

THE AUTHOR HIMSELF SAID of this little volume that it is "the shortest, the clearest, and the most direct" of his books. In it he seeks to express the essence of ancient wisdom in modern terminology. One reviewer calls the author "an impassioned Taoist" who offers the reader the "chance to finally participate in the truth of things and of beings" (*East and West* magazine). Wei Wu Wei considered *All Else Is Bondage* to be the epitome of his life's work.

"Please be so good as to believe that there is nothing whatever mysterious about this matter. If it was easy, should we not all be Buddhas? No doubt, but the apparent difficulty is due to our conditioning. The apparent mystery, on the other hand, is just obnubilation, an inability to perceive the obvious owing to a conditioned reflex which causes us persistently to look in the wrong direction!"

—From the book



BETWEEN THE YEARS 1958 and 1974, a series of books appeared that were attributed to the mysterious Wei Wu Wei, who joined Paul Reps, Alan Watts, and Philip Kapleau as one of the earliest and most profound interpreters of Buddhism. In the concise *All Else Is Bondage* Wei Wu Wei uncompromisingly destroys the remaining vestiges of that-which-we-are-not in the hope of promoting an insight that will reveal to us this-which-we-are.

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RELIGION/BUDDHISM

ALL ELSE IS BONDAGE

WEI WU WEI



ALL ELSE IS BONDAGE

Non-Volitional Living

WEI WU WEI

All Else Is Bondage

SAMPLE TEXT

Also by Wei Wu Wei

FINGERS POINTING TOWARDS THE MOON

WHY LAZARUS LAUGHED

ASK THE AWAKENED

OPEN SECRET

THE TENTH MAN

POSTHUMOUS PIECES

UNWORLDLY WISE

All Else Is Bondage

Non-Volitional Living



WEI WU WEI



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Deputy-Minister: But I am a profane man, I hold an Office, how could I study to obtain the Way?

Shen Hui: Very well, Your Honour, from to-day I will allow you to work on understanding only. Without practising, only reach understanding, then when you are deeply impregnated with your correct understanding, all the major entanglements and illusory thoughts gradually will subside. . . . In our school we indicate at once that it is the understanding which is essential without having recourse to a multitude of texts.

—SHEN HUI, h. 5

Yes, but then Shen Hui was there to promote the understanding: we only have him as one of a “multitude of texts.”

Yes, he says it—understanding can suffice. But we must “live” that understanding—noumenally of course!

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Foreword

All Else Is Bondage: Non-Volitional Living is the fourth of eight remarkable works by Wei Wu Wei that were originally published between 1958 and 1974. These works draw on a wide variety of sources including Taoism, especially the texts attributed to Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu; Buddhism, most notably the Heart, Diamond, and Lankavatara Sutras; and Chan Buddhism as taught by Hui Neng, Huang Po, Hui Hai, and Shen Hui. The teachings of Padma Sambhava and Sri Ramana Maharshi, among others, are also frequently referred to.

What makes Wei Wu Wei's work remarkable is not only the breadth and unquestionable authenticity of these sources, but also the uncompromising nature of his interpretation of the truths expressed therein. In *All Else is Bondage* he examines one of the fundamental insights implicit in all these sources—this being that most of us live in a state of bondage and that this state is a direct consequence of our identification with an apparent object in relative reality. This identification—be it with the physical body or with the individualized ego—results in a lack of consciousness of our true nature. This true nature Wei Wu Wei characterizes as the underlying Subject, or “pure being,” of which all apparent objects—our “selves” included—are simply a manifestation in the relative reality of space and time as perceived through the senses. In and of themselves, these apparent objects have no actual existence except as Subject Itself thus perceived. Simply

put, we can either identify ourselves with one of these objects or be conscious of “ourselves” as the Subject underlying them all, the former being bondage and the latter being liberation. As Wei Wu Wei observes in this book,

As long as we are identified with an object: that is bondage. As long as we think, act, live via an object, or as an object: that is bondage. As long as we feel ourselves to be an object, or think we are such (and a “self” is an object): that is bondage.

—*All Else Is Bondage*, pp. 41

Once the nature of the problem is understood, the question that tends to arise is “How can one escape this condition?” Wei Wu Wei points out that at this stage there is the danger that the objectified self, or ego, may decide to make itself “more spiritual” in order to “attain” liberation and begin some sort of rigorous “spiritual practice” to achieve this end. But he sees this as merely a defensive measure on the part of the ego to sidestep the real issue—this being the fact of its own inexistence as an independent entity. In his first book, *Fingers Pointing Towards the Moon: Reflections of a Pilgrim on the Way* he notes that,

There seem to be two kinds of searchers: those who seek to make their ego something other than it is, i.e. holy, happy, unselfish . . . and those who understand that all such attempts are just gesticulation and play-acting, that there is only one thing that can be done, which is to disidentify themselves with the ego, by realising its unreality, and by becoming aware of their eternal identity with pure Being. (pp. 118)

So the next question that arises is “How does one realise the unreality of the ego?” Wei Wu Wei points out that in order for this to occur we must fully comprehend, firstly on an intellectual level but then on a more intuitive level, not only the illusory nature of the ego, but also the illusory nature of relative reality itself, and much of this book is intended to help us come to such an understanding. Wei Wu Wei prods, nudges, and sometimes propels us in the right direction by exposing and undermining the most basic assumptions upon which our perception and conception of relative reality are based. He does this in part by challenging the way in which we experience this apparent “reality,” especially the way in which we experience time and space. He also challenges our assumptions regarding individual volition within this “reality,” especially the concept of free will, and then leads us towards the notion of “non-volitional living” referred to in the subtitle of this book. As Wei Wu Wei says,

The purest doctrines, such as those of Ramana Maharshi, Padma Sambhava, Huang Po and Shen Hui, just teach that it is sufficient by analysis to comprehend that there is no entity which could have effective volition, that an apparent act of volition when in accord with the inevitable can only be a vain gesture and, when in discord, the fluttering of a caged bird against the bars of his cage. When he knows that, then at last he has peace and is glad.

—*All Else is Bondage*, pp. 67-68

In short, what Wei Wu Wei does is help us to understand and experience our true nature by stripping away the various misconceptions that result in our identification with an illusory object or entity.

Foreword

This may all sound a bit daunting, but as he says in his Preface to this work, “If it was easy, should we not all be Bud-dhas?” And this book is certainly not easy reading—it’s both intellectually challenging and a hard-core, no-nonsense attack on the very roots of our bondage. But for those who feel Wei Wu Wei’s words resonating with truths they already sense at some level, and who feel drawn to the challenges presented, this slim volume could prove to be of great value. It is unlikely, however, that the material found in this book will be fully grasped in a single reading even by those for whom the words resonate most strongly. But by dipping into this profound work from time to time they may well find themselves experiencing the occasional crucial insight—and eventually perhaps even coming to experience that extraordinary and truly indescribable liberation, from the perspective of which it is no doubt a simple, self-evident fact that, indeed, “all else is bondage.”

MATT ERREY
Creator of the Wei Wu Wei Archives website
www.weiwuwei.8k.com
Bangkok, Thailand
March 2004

Preface

THERE SEEMS never to have been a time at which sentient beings have not escaped from the dungeon of individuality. In the East liberation was elaborated into a fine art, but it may be doubted whether more people made their escape from solitary confinement outside the organised religions than by means of them.

In the West reintegration was sporadic, but in recent years it has become a widespread preoccupation. Unfortunately its technical dependence on oriental literature—sometimes translated by scholars whose knowledge of the language was greater than their understanding of the subject—has proved a barrier which rendered full comprehension laborious and exceedingly long. Therefore it appears to be essential that such teaching as may be transmissible shall be given in a modern idiom and in accordance with our own processes of thought. But this presentation can never be given by the discursive method to which we are used for the acquisition of conceptual knowledge, for the understanding required is not conceptual and therefore is not knowledge.

This may account for the extraordinary popularity of such works as the *Tao Tè Ching*, and in a lesser degree for that of the Diamond and Heart Sutras and Padma Sambhava's *Knowing the Mind*. For despite the accretion of superfluous verbiage in which the essential doctrine of some of the latter has become embedded, their direct pointing at the truth, instead of explaining it, goes straight to the heart of the

Preface

matter and allows the mind itself to develop its own vision. An elaborately developed thesis must always defeat its own end where this subject matter is concerned, for only indication could produce this understanding, which requires an intuitional faculty, and it could never be acquired wholesale from without.

It may be doubted, however, whether an entirely modern presentation of oriental or perennial metaphysics would be followed or accepted as trustworthy at present. Probably an intermediate stage is necessary, during which the method should be a presentation in modern idiom supported by the authority of the great Masters, with whose thoughts and technical terms most interested people are at least generally familiar. Moreover the question is bedevilled by the use, which has become a convention, of terms, mostly of Sanskrit origin, the colloquial sense of which, accepted by the early translators, is still employed. Often this sense is considerably different from the technical meaning given these terms in the Chinese texts, and it occasionally implies almost exactly the opposite. These misleading terms are still used, which is a matter of no importance to those few who understand to what they refer, and for whom any word whatsoever would suffice, but are a serious hindrance to the pilgrim struggling to understand.

The inadequacy of the short paragraphs that follow is due to the insufficiency of their expression. They are offered in the hope that the verity which underlies them may penetrate the mist of their presentation and kindle a spark that shall develop into the flame of fulfillment.

Please be so good as to believe that there is nothing whatever mysterious about this matter. If it was easy, should we not all be Buddhas? No doubt, but the apparent difficulty is due to our conditioning. The apparent mystery, on the other

hand, is just obnubilation, an inability to perceive the obvious owing to a conditioned reflex which causes us persistently to look in the wrong direction!

A Note on the Terms "Volition" and "Causation"

ALL PHENOMENA, being the result of objectivisation, are necessarily conditioned and subjected to the chain of causation.

Causation, being subjected to what we conceive as Time and Space, implies Space-Time, and vice versa, so that causation and volition may be regarded as one.

Therefore every possible kind of temporal activity must be conditioned and subjected to the chain of causation.

Per contra whatever is intemporal, or whatever intemporal-ity is, cannot be bound by the chain of causation—since it cannot be subjected to Space-Time.

But whatever we are, whatever sentient-beings may be, is intemporal, and that which appears in Space-Time is phenomenal only.

Volition, therefore, in its phenomenal aspect is a manifestation of an I-concept, and it must be an element in the chain of causation, whereas "volition" in its noumenal aspect is not in fact such at all, is never manifest as such, and functions as an unidentifiable urge, as spontaneity, independent of deliberation, conceptualisation, and all phenomenal activity.

This noumenal volition is neither volition nor non-volition: it is volition that is non-volition, as *wei* is the action that is *wu wei*, for all interference on the part of an I-concept is excluded, and action (*wei*) is the expression of volition.

A Note on the Terms "Volition" and "Causation"

Ultimately it is what intemporally we are, for it is devoid of objectivity. It is what all sentient beings are, all Nature that comes into manifestation and returns to non-manifestation, that is born or sprouts, grows, matures, reproduces and dies. It is the non-volitional living which is that of a Man of Tao.

Noumenally

Who is there to possess or exercise volition? Who is there to experience the results of volition?

Who is there to create a cause? Who is there to suffer an effect?

There is no entity to exercise volition, there is no entity to suffer the results of volition.

There is neither a causal nor an effectual entity.

Phenomenally

Phenomenal subject-object are themselves results of temporality.

Phenomenal cause-effect are themselves dependent on the apparent seriality of time.

Phenomenal subject-object are never apart, are not independent entities: they are one whole concept revealing the mechanism of manifestation.

Phenomenal cause-effect are never separate, each is both, dependent on time, describing the temporal operation of the manifested universe.

Phenomenal subject-object and cause-effect not only are each a single concept divided by the temporal illusion, both are aspects of a single concept and are identical.

Therefore they can be called "causal subject-effectual object," and causation is a name for the process of objectivisation whereby the sensorial universe is produced.

I repeat: only an object can suffer, for it requires an object to experience suffering, and only an object can suffer the effect of a cause.

Therefore only objects can be involved in causation and conditioning, for phenomenal subject becomes object at the instant of any such occurrence.

Noumenal subjectivity must be eternally unaffected by causation. Noumenal subjectivity is eternally unconditioned and unbound.

Zero ~ Enlightenment and the Extinction of “Me”

DOING AWAY with the I-notion is the same as not desiring the personal attainment of enlightenment.

Not desiring that (the “last desire,” the “last barrier”) is “having it,” for “having it” is in any case merely being rid of that which concealed what is forever that which alone we are.

Therefore not desiring personal attainment of that is at the same time the elimination of the I-notion which constitutes its concealment.

The *idea* of liberation automatically inhibits the simple realisation that we are free.

Note: Free, we are not number One, the first of all our objects, but *Zero*—their universal and Absolute Subject. This is illustrated by the famous “TENTH MAN” story.

1 - Thought

THE MASTERS' exhortations to abjure "thinking" do not imply the suppression of thought but the reorientation, by articulation, of the impetus that results in dualistic thought into its im-mediate experience.

Suppressed thought is the negative aspect of the dualism "thought-no-thought," another mode of thought itself and "one half of a pair," whereas what the Masters mean is *wu nien*, which is the absence of both counterparts, thought and no-thought, which is the presence of the suchness of thought, and that is expressed in spontaneous Action (pure action arising from Non-action: *Wu wei*).

WU NIEN is the presence of the absence of no-thought.

2 ∴ Truth

THE SEEING of Truth cannot be dualistic (a “thing” seen).

It cannot be seen by a see-er, or via a see-er.

There can only be a seeing which itself is Truth.

The unfree (those still bound by objectivisation) want an object to be relative reality (relatively existing), i.e. that it should be projected independently of the see-er of it. This is basically dualistic.

But an object is projected via the see-er of it, and the seeing of it is at the same time its projection.

The unfree want two independent processes:

- i. The Functioning of Principal localised as an object,
- ii. The object perceived by a sentient being, himself an object projected by Principal.

But

- i. The sentient being is himself Subject and Object, i.e. Principal in so far as he IS, as projected object generally interpreted as “John Smith” in so far as he is an object of perception.
- ii. The generalised interpretation of the projection of Principal as “John Smith” is an object, an appearance only: that which he IS is Principal Whose apparent Functioning subjects him to such generalised interpretation on the part of “other” generalised aspects of that Functioning that are such as apparently independent objects in space-time.

The unfree wish a projected object, “John Smith” to perceive another projected object that is independently existing, but “John Smith,” as a projected object, cannot see anything, being himself only a percept. In so far as he can be said to perceive, it is as the Functioning of Principal (that which he

is) that he perceives, and the Function of perceiving by Principal is itself projection (“creation”).

Note: “Projected” here is intended to cover the total process of interpretation whereby a percept becomes a phenomenal object sensorially perceived and conceptualised as such.

3 -- *Inconceivable*

THE SPACE-TIME, subject-object phenomenal universe is a manifestation of mind, of which day and sleep dreaming are examples in a second degree.

The result of this individualisation process, based on seriality, which all degrees of dreamers know as "reality," has no objective resemblance to that which causes it to appear, because that which causes it to appear has no objective quality at all.

Therefore that is totally inaccessible to any form of objective cognition, let alone of description. The only words that can indicate it at all are This, Here, Now, and Am, and in a context which is entirely abstract.

The negative method is provisional only; it turns from the positive to its counterpart, and then negates both. That wipes out everything objective and leaves an emptiness which represents fullness, total absence which represents total presence. Here the thinking (and not-thinking) process ends, and the absence itself of that IS the Inconceivable.

Inconceivable for whoever attempts to conceive it. But who suggested that we should do that?

4 ~ It: On Realising Mind

When Time stops the universe disappears

It is here all the time precisely because it is beyond the reach of time; and it cannot be held because time is intermittent.

It is present in every now-moment between the tic-toc of serial manifestation via which it functions indirectly.

We know it eternally. It is the background not only of thought—as Maharshi told us—but of every act of living.

That is why it is pure Function, and what pure Function is.

It is too clear and so it is hard to see.

A dunce once searched for a fire with a lighted lantern.

Had he known what fire was,

He could have cooked his rice much sooner.

—MUMON

It is the function whose dualistic and temporal manifestation is living, the act of every action, the origin of every thought, the basis of every percept, not directly what we do, what we think, what we see, subject to Time, what we project serially in the sensing as each phenomenal object. It is the living itself of life, not the way we live it objectively.

The awakened can live directly (as the “Zen” archer or swordsman can act directly), “we” live indirectly, but even indirect living is ultimately it—for it, not the “wooden puppet,” the object, is all that we ARE.

“The mind or the mouth cannot act of their own accord,” said Maharshi, “Recognise the force of the Divine Will and keep quiet!” And again:

“The mind or the mouth cannot act without the Self.”

5 ~ *Gone with My Head*

MY HEAD is the centre of the universe.

Everything I see, sense, know is centred in my head (and in yours, and in the beetle's).

All are objects in which my head is subject (mediate Subject as a head, ultimate subject as "I").

But I cannot see, sense, or know my head, and the inference of its existence is inadmissible, sensorially unjustifiable. I perceive no such object, all other objects but not that. My head alone is not my object.

Of course not: it is subject, and an eye cannot see itself, I cannot sensorially perceive myself, subject cannot know itself—for that which is known is thereby an object. Subject cannot subsist as its own object.

So, all that is object *appears* to exist;

Subject alone does not *appear* to exist.

But object cannot exist apart from subject, whose manifest aspect it is.

Therefore it is *apparently* inexistent subject that IS, and *apparently* existent object that IS not.

Yet, since object is subject, and subject is object, intemporally that which they are, all that they can be, and all that IS, is the absence of my head (and of yours, and of the beetle's), which is also the presence of everything.

Where, then, am I? Where, then, are you, and the beetle?

We are our absence.

With apologies to Mr. Douglas Harding, whose On Having No Head should not be held responsible, and which says so much more so much better.

6 ∴ *This Phenomenal Absence*

NOWHERE, WHERE I am an object, am I; nor where any part of “me” is an object is it part of me or is mine. Only here where I can see nothing (but the objective universe) am I—and I am only an absence objectively.

When I realise that, I cease also to be an individual “I,” *for anything individual* is thereby an object.

My objective absence is the presence of pure non-objectivity, which is just that.

My only existence is non objective, as non-objectivity itself.

I cannot be portrayed in any way, drawn, photographed or described. That which impersonally I am has no qualities or resemblance to an individual subject-object, which is purely conceptual.

Note: A “self,” an “ego,” any kind of separated personality or being, is an object. That is why nothing of the kind is—as the Diamond Sutra so repeatedly insists.

My objective self only has a conceptual existence.

Non-objectively I am the apparent universe.

Identifying myself with my conceptual object is what constitutes bondage. Realising that my conceptual object only exists in so far as it and its subject are THIS phenomenal absence here and now—constitutes liberation.

I am my phenomenal absence.

7 - Our Buddha-Nature

THERE IS no mystery whatever—only the inability to perceive the obvious.

“He has nowhere to hide!” as Mumon put it.

The supposed or apparent “mystery” is due to the objective inexistence of pure non-objectivity—which is the Buddha-nature, because objectivity is only conceptual, and non-objectivity is incompatible with any degree of positivity.

Huang Po said it categorically, “Our original Buddha-nature is, in highest truth, devoid of any atom of objectivity.”

What is there mysterious in This-here-now-am, which is everywhere, and apart from which nothing else is?

This which IS is pure presence, autonomous and spontaneous.

It is This which is looking for Itself when we look for It, and we cannot find It because It is This which we are.

Objectively *It is not here*.

Note: Dualistic language does not permit us to express these things without the use of objective terms such as “it.” There is no such word as “thissself,” nor can the word “this” be repeated indefinitely, and it is only a pointer in any case. The *sense* must maintain an uninterrupted subjectivity.

8 - This Which We Are

SINCE WE are obliged to use dualistic language in order to communicate understanding we should be well-advised to use words in a manner which is verifiable, that is in a way which is etymologically correct.

To per-ceive means “thoroughly to take hold of,” but metaphysically there is no one to take hold of anything and nothing to take hold of. Therefore perception is the first stage of the conceptualisation process, and the two elements—perception and conception—form one whole, and that one whole is the mechanism whereby we create *samsara*.

What we are required to do is the contrary, to lay everything down, to be nothing, to know that we are nothing, and thereby leave behind the whole process of conceptualisation. So-doing we cease to be that which we never were, are not, and never could be. That, no doubt, is *nirvana*, and, since nothing is being conceived, nothing is being perceived, and nothing is being “projected” via the psycho-somatic apparatus which itself is a conceptualised percept.

At that moment the phenomenal universe no longer exists as far as we are concerned. We are “sitting in a *bodhiman-dala*,” in a state of perfect availability. So placed—and automatically—we should re-become integrally that which we always were, are, and forever must be. And that—because it is THIS—can never be thought or spoken, for this, being purely non-objective, is in a different “direction of measurement” from any conceptual dimension, being the source of all dimensionality and phenomenality.

THIS is the sun itself, shining through the dualism of negative and positive, whose rays (which are Itself) appear to split into that negative (*nirvana*) and that positive (*samsara*)

from which arise all phenomena, the perceptual-conceptual universe, including that which we have known as ourselves.

“I am that I am,” said Jahweh—which no doubt means “this which I am.” We, too are “this which we are,” for THIS is everything that ever was, is, or could be.

9 ~ Potential Reality

THE EXTROVERT assumes that things objectively exist, and that subjectively they do not. That indeed is the accepted sense of those terms and, I think, the theoretical and experimental basis of science.

It requires years of intuitive research to understand that the opposite is the truth, that no thing exists objectively other than as a concept, and that subjectively every thing has potential existence, i.e. permanently exists as potential.

When the Masters say tirelessly that every single thing “neither exists nor does not exist” they mean just that: its only existence is as potential which is the integration of object and subject, of negative and positive, by which each interdependent counterpart has been obliterated.

The term “realisation”—“making real, a thing”—logically is only applicable to the illusory process of assuming conceptual objects do exist, for *they have no other* reality.

That which ultimately they ARE, and all that they could ever BE, is neither Reality nor Relative Reality (even with capital “R”s) but Potential (with a capital “P” if you wish).

10 · Potential Plenum

THE MASTERS' constant formula, in a sense their essential "teaching," taking any and every *dharma* and declaring that it "neither is nor is not," means precisely (and factually) that it "is neither positive nor negative." Therefore it is idle to do what we are apt to do, that is immediately to look for that which it ("really," as we say) is—since we are begging the question, having just been told that *it* IS not.

That which is not positive and not negative is the result of the mutual extinction, or negation, of each (Shen Hui's double negative), by means of which each characteristic is cancelled by its counterpart (as light by shade, and shade by light, in positive and negative films), leaving a phenomenal blank, no phenomena whatever, that is perfect objective voidness, unhappily, even absurdly, called "*The Void*."

Shen Hui has stated that, to the awakened, voidness no longer is such—which means that voidness no longer appears as an object. But that which, viewed objectively, is void can never *be* anything else, can never, for instance, be "full," a "plenum," as has been maintained (but never, I think, by a Master): that whose identity is voidness of objects can never not be void of objects without ceasing to be what it is. As long as it is itself an object, it must remain devoid of objects, but when it ceases to be an object, ceases to be itself at all, it thereby returns to subject, as which it is pure potential, and, as such, a *potential plenum*.

That, no doubt, is the sense of Shen Hui's statement, which has caused some disturbance in the heads of the scholars.

Note: May we not generalise from this and declare that the same applies to all objects? Is it not evident that every object, when it

Potential Plenum

ceases to be itself, i.e. objective, thereby becomes void, returns to subject and re-becomes potentiality—which is all that anything IS? Always bearing in mind that “potentiality” is only a pointing, not any “thing,” for phenomenally it must ever be total absence, which non-objectively must be total presence, just as what objectively is void, subjectively is a plenum.

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