

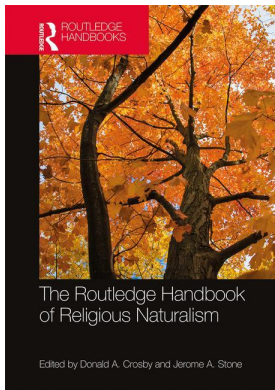
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ZEN BUDDHIST PERSPECTIVES
ON RELIGIOUS NATURALISM*Stephanie Kaza*

The worlds of religious naturalism and Zen Buddhism are wide-ranging geographies, offering diverse journeys to wisdom and insight. The chance of a traveler from one world meeting a traveler from the other world is certainly within the realm of possibility, and they might find they share certain understandings in common. Or, depending on the history and origin of their journeys, they might be complete strangers to each other. The Zen student would not speak of a relationship with God; the religious naturalist might not be acquainted with nonduality. The degree to which science informs their understanding might be vastly different, and yet both may have experienced a profound sense of awe and appreciation for the mysterious complexity and creativity of the natural world.

In this chapter I explore the insights of Zen Buddhism relevant to religious naturalism, particularly as developed in recent Western scholarship focused on thirteenth-century Japanese Zen philosopher Eihei Dogen. Though other schools of Buddhism may also offer insight into religious naturalism, I have selected the work of Dogen because it has received considerable attention for its depth and significant attention to human-nature relations. I have not looked for broad overlaps of Buddhist thinking with the many varieties of religious naturalism, nor looked for ways to make Buddhism more compatible with religious naturalism. I note here fundamental differences in assumptions and approach that should be clearly stated, to honor the respected tradition of interreligious dialogue.

My primary texts for this study are from Dogen's main source work: *Shobogenzo, Treasury of the True Dharma Eye*, compiled in 1246 from his teaching discourses. The two fascicles I have chosen are "*Genjokoan, Actualizing the Fundamental Point*," and "*Sansui-Kyo, Mountains and Waters Sutra*." I look at key philosophical principles in these texts, paying particular attention to teachings on nonduality, mutual permeation, and the nature of existence. Eastern and Western scholars have developed a number of translations and commentaries on these texts; I work with those that make the most helpful links to a naturalistic or holistic understanding, including those by Bokusan Nishiari, Kosho Uchiyama, Masao Abe, Gudo Nishijima and Chodo Cross, and Kaz Tanahashi.

Dogen's Zen teachings

Who was Eihei Dogen and why have his teachings come to be of such interest in Western Zen? Dogen was born in 1200 in Kyoto, the Japanese imperial capital of the previous 400 years.

Japanese Buddhism had been developing for the past six centuries, having been brought to Japan from China as part of the northern school lineage. Though Dogen was entitled to a high court position due to his parents' lineage, he left home at the age of 13 to study Buddhism at Mt. Hiei and was ordained the following year. He received dharma transmission seven years later and set off for China with his teacher in 1223. He visited a number of teachers over two years, eventually settling at Rujing's monastery where he learned *shikantaza*, a form of meditation sometimes called "just sitting." After returning to Japan, he founded a small practice center in 1233, Kannon-dori Temple, named after Kannon, the bodhisattva of compassion. Here he wrote the *Genjokoan*, the first fascicle of his eventual life-work collection. Over the course of the next 20 years, Dogen was prolific in his teaching and writing, establishing his own monastery in the mountains at Eihei-ji, now a modern pilgrimage destination for Western Zen students.

Because of his focus on pure practice, Dogen was regarded as a reformer during the Kamakura period. He called his teaching "the treasury of the true dharma eye," pointing to the true heart of awakening in an unbroken lineage back to Buddha. His spirit is reflected in a late poem he wrote to accompany a portrait painting:

Fresh, clear spirit covers old mountain man this autumn.
 Donkey stares at the sky ceiling; glowing white moon floats.
 Nothing approaches. Nothing else included.
 Buoyant, I let myself go—filled with gruel, filled with rice.
 Lively flapping from head to tail,
 Sky above, sky beneath, cloud self, water origin.

(Tanahashi 1985: 20)

After Dogen's death his religious community came to be known as the Soto school, now one of the largest orders in Japan affiliated with several major Western Zen centers, including San Francisco Zen Center. Japanese scholars brought Dogen's work to light in the twentieth century; a first English translation of the *Shobogenzo* was completed by Matsunaga Reiho in 1958. The *Genjokoan* text was used as early as the mid-1960s at San Francisco Zen Center, and in 1983 a complete four volume set of 92 fascicles was finally published, the work of Kosen Nishiyama and John Stevens with collaborators. Since then a number of scholarly commentaries and textual interpretations in English and Japanese have greatly enhanced Western understanding of Dogen's philosophy and practice approach.

Dogen's form of Zen stressed direct awakening through single-minded practice, often requiring many long hours of zazen meditation in silent retreat. For young Western students, steeped in the Vietnam war conflict, the upheaval of feminism, the lure of consumerism, the failure of idealism, Dogen's words offered an opening to something more penetratingly real. Western fascination with the exotic otherness of Japan added to the lure of Zen practice, with its obscure and highly disciplined practice forms. Japanese scholar Masao Abe introduced Dogen into Buddhist-Christian dialogues with process theologian John Cobb and others, adding to the academic foundation for Dogen studies. Dogen's haiku-like references to green mountains, plum blossoms, dragons, and fish caught the attention of early eco-Buddhists looking for deep ecology sensibilities in the world's religious traditions.

The two texts for this study are quintessential Dogen, carrying strong instructions for practice, often in inscrutable koan-like format. A footnote on one translation of *Genjokoan* offers this comment by Bokusan Nishiari, Soto priest in 1922: "This fascicle is the skin, flesh, bones, and marrow of the Founder. The fundamental teaching of the Founder's lifetime is expounded in this fascicle ... The ninety-five fascicles of the Treasury of the True Dharma Eye are the offshoots of

this fascicle” (Tanahashi 1985: 244). The title, “Genjokoan,” is a compilation of characters or kanji that point to something that is present or appearing yet also hidden, but in the cryptic sense of “nothing to hide, so there is nothing to reveal” (Nishiari 2011: 14). Or put another way, “A great secret is greatly apparent. What is greatly apparent is a great secret ... Because of *genjo*, things are originally complete” (Nishiari 2011: 14). Another scholar translates this idea as “the ordinary profundity of the present moment becoming the present moment” (Uchiyama 2011: 151).

Sansui-Kyo, or the Mountains and Waters Sutra, was written in 1240, during a very active period of teaching and writing for Dogen. This fascicle is of particular interest for Western students seeking Buddhist sources for environmental ethics (see Kaza and Kraft 2000). Dogen’s imagery throughout the 22 verses evokes wild areas in high mountains and flowing streams, beginning with the first sentences: “Mountains and waters right now are the actualization of the ancient buddha way. Each, abiding in its phenomenal expression, realizes completeness” (Tanahashi 1985: 97). The sutra can be thought of as an eco-koan, offering an interpenetrating, co-creating view of the universe, understood through practice realization. Many of the themes introduced in the *Genjokoan* are taken up in *Sansui-Kyo*, challenging students to firmly study the way of such mountains and waters. Dogen’s writing in both texts exhibits his sophisticated use of allusion, puns, and metaphor in poetic prose, meant to be absorbed rather than analyzed.

Key philosophical principles

At the core of Dogen’s teaching is a consistent pointing to *nonduality* as the awakened view of reality. The opening verse of the *Genjokoan* urges students to go beyond superficial dualistic thinking on all matters.

As all things are buddha-dharma, there is delusion and realization, practice, and birth and death, and there are buddhas and sentient beings.

As the myriad things are without an abiding self, there is no delusion, no realization, no buddha, no sentient being, no birth and death.

The buddha way is, basically, leaping clear of the many and the one; thus there are birth and death, delusion and realization, sentient beings and buddhas.

Yet in attachment blossoms fall, and in aversion weeds spread.

(Tanahashi 1985: 69)

This teaching of nonduality is particularly relevant in exploratory cross-philosophical dialogue, as so much of Western ethical thinking is predicated on dualistic categories. Radical nonduality challenges the limitations of relying on familiar categories of subject/object, whole/part, birth/death, truth/delusion.

The structure of this teaching is threefold. In the first statement, Dogen affirms the existence of all aspects of being, a full recognition of “what is.” In the second statement, he seems to apparently contradict himself, but the key phrase here is that all beings are “without an abiding self,” i.e., they have no independent existence, so in this sense they do not exist. The third statement suggests the way out of the apparent contradiction, going beyond dualistic distinctions, thus affirming the true nature of existence. Nishiari describes this as no existence separate from nonexistence, and no transcendence outside of existence and nonexistence. “Therefore being, non-being, and transcendence are each the entire world and *Genjokoan*” (Nishiari 2011: 20).

Tanahashi contrasts this three-fold structure as significantly different from the Hegelian dialectic of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. Hegel’s process involves development and progression, a narrative approach to understanding, with the outcome valued more highly than the steps

leading to it. Dogen, however, gives each step of the teaching its own absolute value, with each requiring the other two for full understanding. Tanahashi summarizes this as 1) discrimination, 2) denial of discrimination, and 3) beyond discrimination and denial of it (1985: 17–18). Throughout the *Genjokoan*, Dogen emphasizes the nonduality of practice and realization, that is, no separation between living and awakening.

In verse 12, as translated by Ushiyama, Dogen suggests that the reality of life is to be seen as before the separation between being and non-being:

We should not think that what we have attained is conceived by ourselves and known by our discriminating mind. Although complete enlightenment is immediately actualized, its intimacy is such that it does not necessarily form as a view. [In fact] viewing is not something fixed.

(Uchiyama 2011: 145)

“Intimacy” (*mitsu-u*) in this sense is *before* any division into subject, the seeing, and object, the seen. The title of this fascicle is sometimes translated as “actualizing the fundamental point,” i.e., becoming the true intimacy and not mistaking partial views for the full truth of reality.

This three-fold teaching is further developed in the *Sansui-Kyo* fascicle where Dogen takes mountains and rivers as the objects of contemplation. He urges students: “You should study the green mountains, using numerous worlds as your standards. You should clearly examine the green mountains’ walking and your own walking” (Tanahashi 1985: 98). He consistently points out the limitations of conditioned views as “just looking through a bamboo tube at a corner of the sky” (Tanahashi 1985: 99). He explores in great detail the many aspects of mountains and waters as people tend to know them (which environmentalists can affirm) but then reminds students:

All beings do not see mountains and waters in the same way. Some beings see water as a jeweled ornament, but they do not regard jeweled ornaments as water ... Some beings see water as wondrous blossoms, but they do not use blossoms as water. Hungry ghosts see water as raging fire or pus and blood. Dragons see water as a palace or pavilion. Some beings see water as the seven treasures or a wish-granting jewel. Some beings see water as a forest or a wall ...

Thus the views of all beings are not the same. You should question this matter now ... You should pursue this beyond the limit of pursuit.

(Tanahashi 1985: 102)

Throughout the sutra, Dogen seems to raise impossible contradictions, summarizing these in the concluding verse. Here he reiterates the basic three-fold teaching on nonduality, referring to Tang master Qing yuan in his statement, “An ancient buddha said, ‘Mountains are mountains, waters are waters.’ These words do not mean mountains are mountains; they mean mountains are mountains.” For Dogen, true realization goes beyond dualistic thinking and even its opposite, to penetrate the fathomless nature of reality.

The actual experience of nonduality has been described as *mutual permeation* or mutual penetration, a sense of no separation from all the ten thousand beings and their co-existences, arising simultaneously in the present moment. One of the most popularized quotes from the *Genjokoan* instructs students to aim for exactly this interpenetration.

To study the buddha way is to study the self. To study the self is to forget the self. To forget the self is to be actualized by myriad things. When actualized by myriad things,

your body and mind as well as the bodies and minds of others drop away. No trace of realization remains, and this no-trace continues endlessly.

(Tanahashi 1985: 70)

Uchiyama explains that the self Dogen refers to is not the Western sense of “ego” but “the reality of life prior to separation into dichotomies such as self/other or subject/object” (Uchiyama 2011: 182). To study the self is not merely to observe distracting delusional thoughts that fracture intimacy, but more correctly to “accept everything as the contents of our ‘self’” (Uchiyama 2011: 182). Such awakening to the true self requires forgetting any sense of separation that reifies the self and minimizes other existences. Yet this is not an experience of “oneness” expressed in some Western philosophies, but rather a complete experience of all beings, each in their wholeness fully expressing reality in multiple and specific ways. The experience of mutual penetration becomes a profound invitation to full presence, enriched and informed by the realization of myriad things, no trace possible because no separation.

In the *Mountains and Waters Sutra*, Dogen investigates the nature of mutual penetration through engaging directly with “flowing mountains” and the “not-flowing” of water. He challenges students to experience such penetration across eons of time.

If walking stops, buddha ancestors do not appear. If walking ends, the buddha-dharma cannot reach the present. Walking forward does not cease; walking backward does not cease. Walking forward does not obstruct walking backward. Walking backward does not obstruct walking forward. This is called the mountains’ flow and the flowing mountains.

(Tanahashi 1985: 98)

Dogen’s students would have been able to taste this mutual penetration directly in their mountain monasteries or on their pilgrimages from temple to temple. In this sutra he exhorts them to realize the direct connection between their buddha ancestors and their own practice in present time, an unbroken lineage of mutual arising.

The *nature of existence* for Dogen is continuously arising and passing away, generation and extinction appearing in every moment in every existence. This creatively dynamic understanding of nature is marked by impermanence of all phenomena in every aspect. Nothing at all is permanent or maintains a permanent self. In verse 6 of *Genjokoan*, he says: “When you practice intimately and return to where you are, it will be clear that nothing at all has unchanging self” (Tanahashi 1985: 70). Thus impermanence is the first aspect of existence.

The second aspect is the mutually influential nature of all elements in the universe. No being lies outside the universe and all beings affect others in myriad ways throughout time and space. A popular metaphor for this aspect of existence is Indra’s Net, from the Chinese Hua-Yen school of Buddhism in the tenth century. The universe is compared to an infinite strand of woven nets criss-crossing space, with an infinitely faceted jewel at each node crossing point. Each jewel reflects every other jewel in the vast net, a sea of mutual influence, changing constantly on all scales from the micro to the macro.

The third aspect of each existence is that it is completely a singular expression in that moment. In verse 7 of the *Genjokoan*, Dogen works with the elements of fire to explore this in relation to human life and death.

Firewood becomes ash, and it does not become firewood again. Yet do not suppose that the ash is future and the firewood is past. You should understand that firewood abides

in the phenomenal expression of firewood, which fully includes past and future and is independent of past and future. Ash fully abides in the phenomenal expression of ash, which fully includes future and past. Just as firewood does not become firewood again after it is ash, you do not return to birth after death.

(Tanahashi 1985: 70–71)

Uchiyama explains the typical human error as assuming a causal before and after relationship without fully recognizing ash as ash and firewood as firewood. He shows how Dogen is speaking to a broader understanding beyond causal relationship. The take-home point is that, likewise, human life is just life. “It is neither life as a step toward becoming death, nor life that is relative and opposite death” (Uchiyama 2011: 196). Though with human eyes we may see this as some form of coming and going, even this is animated by “the coming and going of not-coming and not-going” (Uchiyama 2011: 196).

Dogen brings up yet a fourth aspect of existence as its ungraspability. Even as he teaches a nondualistic method and approach to realization, he reminds students toward the end of *Genjokoan*: “Do not suppose that what you realize becomes your knowledge and is grasped by your consciousness. Although actualized immediately, the inconceivable may not be apparent. Its appearance is beyond your knowledge” (Tanahashi 1985: 72).

Perception of realization is necessarily deluded, according to Dogen, because full realization goes beyond the limitations of human perception. Heine (2012: 60) explains how human “seeing” is drawn to what is illuminated, while the dark or unilluminated elements of existence remain concealed and therefore unknowable through typical means.

These aspects of the nature of existence are further illustrated in the *Mountains and Waters Sutra*. In the opening verse, Dogen writes:

Mountains and waters right now are the actualization of the ancient buddha way. Each, abiding in its phenomenal expression, realizes completeness. Because mountains and waters have been active since before the Empty Eon, they are alive at this moment. Because they have been the self since before form arose they are emancipation-realization.

(Tanahashi 1985: 97)

Mountains and waters themselves are a radical phenomenological expression of a multifaceted, infinitely unfolding universe of practice realization. Modern Zen teacher Daido Looi, in his *teisho* on this sutra, comments on verse 11 about water. He explains that “‘Harder than diamond’ expresses the unchanging Suchness of all things, or absolute reality. ‘Softer than milk’ refers to the “conditioned Suchness of things,” e.g., the relative reality. Looi uses this seemingly impossible contrast in the qualities of water to point to the “incomprehensibility of something that is without any fixed characteristics whatsoever, without any existence, being able to give rise to conditioned existence, to the multiplicity of things” (Looi 2000: 146).

Comparing Zen Buddhist thought to religious naturalism

This preliminary exploration of key philosophical points in major fascicles of Dogen’s teaching can provide a platform for examining overlaps and contrasts between religious naturalism and Zen Buddhism. To begin, I look at philosophical methods, in particular the role of

scientific understanding, and experiential approaches, especially in regard to impermanence and mutual co-arising. I will further consider nature and morality in Dogen's Zen in relation to religious naturalism, as these understandings might inform human choices regarding the environment.

Philosophical methods

Both Zen and religious naturalism address and encourage depth of connection to the natural world as a source of awe, humility, and insight. For both, the natural world is seen as a fundamental crucible for human understanding, proper perspective, and guide for moral choices. For both, a monotheistic God is not a requirement for spiritual awakening. However, the two are distinctly different in considering the role of science in relation to religious context. Across a range of views within religious naturalism, modern science is taken as an important rational corrective to potential distortion in fanaticism or mysticism. Reason and clear-headed thinking are highly regarded as a true path to knowledge and, in accepting the limits to that knowledge, to humility. A number of religious naturalists draw on emerging holistic understandings from evolutionary biology, ecology, and cosmological physics, among others. Some emphasize or advocate for a shared central story that describes the human place in the cosmos, beginning with the Big Bang and continuing through the geologic stages of planet building and evolutionary phases of organic life development.

None of this was known at the time of Dogen's teaching, so he would not have had a chance to reflect on these insights from modern science. However, I believe he would likely caution students to be skeptical about accepting scientific perspectives as complete understanding. This is because Western scientific method is often based in subject/object dualities, and a foundational belief in the distinction between observer and observed. A long history of reductionist thinking has influenced Western scientific approaches to the natural world. In human/nature dualistic thinking, humans are typically perceived to be distinct from and superior to nature. Though religious naturalism may seek to correct this distortion through more holistic science, the dualistic frame is not easily dislodged.

In his essay on *Genjokoan*, Uchiyama acknowledges that, of course, "it is only natural to make a distinction between self and others. We always think, 'I am I. Others are others.' And we think the world in which we are living exists outside of ourselves" (Uchiyama 2011: 184). Yet Dogen urges students in the opening lines to give up or go beyond the view that discriminates between self and others and to study the *Buddha dharma* on this ground. Scientific method is based entirely on "the view that discriminates," thus it could never offer more than a partial view of reality. Dogen would likely consider too much reliance on scientific thinking to be an impediment to spiritual awakening.

This likelihood is further reinforced by the last sentence of the first verse, "Yet in attachment flowers fall, and in aversion weeds spread." Attachment to flowers can be interpreted as attachment to awakening, attachment to weeds as attachment to delusion. The very goal of science is to debunk delusional and distorted understanding in any scientific field, i.e., to continuously question and critique previous understandings. Attachment abounds in the ego-building of scientific careers, the publication industry, and among those seeking to use science to support their views. Dogen's caution offers the teaching on nonattachment as necessary for access to true liberatory awakening. "One needs to give up everything in order to open oneself to the ultimate truth" (Tanahashi 1985: 19). For Dogen, the path to true understanding lies in experiencing all things without any preconception.

Dogen emphasizes direct practice realization in the Mountains and Waters sutra, challenging students to see through incomplete, distorted, and conditioned views, even those of biologists, spiritualists, and storytellers.

Even if you see mountains as grass, trees, earth, rocks, or walls, do not take this seriously or worry about it; it is not complete realization. Even if there is a moment when you view mountains as the seven treasures shining, this is not returning to the source. Even if you understand mountains as the realm where all buddhas practice, this understanding is not something to be attached to ...

Turning an object and turning the mind is rejected by the great sage. Explaining the mind and explaining true nature is not agreeable to buddha ancestors ... There is something free from all of these understandings ... You should study this in detail.

(Tanahashi 1985: 99)

These sutras make plain that, in Dogen's view, science is not privileged as a source of insight and may even be an impediment to true realization.

Experiential approach

Many strands of religious naturalism include a revised theistic or avowedly non-theistic or agnostic approach to awakened understanding. This arises as a critique or distinction from more traditional monotheistic approaches to spiritual realization through oneness with God and/or Jesus and other holy teachers. All of these theistic and non-theistic options would be understood as partial views in Dogen's Zen. For Dogen, the only valid path to realization is through personal direct experience "free of the conventional, discriminating frame of mind" (Tanahashi 1985: 16). As Tanahashi points out, Zen teachers use all sorts of confusing behaviors and cryptic statements to disturb students deeply enough to show them their conditioned minds. What may appear to be illogical contradictions are strategically phrased koans that serve as pedagogical tools in the non-directional curriculum of Zen teaching. Students' conditioned beliefs, whether in God or science, nature or self, offer teachable moments for the Zen teacher. Western students conditioned by dualistic thought are particularly vulnerable to mentally abstract conceptualization and idealization of spiritual goals.

The Zen experiential approach is critical for fully grasping the nature of reality as impermanent, mutually co-arising, and interdependent. The religious naturalist approach accepts the natural world as a reliable ground for religious experience, but Zen adds cautionary doubt around assumptions of permanence based on human-centered perspective. "You who study with buddhas should not be limited to human views when you are studying water" (Tanahashi 1985: 104). The religious naturalist approach typically highlights rational intellectual use of the mind, where the Zen approach leaps clear of concepts, ideas, opinions, arguments to a total body-mind experience of existence. Uchiyama speaks of this leap as "to meet everything, without exception, as part of my life is most essential to the Buddha Way" (2015: 182).

In the introduction to a related sutra, *Shinjin-Gakudo*, Learning the Truth with Body and Mind, translators Nishijima and Cross (1996: 247) explain how learning the truth in Buddhism requires both physical and mental pursuit, the two always synergistic and reflected in action. Dogen writes:

There is the learning of truth through casting aside these kinds of mind, and there is learning of the truth through taking them up. In such instances, the truth is learned

through thinking, and the truth is learned through not thinking ... Or there is the learning of the mind with the mind in pounding of rice and transmission of the robe ... In brief, mountains, rivers, and the Earth, and the sun, moon, and stars, are the mind ... they are not attainable or unattainable, they are beyond recognition and non-recognition, they are beyond penetrability and impenetrability, and they do not change with realization and non-realization.

(Nishijima and Cross 1996: 248–249)

Underpinning Dogen's experiential approach is his insistence on the oneness of practice and attainment, *shuso-itto*—that realization does not happen without practice and that practice itself is the manifestation of realization (Abe 1992: 16–33). This is the fundamental principle in *Genjokoan* and *Sansui-kyo*, making clear that action is the expression of true understanding.

Although my understanding of religious naturalism is limited, I have not seen any parallel equation or guideline for spiritual realization. This may reflect the wide range of philosophies within religious naturalism (i.e., theistic and non-theistic) and thus a wide range of practice possibilities for realization. The Zen practice of sitting meditation, in contrast, is seen as foundational in preparing the student to break through barriers of the conditioned body/heart/mind.

Nature and morality

Dogen's collection of writings offers very little explicit instruction on how to behave in the natural world, i.e., respect life, offer kindness, do not kill, etc. However, the *Genjokoan* and *Sansui-kyo* clearly teach that humans are not separate from the universe and that mountains and waters are the human body. The most objectionable actions would be those made without this understanding, based on a mistaken sense that a tree or grasshopper's life is separate from one's own. Much of what is acceptable in Western scientific experimentation would not meet this criterion, as it is based on a hierarchy of life value with humans at the top and quite separate from life forms "below" them. Religious naturalists may not affirm this hierarchy, but also may not go as far as Dogen in understanding that every one of the ten thousand beings is "a world of buddha ancestors" (Tanahashi 1985: 107).

Dogen's Zen likewise provides few moral principles for social justice, a critique that has been made of Zen Buddhism generally. Religious naturalists have inherited the Judeo-Christian lineage with a significant body of literature supporting a religious approach to justice, following the examples of Jesus and other prophets. Such a prophetic tradition is more or less absent in Eastern religious traditions, where class analysis and racial bias are minimized in the long curve view of karmic time. Dogen is hardly a prophetic voice for modern environmental ethics. Yet his understanding of radical interdependence as central to spiritual realization has been claimed by eco-Buddhists as supporting an environmental worldview.

In a 1998 interview regarding his epic poem collection, *Mountains and Rivers Without End* (1996), Zen student Gary Snyder explains how his own insights reflect the interdependent collaboration of many selves. This includes teachers and friends of the past as well as time spent working in the engine room of a marine transport ship. He says,

the acknowledgement that we reflect a number of selves, all of which, of course, are illusory anyway, and resolve into a non self—which is another way of speaking of the totally collaborative quality of any individual entity, namely that we are an intersection

of influences in the present and in the past, from the present and from the past. That is, the self is a moving target.

(Gonnerman 2015: 263)

Snyder's poem cycle was inspired by a Chinese scroll painting that seemed to convey the spirit of Dogen's Mountains and Waters sutra. In these poems Snyder points to the beings themselves as teachers, as wisdom guides, as sources of moral authority—Bristlecone, Coyote, Jackrabbit, Kingfisher. Many of the poems are moments of time in mountain spaces of the North Cascades, the High Sierra, or the White Mountains. Paying attention to these spirit beings is the way one learns to be ethical in place. From his Sierra foothill home in Kitkitdizze, he wrote, "The true source of compassion and ethical behavior is paradoxically none other than one's own realization of the insubstantial and ephemeral nature of everything" (Snyder 1990: 246).

While religious naturalists may look to science and spiritual experiences of awe and wonder for ethical inspiration, Dogen would find these inadequate to the full measure of human experience. He might, instead, identify the rational spaces of science and the emotional spaces of awe as potential practice fields—springboards for examining conditioned thinking. From these starting points he would urge breaking through any illusions of separation from the holographic responding universe. This would necessarily include letting go of cherished attachments to the sacred and even to the natural world as ultimate authority. For Dogen the source of humility is not scientifically verified accounts of the amazing complexity of the created, creative, and creating world. Rather, it is the absolutely stunning liberatory experience of no separate self, available in every moment and time to those who practice deeply.

Differences and overlaps between Dogen's Zen and religious naturalism

In reviewing the core principles and approaches in Dogen's writing through these two sutras, I have shown a number of areas where Zen and religious naturalism clearly do not overlap in spiritual orientation. First, the prominent reliance on science and reason in religious naturalism is absent or questioned in Zen. Second, Dogen does not rely on or give weight to a central shared creation story, as does much Western religious naturalism. If anything, Dogen's central emphasis is challenging the conditioned mind to find liberation in the present moment. Third, Dogen's Zen does not bring attention to justice concerns or principles of equity and fairness that are taken up in Western religious naturalism as an important part of spiritual engagement. This gap in the Eastern Zen heritage is being addressed by Western Buddhists in the dialogue around "socially engaged Buddhism," led by Sulak Sivaraksa, Thich Nhat Hanh, Joanna Macy, and H. H. Dalai Lama, among others.

Fourth, the two religious traditions share few religious practices in common. Zen students commit considerable time to sitting and walking meditation, bowing and chanting, silent retreat, and mindfulness practice in kitchen work and zendo caretaking. They also hear *teishos* (lectures) on key sutras, meet regularly with certified teachers, and work with religious texts such as Dogen's fascicles. In some schools, they also take up koan practice. I am not familiar enough with religious naturalism to identify parallel shared religious practices, though I imagine these may include silent retreat and other contemplative supports for cultivating a sense of awe or reverence with the natural world.

Fifth, Dogen does not use language of the "sacred" as it sets up a dualistic frame (sacred/profane), which he would see as an impediment to true realization. This leaves a big gap with

religious naturalism and its emphasis on nature as sacred, and the human experience in nature as a meeting with the sacred.

From my limited exposure to the religious naturalism literature, I find several areas of intriguing possibility for dialogue around shared approaches or understandings. First, I will mention the writing around *emergentist thinking*. This sort of dynamic, co-created, co-evolving view of nature aligns well with Dogen's writing on mutual interdependence. He would see humans not only as an emergent part of nature but as an emergent process continuously unfolding, simultaneously with all other aspects of the universe. Religious naturalist thinkers in the 1920s such as Bernard Meland and Roy Wood Sellers built on the writings of William James and Alfred North Whitehead to emphasize emergence as an alternative to reductionist and dualist thinking. Meland pointed out the limits to rational thought and the need to recognize complexities beyond what human minds could conceive (Stone 2008: 132–133). In their time these writers saw the distorted implications of what had been widely accepted Cartesian reductionism and spiritual vitalism. Their critiques of the limits to these forms of thought would be shared by Dogen, and if they had known of his writing, they may have found additional inspiration for their views on emergence.

Dogen, however, might have questioned some of their proposed hierarchies of transformation, for example, from inorganic to organic to mental to social or from matter to life to mind to personality (Stone 2008: 52–56). Theories of this sort of evolutionary emergence were not of much interest to Dogen; he was focused more on human awakening and how to move students to experience the emergent nature of the entire universe. He would likely agree with Sellers in his statement that “emergence [at least in part] is brought about by the unplanned increasing organization of matter” (Stone 2008: 52). Dogen, though, would be equally interested in the increasing *disorganization* of matter and how the drive to simplification interacts with the drive to complexity. I think Dogen would have enjoyed Gordon Kaufman's expression of emergentist thinking as “trajectories of serendipitous creativity” (Stone 2008: 203–204). Kaufman was referring to the surprising, unforeseen and unexpected outcomes of dynamic events unfolding that may not always be positive.

A second area of potential dialogue could be around John Dewey's writing on *radical empiricism*. For Dewey, the starting point for all philosophy of religion is not analysis, principles, or historical perspective, but rather the actual experience that informs the practitioner. He describes the interplay between knower and known, between experience and concepts as shaping the transactional or interactive nature of religious experience. For Dewey, a key quality is “the shift in orientation from engagement with a distinct entity, ground, or process to engagement with processes within this world that have a quality that may be designated as religious, at least in a revised sense” (Stone 2008: 48). Dogen would be interested in this shift of orientation away from illusory grounds for understanding and toward a groundless and boundless experience of manifestation.

Dogen's *Mountains and Waters* sutra is rich with encouragement for radical empiricism and seems to fit well with Dewey's Western philosophical explorations. For example, he suggests that students examine closely their own walking in order to fully understand mountains walking.

If you doubt mountains' walking, you do not know your own walking; it is not that you do not walk, but that you do not know or understand your own walking. Since you do know your own walking, you should fully know the green mountains' walking.

(Tanahashi 1985: 98)

Dogen, though, may go further than Dewey intended in his admonitions to push radically beyond human mental and cultural conditioning.

If you do not learn to be free from your superficial views, you will not be free from the body and mind of an ordinary person. Then you will not understand the land of buddha ancestors, or even the land or the palace of ordinary people.

(Tanahashi 1985: 104)

A third area for future conversations with religious naturalism and Zen might be around *new animism* writings among thinkers such as Graham Harvey and Freya Mathews. Much of the older understanding of animism would be anathema to both religious naturalists and Zen Buddhists. Edward Tylor, for example, described animism in his 1871 treatise as belief in the “souls of individual creatures, capable of continued existence after the death or destruction of the body” (Tylor 1871, cited in Capper 2016: 383). In his recent article, Capper describes how the new animists define animism *relationally* rather than through dependence on a human-like soul. “Animism, for them [the new animists], means living in a community of persons, both human and nonhuman, and extending respect for the existential agency of those persons” (Capper 2016: 8–9). This is essentially a non-dualistic orientation to other-than-human life forms, something Dogen would easily support. The new animists are more interested in relational encounter and mutual respect than in transmigration of souls. This would seem to provide greater opportunity for liberatory awakening beyond dualistic views, something Capper (2016) explores in his review of three Zen thinkers as potential new animists.

Conclusion

This exploration has been undertaken in the spirit of interreligious dialogue, with an aim to shed light on religious naturalism through the lens of Zen Buddhist teacher Eihei Dogen. Because Dogen’s writing has received great interest and attention among modern Western Buddhist thinkers, including those interested in environmental concerns, these teachings offer a fruitful platform for preliminary conversations with religious naturalists. Interreligious dialogue provides an opportunity to identify parallel philosophies and practices as well as distinct non-overlapping approaches.

In this particular dialogue a number of differences are profound and distinct, which could lead to unbridgeable gaps between conversation partners. However, I have also identified several areas of potential overlap that could serve as a starting point for informative dialogue. It could be that mutual interest in environmental concerns would be a motivation for sharing perspectives; this has been very productive in Buddhist–Christian interreligious dialogue (see, for example, the writings of Jay McDaniel, Rita Gross, Paul Knitter, and John Cobb).

In closing, let me offer the words of Shohaku Okumura in his study of Dogen’s *Genjokoan*:

In my understanding, this teaching of individuality and universality is the essence of the title *Genjōkōan*. *Genjō* is nothing other than *kōan*, and *kōan* is nothing other than *genjō*: *Genjō* means “reality actually and presently taking place,” and *kōan* means “absolute truth that embraces relative truth” or “a question that true reality asks of us.” So we can say that *genjōkōan* means “to answer the question from true reality through the practice of our everyday activity.”

(Okumura 2010: 21)

At the heart of this interreligious reflection has been that goal: to answer the question of true reality and find meaning in our current existence, complicated as it is, in this messy and dynamic world.

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