

Existence/Time as the Way of Ascesis

An Analysis of the Basic Structure of Dōgen's Thought

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ONE OF THE basic premises of early Buddhist thought is the claim that all conditioned things are impermanent. It is the nature and destiny of all things that they arise and perish; when their arising and perishing are extinguished, the bliss of nirvāṇa is realized. The later Buddhists speculated about the impermanence/change of existence especially in relation to its momentariness: a moment is followed by another, and the succession of moments constitute the duration of existence. Thus the keen awareness of time was an integral part of Buddhist thought from its very inception. Yet, the problem of impermanence, and that of time for that matter, were treated mainly in the context of causality and other cognate philosophical issues. That is, from the standpoint of Buddhist speculative interest, the problem of time was but a side issue; time as such was never considered to be pivotal in Buddhist thought metaphysically.¹

* This paper was originally presented, under the title of "Existence/Time as the Way of Spiritual Freedom," for a panel on "Existence and Time in Dōgen" at the 30th annual meeting of the Association for Asian Studies held March 31—April 2, 1978, in Chicago. In this connection, I would like to thank Professor Richard DeMartino of Temple University, who was the discussant of the panel, for calling my attention to Nishida Kitarō's notion of *hataraku-mono kara miru-mono e* 働くものから見るものへ which is strikingly akin to Dōgen's conception of ascesis as presented in this article.

¹ The title of David J. Kalupahana's recent work, *Causality: The Central Philosophy of Buddhism* (Honolulu: The University Press of Hawaii, 1975), is indicative of such a persistent Buddhist concern. On the other hand, the Buddhists did speculate on time; for this see two essays by Hirakawa Akira and Ejima Yasunori on the early Buddhist, Abhidharma Buddhist, and Mahāyāna views on time, in Saigusa Mitsuyoshi, ed., *Kōza Bukkyō-shisō*, vol. 1 (Tokyo: Risōsha, 1974), pp. 181–269.

On the other hand, from the standpoint of Buddhist religion, the idea of time was by and large associated with the painful and illusory character of life and reality; time as constitutive of man's finitude was regarded, more often than not, as that aspect of existence which should be overcome and transcended, rather than penetrated and realized. For this reason, the negative overtones and undertones surrounding the meaning of time, coupled with such metaphors as bubbles, dreams, dews, and so forth, abounded in the Buddhist tradition.

Furthermore, in Buddhism as a whole, and especially in the Mahāyāna tradition, the symbol of space seems to have played the predominant role in its religious imagination and philosophical speculation. The myriad worlds peopled with buddhas, bodhisattvas, and other countless forms of sentient, as well as insentient, beings occupied the sacred space of the Buddhist envisionment. The Hua-yen cosmology of all dharmas of the universe as mutually identical and interpenetrating in the absolute freedom of nonobstruction was very much, if not exclusively, spatially oriented. The metaphor of "empty space," perhaps because of its symbolic affinity with the idea of emptiness, was particularly favored in the Ch'an/Zen tradition, the fact of which indicates the key role played by a spatial orientation.² True, Hua-yen and Ch'an, as the two finest philosophical and religious products of the Chinese mind, were the most practically and dynamically oriented schools of Buddhist thought; nevertheless, the awareness of time, if any, was overwhelmed and overshadowed by the dazzling vision of the sacred space of Vairocana or of Buddha-nature. As a whole, atemporality in their mode of thinking was undeniable.

In view of the foregoing cursory observations, the unique significance of Dōgen's contribution to the history of Buddhist thought lies in his attributing central importance to the problem of time. He reinstates this inconspicuous concept from its obscurity, thus placing it in relief at the very foundation of his religion and metaphysics. What is doubly remarkable is the fact that Dōgen arrived at his thought by working from within

² For the use of the metaphor of empty space in Ch'an/Zen, see Hisamatsu Shin'ichi, "The Characteristics of Oriental Nothingness" in *Philosophical Studies in Japan*, no. 2 (1960), pp. 65-97. The classical Ch'an/Zen treatment of time is well presented in D. T. Suzuki, "Ummon on Time," *The Eastern Buddhist*, vol. 6, no. 2 (October 1973), pp. 1-13.

the Buddhist intellectual milieu, through his unique method of analysis of Buddhist concepts and symbols. Dōgen has shown that an extremely suggestive theory of time can be derived from Buddhist thought itself.

This intellectual feat, however, is executed not from any speculative interest as such, which by the way he vehemently disdained, but from his existential and soteriological involvement in the very character of existence as inexorably impermanent and ultimately destined to death. Dōgen's life was deeply embedded in the ethos of medieval Japan of the early Kamakura period, which belonged to the so-called "Age of Degenerate Dharma" (*mappō* 末法). According to the traditional Buddhist view of history: the age was deeply troubled, dark, and helpless; life seemed fleeting, wearisome, and empty. Dōgen lived and died in the midst of such pervasive ethos of despair, helplessness, and desperation; and quite understandably, the tragic sense of life is a persistent undercurrent of his thought.³ Thus the problem of existence and time in Dōgen was part and parcel of living in the historical and cultural situation of medieval Japan.

In what follows we shall attempt to briefly delineate and elucidate some salient aspects of Dōgen's view of existence/time (*uji* 有時), with special attention given to its ascetic nature and function—"ascetic" in the original sense of the word, namely, practice or discipline as the way of spiritual freedom. Our guiding assumption throughout this paper is that the soteriological intention of Dōgen's discourse can be better understood in terms of asceticism rather than vision: vision is not discredited, but penetrated, empowered by asceticism.

Self/world as radically individual and temporal

Perhaps one of the most striking characteristics of Dōgen's view of time is an intensely personal and existential manner and tone of his presentation, especially in the *Shōbōgenzō*, *Uji*.⁴ The question of time is raised here not from a theoretical or speculative standpoint, but as we have

³ As to Dōgen's life, see Hee-Jin Kim, *Dōgen Kigen—Mystical Realist* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1975), chapter 2.

⁴ Throughout this paper we used the critical recension of the *Shōbōgenzō* 正法眼藏 edited by Ōkubo Dōshū in his *Dōgen zenji zenshū*, vol. 1 (Tokyo: Chikuma shobō, 1969), hereafter cited as *Sbgz*.

already observed, from the standpoint of Dōgen's own personal concern with spiritual freedom. Thus it is inseparably bound with the total life of one's existential self; the verity of time is invariably personal and individual. Time is, first of all, *my* time. To illustrate the case in point, we can adduce a few statements:

We should understand that my self, by unfolding itself in all things, constitutes the entire world, and that things and events of this entire world are temporal particularities. . . . My self unfolds itself, thereby it beholds this [scene]. Such is the truth that the self is time.

Essentially speaking, all existences of the entire universe are contiguous to one another, yet constitute discrete times. Because of being existence/time, they are my existence/time.

Speaking of the foregoing example, when I waded rivers and ascended mountains, I was present; [hence] time belongs to me. If time does not have the aspect of coming and going, the moment of mountain-climbing is the absolute present of [my] existence/time. [On the other hand,] if time possesses the aspect of coming and going [in the lived experience of existence/time], the absolute present of existence/time belongs to me. This is the meaning of existence/time.

We should understand thoroughly that unless I put forth the utmost exertion and live the inner dynamicity of time, not a single dharma, not a single thing will be realized, nor will it ever live out the inner dynamicity of time. [*Sbgz, Uji*]

In these quotations it is unequivocally expressed that the problem of time inevitably bears upon one's personal fears and hopes, pains and pleasures, ambiguities and clarities which constitute the unadulterated particularity of one's existence. In a sense, we might even say, though with utmost caution for the reasons that will presently become clear, that Dōgen's predominant concern is less the interrelationship between persons than the unique existence of a person. The irreplaceable uniqueness and freedom of an individual being is the focal point of Dōgen's religious-philosophical interest. Indeed we might say that Dōgen was an individualist par excellence.

Radical individuality, however, should not be construed as portraying a solitary, egocentric individuality in isolation from the rest of humanity and nature. Just as it is foundational to Buddhism that existence is fundamentally socio-cosmic and only derivatively individual, for existence originates from and is embedded in the universal law of dependent origination (*pratitya-samutpāda*), so is it to Dōgen's religion and metaphysics. Nothing in the universe exists in and of itself; each and every being is interdependent on and penetrated by all other beings. In an oft-quoted statement Dōgen observes:

To learn the Buddha-way is to learn one's self; to learn one's self is to forget one's self; to forget one's self is to be enlightened by myriad dharmas; and to be enlightened by myriad dharmas is to cast off the body and mind of self as well as those of other. All traces of enlightenment [thus] are wiped out, and life with traceless enlightenment goes on for ever and ever. [*Sbgz, Genjō-kōan* 現成公案]

In a similar vein Dōgen also has this to say:

It is delusion for one's self to [mistakenly] practice and realize myriad dharmas by acting upon them; it is enlightenment for myriad dharmas to practice and realize one's self through their advance in unison. [Those] who profoundly enlighten delusion are buddhas; [those] who are profoundly deluded in enlightenment are sentient beings. [Thus] there are persons who attain further enlightenment beyond enlightenment, [whereas] there are persons who are more deluded amidst delusion. [*Sbgz, Genjō-kōan*]

The self and the world, man and cosmos, reality within and reality without, in the enlightened man's existence, are coextensive and coeternal, sharing their common roots and collaborating for common destinies.

Moreover, from the standpoint of Mahāyāna Buddhist religion, the ideal of the bodhisattva does not permit a selfish individualism. Individual liberation as such, in isolation from social liberation of all beings, is a contradiction in terms. The arousal of desire-for-enlightenment is inextricably connected with the resolution to ferry across all beings to the other shore even when one has not yet crossed himself.

All these qualifications notwithstanding, Dōgen's thrust of radical

individuality cannot be doubted. The individuality with crystal-clear boundaries of self-identity is what emerges from the study of Dōgen's view of the self. Individuality, seen in this light, does not comprise an aesthetic continuum in which the boundaries of each particularity melt away, in favor of an undifferentiated oneness of life. To put the matter differently, the self is neither the pointer to the Infinite, nor the end-product of evolution, nor a self-contained psycho-physical entity; instead, as we shall examine later, the self, together with the world, constitute, in their nondual oneness, the bearer and enactor of ultimate reality, namely, Buddha-nature in Dōgen's most cherished designation. Thus the radical individuality under consideration is unmistakably that of Buddha-nature. In this view Buddha-nature functions to radicalize individuality, not to devalue it; the perfect transparency of individuality and Buddha-nature is called the "man of a particular rank" (*ui-shinjin* 有位真人), in contrast to Lin-chi's "man of no rank" (*mui-shinjin* 無位真人).⁵

At any rate the poignancy of Dōgen's entire thought, as we have intimated before, stems directly from his acute sensitivity to the impermanence/death of existence, the magnitude of which is comparable to Shinran's profound understanding of man's passion-ridden existence. Herewith Dōgen's search for spiritual freedom becomes not only individual but radically temporal.

Time and again throughout his writings⁶ Dōgen reminds his monk-disciples of the intimate relationship between the awareness of impermanence/death and the desire-for-enlightenment. To him the essence of religion consists of the lucid understanding of life and the thorough penetration into death (*ryōshō-tasshi* 了生達死); and this begins and ends with a clear understanding of the meaning of impermanence. "The arising and decaying of all things occur swiftly," thus admonishes Dōgen. "Birth-and-death is gravely important" (*Sbgz zuimonki, passim*). The sense of impermanence is inseparably connected with the awareness of death:

The student of the Buddha-dharma should think of the inevitability of dying. The truth is quite obvious, so much so that he

⁵ *Sbgz, Sesshin-sesshō* 説心説性.

⁶ Especially in Dōgen's *Shōbōgenzō zuimonki* and *Eihei shōso gakudō yōjinshū, passim*, in Ōkubo Dōshū, ed., *Dōgen zenji zenshū*, vol. 2 (Tokyo: Chikuma shobō, 1970).

may not even think of it with such an expression; yet, he should not waste his precious time by doing useless things, but instead do worthwhile things. Of many worthwhile things, just one—indeed all else is futile—is vitally important: the way of life of buddhas/patriarchs. [*Sbgz zuimonki*, III: 23]

In making these utterances Dōgen was no doubt a child of his age: like his medieval contemporaries in Kamakura Japan, impermanence was not impersonal and abstract as understood in the succession of moments or point-instants, but instead it was the deeply felt quality of life and reality. Yet he went beyond them by cosmicizing and ontologizing the problem at hand so that impermanence/death was now regarded as structurally inherent in man and the universe, hence as that “factuality” which should be treated religiously as well as metaphysically. As a result his solution consisted neither in a speculative study in the momentariness of existence, nor in a transcendental flight from the unbearable reality of impermanence, nor in an aesthetic indulgence in the fleeting beauty of life, but in the recognition and actualization of what impermanence truly meant to be. The impermanence of finite existence is not to be transcended so much as to be realized. This is the gist of “realization” (*genjō* 現成), or of “freedom in penetration” (*tōdatsu* 透脱). A radical temporalization of his understanding of man and the universe naturally follows from this recognition.

Dōgen's view of impermanence is nowhere more explicit than in his analysis of the notion of impermanence/Buddha-nature (*mujo-busshō* 無常佛性). In his usual, critical manner, Dōgen approaches the widely-held contention that Buddha-nature is permanent and thus spiritual freedom consists in departure from the world's impermanence, and argues for its untenability. Taking up a well-known statement of the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra*, “Buddha-nature is always abiding; all dharmas are arising and perishing,” Dōgen contends that impermanence is Buddha-nature and that its inverse is also true. A good Mahāyānist, Dōgen is here quite consistent with the fundamental religio-philosophical foundation of the tradition he was nurtured in, which can be epitomized in the formula of the *Heart Sūtra*, “form is emptiness; emptiness is form.” Thus not only impermanence is Buddha-nature, but Buddha-nature is impermanence, because both are bound to be “arising and perishing.” Nevertheless, from the standpoint of the generally held view of the abiding character of

Buddha-nature, which incidentally must have been quite widespread in those days, Dōgen's is certainly a shocking assertion.

Although we cannot dwell on Dōgen's view of Buddha-nature at length,⁷ it is already abundantly clear: Buddha-nature no longer has a preeminent metaphysical status of its own in the sense that it is absolutely independent of all dharmas and that hence it is immune to change and modification; although it is not a dharma, yet like all other dharmas, Buddha-nature is empty of self-existence and shares its workings with all dharmas. Impermanence in light of this view is far from being devaluated, but on the contrary, sacralized with ultimate value and significance. Dōgen writes:

The impermanence of grasses and trees, thickets and woods, is none other than Buddha-nature. Men and things, body and mind, are impermanent, hence the very Buddha-nature. Nations and lands, mountains and rivers, are impermanent because they themselves are Buddha-nature. Supreme enlightenment, because it is Buddha-nature, is impermanent; great nirvana, because it is impermanent, is Buddha-nature. [*Sbgz*, *Bussō* 佛性]

What is original in Dōgen, however, is the thought that both Buddha-nature and all dharmas are mediated by activity-unremitting and expression. Since we shall consider the latter two notions later on in this paper, suffice it to say at this juncture that impermanence/Buddha-nature is now associated with the dynamic, ascetic qualities of reality. Thus it is not surprising to read such statements as: "The impermanent themselves expound, enact, and realize impermanence—all should be impermanent" (*Sbgz*, *Bussō*). The traditional idea of impermanence is appropriated here in terms of the self-enactment of impermanence in the cosmic scale.

Then the notion of permanence, which inevitably accompanies that of impermanence, is dealt with in a manner which is consistent with what we have seen in the preceding few paragraphs. "Whether [a person] becomes an enlightened one cutting off delusions or manifests himself as a worldly one to be liberated from them," says Dōgen, "[his changes] do not necessarily have to do with the traces of their coming and going" (*Sbgz*,

⁷ For Dōgen's view of Buddha-nature, see Abe Masao, "Dōgen on Buddha Nature," *The Eastern Buddhist*, vol. 4, no. 1 (May 1971), pp. 28-71; Kim, *op. cit.*, pp. 160-227.

Bussō).⁸ This is a crucially important statement which shows Dōgen's ascetic interpretation of permanency. Indeed permanence cannot mean the eternity, immutability, or indestructibility of a metaphysical entity any more than Buddha-nature can refer to a cosmic source of which all dharmas are created: it cannot be referential. Nor can the notion of permanency be understood in terms of transcendence as opposed to immanence. As we have intimated a moment ago, phenomenality and absoluteness are nondually one in Buddha-nature. If this is the case, what Dōgen is suggesting in the aforementioned statement is that the permanence in question signifies the mode of selfless, liberated existence of Buddha-nature through which activity-unremitting/expression is totally exerted and totally free from its traces or taints. In short, "permanence" refers to the unchanging quality of absolutely free, ascetic existence on the part of both Buddha-nature and all dharmas. For this reason, it has nothing to do with metaphysical entity but with soteriological act. To use Dōgen's favorite expressions, an impermanent existence realizes itself in the impermanent world and "casts off its body-mind" (*shinjin-datsuraku* 身心脱落) and thereby is "undefiled" (*fuzenna* 不染汙, 不染汚) so as to ever create, transform, and renew its being. Permanence points to such an unfailing actuality of Buddha-nature and universal possibility of all dharmas. All in all, it means the mode of being/becoming of Buddha-nature/all dharmas.

The total exertion of the present

The radical temporalization of the problem of existence/time in Dōgen is closely related to his critique of the quantitative view of time. The people commonly speak of a day in terms of "the twelve hours" as though time were divided and segmentalized in some measurable, homogeneous units, and these temporal units progressed mechanically in a one-dimensional, sequential manner regardless of the experiential qualities of existence; the event of existence thus is but an episode or an appearance on the stage of the impersonal passage of time, as though existence were in time. Thus the beginningless and endless succession of now-moments constitutes the backdrop of human dramas.

⁸ The original *miten* 未轉 for permanence, literally, means "nonturning" or "prior-to-turning."

Also similar to this is the common way of speaking of time in quasi-physical terms such as "long or distant, short or quick," "flowing," "flying," or "coming and going" (*Sbgz, Uji*). For example, often in the hurly-burly of mundane life, where the tempo of surrounding realities is outrunning that of our biological and psychological existence, we vaguely experience the transience of life, and use some such expressions.⁹ Under such circumstances, the manner in which the people speak of their experiences must be carefully examined and understood. In the tone of a critical appreciation, Dōgen observes: "If time were exclusively dependent on flying, there would be an interval [between time and self]. The people cannot grasp the truth of existence/time, because they conceive it to be only passing away" (*Sbgz, Uji*).¹⁰

These conventional ways of describing time have the fundamental assumption of a dualism between time and existence. In contrast to such a common-sense view, Dōgen proposes the nondualistic equation of existence and time. Time itself is existence; existence is invariably time. Dōgen does not say that existence is in time, but instead, that existence *is* time. As Dōgen sees the matter, time cannot be meaningfully talked about apart from the personal qualities of self/world, which we observed in the preceding section, and existence, in turn, though empirically characterized in terms of space, time, and causality, is preeminently temporal in its innermost existentiality. The net result is a radical temporalization of existence and a radical existentialization of time.

Thus the following observation is made:

Mountains are time, oceans are time. If they were not, there would be neither mountains nor oceans. Do not say that mountains and oceans are not temporal at this moment of eternal present. If time perishes, mountains and oceans will perish as well; if time does not, they will not, either. [*Sbgz, Uji*]

It follows from this that time has shapes, colors, smells, sounds, and so forth. Quite consistent with the traditional Buddhist position, time is denied its own self-same entity but construed as the bearer of the events of self/world. The particularities of existence and those of time are not two

⁹ Karaki Junzō, *Mujō* (Tokyo: Chikuma shobō, 1974), pp. 1-18 concerning the analysis of *hakanashi*.

¹⁰ Regarding Ch'an/Zen critique of the common-sense view of time, see Suzuki's aforementioned essay, "Ummon on Time."

different sets of realities but one and the same. That is, "all existence" (*jīn'u* 盡有) is "all time" (*jīnji* 盡時).

What differentiates Dōgen from the traditional view of Buddhism is that the nonduality of existence and time is appropriated in the manner of asceticism rather than in that of vision. Dōgen says:

There is only one thing for us to do—to totally live the truth that all time is all existence. There is no dharma extraneous to this, because "extraneous dharma" by definition means what it means. Even half-exerted existence/time is the total exertion of half existence/time. Even what appears to be mistaken is itself existence/time. Going a step further along this line, even before and after you have made a mistake, you always abide in existence/time. Living vigorously in one's Dharma-situation—this is existence/time. [*Sbgz, Uji*]

Dōgen's ascetic intention is quite clear in these statements, but more will be said of this presently.

Such existence/time invariably presents itself as the present. That is, existence/time is realized as the absolute present. "No matter how many periods—even tens of thousands of them—you may think of, they consist of the present, the absolute now. Each person's share of being lies invariably in the present," Dōgen says (*Sbgz, Daigo* 大悟). Similarly, the following statement is made: "All existences and all worlds are realized in each temporal particularity. Just meditate upon this for a moment: Is any existence or any world excluded from this present moment?" (*Sbgz, Uji*).

The present in this view is sharply different from an intermediate position between a before and an after in the series of homogeneous now-points. This is the reason that when Dōgen refers to a familiar theme of the identity of time and dharmas, he means much more than the ordinary time: "[In 'When these dharmas arise,'] *when-arise* is *these-dharmas*, yet it is not the twelve hours. *These-dharmas* is *when-arise*, yet it differs from the triple world arising in rivalry" (*Sbgz, Kaiin-zammai* 海印三昧). Thus existence/time as the present must be unequivocally differentiated from any dualistic conceptions adduced here in terms of "the twelve hours" and "the triple world arising in rivalry."

Thus Dōgen analyzes the problem of the present from a soteriological standpoint. For example, he states:

An ancient buddha asked: "What is time—incessantly arising and perishing—like?" As is clear from this, arising and perishing mean that self arises in and of itself and perishes in and of itself, and that it never halts. This expression *never-halts* should be understood in such a way that arising or perishing is total arising or total perishing. This *time-incessantly-arising-and-perishing* pulsates as the life of buddhas/patriarchs. [Sbgz, Kaiin-zammai]

From what we have observed before, the *never-halts* cannot imply the continuity of now-moments; it is not the process of succession. Rather it is the event of total arising or total perishing. It is total time in this respect. From the standpoint of causality, nothing comes into being and goes out of being in and of itself; yet from the standpoint of spiritual freedom, any and every dharma does exist in and of itself. This is not the denial of causality but the temporalization of it. Temporality and ascesis are inextricably interfused here.

It is from this perspective that Dōgen writes about the Dharma-situation (*hōi* 法位) which is his ascetic way of speaking of the present:

When firewood becomes ash, it can no longer revert to firewood. But we should not regard ash as following and firewood as preceding. Take note that firewood abides in its own Dharma-situation and has before and after, and that although possessing before and after, it is cut off from them. Ash abides in its Dharma-situation and is possessed of before and after. Just as firewood does not change to firewood again after its having been burnt to ash, so death is no longer transformed into birth after man is dead. Accordingly, it has been a long-established view of the Buddha-dharma not to speak of birth becoming death; for this reason it is called "no-origination." It is [also] a traditional teaching in the Buddha-dharma that death does not change to birth; hence it is called "no-extinction." Birth is a situation of total time, death is a situation of total time as well. They are likened to the winter and the spring. We do not think that the winter turns into the spring, or say that the spring becomes the summer. [Sbgz, Genjō-kōan]

Whether it be firewood or ash, birth or death, the winter or the spring—each has its own Dharma-situation which is absolutely discrete and

discontinuous. Each has its "before" and "after," but is cut off from those Dharma-situations "preceding" and "following." However, note that these expressions are not made in the manner of "the twelve hours" or of "the triple world arising in rivalry" or in terms of any conventional view. The Dharma-situation in question is extremely similar to what Heidegger had in mind when using the Greek word "*epoche*" in his analysis of time and being.¹¹ In any event Dōgen's view is a most radical advocacy of the discontinuity of existence/time, thereby denying the present as an instance of any linear, evolutionary process or of any nexus of things spatially contiguous. In this respect, we can say that "time does not pass" (*Shgz, Uji*), without necessarily implying a static conception of time.

Because of its centrality in understanding Dōgen's view of existence/time, the notion of "abiding in the Dharma-situation" (*jū-hōi* 住法位) should be examined in some detail at this juncture. Existence/time, as the present, is now conceived in terms of abiding in the Dharma-situation. To begin with, a Dharma-situation is a dharma's particular spatio-temporal existence sacralized with its absolute significance in the total scheme of things. Each and every dharma, whether it be a flower in the field or a piece of rock in the river, has absolute, irreplaceable value in and of itself. As we have seen before, there is no denial here of its coming into being through the law of dependent origination. But the emphasis in the notion of Dharma-situation is placed on the dharma's absolute discontinuity with and independence of other dharmas. Thus continuity and interdependence in the context of causation recedes to the background. With respect to human existence, a Dharma-situation is a present with uniquely personal values, meanings, and experiences; the phenomenal and existential qualities are, in the least, devaluated. Nevertheless, these values and qualities are not merely personal and subjective, but a Dharma-state in the sense that in and through this particular Dharma-situation the totality of Buddha-nature enacts and realizes itself. For this reason, the Dharma-situation is in no way a self-limiting manifestation or a temporal instance of eternity, but the totality

¹¹ Martin Heidegger, *On Time and Being*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), p. 9. "To hold back is, in Greek, *epoche*. Hence we speak of the epochs of the destiny of Being. Epoch does not mean here a span of time in occurrence, but rather the fundamental characteristic of sending, the actual holding-back of itself in favor of the discernibility of the gift, that is, of Being with regard to the grounding of beings."

of eternity itself. It is what Dōgen calls realization/kōan (*genjō-kōan* 現成公案). In short, a Dharma-situation is a radically temporal situation of eternity.

Inseparable from the notion of the Dharma-situation is that of "the total exertion of a single dharma" (*ippō-gūjin* 一法究盡). "A single dharma" bears the meaning of a single existence as well as of that existence which realizes all dharmas in it. Dōgen is cautious to remind us that the total experience of all dharmas does not deprive a single dharma of its own unique particularity.¹² This is significant because Dōgen here seems very much in line with Hua-yen Buddhism's totalistic vision of the Dharmadhātu of *shih-shih-wu-ai* (事事無礙; J., *jijimuge*) in which all things of the universe are mutually identical and interpenetrated with each other in perfect freedom. Dazzling and brilliant as its cosmic vision may be, Hua-yen Buddhism, however, is still very much contemplative in its orientation and methodology. Dōgen's emphasis, in contrast, is, through and through, an ascetic appropriation of nonduality in such a way that the whole universe is crystallized into the unique historical singularity of an individual dharma. Spiritual energy in Hua-yen moves centrifugally, whereas in Dōgen it moves centripetally; dharmas in the former, thus, are diffused in the harmony of nonobstruction, but in the latter (in Dōgen) they are condensed into a single dharma. Thus a single dharma, as totally exerted, becomes the total cause for the totality of all dharmas—the total cause that involves all causes and all effects; the whole universe is transformed into the single dharma's selfless ascesis in absolute freedom.

The centripetal focalization of all dharmas into the total exertion of a single dharma is characterized in still another way in terms of "total dynamism" or "total function" (*zenki* 全機). In his analogy of sailing in a boat, the existence/time of the boat is described as follows:

At such a time, there is nothing but the boat's world. The heavens, the water, and the shore—all become the boat's time; certainly, it is not the same as the time that is not of the boat. Hence, I make life what it is; life makes me what I am. By riding in the boat, one's body and mind, as well as the self and the world, are together the dynamic function of the boat. The entire

¹² *Shgz, Gabyō* 畫餅.

great earth and the whole empty space are alike in company with the boat's dynamic working. Such is the I that is life, the life that is I. [*Sbgz*, *Zenki*]

All dharmas cooperate in concerted efforts to bring forth the total exertion of a single dharma. As A. N. Whitehead said, "The whole world conspires to produce a new creation."¹³

The ascetic appropriation of the mutual identity and interpenetration of a single dharma and all dharmas must go still a step further: it is to be cast off. Dōgen writes for example:

Origination is a situation of total time and has indeed before and after; accordingly, in the Buddha-dharma origination itself is said to be no-origination. Extinction also is a situation of total time and possesses before and after; hence, extinction itself is said to be no-extinction. When you speak of origination, there is nothing but origination; when you speak of extinction, there is nothing but extinction. For this reason you should surrender yourselves totally to origination, when origination comes, and to extinction, when extinction comes. Do not hate them; do not desire them. [*Sbgz*, *Shōji* 生死]

Thus "a single dharma" involves one dharma, all dharmas, and no-dharma; thereupon it is the total dharma.

The total exertion, as the ascetic dimension of a single dharma, is expounded as the act of absolutely and thoroughly enacting the entire world with the entire world: the self-exertion of the entire world in and through itself.¹⁴ For this reason, the total exertion comprises not only mere human efforts on the part of an individual, psychological, intellectual, moral or otherwise, but more importantly, the totality of self/world and Buddha-nature. In this respect total exertion is that soteriological act in which a single dharma is chosen and enacted not dualistically but nondualistically. In other words, by virtue of its total exertion, a single dharma is no longer one among all dharmas, but the total dharma that is all there is in the universe. For example, sitting in meditation

¹³ A. N. Whitehead, *Religion in the Making* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1926), p. 99.

¹⁴ *Sbgz*, *Uji*. The original reads: *sore jinkai o mote jinkai o kaijin suru* それ盡界をもて盡界を界盡する。

is thoroughly and absolutely enacted in the nondualistic mode of ascesis so that there is nothing but that sitting in the entire world, all other things being realized together in and through it.

Yet by far the most typically Dōgen-like expression with respect to the idea of total exertion runs as follows: "Obstruction hinders obstruction, thereby obstruction beholds itself; obstruction obstructs obstruction—such is time" (*Sbgz, Uji*). As he often does elsewhere in the *Shōbōgenzō*, Dōgen uses the word "obstruction" (*ge 礙*, a shortened form of *keige* 聖礙) in the sense of "self-obstruction," in which a dharma is "obstructed" by itself, thus exerting itself in absolute freedom. Moreover, the noun "obstruction" in the Japanese original in this quote is used in a verb from, which is another characteristic of Dōgen's diction. We might say, "the universe universe-s the universe," "a mountain mountain-s a mountain," and so forth. The prototypal expression "obstruction obstructs obstruction," in the final analysis, signifies that a single dharma realizes itself—and the entire world for that matter—by enacting its whole being thoroughly and absolutely in a radically nondualistic manner. Herein we see the crux of Dōgen's entire thought in which nonduality is appropriated not in a visionary fashion but in an ascetic, soteriological manner.¹⁵

When we compare Dōgen's logic of the total exertion of a single dharma with the *Diamond Sūtra's* logic of identity-and-difference, "A is not-A; therefore, A is A," or with Yün-mên Wên-yen's tautological statement, "Mountains are mountains, waters are waters," in the Ch'an tradition, it seems evident that Dōgen is philosophically more emphatic and explicit than traditional Buddhists in stressing the centrality of ascesis which is the hallmark of Ch'an/Zen. In the logics of identity-and-difference and of tautology, it is often criticized, rightly or wrongly, that spiritual freedom in Ch'an/Zen is attained at the expense of obfuscation of conflicts, antitheses, paradoxes—human, all too human qualities of existence. One of the most serious implications of such a criticism is that nonduality in Ch'an/Zen is incomplete, and even inconsistent with its fundamental notion of emptiness. Be that as it may, the ascetic dynamism of total exertion abhors any slight devaluation of these existential qualities which form what Dōgen calls "the authentic human embodiment" (*shinjitsu-*

¹⁵ Heidegger, *op. cit.*, p. 24. His shift away from metaphysics in speaking of "four dimensional true time" may be comparable to Dōgen's effort to move in the direction of ascesis.

nintai 眞實人體). In this regard Dōgen seems to have pursued more rigorously and consistently the ascetic implications of Ch'an/Zen.

Activity and expression

We are now in a position to scrutinize Dōgen's further elaboration on the last statement made in the preceding section. It is already abundantly clear from the foregoing investigation that when Dōgen speaks of existence and time, his position of thoroughgoing nondualism often runs counter to familiar mystical notions such as "timelessness," "ineffability," "nondifferentiation," and so forth. If the appellation "mysticism" is applicable to Dōgen's thought, his is not so much the matter of seeing things differently as that of creating things differently; his mysticism concerns itself with transforming rather than seeing as such. Dōgen delves deeply in this direction in his treatment of existence and time: that is, existence/time as the way of asceticism is now dealt with in terms of two fundamental notions of Dōgen's religion and metaphysics: activity-unremitting (*gyōji* 行持) and expression (*dōtoku* 道得). These ideas will be examined one by one in what follows.

Activity-unremitting which means sustained and sustaining spiritual practice is the essential nature of existence/time, and of Buddha-nature for that matter. It is not confined to only observable, behavioral actions, but more importantly, includes man's innermost secrets and aspirations, as well. All the events of the world, from the subatomic realities to the galactic ones, originate from the workings of activity-unremitting.

The sun, moon, and stars exist by virtue of this activity-unremitting; the great earth and empty space, our body-mind and its environments, the four elements and the five skandhas—all exist by virtue of this activity-unremitting. Although activity-unremitting is not what the worldly people are fond of [seeking], it is the ultimate matrix to which they should return. [*Sbgz*, *Gyōji*]

Furthermore, the following is stated:

That activity-unremitting which actualizes me, when [its workings are] hidden at the moment, is beyond my comprehension with respect to what conditions of dependent origination bring it forth. The reason for this is that the compre-

hension of activity-unremitting reveals nothing particularly novel. It should be carefully examined and thoroughly understood that dependent origination is activity-unremitting, because activity-unremitting [itself] is not brought forth by [the conditions of] dependent origination. [*Sbgz, Gyōji*]

Note that Dōgen goes so far as to say that activity-unremitting is more primitive than even dependent origination: activity-unremitting, as Dōgen sees it, is not a dharma whose existence is interdependent on the conditions of dependent origination, nor is it itself dependent upon the law of dependent origination. Activity-unremitting, as the primordial creative force, makes the process of dependent origination possible, not the other way around. Here Dōgen seems to have advanced an important philosophical step further beyond the top of a hundred-foot pole, to use a Ch'an/Zen expression. Nāgārjuna's (and Mahāyāna's for that matter) fundamental insight into the nonduality of emptiness and dependent origination already has in it the dynamic, creative outlook of life and reality. It is manifest particularly in the East Asian forms of Mahāyāna Buddhism such as Hua-yen, as we have alluded to before. Dōgen, however, makes this absolutely explicit and unmistakable, by elevating the notion of activity-unremitting to a metaphysical eminence. Thus activity-unremitting is fundamental not only soteriologically but also metaphysically. Its metaphysical import has not as yet been properly appreciated by Dōgen students. In any event, the result is that emptiness/dependent origination is immensely enriched and empowered; its creative implications are made unequivocally manifest.

Parenthetically speaking, Dōgen's notion of activity-unremitting is strikingly similar to the Pure Land Buddhist notion of Amitābha's original vow-power. One is the primordial ascesis, where the other the primordial compassion. Herein lies the fundamental difference between Dōgen and, say, Shinran—a difference not in kind but in emphasis. Both activity-unremitting and original vow-power are symbolic of the primordial, self-liberating power of reality.

Now Dōgen continues:

That which actualizes such [primordial] activity-unremitting is none other than our activity-unremitting of the present. The present of activity-unremitting is not the original being abiding from the beginning in the self, nor is the present of activity-

unremitting something that enters and leaves the self. [The time] expressed as the present does not precede activity-unremitting; [the event of] activity-unremitting realized is called [the time of] the present. [*Sbgz, Gyōji*]

As it is clear in these statements, the present is indivisibly bound up with activity-unremitting, so as to actualize itself always as "the present of activity-unremitting." In brief, time and ascesis are here self-identical, and contemporaneously realized. Inasmuch as the primordial character of activity-unremitting is conjoined with the present, activity-unremitting becomes the bond between existence/time and Buddha-nature. Seen in this light, the ground, the path, and the goal of spiritual freedom consist in activity-unremitting.

Such spiritual freedom is prototypally expressed in zazen-only (*shikan-taza* 只管打坐, 只管打坐), which to Dōgen was none other than the self-enactment of the Way (*bendō* 辦道). This is why he thinks that truth lies in the authenticity or inauthenticity of ascesis, neither the superiority or inferiority of doctrine nor the deepness or shallowness of teaching.¹⁶ Hence zazen-only, or the enactment of the Way, is not a part of birth-and-death; rather birth-and-death is an outreaching or flowering of zazen-only. As Dōgen puts it, we see birth-and-death through the enactment of the Way; we do not enact the Way in birth-and-death.¹⁷ By the same token, activity-unremitting in Dōgen's view should not be construed as part of spiritual freedom; the truth of the matter is that the latter is the unfoldment of the former.

The present of activity-unremitting, furthermore, is elaborated on as that activity-unremitting which perpetuates itself as "the ring of the Way" (*dōkan* 道環) with no beginning and no end. Since this notion will be discussed later in a different context, let us just underscore at this point that activity-unremitting has its self-expression not only in the present but also in the advance of the Way through history.

Activity-unremitting is inseparably connected with another cognate idea "expression," which in Dōgen is as equally primitive as the former. At one place Dōgen puts it this way: "While enactment fathoms a path leading to exposition, exposition possesses a path leading to enactment.

¹⁶ *Sbgz, Bendōwa* 辦道話.

¹⁷ *Sbgz, Gyōji*.

Thereupon, one expounds all day long, wherein one enacts all day long" (*Sbgz*, *Gyōji*). Enactment and exposition (i.e., activity-unremitting and expression) are originally one and the same, and exist primordially "in the beginning." Thus any and every activity-unremitting is expressive, any and every expression is unremittingly active.

Furthermore, as in the case of activity-unremitting, expression does not mean utterance in spoken words alone; that which is not said, yet deeply and vividly felt, is an expression. Thus silence is a form of expression as well. Dōgen apparently had this thought in mind when he wrote: "Although we say that the ultimate experience of enlightenment is swiftly actualized, [the state in which] we intimately have it does not necessarily constitute [concrete] actualization" (*Sbgz*, *Genjō-kōan*). Intimate having (*mitsu* 密有) and concrete actualization (*genjō* 現成, 見成) are mediated by activity-unremitting/expression which is the essence of the primordial ascesis, so that both partake of its urge to express and act out.

With respect to expression in relation to temporality, Dōgen has the following to say:

When buddhas/patriarchs inquire about buddhas/patriarchs and understand their expression, such expression will naturally be unfolded in the spiritual life of three years, of eight years, of thirty years, or of forty years, expressing itself through and through. . . .

In this case there are no interruptions in expression even for the period of those many decades. In view of this, realization-by-seeing at the time of enlightenment must be authentic. As realization-by-seeing-then was true, it is no doubt realization-by-saying-now. Accordingly, realization-by-saying-now is endowed with realization-by-seeing-then, and realization-by-seeing-then is in possession of realization-by-saying-now. Thus realization-by-saying exists now, realization-by-seeing exists now. Realization-by-saying-now and realization-by-seeing-then are ever one in their perpetuation. Our spiritual efforts now are being sustained by realization-by-saying and realization-by-seeing. [*Sbgz*, *Dōtoku*]

What interests us most in these statements is, among others, that realization-by-seeing-then for Dōgen is not a contemplative vision of the pre-

established harmony nor a mystical absorption in the metaphysical Absolute. Seeing is always pregnant with the possibilities of saying; saying is ever open to the possibilities of seeing. This dynamic interpenetration of seeing and saying is the meaning of the statement: "Our spiritual efforts now are being sustained by realization-by-saying and realization-by-seeing." Just as intimate having and concrete actualization are firmly grounded in activity-unremitting/expression, so are seeing-then and saying-now. The latter, however, should not be viewed in terms of a causal relationship, but in terms of realization in the present. "Then" and "now" are thus realized in the absolute present. As we understand the so-called seeing *into* one's own nature (*chien-hsing*; *kenshō* 見性) from this perspective, it should be construed as seeing/saying *from* one's own nature, thereupon expressing and acting out one's own nature.¹⁸

The other side, of one and the same coin, of expression is nonexpression (*fudōtoku* 不道得):

... when this expression exerts itself to the utmost, we realize that nonexpression has been nonexpressed. Even if we suppose we have understood expression fully and completely, yet do not penetrate into the truth of nonexpression in its total exertion, we are still short of attaining the original countenance of buddhas/patriarchs as well as the bones and marrow of buddhas/patriarchs. [*Sbgz*, *Dōtoku*]

Nonexpression here may sound very much like the notion of ineffability in the mystical tradition; no doubt, the latter has also its legitimate place in Dōgen to a certain extent. Dōgen's intention, however, lies neither in the impossibility of expression nor is it in silence in opposition to speech; nonexpression, as yet "nonexpressed" (n.b., not "unexpressed"), totally exerts itself in and through expression, constantly casting off an expression so as to give being to a new expression. Therefore, nonexpression does not mean acquiescence before the limitations of language but, on the contrary, unceasing transformation and renewal of language beyond its limitations, despite those limitations. Essentially speaking, nonexpression is expression, expression is nonexpression. Thus expression/nonexpression is the primordial form of ascesis.

¹⁸ *Sbgz*, *Shizen-biku* 四禪比丘 where Dōgen severely criticizes the idea of seeing into one's own nature and goes so far as to regard the *Platform Sūtra* as spurious.

Such a conception of expression is directly related to Dōgen's refined sensitivity to poetic and expressive language and his rigorous analysis of the symbolic intricacy of language and thought, which are characteristic of his methodology.¹⁹ These language- and symbol-related activities, in turn, are none other than "the Way's grasping" or "the Way's seizure," which is implied by the words such as *dōtoku*, *dōshu* 道取, and the like, so often used by Dōgen. That is, our linguistic and symbolic efforts are not excluded from the purview of the Way's appropriation.

Thus far we have seen the dynamic relation of existence/time to activity-unremitting/expression. What existence/time is to form, activity-unremitting/expression is to content. We have endeavored to understand Dōgen's philosophical penetration into the inner workings of the ascesis of existence/time. It may be fruitful, at this point, to compare Dōgen with Daisetz T. Suzuki. While both thinkers are in the same Zen tradition and hence share its basic presuppositions, they are significantly different in many respects. Suzuki writes that "The essence of Zen Buddhism consists in acquiring a new view point of looking at life and things generally."²⁰ This acquirement of a new point of view is called "satori," which is further explained as follows: "Satori may be defined as an intuitive looking into the nature of things in contradistinction to the analytical or logical understanding of it. Practically, it means the unfolding of a new world hitherto unperceived in the confusion of a dualistically-trained mind."²¹ Here Suzuki is saying that satori is not only a form of intuitive perception, which is quite evident in his translation of *prajñā* as "prajñā-intuition," but also a form of intellection opposed to analytic and logical thinking which he calls "transcendental intellectualism."²² This position is directly related to his interpretation of Zen as inevitably artistic. For example, Suzuki says: "Zen finds its inevitable association with art but not with morality. Zen may remain unmoral but not without art."²³ It is clear from this that Suzuki relates his transcendental in-

¹⁹ Concerning Dōgen's methodology along the lines here suggested, see Kim, *op cit.*, chapter 3.

²⁰ D. T. Suzuki, *Essays in Zen Buddhism*, First Series (London: Rider, 1949), p. 229.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 230.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 231.

²³ D. T. Suzuki, *Zen and Japanese Culture* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1959), p. 27.

²⁴ *Loc. cit.*

tellectualism with "aesthetic impulses" which in his view are said to "more primitive or more innate than those of morality."²⁴ Thus it is quite natural for him to say that "Zen is . . . at once antinomian and disciplinarian."²⁵ Despite his otherwise quite legitimate abhorrence of any bifurcation of reality, Suzuki's view seems to leave a rather uneasy cleavage between morality and art, between *prajñā* and *viññāna*, between *prajñā*-intuition and meditation.²⁶ To be sure, this cursory treatment does not do full justice to the complexity and subtlety of Suzuki's view of Ch'an/Zen; yet the manner of his speaking of this tradition leaves no doubt about his strong predilection toward intuitionism and aestheticism—which are almost solely the terms in which Ch'an/Zen has been currently understood in the West.²⁷

We have taken this brief excursion in order to contrast Dōgen with Suzuki so that we may understand two significantly different views of Ch'an/Zen soteriology. Although in a grossly oversimplified fashion, we can reasonably say that while both Dōgen and Suzuki are concerned with the soteriological search for spiritual freedom, the former strives for rational and ethical ascesis and the latter for an intuitive and aesthetic vision. This by no means should imply that what one emphasizes is completely absent in the other; rather the difference is in degree, not in kind. Be that as it may, Dōgen's treatment of the ascetic dynamism of existence/time lends itself to our fundamental reassessment of Ch'an/Zen.

All things considered, man's creative efforts through his activity-unremitting and expression are coeval and consubstantial with Buddha-nature. In Dōgen's expression, "Buddha-nature and becoming a buddha always occur contemporaneously" (*Sbgz, Busshō*). Man sculpts, so to speak, Buddha-nature in and through his being; or to put it differently, Buddha-nature chisels itself through man's existence/time. Ultimately speaking, however, "we enact that which is impossible to enact and expound that which is impossible to expound" (*Sbgz, Gyōji*). Existence/

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 274.

²⁶ See also *idem*, *Studies in Zen* (London: Rider, 1955), p. 124: "This most thoroughgoing interpenetration [of *prajñā* and *viññāna*], indefinably complicated and yet subject to systematization, is the self-weaving net of *prajñā*, and *viññāna* takes no active part in it."

²⁷ In his comparative study of Heidegger and Ch'an, Chang Chung-yuan confirms this point: "In Ch'an, ontological experience is identical with the highest aesthetic achievement." *The Eastern Buddhist*, vol. 5, no. 2 (October 1972), pp. 161-162.

time as the way of spiritual freedom consists of the living out of such an impossible task.

Temporal dynamicity

One last problem remains to be considered: the problem of temporal movement, or what is commonly called the passage of time (*kyōryaku* 經歷). If temporal succession is philosophically and religiously untenable, in what way can we redeem it? Indeed, the common-sense observation speaks of time in such a way that the past has already perished, the future is yet to come, and the present does not persist. This poses the most intricate enigma of time which St. Augustine rightly discerned: time, whether it be past, present, or future, *is* precisely because it is tending *not to be*.²⁸ Time is ever intangible, immeasurable, and elusive; yet we speak of time as though we could measure, calculate, and quantify it, as we have seen previously. The critique of the notion of succession should not stop at this, however; it must be purified and liberated. This is what Dōgen does with the concept of the passage of time by rendering it in his unique interpretation.

Time's inexorable vanishing into nonbeing, according to Dōgen, is not beyond soteriological appropriation. He states:

[The common belief] says that the past has already perished, the future is yet to come, and the present does not stay. The past has not necessarily already perished, the future is not inevitably yet to come, and the present is not inexorably ephemeral. If you learn the not-staying, the not-yet, and the no-longer as present, future, and past, respectively, you should certainly understand the reason that the not-yet is the past, present, and future. [The same holds true of the no-longer and the not-staying.] [*Sbgz, Juki* 授記]²⁹

²⁸ *The Confessions of Saint Augustine*, trans. Edward B. Peasey (New York: Collier Books, 1961), pp. 194-195.

²⁹ It is interesting to note, in this connection, St. Augustine's observation: "What now is clear and plain is, that neither things to come nor past are. Nor is it properly said, 'there be three times, past, present, and to come': yet perchance it might be properly said, 'there be three times; a present of things past, a present of things present, and a present of things future.' For these three do exist in some sort, in the soul, but

The past, present, and future are distinct from each other, each constituting a discrete reality. But they are no longer divisions of time but lived times. The past is not absolutely irretrievable, nor is the future ever beyond grasp, nor is the present hopelessly transient; the three periods, as lived realities, interpenetrate each other, presenting themselves as possibilities for man's creativity, renewal, and transformation.

The functional complexity in which these three periods are appropriated in the temporal passage of the present constitutes the very mystery of existence/time. This is characterized by Dōgen, for example, as follows: "Existence/time has the characteristic of temporal passage: namely, it moves from today to tomorrow, from today to yesterday, from yesterday to today, from today to today, from tomorrow to tomorrow. For the passage of time is the quality of time" (*Sbgz, Uji*). He also observes: "The hour of the horse [11 a.m. — 1 p.m.] and the hour of the sheep [1 p.m. — 3 p.m.], arranged in the world now, are what they are by virtue of thusness of their abiding in the Dharma-situation, ascending and descending, up and down [in the realization of existence/time]" (*Sbg, Uji*). The three periods of the past, present, and future, or the twelve hours such as the hour of the horse and the hour of the sheep, are no longer conceived of in terms of the common-sense view, but are now sacralized in epochal realization so that they coexist with, interpenetrate each other, and integrate into a unique living complex of the temporal passage of the present.

Dōgen provides us with an intriguing analogy in this connection: "The truth of yesterday and today is [comparable to] that moment in which we enter mountains and look upon tens of thousands of peaks at a glance. Time does not pass" (*Sbgz, Uji*). All time is seen simultaneously in one single viewing. The passage of time is neither a succession nor a span of now-moments; rather, it is the epochal dynamicity of the absolute present. In this regard, the passage of time is the nonpassage of time. In this are the psychic deposits of the past, the anticipative possibilities of the future, and the feelings and thoughts of the present, whether conscious, unconscious, or otherwise, all fulfilled conjointly. Here again we are tempted to allude to Heidegger's "epochal abundance

otherwise do I not see them; present of things past, memory; present of things present, sight; present of things future, expectation. If thus we be permitted to speak, I see three times, and I confess there are three." St. Augustine, *op. cit.*, p. 198.

of transmutations" in his analysis of time and being.³⁰ At any rate, we must remind ourselves of Dōgen's intention that the analogy of viewing myriad peaks at a glance is given not in a visionary context but in an ascetic context.

Still another analogy is given:

Speaking of the passage of time, we should not construe it as something like a storm passing from east to west, or from west to east. The world, neither motionless nor changeless, is of temporal movement. Temporal movement, then, is like the spring. Myriad events take place in the spring, and they are called temporal movement. It should be noted that it passes without anything outside itself. For example, the temporal movement of the spring operates necessarily in and through the spring itself. Temporal movement is not the spring, but because of its being the temporal movement of the spring, it is now consummated in the Way at this particular time of the spring. This should be understood carefully. The ordinary people, as they see the passage of time, think that the objective environment exists independently, and temporal passage, as a form of active subject, traverses eastward through hundreds of thousands of worlds and aeons. Such understanding is due to the lack of singleminded devotion to the study of the Buddha-way. [*Sbgz*, *Uji*]

The key statement in this quote is "it passes without anything outside itself." From the standpoint of existence/time the spring passes through the spring in the spring, but from that of the succession of now-moments it does not. Thus, hues, shapes, sounds, and fragrances of spring, together with all dharmas of the spatio-temporal world, are crystallized in the temporal dynamicity of a single dharma, i.e., spring. Continuity, movement, duration, and some cognate ideas implied here refer to such a dynamicity of existence/time as the present, in which the self and the world are incessantly transformed and renewed in total exertion.

The lived quality of the present as temporal dynamicity can be divisible into earlier, middle, and later phases, or into new and old, or into

³⁰ Heidegger, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

past, present, and future; but the temporal dynamicity itself is not divided. This is why Dōgen says in connection with his analysis of the moon:

... you should understand thoroughly that even though there was the moon last night, the moon you see tonight is not last night's moon, and that tonight's moon, throughout its beginning, middle, and end, is nothing but tonight's moon. Although there are the moons [of, say, the past, present, and future], the moon inheriting the moon has, precisely for this reason, no discrimination of old and new. (*Sbgz*, *Tsuki* 都機)

The beginning, middle, and end, or the origin, path, and goal, are realized as the temporal movement not toward Buddha-nature but of Buddha-nature. Both the beginning and the end are realized in the path. Thus the origin, the path, and the goal are one through their total exertion in temporal dynamicity. For this reason, Dōgen has this to say: "Arising is nothing but arising in its beginning, middle, and end. . . . Perishing also is nothing but perishing in its beginning, middle, and end" (*Sbgz*, *Kaiin-zammāi*). The dynamicity of time is Buddha-nature's ascesis itself.

From the foregoing observations it becomes evident that the temporal dynamicity in question does not imply in the slightest any hierarchical model of time and eternity or any evolutionary model of sequential time. That is, Dōgen's conception of temporal movement has nothing to do with a horizontal or vertical, evolutionary or hierarchical, envisionment of reality. Indeed, Dōgen felicitously puts it: "The times ancient and modern do not pile up, nor do they line up" (*Sbgz*, *Uji*).

This can be shown in several ways in relation to Dōgen's view of existence/time. For one thing, Dōgen argues that Buddha-nature is not something that will be realized in some future time if and when a right season arrives, as in the case of a seed that grows into a plant and bears fruits.³¹ Dōgen's conception of Buddha-nature does not permit evolutionary processes in spiritual freedom, say, from the inferior to the superior, from the imperfect to the perfect, or from the hidden to the manifest, all of which are invariably associated with the image of the linear progression. This is clear from the following statement: "To say 'if time arrives' is tantamount to declaring that time has already arrived" (*Sbgz*, *Busshō*):

³¹ *Sbgz*, *Busshō*.

Dōgen thus unequivocally rejects any implications whatsoever of degrees, levels, means-end, and the like, in conceiving his idea of realization.

In the same vein Dōgen observes in the course of his analysis of moral causation (*inga* 因果): "Cause is not before and effect is not after; the cause is perfect and the effect is perfect. Cause is nondual, Dharma is nondual; effect is nondual, Dharma is nondual. Though effect is occasioned by cause, they are not before or after, because the before and the after are nondual in the Way" (*Sbgz*, *Shoaku-makusa* 諸惡莫作). Cause and effect, it is unmistakably clear, are not sequentially arranged as in conventional thinking, but the absolute events of "wondrous cause" (*myōin* 妙因) and "wondrous effect" (*myōka* 妙果)³² in the living context of temporal dynamicity. In short, both cause and effect are transformed into epochal events of temporal movement.

Such a mode of thinking is reflected also in his notion of "the Way's ring of activity-unremitting" (*gyōji-dōkan* 行持道環). Dōgen writes:

The great Way of buddhas/patriarchs is constituted invariably by supreme activity-unremitting which continues as the ring of the Way [with no beginning and no end], never interrupted. Aspiration-for-enlightenment, practice, wisdom, and nirvāṇa never allow the slightest interval between them, thus going on and on in the Way's ring of activity-unremitting. [*Sbgz*, *Gyōji*]

And he also states:

It is through our activity-unremitting that this ring of the Way is possessed of its meritorious power; [also] it is through this [activity-unremitting] that buddhas/patriarchs each have stayed as buddhas, transcended themselves as buddhas, cogitated as buddhas, and perfected themselves as buddhas, without any interruption. [*Sbgz*, *Gyōji*]

It is significant to observe that Dōgen here associates this uninterrupted perpetuation of the Way's activity-unremitting with the image of a ring rather than a straight line. Yet it is not exactly a cyclic view of eternal recurrence, much less a linear view of progression. As the Way of activity-unremitting exerts itself totally, it pulsates concentrically in its Dharma-situation, from an absolute present to an absolute present in the absolute

³² *Sbgz*, *Shoaku-makusa*.

present, from realization to realization in realization. For this reason, progression, if any, is that of such time within itself through itself to itself.

A further explication of this view can be seen in what Dōgen calls "the task of going beyond Buddha" (*bukkōjōji* 佛向上事). It is defined as reaching Buddha and advancing further to meet Buddha.³³ This may sound very much like a vertical, hierarchical way of thinking; but Dōgen's view is not. Here once again, the movement of advancing or reaching is strictly the matter of realization within itself through itself to itself. It is not an ascending of time to eternity through the degrees of being. Dōgen has this to say:

The man of going beyond Buddha is none other than non-Buddha. When you wonder what non-Buddha might be like, think [of the following statements]: non-Buddha is so called not because he exists before buddhas, not because he exists after buddhas; nor is non-Buddha what he is because he transcends buddhas. It is solely because non-Buddha goes beyond Buddha: "non-Buddha" is so symbolized because of casting off Buddha's countenance and casting off Buddha's body-mind. [*Sbgz*, *Bukkōjōji*]

The ever-unceasing casting off of Buddha's countenance and of Buddha's body-mind constitutes "reaching" and "advancing" in ongoing enlightenment. The task of going beyond Buddha, then, is the Way's manner of unremitting self-renewal and self-transformation through its asceticism.

In this paper we have examined some salient aspects of Dōgen's treatment of existence and time as the way of spiritual freedom. In our analysis and exposition, we have seen that Dōgen is more explicit in the use of the language of asceticism than that of vision, without necessarily rejecting the latter: thus his thought points to the path of asceticism beyond that of vision. As we have alluded to frequently, Buddha-nature (or original enlightenment) is not given, that is, not preexistent or gratuitous, but is to be used, appropriated, and cast off in and through the activity-unremitting/ expression of a particular, historical existence. In Dōgen, Buddha-nature

³³ *Sbgz*, *Bukkōjōji*.

is the principle of such an asceticism that calls for man's and the world's creative efforts, not the principle of vision that acquiesces the given reality. Responsiveness and openness to new horizons and new depths of reality are essentially the modes of asceticism which demands concrete historical and moral actions. Thus self/world and Buddha-nature are alike constantly cast off, renewed, and transformed; the reality of existence/time, however tragic and painful it may be, constitutes the self-realization and self-transformation of Buddha-nature. By way of concluding this paper, the following few points additionally deserve mention.

The view of existence/time, abstruse and philosophical as it may appear, is, in the final analysis, the philosophical foundation of zazen-only, the prototypal asceticism which is the matrix of Dōgen's religious-philosophical thought. Although we did not fully discuss the idea of zazen-only in this paper, this should not be construed as implying its nonessentiality in any manner. On the contrary, this paper has throughout assumed the centrality of zazen-only as the backdrop of its investigation. All in all, Dōgen's view of existence/time is the direct product of the practice of zazen-only.

We have seen Dōgen's philosophical and soteriological sensitivity to the existential tensions of opposites and polarities, which many mystically oriented traditions including Buddhism tended to tone down. To Dōgen life and reality were essentially paradoxical. On the other hand, this sensitivity centered mainly around his view of a radical individuality; as a result, concern with the interaction and interdependence of dharmas and individuals in the context of dependent origination was less prominent than it should have been.

Dōgen's elitist approach to asceticism had to do with Dharma for the sake of Dharma and, more specifically, with the monastic way of life for professional monks; thus it ruthlessly rejected even the slightest accommodation to the frailties, ambiguities, and bonds of the common mortals. Not the absence of compassion, but on the contrary, this was no doubt Dōgen's mode of expressing the age-old bodhisattva ideal of "seeking bodhi above and saving sentient beings below" (*jōgu-bodai geke-shujō* 上求菩提下化衆生). Nevertheless, while Dōgen emphasized a concrete historical and moral responsibility, the labyrinthine involvement of the ideal of compassion in the ambiguities of existence was rather on the periphery of such a religion of monks.

As we have intimated before, Dogen's works, particularly the *Shōbōgenzō*,

are pregnant in poetic sensibilities and expressions, and no student of Dōgen can fail to recognize them. The aesthetic dimension of spiritual freedom, however, is rather subdued, and even muffled, by and large. The integration of the ethical and the aesthetic, or of art and morality, remains to be a problem in Dōgen's thought, as much as it is in the thought of D. T. Suzuki.

These reservations notwithstanding, Dōgen's religious and metaphysical insights into both the temporality of existence/time and its ascetic nature and function in the domain of spiritual freedom will no doubt be a lasting contribution to the history of ideas in general and to the history of Buddhist thought in particular.