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Tubali, S. 2023. *The Transformative Philosophical Dialogue: From Classical Dialogues to Jiddu Krishnamurti's Method*. Switzerland: Springer Cham, 258, HB, £99.99, ISBN: 978-3-031-40073-5.

1 Author

Shai Tubali is a post-doctoral researcher in the Philosophy department at the University of Leeds, UK. Originally from Israel, his Middle Eastern roots are not incidental to his argument for a multicultural form of dialogue put forward in *The Transformative Philosophical Dialogue: From Classical Dialogues to Jiddu Krishnamurti's* (2023). The author's evident grasp of different languages and epistemologies from across the globe enables him to present a carefully constructed, extremely well referenced, and highly original piece of scholarship. The lucid text has been clearly adapted from a doctoral thesis, and includes the signposting common with such a piece of writing. The author attempts to cover a vast amount of ground by "returning to beginnings of both Western and Eastern philosophies"1 that gave rise to the earliest recorded dialogues. This is a highly ambitious thesis, but one which the author – having evidently spent the better part of a couple of decades engaged in the issues discussed – successfully accomplishes.

According to Tubali's personal website, he aims to "make use of ancient mystical knowledge to enlighten our human experience,"2 synthesizing "meditation, psychological and emotional development, and intellectual study" in order to make life simpler for his students, not more complicated. There is a paradox at work in the author's own method that echoes that which he ascribes to Jiddu Krishnamurti (1895–1986): necessary accumulation of knowledge to recognize the limits of it, and, ultimately, transcend it. That notwithstanding, Tubali also has an open-ended aim of achieving "full mastery over our complex human existence".3 I will return to the problem of 'mastery' later in the review.

1 Shai Tubali, *The Transformative Philosophical Dialogue: From Classical Dialogues to Jiddu Krishnamurti's Method* (Switzerland: Springer Cham, 2023), 3.

2 https://shaitubali.com/. Accessed 07/07/2025.

3 https://shaitubali.com/. Accessed 07/07/2025.

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2 Series

The Transformative Philosophical Dialogue meets the criteria to sit within the Springer Sophia Studies in Cross-cultural Philosophy of Traditions and Cultures. The text carefully synthesizes European and Asian traditions, logically building the argument that the Indian mystic Krishnamurti implicitly developed a method of transformative dialogue that drew upon the Socratic method as presented through Plato, the guru-disciple conversations presented in the Ancient Hindu Upanishads, and emulated aspects of early Buddhist and Zen practices.4

3 Personal Transformation

Tubali's argument draws heavily upon the hermeneutic approach of the French Philosopher and Historian, Pierre Hadot (1922–2010); namely, Hadot's thesis in *Philosophy as a way of life* (1995), in which he posits that the contemporary philosopher often gives in to the temptation to lock himself into a refuge of conceptual analysis, "instead of going beyond discourse in order to take upon himself the risk of the radical transformation of himself."5 Hadot argues that in Ancient Greece, philosophy aimed at transforming the whole person, as opposed to its contemporary relegation to a professional discipline, with a "technical language reserved for specialists … as if philosophical depth were exhausted by one's ability to make use of conceptual abstractions and by one's skill at demonstrating the truth and falsity of various propositions."6 Thus, paradoxically, Tubali's rigorous doctoral thesis, examined via a Philosophy department renowned for its focus upon the Philosophy of Science, focusses explicitly for "transformation over theory."7

Via Hadot, Tubali argues that in the Ancient Greek context, philosophy was concerned with transformation through áskēsis (spiritual exercises). These were designed to shift the consciousness of the participant through coming to an aporíā (impasse), which would reveal the limits of intellectual inquiry

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4 Tubali, *The Transformative Philosophical Dialogue*, 47 and 61.
5 Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a way of life: spiritual exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, ed.
Arnold I. Davidson, trans. Michael. Chase (Maldon, MA: Blackwell, 1995), 31.
6 Hadot, *Philosophy as a way of life*, 32–33.
7 Tubali, *The Transformative Philosophical Dialogue*, 2. Having previously worked at the University of Leeds, I was curious to see that this thesis was supervised through its Philosophy department, and not Theology and Religious Studies.

and conceptual analysis, thereby via negativa revealing a transcendent state.8 Developing from Hadot's hermeneutic approach, Tubali offers a five-fold reading of transformative philosophy:9

1. Mystical experience: transformation of the mind leading to self-awareness beyond the register of the ego;10
2. Internal and external practices: designed to purge and ready the seeker to become fully receptive to embody the wisdom they experience through dialogue with their guide;11
3. Systematic discourse: breaking down any neat distinction between the observer and the observed, evidencing the dialectical and hermeneutic relationship between the two;12
4. Embodiment: remembering that abstract theory is not so removed from its objects of enquiry as it purports;13
5. Communal dialogue: a lived praxis from which classical texts emerged and engendered a particular type of lived, not abstractly theorized, philosophy.14

According to Tubali's Hadotian reading, classic philosophical dialogue was concerned with "actively and directly alter[ing] the interlocutor's mind,"15 with a telos of the subject becoming eternal through self-transcendence.16 Supplementing the Ancient Greek dialogue as read via Hadot, Tubali argues that Ancient Indian texts such as the Upanishads and Mahābhārata (and Bhagavadgītā therein) signify a transition from animistic practices and ritual based adherence through guru-disciple dialogue. The primary purpose of such dialogue, according to Tubali, was "essentially transformative rather than informative,"17 through which the 'tool' employed to inquire (i.e. the brain) was itself interrogated. The Buddha's teachings are presented as aiming to liberate listeners (not dialogic interlocutors) from suffering, by recognizing how its origins lie with the construction, and steadfast preservation, of an egoic

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8 Ibid.,
111. 9 Ibid.,
11.
10 Ibid.,
22. 11 Ibid.,
23.
12 Ibid., 24.
13 Ibid., 26. This links to the (uncited) work of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Philosophy in the flesh: the embodied mind and its challenge to Western thought* (New York: Basic Books, 1999).
14 Ibid., 30. 15 Ibid., 62. 16 Ibid., 27. 17 Ibid., 32.
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self. Through careful comparison of the Ancient Greek and Indian dialogic contexts, Tubali argues that whilst both are broadly concerned with transcendence and liberation of the self, the Greek model is more philosophically rigorous (step by step discussion, disputation), while the Indian one more mystical (direct, instantaneous realization18). Having spent the first half of the text presenting, and comparing, elements of both of these traditions, in the second half Tubali argues that there is a consistent method attributable to the mature Krishnamurti's dialogues.

Tubali's original contribution is that Krishnamurti unwittingly synthesized philosophical and mystical dialogues, which resulted in what the author coins an ironic transformative mystical dialogue.19 Tubali argues that this implicit method involves "*a process of questioning designed to block all ordinary pathways of thought with the intention to prepare the mind for an unfamiliar condition in which the activity of insight is made possible.*"20 Tubali deems this process as 'ironic' because it is self-defeating; it negates all teleological processes: "upon seeing false movement of thought, nothing can be done, since any further internal movement one may make is again the continuation of thought."21

4 Direct Awareness

Tubali presents a short biography of Krishnamurti's early life to better contextualise his mature dialogical practice from 1948 onwards. Krishnamurti's biography is authoritatively presented in Pupul Jayakar's *Krishnamurti: a biography* (1986),22 a text that Tubali understandably draws heavily upon. The young Krishnamurti is presented as intellectually rebellious, and insistent upon non-hierarchical engagement with interlocutors (in spite of being positioned in the guise of a messiah by key members of the Theosophical Society in the early twentieth century).

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Krishnamurti's 'method' is presented as non-hierarchical, collaborative inquiry, in which the teacher (Krishnamurti) aimed to embody and demonstrate his 'pedagogy'; namely, that of a paradoxical choiceless awareness of that which presented itself to, and via, the brain.23 Krishnamurti insisted that he

18 Ibid., 73.
19 Ibid., 142.
20 Ibid., 142. Italics from the original text.
21 Ibid., 130.
22 Pupul Jayakar, *J. Krishnamurti: a biography* (London: Arkana, 1986). 23 Tubali, *The Transformative Philosophical Dialogue*, 110.

was not interested in providing information, building conceptual systems, or persuading his participants of anything.24 Taking inspiration from Friedrich W. Nietzsche (1844–1900), who explicitly stated his distrust of all systematizers,25 Krishnamurti was primarily concerned with creative destruction: "'Through negation come to the positive; do not seek the positive, but come to it by understanding what it is not."26

Building upon the similarities to Nietzsche, Krishnamurti's implicit critical task was also similar to that of the neo-Marxist Frankfurt School Critical Theorist, Theodor W. Adorno (1903–1969).27 Like Adorno, Krishnamurti employed determinate negation to avoid the pitfall of either an Ancient Greek, or rational, scientific, Enlightenment rooted conception of the 'good'. According to Krishnamurti, recognizing an aporíā (although he understandably did not use such terminology, whilst Adorno did), would 'jolt' the brain into an awareness of its limitations, recognizing something other than conceptual discourse as a means to/of understanding. Rather, a perception of that which is would lead to a remembrance (anamnesis) of something prior to concepts.28 Tubali thus effectively demonstrates how Krishnamurti's method builds upon the Socrative dialogue of leading interlocutors to an aporíā, but also employs the Ancient Indian prioritization of direct, instantaneous, insight.29 Similar to a flash of lightning,30 this jolts the recipient (or, 'victim', according to normative discourse) into an altered state of awareness, resulting in a congruence between observer and the observed;31 transformative dialogue overcomes limits of dialogue by way of dialogue.32

24 Ibid., 178.

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25 Friedrich W. Nietzsche, *Twilight of the idols*, trans. Duncan Large (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 8: "I mistrust all systematists and avoid them. The will to system is a lack of integrity."
26 Jiddu Krishnamurti, *The Awakening of Intelligence*, ed George and Cornelia Wingfield Digby (London: Victor Gollancz, 1973), 358.
27 Sunny Dhillon, "Adorno, Jiddu Krishnamurti, and Critical Theory: Negative Dialectics and Non-identity Thinking," *Comparative and Continental Philosophy* 15, 3 (2023): 181–194.
28 Tubali, *The Transformative Philosophical Dialogue*, 23, 26, 86 and 156.
29 Ibid., 152.
30 There are numerous similar references to a jolt of lightning in the works of Nietzsche, too: Friedrich W. Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, trans. Marion Faber and Stephen Lehmann (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), 39–40; Friedrich W. Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth; Penguin, 2003), 219 and 299; Friedrich W. Nietzsche, "Beyond Good and Evil," in *Basic Writings*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: The Modern Library, 2000), 420.
31 Tubali, *The Transformative Philosophical Dialogue*, 155 and 162. 32 Ibid., 72.

Tubali bolsters his argument concerning the uniqueness of the method he attributes to Krishnamurti by interpreting his dialogues with prominent intellectuals throughout his life, and the varied responses he elicited. The crux of these is that Krishnamurti is *not* a philosopher, whilst his interlocutors repeatedly (and mistakenly) often aim to converse with him as one; in effect, seeking conceptual rigour and clarity through careful construction of arguments in classic dialectical fashion. Krishnmaurti steadfastly refuses to provide solid ground from which to build coherent and cohesive arguments.33 This is the central line of argument of Tubali's thesis and Hadot inspired hermeneutic approach, focusing on the method he has discerned through studying Krishnamurti's dialogues.

In sum, Tubali deems that in Krishnamurti's dialogic method, "the mystical tendency is stronger than the tendency towards philosophy, even philosophy of a transformative nature."34 Krishnamurti's emphasis is on "self-understanding without theory" and the irrelevance of "speculative concepts."35 Similar to how Hadot inspired a different reading of the goals of the Socratic dialogue to that of normative academic philosophical discourse, the implications of Tubali's thesis are that Krishnamurti may now be reinterpreted by scholars interested in his critical task as mystical in orientation, via employment and negation of philosophical methods. This is a radical thesis (in so far as 'radical' signifies getting to the 'root' of something), and will hopefully inspire further research into Krishnanmurti; for example, through the lens of Critical Theory (as this review's author has undertaken36), Nietzsche, and related thinkers such as Derrida, Deleuze and Guattati (among other in the field of twentieth

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century Continental Philosophy). Herein, however, lies a key problem with this type of discourse about Krishnamurti's method that will be explored in the next section.

5 Limitations

Following from the potential avenues for further research noted above, whilst appreciative of the limits of word count and scope, I would have liked the text to dedicate slightly more attention to the relationship between Nietzsche and Krishnamurti. Similar to how Adorno's relationship with Nietzsche has

33 Ibid., 173 and 176.
34 Ibid., 249.
35 Ibid., 249.
36 Dhillon, "Adorno, Jiddu Krishnamurti, and Critical Theory."

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been insufficiently explored,37 there is much to be proffered through exploring Krishnamurti's links to Nietzsche. For example, the latter's notion of the three metamorphoses of the spirit, and both thinkers' focus upon the importance of the play and creation of a child.38 Furthermore, the text could have briefly mentioned Krishnamurti's legacy on similar contemporary and later public mystics who have employed similar techniques; for example, Acharya Rajneesh (Osho) (1931–1990), Alan Watts (1915–1973), Anthony Paul Moo-Young (Mooji) (1954–) and Jagadish Vasudev (Sadhguru) (1957–).

Further to the above, the argument could have been bolstered through greater critical analysis of the problematic brain / mind distinctions made at times by Krishnamurti; for example, his assertion that certain modes of thinking lead to "brain cells mutating,"39 and observations concerning LSD and psychedelics that, according to Krishnamurti, remove "the space between observer and observed resulting in no observer."40 There is thus certainly scope for further neuroscientific research into Krishnamurti's comments about the brain. Also, if I have understood Tubali's description correctly, then the 'mind', as articulated by Krishnamurti appears to function similar to Carl G. Jung's (1875–1961) notion of a collective unconscious. The implications of this could also have been briefly further explored.

One last observation about a perceived omission in the text – before moving onto the key problem about these suggestions – is the lack of explicit reference to Gnosticism or gnosis. The transformative mystical dialogue attributed to Krishnamurti suggests that he satisfies criteria to be deemed a gnostic; in effect, one who 'knows' a perennial truth, and transmits it to interlocutors through his presence and demonstration, not by philosophical argument.

The above caveats notwithstanding, a key problem remains when constructing academic arguments about any aspect of Krishnamurti's critical task; it is likely that he would deem Tubali's text, this review, and the other potential avenues of research into his dialogues as distractions from undertaking the more important practice of silent awareness. Critical of the academic endeavour, Krishnamurti argued that "for most of us knowledge or learning has become an addiction and we think that through *knowing* we shall be

37 Gillian Rose, *The Melancholy Science: an introduction to the thought of Theodor W. Adorno* (London: Macmillan, 1978), 11–26.

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38 Consider Nietzsche's articulation of three metamorphoses of the spirit, from a burden carry camel, to a vengeful lion, to a playful and creative child. Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 54–55; Tubali, *The Transformative Philosophical Dialogue*, 102 and 127.
39 Tubali, *The Transformative Philosophical Dialogue*, 131, 135, 137 and 153–156.
40 Krishnamurti, *The Awakening of Intelligence*, 194; Tubali, *The Transformative Philosophical Dialogue*, p. 87.

creative. A mind that is crowded, encased in facts, in knowledge – is it capable of receiving something new, sudden, spontaneous?"41 Within numerous dialogues, often with academics from the disciplines of Philosophy, Psychology and Physics, Krishnamurti is at pains to remind his interlocutors and wider audience of the pitfalls of formal research. For example, in dialogue with the theoretical physicist David Bohm (1917–1992), Krishnamurti asks "why haven't fairly intelligent philosophers and religious people, who have spent a great part of their lives achieving, seen this very simple thing? Why haven't the intellectuals seen the simple fact that where there is accumulation there must be more? (DB): They've seen that but they don't see any harm in it. (K): I'm not sure they see it."42

Asserting that "self-improvement is the very antithesis of freedom and learning,"43 Krishnamurti would likely take issue with an aspiration for "full mastery over our complex human existence", as noted above on Tubali's website. Whilst not a criticism of the text, the author's project (and this review), would likely be seen by Krishnamurti with scepticism. Indeed, Krishnamurti's assertion that "the clerk, when he seeks to become a manager, becomes a factor in the creation of power-politics which produce war; so he is directly responsible for war,"44 can also be directed towards the academic. For example, when they seek to attain the award of a doctorate, title, accolade, publication etcetera, they are arguably enacting the same 'will-to-power' (to borrow from Nietzsche) that Krishnamurti deems to be the source of his contemporary socio-political issues. Furthermore, his following observation links appropriately to the academic endeavour, especially that of constructing and defending a doctoral thesis:

> Contradiction gives us an impetus to live; the very element of friction makes us feel that we are alive. The effort, the struggle of contradiction, gives us a sense of vitality. That is why we love wars, that is why we enjoy the battle of frustrations. So long as there is the desire to achieve a result, which is the desire to be psychologically secure, there must a contradiction; and where there is contradiction, there cannot be a quiet mind.45

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41 Jiddu Krishnamurti, *The First and Last Freedom*, ed. David Skitt (London: River, 2013), 165.
42 Jiddu Krishnamurti, *The Limits of Thought: Discussions between J. Krishnamurti and D. Bohm*, ed. R. McCoy (London; New York: Routledge), 122.
43 Jiddu Krishnamurti, *The Impossible Question* (London: Phoenix, 2003), 25.
44 Krishnamurti, *The First and Last Freedom*, 23. 45 Ibid., 67.

Constructing and defending academic arguments renders the researcher subject to power dynamics that, for Krishnamurti, merely regurgitate existing socio-political problems. To be an academic and undertake theses (and reviews like this), is, in Krishnamurti's reading noted above, to be an (unwitting?) addict. The academic endeavor is invariably ego led; the academic only publishes under a pseudonym when they do not wish to be identified, often for reasons concerning personal (egoic) safety.

6 Strengths

Whilst the above are meta-criticisms of any attempt to critically engage with Krishnamurti in academic fashion, taken at face value, Tubali's contribution, as noted earlier, certainly has much to proffer to a wide spectrum of readers. Tubali argues that to benefit from Krishamurti's method, the interlocutor must "succumb to a philosophically disruptive line of inquiry."46 In effect, they must transvalue logical disputation. Less charitably, they must do away with their rational faculties and rigour in favour of non-verifiable mysticism. There is evidently a non-philosophical hermeneutic that must be employed when engaging with Krishnamurti's lived example and provocations. For example, warning against what he deems to be the potentially noble, but limited, act of political demonstration, Krishnamurti offer the following: "You can't demonstrate, you have to live it. And when you live it; that in itself is a demonstration."47 Building upon the critique of the clerk who seeks promotion, or academic who desires publication, Krishnamurti deems it better to remain in silent awareness and 'live it', rather than engage in disputation or political demonstration. Tubali's thesis is, then, not about what Krishnamurti intellectually argues – for there is not much – but *how* he engages in his transformative mystical dialogue and proceeds via an implicit method along a pathless land. There is thus a utopian strand to Krishnamurti's critical task. This is likely a reason why his legacy

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continues to fascinate, but also frustrate. As Tubali poetically observes, with a nod to Nietzsche,48 "Krishnamurti treats

46 Tubali, *The Transformative Philosophical Dialogue*, 241.
47 Krishnamurti, *The Awakening of Intelligence*, 305.
48 Friedrich W. Nietzsche, *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 73: "We sit within our net, we spiders, and whatever we may catch in it, we can catch nothing at all except that which allows itself to be caught in precisely *our net*."

even the noblest ideals and the most cherished beliefs as nothing more than cobwebs on the window through which one hopes to see God."49

7 Conclusion

Overall, Tubali's text is an excellent addition to the relatively limited academic literature on the thought and legacy of Krishnamurti. Tubali satisfies criteria to situate Krishnamurti's transformative mystical dialogue as a "multicultural philosophy."50 The text will be of interest to readers along the spectrum of those fascinated to frustrated by Krishnamurti. I found the text to be very helpful in illuminating aspects of Krishnamurti's legacy that I had not sufficiently previously considered; namely, his implicit method. The text was very ambitious in scope, but withstands scrutiny. As an academic argument, it is suitably critical of Krishnamurti, and navigates the fine line between being philosophically robust, whilst paying fidelity to Krishnamurti's non-philosopher status. Whilst reiterating that it is reasonable to suggest that Krishnamurti would be sceptical, and likely dismissive, of a thesis (and review) about his critical task, Tubali's text is a highly recommended contribution to the literature on a key twentieth century figure that bridges any East–West intellectual divide.

Sunny Dhillon | ORCID: 0000-0002-6632-701X
Bishop Grosseteste University, Lincoln, UK
sunny.dhillon@lincolnbishop.ac.uk

49 Tubali, *The Transformative Philosophical Dialogue*, 150. 50 Ibid., 1.

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