

Dōgen on Buddha Nature

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I

DŌGEN (1200–1253) is one of the most outstanding and unique Buddhists in the history of Japanese Buddhism. He is unique in at least the following three senses.

First, rejecting all existing forms of Buddhism in Japan as unauthentic, he attempted to introduce and establish what he believed to be the genuine Buddhism, based on his own realization which he attained in Sung China under the guidance of the Zen Master Ju-ching (Nyojō, 1163–1228). He called it “the Buddha Dharma directly transmitted from the Buddha and patriarchs.” He emphasized *zazen*¹ (seated meditation) as being “the right entrance to the Buddha Dharma” in the tradition of the Zen schools in China since Bodhidharma, originating from Śakyamuni Buddha. Yet he strictly refused to speak of a “Zen sect,” to say nothing of a “Sōtō sect,” that he was later credited with founding. For Dōgen was concerned solely with the “right Dharma,” and regarded *zazen* as its “right entrance.” “Who has used the name ‘Zen sect’? No buddha or patriarch spoke of a ‘Zen sect.’ You should realize it is a devil that speaks of ‘Zen sect.’ Those who pronounce a devil’s appellation must be confederates of the devil, not children of the Buddha.”² He called himself “the Dharma transmitter Shamon Dōgen, who went to China”³ with

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¹ 坐禪

² *Sbōbōgenzō*, 正法眼藏, ed. Etō Sokuō. Iwanami-bunko edition (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1942) II (*Butsudō* 佛道), p. 217.

³ 入宋傳法沙門道元

DŌGEN ON BUDDHA NATURE

strong conviction that he had attained the authentic Dharma that is directly transmitted from buddha to buddha, and that he should transplant it on Japanese soil. Thus he rejected the idea of *mappō*⁴ i.e., the last or degenerate Dharma, an idea with wide acceptance in the Japanese Buddhism of his day. It may not be too much to say of Dōgen that just as Bodhidharma transmitted the Buddha Dharma to China, he intended to transmit it to Japan.

Secondly, though Dōgen came to a realization of the right Dharma under the guidance of a Chinese Zen master whom he continued to revere throughout his life, the understanding of the right Dharma is unique to Dōgen. With religious awakening and penetrating insight, Dōgen grasped the Buddha Dharma in its deepest and most authentic sense. In doing so, he dared to reinterpret the words of former patriarchs, and even the sutras themselves. As a result, his idea of the right Dharma represents one of the purest forms of Mahayana Buddhism, in which the Dharma that was realized in the Buddha's enlightenment reveals itself most profoundly. All of this, it is noteworthy, is rooted in Dōgen's own existential realization, which he attained in himself through long and intense seeking. Based on this idea of the right Dharma, he not only rejected, as stated above, all existing forms of Buddhism in Japan, but also severely criticized certain forms of Indian and Chinese Buddhism, though, it is true, he generally considered Buddhism in these two countries as more authentic than that in Japan.

The third reason Dōgen is unique in the history of Japanese Buddhism, is because of his speculative and philosophical nature. He was a strict practitioner of *zazen*, who earnestly emphasized *shikantaza*⁵, i.e., just sitting. His whole life was spent in rigorous discipline as a monk. He encouraged his disciples to do the same. Yet he was endowed with keen linguistic sensibility and a philosophical mind. His main work, entitled *Sbōbōgenzō*,⁶ "A Treasury of the Right Dharma Eye," perhaps unsurpassable in its philosophical speculation, is a monumental document in Japanese intellectual history. In Dōgen, we find a rare combination of religious insight and philosophical ability. In this respect, he may be well compared with Thomas Aquinas, born twenty five years after him.

⁴ 末法 ⁵ 只管打坐

⁶ The collection of Dōgen's discourses in Japanese, presently edited in 95 books or fascicles, which he delivered from 1231 to 1253. See p. 124

THE EASTERN BUDDHIST

He wrote his main work, *Sbōbōgenzō*, in Japanese, in spite of the fact that leading Japanese Buddhists until then had usually written their major works in Chinese. Dōgen made penetrating speculations and tried to express the world of the Buddha Dharma in his mother tongue by mixing Chinese Buddhist and colloquial terms freely in his composition. The difficult and unique style of his Japanese writing is derived from the fact that, in expressing his own awakening, he never used conventional terminology, but employed a vivid, personal style grounded in his subjective speculations. Even when he used traditional Buddhist phrases, passages, etc., he interpreted them in unusual ways in order to express the Truth as he understood it. In Dōgen, the process of the search for and realization of the Buddha Dharma and the speculation on and expression of that process are uniquely combined.⁷

In this paper I shall discuss Dōgen's idea of Buddha nature, which may be regarded as a characteristic example of his realization.

II

In the opening of the *Buddha nature* book of *Sbōbōgenzō*, Dōgen quotes the following passage from the Nirvana Sutra: 一切衆生悉有佛性 如来常住無有變易 (*Issai no sbujō wa kotogotoku bussbō o yūsu: Nyorai wa jōjūnishite benyaku arukoto nasbi*), "All sentient beings without exception have the Buddha nature: *Tatbāgata* (Buddha) is permanent with no change at all."⁸ This well expresses the fundamental standpoint of Mahayana Buddhism. In the passage two important themes are emphasized: "All sentient beings have the Buddha nature," and "*Tatbāgata* abides forever without change." These two themes are inseparable from one another.

Against this traditional reading, Dōgen dares to read as follows: "*Issai wa sbujō nari; sbitsuu wa bussbō nari; Nyorai wa jōjūnishite mu nari, u nari, benyaku nari.*" "All is sentient being, all beings are (all being is)⁹ the Buddha nature;

⁷ *Dōgenshū* (A Collection of Dōgen) ed. Tamaki Kōshirō, *Nihon no Shisō* II (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1969), p. 4.

⁸ The twenty seventh chapter "Lion's Roar Bodhisattva." [Taishō. Vol. 12, p. 522 C]

⁹ Since the Chinese characters 悉有 *sbitsuu* do not make distinction between singular and plural, *sbitsuu* means both "all being" in its entirety and "all beings" in their individuality. Dōgen actually uses the term in these two meanings according to context.

DŌGEN ON BUDDHA NATURE

Tatbāgata is permanent, non-being, being, and change."¹⁰ Since grammatically speaking, this way of reading is unnatural and might even be termed wrong, why does Dōgen read it in this manner? It is because this is the only way for Dōgen to express clearly what he believes to be the fundamental standpoint of Mahayana Buddhism. It is more important for him to rightly and correctly convey the Buddhist truth than to be grammatically correct. The crucial point in Dōgen's reading is the four Chinese characters of the first part of this passage, —悉有仏性—traditionally read (All sentient beings) "without exception have the Buddha nature," which he changes to read "All beings are the Buddha nature." Why did Dōgen believe that this strange way of reading more appropriately expresses the Buddhist truth? To answer this question I must explain the traditional interpretation of the sentence.

First, the term *sbujō*¹¹, *sattva* in Sanskrit, means all the living, i.e., living beings which are in samsara, the round of birth-and-death. Buddhist texts show that the term *sbujō* is interpreted in one of two ways: in its narrow sense it refers to 'human beings,' and in its broad sense, 'living beings.' Accordingly, *Isai no sbujō wa kotogotoku bussō o yūsu* means that not only human beings but also all other living beings have the Buddha nature. Buddha nature (*bussō*¹² in Japanese, *buddhata* in Sanskrit) refers to Buddhahood or the nature that enables man to become buddha, that is, to attain enlightenment. The second part of the passage, *Nyorai wa jōjūnibite benyaku arukoto nasbi*, "*Tatbāgata* is permanent, with no change at all" expresses the eternal, unchangeable truth a buddha awakens to.

Here one can see that in Buddhism human beings and other living beings are similar in that they have the Buddha nature and the capacity for attaining enlightenment. In this understanding, however, Buddhism must imply a basic dimension common to human beings and other living beings. This common dimension may be said to be *sbōmetsusei* 生滅性, *uspādanirodha*, the generation-extinction nature. Man's 'birth-and-death' (*sbōji* 生死) is a human form of 'generation-and-extinction' which is common to all living beings. Although the problem of birth-and-death is regarded in Buddhism as the most fundamental problem for human existence, Buddhism does not necessarily approach

¹⁰ *Dōgenbū* p. 146.

¹¹ 衆生 ¹² 佛性

this as a 'birth-death' problem on a 'human' dimension, but as a 'generation-extinction' problem on a dimension of 'living beings.'

Unless we are liberated from the very nature of generation-extinction common to all living beings, we human beings cannot rightly be liberated from man's birth-death problem. This is the reason why, in Buddhism, it is emphasized that man is in samsara, the endless round of transmigration from one form of life to another, and why man can be said to attain nirvana only by freeing himself from this endless round.

According to traditional Buddhist doctrine it is said that *sujā* transmigrate through six realms of existence: *naraka-gati* (the realms of hell), *preta-gati* (the realm of hungry ghosts), *tiryagyoni-gati* (the realm of animals), *asura-gati* (the realm of fighting spirits), *manusya-gati* (the realm of human existence), and *deva-gati* (the realm of heavenly existence). This concept of transmigration was derived from pre-Buddhistic Brahmanism, and was a reflection of the then world-view. We need not take the number six for the realms of existence seriously. What is essential in this connection is that these six kinds of living beings including human existence are all interpreted as transmigrating in *one and the same dimension*, the dimension of generation-and-extinction. Here one can see the dehomocentrism in the Buddhist understanding of man's basic problem and his salvation from it. An old Japanese poem says:

Listening to the voice of a singing mountain bird,
I wonder if it is my [dead] father
Or my [dead] mother.

The poet expresses his feeling of solidarity with all living beings that may transmigrate from one form of life to another. A bird thereby may have been one's father or mother, brother or sister in a previous life. This feeling of solidarity is inseparably connected with the realization of the generation-extinction common to all living beings.

In the West and in the East as well, the Buddhist idea of transmigration is often misunderstood as a transmigration simply from man to animal and from animal to other forms of life—without an awareness of its dehomocentric nature. If the idea of transmigration indicated a flow, in the homocentric dimension, from man to animal life and so on, it would be unacceptable. Dehomocentrism in this connection means to transcend the dimension of man's birth-

DOGEN ON BUDDHA NATURE

and-death to that of living beings' generation-and-extinction. Transmigration as samsara is emphasized in Buddhism simply because man's birth-death problem is believed to be fully solved only in the dehomocentric or transhomocentric dimension, i.e., the dimension of generation-extinction common to all living beings. And nirvana as the emancipation from samsara is understood to be attained only on this wider basis.

Accordingly, regarding the Buddhist idea of transmigration in terms of dehomocentrism, the following two points must be observed. First, the Buddhist idea of transmigration has nothing to do with animism, which believed in *anima* which exists apart from human bodies and things, and animates them, (although the above-cited poem might be understood to suggest an animistic idea.) The Buddhist idea of transmigration is not based on a belief in the independent existence of *spirit*, or *soul*, nor on the idea of the *stream of life*, but on the realization of *generation-and-extinction at each and every moment*. In reality the *endless* transmigration is inseparably connected with the realization of *momentary* generation-and-extinction. Here one can see the endlessness of transmigration as regards temporality.

Secondly, the so-called six realms of transmigratory existence do not necessarily mean that six different worlds stand somewhat side by side. For human beings this world is understood to be the human world in which animals and the like are living. For animals, however, this world is the animal world in which human beings are living as well. In this sense it is not that there are six worlds existing somewhere side by side, but that the boundless horizon of generation-extinction opens up, in which six kinds of transmigration are taking place. This shows the boundlessness of transmigration in its spatiality.

Thus transmigration in terms of dehomocentrism is endless and boundless in time and space. This endless and boundless dimension is nothing but the dimension of generation-extinction, in which, in the name of *sbujō* man and other living beings are not discriminated from each other. This means that Buddhism does not give a special or superior position to man over and against other living things with regard to his nature and salvation.

In this respect Buddhism is largely different from Christianity. As the Genesis story shows, Christianity assigns man the task of ruling over all other creatures and ascribes to him alone the *imago dei* through which he, unlike other creatures, can directly respond to the word of God. Man's death is understood

as the “wages of sin,” the result of his own free acts, i.e., rebellion against the word of God. Here, one can see homocentrism among creatures in Christianity. Accordingly, in Christianity there is a clear distinction between man and other creatures regarding their nature and salvation, with the former being given prominence over the latter. This homocentric nature is essentially related with Christian personalism in which God is believed to disclose himself as personality and in which a dialogical I-Thou relation between man and God is essential.

Then, does not Buddhism establish any distinction between man and other creatures? Is it that, in Buddhism, man has no special significance among creatures? The very realization of dehomocentrism is possible only to human existence which has self-consciousness. In other words, it is by transcending the human limitation that one comes to realize man’s birth-death as an essential part of a wider problem, i.e., the generation-extinction problem common to all living beings. This self-transcendence is impossible apart from “self-consciousness” on the part of human beings. Like human beings, animals, *asura*, and so on are all undergoing transmigration, equally confined by the nature of generation-extinction. Unlike human existence, however, other living beings cannot know transmigration as transmigration. Since only man who has self-consciousness can realize the nature of generation-extinction as such, this becomes for man a “problem” to be solved rather than a “fact.” When a “fact” becomes a “problem” the possibility of solving the problem is also present, i.e., the possibility to be liberated from transmigration. Because of this peculiarity of man, Buddhism emphasizes the need for him to practice Buddhist discipline to attain enlightenment while he, though transmigrating endlessly through other forms of life, exists *as a man*. ‘The rare state of man’ is, in Buddhism, highly regarded; one should be grateful he is born a man, for it is more difficult to be born a man than for a blind turtle to enter a hole in a log floating in an ocean. Unlike other creatures, man is a ‘thinking animal,’¹³ being endowed with the capability of carrying out the Dharma. Here one can see the Buddhist notion of man’s special position among all living beings. In this sense, Buddhism may be said to be homocentric as well.

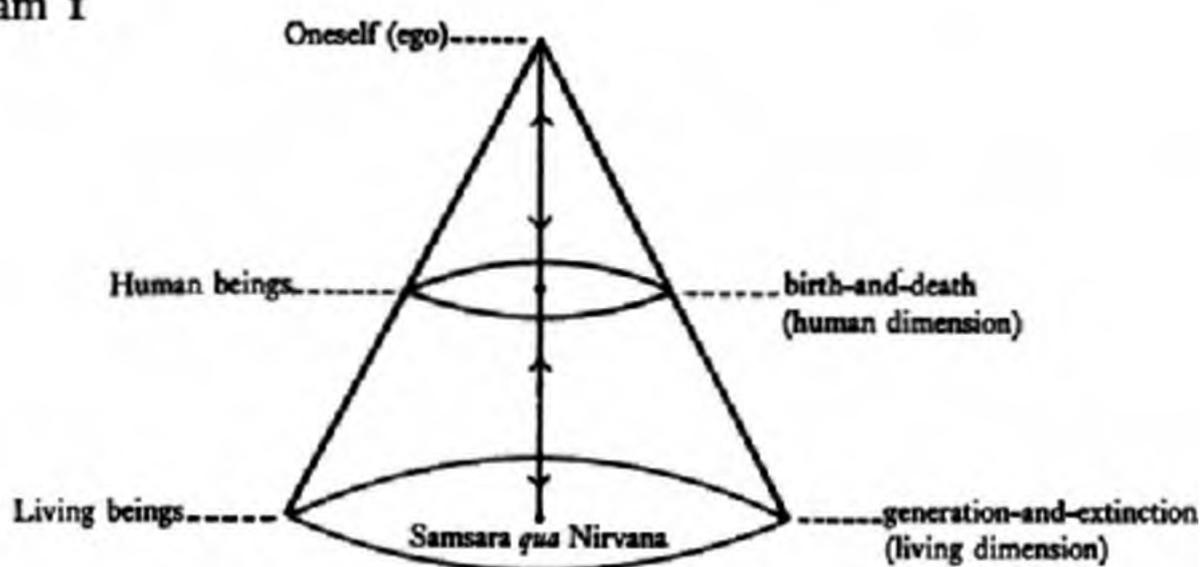
¹³ Sanskrit “*manuṣya*”, like the English term “man”, is etymologically connected with “*√man*”—to think. Nakamura Hajime, *The Ways of Thinking of Eastern Peoples* (Tokyo: Japanese National Commission for UNESCO, 1960), pp. 108–110.

DŌGEN ON BUDDHA NATURE

Further, the realization of transmigration is a personal realization for one's self (ego), not for human existence in general. Apart from one's self-realization there can be no "problem" of birth-and-death, generation-and-extinction. Only through one's self-realization one can attain nirvana by solving the problem of generation-extinction, i.e., the problem of samsara.

Buddhism is, it must be noted, primarily concerned with the liberation of human existence. In this respect it does not differ from Christianity. Yet, what Buddhism believes to be the fundamental problem for human existence, i.e., the problem of man's birth-and-death, can be solved not through a personalistic relationship with the word of God, but, as described above, only when the very nature of generation-extinction common to all living beings is done away with.

Diagram I



This refers to the fact that, while both Christianity and Buddhism are concerned primarily with the salvation of human existence, their *bases* for salvation differ:¹⁴ in Christianity it is personalistic, whereas in Buddhism it is cosmological. In the former, the personal relationship between man and God is axial, with the universe as its circumference; in the latter, man's personal suffering and salvation is accounted for in the impersonal, boundless cosmological dimension which embraces even a divine-human relationship.¹⁵

¹⁴ Nishitani Keiji, "The Personal and the Impersonal in Religion," *The Eastern Buddhist*, New Series Vol. III: No. 1 pp. 4-5.

¹⁵ See p. 58.

The Buddhist position indicates that if one attains enlightenment by freeing oneself from generation-extinction, all living beings simultaneously and in like manner are enlightened by being liberated from generation-extinction. This is simply because the generation-extinction itself, common to man and other creatures, is thereby overcome, and the unchangable Reality is now disclosed universally. According to a Buddhist tradition, upon his enlightenment Śakyamuni exclaimed: "Wonderful, wonderful! How can it be that all sentient beings are endowed with the intrinsic wisdom of the *Tatbāgata*?"¹⁶ Even though one believes he has himself attained enlightenment, if, from his point of view, other creatures are not enlightened as well, his enlightenment is not genuine. With one's realizing the Buddha nature, the possibility of which is possessed by every person, all living beings attain their Buddha nature. This is the meaning of the above quoted phrase from the Nirvana Sutra, "All sentient beings have the Buddha nature."

III

What is Dōgen's position in relation to this traditional understanding, why does he reject it and why does he read the phrase from the Nirvana Sutra in his peculiar way? Against the ordinary reading of the passage, "All *living* beings without exception *have* the Buddha nature," Dōgen reads it, especially the four Chinese characters 悉有佛性 as follows: "All *beings are* the Buddha nature." According to the traditional reading, it is understood that all living beings have the Buddha nature within themselves as the potentiality of becoming a buddha. Naturally this reading implies that, although all living beings are at this moment immersed in illusion, they can all be enlightened sometime in the future because of their potential Buddhahood. The Buddha nature is then understood as an object possessed and aimed at to be realized by the subject (living beings). In this understanding dichotomies of subject and object, potentiality and actuality, within and without, present and future, and so on are implied. This results in a serious misunderstanding of the basic standpoint of Buddhism. The traditional understanding of the Buddha nature not only does

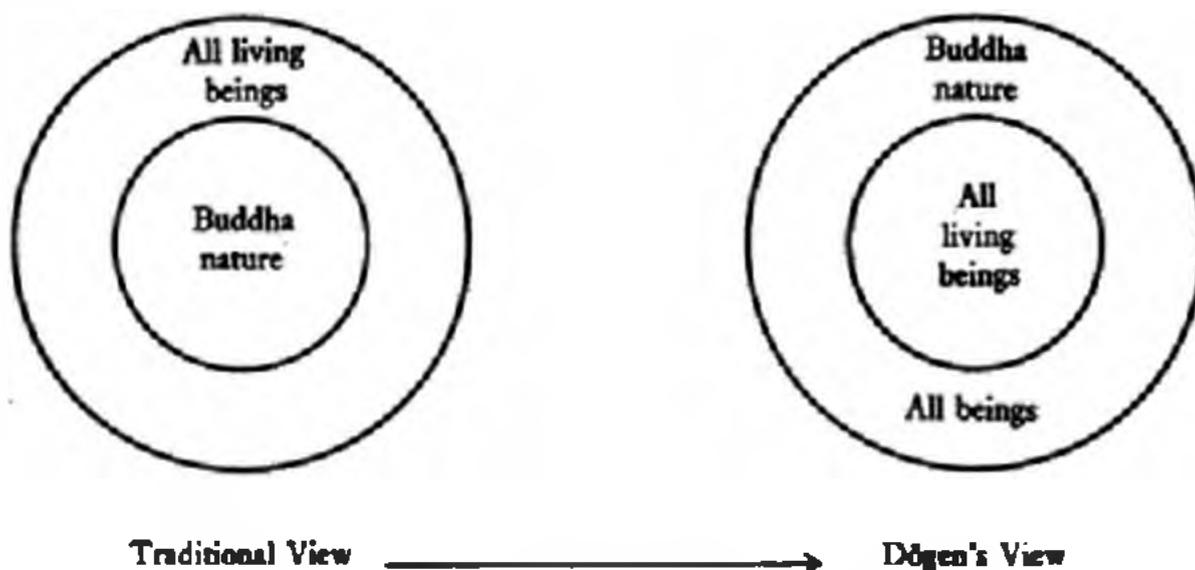
¹⁶ See Miura Isshū & Ruth Fuller Sasaki, *Zen Dust* (Kyoto: The First Zen Institute of America in Japan, 1966), pp. 253-5.

DŌGEN ON BUDDHA NATURE

not represent the right Dharma of Buddhism which Dōgen mastered and confirmed in himself but it is also against it. Thus he rejected the ordinary way of reading the passage with all the above implications, and gave a new reading, even though it meant violating grammatical rules, to clarify the right Buddha Dharma. As a result he reads *sbitsu wa bussō nari*, meaning “All beings are the Buddha nature.”

This involves a complete, radical reversal concerning the Buddha nature’s relation to living beings.

Diagram 2



For, in this understanding, the Buddha nature is not a potentiality, like a seed, which exists within all living beings. Instead, all living beings, or more exactly, all beings, living and nonliving, are originally Buddha nature. It is not a potentiality to be actualized sometime in the future, but the original, fundamental nature of all beings. In order to elucidate these two different understandings of the Buddha nature and to clarify Dōgen’s unique position, the following four points must be carefully observed: first, the dehomocentric nature of Buddhism; second, the nonsubstantial character of the Buddha nature; third, the nonduality of “all beings” and the “Buddha nature”; fourth, the dynamic idea of “impermanence-Buddha nature.”

[1] *The dehomocentric nature of Buddhism.* As I stated earlier, in Buddhism the problem of birth-and-death, the fundamental problem of human existence, is not necessarily treated as a birth-death (*sbōji*) problem merely within the ‘human’ dimension, but as a generation-extinction (*sbōmetsu*) problem within

THE EASTERN BUDDHIST

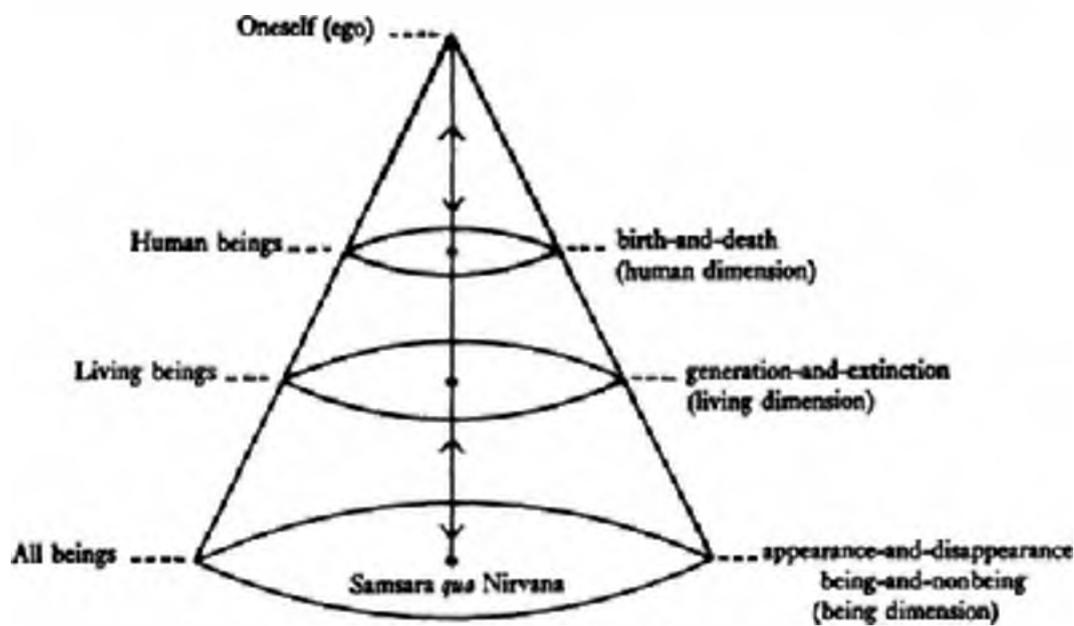
the total 'living' dimension. It is in this dehomocentric, living dimension that the Buddhist idea of transmigration (samsara) and emancipation from it (nirvana) are understood. By emphasizing "All beings are the Buddha nature" Dōgen carries the dehomocentrism of Buddhism to its extreme, by going beyond the 'living' dimension. 'All beings,' needless to say, includes living as well as non-living beings.

The dimension of all beings is no longer that of generation-extinction, but that of appearance-disappearance (*kimetsu* 起滅) or being-nonbeing (*umu* 有無). The 'living' dimension, though transhomocentric, has a life-centered nature that excludes nonliving beings. The 'being' dimension, however, embraces everything in the universe, by transcending even the wider-than-human 'life-centered' horizon. Accordingly the 'being' dimension is truly boundless, free from any sort of centrism, and deepest precisely in its dehomocentric nature.

Diagram 3



Diagram 4



DŌGEN ON BUDDHA NATURE

When Dōgen emphasizes “all beings” in connection with the Buddha nature, he definitely implies that man’s samsara, i.e., recurring cycle of birth-and-death, can be properly and completely emancipated not in the ‘living’ dimension, but in the ‘being’ dimension. In other words, it is not by overcoming generation-extinction common to all living beings, but only by doing away with appearance-disappearance, or being-nonbeing common to all beings, that man’s birth-death problem can be completely solved. Dōgen finds the basis for man’s liberation in a thoroughly cosmological dimension. Here Dōgen reveals a most radical Buddhist dehomocentrism.

Accordingly, one may readily understand why Dōgen refuses the ideas of permanent ego or *ātman*, and of organicism. In the *Buddha nature* book Dōgen severely attacks as not representing the genuine Buddhist standpoint the Senika heresy,¹⁷ which emphasizes the immutability of *ātman* or selfhood and the perishability of the body, a view whose western equivalent may be the Platonic immortality of the soul or the Cartesian thinking ego. In the same book he also refutes as false the view of those who think “the Buddha nature is like the seeds of grasses and trees. When it is well wetted and nourished by the Dharma rain, it may bud and shoot out branches, leaves, and fruit themselves swelled with seeds.”¹⁸ This is a teleological or organicistic view of the Buddha nature. The Aristotelian idea of *dynamis* and *energeia*, and various Renaissance philosophies, might perhaps be cited in comparison.

Rejecting these two views altogether, Dōgen often emphasizes that “Throughout the universe nothing is ever closed.”¹⁹ This clearly refers to the complete disclosure of ‘all beings’ (*shitsuu*), including man, living and non-living beings within the limitless universe, which is radically dehomocentric and ontological.

[2] *The non-substantial character of Buddha nature.* Dōgen’s idea, “All beings (*shitsuu*) are the Buddha nature,” as discussed above, opens up a limitless dimension for the Buddha nature. In Dōgen, the Buddha nature, the ultimate Reality, is realized precisely in this infinite and ontological dimension in which all beings can exist respectively as they are. This idea of the Buddha nature may suggest Spinoza’s idea of God as Substance which is also called

¹⁷ See p. 145.

¹⁸ *Sbōhōgenzō* I (*Bussbō* 佛性), p. 317.

¹⁹ 論界不曾闕 *ibid.* p. 316.

“nature” and which is absolutely infinite, with finite beings as His “modes.” Despite real similarities between them, Dōgen’s idea of the Buddha nature is radically different from Spinoza’s idea of God precisely because Dōgen’s Buddha nature is not a substance.

In the *Buddha nature* book Dōgen says, “What is the essence of the World Honored One’s (Śakyamuni) words ‘Everything is a living being: all beings are the Buddha nature’? They are a verbal preaching of ‘What is it that thus comes?’”²⁰ The question “What is it that thus comes?” is found in the conversation that took place at the first meeting between the sixth Patriarch Hui-neng (Enō, 638–713) and Huai-jang of Nan-yüeh (Nangaku Ejō, 677–744).

The Patriarch asked: “Whence do you come?”

“I come from Tung-shan.”

“What is it that thus comes?”

Nan-yüeh did not know what to answer. For eight long years he pondered the question, then one day it dawned upon him, and he exclaimed,

“Even to say it is something does not hit the mark.”

The question, “*What* is it that *thus* (*immo ni*) comes?”²¹ that Huai-jang took eight years to solve refers to the Buddhist Truth, and in Dōgen’s present case, to the essential point of the words, “All beings are the Buddha nature.” Even the first question “*Whence* do you come?” is not an ordinary question. Zen often indicates the ultimate Reality beyond verbal expression by interrogatives as well as by negatives such as “nothingness” and “emptiness.” An interrogative “what” or “whence” is that which cannot be grasped by hand, that which cannot be defined by intellect; it is that which can never be objectified: it is that which one can never obtain, no matter what he does. Indeed, “what” or “whence” is unknowable, unnamable, unobjectifiable, unobtainable, and therefore limitless and infinite. Since the Buddha nature is limitless and boundless, without name, form, or color, it can be well, indeed best, expressed by such an interrogative. This is the reason Dōgen finds the essence of his idea “All beings are the Buddha nature” precisely in the question “*What* is it that thus comes?”

²⁰ *Sobōgenzō* I (*Bustō*), p. 315.

²¹ 是什麼物怎麼來

DŌGEN ON BUDDHA NATURE

This does not, however, mean that for Dōgen Buddha nature is *something* unnamable, and unobtainable, *something* limitless and boundless. If the Buddha nature were *something* unnamable it would not be truly unnamable because it is something *named* "unnamable." If the Buddha nature were *something* limitless it would not be really limitless because it is *limited* from something limited. Therefore, for Dōgen the Buddha nature is not *something* unnamable, but *the unnamable*. Yet, at the same time *the unnamable is the Buddha nature*. The Buddha nature is *the limitless*, yet at the same time *the limitless is the Buddha nature*. This simply means that for him the Buddha nature is *not something whatsoever*, even in a negative sense: in other words it is *not substantial* at all. Accordingly, an interrogative such as "what" or "whence" does not *represent* the Buddha nature. If it did, then the Buddha nature would have to be *something* existing *behind* and being represented by "what." Since the Buddha nature is not substance, "what" is immediately the Buddha nature and the Buddha nature is immediately "what."

This being so, the question "What is it that thus comes?" is completely a question, and the word "what" is also thoroughly an interrogative. Yet, at the same time "what" is not a sheer interrogative, but is the Buddha nature. Again "What-is-it-that-thus-comes" is not a mere question, but is a realization of the Buddha nature.

Spinoza's idea of God as Substance is of course not something. Since in Spinoza God is the Substance of so-called substances, He is really infinite and the one necessary being. However, Spinoza's idea of God as Substance cannot in itself be properly called "what,"—though it might be so called from the side of relative substances and finite beings—because "Substance" is that which is in itself and is conceived through itself; it can be conceived independently of the conception of anything else.²² In other words, for Spinoza God may be said to be "what," but it is not that "what" is God. This is because in Spinoza God is Substance.

The difference between Dōgen's idea of the Buddha nature and Spinoza's idea of God as Substance may be clearer if we take into account their relations to things in the universe. In Spinoza the One God has, in so far as we know, two

²² *Ethics*, tr. by R. H. M. Elwes, in *Philosophy of Benedict de Spinoza* (N.Y.: Tudor Publishing Company, n.d.) Part I, def. 3.

“attributes,” thought (*cogitatio*) and extension (*extensio*); particular and finite things are modifications, being called the “modes” of God, which depend upon, and are conditioned by, the divine and infinite being. This clearly shows the monistic character of Spinoza’s idea of God from which everything else is derived and by which everything else is conceived. Yet, the very ideas of “attribute” and “mode” involve a duality between God and the World, in Spinoza’s terminology, between *natura naturans* (the active nature) and *natura naturata* (the passive nature), a duality with the priority of the former. In sharp contrast to this, Dōgen’s Buddha nature is not *natura naturans* which is distinguished from *natura naturata* i.e., the created world. Accordingly, particular things in the universe are not “modes” of Buddha nature. Nor is there any exact equivalent to Spinoza’s idea of “attribute” in Dōgen’s idea of Buddha nature because the idea of “attribute” is meaningless in a non-substantial Buddha nature.

Then, what significance do particular things, and particular qualities have for the Buddha nature? Since the Buddha nature is non-substantial, no particular thing or particular quality in the universe corresponds to, or is represented by, Buddha nature. In terms of mode and attribute, for Dōgen each particular thing is a mode of “what”; each particular quality is an attribute of “what”. A pine tree, for instance, is not a mode of God as Substance, but a mode of “what”, namely a mode without modifier. Therefore, a pine tree is really a pine tree in itself, no more no less. This refers to the pine tree’s “*thus comes*” in the above “What-is-it-that-*thus comes*”. Again, thought is not an attribute of God as Substance, but an attribute of “what”, an attribute not attributed to anything. Accordingly, thought is just thought in itself, no more no less. This again refers to the thought’s “*thus comes*”.

When the sixth Patriarch asked Huai-jang “*What is it that thus comes?*” the question directly pointed to Huai-jang himself as an independent and individualized personality that will not allow surrogation. Huai-jang is not a creature determined by God as Substance. He may be said to be something coming from “what,” something determined without determinator. Determination without determinator is self-determination, freedom, and selfhood, which are but different terms for the Buddha nature. If Huai-jang had realized himself as that which “*thus comes*” from “what,” he would have realized his Buddha nature. It took Huai-jang eight years to solve this question and say, “Even to say it is *something* does not hit the mark!”

DŌGEN ON BUDDHA NATURE

Huai-jang in himself is “What-is-it-that-thus-comes.” However this is not the case only for him. You and I as well are precisely “What-is-it-that-thus-comes.” Trees and grasses, heaven and earth, are equally “What-is-it-that-thus-comes.” *Cogitatio* and *extensio*, mind and body, are respectively “What-is-it-that-thus-comes.” Everything without exception in the universe is “What-is-it-that-thus-comes.” This is precisely the meaning of Dōgen’s “All beings *are* the Buddha nature.” It is the reason Dōgen recognized that the sixth Patriarch’s question “What is it that thus comes?” involves the essence of his above idea.

Like Dōgen’s idea of the Buddha nature, Spinoza’s idea of God is eternally infinite, absolutely self-sufficient, self-determining, and self-dependent. However, for Spinoza, the perfect monist, the relationship between the One Substance and the multiplicity of finite beings is understood *deductively*. In marked contrast to this, in Dōgen the relationship between Buddha nature and all finite beings is not deductive, but *nondualistic*, precisely because the Buddha nature is *not* One Substance. All beings without exception are *equally* and *respectively* “What-is-it-that-thus-comes.” Even God as the One Substance in Spinoza’s sense cannot be an exception to this. In other words, from Dōgen’s point of view, God as the One Substance is, prior to being so called, “What-is-it-that-thus-comes.” So far, there is no difference, no deductive relation, between God and finite beings in the universe. This all embracing, even-God-or-Substance-embracing “What-is-it-that-thus-comes” in itself is the Buddha nature in the sense of Dōgen’s words, “All beings are the Buddha nature.”

Accordingly, in Dōgen the Buddha nature is neither transcendent nor immanent. One of the characteristics of Spinoza’s philosophy lies in the immanent character of his idea of God—*Deus sive natura* (God or nature). Spinoza rejected the orthodox theological doctrine of a transcendent personal God who creates and rules the world with will and purpose. He emphasized God as the infinite cause of the necessary origination of all entities. In this sense, Spinoza’s position is much closer to Buddhism in general, and to Dōgen in particular, than orthodox Christianity. As Richard Kroner, however, speaks of Spinoza, “All individuality is finally swallowed up by the universality of the One God who alone truly Is.”²³ This may be the reason Spinoza’s system is called pantheism.

²³ *Speculation and Revelation in Modern Philosophy* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, n.d.), p. 126.

THE EASTERN BUDDHIST

In Dōgen however the statement "All beings are the Buddha nature" does not indicate that all beings are *swallowed up* by the Buddha nature. Instead, as he stresses "Throughout the universe nothing is ever closed," every particular thing in the universe manifests itself in its individuality simply because the Buddha nature is not a substance, but a "what." For Dōgen, all beings are "swallowed up" *bottomlessly* by the Buddha nature; yet at the same time the Buddha nature is also "swallowed up" *bottomlessly* by all beings. This is because all beings (*shitsuu*) and the Buddha nature are nondualistic and therefore the Buddha nature is neither immanent nor transcendent (or both immanent and transcendent). Thus, despite frequent misunderstandings to the contrary, one may readily notice that Dōgen is not a pantheist however pantheistic his words may appear at first glance. Indeed, he is as unpantheistic as he is nontheistic.

IV

[3] *Nondualizy of "all beings" (shitsuu) and the "Buddha nature."* With the idea "All beings are the Buddha nature," Dōgen carries the nonhomocentric nature of Buddhism to its ultimate end, by transcending the dimension of generation-extinction (traditionally considered the realm of man's transmigration and the basis for his liberation from it) to the dimension of appearance-disappearance, or the dimension of being-nonbeing that is common to all beings, living or nonliving. Again, for Dōgen, only on this infinite, ontological basis common to all beings can man's problem of birth-and-death be properly and completely resolved. However Dōgen's is not different from the traditional interpretation in respect that only through man's self-consciousness is his radical transcendence to the dimension of being-nonbeing possible. For man's problem of birth-and-death is essentially a subjective problem with which each person must individually and consciously cope. Buddhist nonhomocentrism, in Dōgen's case as well, is connected inseparably with its emphasis on one's self (ego) as the subject of self-consciousness. Dōgen insists that, to attain the Buddha nature, one must transcend one's ego-centrism, homo-centrism, and living being-centrism, and thereby ground his existence in the most fundamental plane, that is, in the 'being' dimension, which is the dimension of Dōgen's *shitsuu*, i.e., "all beings."

Accordingly, if one attains the Buddha nature in oneself by transcending and

DŌGEN ON BUDDHA NATURE

basing one's existence in the 'being' dimension, freeing oneself from the being-nonbeing nature common to all beings, then everything in the universe attains the Buddha nature as well. For at the very moment of his enlightenment the being-nonbeing nature itself is overcome. It is for this reason Buddhist sutras often say, "Grasses, trees, and lands, all attain Buddhahood," "Mountains, rivers, and the earth totally manifest the *Dharma-kāya* (Dharma body)." These passages taken objectively without one's own existential awakening seem absurd, at best pantheistic. Dōgen emphasizes *dōji-jōdō*,²⁴ "simultaneous attainment of the Way" which refers to the fact that everything in the universe attains enlightenment simultaneously at the moment of one's own enlightenment—an enlightenment that opens up the universal horizon of the Buddha nature. If one cannot rightfully speak of the attainment of Buddha nature by mountains, rivers, lands and the like, one cannot be said to realize the Buddha nature.

This is a crucial point for a thorough realization of the Buddha nature through emancipation from birth-and-death. Although always latent in Mahayana tradition, this point was clearly realized and explicitly expressed in Dōgen's "All beings *are* the Buddha nature." More important however in this connection is that unlike the dimensions of human beings and living beings, the dimension of *all beings* (*sbitsu*), which Dōgen takes as the basis for the Buddha nature, is *limitless*. There is no "centrism" of any sort at all in this dimension. Further, the Buddha nature which is realized by freeing oneself from the being-nonbeing nature common to all beings is nonsubstantial. Therefore, even if Dōgen emphasizes "All beings are the Buddha nature," he does not mean by this an 'immediate' identity between all beings and the Buddha nature; rather the identity is established only through the realization of the limitlessness of the 'being' dimension and the nonsubstantiality of the Buddha nature—in short, only by the realization of "What." This means a complete turnover of the immanent view of the Buddha nature, which Dōgen doubly denies; first, by transcending the 'living' dimension to the 'being' dimension he denies the immanence of the Buddha nature within living beings; secondly, by emphasizing the nonsubstantiality of the Buddha nature he denies its immanence as the one cause of the world, i.e., like Spinoza's idea of God. This double negation of

²⁴ 同時成道

²⁵ *Sōbōgenzō* I (*Buisō*), p. 317.

the immanent view of the Buddha nature brings about a radical reversal in the traditional interpretation of the Buddha nature. It is the logical conclusion to the idea of the Buddha nature latent in Mahayana tradition, rather than a mere explication of its implicit elements. This results in the nonduality of all beings and the Buddha nature, a Buddha nature that is neither immanent nor transcendent. “*The Buddha nature is assuredly all beings, because all beings are the Buddha nature.*”²⁵ says Dōgen.

To avoid man’s natural tendency to objectify and to substantialize everything, and to make clear the nonduality of “all beings” and the “Buddha nature,” Dōgen emphasizes two things: (1) the idea of “no Buddha nature”—to clarify the nonsubstantiality of the Buddha nature, and (2) the bottomlessness of ‘all-being’—to deny its being objectified.

(1) In the *Buddha nature* book Dōgen often emphasizes the idea of *mubussbō*,²⁶ no-Buddha-nature, by quoting and reinterpreting various words and conversations of old Zen masters. In one such case he quotes Kuei-shan Ling-yu (Isan Reiyū, 771–853): “All living beings have no Buddha nature” and says:

Śakyamuni preached “All living beings without exception have the Buddha nature.” Kuei-shan preached, “All living beings have no Buddha nature.” “Having,” “not having” are completely different in verbal meaning. People must have doubts as to which grasps the essence. In spite of this, only “All living beings have no Buddha nature” excels in the Buddha Way.²⁷

In Dōgen the idea of “no Buddha nature” is not understood as peculiar to Kuei-shan alone. “The Way of no-Buddha-nature” Dōgen says, “has been taught since long before, from the inner sanctuary of the fourth Patriarch. It was seen and heard by the fifth Patriarch Hung-jen, transmitted in Chao-chou and advocated by Kuei-shan. The way of no-Buddha-nature must be practiced. Do not hesitate.”²⁸ Those who remember Dōgen’s emphasis that “All beings are the Buddha nature” may be surprised by these words.

Dōgen’s comment on Kuei-shan’s words is also striking.

²⁶ 無佛性; “No Buddha nature” refers to the ordinary idea of the term, i. e., the counterconcept of “Buddha nature”; “no-Buddha-nature” indicates Dōgen’s idea, i. e., the unobjectifiable Buddha nature which is freed from ‘having’ or ‘not having’.

²⁷ *Sbōbōgenzō* I (*Bussbō*), p. 334.

²⁸ *ibid.* pp. 321–2

DŌGEN ON BUDDHA NATURE

The reason in Kuei-shan's words is the reason of "All beings have no Buddha nature." He does not speak of vastness beyond rules and regulations. The sutras within one's own house are thus preserved. One should grope further as to why all living beings are the Buddha nature, why they have the Buddha nature. If they have the Buddha nature they must be confederates of the devil. They bring a devil to add to all living beings.²⁹

This is a complete negation of a traditional doctrine of the Buddha nature possessed by living beings. However if we penetrate Dōgen's standpoint these words are not merely surprising, they have deep meaning. Dōgen's idea of "no-Buddha-nature" is not a counterpart to the idea of "Buddha nature," it is "no Buddha nature" in its *absolute* sense. Here we find another example of Dōgen's peculiar way of reading traditional texts. In the same *Buddha nature* book he quotes the following conversation between the fifth Patriarch Hung-jên and Hui-nêng, later the sixth Patriarch, at their first meeting:

"Where are you from?"

"I am from Reinan [in the southern part of China, then considered uncivilized]."

"What did you come for?"

"To become a buddha."

"嶺南人無佛性, *reinanjin mubussbō* (men from Reinan have no Buddha nature). How could you become a buddha?"

"Although there is for man north and south, there is no north and south for the Buddha nature."³⁰

Commenting on this conversation, Dōgen dares to say:

This "*reinanjin mubussbō*" does not mean "men from Reinan have no Buddha nature," or "men from Reinan have a Buddha nature," but "men from Reinan, no-Buddha-nature." "How could you become a buddha?" indicates "What buddha is it you expect to become?"³¹

Traditionally, the term 無佛性 *mubussbō* meant living beings have no Buddha nature within themselves. However Dōgen is not concerned with *having or not*

²⁹ *ibid.* pp. 334-5.

³⁰ *ibid.* pp. 322, 324.

³¹ *ibid.* pp. 322-3.

having the Buddha nature but with the *Buddha nature in itself* which is non-substantial. When we concern ourselves with having or not-having the Buddha nature we thereby objectify it in a positive or a negative way. Since the Buddha nature is an unobjectifiable and unobtainable "What" it is entirely wrong to talk objectively whether or not one *has* the Buddha nature. With Hung-jên, Dōgen emphasizes "Since the Buddha nature is empty it is called *mu* (no-thing)."³² He also stresses that "The principle of the Buddha nature is that it is not endowed prior to enlightenment; it is endowed after enlightenment; the Buddha nature is unquestionably realized simultaneously with enlightenment. This principle should be penetrated in most assiduous, concentrated effort, even for 20 or 30 years."³³

If one realizes that living beings are fundamentally the Buddha nature there is no need to emphasize "having the Buddha nature." It suffices simply to say that living beings are living beings. To say living beings have the Buddha nature is like adding legs to a snake, which is the reason Dōgen says "Why are all living beings the Buddha nature? Why do they have the Buddha nature? If they have the Buddha nature they must be confederates of the devil. They bring a devil to add to all living beings." Continuing, Dōgen says, "While the Buddha nature is the Buddha nature, living beings are living beings"³⁴—a definite statement referring to his idea of "no-Buddha-nature." The Buddha nature is absolutely the Buddha nature and living beings are absolutely living beings. Yet, in this realization, the Buddha nature and living beings are not two different things, simply two aspects of one and the same living reality. Practically speaking, the Buddha nature is realized as such simultaneously with enlightenment. It is an illusion to think that the Buddha nature is or is not endowed in living beings apart from enlightenment. This is why, against the ordinary reading, Dōgen reads *reinanjin mubussbō* as "Men from Reinan, no-Buddha-nature," meaning that men from Reinan in themselves are freed from dichotomous thoughts as to whether or not they have the Buddha nature. This freedom, no-Buddha-nature itself, is the genuine realization of Buddha nature.³⁵ Hence Dōgen emphasizes that both a preaching of having the Buddha nature and a

³² *ibid.* p. 322

³³ *ibid.* p. 323.

³⁴ *ibid.* p. 335.

³⁵ In the *Genjō-kōan* 現成公案 book Dōgen says, "When buddhas are truly buddhas there is no need for the perception that one is a buddha. Nevertheless he is a confirmed buddha, performing the confirmation of buddha."

DŌGEN ON BUDDHA NATURE

preaching of having no Buddha nature involve defamation of Buddhism. Dōgen's idea of "no-Buddha-nature" clearly indicates the nonsubstantiality of the Buddha nature by rejecting both the "eternalist" view which substantializes and is attached to the idea of the Buddha nature, and the "nihilistic" view which also substantializes and is attached to the idea of no Buddha nature.

(2) For Dōgen, just as the Buddha nature is nonsubstantial, "all beings" (*sbitsuu*) are unobjectifiable, limitless and groundless.

As stated earlier, Dōgen emphasizes "All beings (*sbitsuu*) are the Buddha nature" by changing the ordinary reading of the passage in the Nirvana Sutra which had been traditionally read as "All living beings (*sbujō*) without exception have the Buddha nature." In this case Dōgen broadens not only the meaning of the term "Buddha nature," but also that of the term "living beings" (*sbujō*). In the *Buddha nature* book, immediately after saying "All beings are the Buddha nature," he continues "All beings in their entirety are called *sbujō*. Just at the right moment, living beings (*sbujō*) both inside and outside are all beings (*sbitsuu*) of the Buddha nature."³⁶ This means that Dōgen broadens the meaning of *sbujō*, which traditionally referred to living or sentient beings, to include non-living beings or non-sentient beings. In other words he ascribes life to non-living beings, sentiments to non-sentient beings, and ultimately mind and the Buddha nature to all of them. Thus he states:

In what is called in the Buddha Way all living beings (*sbujō*), all beings that have mind are *sbujō*, because mind is *sbujō*; all beings that have no mind must equally be *sbujō* because *sbujō* is mind. Therefore, all mind is *sbujō*; all *sbujō* is 'having the Buddha nature.' Grasses, trees, and lands are mind; being mind, they are *sbujō*; being *sbujō*, they have the Buddha nature. Sun, moon, and stars are mind; being mind, they are *sbujō*; being *sbujō*, they have the Buddha nature.³⁷

Thus we see that for Dōgen, living beings (*sbujō*), all beings (*sbitsuu*), mind, and the Buddha nature are ultimately identical.

³⁶ *Sōbōgenzō* I (*Bussō*), p. 315. Another interpretation of 悉有の一悉 which is, in the present text, translated "All beings in their entirety," is "A part of all beings" (is called *sbujō*). Dōgen's view in Diagram 2 follows this interpretation.

³⁷ *ibid.* p. 313.

However strongly Dōgen emphasizes the idea “All beings are the Buddha nature” the concept of “all beings” (*sbitsu*) is not a counterconcept to non-being. It is “all beings” in its absolute sense which is beyond and freed from the opposition between being and nonbeing. This is clearly shown in the following:

Beings one and all now caused to exist by the Buddha nature are not ‘being’ of being-nonbeing.... The term “all beings” (*sbitsu*) is furthermore not a being that has beginning,³⁸ or the Original Being,³⁹ or a mysterious being,⁴⁰ or the like; and it is of course not conditioned being⁴¹ or illusory being.⁴² It has nothing to do with mind-and-object, substance-and-form, etc.⁴³

It is noteworthy to point out that in this passage Dōgen insists that “all beings” (*sbitsu*) does not mean the “Original Being,” such as might be interpreted as an equivalent to the Heideggerian “*Sein*,” because the Original Being is that which discloses itself as the place in which beings exist. Heidegger establishes *ontologische Differenz* (ontological difference) which essentially differs from *ontische Differenz* (ontich difference: that merely distinguishes one being from another). By establishing *ontologische Differenz* Heidegger thematically questions the sense of *Sein* (Being), the idea of which is implied as being self-evident in the everyday experience of various beings (*Seiendes*). He thereby constructs *Fundamental-Ontologie* in order to elucidate the significance of *Sein des Seienden* (Being of beings) that is concealed in everyday understanding. In contrast to this, Dōgen does not make an *ontologische Differenz*, not because he is unaware of the essential difference between Being and beings, but simply because he deliberately denies the idea of *Sein*, ontologically distinguished from *Seiendes*. Hence his emphasis on the idea of “no-Buddha-nature.”

A question however must remain here. Why, in Dōgen, is *sbitsu* or “all beings” referred to in the plural form while *sbitsu* is said to be identical with the Buddha nature? If “all beings” is not *Sein* in the Heideggerian sense, is not then “all beings” the ground of *Weltanschauung* in which everything including God, nature, man, life, and so on, is systematically grasped? Definitely

³⁸ 始有

³⁹ 本有

⁴⁰ 妙有

⁴¹ 緣有

⁴² 妄有

⁴³ *Sbōbōgenzō* I (*Bussbō*), p. 315.

not, as Dōgen's previously quoted words on "all beings" already clearly show. Then what are "all beings" (*sbitsu*)? Beings (*Seiendes*) are, needless to say, not Being (*Sein*), and vice versa. However *all beings* are just *all beings*, no more no less; *nothing* is outside of them. For *all beings*, there is no possibility even for *ontologische Differenz*. *All beings* are really and absolutely *all beings*—through the mediation of *nothing*. This is precisely the meaning of "All beings are the Buddha nature."

In Heidegger as well nothingness is essential in his quest for Being. *Sein selbst* (Being itself) or *Sein als solches* (Being as such), we are told, must be held down into Nothingness, it must appear as nothing, in order to be.⁴⁴ In Dōgen however *Seiendes als solches* (beings as such) must appear as nothing in order to be. This is because the dimension of "all beings" (*sbitsu*) is limitless and bottomless without a further embracing, deeper dimension, without the ultimate ground, even in the Heideggerian sense of *Sein als solches*, or in the traditional Buddhist sense of the Buddha nature, from which all beings come to present (*anwesen*).

This may be clearer when we take into account Dōgen's remarks on the term "thus" (*immo*) which appears in the words "What-is-it-that-*thus*-comes," words which Dōgen takes as an adequate expression of the Buddha nature. In the *Immo* book of *Shōbōgenzō*, based on Huai-jang's words, Dōgen emphasizes that *immo* is unobtainable, not-*immo* is unobtainable, both *immo* and not-*immo* are unobtainable. This clearly shows that in the words "What-is-it-that-*thus*-comes" "thus" (*immo*) is not simply affirmative. Rather it is neither affirmative nor negative. The genuine "thus" is the kind of "thus" freed from both affirmation and negation. Accordingly, when Dōgen says the essence of "All beings are the Buddha nature" is well expressed in the words "What-is-it-that-*thus*-comes," all beings appear in this sense of "thus." And the very fact that all beings "thus" appear from "What" indicates "All beings are the Buddha nature." Zen's household expressions, "Willows are green; flowers are red," "Mountains are really mountains; waters are really waters," simply indicate this. We may fully concur: "I am really I; you are really you." Yet, at this very moment—all beings are the Buddha nature. *Seiendes als solches* "thus" come

⁴⁴ *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* ed. Paul Edwards (N.Y. The Macmillan Company & The Free Press, 1967), vol. 3, p. 463.

to present (*anwesen*) from "What." Only when the Heideggerian idea of *ontologische Differenz* is overcome can Dōgen's idea of "All beings are the Buddha nature" be truly understood.

V

[4] *The dynamic idea of "impermanence-Buddha nature."* I have stated that Dōgen on the one hand insists "All beings are the Buddha nature," and on the other emphasizes "no-Buddha-nature." This he did to reject the common view that objectifies and substantializes "all beings" and the "Buddha nature," and to clarify their nondualistic and dynamic oneness. Dōgen's characteristic idea of "no-Buddha-nature" (*mubusshō*) already serves this purpose as it denies both the eternalist view and the nihilistic view of the Buddha nature. To make, however, definitely clear the nondualistic and dynamic oneness of "all beings" and the "Buddha nature," Dōgen goes further by saying "*mujiō* (impermanence) is the Buddha nature."

In Hegel the contradistinction of Being and Nothing sets the dialectic in motion, and the unity of Being and Nothing is Becoming (*Werden*). In Dōgen *mujiō-busshō*⁴⁵ (impermanence-Buddha nature) is the unity of Buddha nature and no Buddha nature. *Mujiō* (*anitya* in Sanskrit, impermanence, mutability, transiency) has been one of the key concepts of Buddhism from its very beginning, one of the three basic Buddhist principles⁴⁶—"Whatever is phenomenal is impermanent." In Buddhism the impermanence or mutability of phenomena had been emphasized in contrast with permanence or immutability of the Buddha nature or the *Tathāgata* (Buddha). Dōgen however insists that impermanence is the Buddha nature. He quotes the following words of Hui-nēng:

The sixth Patriarch taught his disciple Hsing-ch'ang (Gyōshō) that impermanence in itself is the Buddha nature, that permanence is good and evil, each and every phenomenal thing, and discriminating mind.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ 無常佛性

⁴⁶ 三法印 The other two are "Nothing has an ego" and "Tranquil nirvana."

⁴⁷ *Shōbōgenzō* I (*Busshō*), p. 325.

DŌGEN ON BUDDHA NATURE

This again may sound surprising to the ear of one who holds to a stereotyped understanding of Buddhism. The task of Buddhism is to emancipate oneself from impermanence or samsara and to enter nirvana by attaining the Buddha nature. However, if nirvana is sought for simply *beyond* impermanence it is not true nirvana because it stands against impermanence and thereby is still related to and limited by impermanence. The true nirvana is attained only by emancipating oneself even from nirvana as transcendence of impermanence. In other words, it is realized by complete return to the world of impermanence from nirvana through liberating oneself from both impermanence and permanence, from both samsara so-called and nirvana so-called. Therefore genuine nirvana is nothing but realization of impermanence as impermanence. If one remains in 'nirvana' by transcending samsara one must be said to be still selfish because he loftily abides in his own enlightenment apart from the sufferings of the samsara-bound sentient beings around him. The true compassion can be realized only by transcending 'nirvana' to return to and work in the midst of the sufferings of the ever changing world. This is the characteristic realization of Mahayana Buddhism, which emphasizes "Do not abide in samsara, or nirvana." This complete no-abiding is the true nirvana in the Mahayanist sense. Hui-nēng's words quoted above are one Zen expression of this idea.

When Dōgen quotes Hui-nēng to the effect that "*mujo* (impermanence) in itself is the Buddha nature" he carries the Mahayanist standpoint to its logical conclusion. As stated before, by stressing "All beings are the Buddha nature" Dōgen goes beyond the dimension of living beings to that of beings, and makes explicit the implication of Mahayana Buddhism that even nonliving, nonsentient beings can attain Buddhahood. The dimension of beings was that of appearance-disappearance or being-nonbeing. This dimension, embracing all beings, sentient or nonsentient, may be said to be the most thoroughgoing dimension of *mujo* i.e., impermanence. In other words, it is only in Dōgen's emphasized dimension of "all beings" that the time-honored Buddhist idea of *mujo* is fully and completely realized. It is precisely through the realization of impermanence in this sense that one can properly state of his own enlightenment that grasses, trees, and lands disclose the Buddha nature.

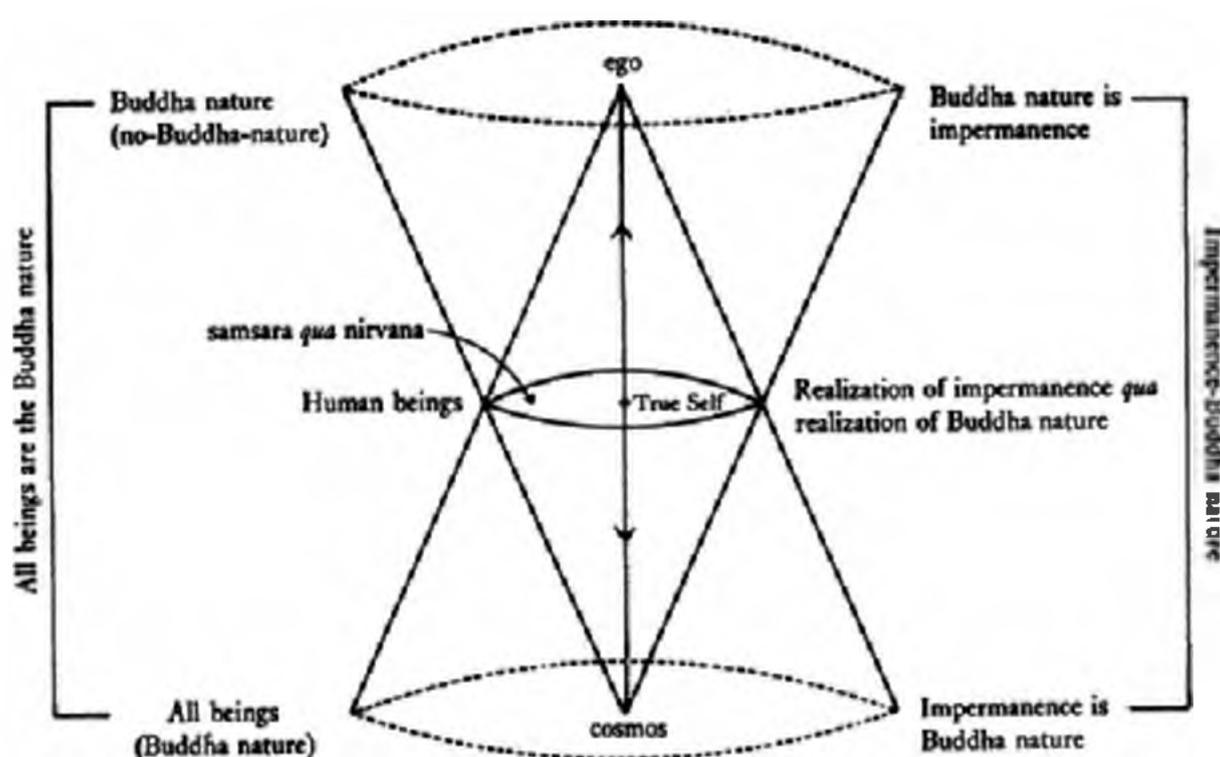
Not only that, by emphasizing "All beings are the Buddha nature," Dōgen radically turned over the traditional view of the Buddha nature. The dimension of "all beings" was limitless and bottomless, to the extent it cannot properly

THE EASTERN BUDDHIST

be called a measurable dimension. For Dōgen who grounded his own existence in this dimensionless dimension of all beings, there is a mutual interpenetration between the “Buddha nature” and “all beings”: the Buddha nature is neither immanent nor transcendent in relation to all beings.

Diagram 5

The dynamic and nondualistic structure of “All beings are the Buddha nature” or “impermanence-Buddha nature.”



Restated in connection with the idea of impermanence, when Dōgen reaches the dimension of “all beings,” impermanence common to all beings is thoroughly realized *as impermanence*, no more no less. Apart from this thorough realization of impermanence there is no realization of the Buddha nature. However, in this very realization that underlies Mahayana Buddhism, Dōgen achieves a complete and radical reversal, a reversal from the realization of “the impermanence itself being the Buddha nature” to the realization of “the Buddha nature in itself being the impermanence.” His idea of *mujō-busshō*, i.e., “impermanence-Buddha nature,” is the outcome of this reversal. It can also be seen in the following passage in which he develops the words of the sixth Patriarch.

DŌGEN ON BUDDHA NATURE

The very impermanence of grasses, trees, bushes, and forests is the Buddha nature; the very impermanence of man, things, body, mind is the Buddha nature; states, lands, mountains, rivers are impermanent, because they are the Buddha nature. The supreme and complete enlightenment is impermanent because it is the Buddha nature. Great nirvana is the Buddha nature because it is impermanent. Those holding various narrow views of the two vehicles [the hearer and the self-enlightened], Buddhist scholars of the scriptures and commentaries and the like may be suspicious of, surprised and frightened by these words of the sixth Patriarch. If they are they are a confederation of devil-heretics.⁴⁸

For Dōgen, impermanence itself is preaching impermanence, practicing impermanence, and realizing impermanence, and this, as it is, is preaching, practicing, and realizing the Buddha nature.

Spinoza looked at everything under the aspect of eternity (*sub specie aeternitatis*). In marked contrast, Dōgen looked at everything under the aspect of impermanence. In Spinoza, time seems to be effaced or conquered by the one Substance. Transcendency is surpassed by the perfect stability of truth in its ultimate sense. But for Dōgen transcendency is indispensable; apart from it there is no such thing as eternal substance. Time is realized as “being” which is beyond both continuity and discontinuity. Rejecting the eternalist view Dōgen states:

To learn, in speaking of substance, there is no flowing for water and no growth and perishing for trees is heresy. Śākyamuni Buddha said “Such is form; such is substance.” Accordingly, flowers opening, leaves falling in themselves are substance of suchness. Nevertheless fools think there can be no flower opening, no leaf falling, in the realm of True Essence.⁴⁹

In emphasizing change and motion Dōgen is more akin to Hegel than Spinoza. As “Becoming” in Hegel is the unity of Being and Nothing, “*mujo-busshō*” (impermanence-Buddha nature) in Dōgen is the unity of the Buddha nature and no Buddha nature.

⁴⁸ *ibid.* pp. 325–6.

⁴⁹ *ibid.* II (*Hossō* 法性), pp. 283–4.

One cannot doubt that negation and contradiction are the vital notions in Hegel's account of the dialectic. For Hegel neither pure Being nor pure Nothing is true, and only Becoming as their unity (*Einheit*) or unseparateness (*Ungetrenntheit*) is their truth. In his *Science of Logic*, referring to Being and Nothing he says:

The truth is not their lack of distinction, but that they are not the same, that they are absolutely distinct, and yet unseparated and inseparable, each disappearing immediately in its opposite. Their truth is therefore this movement, this immediate disappearance of the one into the other, in a word, Becoming: a movement wherein both are distinct, but in virtue of a distinction which has equally immediately dissolved itself.⁵⁰

This is strikingly similar to Dōgen's idea of *mujō-bussō*. However, despite Hegel's emphasis on the unseparateness and the mutual passing over (*Übergeben*) of Being and Nothing, it cannot be overlooked that in his system Being is prior to Nothing. In Hegel the Beginning (*Anfang*) of everything is Being as such, and his dialectic movement develops itself in terms of Being (thesis), Nothing (antithesis), and Becoming (synthesis). It never involves a movement in terms of Nothing (thesis), Being (antithesis), and Becoming (synthesis). Being as such is the supreme principle of Hegel's metaphysical logic. In so far as it is so, however dialectic "Becoming" as the unity may be it is not a genuine Becoming but a quasi-Becoming which is after all reduced to Being. And, by asserting that there is a final synthesis, his system cut off all further development: it swallowed up future and time itself. For all its dynamically fluid, dialectical character, his system is consistently supported in an irreversible, one-directional line with Being as the Beginning.

On the other hand, Dōgen's idea of "no-Buddha-nature" is already freed from the contradiction between Buddha nature and no Buddha nature. Herein 'Buddha nature's possible priority over 'no Buddha nature' is overcome. When he goes further and comes to the point of "impermanence-Buddha nature,"

⁵⁰ *Science of Logic* tr. by W. H. Johnston & L. G. Struthers, (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd. 1929), Vol. 1, p. 95. *Wissenschaft der Logik* herausgegeben von Georg Lasson (Leipzig, Felix Meiner. 1923) P. B. Erster Teil: S. 67.

DŌGEN ON BUDDHA NATURE

Dōgen consciously denies any possible trace of final duality, i.e., the possible priority of 'no Buddha nature' over 'Buddha nature' possibly implied in the very idea of "no-Buddha-nature." Hence in the idea of *mujo-bussbō*, i.e., "impermanence-Buddha nature" every kind of duality and every sort of priority of one against the other is completely overcome. There is no irreversible relation. Everything is dynamically interrelated yet distinct. Thus Dōgen's idea of "impermanence-Buddha nature" is not a Becoming that can be reduced either to Being, Buddha nature, or to Nothing, impermanence. Rather it is a genuine "Becoming" of which we can, after Hegel, legitimately say:

They [the impermanence of all beings and the Buddha nature] are not the same. They are absolutely distinct, and yet unseparated and inseparable, each disappearing immediately in its opposite. Their truth is therefore this movement—in a word, Becoming.

Becoming in this sense is seen in the following Dōgen's words:

To think the Buddha nature exists only during one's life and ceases to exist at death is the utmost in ignorance and superficiality. During life there is the 'Buddha nature' and 'no Buddha nature.' In death as well there is the 'Buddha nature' and 'no Buddha nature'.... Nonetheless the attachment to false views that the Buddha nature exists or not according to whether there is motion or not, that it functions or not in proportion to consciousness or no-consciousness, or that it ceases as the Buddha nature or does not cease according to whether it is perceived or not, is heretical.⁵¹

Therefore, "Becoming" in Dōgen's sense is not a *synthesis*, which *presupposes* two things as its basis, of Being and Nothing, Buddha nature and impermanence. Instead, this "Becoming" itself takes place in the boundless, dimensionless dimension of "all beings," which is truly cosmological. This leads us to sum up the essential differences between Hegel and Dōgen as follows:

1. Taking the "absolute Mind" as the philosophical foundation, the *basis* of Hegel's system is still personalistic, not completely

⁵¹ *Sōbōgenzō* I (*Bussbō*), p. 343.

THE EASTERN BUDDHIST

- dehomocentric or cosmological; while the *basis* of Dōgen's system is completely dehomocentric and cosmological.⁵²
2. Accordingly, in Hegel the development of concept (*Begriff*), though dialectic, is ultimately a one-directional and closed system; in Dōgen everything is reversible and mutually interpenetrating, thereby consisting an open system. The more cosmological the basis is, the more personalistic mind is, and vice versa. (This may be termed "cosmo-personalistic.")
 3. In Hegel, because emphasis on the final synthesis is stronger than contradictory opposition, an individual finally loses its individuality. This is seen in his term *List der Vernunft* (artifice of reason) which manipulates individual figures through passion in history. Since for Dōgen, the Buddha nature is thoroughly nonsubstantial, all beings are all beings, inseparable from each other yet without losing individuality.
 4. Despite his emphasis on "The truth is the Whole" and "The ultimate truth is Subject" there is working in Hegel's system a hidden objectification which *speculates* the whole. In marked contrast, based on *Zen practice*, i.e., seated meditation, in Dōgen every objectification is overcome and dynamic nonduality between 'subject' and 'object,' self and the universe is achieved.
 5. Again, despite his emphasis on time and history Hegel's speculative dialectic, which is often called panlogicism, ultimately turns them into motionless eternity. In Dōgen, however time is being and being is time. Becoming as 'impermanence-Buddha nature' involves paradoxical unity of time and eternity at each and every moment.

All of these differences are based on a completely radical reversal of Being and Nothing; in Dōgen's case, between the Buddha nature and the impermanence—from "impermanence is the Buddha nature" to "the Buddha nature is impermanence"—which is lacking in Hegel. For Dōgen, all beings, impermanence,

⁵² "Cosmological" here does not refer to the cosmos created by or distinguished from God, but to the cosmos in its broadest sense in which even "God" is embraced.

and the Buddha nature are identical, with the realization of impermanence as dynamic axis.

VI

The four items given above outlines, I hope, Dōgen's idea of the Buddha nature in its ontological structure. However his position is not exhausted by an ontology of the Buddha nature nor by a philosophy of "all beings." Not solely a thinker, Dōgen was originally an ardent religious practitioner who emphasized *shikantaza*, just sitting, and devoted himself fully to faith in the Buddha Way. *Mujō* (impermanence) of all things was not, in Dōgen, the nature of the world viewed with a philosophical eye but the pain and suffering of all sentient beings and the universe felt by a religious mind. In fact, it was this impermanence that drove him as a youth to renounce the world and seek the truth. *Mujōbusshō*, i.e., "impermanence-Buddha nature," was the consummation of his final realization "All beings are the Buddha nature."

Dōgen's idea of "All beings are the Buddha nature" cannot be fully understood apart from his idea of "oneness of practice and enlightenment."⁵³ The latter as well as the former is the solution, realized in his own enlightenment, for the question that he encountered as a young monk; "Both exoteric and esoteric Buddhism teach the primal Buddha nature and original enlightenment of all sentient beings. If this is the case, why then do all buddhas and bodhisattvas arouse the longing for enlightenment and engage in ascetic practice?"⁵⁴ This concerns the T'ien t'ai idea of "original awakening"⁵⁵ that is contrasted with "acquired awakening".⁵⁶ Why should man engage in religious practice to overcome illusion if he is already endowed with the Buddha nature and is originally enlightened? Christian equivalent to the question may be theodicy, which concerns with the reality and origin of evil in the universe, a creation of an all-powerful and all-good God.

An emphasis on "original awakening" that is *a priori*, fundamental to all living beings and eternal, is apt to become pantheistic or mystical, neglecting

⁵³ 修証一等

⁵⁴ *Kenzeiki* 建齋記, (*Dainibon bukkyō zensho*, Vol. 115, Tokyo, 1922); also see Heinrich Dumoulin: *A History of Zen Buddhism* (N.Y. McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1965), p. 153.

⁵⁵ 本覺 ⁵⁶ 始覺

ethical and religious practice. On the other hand, an emphasis on “acquired awakening,” which an unenlightened one can attain *a posteriori* only through various stages of practice, is inclined to become idealistic or teleological, setting enlightenment far afield as an end. The relationship between original and acquired awakening is a dilemma involved in Mahayana Buddhism, particularly in T’ien t’ai school with which Dōgen started his Buddhist studies. It is however not theoretical. It is the practical problem par excellence.

After serious struggles with this problem, Dōgen, through Zen practice and his own enlightenment, rejects sheer original awakening as a naturalistic heresy that regards man’s mind itself as buddha by identifying the given human self-consciousness with true awakening. Accordingly, he emphasizes the importance and necessity of practice: “Although this Dharma [the Buddhist truth] is amply present in every person, unless one practices, it is not manifested; unless there is realization, it is not attained.”⁵⁷ At the same time Dōgen also rejects an idea of a mere acquired awakening as an unauthentic Buddhist teaching which distinguishes practice and enlightenment, taking the former as a means to the latter as an end. In consequence, he emphasizes oneness of practice and enlightenment saying, “To think practice and realization are not one is a heretical view. In the Buddha Dharma, practice and realization are identical. Because one’s present practice is practice in realization, one’s initial negotiating of the Way in itself is the whole of original realization. Thus, even while one is directed to practice, he is told not to anticipate a realization apart from practice, because practice points directly to original realization.”⁵⁸ Thus by rejecting both the naturalistic-pantheistic and the idealistic-teleological views of the Buddha nature Dōgen breaks through the relativity of “original” and “acquired” awakening and opens up a deeper ground that is neither *a priori* nor *a posteriori*. This very ground is the original Awakening in its absolute sense because it is prior to and liberated from any dualistic thought, any discriminatory view. For Dōgen it is the “immaculate” Buddha nature that is realized in *zazen*, seated meditation which he calls “body-and-mind-casting-off.”⁵⁹ It is not an original awakening looked at and aimed at from the point of view of

⁵⁷ *Shōbōgenzō* I (*Bendōwa* 辨道話), p. 55. See p. 128.

⁵⁸ *ibid.* p. 65–6. See p. 143.

⁵⁹ 身心脱落

DŌGEN ON BUDDHA NATURE

acquired awakening. Conversely it is the original Awakening that embraces the relativity of original and acquired awakening taking it as its own development. This is the reason Dōgen emphasizes “One should practice within enlightenment”⁶⁰ and “As enlightenment is already in practice, enlightenment is endless: as it is practice in enlightenment, practice is beginningless.”⁶¹ For Dōgen the Buddha nature manifests itself regardless of man’s illusions and enlightenment. Both practice and enlightenment are beginningless and endless. There is nothing standing against the Buddha nature in its immediacy. Throughout the universe nothing is ever closed, all beings always manifest the Buddha nature just as they are ever changing.

Accordingly, Dōgen’s position of “oneness of practice and enlightenment” combined with “All beings are the Buddha nature” completely overcomes the following three dualities:

1. The duality of subject and object. When Dōgen emphasizes “All beings *are* the Buddha nature” instead of “All living beings *have* the Buddha nature” subject-object structure is already overcome. The Buddha nature is no longer an object that is possessed and aimed at to be realized by the subject (living beings), but subject (all beings) and object (Buddha nature) are identical, combined by “are.” Yet they are not immediately identical because all beings are limitless and the Buddha nature is nonsubstantial. Through the realization of impermanence they are dynamically nondualistic yet one. Here realizer and the realized are one and the same. Even a distinction between creator and creature does not exist because the realization of “All beings are the Buddha nature” is based on dehomocentric, cosmological dimension. Oneness of practice and enlightenment, an exceedingly human and personal problem, is realized not on a personalistic basis but on the limitless cosmological basis. Hence simultaneous attainment of a *zazen* practitioner and everything in the universe. This is also the reason Dōgen emphasizes self-enlightenment *qua* enlightening others.⁶²

⁶⁰ *Sōbōgenzō* I (*Bendōwa*), pp. 66–67.

⁶¹ *ibid.* p. 66.

⁶² See p. 135

2. The duality of potentiality and actuality. The Buddha nature is not a potentiality to be actualized sometime in the future but originally and always the basic nature of all beings. At each and every moment in the ever changing movement of all beings including men, the Buddha nature manifests itself as "suchness" or "thus-comes." Since "suchness" or "thus-comes" is the Buddha nature, Dōgen says as stated before that "The principle of the Buddha nature is that it is not endowed prior to enlightenment The Buddha nature is unquestionably realized simultaneously with enlightenment." Therefore, for Dōgen the distinction of Buddha nature and Buddha is also overcome. The simultaneity of the Buddha nature and enlightenment (Buddha) is realized only *here and now* at each and every moment. From this point of view the theological ideas of "participation" and "anticipation" are not acceptable because, though dialectical, they imply the ultimate Reality beyond "here and now." They look to be well aware of man's finitude but are lacking a keen realization of impermanence common to all beings, which is fully realized only "here and now" at each and every moment in the ever changing world.

3. The duality of means and end. Practice in itself that is, as a means, approaching enlightenment as an end, is an illusion. With such a practice one may infinitely approximate but never reach the "end," thereby falling into a false endlessness (*G. schlechte Unendlichkeit*). In the very realization of the illusory character of such a practice one may find oneself at the real starting point for life because in this realization one realizes that the Buddha nature is not the end but the basis of practice. Even in an initial resolution to attain enlightenment the Buddha nature fully manifests itself. Dōgen says, "Both the moment of initial resolution and the moment of attaining highest enlightenment are the Buddha Way; beginning, middle, and end equally are the Buddha Way."⁶³ For Dōgen religious conduct, i.e., initial resolution, practice, enlightenment, and

⁶³ *Sōbōgenzō* II (*Sesshin-essho* 説心説性), p. 208.

DŌGEN ON BUDDHA NATURE

nirvana, consists of an infinite circle, where every point is its starting point as well as its end.

Accordingly Dōgen's rejections of a mere 'acquired awakening' and practice-enlightenment duality do not involve a negation of ethical and religious practice. Rather they imply a strong emphasis on the importance of pure practice, because for him realization is fully functioning at every step of practice in so far as it is undefiled. Practice as such is a manifestation of realization. His apparently contradictory emphasis on "Do not intend to become a buddha"⁶⁴ refers to a realm free of human agency in which practice (*zazen*) is pure practice. This pure practice, undefiled *zazen*, in itself is realization—simply because it is practice (*zazen*) of body-and-mind-casting-off. On the other hand, Dōgen's rejection of a sheer 'original awakening' and emphasis on practice does not indicate a negation of the ontological basis for the practitioner. It simply denies the notion of given enlightenment, innate Buddha nature. It involves a recognition that men are immersed in the midst of illusion and suffering in this floating world and that there is no self-existing Reality apart from this fact. Here we should notice Dōgen's words, "Buddhism has never spoken of nirvana apart from birth-and-death."⁶⁵ Illusions and sufferings originate from a lack of right and full realization of the impermanence of man and the world, and from a false idea of Reality apart from this impermanence. A rejection of the defiled idea of 'original awakening' that itself is given beyond impermanent phenomena and a direct realization of impermanence as impermanence immediately enables one to awaken to Reality here and now, liberated from illusions and sufferings. This awakening is *originally* functioning precisely in the impermanence of the world. It is through undefiled practice that this original Awakening in its authentic sense is awakened to.

Oneness of practice and enlightenment is realized only in the realm of undefiled practice and awakening—practice undefiled by an intention to become a buddha, and awakening undefiled by projective thinking beyond impermanence. In other words only by being freed from human agency both in the aspect of practice and enlightenment is Dōgen's idea of oneness of practice and en-

⁶⁴ 英國作佛 *ibid.* II (*Zazengi* 坐禪儀), p. 323.

⁶⁵ *ibid.* vol. I (*Bendōwa*), p. 69.

lightenment realized. However, this undefiled realm is not static but highly dynamic, because through *zazen* it opens up directly under one's existence, here and now at each and every moment the practitioner is freed from human agency.

Practically speaking, in Dōgen this freedom from human agency indicates faith in the Buddha Way, religious spirit, and compassion. Dōgen's following words emerge from that realm:

One who practices the Buddha Way above all should have faith in the Buddha Way.⁶⁶

To begin with, the practice of the Buddha Dharma is not done for one's own sake. And of course not for the sake of fame and wealth. One should simply practice the Buddha Dharma for its own sake.⁶⁷

The resolve to attain supreme enlightenment is the issuance and act of a vow to save all sentient beings prior to one's own salvation.⁶⁸

The *zazen* of buddhas and patriarchs is a prayer to gather and appropriate the entire Buddha Dharma from the time of initial resolution. Accordingly, their *zazen* does not forget or reject living beings; their compassionate thought always extends even to insects, and their earnest desire is to save them and to transfer all merits to all things.⁶⁹

However, the realm of undefilement with its accompanying faith and compassion is not merely the goal but the starting point of Buddhist life, because without realization of faith and compassion one cannot have a real point of departure for this life. And only in the undefiled realm in which oneness of practice and enlightenment is realized is the idea "All beings are the Buddha nature" as well rightly realized.

⁶⁶ *Gakudō-yōjinshū* 學道用心集 in *Dōgen Zenji Goroku* 道元禪師語錄, ed. Ōkubo Dōshū. Iwanami bunko edition (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1941), p. 42.

⁶⁷ *ibid.* p. 26.

⁶⁸ *Sōbōgenzō* II (*Hotsūbodaisbin* 覺善提心), p. 407.

⁶⁹ *Hōkyōki* 宝慶記 ed. Ui Hakujū, Iwanami-bunkō edition (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1940), p. 44.

VII

Dōgen's idea of "oneness of practice and enlightenment" necessarily leads us to an examination of his view of *time*, because that idea overcomes another important duality—time and eternity. His view of time in connection with the Buddha nature is clearly seen in still another example of his peculiar way of reading traditional texts.

In the *Buddha nature* book Dōgen quotes the following passage from the Nirvana Sutra: 欲知佛性義當觀時節因緣 時節若至佛性現前 (*Bussbō no gi o sbiran to omobaba masami jisetsu no innen o kanzubesbi: Jisetsu moshi itareba bussbō genzen su*), "To wish to know the meaning of the Buddha nature one should contemplate the causal relation of time and occasion. If the time comes the Buddha nature will manifest itself."⁷⁰ This traditional reading implies waiting for the time of the Buddha nature's manifestation sometime in the future through present practice: unless the time comes the Buddha nature is not manifested, however one may engage in practice. This reading presupposes the Buddha nature as a potentiality like a seed contained within living beings, a view Dōgen severely rejects. Accordingly he changes the reading: 當觀時節因緣 *tōkan jisetsu innen*, "Just see the causal relation of time and occasion,"⁷¹ instead of "one should contemplate the causal relation of time and occasion," and 時節若至 *jisetsu nyakusbi*, "the time and occasion *thus* come,"⁷² instead of "if the time and occasion come." Dōgen's aim is clear. He rejects such an attitude as anticipation of Buddha nature's future manifestation and clarifies the presence of the Buddha nature. There is no time that is not the right time.

Dōgen's emphasis on the idea of "All beings are the Buddha nature" may be regarded as referring to spatiality. The idea developed itself through "no-Buddha-nature" to "impermanence-Buddha nature" which implies temporality. The dimension of all beings was that of appearance-disappearance, mutability. However, it is not to begin with there is time and then within this time, for example, spring comes. Nor is it that there is a time named spring and

⁷⁰ *Sbōbōgenzō*, I (*Bussbō*), p. 318. This is not the exact quotation from the Nirvana Sutra. It is partly based on Po-chang's (Hyakujō) words in *Renzōyō* 禪燈會要 7.

⁷¹ *ibid.*

⁷² *ibid.*

then, in it, flowers bloom. But flower blooming in itself is spring coming, i.e., time called 'spring.' Apart from the facts of flowers blooming, birds singing, grass growing, breezes blowing and the like there is no 'spring.' Apart from mutable phenomena of the world there is no 'time.' Dōgen says "Times have colour such as blue, yellow, red, and white."⁷³ He also says, "Mountains are time, oceans are time. If they were not, there would be no mountain, no ocean. One should not think there is no time in the absolute present of mountains and oceans. If time decays, mountains and oceans will also decay. If time does not decay mountains and oceans will not decay either."⁷⁴ There is no time apart from mutability or appearance-disappearance of things in the universe. Yet there is nothing apart from time. Thus emphasizing *uji* 有時 (being-time) Dōgen says "Time in itself is being; all beings are time."⁷⁵

Dōgen does not however simply identify being and time. Their common denominator is mutability or impermanence. For Dōgen all beings without exception are impermanent; just because so all beings are the Buddha nature, for he rejects an immutable Buddha nature beyond impermanence. Here we have seen a radical turnover of the traditional understanding of the Buddha nature. Similarly Dōgen makes a radical change of the common understanding of time. For him, time does not simply flow.

Time should not be understood simply to fly away. Flying away should not be learned as the only function of time. If time is subject to flying there may be an interval [between coming and going]. It is because time is understood as merely passing that the truth of *uji* is not truly grasped. In short, all beings of the universe are joined together, and each is time. Being *uji* it is one's own time. *Uji* has the characteristic of *kyōryaku*⁷⁶ i.e., movement.⁷⁷

Against the ordinary understanding, for Dōgen, time is flying, yet not flying; flying-*qua*-not flying is time's movement. Movement as flying-*qua*-not flying is always the *present* in which the Buddha nature manifests itself. In other words, the Buddha nature always manifests itself as time, specifically as present time.

⁷³ *ibid.* II (*Kūge* 空華), p. 171.

⁷⁵ *ibid.* p. 159.

⁷⁶ 廻屋

⁷⁴ *ibid.* I (*Uji* 有時), p. 164.

⁷⁷ *Sbōbōgenzō* I (*Uji*), p. 161.

DŌGEN ON BUDDHA NATURE

Accordingly, with the realization of mutability or impermanence as dynamic axis, being and time are identical. The realization of universal impermanence involves the unity of spatiality and temporality. And just as all beings are the Buddha nature all times are the Buddha nature. This the Zen maxim "Every day is a good day" well expresses. Dōgen himself expressed the same realization in the following poem shortly after his return from Sung China:

Morning after morning the sun rises from the east,
Every night the moon sinks in the west;
Clouds disappearing, mountain ridges show themselves,
Rain ceases, surrounding mountains are low.

When Dōgen emphasizes a new reading "*Just seeing* the causal relation of time and occasion" instead of the traditional reading "*One should contemplate* the causal relation of time and occasion" he strongly rejects such ideas as anticipation, hope, and expectation that look for eternity beyond the present moment. Even an idea of anticipation or hope that involves a dialectic of "already" and "not yet" is not an exception, because the very dialectic is based on the idea of divine will or supreme Being. Dōgen denies continuity of time and emphasizes the independence of each point of time as seen in his following words:

Wood becomes ashes and cannot return to wood again. Accordingly one should not regard ashes as after and wood as before. One must understand that wood abiding in its own state has before and after: though it has sequence it is cut off from before and after. Ashes in their own state have after and before. Just as wood does not become wood again after becoming ashes man does not live again after death. Therefore not to speak of life becoming death is the confirmed way of Buddhism: so this is called no-life. To say that death does not become life is the regular preaching of the Buddha: so this is called no-death. Life is a stage of time, death is a stage of time, just as winter and spring. One must not think winter becomes spring, nor can one say spring becomes summer.⁷⁸

⁷⁸ *ibid.* I (*Genjōkōan*), pp. 84–85.

This indicates complete discontinuity of time negating a transition from one state to another, immortality of soul, and eternal life after death. Life is absolutely life, death is absolutely death; spring is absolutely spring, summer is absolutely summer; each in itself no more no less—without the slightest possibility of becoming. This precisely refers to Dōgen's idea of *tōkan* "just seeing" the causal relation of time and occasion. When we "just see" time and occasion at each and every moment there is nothing beyond it, nothing apart from it. Thus Dōgen says "The causal relation of time and occasion should be seen by the causal relation of time and occasion."⁷⁹ There is no room for God as the ruler of time and history, the one Substance, or even the Buddha nature. To realize time as time is to attain the Buddha nature. For Dōgen time is the Buddha nature and the Buddha nature is time.

This is the reason he changes the reading of the phrase *jisetsu nyakushi* from "if the time and occasion come" to "the time and occasion *thus* come." In Dōgen's realization it is not that the fullness of time occurs at a particular time in history but that any moment of history is the fullness of time because for him at every moment time fully manifests itself. This is inseparably connected with his idea of complete discontinuity of time and the independence of each moment. Someone may be suspicious and doubt whether time and history might be spatialized by such ideas and thereby lose its meaning. But, conversely the idea of anticipation or waiting for the fullness of time in the future, however dialectic it may be, is not entirely freed from a naturalistic view of time. Only by the realization of the complete discontinuity of time and of the independent moment i.e., only by negation of temporality, does time become real time. For Dōgen there is no time that is not the fullness of time. "*Jisetsu nyakushi* indicates the time and occasion have already come. There is nothing to doubt. . . . You should know *jisetsu nyakushi* never involves passing time in vain. . . . Since the time and occasion have arrived, this is the manifestation of the Buddha nature. . . . There has been no time and occasion that does not 'thus come.' There is no Buddha nature that does not manifest itself."⁸⁰

However, with complete discontinuity of time and independent moment, time flows. This is *kyōryaku* i.e., movement as flying-*qua*-not flying. Therefore time's movement is not one-directional but completely reversible.

⁷⁹ *ibid.* I (*Bunbō*) p. 318.

⁸⁰ *ibid.* p. 319.

⁸¹ *ibid.* I, (*Uji*) p. 161.

DŌGEN ON BUDDHA NATURE

Uji (being-time) has the virtue of movement, it moves from today to tomorrow, from today to yesterday, from yesterday to today, from today to today, and from tomorrow to tomorrow. Since movement is the virtue of time, time past and time present are neither piled up nor congregated linearly. Therefore Ch'ing-yuan (Seigen) is time; Huang-po (Ōbaku) is time; Ma-tsu (Baso) is time; Shih-t'ou (Sekitō) is time. Because self and others are already time, practice and enlightenment are time.⁸¹

There are great similarities between Dōgen's view of time and Heidegger's. Both of them emphasize the identity of being and time. In Heidegger, through the analysis of *Dasein* (man) in terms of *Sorge* (care), *Angst* (dread), and a being unto death, temporality is regarded as the essential nature of human existence. In Dōgen it is through man's self-consciousness that the problems of life-and-death, generation-and-extinction, and being-and-nonbeing, in short, the problem of impermanence, are realized as the problem to be solved. However at least the following three differences must be noticed:

(1) In Heidegger temporality is grasped particularly through the analysis of human existence, while in Dōgen impermanence is realized emphatically as the universal nature of all beings in the universe. This is because Dōgen grounds his existence on the radically dehomocentric, cosmological dimension whereas Heidegger is not altogether freed from homocentrism, though he emphasizes transcending to the world.

(2) In Dōgen, through the realization of impermanence of all beings, the dimension of which is limitless and bottomless, not only that being is time but also that time is being is clearly realized. On the other hand, in Heidegger it is clear that being is time but not clear that time is being even in the thought of his later period.⁸²

(3) Dōgen's idea of 'impermanence-Buddha nature' results in the realization of simultaneous enlightenment for man and nature. His idea of reversible 'movement' involves the realization of contemporaneity

⁸² However, in his recent book *Zeit und Sein* (Max Neimeyer, Tübingen, 1969), Heidegger discusses "Zeit und Sein" (Time and Being) emphasizing 'Ereignis' as a "gift" of "it" (*Es gibt*) in which time and being are inseparable.

of infinite past and infinite future in terms of the Buddha nature.; progression is regression and regression is progression—in the awakening to “What.” However we cannot find the exact equivalent of these ideas in Heidegger.

In Dōgen the impermanence of the universe and the movement of time are inseparable. The mediating point of these is man’s sustained practice and realization. His ideas of the oneness of being and time, and the fullness of time at each and every moment, are backed up by severe religious practice, especially *zazen*. At the culminating point of religious practice “All times are the Buddha nature” is fully realized. Through *zazen* all beings in the universe are enlightened and all times in history manifest eternity. Yet this takes place here and now, at the absolute present. Apart from the here and now, apart from “body-and-mind-casting-off” realization at the present, this does not take place. Time elapses from present to present. Things in the universe are mutually interpenetrating, with self and others being undifferentiated yet distinct. This is Dōgen’s world of manifestation of the Buddha nature. It must, however, be repeatedly emphasized this is not merely the goal but the starting point of Buddhist life.

In the *Sansuikyō* book Dōgen quotes Fu-jung Tao-k’ai’s (Fuyō Dōkai n.d.) words “A stone-woman bears a child at night,”⁸³ to indicate Beginning (*Anfang*) from the Absolute and free subjectivity. A “Stone-woman” refers to the undifferentiated “What” as the Buddha nature. “Bear a child” may be taken as differentiated multitude coming out of the undifferentiated “What.” It happens “at night” because it is beyond analytic reasoning. The words excellently symbolize the Beginning of all things and freedom in Zen.

Freedom in Zen, particularly in Dōgen, is different from that in Spinozism. In Spinoza God as the one Substance is free because he is *causa sui* (self-cause) and self-determined, while man can be free by seeing himself as part of God’s self-determined being. On the other hand, as has been repeatedly stated, since Dōgen’s idea of the Buddha nature is nonsubstantial, empty, and no-Buddha-nature, man himself is *causa sui* and completely free in the sense of “What-is-it-that-thus-comes.” “A stone-woman bears a child at night” is simply another expression of this. However, the “night” is not the same as “the night in which...

⁸³ 石女夜生兒

all cows are black," so stated by Hegel concerning Schelling's idea of the undifferentiated identity. Hegel criticized Schelling in that manner because for the latter the law of identity, $A=A$ is supreme, whereas the distinction between subject and object is formal and relative. On the contrary, in Dōgen the distinction between subject and object, self and others, becomes clear through the realization of all beings' limitlessness and the Buddha nature's nonsubstantiality. One statement, "All beings are the Buddha nature," may be rendered into two, inseparable statements, "All beings are absolutely all beings" and "the Buddha nature is absolutely the Buddha nature."

In this sense "night" in which "A stone-woman bears a child" is much closer to "a bright night of nothingness of dread" in Heidegger's philosophy. By referring to "onto-theo-logy" Heidegger rejects the whole Western metaphysical tradition and emphasizes nothingness instead of substance. Beings in totality are opened up through "night of nothingness of dread." However, Heidegger's emphasis on nothingness of dread does not necessarily lead him to the completely dehomocentric, cosmological dimension in which alone the impermanence of all beings in the universe is fully realized. Only in this dimensionless dimension is a complete radical reversal from "impermanence is the Buddha nature" to "the Buddha nature is impermanence," from "being is time" to "time is being," possible. "A stone-woman bears a child at night" indicates the cosmo-personalistic freedom based on the realization of this reversal. It is self-determination without determinator, that takes place at each and every moment of absolute present with the boundless cosmological dimension as its basis. This freedom is realized in the infinite circle of religious conduct in which practice and enlightenment are not two but one.

Let me conclude this lengthy discussion on Dōgen's idea of the Buddha nature by quoting the following conversation between Zen master Ch'ang-sha Ch'ing-ts'en (Chōsha Keishin, n. d.) and Minister Chu which Dōgen discusses at the end of the *Buddha nature* book.

"An earthworm being cut, becomes two. Both of them move.
I wonder which contains the Buddha nature?"
The master replied,
"No illusions!"⁸⁴

⁸⁴ *Sōbōgenzō* I (*Bussō*), p. 341.