Zarathustra, Zhuangzi and Zen:

Staying Loyal to the Earth in the Time of Climate Change

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Until the End of the World

So often these days it feels like that scene in Wim Wenders' Odyssean epic film Until the End of the World when, in the middle of a kiss, the engine suddenly cuts out in their small single engine plane, leaving the protagonists Claire and Sam adrift over the Australian outback. "It's the end of the world," Claire concludes, understanding that the engine failure was likely the result of an electromagnetic pulse from the explosion of an out-of-control nuclear satellite.¹ Of course, it turned out not to be the end of the world. The apocalyptic setting of the famously long film just added a sense of urgency to Wenders' primary concerns in exploring the blinding power of images, the importance of dreams, and the search for love and the meaning of existence. At the end of the film, set sometime in the beginning of the 21st century, Claire is an astronaut, orbiting the earth as an ecological observer. What the film could not have anticipated is what an ecological observer orbiting the earth would see today, and that is the dramatic loss of sea ice in the Arctic ocean. Climate scientists are most alarmed by what has been taking place in the Arctic—the dramatic increase in temperature, the loss of sea ice, and the release of vast quantities of methane, all suggest we may be perhaps like Wenders' protagonists, powerless and adrift, hurtling over a desolate landscape toward the end of the world.²

2 The consensus of climate scientists that produced the 2014 Synthesis Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change suggest that the effects are likely to be far more serious than most people today yet realize. “Human influence on the climate system is clear, and recent anthropogenic emissions of greenhouse gases are the highest in history,” the report states at the outset. “Warming of the climate system is unequivocal, and since the 1950s, many of the observed changes are unprecedented over decades to millennia.” The report goes on to warn that “[c]ontinued emission of greenhouse gases will cause further warming and long-lasting changes in all components of the climate
One could say that Nietzsche saw this coming. Although he might not have imagined what we face today with the polar icecaps melting, massive fires raging across wide landscapes, and other effects of global climate change, Nietzsche’s anticipation of an unparalleled crisis facing humanity that is the result of the underlying values of Western culture seems prophetic today. Nietzsche’s call for a revaluation of all values, summed up in Zarathustra’s exhortation to “remain loyal to the earth,” suggests the relevance of Nietzsche’s thought in this time of global ecological crisis. Since the early 1980s the work of Graham Parkes has been very influential, especially for a generation of his students including myself, in emphasizing the importance of Nietzsche’s thought for environmental philosophy. Environmental philosophers, however, have sometimes challenged the relevance of Nietzsche’s thought for environmental philosophy. Some contend that even though Nietzsche may have sought a perspective that is loyal to the earth, his critique of truth and his perspectivism inevitably leads to an untenable relativism that undermines any basis for an ecologically sound philosophy. There is also the widespread view, which Parkes calls attention to that “Nietzsche is such a strong advocate of will to power as domination and exploitation that one cannot sensibly count him as a contributor to environmental philosophy” (Parkes 2005, 77).

Parkes attempts to meet both these objections to a "green" reading of Nietzsche, first in the “Staying Loyal to the Earth” essay, contending that "Nietzsche's philosophy of nature, his understanding of the natural world and human existence as interdependent processes and dynamic configurations of will to power, can contribute to grounding a realistic, global ecology that in its loyalty to the earth may be capable of saving it" (Parkes 1999, 185).

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One of the major themes that ties together diverse environmental philosophers is a common critique of the anthropocentrism that has characterized so much of Western culture, and Parkes has emphasized how much this critique is a central feature of Nietzsche’s thought. Parkes highlights “Nietzsche’s definitive pronouncement” criticizing this anthropocentrism in the late writings: “The human being is by no means the crown of creation: every creature is, alongside the human, at a similar level of perfection” (Parkes 2005, 85). Parkes also points to a passage from The Genealogy of Morals which he finds to be especially "ecologically prescient": "Our whole attitude toward nature today is hubris, our raping of nature by means of machines and the unthinking resourcefulness of technicians and engineers" (Parkes 2005, 85).

In defending Nietzsche as an ecological thinker, Parkes has also been quite influential in exploring the affinities between Nietzsche’s thought and Asian philosophies, particularly Daoism and Zen. In this paper I wish to take up two lines of inquiry opened up by Parkes’ attempt to meet the objections to considering Nietzsche as an ecological thinker. In the first part, I will focus on the comparison between Nietzsche’s thought and Daoism, and will examine Parkes’ attempt to meet the objection that Nietzsche’s perspectivism undermines his relevance for environmental philosophy. Here I find

5 Nietzsche’s critique of Western philosophy, along with the related polemic against Christianity, bears some resemblance to the thesis by historian Lynn White Jr. that “Christianity bears a huge burden of guilt” for the ecological crisis (White 1967, 1206). White’s paper became influential in the environmental movement after it came out in 1967, and quite controversial for its critique of Christianity. White emphasizes that “Christianity is the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen” and he traces the roots of the ecological crisis to the dualism of man and nature and the teleological view that “it is God’s will that man exploit nature for his proper ends” (White 1967, 1205).

6 Parkes’ translation from The Antichrist §14.


8 An interesting feature of White’s paper is that, toward the end, he praises the ‘beatniks’ who “show a sound instinct in their affinity for Zen Buddhism, which conceives of the man-nature relationship as very nearly the mirror image of the Christian view” (White 1967, 1206). There has been a great deal of work exploring the relevance of Daoism and Zen in considering the ecological crisis in recent years. See, for example, John L. Culliney and David Jones, The Fractal Self: Science, Philosophy, and the Evolution of Cooperation (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2017). For the affinity for Zen in the work of one of those “beatniks”, see Jason M. Wirth, Mountains, Rivers, and the Great Earth: Reading Gary Snyder and Dōgen in an Age of Ecological Crisis (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2017). Wirth also explores the relationship between Nietzsche’s thought and Zen in Jason M. Wirth, Nietzsche and Other Buddhas: Philosophy after Comparative Philosophy (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2019).
Parkes’ attempt to pull Nietzsche back from his customary perspectivism to be deeply problematic and ultimately unnecessary in defending Nietzsche as an ecological thinker. In the second part I will consider the comparison between Nietzsche’s thought and Zen, and will take up Parkes’ attempt to meet the objection concerning the notion of the will to power. Here I find Parkes’ work to be more illuminating in understanding why Nietzsche’s thought is relevant for us in this time of climate change.

Zarathustra and Zhuangzi

One of the more obvious resonances between Nietzsche’s thought and Daoism, which Parkes has long drawn attention to since his seminal essay “The Wandering Dance: Chuang Tzu and Zarathustra” is a common critique of anthropocentrism. For the Daoist philosophers, the Confucian focus on human beings was too narrow and thus they emphasize trying to take a wider view and see what is human in the perspective of the vast (da 大), the vastness of ‘the heavens and the earth’ (tiandi 天地). In contrast to the view expressed in Genesis that the Earth and all of its creatures were created for human beings, Parkes points out that the Daoists philosophers emphasize that human beings are "irrevocably subject to the powers of Heaven and Earth" and

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9 It is worth noting that the sharp separation between human beings and nature, which is such a distinctive feature of Western thought, just doesn't arise in Chinese philosophy because of what Roger Ames has called the "assumed mutuality and collaterality" of the ‘three powers’ of Heaven (tian 天), Earth (di 地), and human beings (ren 人) in Chinese cosmology (Ames 2018, 259). The notion of Heaven, as Parkes explains, did not "signify a transcendent realm beyond this world, as in the dualistic metaphysics of the Platonist or Christian traditions, since the three powers were always regarded as belonging together" (Parkes 2018, 66).

10 The notion of Heaven evolved over time, as Parkes explains, "from originally meaning a sky god who ruled the cosmos, then fate in the sense of an all-encompassing power beyond human control, the sky (as in 'the heavens') . . . and eventually to an impersonal standard for human conduct." By the time of Confucius, the notion had become "a relatively impersonal force of nature that reigned over the worlds of Earth and humans beneath it" (Parkes 2018, 66). The phrase ‘the heavens and the earth’ (tiandi 天地) is thus often taken to refer to the ‘whole world’, or ‘cosmos’, and thus might be understood as ‘nature’ in the broadest sense of the natural world or universe.
thus must approach the task of governing by "following the ways of nature"¹¹ (Parkes 2018, 79).

In the Daodejing the majority of similes for dao, as Parkes observes, are drawn from nature; human beings are encouraged to be more like water, thawing ice, or an uncarved block of wood. The Daoist view, Parkes concludes, "is not only that human beings will flourish if they emulate natural processes, but also that this happens primarily because the best ruler is the most consummate emulator—of water especially" (Parkes 2018, 82). Parkes draws an affinity between this Daoist view and Nietzsche's project of re-naturalizing human beings, and thus overcoming the dualism that separates human beings and nature, as well as the resulting anthropocentrism that conceives nature as existing to serve human interests. Parkes calls attention to a similar use of imagery drawn from the natural world, both in the Daoist texts and in Zarathustra. In "The Wandering Dance," Parkes emphasizes that Zarathustra and Zhuangzi are "first and foremost works of imagery" (Parkes 1983, 236). "Beyond being works of the philosophical imagination," Parkes continues, "both texts share the same kinds of images. The primary source of imagery is the natural world: the elements—sky, earth, fire, and water; the sun, moon, and stars; the climate, weather, and seasons; and the realms of plant and animal" (Parkes 1983, 237). Thus, just as the Daoists texts recommend emulating nature in a decidedly non-anthropocentric view, Parkes contends that Zarathustra's teaching of the Overhuman is "profoundly relevant for ecological thinking" since it "signifies a way of being that is attained by ‘overcoming’ the human, which, as the rest of Zarathustra shows, requires that one go beyond the merely human perspective and transcend the anthropocentric view" (Parkes 2018, 81).

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¹¹ Parkes cites here the famous passage from the Daodejing: “Human beings emulate the earth/The earth emulates the heavens/The heavens emulate way-making/And way-making emulates what is spontaneously so (ziran 自然)” (Ames & Hall 2010, 115).
Perhaps the most crucial question raised in Parkes’ attempt to find resonances between Zarathustra and Zhuangzi concerns just what he means here in suggesting some kind of transcendence “beyond the merely human perspective.” In his latest essay, Parkes suggests that his comparison between Nietzsche and Zhuangzi “might highlight aspects of their thought that have generally gone unnoticed—especially on the question of whether and how perspectives beyond the human might be attainable” (Parkes 2020, 61). Of course, one of the most distinctive features of Nietzsche’s thought is his perspectivism. In the preface to Beyond Good and Evil, Nietzsche suggests that Plato’s fundamental error, the error that made the history of Western thought the “history of an error,” was the mistake of “denying perspective, the basic condition of all life”12 (Nietzsche 1966, 3). Parkes turns to an important passage from the Genealogy in which Nietzsche emphatically emphasizes this basic condition of all life, highlighting the part where Nietzsche goes on to suggest that the closest we can get to any objectivity is to multiply our perspectives:

> There is only a perspective seeing, only a perspectival “knowing”; the more affects we are able to put into words about a thing, the more eyes, various eyes we are able to use for the same thing, the more complete will be our “concept” of the thing, our “objectivity.”13 (Parkes 2020, 71)

Parkes then wonders: “multiplying perspectives all around is enlightening—but can’t we thereby go further to some kind of perspectiveless experience?” (Parkes 2020, 71). One of the main themes of much of Parkes’ work over the years has been the contention that, in both Nietzsche’s writings and in the Zhuangzi, one can find suggestions of just such an experience, one that would allow, as he puts it, “knowing things as they are in themselves” (Parkes 2020, 70). In support of this interpretation, Parkes highlights a few passages in the Zhuangzi describing an experience “in the

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12 Of course, Nietzsche suggests the history of Western thought is the “History of an Error” in the famous passage “How the ‘Real World’ Finally Became a Fable.” (Nietzsche, 1998, 20).
13 Parkes’ translation from On the Genealogy of Morals III, §12.
broad light of Heaven,” comparing this with the experience described in the section titled “Before Sunrise” in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.

Before examining Parkes’ reading of these passages, it is worth noting that in the early “Wandering Dance” essay we do not find the suggestion that there is ever any pulling away from perspectivism, either in Nietzsche’s writings or the *Zhuangzi*. There we find Parkes drawing the connection between Nietzsche, “who emphasizes experience is always necessarily perspectival,” and Zhuangzi, who “does not believe that we could ever attain a kind of ‘perspectiveless seeing’” (Parkes 1983, 242-43). It turns out the problem arises, not because we see things from perspective points of view, but only “when we become fixated in a particular perspective” (Parkes 1983, 241). Parkes notes that both thinkers address this problem through the dream, calling attention to both Nietzsche's lucid dreaming and the famous butterfly dream in the *Zhuangzi*. In the section titled “The Consciousness of Appearances” from *The Joyous Science*, Nietzsche develops the notion of the philosopher as lucid dreamer: “I have suddenly awakened in the middle of this dream, but only to the consciousness of dreaming, and that I must continue to dream lest I perish, just as the sleepwalker must continue to dream lest he slip and fall” (Nietzsche 2018, 73). Zhuangzi also suggests the philosopher as lucid dreamer when he mocks Confucius and other philosophers who think they are awake, closing his riposte with the butterfly dream in which one can no longer distinguish between dreaming and waking life.14 In “The Wandering Dance,” Parkes embraces the perspectivism in both thinkers and explains that Zhuangzi's butterfly dream makes the point, “relevant also to Nietzsche's perspectivism, that when one is in a certain perspective it is impossible to see it as a perspective. Only when we are placed in a different perspective can we

14 “Once Zhuang Zhou dreamt he was a butterfly, a butterfly flitting and fluttering around, happy with himself and doing as he pleased. He didn't know he was Zhuang Zhou. Suddenly, he woke up and there he was, solid and unmistakable Zhuang Zhou. But he didn't know if he was Zhuang Zhou who had dreamt he was a butterfly, or a butterfly dreaming he was Zhuang Zhou” (Watson 2003, 45).
appreciate the limitations of our former standpoint” (Parkes 1983, 242). The problem is not that we are dreamers, but is rather, as Parkes explains, “the refusal to admit that we are dreamers, to become aware of the extent to which the ‘real world’ is projected by human needs and desires, and to celebrate this creative activity by both seeing through and playing with it at the same time” (Parkes 1983, 243).

This play with different perspectives is what the wandering dance is all about. Parkes draws attention to the notion of ‘wandering’ (yóu 遊) in the title of the first chapter of the Zhuangzi, translated as “free and easy wandering” or “going rambling without a destination,” and also points out a connotation with ‘dance’ in the cognate term (yóu 游) meaning “to dance, float, swim about in water” (Parkes 1983, 243-44). The stories in the chapter, Parkes explains, “conduct the reader through a variety of perspectives ranging from the vegetative through the animal to the human, all point up the limitations of adopting a fixed standpoint” (Parkes 1983, 243). In another essay a little later, Parkes explains that the point of Zhuangzi’s perspectivism is to get us to see that “all value judgements are relative insofar as they are made from a particular perspective, and that particular perspectives are by their nature narrow and limited in comparison with the openness of heaven or the way” (Parkes 1989, 86).

In the “Wandering Dance” Parkes emphasizes that Zarathustra is also a wanderer and a dancer. Throughout the narrative Zarathustra proceeds to wander, Parkes continues, “from place to place, trying out the perspectives of mountain top and valley, underworld and ocean” (Parkes 1983, 243-44). Parkes points out that the ‘tightrope walker’ is literally a ‘tightrope dancer’ (Seiltänzer), and this, Parkes suggests, is one of the keys to the whole text: “This corresponds to the dance as a central image in Zarathustra and an indispensable capability of the overman. The overman must be dancer because through realizing the relativity of all perspectives, he knows that there is no
longer any firm ground on which to take a stand” (Parkes 1983, 244). At this point Parkes seems to fully embrace a perspectivism in both Zhuangzi and Nietzsche in which it would not make sense to speak of a perspectiveless experience that would enable “knowing things as they are in themselves.”

In subsequent writings Parkes seems to want to pull both Nietzsche and Zhuangzi back from this abyss, back from this perspectivism, at least a little, in emphasizing a “transperspective experience.” He begins to suggest this as he turns his attention to defending Nietzsche as an ecological thinker. In his characterization of the development of Nietzsche’s thought, Parkes sees a tension developing in the middle period of his writings where there is, on the one hand, a growing awareness of how our conceptions of nature are “conditioned by various kinds of fantasy projections,” and yet also a recognition of the need to withdraw these projections.15 “The tension between a view that understands fantasy projection as an ineluctable (if occasionally see-throughable) aspect of the human condition and one that allows for a seeing of the world of nature as it is in itself, apart from human projections on to it,” Parkes explains, “persists to the time of Zarathustra” (Parkes 1999, 170). Parkes thinks Nietzsche is suggesting a “withdrawal of at least some kinds of projection,” when he suggests, in The Joyous Science, the task of naturalizing the human being “by means of the pure newly discovered, newly redeemed nature” (Parkes 1999, 169; Nietzsche 2001, 110). Human beings have misunderstood the relationship between human beings and nature because they have misunderstood both human beings and nature. The task of thus re-naturalizing the human being thus requires a new understanding of nature, and involves a twofold

15 Parkes traces the development of Nietzsche's thinking about nature from an early Romanticist view emphasizing a mystical union with the natural world, through a “cooly scientific phase” of Nietzsche's thinking about nature, and then to the mature writings, culminating in Thus Spoke Zarathustra, which emphasize a loyalty to the earth, a reverence for the ultimately enigmatic nature of things, and “a profound and comprehensive vision of humanity and the natural cosmos as dynamic and interpenetrating configurations of what he called ‘will to power’” (Parkes 1999, 168).
process, as Parkes explains, “to strip away the fantastic metaphysical interpretations of human origins that have obscured human nature, and to confront human beings with nature itself, similarly stripped of human projections” (Parkes 1999, 179). The key passage in *Zarathustra* Parkes turns to as also suggesting this experience of nature stripped of human projections is Zarathustra's blessing in "Before Sunrise": “But this is my blessing: to stand over each and every thing as its own Heaven, as its round roof, its azure bell and eternal security” (Nietzsche 2005, 143). Parkes finds that Zarathustra's blessing, in liberating all things from their bondage under purpose, "frees them from any universal teleology, whether stemming from divine providence or the projection of a scientific view of progress, in order to let them be—or rather, come and go—in what Nietzsche calls the ‘innocence of becoming’” (Parkes 1999, 172). As Parkes explains elsewhere: “‘Before Sunrise’ is of crucial importance since it seems to go beyond Nietzsche's customary perspectivism and allows for an experience of the world that is not merely ‘from our little corner’ but from a horizon that transcends anthropocentric views” (Parkes 2000, 192).

In a later essay Parkes finds Zarathustra's blessing to resonate with both Daoism and Zen in allowing things to be just as they are: “Just as the Daoist sage and the Zen master are able to experience events in the ‘self-so-ing’ of their spontaneous unfolding, so Zarathustra's blessing lets each particular thing generate its own horizons, arising and perishing just as it does. In terms of environmental ethics, to experience in this way allows one to appreciate the intrinsic value of the natural world absolutely” (Parkes 2005, 89). Parkes finds this resonance with Zarathustra’s blessing in the ‘Autumn Floods’ dialogue in the Outer Chapters of the *Zhuangzi* where the sage is described as able to “penetrate the pattern of the myriad things” by “fathoming the beauty of heaven and earth” and thus have “a full view of heaven and earth” (Zhuangzi 1981, 148). Parkes also points to a passage in the Inner Chapters where Zhuangzi suggests the importance of knowing
the difference between the human and Heaven: “To know what is Heaven's doing and what is man's is the utmost in knowledge. Whoever knows what Heaven does lives the life generated by Heaven. Whoever knows what a man does uses what his wits knows about to nurture what they do not know about” (Zhuangzi 1981, 84). Parkes draws out the comparison with Zarathustra's blessing: “Just as the Daoist sage (a precursor of the Zen master) is able to broaden his perspective to the point where he is able to ‘illumine all things in the light of heaven,’ and by acting in a way harmonious with heaven and earth can ‘help the ten-thousand things be themselves’, so Zarathustra's blessing lets each particular thing generate its own horizons and be (or, rather, become: arise and perish) just as it is” (Parkes 2000, 192-93).

Sometimes Parkes seems to acknowledge there is no transcending perspectivism in Nietzsche’s task of broadening perspectives: “This is not a transcending toward some God's eye perspective or view from nowhere, but rather a broadening of the human world view to include an appreciation of the perspectives of the natural phenomena with which we share the world” (Parkes 2005, 81). Yet in the very same text Parkes goes on to respond to the view that “Nietzsche strongly emphasizes that we can only know interpretations of nature and never nature as it is in itself” by emphasizing that even though Nietzsche “is certainly concerned with our interpretations of and projections on to the natural world, but this does not mean that we can never know nature ‘as it is in itself’”16 (Parkes 2005, 87). In that essay and in the most recent one, Parkes thinks Nietzsche elaborates on the idea of knowing things as they are in themselves, rather than as human awareness construes them, when he writes, in the notebooks from 1881: "The task: to see things as they are!" (Parkes 2020, 70). Parkes seems to think that Nietzsche’s task of seeing things ‘as they are’ involves transcending perspectivism.

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Here Parkes contends that Nietzsche’s task invites a comparison with Zhuangzi’s recommendation of the fasting of the heart-mind (xin 心).\(^{17}\) As Parkes explains this is a “matter of emptying the mind of what we human beings bring to our engagement with the world in the way of prejudices and preconceptions, inclinations and aversions, all of which get in the way of our experiencing what is actually going on” (Parkes 2020, 67). As Parkes puts it earlier, this fasting of the heart-mind “dissolves sedimented judgments and prejudices in the mind, and loosens habitual reactions in the body, so that the energies of heaven and earth can flow through unimpeded and keep the practitioner on course” (Parkes 2013, 13). Again in the most recent essay, Parkes suggests this fasting of the heart-mind allows for seeing things as they really are: “This fasting of the heart bypasses human prejudices and lets one experience through the openness of qi, ‘the presence of beings’” (Parkes 2020, 67). Drawing together these passages from Nietzsche and Zhuangzi, Parkes contends both thinkers suggest an experience going beyond merely seeing from multiple perspectives, to a “perspectiveless experience” in which one is able to know “things as they are in themselves, rather than as human awareness construes them” (Parkes 2020, 70-71).

As Parkes has made quite clear, Nietzsche surely does emphasize overcoming the narrow anthropocentric view that has shaped so much of the human comportment toward the natural world; and since the notion of the Overhuman involves overcoming the human in some sense, it is clear that Nietzsche emphasizes overcoming ‘merely’ human perspectives. But does Parkes really mean to suggest something of a return to the notion of nature as origin, the view that is the target

\(^{17}\) In this passage, Zhuangzi is telling a story in which Confucius is responding to Yan Hui, one who thinks he knows the way of Heaven. Confucius reprimands him “You are still taking your mind as your instructor.” When Yan Hui then asks what he should do, Confucius explains the fasting of the mind: “If you merge all your intentions into a singularity, you will come to hear with the mind rather than the ears. Further, you will come to hear with the vital energy (qi 氣) rather than the mind. For the ears are halted at what they hear. The mind is halted at whatever verifies its preconceptions. But the vital energy is an emptiness, a waiting for the presence of beings. The Course (dao 道) alone is what gathers in this emptiness. And it is this emptiness that is the fasting of the mind” (Zhuangzi 2009, 26-7).
of the poststructuralist critique of the traditional notion of ‘nature’? At one point Parkes explains that he is responding to the problem posed by the poststructuralist deconstruction of ‘nature,’ the view, as he puts it, that “nature is always socially constructed, so we can never reach anything like ‘pure’ nature in itself, apart from human factors that condition all experience of it” (Parkes 2013, 2). The problem with Parkes’ attempt to pull Nietzsche back from the poststructuralist critique of the notion of nature as origin is that this critique owes so much to Nietzsche’s thought. One might even say that the main point of Nietzsche’s critique of the tradition of Western thought is to challenge the notion that we can ever see “things as they are in themselves.” Rather than suggesting a “perspectiveless experience,” the force of Nietzsche’s critique challenges us to take responsibility for our interpretations which shape our values and our ‘truths.’

In the preface to The Joyous Science, the text where Parkes thinks Nietzsche suggests the task of confronting human beings “with nature itself, similarly stripped of human projections” Nietzsche calls into question the very notion of a ‘naked truth’ emphasizing that we “should cherish the modesty with which nature has concealed herself behind enigmas and iridescent uncertainties” (Nietzsche 2018, 13). One would be hard pressed to find a better, more succinct statement of the poststructuralist critique of the conception of nature as origin. One might also recall the famous fragment from Heraclitus, “Nature loves to hide,” which Nietzsche is surely playing on here. One should cherish the modesty of nature, concealing herself behind enigmas and iridescent uncertainties; and, by implication, one should be more modest with respect to nature,

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18 This is the view, as Steven Vogel explains, of ‘nature’ as “a stable world that precedes humans, ontologically prior to human activity and to the social structures (and the language) within which that activity takes place” (Vogel 1998, 170). As Vogel also explains, the poststructuralist project of deconstruction that begins with Derrida “is a project of taking that which appears to be original, foundational—in a word: natural—and revealing the complex processes of linguistic and social construction required to produce that appearance” (Vogel 1998, 170).

19 Vogel addresses this concern, noting that there has been some anxiety among environmental philosophers since there is this “vague sense that ‘postmodernism,’ by turning the whole world into a text, denies the very existence of nature and therefore the significance of attempts either to understand the dangers to which it is currently exposed or to argue for the need to protect it” (Vogel 1998, 169).
giving up the ‘youthful madness’ as Nietzsche puts it, to see nature stripped of her veils. Perhaps the most radical aspect of Nietzsche’s thought—and perhaps the one aspect most often missed—is the modesty of his thought. Isn’t the very notion of seeing nature, as it is in itself, exactly what Nietzsche is here finding indecent?

Nietzsche continues this play with the ‘woman-truth’ in the preface to Beyond Good and Evil where he again makes fun of philosophers, this time portraying them as lovesick suitors, clumsy in their pursuit of the woman-truth, and left standing around all “dispirited and discouraged” because they never understood the woman-truth, never understood that “she has not allowed herself to be won” (Nietzsche 1966, 2). This is where Nietzsche goes on to suggest that the problem with these lovesick philosophers is that they were seduced by Socrates and thus fell into Plato’s error of “denying perspective, the basic condition of all life.” In contrast to this, Nietzsche’s ‘philosophers of the future’, returning now to the end of the preface to The Joyous Science, will be those who understand that they are artists.

In order to emphasize a transperspectival experience allowing for “knowing things as they are,” Parkes ends up deemphasizing this aspect of Nietzsche’s philosophy of the future. In the latest essay he wonders, “what are we to make of Nietzsche’s occasional praise of creative experience and repudiation of ‘mirror’-like perception?” (Parkes 2020, 78). In contrast to Parkes, I think that Nietzsche’s praise of creative experience is hardly “occasional.”20 In contrast to Plato’s

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20 My discussion with Parkes on this issue goes back a long ways as this claim that Nietzsche never wavers in emphasizing the importance of art was the central thesis of my dissertation, Written and Painted Thoughts: Nietzsche’s Aesthetic Turn, written under Parkes’ direction. My title is taken from the closing of Beyond Good and Evil where Nietzsche writes: “Alas, what are you after all, my written and painted thoughts! It was not long ago that you were still so colorful, young, and malicious, full of thorns and secret spices—you made me sneeze and laugh—and now? You have already taken off your novelty, and some of you are ready, I fear, to become truths” (Nietzsche 1966, 236). There I suggest that Nietzsche’s closing lament, in drawing together writing and painting, thus recalling the connection between writing and painting in Plato’s Phaedrus, is a “provocation, a warning to the reader not to take what is written as truth, and a temptation to take his philosophy as nothing other than his written and painted thoughts, in other words—as art” (Freeman 1995, 7).
condemnation of art, Nietzsche emphasizes that the philosopher is necessarily an artist since knowledge is not the product of passive mirror-like perception, but rather a creative, active interpretation. This is brought out in another passage in which Nietzsche uses an analogy drawn from painting to suggest the philosopher as artist: “Is it not sufficient to assume degrees of apparentness and, as it were, lighter and darker shadows and shades of appearance different ‘values,’ to use the language of painters? Why couldn't the world that concerns us—be a fiction?” (Nietzsche 1966, 46-47). The modesty of Nietzsche's 'philosophy of the future' is then to acknowledge that the world that concerns us is a fiction, a product of an active interpretation. There may be narratives, stories we tell ourselves about the point of it all and the nature of nature, but there is no 'ultimate and real' story or 'metanarrative.'

The emphasis on art from the earliest to the last writings is also indicated by the prominence of the figure of Dionysus in Nietzsche’s thought. In what might be regarded as his last words, the closing line of his autobiography Ecce Homo, Nietzsche writes: “Have I been understood? — Dionysus against the crucified one…” (Nietzsche 2007, 95). One might get some sense of what he means by this opposition from what he says about The Birth of Tragedy, fourteen years after its initial publication. There he makes clear that his first book is opposed to the Christian teaching which is “hostile to art” because of its “vengeful antipathy to life itself: for all of life is based on semblance, art, deception, points of view, and the necessity of perspectives and error” (Nietzsche 1967a, 23). At the end of his career, in The Antichrist, Nietzsche condemns the Christian interpretation of the meaning of the ‘life of Christ’ for its arrogance in assuming that its narrative

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21 This suggestion that we should understand that the world that concerns us is a fiction anticipates Lyotard’s famous characterization of the postmodern condition as an “incredulity toward metanarratives” (Lyotard 1979, xxiv-xxv). This is also what Derrida meant by the controversial phrase “il n’y a pas de hors-texte” (Derrida 1967, 159), often mistranslated as 'there is nothing outside the text' and thus misunderstood as the claim that there is nothing outside of language. What the phrase really says is that 'there is no outside-text' or, in other words, there is no truth without veils, no access to a reality that is not already a product of interpretation.
is the ‘truth’ and not just an interpretation. In that narrative, the meaning of the life of Christ is symbolized by the image of the crucified one—the death on the cross was the promise of eternal life in heaven for the believer. It should be obvious, then, that “the crucified one” in Nietzsche’s last words is an image both for the Christian interpretation expressing the longing for another world, and also for this hostility to art, this inability to recognize its own interpretation as an interpretation. Against this denial of art, Nietzsche’s last words point to “Dionysus”—a figure which always points to the importance of art and creative experience. Nietzsche’s last words would then suggest that if one wants to understand his philosophy, one must understand this opposition between art and truth—the opposition between recognizing the necessity of perspective points of view, and thus the importance of art, in contrast to the notion of a ‘naked truth’ stripped of all perspectives.

The Birth of Tragedy is often regarded as merely illustrating Nietzsche’s youthful Romanticism when he suggests that the Dionysian experience reveals the truth of reality behind the veils. It perhaps offers a preview of his mature thought, however, in the suggestion that what the Dionysian experience reveals is not the truth of reality as it is in itself—nature as origin—but rather the abysmal truth that there is no truth of reality as it is in itself. In the crucial passage Nietzsche explains that in the Dionysian experience “Excess (Das Übermass) revealed itself as truth” (Nietzsche 1967a, 46). All of our truths, Nietzsche suggests, are the result of the Apollonian drive to make sense of the chaos of existence; but Dionysian insight, however, reveals truth as excess—despite all our attempts to make sense of existence, it always exceeds all those attempts as it is always capable of being interpreted otherwise. Here is nature, not as origin, but as abyss. The

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22 Against this narrative Nietzsche offers a different interpretation: The “kingdom of heaven” is a state of the heart—not something that is to come “above the earth” or “after death.” [ . . ] The “kingdom of God” is nothing that one expects; it has no yesterday and no day after tomorrow, it will not come in “a thousand years”—it is an experience of the heart; it is everywhere, it is nowhere” (Nietzsche 1977, 608).
preview of Nietzsche’s mature thought lies in confronting the abyss that is revealed in the Dionysian experience.\textsuperscript{23}

Later, Nietzsche’s confrontation with this abysmal truth is developed most powerfully in the imagery of the ‘death of God.’ This ‘death of God’ is a metaphor for Nietzsche’s critique of the traditional notion of truth—the notion of truth expressed in Plato’s imagery of the sun, the truth of reality as it is in itself. As this notion of truth as stable ground provided the foundation of Western thought, the ‘death of God’ opens up an abyss: “What did we do when we unchained this earth from its sun? Where is it heading? Where are we heading? Away from all suns? Are we not constantly falling? Backwards, sideways, forwards, in all directions? Is there still an above and below. Are we not straying as through an infinite nothingness” (Nietzsche 2018, 133-134). In another famous passage a little later in \textit{The Joyous Science}, Nietzsche emphasizes that this “eclipse of the sun” would lead to the collapse of “our entire European morality” (Nietzsche 2018, 225).

The nihilistic consequence of this lead some environmental philosophers to dismiss Nietzsche as an ecological thinker, and this seems to lead Parkes to want to pull Nietzsche back from his perspectivism, back from the emphasis on art and creative experience, back from confronting this abyss. In the “Wandering Dance” essay, however, Parkes draws attention to Zarathustra’s confrontation with the abyss in the teaching concerning the Overhuman; and he points out that the tightrope walker must be a dancer because knows there is no longer any firm ground upon which to stand, because “every apparently firm ground (Grund) is, for Nietzsche, an abyss (Abrgrund)”

\textsuperscript{23} John Sallis suggests this preview of Nietzsche’s mature thought in \textit{The Birth of Tragedy} in the “shimmering shining” that results when the Apollonian and Dionysian are brought together in Greek tragedy: “Tragedy both reveals and conceals the Dionysian abyss. And yet, such revealing and concealing are no longer simply binary opposites, nor is the disclosure thus to be thought as a mere mean between these opposites. In the determination of tragedy Nietzsche is under way to a thinking of disclosure that would differentiate it decisively from mere uncovering (limited by a symmetrical opposite). For it is a matter of a disclosure of the abyss, of that which withdraws from any presentation, of that which cannot as such be present (or absent, as long as absence is considered merely the complementary opposite of presence). It is a matter of a disclosure in which, nonetheless, the unpresentable is brought to shine in the distance as sublime” (Sallis 1991, 100).
There Parkes emphasizes what Zarathustra says at the edge of the abyss: "Courage also slays dizziness at the edge of abysses: and where would the human being not stand at the edge of abysses? Is to see not itself—to see abysses?" (Parkes 1983, 244).

Seeing is seeing abysses, Nietzsche emphasizes, because seeing always involves perspective points of view, and the world is always interpretable otherwise. Nietzsche suggests this in another well-known passage from The Joyous Science: “the world has once more become “limitless” (unendlich) to us, in so far as we cannot deny the possibility that it contains limitless interpretations” (Nietzsche 2018, 272). In the aphorism just prior to the madman’s announcement of the ‘death of God,’ Nietzsche suggests the sea as an image for this ‘infinity’ or ‘limitlessness’ of perspectivism: “We have left dry land and put out to sea! [. . .] there will be hours when you realize that it is infinite, and that there is nothing more terrible than infinity (Unendlichkeit).” (Nietzsche 2018, 133).

Instead of turning to an experience of things as they are in themselves, Nietzsche’s response to the crisis opened up by the ‘death of God’ is to suggest the courage needed at the edge of abysses, the courage also of an intrepid seafarer venturing out into the open sea:

In fact, we philosophers and ‘free spirits’ experience the news that ‘the old God is dead’ as if illuminated by a new dawn; our hearts are overflowing with gratitude, astonishment, presentiment, expectation—at last the horizon seems free again, even if it is not be bright; at last our ships can set sail again, ready to face any danger; every venture of the knowledge-seeker is permitted again; the sea, our sea, lies open again before us; perhaps there has never been such an ‘open sea’. (Nietzsche 2018, 226)

Rather than turning away from the emphasis on art in his first book, Nietzsche’s response to the crisis of nihilism emphasizes art as the countermovement to nihilism: “Art and nothing but art! It is the great means of making life possible, the great seduction to life, the great stimulant to life.

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24 I have altered the translation, combining Kaufmann's translation, which Parkes uses here, slightly altered with Parkes’ own later translation (Nietzsche 2005, 135).
Art as the only superior counterforce to all will to denial of life, as that which is anti-Christian, anti-Buddhist, antinihilist *par excellence*” (Nietzsche 1968, 452).²⁵

The emphasis on art as the countermovement to nihilism is also connected to the lucid dreaming which Parkes drew attention to in the “Wandering Dance” essay. If the task of philosophy since Plato was understood as the challenge of ascending out of the dream-world of the cave where the artists are, and awakening to the real world, the world as it is in itself, Nietzsche counters with the notion of the lucid dream. If the Apollonian in *The Birth of Tragedy* is associated with dreaming, and the Dionysian with the shattering of the dream, when they are brought together, as in Greek tragedy, what results is not an awakening from the dream, but rather the awareness that one is dreaming.²⁶ The development of the notion of the philosopher as lucid dreamer in *The Joyous Science*—"I must continue to dream lest I perish"—is echoed in another, much discussed note from the late notebooks: “We possess art lest we perish of the truth” (Nietzsche 1968, 435). Thus, rather than suggesting a “perspectiveless experience” revealing nature “as it is in itself,” Nietzsche’s mature thought echoes the shimmering shining suggested in *The Birth of Tragedy*, and thus the more modest recognition that all of our ‘truths,’ including our views about ‘nature,’ are the result of an artistic drive that is at work in all our attempts to make sense of existence.²⁷

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²⁵ Richard Schacht emphasizes the importance of art in summing up Nietzsche’s thought: “of all the points he seeks to make none is of greater interest and importance than his contention that art is the clue and key to the possibility of discovering a way beyond nihilism” (Schacht 1983, 529).

²⁶ This is, at least in part, why Nietzsche suggests, in *The Birth of Tragedy*, that the high point of Greek culture was not Socrates and Plato, but rather Aeschylus and Sophocles. Socrates and Plato had a naively optimistic view that it was possible to awaken from the dream and discover the truth about the nature of things, while Aeschylus and Sophocles understood art as the “healing sorceress” that enabled one to face the ‘abyssmal truth’ that there is no ‘truth’.

²⁷ I have earlier described this shimmering shining: “Thus, in the coming together of the Apollonian and Dionysian in Greek tragedy there is a continuous cycling reciprocal movement in which the shining forth of beautiful illusions is necessary in order to deal with the Dionysian insight into the abysmal nature of existence; and then the Dionysian insight is necessary in order to tear through those Apollonian veils of appearance, shattering the dream and its beautiful illusions. This, in turn, must inevitably be followed again by the further shining forth of images. . . . So there is in the work of art that was Greek tragedy as Nietzsche understood it, this repeating cycling of the two opposed movements of drawing and withdrawing, figuring and disfiguring—what Sallis refers to as the "abyssmal effect" that spaces Nietzsche's discourse—so that the shining forth of the figure that comes forth is a shimmering shining” (Freeman 2013, 59).
Considering the play with lucid dreaming in the *Zhuangzi*, the notion that Zhuangzi thinks a “perspectiveless experience” is possible seems questionable. One might wonder, first of all, whether the very notion of the “mutuality and collaterality” of ‘heaven and earth’ and human beings precludes the very possibility of seeing ‘heaven and earth’ as it is in-itself? The passage from the Outer Chapters where Parkes wants to emphasize the notion of having a “full view of Heaven” seems to really only emphasize overcoming the anthropocentrism that reduces ‘heaven and earth’ to a mere resource for human use. In the passage from the Inner Chapters where Parkes wants to call attention to Zhuangzi’s emphasis on knowing the difference between Heaven and the human being, Zhuangzi goes on to admit there is a problem here: “So how could I know whether what I call the Heavenly is not really the Human? How could I know whether what I call the Human is not really the Heavenly” (Zhuangzi 2009, 38-39). Isn’t the point of knowing the difference between Heaven and human beings to emphasize the modesty of all our human efforts to understand the vastness of ‘heaven and earth’? When Zhuangzi ridicules Confucius and others for thinking they are awake when they are still dreaming, he admits “when I say you’re dreaming, I am dreaming too” (Zhuangzi 2009, 19).

In the passage from the notebooks where Parkes emphasizes Nietzsche’s task of seeing things as they are, Nietzsche explains that the means to do this is “to be able to see with a hundred eyes, from many persons!” (Parkes 2020, 70). Here Nietzsche seems to suggest that seeing “things as they are” involves recognizing that we only see things as they are from perspective points of view. Rather than contrasting with the perspectivism in which Nietzsche emphasizes that there is “only a perspective seeing” this passage is consistent with the passage from the *Genealogy* emphasizing that the means to seeing things as they are is to see from multiple perspectives. As Parkes had
explained in the “Wandering Dance” essay, if one becomes fixated in one perspective one can fail to recognize it as a perspective. One might be deluded into thinking that one sees reality as it is in itself apart from its appearance. The more we are able to see from different perspectives, the more we will be able to recognize that we only see from perspective points of view.

Perhaps Parkes never really needed to try to pull Nietzsche back from his perspectivism. Perspectivism would only imply nihilism if one drew the conclusion that all perspectives are all the same, or equally valid, and that one could thus rest content with the perspective one already has. Nietzsche never suggests anything of the sort; he is always emphasizing that we should broaden our horizons, try to see the world from as many perspectives as possible, and never rest content with our limited perspectives. The task of overcoming and challenging the perspectives of the past is dangerous, Nietzsche admits, but this is when he recommends living dangerously: “Build your cities on the slope of Vesuvius! Send your ships into uncharted seas!” (Nietzsche 2018, 182).

Parkes suggestion of this “perspectiveless” experience is puzzling because it seems to conflict with his understanding of Nietzsche’s thought of ‘will to power.’ In defending Nietzsche as an ecological thinker Parkes admits, "it all comes down to a question of will to power, conflicts between competing interpretations and world-views” (Parkes 1999, 185). In the most recent essay Parkes makes the same point: “Every particular thing or process, as a configuration of interpreting will to power, is at every moment construing all other things and is the product of their manifold interactions” (Parkes 2020, 72). A little later, he suggests what Zhuangzi and Nietzsche allow us to do is “go beyond our customary, restricted, all-too-human perspectives, and get a sense of the whole.” He goes on to explain that this is “not a transcendence to a God’s-eye-view, nor a view from everywhere or nowhere, this drive to the heart of things, or withdrawal to the center, may let
us see ‘the world from the inside,’ as Nietzsche puts it when he writes of ‘the world as will to power—and nothing besides.’” (Parkes 2020, 73).

Perhaps the importance of Nietzsche's thought for environmental philosophy is not in suggesting we can ever view 'nature' as it is, stripped of human projections, but rather in the transformation of humankind, and the social constructions of 'nature' that are the voice of will to power. And this seems to be what Parkes suggests in "The Wandering Dance": "Both Nietzsche and Zhuangzi are psychologically acute philosophers intent on effecting a transformation of our ideas of self and world—and thereby of ourselves" (Parkes 1983, 235). I will now turn to examine how Parkes develops this thought in responding to the charge that Nietzsche’s notion of will to power marks a limit both to considering him as an ecological thinker, and also to the resonances between Nietzsche’s thought and Zen.

Zarathustra and Zen

It is well known that Nietzsche had a pessimistic understanding of Buddhism. In *The Antichrist* Nietzsche expresses the hope that his condemnation of Christianity has not involved an injustice toward Buddhism. He says that Buddhism is “a hundred times more realistic than Christianity” in that the concept of “god” had already become irrelevant, and in its psychological approach to the problem of suffering as opposed to the “struggle against sin” (Nietzsche 1977, 586-587). It is also much healthier than Christianity in showing no signs of *ressentiment*. Of the Buddha, Nietzsche writes: “he does not ask his followers to fight those who think otherwise: there is nothing to which his doctrine is more opposed than the feeling of revenge, antipathy, *ressentiment*” (Nietzsche 1977, 587). And yet, because Nietzsche understood nirvāṇa, as Schopenhauer thought, to be the final goal of extinction, he concluded that Buddhism was like Christianity in being nihilistic, hostile to
life, a religion of décadence. In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche describes the thought of eternal recurrence as a joyful affirmation of the world as it is, and contrasts this with the "most world-denying of all possible ways of thinking" which he sees in the philosophy of Schopenhauer and the Buddha (Nietzsche 1966, 68).

Despite Nietzsche's negative view of Buddhism, Parkes has drawn affinities between Nietzsche's thought and the Buddha’s central teachings of interdependence (*pratītyasamutpāda*), impermanence (*anitya*), and 'no-self' (*anatman*), and especially with Mahāyāna Buddhism, with which Nietzsche was unfortunately not aware. When *nirvāṇa* is understood, not as a liberation from this world, but rather as another way of being here, as expressed in Nāgārjuna's view that *nirvāṇa* is not fundamentally different from *saṃsāra*, there is, as Parkes puts it, a "consequential reverence for this world," and this is where "the interesting resonances with Nietzsche's thinking begin" (Parkes 1996, 373).

Bret Davis has challenged Parkes' attempt to find a resonance between Nietzsche's thought and Mahāyāna Buddhism, and Zen in particular, finding Nietzsche's central idea of will to power to be incompatible with the 'standpoint of śūnyatā' in Zen. As Davis puts it: "In Nietzsche's affirmation of the egoism of will to power, then, we run up against a formidable limit to the search for 'ironic affinities' with Buddhism" (Davis 2004, 113). Davis argues that it is the Buddhist path, particularly the way of Zen, which offers "a great affirmation of living otherwise than willing" (Davis 2004, 89). Davis explains that the standpoint of śūnyatā "demands first of all a radical negation of the will" (Davis 2004, 98). The standpoint of will to power, Davis contends, thus falls short of standpoint of non-ego on the field of śūnyatā, which "requires breaking through all such transmutations of self-centered willing" (Davis 2004, 105). The crux of Davis' reading that Nietzsche falls short of Zen is his understanding of will to power as the willful craving that the
Buddha had identified as the cause of suffering: "To the extent that the will to power could be understood as a form of *tanhā*, a critique of the will to power would lie at the very heart of Buddhism" (Davis 2004, 108).

Parkes contends that Davis has misunderstood Nietzsche "as advocating the 'egoism of will to power'" and that this misunderstanding has led him to "consistently overlook or ignore key aspects of his [Nietzsche's] thinking that are consonant with Buddhist ideas" (Parkes 2014a, 42-43). Parkes also argues that Davis misunderstands Nietzsche in suggesting that he is advocating the "egoism of will to power." As Parkes explains, "a major theme of Nietzsche's psychology, from *The Birth of Tragedy* to *Twilight of the Idols*, is the rejection of the ego as a convenient but ultimately unnecessary fiction" (Parkes 2014b, 87). "Throughout his career," Parkes points out, “Nietzsche regards the I as something that stands in the way of one's becoming what one is” (Parkes 2014a, 44). The crude reading of will to power as a desire for power can be rejected because the ‘will’ in ‘will to power’ is not a self-conscious ego. Although he was concerned about the negative consequences, the *décadence*, that can result from the ‘disintegration of the ego’, Nietzsche “never talks about the task of constructing an ego” (Parkes 2014a, 43). As Parkes explains in an earlier essay, Nietzsche had “shown the human ‘I’ to be a fiction generated by the grammatical habit of positing a doer [behind] every doing”, and thus, “far from being the ‘will power’ exerted by the human ego, the will of will to power is (as in Schopenhauer's conception of will) a cosmic force” (Parkes 2005, 84).

There is no point in even considering whether there is an overcoming of will to power in Nietzsche's thought, Parkes explains, because “the will to power is the whole world, and ‘there is nothing outside the whole!’” (Parkes 2014a, 54). Parkes calls attention to the famous passage from the notebooks where Nietzsche describes the world as dynamic play of forces and then concludes:
“This world is the will to power—and nothing besides! And you yourselves are also this will to power—and nothing besides!” (Parkes 2014a, 54). If the will to power is what is, then it is clear that there cannot be an annihilation or overcoming of will to power such as Davis thinks is implied in the Zen “standpoisnt of śūnyatā.”

Nietzsche's conception of the world as will to power suggests also his affinity with Heraclitus's conception of existence as a continually flowing river or an "ever-living fire." There are no unchanging, substantial entities in Nietzsche's conception of existence. Everything is in motion as the whole cosmos is an ocean of forces. Even within the soul Nietzsche finds, not a substantial entity, and not a single force, but waves of forces. This conception of the entire world as "will to power and nothing besides" is not "an instance of anthropocentrism," Parkes explains, "since Nietzsche has just desubstantialized the 'soul' into a configuration of forces ('a social structure of the drives and affects') [. . .] and demonstrated 'will' to be a complex function of forces issuing from a social structure of multiple 'souls' within the body" (Parkes 2005, 84). In undermining the concept of a substantial self, Nietzsche echoes the no-self doctrine in Buddhism, as Parkes explains, "[a]ll this corresponds to the idea of 'no-self' (anatman) that is central to Buddhism and which, on the basis of a radically relational ontology, applies equally to the I and to things" (Parkes 2014a, 44). In Beyond Good and Evil, Nietzsche writes: A living thing seeks above all to discharge its strength—life itself is will to power; self-preservation is only one of the indirect and most frequent results" (Nietzsche 1966, 21). All living things, Nietzsche suggests, from the smallest organisms to the most complex like human beings are this play of forces.

The crux of the issue between Parks and Davis in their conflicting readings of Nietzsche perhaps comes down to their response to what is surely one of the most notorious passages in Nietzsche’s writings, one of the passages where he emphasizes that “life is will to power.” Davis
cautions against “any postmodern or comparative attempt to skip lightly over such passages” (Davis 2004, 113). At the outset of the closing chapter of Beyond Good and Evil, titled “What is Noble”, Nietzsche writes: “truth is hard” (Nietzsche 1966, 201). One might find what he says next too hard, too dangerous a plant to handle; nevertheless, one might easily provide an analysis explaining the whole climate catastrophe as the result of this hard truth: “life is essentially appropriation, injury, overpowering of what is alien and weaker; suppression, hardness, imposition of one's own forms, incorporation and at least, at its mildest, exploitation (Ausbeutung)” (Nietzsche 1966, 203). He continues on to say that this ‘exploitation’ is not a character of primitive societies that humanity has evolved out of; nor is this true only of corrupt societies, aberrations from the refined norm of modern advanced civilization. This ‘exploitation,’ Nietzsche explains, “belongs to the essence of what lives, as a basic organic function; it is consequence of the will to power, which is after all the will of life.” All of life, he explains, strives “to grow, spread, seize, become predominant” precisely because “life is will to power” (Nietzsche 1966, 201).

One might like to resist this thought and argue that Nietzsche was wrong in this supposition that all of life is will to power; but when one considers the totality of the human impact upon the earth, it is hard to really avoid the conclusion that Nietzsche may have been right in this hard truth about life. When one considers the human impact upon the earth, it is easy to see that the life of human beings—the near exponential population growth, continual depletion of resources, the appropriation and overpowering of alien, i.e. non-human and weaker species for food and other resources, the constantly increasing need for energy, and thus the ever increasing release of

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28 One might, of course, simply dismiss the thought and focus on other passages as Nietzsche was certainly not a systematic thinker and was fond of exploring many dangerous thought experiments. One might do well to recall what he writes to a friend in the summer of 1888: “It is not at all necessary or even desirable to side with me; on the contrary, a dose of curiosity, as if confronted with some unfamiliar plant, and an ironic resistance would be an incomparably more intelligent position to adopt” (Hayman 1982, 320).
greenhouse gases into the atmosphere—might be the perfect expression of this force of exploitation that Nietzsche describes here as will to power. In short, one might say that the very notion of the Anthropocene is a confirmation of Nietzsche's hard truth about life. If life is will to power as Nietzsche describes in this passage, how does human civilization not inevitably end up causing a collapse of the global ecosystem leading to another mass extinction of life on earth? How could it even be possible to heed Zarathustra's exhortation to remain loyal to the earth if Nietzsche was right that life is will to power as he describes it in this passage?

Perhaps one might like to think that Davis is right and that there is a way of being other than this will to power as he suggests is the point of Zen; but I think Parkes is right that this misunderstands will to power and thus doesn't quite meet the challenge of Nietzsche's thought. Perhaps what leads Davis astray in his understanding of will to power is his contention that will to power is the willful craving (tanḥā) which the Buddha diagnosed to be the cause of suffering. Perhaps a better analogy for will to power in the Buddha's teachings can be noticed in the third of the Buddha's teachings, the discourse known as The Fire Sermon. The Buddha explains to the assembled monks that to live is to burn. What is burning, the Buddha makes clear, are all the processes, the skandhas, that make up the self. The crucial question concerns what the point of the Buddha's teaching here is. If to live is to burn, and the point of The Fire Sermon is that we have to put the fire out, then Nietzsche may have been right in his pessimistic understanding of nirvāṇa as a will to nothingness. Perhaps the point of The Fire Sermon, however, is not that we have to

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29 “All is burning,” he tells the monks. “And what is the all that is burning?” he asks. The answer, he begins to explain, is that “the eye is burning, visible forms are burning, visual consciousness is burning. . . .” He goes on through all the sense faculties to explain that they are all burning, along with the mind and all the processes that compose the self. But what are they burning with? The repeating refrain in the Buddha’s answer is that, at least for most people, caught up in the suffering of samsaric existence, they are all burning with the three poisons of ragā, variously translated as ‘passion,’ ‘lust,’ or ‘greed,’ and dosa, ‘hatred, ‘aversion,’ or ‘anger,’ and moha, ‘delusion,’ or ‘ignorance.’ The Buddha goes on to say that when a learned and noble disciple sees this, he becomes “dispassionate” or “disenchanted” (nibbindati) with regard to all these processes of the self, and through this disenchantment he becomes “detached” (virajjati) and through this detachment he becomes “liberated.” (Rahula 1974, 95-96).
extinguish the fire, but that the way to liberation, nirvāṇa as another way of being here, is to change the fuel with which we burn.\textsuperscript{30} If the will to power is everything, is what is, as Parkes explains, then it must be all dharmas, everything that exists; but as that which interprets, that which is responsible for the fiction, the world that concerns us, perhaps will to power is analogous to vijñāna, the fifth skandha, most often translated as “mind” or “consciousness.” If will to power is analogous to vijñāna, that which interprets, then the point of the Fire Sermon, is not to recommend extinguishing will to power, but suggest instead its radical transformation

If will to power is analogous to vijñāna, then perhaps Nietzsche’s explorations of the unconscious depths of the soul—the will to power operating below the surface of the conscious ego, far below the sense of will as volition—might be compared to the psychological analysis in Yogācāra Buddhism.\textsuperscript{31} What perhaps especially resonates with Nietzsche’s thought is the famous Yogācāra doctrine of vijñāpti-mātra (perception or cognition-only). This is the view that whatever is observed is already an interpretation of perception, and thus we never face reality as it is apart

\textsuperscript{30} In the PBS documentary, The Buddha: The Story of Siddhartha, there two contrasting interpretations of The Fire Sermon, and in these two views perhaps the fundamental question concerning Buddhism is brought to light. Max Moerman, professor of religion, explains: "We're on fire. We may not know it, but we're on fire and we have to put that fire out. We're burning with desire, burning with craving, everything about us is out of control." The poet W.S. Merwin offers a different take on it, suggesting that we have to find a way to turn those poisons around to their opposites: “The Buddha goes on to talk about the three poisons, greed, anger, and ignorance, and how the three poisons are what is making the fire, and the way out of doing this is, not to deny the three poisons, but to recognize that if you turn them around, you come to their opposites; instead of greed you have generosity, instead of anger you have compassion, and instead of ignorance you have wisdom.”

\textsuperscript{31} What Yogācāra adds to the Abhidharma analysis of vijñāna are two subliminal vijñānas. The 7th consciousness, manas, a subtle, uninterrupted stream of consciousness is always deliberating below the surface of consciousness. The delusion of a substantial self, which is the root cause of suffering, is generated by this subliminal consciousness. Below this level of consciousness there is the 8th consciousness, the ālaya-vijñāna, the store-house consciousness. This consciousness is not a vijñāna in the strict sense, since it does not deliberate, but it is the root of all the others. The Yogācāra conception of consciousness is likened to an ocean, with the ālaya-vijñāna at the bottom, the base of consciousness. While it does not deliberate, it contains karmic seeds (bījas) which influences the subliminal deliberating consciousness, and from this vijñāna at the bottom of the ocean, the surface consciousnesses are produced like ocean waves. Nietzsche suggests something like this when he writes, in that same aphorism where the notion of the lucid dream is developed: “I have discovered first-hand that the human and animal nature, indeed the whole history and prehistory of feeling within me, continues to love, hate, concoct, and conclude” (Nietzsche 2018, 73).
This notion has led Yogācāra to sometimes be referred to as the School of Mind-Only (Vijñānavāda) and thus often understood as a Buddhist Idealism holding that only consciousness or mind (vijñāna) exists. Perhaps the point of the Yogācāra teaching, however, is to call attention to the role that consciousness takes in forming our mental constructions that shape the way the world that shows up for us, and thus perhaps similar to Nietzsche’s suggestion that the world that concerns us is a fiction.

Yogācāra is the study of the practice (ācāra) of yoga. The aim of the practice of yoga in Mahāyāna Buddhism is to fulfill the bodhisattva vow to deliver all sentient beings from samsaric existence to nirvāṇa. Another crucial passage from the Thirty Verses concerning vijñapti-mātra has also led to considerable debate concerning its implications concerning the whole point of the practice of yoga: “It is the ultimate truth of all events (dharmas), and so it is Suchness (tathatā) too, since it is just so all the time, and it’s just perception-only (vijñapti-mātra)” (Anacker, 1984, 188). Sometimes this passage is understood to suggest that the practice of yoga leads to a state in which the discriminating mind (vijñāna) ceases and one is able to see reality as it is, in its suchness, apart from all interpretation. Parkes obviously suggests something like this when he contends that the Zen master (and Daoist sage) are able to see things as they are in themselves. But the Yogācāra

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32 This is expressed in Vasubhandu’s classic summary of Yogācāra teaching in the Thirty Verses, where he explains how the metaphors of “self” and “nature” takes place in the transformation of consciousness: “This transformation of consciousness (vijñāna) is a discrimination (vikalpa), and as it is discriminated, it does not exist [in-itself], and so everything is perception-only (vijñapti-mātra)” (Anacker 1984, 187).

33 In the early essay, “Truth and Lie in a Nonmoral Sense,” written long before Nietzsche introduced the notion of will to power, he explains that "the intellect unfolds its principle powers in dissimulation (Verstellung)” (Nietzsche 1979, 80). Since the Sanskrit term jñāna is the basic term for knowledge, and the prefix ‘vi’ is equivalent to English ‘dis’ (and perhaps also to German ‘ver’ in this context), the term vijñāna is sometimes rendered “discernment” or as the “discriminating mind”; but perhaps it might also be rendered as “dissimulation” in the sense that Nietzsche is suggesting in this passage. His point is that the intellect does not unfold its powers in simulation, merely copying reality; it is rather always adding something, selectively, creatively interpreting reality from particular perspectives. Even in this early text, Nietzsche suggests this process takes place, to some extent, below the surface of consciousness, and this anticipates his mature view that the will to power interprets. Perhaps this is what the Yogācāra doctrine of vijñapti-mātra is really all about.
teaching is not meant as a rejection of Nāgārjuna’s explanation of the central teaching of the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras*; and this teaching of emptiness (śūnyatā) is that everything is empty of inherent existence (svābhava) and thus exists in interdependence. Isn’t the notion of “in itself” exactly what is refuted in śūnyatā?\(^{34}\) Thus when Vasubhandu explains that the ultimate nature of all dharmas is tathatā, it is already assumed that this ‘suchness’ is śūnyatā, that everything exists in interdependence, and thus the whole world that concerns us is the result of vijñapti-mātra.

Perhaps this is what Dōgen is also suggesting in *The Mountains and Waters Sūtra*. Isn’t the point of Dōgen’s text to emphasize this radical interdependence with the ‘mountains and waters,’ that is to say, with all of the natural world and even the whole cosmos? Isn’t Dōgen also explaining that all this is vijñapti-mātra when he writes of the way of seeing mountains and waters?\(^{35}\) Is not Dōgen acknowledging here the role that interpretation plays in all seeing, in all our attempts to understand anything? If will to power is always at work in all interpretation, then it cannot be the case that Zen aims at the dissolution of will to power as Davis contends. But if there is nothing besides will to power, as Parkes makes clear, and thus no getting outside interpretation, then it also doesn't make sense to suggest that Nietzsche ever considers it is possible to discover nature as it is in itself, stripped of human projections. To speak of nature as it is in itself seems to be clearly at odds with the relational ontology that Parkes argues is implied in both the Buddha's teaching of interdependence (*pratītyasamutpāda*) and Nietzsche's thought of will to power.


\(^{35}\) “In general, then, the way of seeing mountains and waters differs according to the type of beings [that sees them]. In seeing water, there are beings who see it as a jeweled necklace. This does not mean, however, that they see a jeweled necklace as water. How, then, do we see what they consider water? Their jeweled necklace is what we see as water. Some see water as miraculous flowers, though it does not follow that they use flowers as water. Hungry ghosts see water as raging flames or as pus and blood. Dragons and fish see it as a palace or a tower, or as the seven treasures or the mani gem. [Others] see it as woods and walls, or as the Dharma nature of immaculate liberation, or as the true human body, or as the physical form and mental nature. Humans see these as water. And these [different ways of seeing] are the conditions under which [water] is killed or given life.” (Dōgen, 2018, 29)
In the *Thirty Verses*, Vasubhandu also explains that the subliminal consciousness, the *mano-vijñāna*, that is shaping the world that concerns us is always flowing like a stream. It cannot be stopped, only turned; and this turning or transformation of consciousness, a “revolution at the basis” is the aim of the practice of yoga in Yogācāra Buddhism. Perhaps the most interesting of the resonances that Parkes finds in Nietzsche and Zen is the emphasis on a profound transformation in the depths of the soul. Zarathustra’s teaching concerning the Overhuman is not about an overcoming of will to power, an extinguishing of will to power, but rather a transformation of will to power. As Parkes explains, since "nothing can twist free from the world 'as the will to power and nothing besides' and still be", what is needed is "a transformation of the interpreting will to power" (Parkes 2014a, 51).

Parkes calls attention to Nietzsche’s emphasis on a transformation of will to power, highlighting the transformative power of imagery in Nietzsche’s thought. In the “Wandering Dance” Parkes emphasizes that *Zarathustra*, the book that focuses on this transformation of humankind, is first and foremost a work of imagery. The importance of this characteristic of the text is that it has the potential to have an effect beyond mere argument. If the transformation that the book is concerned with concerns the will to power below the surface of consciousness, it has to do more than simply attempt to persuade the conscious thinking subject. As Parkes puts it: "a philosophy presented in images works on the reader's psyche by inviting the kind of participation in their play that effects a psychical transformation more radical than just a change of mind" (Parkes 1983, 239).

In later essays Parkes continues to emphasize this profound transformation of the psyche in Nietzsche’s thought and drawing out the resonances with this transformation in Zen. As Parkes explains, the transformation of human being in the Overhuman opens up "the possibility of a
radically new way of being for the human," and this he emphasizes, "is profoundly relevant for ecological thinking" (Parkes 2005, 81). If there is a solution to the ecological crisis, it is not in discovering 'nature' outside of all human interpretations, but rather in transforming the will to power that shapes those interpretations, from a will to power driven toward constant growth, domination and exploitation of nature, to one capable of co-operation and sustainable existence.

The problem of climate change makes it obvious that human beings are literally burning up the planet, burning down the forests which provide oxygen to breathe, and burning up so much fossil fuel that the very future of life on earth is imperiled. There is no doubt that if we are to survive, we do have to change the fuel with which we burn, both in the literal sense of the fuel that is powering modern industrial civilization, and also in the metaphorical sense of changing the fuel within, the fuel that drives the will to power in the depths of the soul, the fuel with which the heart is burning. As Parkes has emphasized, there are many streams of imagery in Zarathustra; but perhaps the fire imagery is the most important. It is the fire imagery that links Zarathustra with Dionysus, and thus through which the Dionysian power of transformation is evident in the text.36 It is this Dionysian fire of transformation that Nietzsche points to, at the end of The Birth of Tragedy, as the highest aim of art. In Zarathustra the transformation of humankind is suggested in the imagery of the golden sun. Zarathustra descends from the mountain in order to bring human beings a gift, and the golden sun is an image for this ‘gift-giving,’ or ‘bestowing’ virtue as Parkes translates it: “‘Only as an allegory of the highest virtue did gold assume the highest value. Gold-

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36 The imagery of fire and lightning are prominent in ancient Greek narratives of Dionysus. Dionysus was the god born of fire and lightning. There is also the scene from Sophocles’ Antigone that connects Dionysus with fire and lightning. At the end when the chorus calls upon Dionysus to come and save Thebes, they call upon the god “whose torches of lightning storm the mountains,” the god who sets the hearts and minds of his followers “afame with ecstasy,” the “god of the heavens of fire-pulsing stars that throb like hearts” (Sophocles 1999, 235). In his classic book on Dionysus, Kerenyi explains: “Fire is a Dionysian weapon” (Kerenyi 1976, 78). What Dionysus does with this weapon, in setting hearts aflame, in burning down to ashes whatever he touches with his lightning torches, is to bring about a transformation of the self.
like shines the glance of the one who bestows […] a bestowing virtue is the highest virtue”’ (Nietzsche 2005, 65). It is with this alchemical transformation of the heart in which one becomes capable of this gift that Zarathustra implores us to remain loyal to the earth. Zarathustra’s golden sun is an image for a love that is not an investment, expecting a return, but rather a gift. As Parkes explains, the transformation in Zarathustra leads to a new health, the great health, that wants "to embrace all things, so that it can bestow and contribute to the world with no egoistic thought of thanks or return" (Parkes 2014b, 87). Parkes compares this “bestowing love” of Zarathustra with the bodhisattva vow of giving without return: "It is the same with the bodhisattva: the attainment of wisdom, which involves the realization of emptiness of the self through its interrelatedness with all things, naturally leads to an abundant generosity and a re-engagement with the world" (Parkes 2000, 183). Here is where I think Parkes’ work is most illuminating in suggesting the resonance between Zarathustra and Zen, and a new way of being capable of remaining loyal to the earth.

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37 One could say that the key teaching of Zarathustra involves an alchemical transformation of the heart. We know that in addition to the physical illnesses Nietzsche suffered—the headaches, burning fevers, and near blindness that left him sometimes almost completely incapacitated—he was also, through the time he was composing Zarathustra, struggling to overcome a sickness within his heart that was the result of a love for a woman. In the aftermath of his fateful encounter with Lou Salomé, he confides to a friend: “‘Unless I can learn the alchemist’s trick of turning this filth into gold,’ he told Overbeck, ‘I am lost’” (Hayman 1982, 254).
Works Cited


