

Article

What Do a Jew, a Hindu and a Buddhist Mean by “One”? Trans-Different Reflections

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Abstract

In this study, I analyze how reflections on the “one” appear in different cultures. Thoughts on the “one” in several worldviews show similarities but also dissimilarities that should not be neglected. More specifically, I juxtapose Arthur Green’s neo-mystic “oneness” with Anantanand Rambachan’s Hindu view on the one and the many and with Thich Nhat Hanh’s insights on inter-being and on “one” and “many” as mere mental constructs. I clarify what each of these three thinkers means by “one” in, respectively, their Jewish, Hindu and Buddhist thoughts.

Keywords: one; many; trans-difference; neo-mysticism; creation theology; Advaita; liberation theology; Zen Buddhism; interdependence

1. Arthur Green’s Theology and Eastern Philosophies in a Trans-Different Perspective

Arthur Green himself does not discuss the parallels between his own radical theological ideas and Eastern religious teachings, although he is aware of them. He does not make explicit the nearness of his reinterpretation of Judaism to nondual philosophies in Advaita Vedanta or Zen Buddhism. The aim of this study is to make explicit some of these parallels, to signal communalities without conflating views. With all the parallels, we should not disregard the differences between Green’s theological thinking and Eastern concepts as they appear in Rambachan’s Hindu liberation theology and in Nhat Hanh’s Zen Buddhist poetic meditations.

“Trans-difference” allows us to point out the communalities between cultures and, at the same time, to be alert to the specificities of each culture (Meir 2021, pp. 308–9). The words “one” and “oneness” are the same, but the cultural contexts color their meaning. This does not mean that there is no common ground or *trans*-difference. It is from this methodological perspective that the following analysis is performed.

2. Oneness in Arthur Green’s Theology

Arthur Green offers a radical interpretation of Judaism (Green 2010).¹ He wrote his book *Judaism for the World* for Jews and non-Jews alike, in the conviction that Judaism has an important role to play in human history (Green 2020). Reinvigorating Judaism, he believes that it is there for the world. He even universalizes Israel, as does Levinas (Green 2010, p. 31; 2020, p. 208).

In his neo-Hasidic non-dualism there is only One and we are part of it. The One garbs itself in the plurality of the world. It fills and surrounds all the worlds (*memale kol-almin* and *sovev kol-almin*). Green summarizes his neo-mysticism with the classical words, “There



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is only One" (*let atar panuy miné*; Green 2020, p. 203). In his attempt to leave the personal speech on God, he comes close to eastern teachings on all as "one".

2.1. The Meaning of the Word God

As a religious seeker, Green leaves aside accepted religious interpretations. He searches for alternative views in order to penetrate deeper, unconceivable realities that are beyond the multiple. Using the language of Kabbalah and Hasidism he creates an alternative for approaching God as a person, a commander, a King or a Father. In his theology, God is *eyn sof*, without end, "flowing through all finite beings" (Green 2010, p. 18; 2020, p. 205). Green has a "universalized reading of the Hasidic legacy" (Green 2020, p. 8). He learned from the Hasidic masters "the unity and holiness of all life, even of all existence" (Green 2020, p. 7). He develops a non-conventional theology in which God does not govern history and does not intervene in it. He reminds his readers of the words of the prophet Isaiah: "The whole world is filled with God's glory" (Jes. 6:3). God is the "all-embracing One, the undivided One" (Green 2020, p. 192). In a formula that, at first sight, comes close to Paul Tillich's understanding of God as the ground or source of being, he approaches God as "the ground of life itself" (Green 2020, p. 5). He writes about our "inner transcendence" (Green 2020, p. 4). As a mystical panentheist and a non-dualist, he claims that transcendence "dwells within immanence": there is "only one Being and many faces" (cp. Green 2010, p. 18; 2020, p. 205).² Against a widespread authoritarian approach of God as a high commander dispatching commandments, he perceives God as dynamically present in all that fosters life and causes it to thrive and flourish.

Green's view on the One is not that of a classical *unio mystica* in which there is complete human absorption in the divine but still duality. *Unio mystica* as the summit of relationship is reached through *devekut* as cleaving or attachment to God. In Green's monist thoughts, God knows no other (Green 2010, p. 70). The word God denotes not a being or the highest being but rather Being itself (Y-H-W-H). Green develops a nondual view that perceives the One in all that is.³ Humans reflect the Oneness. They are part of God, distinct but not separated; they flow together. Green still uses the language of love which presupposes duality, but ultimately there is only One.

2.2. God and the World?

For Green, there is duality at first sight, but in a deeper insight the one is ultimately disclosed within the many. His theology is not about God and the world but about the ineffable and the infinite to be touched in the finite. In the footsteps of the Hasidic masters, he writes that the world is "the One dressed in the garb of the many" (Green 2020, p. 196). There is "always a one behind the faces of duality" (Green 2020, p. 197). Only on the level of our human understanding the many exist: "All is contained within the simple *alef*, a One to which there is indeed no other" (Green 2020, p. 197). It is only *quoad nos*, from our viewpoint, that "God is indeed *Elohim*, a seemingly plural Self who shares the stage of existence with countless other selves, including our own" (Green 2020, p. 192). God dwells in the developing world. It is "the One that underlies and unifies all of being" (Green 2010, p. 17; 2020, pp. 204–5). God "underlies all being" and "dwells within the evolutionary process" (Green 2020, p. 204). From the above it becomes clear that Green is not a classical, personalist theist. He does not consider God as a being or the highest being. Writing for a wide public of Jews and non-Jews, he hopes that his universal insights on the One in the many contribute to a worldwide religious consciousness.

2.3. Creation Theology

Green takes up the topic of creation, which was rather neglected in the preceding century. He makes it even central in his theology. The focus upon the specificities of the

religions have made the theme of creation less relevant. In his radical, non-conventional interpretation of creation, Green explores the deeper layers of human consciousness. He develops an original creation-theology that interprets creation in a way that does not oppose faith to science or nature to wonder. In our post-Darwin period, in which one conceives evolution as a struggle for life, this is a surprising and refreshing standpoint. Far from a creationist, Green defines himself as a “religious evolutionist” (Green 2020, p. 198). Focusing upon the theme of creation, he elucidates creation as the “divine self-revelation, the undefined breath-energy of Y-H-W-H revealing itself through its presence in created forms” (Green 2020, p. 202). Y-H-W-H, “Is-Was-Will Be” is present in all (Green 2020, p. 207). With his radical theology in which God-consciousness is compatible with the evolution, Green teaches his audience to look differently at reality and to discover its depth. In this sense, God is not ontologically “other” but epistemologically “other”: it is “an otherness of perspective” (Green 2010, p. 18; 2020, p. 205).

With creation comes a certain duality: “the limitless One is forced to become the One-in-relation” (Green 2020, p. 192). God “becomes *Elohim*, a God of diversity and multiplicity” (ibid.). Green’s unusual perception of creation, which is already revelation, is far from literalist. He develops a paradigm of creation, in which evolution, science and the holy dimension in everything go hand in hand. It is a view of the future with close attention to whatever comes into life and more especially to human evolution and creativity. Green does not separate God and the world; he distinguishes between them and shows their interconnectedness that reveals unity beyond multiplicity. Raising his cup of wine on Shabbat, he celebrates “a sacred presence that underlies all that is” (Green 2020, p. 189).

2.4. Influence of Abraham Joshua Heschel

In his unusual reframing of creation, Green is clearly influenced by his teacher, Abraham Joshua Heschel. Like his mentor, he asks to develop our sense of wonder (Green 2020, p. 208). It was Heschel who instilled the loftiness of radical amazement in his students’ minds (Heschel [1951] 1997, pp. 11–21). Wondering was deeper, more fundamental than knowledge. Wonder uncovers the deepest meaning in reality. It points to the mystery and sacredness of life and to the grandeur and beauty in nature. It reveals the ineffable—the mystery beyond words—beyond logics and judgment. Wonder opens the soul to the enigma in life. Heschel made his students aware of the world as an allusion. There is more than perception. In radical amazement, one encounters the depth of reality. For Heschel, we are in touch with this depth dimension and approach it in indicative rather than in descriptive terms. Heschel’s great teaching on radical amazement made it possible for Green to develop a perspective or “inner eye” that uncovered the One beyond and in the many (Green 2010, p. 22, 2020, p. 209). He wonders and approaches evolution as the self-development of the One.

2.5. Revelation

Revelation is usually defined as the communication of God with human beings. God is presented as a person, who speaks to Moses from a mountaintop and gives him the Law. In Green’s creative reinterpretation of revelation, inspired by Kabbalist and Hasidic masters, the divine Self or the divine Name present in creation, is uniquely—not exclusively—revealed at Mount Sinai (Green 2020, pp. 169–76). The universal One wants to be known by the human beings, who articulate the ineffable in words. Green refers to the Sages who commented upon the verse “Moses spoke and God responded in a voice” (Ex. 19:19); they thought that God spoke in the voice of Moses (Berakhot 45a). The divine Inhabitation spoke through the throat of Moses (*shekhina medaberet mi-tokh gerono*). Moses’s mouth translated the Divine; his face radiated.

Green offers an alternative for a God in heaven, descending upon a mountain, and commanding human beings who have to negate their selves and to be submissive to his authority. He invites his readers to consider the Torah or divine wisdom as a well flowing from deep in the earth. “Sinai is a vertical metaphor for an inner event” (Green 2020, p. 172). Accepting the Torah is accepting the divine presence in humans and in human actions. Each human being does so in his or her unique way.

3. Juxtaposing Traditions

Revisiting the classical notions of God and creation as well as God and revelation, Green formulates his theology in universal terms. Reframing his Judaism, he deems that Judaism is closer to Eastern religious teachings than usually expected (Green 2010, p. 14). He did not elaborate on this nearness, which is the aim of the present study. In the following, I show the similarities and dissimilarities between Green’s panentheist monism on the “all-encompassing oneness of Being” (Green 2010, p. 63), Anantanand Rambachan’s Hindu view on the one and the many, and Thich Nhat Hanh’s Buddhist thought on the oneness of all, on the all in one and the one in all.

4. Rambachan’s Understanding of Advaita

Anantanand Rambachan’s understanding of Advaita (not-two) comes close to Green’s non defensive reformulation of God and creation. This well-known Hindu scholar argues that Advaita is not the negation of the many into one (Rambachan 2014, p. 7). Against other interpretations of Advaita, Rambachan argues that Advaita is not world-renunciation; it is rather world-affirming. The world is, therefore, not an illusion or unreal; it is “a celebrative expression of *brahman*’s fulness, an overflow of *brahman*’s limitlessness” (Rambachan 2014, p. 7). The world’s value “is derived from the fact that it partakes of the nature of *brahman* even though, as a finite process, it can never fully express or limit *brahman*” (ibid.). Rambachan insists that the world is “the outcome of the intentional creativity of *brahman*, expressing and sharing *brahman*’s nature” (ibid.) He concludes: “Not-two (advaita) is not to be construed simplistically as one” (Rambachan 2014, p. 8). Formulated more succinctly: not-two is not one.

4.1. Liberating the World

It is this understanding of Advaita that allows Rambachan to formulate his liberation theology that takes the world seriously as participating in the nature of *brahman*. His theology aims at liberating people from patriarchy, homophobia, anthropocentrism, childism and caste. This theology is based upon an understanding of creation as *brahman*’s self-multiplication. The many are dependent on the one, they do not exist separately from the one. They are sharing in the nature of *brahman*, but they are not *brahman*.

In a recent book chapter, Rambachan elucidates further his understanding of Advaita or not-two (Rambachan 2023, chap. 1). Not-two is not pantheism that equates the one with the many. Neither is not-two panentheism, since for panentheism the many exist within the one, which is still dualistic. Advaita is further not a monism in which there is only the Real Self. Monism, Rambachan explains, affirms the one at the expense of the many. Finally, he disagrees with the understanding of not-two as illusionism, for which the many are but a dream.

In his interpretation of Advaita, Rambachan takes the world, its suffering and its mending seriously. At the same time, the world is valued in the nondual relationship. The world is not ontologically independent. It is not independent of the one. Human nature is not different from *brahman*. The nature of the self, *atman*, is *brahman*. This understanding of Advaita in which *brahman* is “the totality of all that exists” allows Rambachan to construct

his liberation theology that does not aim at being free *from* the world but *for* the world. Liberation (*moksha*), —he expounds—, is the removal of deep ignorance (*avidya*) of the special relationship between the one and the many. Referring to and commenting upon Chapter 6 of the Chandogya Upanishad, he explains that the relationship between the one and the many is like the relationship between clay and objects of clay. Clay is the reality; it is always present in the objects of clay. Objects of clay emerge from clay. Gold is present in gold ornaments. In the same manner, the many emerge from the One and express a “single ontological source.” It follows that one should not devalue the many, just as gold does not lose its nature in gold ornaments. This is expressed also in the Bhagavadgita (13:28;18:20): “One who sees the great Lord existing equally in all beings, the imperishable in the perishable, truly sees.” Rambachan comments that the eyes of the liberated see in a transformed way. They see the world “as brahman’s marvelous outgoing and as a celebrative expression of its fulness.”

4.2. Between Rambachan and Green

In his own theology Green detects the divine in the deeper layers of reality. For him too God is not ontologically other. With his neo-mystical thoughts, he draws our attention to the necessity of liberation as the uncovering of the divine nature in the ongoing process of evolution. Although Green does not define himself as an activist, his vision that *Einsof* (Infinity) expresses itself in the finite reality has clear social, economic and political implications. As in Rambachan’s interpretation of Advaita, Green’s nondualism means that not-two does not mean one: the Divine is in the world and embraces it. Green’s understanding of humans as “self-articulation” or “self-fulfillment” of the One comes near to Rambachan’s understanding of creation as self-multiplication of *brahman* (Green 2010, p. 27; Rambachan 2014, p. 144). Like Rambachan who strives to liberate people, Green considers humans as partners of the One in moving the evolutionary process forward (Green 2010, p. 26). Rambachan’s “dual seeing” corresponds to Green’s view that God is only epistemologically other.

For Green and Rambachan, the world is not the other of God. In Green’s terminology, the world in its deepest sense—the ongoing process of life energy—, is nothing less than divine “self-manifestation” and divine “self-disclosure” (Green 2010, p. 20). In a parallel manner, Rambachan builds his liberation theology on the insight that *brahman* is present in all that lives. Their effort of mending the world follows from their insight that the One is “the single unifying substratum of all that is” (Green 2010, p. 19) and that *brahman* is equally and identically present in all. Rambachan’s thoughts on the one God (*ekam sat*) as present everywhere corresponds to Green’s central point in his creation theology which is summarized in the words of Isaiah: “The earth is full of His glory” (Is. 6:3). In Green’s theology the One is “garbing itself in the multicolored garment of diversity and multiplicity” (Green 2010, p. 24).

In both Rambachan’s Hindu theology and Green’s neo-mysticism the word “God” is focal, although Green demythologizes the word more than Rambachan. Their use of the word “one” does not conceal the existence of the “many”. In Green’s mysticism the one “garbs” itself in the multiplicity and the multiple are “masks” of the one, whereas Rambachan develops a liberation theology that values the world as a manifestation of *brahman*.

With all the communalities between Green and Rambachan, their views are not entirely congruent. As mentioned, Rambachan differentiates between nonduality and panentheism as well as between nonduality and monism. He insists that the one and the many are not two. Not-two is a way of “dual seeing, without division or separation.” Affirming that nothing exists without the one, he does not overvalue the one, nor does he devalue the world.

5. Nhat Hanh's Zen Buddhist Oneness

Thich Nhat Hanh's teachings too show great parallels to Green's theology. In Nhat Hanh's Zen Buddhism one may detect notions that are similar to what Green finds in the esoteric Jewish literature. Both remark that there are interconnections among all that lives. Like Green, who finds transcendence in immanence, Nhat Hanh uncovers the deeper layer in all that is. This layer becomes manifest through meditation that allows the meditator to transcend her usual perceptions and become connected with everyone and everything.

5.1. Between Green and Nhat Hanh

In "trans-difference", the common platform is important, but so is the specificity of each culture. In trans-difference emphasis is upon unity as well as upon undeniable differences. Although there are parallels between Nhat Hanh and Green, dissimilarities should be noted. The "oneness" in Nhat Hanh's Buddhist meditations differs from Green's theology in that Nhat Hanh emphasizes the radical interconnectedness of all, whereas Green's "one" is based upon the God-talk in the Kabbalist and Hasidic tradition.

Nhat Hanh calls our attention to the fact that "one is present in all and all are present in one" (Nhat Hanh [1988] 2020, p. 58). He quotes the Avatamsaka Sutra: "One is all, all is one" (ibid.). Each one is all. Paradoxically Nhat Hanh writes, for instance, that the sun is his heart or that he is the river. He is not separated from all that is; all is linked. The one is in the multiple and the multiple is in the one. On first sight, this is parallel with Green's nondualism. Yet, a *caveat* is needed. Following the Avatamsaka Sutra, Nhat Hanh deems that inner and outer, one and many, are mere conceptions (Nhat Hanh [1988] 2020, p. 70). Space and time, which are themselves interrelated, collapse in this thinking. Ideas as finite and infinite, before and after, inside and outside, are broken down (Nhat Hanh, p. 72). In a way, Nhat Hanh's Zen Buddhist thoughts are more radical than Green's radical theology. His nondualism goes deeper. There is no separation between "one" and "many"; unity and diversity inter-are. "Unity is diversity. This is the principle of interbeing and interpenetration in the Avatamsaka Sutra" (Nhat Hanh [1988] 2020, p. 61). For Nhat Hanh, the insight of interdependency frees from the idea of "one-many" (ibid.).

Nhat Hanh's point is that everything is interdependent. Consequently, thinking of "one" and "many" is misleading. It is a mental construct; it only appears to be as such. Nothing is separated. Indeed, the Avatamsaka Sutra's image of Indra's jeweled net illustrates the oneness in multiplicity and multiplicity in oneness. In Indra's net there is an infinite variety of gems, and each gem reflects each other gem. Of course, Green too notes that there are interconnections among all that lives. Yet, his theology uncovers the divine as the depth dimension in life. Given the interwovenness of everything, Nhat Hanh does not differentiate between inner and outer. Through meditation, one cultivates mindfulness, an awareness that we "are everything" (Nhat Hanh [1988] 2020, p. 108). Without attachment or clinging to the 'self', one becomes aware of the relatedness of everything.⁴

Phrased differently: Green is concerned with the Divine or the One in the many, whereas Nhat Hanh's concern is rather the inter-being and interconnectedness that makes the logical concepts of one and all superfluous. Nhat Hanh's point is that, just as in science, particles do not have a separate existence, the meditator and the object of meditation are inseparable. Reality is interaction and interbeing. All is dependent upon all: "All is one" (Nhat Hanh [1988] 2020, p. 18). This does not mean that at the end of all there is a single entity. The many do not leave the one. There is no "one" per se. For Nhat Hanh oneness is foremost interdependence. His oneness is, therefore, not the divine One that underlies everything that is. It is the result of the awareness of the interwovenness of everything.

Another parallel between Nhat Hanh's teaching and Green's nondualistic theology concerns their criticism of objects of thinking, although Nhat Hanh's criticism is more

explicit and radical in deconstructing logical thinking. In Green's theology, God is not an object. Nhat Hanh's refuses the subject-object thinking since knower and known inter-are. Meditation and phenomena are interdependent. Mind and object are one (Nhat Hanh [1988] 2020, p. 55). In Nhat Hanh's poetic works, meditation and retreat make it possible to become aware of the interwovenness of everything: nothing is separated or independent.

Just as in Green's theology concepts make an object of God, Nhat Hanh denies that conceptual thinking gives access to the truth. In his poetical phrasing: water does not need containers, bottles or flakes to prove that water does not need measure or form to exist. One has to drop categories to encounter reality directly (Nhat Hanh [1988] 2020, p. 44). Everything is interrelated; nothing is independent. In his poetic formulation: to measure the saltiness of the sea, a grain of salt must enter the sea (Nhat Hanh [1988] 2020, p. 29). As mentioned, both Green and Nhat Hanh refuse the Cartesian subject-object thinking in which the subject remains imprisoned in itself. For Green, in wondering and in radical amazement—not in logical thinking—one meets miracles. In Nhat Hanh's poetic meditations, awareness opens our eyes for daily miracles.

Green teaches that with the "inner eye" we may uncover the depth dimension in human existence, —a life affirming energetic presence. This comes near to Nhat Hanh for whom it is meditation that offers deeper insights than the usual ones. However, in his creation theology, Green uses the word "God" in the sense that all that is constitutes the process of a "self-manifesting Being" (Green 2020, p. 208). In Nhat Hanh's nondualism the word God does not play a role.⁵ But like Nhat Hanh, the depth of life is discovered in a way of looking at the world. For Green this happens in radical amazement, for Nhat Hanh in meditation.

Both Green and Nhat Hanh pay special attention to the environment of which one has to take care. But their thoughts go beyond environmentalism. In a way that reminds us of Spinoza's *deus sive natura*, Green writes that nature could be another name for God (Green 2010, p. 25). Nhat Hanh too does not only care for environment. Nature is hugely important to him: "The earth is not just the environment. The Earth is *us*. Everything depends on whether we have this insight or not" (Nhat Hanh 2012, p. 27). His nondualism shows the profound interconnectedness between humans and nature (Meir 2025). To a great extent, Green's God, the "one", is identical with nature and evolution. In Nhat Hanh's oneness, this identification is absent. He pays attention to the interconnectedness by absence of a separated 'self'.

Another parallel arises when Green writes about the "mutual dependency" of everything and about "interrelationships" (Green 2010, p. 22). Nhat Hanh uses the term "interbeing", but the result is the same. Green's emphasis on love energy parallels Nhat Hanh's compassion for all, that is the result of awareness of interdependence.

Both Green and Nhat Hanh use poetic language and imaginary. Green does not conceive theology as a science but rather as an art, close to poetry. He is of course a scholar but uses his knowledge of Kabbalah and Hasidism to radically reformulate his Judaism and make it relevant for the world.

5.2. Coping with Evil

Inevitably, Green's approach to the Divine as the One that manifests itself in the many raises the question of the presence of evil. Is evolution not a brutal struggle for life rather than a meaningful process? Is Green's neo-mysticism too utopian, a product of a too optimist American Jew? Or is it rather the staunch belief in a continuous process and in the possibility of developing human capacities that reveal the divine in human existence? The latter seems to be more exact to describe Green's nondualism.

Like Nhat Hanh, Green is not purely contemplative.⁶ He is actively involved in the world. This means that he struggles to mend the world, to change it in the direction of what it is meant to be: a manifestation of the One. In other words: Green's mysticism is about the One that must be made manifest through working in a concrete messy world. He does not deny the violence in our biological evolution, but he looks with "the eye of wonder" upon the cooperating forces that make us "partner of the One" (Green 2010, pp. 25, 26). He firmly believes that there is a non-mechanic teleology hidden in what is: we are in a continuous process of which we become aware in a sense of wonder (Green 2020, p. 208). Green's teleology is not simplistically deterministic. It is rather based upon the unbreakable hope that deeper layers in human existence will continue to promote and enhance life, notwithstanding negative developments and the tendencies to destroy. Green recognizes with Kohelet that there are times of sorrow and of joy, of war and of peace. Following his line of thinking, we could reformulate the pre-ultimate verse of Kohelet (Eccl. 12: 13; *sof davar ha-kol nishma et elohim yere ve-et mitsvotav shmor ki ze kol ha-adam*) and state that mending the world is the eminent task of the human being. Criticizing an authoritarian, commanding God who punishes, rewards, and desires a uniform behavior, Green develops a view in which the Divine is dynamically present in all that fosters life and makes it thrive and flourish.

Nhat Hanh is famous for his non-discriminatory attitude, transcending all views. In times of conflict, he refuses to take sides. This does not mean that he is indifferent or that he approves of evil-doing. On the contrary, he wants people to be compassionate and help wherever they can. He compares his unusual attitude with that of a mother who looks at her rivaling children and only desires their reconciliation (Nhat Hanh [1988] 2020, p. 67). The mother chooses a "third way". She displays equanimity. Green's love and mercy are also inclusive and concern all who suffer. But he would not go as far as Nhat Hanh who teaches that one may recognize oneself even in the most inhumane human beings (Nhat Hanh [1988] 2020, p. 112)⁷. But is Green's awareness that God is everywhere and that all are created in God's image that far from Nhat Hanh's ultimate relatedness to all others who have to be assisted to realize their interconnectedness?

6. Multiple Interpretations of the One

Although not entirely overlapping, Green's creation theology and Rambachan's view on creation as "celebrative self-expression" of *brahman* come close to each other (Rambachan 2014, p. 69). The well-known Hebrew expression "He is the place of the world and his world is not his place" (*hu maqom shel olam ve-ein olamo meqomo*; Bereshit Rabba 68:9) parallels the previously mentioned Upanishad analogy of the relationship between clay and clay pots (Rambachan 2014, p. 66). The clay pot is clay but not vice versa. Without analogy: the world is an effect of *brahman*, it shares its nature, but it is not *brahman*. Green's nondual view on the One in all corresponds to Rambachan's view on the distinction between the finite and the infinite but also on their interconnectedness. Green and Rambachan distinguish between God and the world, without separating them. As against other Hindu interpretations that devalue the world Rambachan insists in his liberation theology that one should not deny the world, since the world stems from the fulness of *brahman*. The world expresses the limitless infinity. At the same time, "there is nothing with *brahman* and nothing *beyond brahman*" (Rambachan 2014, p. 68). In a capsulated form: not-two is not one.

Liberation—*moksha*—comes from the right understanding of the self as identical with the infinite *brahman* (Rambachan 2014, pp. 72–73). In paying attention to and freeing from suffering (*dukha*), by promoting justice, dignity and equality for all and opposing oppressive structures, people are transformed and brought to their deeper identity. Green and Rambachan emphasize the ethical implications of their worldviews. As mentioned,

Green's use of the word "love" still implies duality. For both thinkers, one's deepest identity is the unity with all others, to suffer with their sufferings and to be joyous with their joy. Rambachan refers to the insight of the Bhagavadgita (6:29) that the liberated one sees oneself in all beings and all beings in oneself.

Like Rambachan, Green puts the infinite at the center of his creation theology. Uncovering the depth dimension in life presupposes care and compassion. Green's Judaism for the world is based upon the memory of the liberation from slavery and upon the universality of the divine image in all (Green 2020, p. 234). In Rambachan's Hindu non-pantheist theology, liberation must be realized in the world since *brahman* is "equally and identically" present in everyone (Rambachan 2014, p. 191). However, again, Rambachan warns that Advaita does not merely describe the interrelated many, which is still compatible with dualism: the universe is the body of the one "so long as the many is sustained and unified by the one."

Both Green's nontheist panentheism and Nhat Hanh's engaged Buddhism imply the realization of social justice and of peace. This is the logical outcome of their visions. They are both profoundly concerned with the situation in Israel and Palestine. They see the suffering from all sides. Green speaks truth to power. He has compassion for all those who suffer, supports a two-state solution, and pleads for looking at the other as in the image of God, *be-tselem Elohim* (Green 2020, pp. 254–72). Nhat Hanh too has been involved in peacemaking through deep listening to the other's story. In 2003 he organized a retreat in Plum Village for Israelis and Palestinians. Meditation and deep listening are his tools. "Inner peace" allows him to become a peacemaker (Nhat Hanh [1988] 2020, p. 118). The precondition for bringing peace is for him being peace. Making peace is only possible in a peaceful manner (King 2009, p. 176). Changing oneself is the precondition for changing society. As Mahatma Gandhi said: "Be the peace you want to see." Inner peace leads to the healing of society. However, Nhat Hanh's Buddhism as "love in action" brings meditation and social action together. It is not restricted to not harming others; it actively promotes life. Similarly, his Buddhism is not only not steeling; it is exercising generosity (King 2009, pp. 26–27, 49).

7. Conclusions

All three thinkers deem that their worldview has universal significance: their creative thoughts are relevant for the world. Green's mystical, neo-Hasidic thoughts on the One accompany his creative interpretation of evolution. Against worldviews that deny the world, Rambachan endeavors to explain advaita (not-two) as a challenge for liberation. Nhat Hanh's inter-being with nature aims at creating inner peace. All three thinkers who reflect on the "one" value this world and are engaged in it. They are peaceful human beings concerned with peace in a broken world. For Green, Rambachan and Thich Nhat Hanh alike, the world of multiplicity is not ultimate; the ultimate reality is "one." Their innovative thinking is rooted in their respective particular traditions, which they reevaluate in view of what Jews call *tiqqun olam* (reparation of the world). Their positive approach to the world and to nature allows them to become engaged in world affairs and to bring changes in the political, cultural, social and economic fabric of their societies. Their commitment to and deep concern for liberation characterize their particular worldview endowed with universal significance. All three thinkers opt for activism as an outcome of their meditations.

Certainly, their ways of speaking are different, and these differences have to be acknowledged. Yet, with and beyond these differences, "trans-difference" brings them together in their concern for the relatedness of all. Reinterpreting his Judaism by using the language of the Jewish esoteric tradition, Green comes close to the teachings of Rambachan and Nhat Hanh. We have come full circle: Green's radical reinterpretation of Judaism comes near to the nondual philosophies of Hindu and Zen Buddhist thinkers. Discussing

the communalities between them confirms Green's feeling that his thoughts are parallel to some nondual Eastern teachings.

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Notes

- ¹ Scholars have extensively discussed Green's theology. See, for instance, Alan Brill in his blog "The Book of Doctrines and Opinions. Notes on Jewish Theology and Spirituality" of 1, 8 and 22 May 2010 and 18 February 2021. Shaul Magid perceives Green's theology as part of a growing trend in non-dualistic Judaism. He quotes the works of people who belong to the same trend (Magid 2013, p. 288, note 22). For a discussion of Green's radical Judaism, also in comparison with Zalman Schachter-Shalomi's pantheism, see (Magid 2013, pp. 97–106).
- ² I do not think that the question whether Green is a pantheist or panentheist has much relevance. He himself does not make a rigid distinction between them (Green 2010, p. 32). Basically, he claims that there is only one Being, beyond duality. For his views, Green was fiercely attacked by doctrinaire thinkers.
- ³ Green quotes Rabbi Yehuda Aryeh Leib of Ger, author of *Sefat Emet*, who claimed that there is nothing other than God (Green 2010, p. 77).
- ⁴ Too much attachment to the self is present in today's discussions on identity. In one of her poems Chelan Harkin asks the question "What is identity?" Her answer: "Asked the leaves, once part of the grand, noble oak, now just as content to flutter down and feed the forest floor."
- ⁵ In bringing Buddhism to the West, Nhat Hanh knew the theistic language of the West and occasionally translated his thought in a Western manner. In this sense, he wrote about God as the ultimate, who is "inside", "right here within us" (Nhat Hanh 2017, pp. 85, 107). The Kingdom of God is in the present (Nhat Hanh 2017, p. 90). In Judaism, God is also not far away but close to us (Deut. 30:11–13). He dwells "within" the Jewish people (Ex. 25:8).
- ⁶ Nhat Hanh developed what he called "an engaged Buddhism" that actively engages with the problems of society. For a broad discussion of engaged Buddhism: (King 2009).
- ⁷ The poem "Please call me by my true names" clearly expresses Nhat Hanh's relation to evildoers. Jews may know Nhat Hanh's nondiscrimination and nonjudgement from the Yom Kippur experience. Looking deeply, not taking sides or being nonjudgmental, one may discover that all are responsible for the evil that is performed. Moreover, if one is born in the same circumstances as the evildoer, chances are great that one becomes a pirate too (Nhat Hanh 1995, pp. 121–24). For a discussion of the poem: (King 2009, pp. 27–30).

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