Relational Buddhism: Toward the Social Construction of Societal Harmony In-Between-Selves [1]

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Introduction

This article is about Relational Buddhism which is a rendering that takes a meta-psychological view on the pan-Buddhist teachings rooted in the Dhamma/Dharma by placing Dependent Origination, i.e. regarding interpersonal relationships of "empty selves", in its core of practice. It is meant to be a practical guide, though rudimentary, rather than a theoretical exercise for academic debate. In practice, its centerpiece and playing field is not the "conventional self" but the invisible space "in-between-selves" which is of an ultimate nature and may well eradicate the provisional but illusory boundaries between people. Artificially created as a handy provision to serve intelligible communication and indexation, I/me/mine-self became reified to such an extent that it might have outlived its usefulness and proven to be counterproductive in those instances where conflicts of interests occur. How can societal harmony, based on Buddhist relational practice, be actually pursued and is it perhaps an ideal which pursuit is to be enjoyed without ever reaching its noble goal?

There is an abundance of examples where the Buddhist world is at odds with others, for instance with the world of the Taliban destroying "our" Bamiyan art-work statues, and with members of its own Buddhist community, for instance in the case of the Myanmar government versus its democracy loving part of the population. My take is rather pessimistic but not unhopeful when Buddhism meets fanatic believers of "sky-god" religions who are intolerant to those who propose self-inquiry on "self-illusions" and "god-delusions" like Buddhists use to do. It could take years to educate each other but it looks like "the twain shall never meet" as long as dogma and creed on "holiness", be it a city or a piece of land, prevail. To the Buddhist collective mind the merciless destruction of Nalanda in 1193 which wiped out Buddhism from the Indian subcontinent, feels like a rippling echo of a traumatic event that may not happen again. In order to be able to practice "societal harmony in-between-selves" from day to day, the space for such playing field must be cleared first and if its ground is sown by seeds of conflict, these need to be dealt with as a *conditio sine qua non*. Thus, in the case of Buddhists against each other, we are reminded by the Buddha's frustration, when he despised his malicious cousin Devadatta, who in enmity tried to topple him from running the commune, and called him: "spit-licker". Can such scolding in public be done without any trace of anger? On a stretched note: does "compassionate anger" or "compassionate killing" exist? Although *loving-kindness, empathic compassion*, *shared joy*, and *relational equanimity* are the prime Buddhist qualities, "mercy killing" seems to be condoned by our Mahayana forefathers. The *Upayakaushalya Sutra* contends that it is righteous to kill in order to save innocent people's lives, to prevent a potential murderer from suffering and by killing to suffer for the offender instead. In another Mahayana scripture, the *Mahaparinirvana Sutra*, the

Buddha allegedly killed Brahmins in an earlier life for slandering the Dharma to eventually save them from karmic retribution.

What to do when while meditating in Bodh Gaya under the bo-tree at 4 A.M. the muslim call to prayer brutalizes the entire place in an incredibly intrusive and perpetrating manner? The Buddhist way of life is not based on rigidity but on the abovementioned ennobling qualities which one upholds even in extreme circumstances. While non-harming/non-violence (*ahimsa*) is the golden standard, it might be productive to kindly voice democratic rights, appeal to mutual respect, and call in assertiveness for relational responsibility. In togetherness the air could thus be cleansed from brewing tensions due to suppressed anger gradually bubbling into hateful intentions toward hostile action and mutual extermination. To prevent premeditated killing of trespassers, it is more promising to "take arms against a sea of troubles" by courageously asserting one's rights and to even have the menacing "thieves carve you limb from limb with a double-handed saw" to preserve the very teaching rather than betray it and pay the price of self-affliction (*Kamcupama Sutta*).

As a Raja's son and a *kshatriya* the Buddha was not only well-versed in affairs of state and warfare, but all doors were also open to him to be in touch with the powerful and rich of his time. In the frequent contacts with kings and queens who sought his council, no instance can be found in the discourses where the Buddha praised war. The Buddhist spirit is reflected in the *Sangama Sutta*: "Victory brings forth hatred. The defeated lie in grief. The one who is calm and of pacified mind puts aside both victory and defeat and lies in comfort." As everything is interrelated and every interaction will accrue karmic fruit, the Buddha did not give any room to think that physical clash is wholesome. In the *Dhammapada* we read: "Not by enmity are enmities quelled, whatever the occasion here. By the absence of enmity are they quelled. This is an ancient truth."

The Buddha believed in democracy. In the *Agganna Sutta*, he designated that the king is a "great elect" because he is elected by his people. As a king's power is vested by the people, his duty is to serve the people. Thus he should be "indignant at that whereat one should rightly be indignant, censure that which should rightly be censured, banish him who deserves to be banished." Within his own commune, when the Buddha foresaw the danger of leadership transmission, he established a democratic institution, the *sangha*, so that Bhikkhus could choose their head by vote as described in the basket of rules for commune living (*Vinaya Pitaka*).[4]

Relational Buddhism: Some Basics

Relational Buddhism is not for the faint-hearted. It is a Buddhist psychology of Social Construction that requires the letting go of any grand narrative of Transcendental Truth and/or the imagery of an absolute superpower and invites a non-clinging openness to the many personal stories of "truth". In other words Relational Buddhism is a post-modern take of experienced reality (see Table 1) that appreciates the relational as preceding the singular, separate, and bounded individual (see Gergen, 2009a&b, where much of the below ideas on Social Construction and Relational Being can be found in-depth).

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[4] The basic ideas discussed in the remaining of this article can be found in Kwee (2010a&b and 2011a&b).

Table 1: Psychology - from Modern to Post-Modern

Ontology: on 'what is' of being – Epistemology: on 'how to' of knowing
Logical Positivism – Social Constructionism
Timeless/Transcendental Truths – Non-foundational/empty constructs
Truth/reality can be known – Truth/reality is constructional
Natural-scientific – Cultural-historical
Excludes 'subjectivity' – Includes 'objectivity'
Quantitative research – Qualitative research
Erklären – deduction/explaining – Verstehen – induction/interpreting
Rational-empirical/isolated facts – Socio-cultural/contextual narrative
Realism – absolutistic – Scepticism – relativistic
Discovering validity – Creating viability
Individualistic life orientation – Relational life orientation
Language= mirror of reality – Language= form-of-life/game/dance
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Relational Buddhism does not focus on cause-effect links between individuals as if they were colliding billiard balls, nor does it view a community of separate selves to be a determinant of human conduct. It transcends both delimiting options. The challenge is no less than a "new Enlightenment" by submitting the vision that we are all born into an ongoing process of embedded relationships from which there is no escape. Even in the most private instances, like meditating in a remote mountain cave, we are not only in the company of multiple voices but the act itself carries relational meaning. Thus, distinctions between self and others are artificial, functional in order to provisionally soothe the conventional way to make the world intelligible. All intelligible intentions/actions (*karma*) exist by the grace of relational processes as they emerge within relational life. Thus, *karma* is considered not as located in the head separated from others but to be embodied intentional action (in Dependent Origination with reason, emotion, and motivation) which is born within relationship that, by preceding the bounded self, stands before all. To be sure, Relational Buddhism views karmic intentional activity not lurking behind eyeballs but as a pivotal/wholesome alternative for conflict if coordinated in-between-selves. (cf., Gergen, 2009a, p.62; see Figure 1, www.daviddarling.info/encyclopedia).
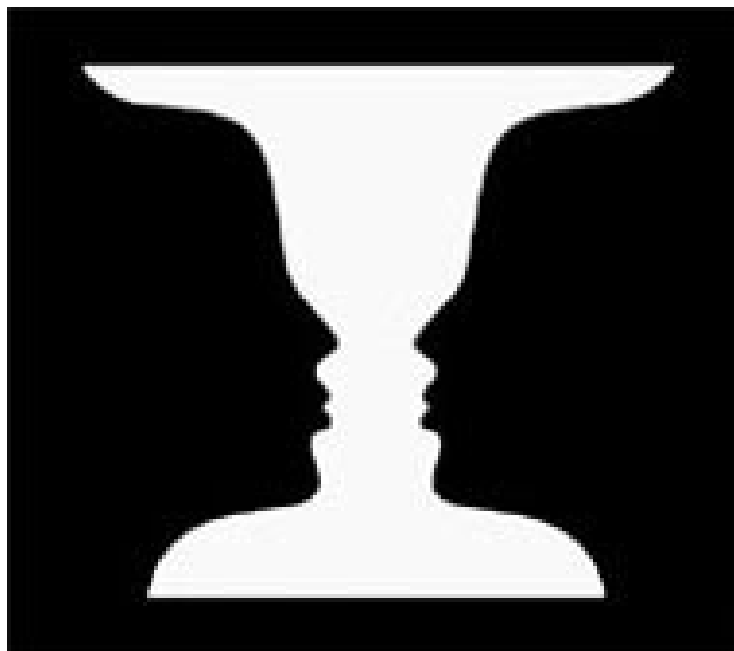

Figure 1: The mind as in-between-selves

Relational Buddhism transcends the vision of the 18th century Enlightenment that embraces the ontological perspective of logical positivism and which hails the natural-scientific and quantitative approach in psychology. Its adage "we can't share our brains, but we can't but share mind…" discards the overstretched hope that brain-based indicators are commanding. The emotions are a case in point as they are generally considered to be biological. The stance taken here is that emotions are cultural performances wedded in relationships and co-action, not byproducts of fixed neural structures. Whereas neurology can tell much about a blink, neural activity has nothing to say about the meaning of a wink. Although the brain carries out emotional performance, it is instrumental and correlational not causal to karmic action. By themselves brain scans do not offer meaning: the cortex does not determine culture, people do. In order to identify emotional states a vocabulary of psychological terms must already be available. Thus, as we give meaning and "acculturate" the brain, its change cannot be more than a byproduct of cultural process (Gergen, 2010). To emphasize brain attribution to the detriment of "interpersonal mind" is to disregard the primacy of culture, which was before private grey matter came into play. All of this is not to belittle brain studies but to revaluate that human action is unintelligible in terms of neurons and that neurons are essentially a conduit serving social purpose.

As a psychology of Social Construction, Relational Buddhism centres round the concept of what the *Gandavyuha Sutra* called "inter-being" which strikingly corresponds with what K.J. Gergen termed Relational Being. "Relational inter-being", inter-mind, inter-self, or in-between-selves is derived from the awareness that human beings are intertwined implying that the real, the reasonable, and the good are enshrined in socio-cultural networks. All that we know is embedded, not in bounded minds, but in communal cultures. Thus, the individual mind is an intersection of interconnected multiple relationships, in short: "multi-being". Individual minds are socialized through participation in the culture one lives by, not the other way around (which would be against the current). The private mind inside the skull full of hidden meanings is not as intimate as one traditionally might assume. Social Construction proposes that meaning/meaningfulness does not exist in a solipsistic manner but in an acculturated way through the process of co-action. What is considered to be separate in the private mind (thought, feeling, or affect) arises in interrelationships and is meaningless outside the context of collaborative practice. In effect, although carried out privately, self-talk is only intelligible for oneself, as socialized speech. Even dancing alone or being in meditation retreat is social performance.

Pan-Buddhist Themes and Terminology

According to Wittgenstein's depiction of a language game within which rules one by necessity speaks, every game in town is equally "true". This consideration discards the majority view that the language of positive science as launched by the Enlightenment thinkers three centuries ago mirrors/pictures reality as the only "truth". Adhering to the idea that what something "is" depends on one's approach and to which social group one belongs, reality is constructed together in ongoing dialogues, negotiations, agreements, comparisons, and so on. Although this premise is simple and straightforward, its impact is mind-blowing and far-reaching. It requires the re-thinking of virtually everything that has been taken for granted in psychology. If reality is socially constructed (including Social Construction itself), nothing can be real in itself. In effect, this corresponds with the Buddhist practice of deconstruction during mindfulness leading to the insight on the non-existence of inherent existence or self-nature of things (*svabhava*) and the baffling Buddhist emptiness experience.

Touching on language games, it is clear that if the Buddhist teachings are formulated in wording that mimics the Abrahamic religions, which is often the case due to (post-)colonial influences, the logical fate is that Buddhism will be interpreted as "religion". On the other

hand, if Buddhism is conceptualized and presented in psychological terms, it will move into becoming a psychology. The hope is that when people would consequently use psychological terminology, Buddhism will develop untoward a mature psychology. Thus, a basic list is provided for the most elementary terms to be worked out and applied in coordinated action of collaborative practice (see Table 2). The present project goes a step further than earlier attempts by Kalupahana (1987) and De Silva (2004).

Table 2: Rendering Psychological Meaning to Selected Buddhist Terms
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1. Buddh-ism: not a belief system but a Middle Way of training (*magga*)
2. Mindfulness: attention & awareness (of awareness)
3. Bhikkhu: not a monk or priest, but an almsman or self-appointed scholar, mendicant friar, or hermit
4. Enlightenment: awakening (to avoid the values of the Enlightenment)
5. Noble Truths: ennobling realities
6. Right: practice of an 8-fold balancing/harmonising discipline
7. Reincarnation: rebirth of emotional episodes (this-worldly)
8. *Karma*: not fate, but intentional inter/action
9. *Nirvana*: extinction of arousal, not retribution based on book-keeping
10. *Dukkha*: difficult to translate – 'psychological malaise'
11. *Skandhas*: modalities of *Body/Speech/Mind*-feeling/thinking/acting
12. *'dharma'*: 'atomistic' experience, not an 'ontological atom'
13. *Arahant*: no saint, but eradicator of inner enemies
14 *Mara*: psychological projections of emotions
15. Six realms of rebirth: metaphors of inner states like heaven, hell, etc.

Relational Buddhism, as the amalgam of Social Construction and Buddhism, comprises the core themes of the Theravada/Pali Dhamma and of the Mahayana/ Sanskrit Dharma, which are summarized in Table 3 (cf., the *Milindapanha's* listing).

Table 3: Pan-Buddhist Core Themes Covered in Relational Buddhism
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1. The 4-Ennobling Realities
2. The 8-Fold Balancing Practice
3. The 3-Empirical Marks of Existence
4. The 3-Poisons: greed, hatred, and ignorance
5. The state/trait of *Nirvana*: cessation of emotional arousal
6. The notion of *Karma* as intentional inter/action (emanating from Dependent Origination and impacting interpersonal relationships)
7. The 5-*skandhas* (& *patthanas*: functional relations of modalities)
8. The provisional self & ultimate not-self/non-self
9. The Dependent Origination of the interactive modalities hypothesis
10. The 6th Sense: the mind's eye (brain circuits)
11. The smallest units of experience: *dharmas* ('perceivables' & 'conceivables' of *Body/Speech/Mind*)
12. The 4-Foundations of Mindfulness: the body, the body's experiences (feelings), the mind, and the mind's experiences (thoughts/speech)
13. The 12-Mindfulness-Based Meditations (see Table 4)
14. The 4-Social Meditations: kindness, compassion, joy & equanimity
15. The non-foundational morality of collaborative practice: K.J. Gergen
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Assuming that these themes are well-known to the reader, the remainder will cover what the mind's eye in meditation encounters, *dharmas,* the 12-Meditations (see Table 4), the 4-Social Meditations, mindfulness (the G-factor of meditation), and Gergen's "non-foundational morality of co-action" which concurs with the Buddhist practice of being conscientious in the spirit of togetherness against the backdrop of emptiness.

Table 4: Mindfulness-Based Meditations on 12 Topics toward Calming/Samatha

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1. *Abdominal breathing* of air passing the nostrils
2. *Behaviors:* sitting, walking, standing, lying, and other activities
3. *Repulsiveness:* the body as a bag of food/liquids enveloped by the skin 4. *Elements*
(earth/water/fire/wind) to disidentify from body
5. *Decomposing:* visualizing one's own dead body from flesh to dust
6. *Feelings:* skin-deep or heartfelt – pleasant, painful, or neither?
7. *Hindrances:* pleasures/ill-will/sloth-torpor/agitation/doubt/worry
8. *Modalities:* Body/Speech/Mind, sensing, thinking, emoting/acting
9. *Sense-bases:* contact of the six senses with their focused objects
10. *Awakening factors:* analysis, forbearance, enthusiasm, serenity, focus, equanimity, and awareness
11. *4-Ennobling Realities: dukkha,* its causes, way out, and practice
12. *8-Fold Balancing Practice:* views-intention-speech-action-living-effort-awareness-attention

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While these twelve meditations are meant to support the forbearing effort of "absolute *bodhicitta*" (heartfelt commitment toward oneself in wholesome self-dialogue) to arrive at the ultimate emptiness, the four social meditations follow suit in "relative *bodhicitta*" (heartfelt commitment toward others to accomplish relational inter-being). These four entail the cultivation of kindness, compassion, joy, and relational balance and harmony, based on equanimity. The spirit of the Buddha concurs with a non-discriminatory outlook on race, gender, social class, and faith.

Heartfulness: Mindfulness in Relational Perspective

While mindfulness has traditionally been viewed as bounded to the individual, the present view transcends this take by adopting a relational perspective to this seemingly solipsistic exercise. In my own personal family tradition the first encounter with meditation is to do it alone by sitting in front of a wall, the Bodhidharma way so to say. Ever since, I have grappled with the meaning of sitting. Does this suggest that one cuts oneself off from the world in solitary confinement? Is total isolation attainable? Would perhaps centered/meditative wholesome action which is pro-socially efficacious be a better fit to my profile?

From a Chinese Mahayana perspective the term mindfulness, coined by Caroline Foley Rhys Davids in 1881, feels like a misnomer as the strife-less striving is toward being "mind-empty" and "full-of-heart" while remembering to be constantly watchful on whatever appears in the stream of consciousness in momentary attention and awareness in order to awaken. Although the Pali word *sati* or its Sanskrit equivalent *smriti* is preferred, the term mindfulness will be maintained because of its vested usage, thus leaving the dilemma to you, the reader. But for those who prefer to see the mind located in the interconnected heart (like in the Chinese term *nian*) "heartfulness" is an appealing alternative if the practice refers to *cultivating (affective) memory not to forget to neutrally focus, observe, or note every moment to guard or protect against unwholesomeness, to introspect and inquire intelligently, and to form wholesome karma* (cf. Kuan, 2008).

Down the ages, ever since the Buddha's time, there have been several conceptualizations and approaches to the practice of mindfulness. Technically speaking, whenever in mindfulness, we encounter *dharmas,* the smallest units of experience to be observably aware of and which I came to call: (1) "perceivables", which vary from neutral sensations to charged emotions (experienced through the body and its feelings), and (2) "conceivables", which include: cognitions, images, memories, dreams, illusions, and delusions (experienced through the mind and its appearances). Mindfulness is a way of life

which involves awareness/introspection and attention/concentration, embedded as the numbers seven and eight of the 8-Fold Balancing Practice, the Buddha's operationalization of his extremities renouncing Middle Way. The previous six of the interlinked practices comprise the balancing of vision, intention, speech, activity, living, and effort.

Based on almost a half century of practice, I came to the following four cyclical stages based on my psychological understanding and relational insights regarding mindfulness. These stages are not static phases but fluid cyclical processes of eight overlapping but clearly discernable states. Transitional states can transform over time into relative stable "personality traits". Aiming no less than the accomplishment of Buddhahood, this project stands on the shoulders of giants from the Buddha to Nagarjuna (2nd century) to Vasubandhu (4th century) where-after no paradigm shift could be detected. Table 5 designates these eight states in four phased stages.

Table 5: Pristine Mindfulness (Heartfulness) in Four Stages

Context: the 8-Fold Balancing Practice	Attention (nr 8) Verbal/speech (description)	Awareness (nr 7) Non-verbal/no speech (acquaintance)
Stage I: Heedfulness to concentrate with zeal and diligence (*appamada*)	1: *Samatha* targets calming & tranquilizing	2: *Samadhi* targets flame extinction: *Nirvana*
Stage II: Wise reflection: aims wholesome karmic action (*yoniso manasikara*)	3: *Vipassana*: insight in Dependent Origination	4: *Sunyata* as highest wisdom of non-self
Stage III: Wisdom through alert & clear comprehension (*sampajanna*)	5: *Non-duality* of subject-object/emptiness-form	6: *Kill-the-Buddha*: the last of hindrances
Stage IV: Accomplishing benevolence of Relational Inter-Being (*antaratman*)	7: *Brahmaviharas*: social meditations in action	8: "*dharmas*": men-made social constructions

States 1-4 traverse a process of *socially deconstructing* self via AHA-experiences while sitting in front of a wall to gain full insight in the emptiness of self (*anatman*). (NB: mindfulness-based stress reduction and cognitive therapy as hyped in western health care are usually confined to states 1 and 2.) States 5-8 reflect a process of *socially re/constructing* inter-mind/self via HAHA-experiences while fully functioning on the marketplace. Called *antaratman* in Javanese Buddhism, inter-self is depicted as Indra's net on the *Gandavyuha Sutra* panels of the Borobudur. This is a jeweled net with a gem at each crossing which reflects every other gem it mirrors in infinite interpenetration. The eight states are:

1. *Samatha*: a state of stress-free amidst adversity via the 12-Meditations; it comprises concentration (*Jhanas*) and contemplation by sensing, perceiving, and meta/cognizing. Apex is absorption (neither-perception-nor-non-perception), taught to the Buddha by Kalama and Ramaputta.
2. *Samadhi*: [5] an awareness state ceasing all flames of emotional arousal, aka *Nirvana*, experienced in firm-focus/receptive absorption (also in action e.g. when

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[5] The *Bahiya Sutta* includes an instruction to Samadhi: "O Bahiya, whenever you see a form, let there be just the seeing; whenever you hear a sound, let there be just the hearing; when you smell an odor, let there be just the smelling, when you taste a flavor, let there be just the tasting; when you experience a physical sensation, let it merely be sensation; and when a thought or feeling arises, let it be just a natural phenomenon arising in the mind. When it's like this, there will be no self, no "I". When there is no self, there will be no moving about here and there, and no stopping anywhere. And that is the end of Dukkha. That is Nibbana." Whenever it's like that, then it is Nibbana. If it is lasting, then it is lasting Nibbana; if it is temporary, then it's temporary Nibbana. In other words, it is just one principle."

painting or making music), called "flow" in psychology. Siddharta got into this state spontaneously while watching a plough breaking ground.

3. *Vipasanna*: a state of insight in how the mind works, i.e. in Dependent Origination, a process which refers to *Body/Speech/Mind*: feeling, thinking, and interacting, modalities arising/subsiding in conjunction while feeling greed (or its underlying fear of loss or sadness of the lost) or hatred (or its underlying other-hate/aggression or self-hate/depression).

4. *Sunyata*: a state of "luminous suchness" or "vast zeroness", a reset point that not only knows no flames, but no candle nor oil either, and which is the highest wisdom as opposed to believing in a supernatural power which would imply the end of self-inquiry toward not-self or pervasive non-self.

5. *Non-duality* is a state that requires attention of speech which inheres in dualities as a trap. The practice is to transcend duality, thus emptiness= form, beginning=end, cause=effect, left=right, up=down, heaven=hell, ugly =beautiful, good=bad, etc., which culminates in: "the Buddha=bad".

6. *Kill-the-Buddha* is an expression by the great Chan master Lin-chi (died 866) whose anarchistic genius is still quite practical for any Buddhist trainee, certainly me. Not only is the Buddha already dead, so that what one metaphorically kills is a hampering concept that impedes progress

7. *Brahmaviharas:* the Buddha often uses Brahmanistic terms to which he subsequently alluded a different meaning; the *brahmaviharas* is one of them. For non-Brahmanists, the term is to be interpreted as a metaphor for sublime places of dwelling: kindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity.

8. *"dharmas"*: this scholastic term for the smallest unit of experience can be conceived as "neither-empty-nor-not-empty" (the Buddha), "empty-of-emptiness" (Nagarjuna), and "empty-non-duality" (Vasubandhu), it is now here fathomed as "social constructions empty of Transcendental Truth".

Beyond Absolute and Relative Morality

In the history of scholarly Buddhism the conceptualization of *"dharmas"* as social constructions, thus as men-made, is, if accepted by the Buddhist community, an innovation bearing the proportion of a paradigm shift. Although Social Construction is socially constructed as well, meaning that its creation is not the result of a lone thinker but owes existence to an array of textual companions, its doyen and champion, K.J. Gergen[6], could symbolically be celebrated as Mr. Social Construction. As the only Buddhist adept on the faculty of the Taos Institute, I was the first to discover that Social Construction <www.taosinstitute.net> is a "Buddhist teaching in disguise" (Kwee, Gergen & Koshikawa, 2006). Ever since, my concern is to tell the Buddhist world that there is a development in mainstream psychology that confluences with the Dharma and which lead me to propose Relational Buddhism. Through these words I am aware to be K.J. Gergen's "king-maker" and that I might have sailed into a journey on turgid waters. But given this unprecedented constellation, I will forbear in reconfiguring the teaching that I love in hopes to contribute a small step in recasting Buddhism as a psychology. It is not only Social Construction, but in its wake Gergen's Relational Being and "non-foundational morality of co-action" beyond absolutism and relativism which strikes me, and hopefully the reader as well, as being particularly Buddhist in spirit.

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[6] Kenneth J. Gergen graduated from Yale University and received his PhD from Duke University. After teaching at Harvard University, he joined Swarthmore College faculty as the Chair of the Psychology Department. He remains there as a Senior Research Professor, and as the Chairman of the Board of the Taos Institute. His work has received numerous awards throughout the world. In short, Gergen boldly rewrote psychology and made great strides to demonstrate that what are considered mental processes are not so much in the head as within relationships.

In the space across the continuum of morality from the rigid to the flabby antagonisms abound. Social constructionists generate a practical device based on the discernment of two different orders of morality. The first-order morality is omnipresent in any community of people who generate meaning together on what is cherished in life, i.e. through nations, religions, corporations, villages, schools, etc. We invest in value formation and create custom (*ethos* or *mores*) of unwritten rules for what constitute the "good" in the context of the particular communal sensibility we are part of and partake in. Thus, we live comfortably and satisfactorily in harmony, trust, and direction within the confines of how things are traditionally done in family, friendship, and community: with a plenitude of virtues. But while virtue abounds, "evil" is underway. Due to our multiple relationships, different meanings, values, and moralities are generated within differing relationships: what is valued as virtuous in one relationship could be unacceptable in another one (e.g., building mosques in Holland vs. building churches in Turkey).

In what is called the "virtuous evil", the plenitude of virtue accommodates evil to lurk in every corner. In a pluralistic world with such multitude of good, the comfort of first-order morality adumbrates repression of competing goods. Thus, the bad and the ugly could become our daily companion to cause positive values clash. First-order morality is not only vulnerable of being jeopardized from within. More importantly, as first-order morality congeals, it creates "the others who are bad". These outsiders, although living in the same multicultural society as our neighbors, are participants of other first-order moralities (e.g., Muslims in urban Europe). If one group sees itself as good, moral, and just and judges the other group/s as bad, immoral, and unjust, conflict is imminent. In case of suicide bombing or ritual murder (of Theo van Gogh; Amsterdam, 11/4/2004) the register shifts into the "evil virtuous", i.e. eliminating evil deemed virtuous by "them" in the name of "our" virtue, eventually leading to mutual demolition. Living in a society full of unavoidable conflict, the challenge is to co-create "team spirit for humanity" to prevent reciprocal destruction.

When elimination is the aim, doors to explore are sealed (e.g., the US government vs. Al Qaeda). Before slaughter is at hand Gergen's proposal is to put a second-order morality in place which focuses on "coordinating coordination", i.e. *the process of the relationship itself*. Thus, second-order morality is collaborative action that restores the possibility of generating first-order morality and of creating joint moral values for embattled groups. Grounded on the idea that there is no morality without relationship, there is no other way than to create new morality together through meaning-making dialogue. The practice of reducing antagonisms is to evade language that invites alienation or inflammation and retaliation by not holding bounded selves responsible for untoward action that emerged from relationship. Second-order morality practice, therefore, emphasizes relational responsibility which honors the primacy of collective accountability and care for co-activity to co-create meaning. Unless executed in co-action, a person's relationship caring is void and useless. Qua content, the co-creation of meaning in second-order morality is rooted in a *non-foundational foundation*, which strikingly corresponds to the Buddhist emptiness. Its results are not universal, but provisional "so we can go on together".

As sung by the Beatles: "You see it your way, I see it my way... We can work it out, we can work it out..." The question is how (Gergen, McNamee, & Barett, 2001)? To cement theory of second-order morality to practice, *transformative dialogue* offers a promising method to dissolve barriers of meaning which separate otherwise conflicting parties. The transformation lies in holding back from *deficit discourse* through constructing the world, and particularly bounded selves, not in terms of problems which would objectify shortcomings and suppress positive possibilities but by using language that explores and emphasizes the positive, the potential, and the possible. "Positive aging" <www.taosinstitute.net/positive-aging-newsletter> is illustrative: rather than blindly following the pervasive view of aging as

decline, it is possible to discover, generate, and construct potential ways of crating later life as a phase of unparalleled growth and enrichment.

For second-order morality and transformative dialogue to occur, *collaborative practice* is conditional. Such relational orientation corresponds to the Buddhist way of building rapport. In the "greater discourse on emptiness" (*Mahasunnata Sutta*) the Buddha admonished that one needs to be mindfully aware of morality in speech:

> Talk which is... leading [not] to... freedom from passion, not to cessation, not to tranquility, not to higher knowledge, not to awakening, not to Nibbana, namely, talk about kings, robbers and ministers, talk about armies, dangers and war, about food and drink, clothes, couches, garlands, perfumes, relatives, cars, villages, towns, cities, and provinces, about women and wine, gossip of the street and of the well, talk about the ancestors, about various trifles, tales about the origin of the world and the ocean, talk about what happened and what did not happen, such and similar talk I shall not entertain… But... talk which is conducive to... Nibbana, namely, talk about a life of frugality, about contentedness, solitude, aloofness from society, about arousing one's energy, talk about virtue, concentration, wisdom, deliverance, about the vision and knowledge of deliverance, such talk I shall entertain.

By staying away from deficit discourse, transformative conversations not only nurture and elevate relationships but might dissolve walls of conflicting dialogues as well, and thus eventually prevent us (e.g., Muslims vs. non-Muslims) from mutual annihilation and the total abolition of meaning.

In closing

The above is an attempt to review Buddhist thinking post the Buddha. Its nutshell necessitated leaving out many details. My priority lies in introducing Relational Buddhism as a psychology of Social Construction which is an exponential discipline of mainstream social psychology. The basic idea is that human beings live in an ocean of relationships from the cradle to the grave. This is in accord with the Buddha's view that everyone is embedded in a network of interconnected relationships (*Sigalovada Sutta*). Using a compass metaphor, there are six relational types each of which requires specific responsibilities and complementary conduct (kids/parents-East, family/friends-North, partner/spouse-West, pupil/tutor-South, student/mentor-Upward, employee/employer-Downward). This relational template offers guidance to find the way in defining stances in relationships which balance and harmony however will depend not on "what you say but on how you say it".

Mindfulness of speech has traditionally been neglected while this lies at the heart of Buddhist morality and forms the basis of societal harmony (walking the talk of kindness, compassion, joy, and relational equanimity). It is therefore pivotal to cultivate gluing relationships in-between-selves by soaking our speech in vernacular reflecting interpersonal significance of binding "we" in full understanding of our state of Dependent Origination. This starts early in life. After parental lustful intercourse (*kamadathu*), sensing-emoting/thinking-talking capability is *embodied*. Speech is *formed* by the syllable (*mantra*) during meaning-making exchange (*rupadathu*). As "languaging" progresses *formless* thoughts transform into fickle mind (*arupadathu*) and self-organize illusory "independent self" that fails to see inseparable "selves" spaced-in-between-people-embedded-in-culture.

To conclude, here is a picture of Social Construction as a Buddhist teaching placed in the context of its peers (see Table 6). A tripartite working division of human functioning in *Body/Speech/Mind* underlies three major disciplines of psychology under which rubrics present-day studies of Buddhism in psychology can be subsumed. The Emptiness-

Only/Sunyavada (Madhyamaka) school championed by Nagarjuna was followed by the Mind-Only/Yogacara-Vijnavada epistemological school of Vasubandhu (and his Yogacara-cittamatra/ontology-oriented half-brother Asanga). Yogacara did not reject but include Sunyavada, just like Relational Buddhism does not oppose Sunyavada or Vijnavada but incorporate both in daily practice as illustrated in the previous table. K.J. Gergen's practical formulation of going on together as Relational Being is a landmark text, a guideline for relational living, which inheres in the Buddhist spirit without being explicit about it. In effect: Relational Buddhism may be viewed as the fourth turning of the wheel since the Buddha's original *dharmachakra*.

Table 6: A Psychological Approach to Post-Buddha Thought

Applied Psychology	Network under Study	Human Functioning	School of Thought	Leading Author	Textual Reference
Neuro-Psychology	Neurons Genes	Body/Mind *Karmadathu*	Sunya-vada	Nagarjuna (2nd century)	Perfection of Wisdom
Clinical Psychology	*Skandhas* Modalities	Mind/Body *Arupadathu*	Vijna-vada	Vasubandhu (4th century)	Buddha-womb sutras
Social Psychology	In-Between Selves	Speech *Rupadathu*	Soc. Con-struction	Kenneth J. Gergen	Relational Being (2009)

Finally, the concern of this article is not academic consumption but daily practice: grass-root training/cultivation leading to Buddhahood of the social Arahat or the 21st century Bodhisattva in order to help alleviate emotional suffering and advance societal harmony through coordinated action of collaborative practice.

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