives, personae, etc,), and (non-systematic) existential (chaotically oriented) 're-presentations'.

[4] Because they lack either a 'context' or a 'co-associated sense of transcendental subjectivity' or an 'intentional focus' implicit in such lopsided constructivism and where all correlative features deserve to be explicitly acknowledged.

[5] 'Space walking' does not really count as a counter to this thought experiment. Moving your legs in a space suit hardly counts as you make no progress by doing so. Then this relational dependence upon the ground or a floor is mirrored in the fact that we would need to depend entirely for 'support' on that space suit being entirely fit for purpose (just as much as a parachute is relied upon not to fail, or our shoes once worn are not meant to fall apart, etc.).

[6] As a test of this phenomenological fact draw a cross on a piece of blank paper, stare at it intently, and, if you could see a pure point you would be able to see the mere 'intersection' of those two lines without their also being seen as a part of the two intersecting lines of that cross!

The upshot of this appreciation of the gestalt nature of intentional fields is that our intentional representations are engendered economically between these three archetypal poles of the World, Object and Ego, and, this epistemological fact is reflected in the philosophical need to acknowledge a relatively co-associated trimodalism in our textual representations. A fact that does not usually need too much to discover for yourself. But, by laying our such trimodal terms of reference, many philosophical problems, e.g., as conundrums, etc., will find forms resolution by virtue of the fact that we no longer are operating in such short-sighted, unbalanced, misinformed and malformed terms of reference. That, in such more open terms of reference, we must realize that all intentional ideation, etc.,[7] must be dialectical in their origination, but, that through 'normal' processes of rectification and re-normalization we find ways of satisfactorily dealing with such integrated complexity through processes of harmonization that can be conducted and enacted with varying degrees of existential authenticity. But, let me explore such details a little later in this essay. (12)

For the moment, let me say we live in a world of dialectical complexity that, for the most part, is just happily overlooked. However, for the more cognizant, they can live even more happily by appreciating, accepting and engaging the richness of this dialectical origination that constitutes our world of lived-experience. That such an attitude may well be engendered in and through more positive forms of nihilism? (13)

Accepting that this swirling world of the dialectical engendering of our relational being in this world with others can be overlooked, let us focus on how what is either already problematic or is being problematized falls into two camps of the proverbial 'sheep' and 'goats'. I.e., as problems that can be resolved, or, those problems that have no resolutions whatsoever, and, accordingly, should be put to the side and accepted as insoluble. Why attempt to untie a knot that could not be untied. However, this metaphor cannot be extended too far since if a knot can be tied, through a reversal of that process of being tied, it should also be able to be untied. (14)

We might like to think of this in the mathematical terms of computation. If a problem can be solved through computation in a finite period of time then it can be treated as computable (C). But, if its solution cannot be achieved in a finite period of time then it must be regarded as not computable (NC). (15)

By sorting philosophical problems into such 'sheep' and 'goats' does mean that the philosopher can then more profitably spend their time attempting to solve those problems that can be solved, indeed, can be resolved and, therein and thereafter, rendered as relatively non-problematic (unless, once more, re-questioned and suitably re-problematized). (16)

This now brings us to the superficial treatment of conundrums, contradictions, *aporia*s, and the like. If we can demonstrate we are being presented with sheer contradictions or mere degrees of incoherency that cannot find forms of logical remediation then

[7] By 'intention(al), etc.' is meant 'the pre-intentional, the intentional, trans-intentional (judgment) and post-intention(al consequences).

we should put such puzzles to the side and stop wasting our time with such philosophical *cul de sacs*. However, all too often, more sophisticated forms of such incoherent self-contradiction are deceptively disseminated by a tranche of misguided philosophers who ever invite us to waste our time going down innumerable rabbit holes chasing solutions that could never exist. E.g., if in intentional consciousness we 'know' intentional objectivity (*noema*), intentional processes (*noesis*), and intentional subjectivity (transcendental subjectivity) must dialectically co-exist then the prioritization and preferentialistic treatment of any one of these dialectical moments is an absolutistical nonsense! Can be nothing more, and nothing less! How could the thought, as an intentional object, be thought without thinking it, and v.v. With such perfect philosophical precision, all extreme realists and idealists can be successfully dismissed. And, with this sweeping out of such exclusivist thinking, we must include all extreme pragmatists who mistakenly believe they are simply watching this impossible game that is being enacted between such realists and idealists. The textual economy cannot be reduced to just 'an endless succession of deferred textual (re)presentations' for how else could we differentiate the (modally enriched) experience of a cup of tea from its linguistic representation as 'a cup of tea', as they are already naturally differentiated in lived-experience? When I desire a cup of tea, I prefer the real thing; even if this type of experience and its linguistic representation are both simulated in intentional consciousness, etc. (17)

All too often philosophically treated conundrums, etc., are just read at face value. Once we have swept aside all self-contradictory, incoherent nonsense then let us see if we are dealing with a 'problem' that is either soluble or cannot be resolved. Forget the latter, and deal with the former should you need to. Preferably, in relevant and suitable economic terms, accepting the dialectical nature of intentional ideation, etc., (with an eye on existentially oriented forms of resolution… but, let me deal with this pro-relational prospect a little later). Through this three-fold approach, learning to happily live with conundrums by sorting such 'sheep' from the 'goats', and, dialectically entertaining the former when constituted in relevant economic terms of reference, and so on. (18)

3. Passive and Active Nihilisms??

Great philosophers have wrestled with great problems, problems that deserve to be dealt with.[8] But, to distil hours of such reflection into short texts is just as problematic, if not more problematic for their readers, than if they were to more patiently unravel their idea in much longer texts. Then, such factories of ideas, themselves, can also see an inevitable subtle shifting of a kaleidoscope of concepts and positions that, in turn, can further perplex the attentive reader. In this regard, Nietzsche's writings are not to be read as if we were following a story in the morning newspaper or as a news item sent to us in our daily emails. Some commentators perceive this philosopher as going through three differing

[8] I.e., not philosophically chasing those problems that are either self-contradictorily incoherent or are just not able to be solved. But, as all philosophers, and other disciplinarians, have their blind-spots, there will be times when even the greatest will go down such 'rabbit holes'. Unfortunately, prolixity usually marks out such blind-spots for the more perspicacious.

periods in philosophizing, but, for all that, perhaps the most perplexing aspect of this philosopher is to understand how his underlying nihilism is to be suitably interpreted?[9] (19)

Nietzsche contrast two kinds of nihilism:[10]

> …Friedrich Nietzsche described in his notebooks (published posthumously by his sister in *The Will to Power*) a choice between 'active' and 'passive' nihilism.
>
> According to Nietzsche, we can then become *active* nihilists and reject the values given to us by others in order to erect values of our own. Or we can become *passive* nihilists and continue to believe in traditional values, despite having doubts about the true value of those values. The active nihilist destroys in order to find or create something worth believing in. Only that which can survive destruction can make us stronger. Nietzsche and the group of 19th-century Russians who self-identified as nihilists shared this outlook. The passive nihilist does not want to risk self-destruction, and so clings to the safety of traditional beliefs. Nietzsche argues that such self-protection is in reality an even more dangerous form of self-destruction. To believe just for the sake of believing in *something* can lead to a superficial existence, to the complacent acceptance of believing anything believed by others, because believing in something (even if it turns out to be nothing worth believing in) will be seen by the passive nihilist as preferable to taking the risk of not believing in anything, to taking the risk of staring into the abyss – a metaphor for nihilism that appears frequently in Nietzsche's work. (20)

But the extreme contrast between 'the choice of being a passive nihilist' *versus* 'the choice of being an active nihilist' need not be treated as an uncrossable gulf or chasm. For a start, the doing away with all beliefs is an impossibility, indeed, sheer nonsense, since the very language we use is impregnated and redolent with such 'myths'. If we were to do away with everything, we would find nothing left. Nothing could survive! Preferable, from my point of view, in order to salvage Nietzsche's insights into such matters, as a transcendental phenomenologist, I would be more inclined suggest the use of a blanket suspension, an *epoché*, a bracketing of any and all our beliefs. Perhaps this philosopher is anticipating this type of 'transcendental phenomenological turn'? (21)

On the other hand, to just believe because you need to believe in something is also an impossible trajectory to follow. Correctly, you cannot believe in something if you 'do

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[9] For me, the expressions 'suitable' or 'suitably' are technical code for 'propriety of phenomenological treatment of encounters, appropriateness of hermeneutical treatment of recognitions, and appositeness of (non-systematic and systematic forms of) existential treatment through forms of existentially oriented modes of engagement'. I.e., seeking propriety, appropriateness and appositeness.

[10] In this section I have quoted from the article *Nihilism* (*The risk of nihilism is that it alienates us from anything good or true. Yet believing in nothing has positive potential*) by Nolen Gertz (an assistant philosopher of applied philosophy at the University of Twente, etc. Author of *The Philosophy of War and Exile* (2014), *Nihilism and Technology* (2018) and *Nihilism* (2019)). Link: https://aeon.co/essays/if-you-believe-in-nihilism-do-you-believe-in-anything?utm_source=Aeon+Newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2020_12_28

not believe in that something'. Normally, we believe, outside religious topics and political mythology, because we believe we have some form of supporting evidence for the same. And if that is the case, such unbelief is to mock the very possibility that evidence could ever have a decisive role in how we course through this world when we know we are ever-confronted by the need to make innumerable decisions of which 'commonsense', as shared with others, is the common arbiter in many such decisions. (22)

Let us assume Nietzsche is being more rhetorical here, treating such choices metaphorically 'as if…' 'as if we were to suspend our beliefs', 'as if we were to creatively imagine there are other ways of approaching the current topic to hand..?' In effect, arguing that the active nihilist is exercising a transcendental suspension… be that either unwittingly or wittingly recognized as such? (23)

But nihilism is also considerably fashioned by epistemological thought:

> In epistemology (the theory of knowledge), nihilism is often seen as the denial that knowledge is possible, the stance that our most cherished beliefs have no bedrock. The argument for epistemological nihilism is based on the idea that knowledge requires something more that a knower and a known. That something more is typically seen as what makes knowledge objective, as the ability to refer to a something outside one's personal, subjective experience is what separates knowledge from mere opinion.
>
> But for epistemological nihilism, there is no standard, no foundations, no ground upon which one can make knowledge claims, nothing to justify our belief that any particular claim is true. (24)

That such claims to such firm foundations, such grounds and standards, truly, is a metaphor gone mad, a linguistic device being utilized well beyond the bounds of its practical utility. That which is beyond experience, is just that, 'beyond experience'! On the other hand, we have relative grounds for more conventionally acceptable truth claims and that they can come with degrees of relatively co-associated forms of evidential self-assurance. Just as I have argued on a number of occasions, to deny 'Julius Caesar crossed the Rubicon' and, thereby, no impending civil war was being signaled, is a feat of historical brinkmanship that discredits vast slabs of Roman history that would follow, and, in whose shadows echoes of that 'historical turn' still resonate today (e.g., in legal history, architecture, language and political thought, and so on). On the other hand, historians can debate how many troops he had in that crossing, as he advanced on Rome, and, what he ate or did not eat for breakfast that day, and so on. Such historical crumbs can be questioned and quibbled over, however, some positions in our disciplines are rather too onerous to turn around and just not worth our while to swim against such overwhelming currents. Of course, in the form of a suspension, we may well wish to re-scrutinize such positions. But, more as a test of their fitness rather than as a way of doing away with such relatively necessary foundations (whilst not claiming that they are indubitably interpreted even if treated, for the purposes of argument, etc., as if indubitably grounded). Although, for sure, never taking anything for granted, officially, not treating such things as indubi-

table and not ever-provisional, even if were to overlook, perhaps wisely, such philosophical qualifications and move on to our making decisions in the light of our qualified 'commonsense'. (25)

From epistemological skepticism comes epistemological nihilism, and v.v:

> The passive nihilist is aware that skeptical questions can be raised about knowledge. But rather than doubt knowledge, the passive nihilist continues to believe in knowledge. Consequently, for the passive nihilist, knowledge exists, but it exists on the basis of faith.
>
> Nihilism is therefore not only to be found in the person who rejects knowledge claims for lacking indubitable foundations. Rather a person who is aware of the doubts surrounding knowledge claims and who nevertheless continues to act as though those doubts don't really matter is also a nihilist. (26)

This last comment strikes me as one way to view conspiratorialists who cannot possibly believe even the better half of some of their non-evidenced based fanciful thinkings but who think it is ok to believe because some people have already believed in such narratives. As if reality is configured through forms of consensus regardless of how many or how few subscribe to such fictions, such self-contradictory and incoherent tales found on the Internet. (27)

From epistemological nihilism and epistemological skepticism comes… moral nihilism:

> In moral philosophy, nihilism is seen as the denial that morality exists… as a consequence of epistemological nihilism. If there exist no grounds for making objective claims about knowledge and truth, then there exist no grounds for making objective claims about right and wrong. (28)

In this regard, the active nihilist might wish to either reconstruct their own system of morality or simply reject (this notion as derivative).

> So rather than such moral egoism, it is more likely that the active nihilist will simply reject morality altogether. Instead, actions are judged only in practical terms, such as what is more or less efficient towards achieving a desired end.
>
> The passive nihilist, on the other hand, doesn't reject traditional morality just because its legitimacy can be questioned. Instead, the passive nihilist rejects the idea that the legitimacy of morality really matters. The passive nihilist obeys morality, not for the sake of morality, but for the sake of obedience. …Moral standards provide a compass, and the passive nihilist would rather navigate life using a faulty compass than risk going through life feeling completely lost.[11] (29)

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[11] This author then goes on to discuss 'political nihilism' as a natural extension of moral nihilism.

It seems to me that the passive nihilist is ‘wanting their cake and eat it at the same time’. Such divided loyalties could not inspire any form of authenticity of being except in those moment, when they forget their doubts, and were to spontaneously forge the responsive and responsible coursing of their own moral adaptations to the situation in hand which also cannot escape how cultures have already reflected upon such situations..? (30)

Personally, I feel as if Nietzsche is heading in the right direction; as long as we read him rhetorically (which as a way of interpreting Nietzsche, perhaps, could be taken as good advice in general?)? Instead, I would like to propose an alternative way to view this complex philosophical phenomenon of nihilism. (31)

4. Negative and Positive Nihilisms??

Some philosophers are very pessimistic without necessarily being nihilistic. It could be argued that they are being realistic rather than unreasonably over-optimistic. However, an unrelieved pessimism is probably indicative of what I regard to be the perspective of a negative nihilist.[12] (32)

A negative nihilist is a philosophical person who pines for what they never had in the first place, an indisputably assured canon of indubitable knowledge to assist them in the coursing of their personal, communal, epistemological, moral, political, religious or spiritual lives. Without such a basis, such bedrock, they feel they can have no faith and that the faith of others is nothing else other than, at best, illusory, or, at worse, delusory. That life is little more that series of accidents waiting to happen one after the other only to be occasionally punctuated by the distraction of moments of fleeting happiness; if one should be so lucky… (33)

In a contrast, I perceive the ‘positive nihilist’ as ‘an optimistic philosopher who perceives the world as a world of existential opportunities, each and every moment of the day’. For these happy and somewhat contented spirits, all significance, all sense, meaning and meaningfulness is to be discovered in the unfolding of what is already to hand. They are ever relieved that there is no fundamental reality controlling the coursing of their existence with-others and that what is real has to be lived, re-made afresh in the possibilities before-us, both individually and collectively. They find their freedom emerging both through-others and how they, themselves, interact with-others, ever happy to be helpful towards others in the hope that they, too, can find and share in this sense of an expansive existential freedom to that degree it can be instantiated in the midst of the exigencies both created by nature and, sadly, by other people given that, also, we can, at times, be ‘human, all too human’. But despite such realism, the basis of this optimism is to be found in the fact that all identity is a construction constructed by-us, as ever a work in progress, and, whose alignment is progressively to be discerned in accordance with lived-reality without subjecting such rapport to impossible forms of reification, substantialization, hypostatization, and so on and so forth! A tendency of careless, over-attached thought to attract a mass of unnecessary desires, addictions and ensuing problems in our relations

[12] E.g., the French philosopher and essayist Emil Mihai Cioran.

both ‘with others’ (non-existentially) and ‘with-others’ (existentially). Realizing that the ‘existential’ is the ‘relative existentialization of the relatively non-existential…’ (34)

In such an open attitude, the philosophical nonsense promulgated by so-called First Philosophies (and so-called Last Philosophies) are put behind us as but metaphors, rhetorical flourishes, unnecessary ornamental embellishments upon the stage of life… dismissing the need to know about the mythological origins dug up by Prime Movers, the teleological ends that never happen, ultimate acts of enlightenment impossible to realize right now, and all manner of other speculative imaginings. On the other hand, in the place of these things that are impossible to obtain… we find the mystical mirror of the moment existentially reflecting what is either already to hand or what could be brought closer to hand… as we work with others and others work with us… in this exciting world of opportunities… if only such possibilities could be seen and worked towards…. (35)

Well, maybe I have exaggerated a little? Much of our lives can be tedious, what with a proliferation of demanded tasks, having to deal with people who enjoy being unpleasant, endless chores, expectations, obligations, duties, extended periods of misfortune, and so on. But, we only have to look more closely to see that the world is not an immutable substance, that although it can be evasive, still, that we can somewhat mould reality the way it can be melded, be masters of our fate or at least accept our lot in order to find and do the best with what is brought to hand..? (36)

The contrast here, as envisaged, is between the negative nihilist, ever the pessimist, and, the positive nihilist, who optimistically revels in that degree of existential freedom that can be found to hand… (37)

The positive nihilist being able to be ‘positive’ by virtue of the experiential fact that lived-reality is both constructed by(-)us and for(-)us, in concert with the world of all other(-)things, but, primarily, by(-)us, both individually and collectively![13] (38)

For such a person, all conundrums are opportunities to happily reflect upon the dialectical nature of the world whose bountiful malleability gives us plentiful opportunities to work with the world and have that existential world work with(-)us…. (39)

5. Can Buddhist Philosophy Be Interpreted as a Form of Religious Nihilism?

I have proposed a form of nihilism that is neither self-contradictory nor incoherent. That, in effect, as a philosophy, there are viable forms of nihilism that deserve to be taken seriously. But, in this, you do not have to agree with me that the positive form of nihilism, as envisaged by myself, is tenable. Instead, let us briefly explore whether much of Buddhist Philosophy could be interpreted as a(n active? and) positive form of nihilism,

[13] This convention ‘(-)’ of mine being utilized to indicate a context between non-chaotically oriented/‘redirected’ patterns of non-existential behaviour *versus* chaotic forms of existentially oriented/‘redirected’ patterns of behaviour. Noting that ‘existentialization’ is the ‘existentialization of the relatively non-existential’. I.e., non-existential value/s, etc., can be transformed, enriched, positively re-directed.

and, through that example, answer in the affirmative the question ‘can nihilists believe in anything?’ For the record, Nietzsche claims that Buddhism is a form of nihilism. (40)

One classic formula is ‘the three basic marks of phenomenal existence’, namely, impermanence (not lasting or not durable); soulessness (not possessing a substantial self); and suffering (or pain, unpleasantness, unsatisfactoriness, etc.) (Sanskrit*: anitya, anat-man, duhkha*/Pali: *anicca, anatta, dukkha*). All three epithets, taken both individually and together, do seem to suggest a nihilistic philosophy? So, the questions to ask, first, is this nihilistic interpretation valid, and, second, if the first question is answered in the affirmative, just what sort of nihilism is involved? (41)

Let me explore what these three basic marks or characteristics of phenomenal existence appear to imply? For a start, the world is a world of change, ‘impermanence’. No one could argue with that. On the other hand, this is not a world of pure change, a world completely changing every instant, because a world that was completely changing every instant would be unrecognizable. Of course, we could imagine the world as if it were some quantum reality that, in the blink of an eye, changed back to what it was more or less, a moment before. But such a qualification still proves this point that even though this world is a world of change, ‘a vale of tears’, still, identity does persist even if it is changeable, subject to decay, is mutable, and so on. (42)

This brings me to the second epithet, namely, ‘without-self’. What is not denied is that, as a person, we persist through the persistence of our embodiment. But what is here denied is that there is a soul, some type of material substrate, or similar, that persists and maintains our identity be that before birth, now, and after death. That this principle applies to everything from chariots to pottery bowls, from trees to sand grains upon a beach. There is just no need to impute such an additional, unnecessary, spiritually unsound source of identity when the material to hand, as it is arranged through a concatenation of conditions, alone, can account for what is to hand. In effect, all identity emerges and cannot be adequately accounted for through extreme forms of reductivism or essentialism, etc. (43)

The third element of ‘suffering’, admittedly, has a pronounced nihilistic flavour. However, the point of perceiving the self and all things as without a material soul or substrate for purposes of identification, is to free the person from forming attachments to such unrealistic reifications that only end in impossible desires; attachments ending in pain and suffering, along with loss and regret, etc. On the contrary, when we are free from seeing things as if permanent, as something to possess, as anchors to form attachments to, and so on, we then find ourselves liberated from these unnecessary aspects of human existence that only lead to pain, a feeling of the unsatisfactoriness of a life filled with endless desires, and so on. ‘To not get what one wants is suffering, to get what one doesn’t want is suffering…’ To both end and extricate ourselves from that cycle of pleasure and pain… we need to stop desiring pleasurable things as if they were permanent, etc. How such a philosophy might sit in the midst of a world of endless consumerism, in a world of finite resources… might be difficult to imagine, but, possibly, could be beneficial, ecologically sound, psychically more productive for such an individual? (44)

However, this brief introduction to my take on Buddhist Philosophy, with respect to this three-word formula, is only to suggest an answer to the questions ‘can a nihilist believe in anything?’ or, indeed, ‘can a nihilist be happy?’ I would reply, that we can answer both questions in the affirmative. (45)

6. Making Sense of Nihilism?

From an amorphous view of nihilism as a ‘believing in nothing, and possibly perceiving life as an endless mass of misery’ I have very briefly introduced and examined four varieties, namely, ‘passive’, ‘active’, ‘negative’ and ‘positive’. I have welcomed this opportunity of defining, if only for myself, just that might be entailed in a nihilistic philosophy when more closely examined. (46)

From the perspective of this brief exploration, it is my opinion that passive and active forms of nihilism are prone to self-deconstruction, but, if we were to read Nietzsche’s style as being rather ‘rhetorical’ we might be able to salvage this contrast between the type of person who has no faith in the authority of their culture but goes along with it all the same *versus* the person who is prepared to sacrifice what needs to be sacrificed in order to start somewhat afresh, but, never ever from the impossibility of a so-called ‘clean slate’. (47)

In contrast to the above, I would cast a negative nihilist as one who is depressed and remains depressed about the world because they have this anxiety that we need indubitable truths in order to then go on our merry way. But the truth of the matter is that we have never had access to such foundations and nor do we need the same. We have always worked with what is to found to hand. We may, for good reasons, wish to overthrow parts of our world, but, the entire world cannot be overthrown for reasons as demonstrated. To say we could do so, is sheer nonsense. (48)

Segueing from this last point lets us introduce the positive nihilist. Such a person is both an optimist but also a realist (in a non-extremist, non-technical sense). They use what is to hand and transform it. They find their freedom through others, and, on the basis of a cooperative freedom, strive to find their ‘voice’ by both ever suspending the world and then de-suspending such a suspension lest they be trapped on that level playing field living a perpetual relativist’s nightmare. ‘Creative virtual destruction’ without ‘the non-virtual, actual destruction of this same world’. In the process treating the world as if it were both an illusion, without substantial identity, but, also as if it were a ‘fountain of abundance’, well-filled and over-flowing with an existential sense of ‘promise’… (49)

By ‘existentialist’ I simply mean a ‘person in the thrall of their relationships, as someone who is respectful of their relationships’ on the premise that ‘wholes are greater than the sum of their parts’, and, ‘psychic wholes are greater than their psychic constituents’. This difference being experienced as an ‘existential excess’, an ‘existential surplus’ (as intimated in the Neoplatonic image of an ‘overflowing spring or well’). This en-

hanced richness of lived-experience being promoted through ‘living the transcendental suspension’ which is nothing more in intentional reality than that basis upon which trans-intentional judgments, as lived-relationships, are conducted and decisively enacted... (50)

We can also note that nihilism, historically, has been closely linked to epistemological nihilism and thence to moral nihilism and political nihilism. I would like to argue that from the perspective of a positive nihilism (and, perhaps, also a qualified active nihilism) that it cannot be suitably defined and dismissed as nothing more than a ‘profoundly negative anxiety unleashed from the recognition that there are no indubitable foundations’. Such mythical ‘foundations’ never existed and, therefore, cannot be treated or experienced as something ‘lost’, ‘once possessed, but never to be found again’. We can do quite happily without such impossible constructs which only deserve to be deconstructed when in the hands of those who think ‘they can possess indubitable, non-provisional access to such impossible standards’. We ever work with what is to hand. Indeed, a veritable ‘body of knowledge’, albeit ever subject to ongoing qualifications, non-reifications, productive forms of suspension, and so on and so forth! (51)

Seen in this vein, we have no need to fear a moral nihilism should it be based on an intuitive, existential appreciation of the apparent trajectories of our relationships, on an appreciation of the deontological, pragmatical and aesthetic values to be found permeating the lived-experience of our relationships. Where our relationships are also found to be both emplaced and embraced in a relational world of relationships where our navigation, negotiation and arbitration of our aspirations, through this world at large, more often than not, is already worked out for us on an intersubjective, cultural-intercultural, meta-textual basis through customs, conventions, genres, narratives, and so forth. (52)

Similarly, we should have no need to fear a political nihilism should it be based on an existential appreciation of our relationships and the ‘political need’ that we will be ‘called upon’, from time to time, to intervene on the behalf of others, on the behalf of our relationships and communities, our institutions and countries, etc. (53)

All in all, nihilism as a metaphorical ‘landscape’ is a much-varied world where some lands are more mythical and impossible than others and where other lands appear to proffer existential responses to how we should regard the very nature of lived-experience. Still, on reflection, the reader, themselves, must decide whether such a wide-ranging philosophy is either tenable or non-tenable, either a world of endless pessimism or wide-ranging optimism?? (54)

Recently, I have been exploring ‘narratives’ through the lens of the ‘narrational economy’ defined as a ‘working together of narrational facts, narratives and critiques’. That, furthermore, a ‘critique’ can be seen as a ‘critically organized narrative that should be in an ongoing alignment, through ongoing re-alignment, with the perceived reality of our lived-experience/s’. That, in the light of this research, I have also come to the conclusion that a nihilist has to jettison, somewhat, their ‘nihilism’ by recognizing that we also need to be in some form of a working accord with our relationships in order to advance

our living together with(-)others... But, then, for a committed nihilist, that type of stance, requiring the sacrifice of the ideological, might well be unproblematic?! (55)

7. Provisional Conclusions: Can a Nihilist be Happy..?

Now, to conclude, albeit provisionally, we must ponder one final question, namely, 'can the nihilist live happily in a world beset with conundrums?' (56)

I have argued, that in the form of a positive nihilist, that they can be realistic optimists. That nihilists do not need to subscribe to just unrelieved forms of pessimism. I have also argued that as the overall world-of-life, as an intersection of both epistemological and ontological orientations, is dialectically riddled with economic conundrums, that it would be better if we just accept that the world is beset on all levels by such dialectical features. Of course, not wasting our time with superficial conundrums that are self-contradictory and incoherent. Moreover, sorting the 'sheep' from the 'goats' and only applying ourselves to the resolution of those dilemmas that have the possibility of solutions, are able to be meaningfully resolved... (57)

We should revel, perhaps, in this dialectical sense of an 'economic' world at the very basis of lived-experience? Through this fluidity of lived-experience we can find a freedom 'to change what can be changed and to let go what cannot be changed'. Moreover, in the same manner, we should also welcome this ability to experience the existentialization of experience as an enhancement of our collectively and individually based freedom/s. That through a 'careful and concerned' harnessing of chaotic phenomena, this semblance of a lived-freedom can be further amplified through the carefully controlled incremental addition and subtraction of inputs that alter the trajectories of our relationships, both individually and collectively, in such a manner so as to beneficially engineer social change… on the behalf of those relationships, where and when we are 'called' to intervene and act both responsively and responsibly..?! (58)

Noël Tointon, Wentworth Falls, 1.1.21.

A Salutary Postscript:

However, at the end of the day, perhaps, it would be salutary[14] to see ourselves as if like 'biblical worms' happily composting the decaying world around us… and finding some enjoyment in its odoriferous beneficence…![15] For who are we to think that we can understand everything… when all we need to know is that which is in front of us, now, to be enjoyed… to be ever enjoyed in the eternal moment, the living-present..!![16] N.T. (59)

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[14] Being salutary by being very nihilistic, albeit as a rhetorical flourish; hopefully, as a metaphor that is not to be taken too literally.

[15] In the Bible there are number of references to people being referred to as if 'worms'. E.g., Psalms 22:6; Job 25:6; Isaiah 41:14; an image to be found in numerous sermons and homilies of the early church fathers.

[16] Working with a number of ideas on the nature of the existential as put forward by Martin Buber but as explored and refracted through numerous essays of mine. 'Enjoyed' can also be read as 'suffered'.