

Philosophy and the practice of reflexivity

On Dōgen's discourse about Buddha-nature¹

Is Dōgen a philosopher? Or even an example of what he scolds a “word-counting scholars”?² Despite the difficulties of classifying Dōgen, many would still agree, at least with regard to his *magnum opus*, the *Shōbōgenzō*, that his writings are philosophical.³ This, however, requires some clarification, since there is not much left of this work if one were to exclude all the fascicles that are not explicitly cited for philosophical interpretation. The philosophic scope becomes even smaller if one were to consider the respective passages of the few fascicles pertinent for explicit philosophical reading. At the risk of oversimplifying, the philosophical reception of Dōgen's works is almost entirely grounded in the fascicle “Uji”,⁴ which is

1 I am indebted to Ricki Bliss, Eveline Cioflec, and Raji Steineck for philological and philosophical comments and to Adam Loughnane both for thoughtful remarks and consistent proofreading.

2 English quoted from W/A 16; jap. DZZ 2: 467–68: 「文字をかぞふる学者」. Note: The original text references quote from *Dōgen zenji zenshū*, [“DZZ”]. The English translations of the three main writings (*Bendōwa* [辨道話], “Busshō” [仏性], and *Hōkyōki* [宝慶記]) are based on Norman Waddell and Masao Abe (2002)[“W/A”]; and, respectively, Takashi James Kōdera (1980)[“K”].

3 As has already been pointed out, most philosophical readers only consider Dōgen's *Shōbōgenzō* (正法眼蔵). In fact, there is probably no reader of Dōgen who would blatantly disregard the religious practitioner's interpretation of Dōgen in favor of that of a strictly theoretical interpretation of a philosopher. Since, to my understanding, most existing philosophical readings of Dōgen are not radically different, it seems worth re-evaluating these readings by dismantling both the historical and rhetorical layers of the respective author's prose to relate the effective ambitions and the factual interpretations. – In the case of Tanabe Hajime's 1939 reading of Dōgen (see Tanabe 2011 and Müller 2006 for translation and commentary), Masunaga Reihō (1939) presents the earliest and most comprehensive critique of Tanabe's philosophical reading including a set of six objections (pp. 627–630) building on Tanabe's own question of the systematic relation of religion and philosophy. Taking Tanabe's reading seriously would require a similar critique from his own vantage point. – A more recent outline of Western readers of Dōgen by Hee-Jin Kim (2004: xv–xxii) subsumes his own approach in contradistinction to the “textual-historical” and “comparative-philosophical” method as “methodological-hermeneutical” (p. xviii) to show “how Dōgen does his religion, especially his way of appropriating language and symbols soteriologically” (*ibid.*). The present article evolves Kim's reasoning with regards to the way Dōgen does philosophy in a similar vein.

4 有時.

distinguished for its thought-provoking discourse on time.⁵ Furthermore the philosophical reading of other fascicles, including “Genjōkōan” and “Zenki”⁶ revolves around a related interpretation of “Uji.”

Nevertheless, we can still ask if there might be yet another accessible vantage point from which one could regard Dōgen's *Shōbōgenzō* as philosophical? This paper will argue that the answer is “yes,” there is such a vantage point, so long as one distinguishes *what* Dōgen writes from *how* Dōgen writes. For the claim of the paper is that while it remains ambiguous to maintain that his writings exhibit a philosophical system based on content, their form realizes what philosophy is at its core, i.e. reflexivity or philosophy's inherent self-reference.⁷

1. Argument: Evincing reflexivity on the textual level

The line of the argument starts from the textual level and runs as follows: a) To support a meaningful reading of Dōgen's writings in philosophy – his writings could be used for recitation, as well – one must, at first, gather evidence for the importance of what I will refer to throughout as a “theoretical discourse” in those writings. Speaking of “theoretical discourse” can be misleading if the actual form of the text is held up against standards of modern academia. Nonetheless, as in the case of non-standard texts of Western philosophy, a central thesis, reasoning and critique can be reconstructed in most cases of Dōgen's texts.

b) This evidence of a theoretical discourse can support both a “typical” philosophical reading of Dōgen, based on the presence of philosophical themes and, as will be suggested here, further evidence for a philosophical approach as expressed in the *way* Dōgen writes and uses language. To make the case for the latter, it will be important to distinguish the theoretical discourse as an argumentation based on rational propositions within a coherent framework

5 See Elberfeld 2006 for a recent interpretation of the fascicle “Uji” in the horizon of the Indian and Chinese Buddhist tradition. Still worth reading is Heine 1985.

6 現成公案 and 全機.

7 Talking of a “core feature” of philosophy deserves more attention than planned at the outset of the paper. Instead of referring to a particular, well-established notion, “reflexivity” here summarizes multiple phenomena of a self-relational structure which are essential to the idea of philosophy. Thus it encompasses the quest for self-knowledge in ancient Greece (“know thyself”) as well as Fichte's idea of the self positing I. So it subsumes the methodological *self-relation* of grounding or ending *philosophy through philosophy*, and any other kind of “meta-philosophy.” If such a reflexive enterprise is evident for philosophy, it is not in the case of other sciences such as physics. See Schällibaum 2001 for a comprehensive account of the idea of reflexivity. On meta-philosophy see more recently Williamson 2007. See also Steineck in the present volume, and his qualification of philosophical texts as “referential texts with a specific reflective quality.”

of convictions in the *Shōbōgenzō* from other discourses within the same text. Among other discourses we find rhetoric, ideology of lineages and intersectorian polemics, which have little theoretical content.

c) However, and here lies the main thrust of the argument, the theoretical discourse in Dōgen's *magnum opus* is, as demonstrated by the “Busshō” fascicle conjoined with a *kōan*⁸-like discourse that parasitically contests the theoretical thread of the fascicle.⁹ The theoretical discourse is primary in the logical sense since the *kōan*-like injunctions rely on rational propositions that are already given. The *kōan* discourse is parasitical in the way it undermines the supposed meaning of those propositions. Hence, speaking of a *kōan*-like discourse does not set up a coherent counter-argument to the primary theoretical discourse, but subsumes under one rubric scattered injunctions which, by their disrupting any form of linear reasoning, do not form a continuous and structured discourse themselves. In fact, looking at the way Dōgen uses language in his writings throws a different light on repeated, fragmented, and often indirectly stated propositions or presuppositions that are partly in accordance with, and partly in critique of, a contemporary scholastic Buddhism whose texts are more akin to philosophical treatises.

d) For the exposition of the argument and a better understanding of “Busshō's” peculiarity, its analysis will be framed by comparing examinations of how theoretical discourse is employed in his diary (*Hōkyōki*¹⁰) and in his introduction to Zen Buddhism (*Bendōwa*¹¹). This will be carried out in an attempt to reconcile seemingly opposing styles and parasitical statements and to show their coherence with the “how” of Dōgen's use of language in “Busshō.” As can be shown by way of example, the theoretical discourse and its permanent undermining by *kōans* are each irreducible.

e) Nevertheless, the mutual relatedness of the theoretical and the *kōan*-like threads evinces a stance of reflexivity that is at the same time held as a core feature of philosophy. In other

8 A story, dialogue, question, or statement, which is used in Zen practice to provoke the “great doubt,” and to test a student's progress in Zen practice. The word *kōan*, literally “public case”, comes from the Japanese pronunciation of the Chinese characters chin. *gōng'àn* 公案. For standard accounts on this text genre see Miura/Sasaki 1966 and Hori 2003. On Dōgen and *kōan* cf. Heine 1994.

9 Cf. Müller 2013: 352-365 for a detailed suggestion how to read the *kōan* rhetorics in the *Shōbōgenzō* philosophically in terms of a “de-” and “re-discursification” after Ernst Cassirer's symbol theory.

10 As has been rightly pointed out, Kōdera's translation is problematic for several reasons including emendations and additions of the *Hōkyōki* woodblock print edition published by Menzan Zuhō. See Bodiford 2012: 20 and Bielefeldt 1981.

11 See Bodiford 2012: 23.

words, it may well be possible to interpret Dōgen's writings against the background of contemporary Mahāyāna Buddhism and to outline ontological, epistemological or linguistic propositions that Dōgen would accept as true. However, his writings display less of a systematic account of certain ideas than a staging of a vivid dialogue on words such as Buddha-nature. Thus it is important to see how this dialogue-like fashion which is reminiscent of *kōan* based encounters of the Zen tradition affects the theoretical discourse. The dialogical encounter is a basic feature of Zen practice. If combined with a theoretical discourse, the result prioritizes the path of discourse over the theoretical outcome. Based on the conviction that reflexivity is a core structure of philosophy, the attempt to follow Dōgen's use of language leads to the discovery of philosophy not in the systematic reflection on certain questions and themes that Buddhism and philosophy might have in common, but in the discovery of a reflexive momentum in the way Dōgen presents ideas in his writings.¹²

2. Presupposition: Knowledge and the quest for the self

12 The present article cannot do justice to a discussion of accounts of Dōgen readings for there have been a vast amount of articles published in recent years which are founded thoroughly both in philology and philosophy. One may note, though, Nakimovitch 1999, Steineck/Rappe/Arifuku 2002 and Ōhashi/Elberfeld 2006. The editorial of Steineck/Rappe/Arifuku (2002) suggests a more conventional approach to reading Dōgen, since most of his writings are said to adhere to philosophical standards as set out in the following: "Nun gehören zur Philosophie auch ein kritisch reflektiertes Verhältnis zu den eigenen Geltungsansprüchen, das Bemühen um rationale Begründung sowie die Ablehnung jeglicher Form der Zurückstellung von Wahrheiten um eines vermeintlich höheren Gutes willen" (7). Steineck (2002a) in his comments on the translated fascicles of "Genjōkōan" and "Busshō" promises new ways of answering known questions through the reading of Dōgen: "Nicht 'die' philosophischen Perspektiven der erwähnten Schriften sollen erläutert werden, sondern es wird an einigen Punkten exemplarisch vorgeführt, in welchem großem Umfang diese Texte philosophisch relevante Probleme stellen – teils, indem sie diese selbst behandeln, teils indem sie wertvolles Forschungs- und Diskussionsmaterial für noch weitgehend ungelöste Fragen sind" (129). – Ōhashi Ryōsuke indicates his program of reading Dōgen in the subtitle to Ōhashi/Elberfeld 2006: "Anders Philosophieren aus dem Zen." As regards the question, "welchen Textcharakter die schriftlichen Überlieferungen von Dōgen besitzen" (1), he cautions not to judge prematurely as to whether or not his thinking is philosophy and philosophical. The alienation of certain expectations in reading Dōgen through the eyes of a "Western" philosopher, might have the positive effect, "daß das philosophische Denken im Sinne der europäischen Tradition zu einer Selbstbesinnung veranlasst wird" (*ibid.*). Through this self-examination, as Ōhashi implies, new perspectives might be endorsed: "Es könnte sogar sein, daß das Denken hier einem 'anderen Denken' begegnet" (*ibid.*). However, what this "other" thinking or the thinking of the alterity of Dōgen's writings results in is left unanswered. – Indeed, Steineck's article and mine in the present volume may be considered to offer some re-examinations of textual differences that give an affirmative response to Ōhashi's vague indication. While Steineck argues for an alternative in terminology, I support the usage of the term "philosophy" or "philosophical" for reasons indicated in the following.

The main argument focuses on the level of the text and the momenta of reflexivity therein. It is, however, important to underpin the argument by laying open the more fundamental form of self-reference that is activated through the study of the text. In other words it is the relation of text and reader that becomes relevant at this point. Textual evidence of Dōgen's emphasizing this relation is already indicative for a philosophical reading of the *Shōbōgenzō* in general.

Any philosophical endeavor into Dōgen latently presumes that there is some rational and intelligible thread running through his text leading to a more or less coherent and consistent theory. What kinds of indication are there in Dōgen's texts that suggest such a theoretical discourse? There are, indeed, a great variety of words with which Dōgen reminds his readers of the intellectual faculties needed for theoretical discourse. All of the following examples denote in their Japanese origin more than syllogistic or logical calculation and possibly more than purely rational understanding. However, none excludes the intellect (or its equivalent in Buddhist psychology and epistemology), or rather all of them include the intellect. Taken from the first few pages of "Busshō," there is "practice of Zen and the learning of the Way," "to know/to understand," "to comprehend/to understand," "learner/scholar," "to perceive," "to know/to discern," "to study the way," "to learn/to study," and "to focus to penetrate". Many of these are found in multiple instances within these few pages.¹³

It is important to note that many instances of these verbs are used in an appellative form and address explicitly the reader. In other words, it should be noted that any theoretical engagement is directed to the Buddhist seeker himself, not only and not primarily to the outer world *per se*. This is why one may also think of the well-known passage in "Genjōkōan," which states that, "to learn the Buddha Way is to learn one's self."¹⁴ While this seems to express an ego- (and, hence, anthropo- or bio-) centric point of view which Dōgen addresses critically in most of his writings, one should remember another passage in "Yuibutsu yobutsu," where he writes: "To seek to know the self is invariably the heart of living beings."¹⁵ This is equally true for any being, as Dōgen adds shortly thereafter: "There is

13 Jap. *sangaku* 参学; abbreviation of *sanzen gakudō*, DZZ 1: 14; *shiru* 知る, *ibid.* 15, 16; *eshu* 会取, *ibid.* 16; *gakusha* 学者, *ibid.*; *kakuchi* 覚知; *ibid.*; *kakuryō* 覚了, *ibid.*; *gakudō* 学道, *ibid.*; *gakushū* 学習, *ibid.*; *sankyū* 参究, *ibid.* 17. To further explore the conceptual ramifications of these terms such as to "understand," "learn," "study," it would be necessary to relate them to each other and to terms such as *kenge* 見解 (opinion; *ibid.* 16), *jōryō* 情量 (feeling; *ibid.* 16) and others. In doing so, it would be possible to work out the underlying psychological and epistemological framework from which Dōgen departs.

14 DZZ 1: 3: 「仏道をならふといふは、自己をならふなり。自己をならふといふは、自己をわするなり。自己をわするといふは、万法に証せらるなり。」

15 English cited after Tanahashi 1995: 164; DZZ 2: 523: 「みづからをしらん事をもとむるは、いけるもののさ

never an entire universe that is not the self, with or without knowing it. On this matter defer to the words of the ancient buddha.”¹⁶ The Zen path entails more than learning through books and verbal teachings. However, the passage just cited ends in commending both the spoken and written words of tradition.

What is more, both cited fascicles indicate that the Buddha Way is based on a self-relational structure of knowledge, and hence reflexivity is implicated in this endeavor. Thus one finds sufficient implicit and explicit evidence in Dōgen's texts to support the assumption that focusing on practice on the path to enlightenment¹⁷ is – at least in the case of Dōgen – interwoven with a theoretical and, hence, philosophical pursuit in the wider sense of philosophical themes and topics. In fact, this is true from the very beginning of seeking enlightenment, since the Buddhist expression “to arouse the mind of [intention to achieve] enlightenment”¹⁸ bears an understanding of what Buddhism is and what it is not. Likewise, the discrimination and acknowledgment of the Zen path requires such understanding. One must also keep in mind that there is no stage of Buddhahood in which sitting meditation would outshine wisdom.¹⁹ Apart from the extent and the excellency of Dōgen's work, the semantics of the terms he uses clearly indicate an invitation for the practitioner to approach his teachings through a careful reading, i.e. through an intellectual study of his writings.

An important step of this study is to show how Dōgen lays out what he calls the “principle” or “truth” of his teaching, both equally pertinent translations of what Dōgen calls *dōri*.²⁰ In short, if the Buddhist seeker follows Dōgen's path, she has not only to rid herself of her delusions, but – on the way from delusion to enlightenment – she passes through a universe of highly theoretical reflections laid out in the *Shōbōgenzō*. If delusion and enlightenment are the formal constraints of Dōgen's intellectual endeavor, or the two directions into which his theoretical discourse reaches, its content is equally clearly delineated. As Akiyama Hanji has lucidly articulated, Dōgen's writings abound in critical remarks on non-Buddhist and Buddhist strands of thoughts that help locate his point of view.²¹ More importantly, this

だまれる心なり」.

16 *Ibid.*

17 Jap. *satori* 覚り or, more commonly in the case of Dōgen, 悟り and *shō* 証 for skt. *bodhai*.

18 Jap. *hotsu bodai shin* 発菩提心.

19 Jap. *chie* 智慧 (and variants) for skt. *prajñā*.

20 See Kim 2004: 107-109 for the importance of jap. *dōri* 道理 (for skt. *yukti*).

21 See Akiyama 1935: 1-71. The persistently cited dualistic concept of the self as brought forth by a school

shows the degree of philosophic reflectedness Dōgen expounds in his teaching and invites exploration of his theoretical – and supposedly philosophical – ideas. What remains to be worked out in greater detail is the implied reflexivity of his writings.

3. Exposition (I): Theoretical discourse in Dōgen's writings

As mentioned above, the *Shōbōgenzō* is not a scholastic treatise that could easily or entirely be reframed in philosophical terms. The theoretical thread is interlaced with threads of a different kind. This will be laid out in the next section through consideration of the opening passage of one of Dōgen's most complex fascicles of the *Shōbōgenzō*, “Busshō.” Before this interweaving is more thoroughly analyzed in the third section, two more subsections follow, which compare the theoretical discourse in “Busshō” with *Hōkyōki* and *Bendōwa*.

Disentangling levels of discourse (“Busshō”)

Consideration of the opening passage of Dōgen's “Busshō” in the present context will refer to nine sentences in the DZZ edition of the *Shōbōgenzō*. The fascicle begins as follows:

[1] Shakyamuni Buddha said, 'All sentient beings without exception have the Buddha-nature. Tathagata abides forever without change.'|| [2] We call this the lion roar of our great teacher the Buddha preaching the Dharma, but it is also the headtops of all Buddhas and patriarchs, and the pupils of all Buddhas' and patriarchs' eyes. Commitment to its study has continued for two thousand one hundred and ninety years (until now, the second year of Ninji), a direct, undeviating lineal descent of exactly fifty generations (until my late master, priest T'ien-t'ung Ju-ching). It has continued uninterrupted for twenty-eight successive generations in India and twenty-three successive generations in China. The Buddhas and patriarchs in the ten directions of the universe have all steadily maintained it.|| [3] What is the essence of the World-honored One's words, 'All sentient beings without exception have the Buddha-nature?' [4] [Their essence] are the words 'What is this that thus comes?', [they] are preaching the Dharma. [5] That is, [the World-honored One's words] speak of 'living beings,' 'sentient beings,' 'all classes of living things,' or 'all varieties.' [6] The words' entire

called Senika is only the most blatant “heresy” that Dōgen repeatedly attacks. And it should be noted that, while the Senika might, as Kim (2004) pointed out, present a fallacy that Buddhist strands easily fall pray to, it does not represent any of Dōgen's contemporaries. Kim points out that the “Senika heresy” is rather a prototype of dualistic fallacy. See He 2000 for a more detailed account and discussion of the Senika.

being [*shitsuu*] mean both sentient beings and all beings.²²

To begin with the title of the fascicle, “Busshō” or “Buddha-nature” is the nucleus of a pivotal discussion in the long and broad history of all types of Buddhism, including Zen. Calling the reader's attention in using this title is particularly justified, since Dōgen delineates his position against the Buddhist tradition instead of simply reiterating traditional ideas about Buddha-nature. By going back to a quote of the Nirvāṇa Sūtra in which Śākyamuni utters a sentence about Buddha-nature [1], Dōgen sets out from the beginning of the Zen lineage with a hermeneutic orientation: by commenting on and interpreting the words of tradition, he expounds his own understanding of the word “Buddha-nature” and achieves, in the end, a critical and creative reappropriation of the term. Before the actual interpretation begins, Dōgen adds sentences with mostly ideological intent [2],²³ pointing to the importance of the cited words of Śākyamuni on the one hand and placing himself within the genealogy subsequent to Śākyamuni to authorize his endeavor on the other.

After these passages the reader is invited to follow the interpretation [3], where Dōgen asks “what is the essence of the [...] words” of Śākyamuni in regard to the first half of the quote? Both the initial quote and the question, which asks for its meaning are intelligible, since they are syntactically and semantically well-formed and the words make reference to common Buddhist terminology. However, Dōgen's immediate answer [4] strikes the reader as impenetrable at first sight, as he writes that “[a]ll sentient beings without exception have the Buddha-nature” and in response to his own questions says this is the same as the question “[w]hat is this that thus comes?” The answer is opaque for several reasons: The standard reaction to a question in theoretical discourse would usually be a positive or negative proposition, not a question, even if rhetorical. Moreover, the given question as such hardly makes sense either in itself or in relation to the question being asked by Dōgen, since neither an anaphoric nor a deictic relation is apparent to furnish an understanding of the reference to

22 W/A 60-61; the three breaks of the Japanese edition are marked by “||” and the number in brackets [#] indicate passages of analysis. DZZ 1: 14: 「釈迦牟尼仏言、一切衆生、悉有仏性、如来常住、無有变易。これ、われらが大師釈尊の師子吼の転法輪なりといへども、一切諸仏、一切祖師の頂寧眼睛なり。参学きたること、すでに二千一百九十年〔当日本仁治二年辛丑歳〕正嫡わづかに五十代〔至先師天童浄和尚〕、西天二十八代、代代住持しきたり、東地二十三世、世世住持しきたる。十方の仏、ともに住持せり。世尊道の一切衆生悉有仏性は、その宗旨いかむ。是什麼物怎麼来（是れ什麼物か怎麼に来る）の道、転法輪なり。あるいは衆生といひ、有情といひ、群生といひ、群類といふ。悉有の言は、衆生なり、即有なり。」

23 However, the first of the four sentences speaks of more than the transmission of Śākyamuni's words, since it points to a metaphorical comparison of its content to the headtops and eyes' pupils of the Buddhas and patriarchs. While this could be taken to be not a specific, but rather a very general underscoring of its being meaningful, Abe/Waddell remark in a footnote that they are “concrete expressions descriptive of the nonobjectifiable essence of Zen monks” (*ibid*).

“this.”

Only by tracing the source of the question “What is this that thus comes?” from the original dialogue, can we discern what “what,” “this,” and “thus” possibly designate, if they designate anything at all. While it is apparent that knowledge of Japanese (or English) alone is not sufficient for an understanding here, the fact that most text editions and translations of this paragraph present the whole dialogue in the notes highlights the opacity of Dōgen's enigmatic question; “[w]hat is this that thus comes?” Moreover, since the original dialogue is open to multiple divergent readings, it is far from univocal what meaning to infer from the dialogue for the present context. Is this the point where Dōgen wants the reader to arrive; in a discursive dead end in *kōan*-like fashion, in order to show the futility of all theoretical discourse? Is this the way in which Dōgen tries to lead the practitioner towards the actual practice of sitting meditation? The answer to these questions is “no,” since, despite his creative use of language meant to displace the reliance on reason, Dōgen does not indulge in allusive, illustrative, or abusive quotation.

To the contrary, he goes on to give another answer to his question (“What is the essence of the [...] words?”) in stating that Śākyamuni speaks of “‘living beings,’ ‘sentient beings,’ ‘all classes of living things,’ or ‘all varieties.’” While this sequence of nouns does not come to a definite conclusion, Dōgen does, indeed, become more conclusive in his answer in the next, though not final sentence. Thus he writes in a definition-like statement: “The words’ entire being [*shitsuu*] means living beings, i.e. existing being.” In short, Dōgen's coining of “entire being” is how he grasps the word “Buddha-nature.” Even if this statement demands further explanation, its meaning is accessible to anyone able to use a Japanese dictionary. Therefore, one can say that the semantic and syntactic structure of the essential sentences of this paragraph do align within the constraints of theoretical discourse common to philosophical texts. But what is one to make of the irritating interjections, which appear at times to be semantic and syntactic enclosures (such as sudden changes of topic, non-sensical answers, or incomplete sentences) as they derail the linear reasoning? The rest of “Busshō” and most of the other fascicles of the *Shōbōgenzō* are interspersed with such interjections. Are they peculiar to the *Shōbōgenzō*?

Comparison to Hōkyōki

How does “Busshō” compare to the most intimate of Dōgen's writings i.e. his diary, the *Hōkyōki*, in which he recollects his interviews with his Zen master Rújìng in China?²⁴ Would

²⁴ While for the sake of the argument it does not matter if Dōgen's account of his travel to China and his encounter with Rújìng has any historical facticity, it should be pointed out that both the transmission of the

one not assume this text to read like the traditional *kōan* collections leaving only traces of conventional communication? In fact, the diary is written like most of Dōgen's writings in a dialogical fashion. This is also true in the case of “Busshō,” even if in most passages Dōgen makes use of traditional master-disciple dialogues instead of addressing the reader directly, this dialogue form still occurs more often than not. In the *Hōkyōki*, we find Dōgen himself as the disciple asking questions to his teacher.

While a constant enthusiasm towards clarifying basic ideas is apparent on the side of the disciple, Rújìng is not reported at a single instant to use a stick or a blow to beat wrong ideas out of Dōgen's mind. On the contrary, the diary displays the give and take of questions and answers, pros and cons, critique and affirmation in a dialogical form that is overall intelligible to the reader; obscure passages do not appear to be intended. Even if the *Shōbōgenzō* is granted philosophical status, essential presuppositions, ideas and themes are already visible in his diary. Indeed, the *Hōkyōki* lays out the initial question that caused Dōgen to leave for China and eventually devote himself to Buddhism.

According to his biographies, he became a devotee of Buddhism for several reasons: The initial step would have been through his personal feeling of evanescence resulting from the early death of his mother. But more importantly, his adherence to the Zen school was prompted by an apparent intellectual inconsistency within the Tendai tradition, which he encountered before he converted to the Zen school. This apparent inconsistency referred to in the Nirvāna Sūtra prompted Dōgen to ask why is it necessary to engage in ascetic practices in the quest of Buddha-nature if all sentient beings originally possess the Buddha-nature?²⁵ Dōgen himself refers to his intellectual quest for an answer in his diary as follows: “He stagnated aimlessly within the realm of names and forms [*myōsō*].”²⁶

Dōgen's starting point in leaving for China, then, was a state of disorientation caused by his own and his potential teachers' inability to make sense of a question by finding the right words for an answer within a theoretical discourse grounded in Tendai metaphysics. Apparently, Dōgen did not primarily look for the right practice as part of the Buddhist way, since the practice that he would ultimately subscribe to was taught in his vicinity, if not sufficiently realized in Tendai, then at least – equally thorough as in the Sōtō tradition – in

well-known phrase jap. *shinjin datsuraku* 身心脱落 and his presence in China in general are disputed (see Heine 2003). For an account of Dōgen's Zen in relation to his master Rújìng, see He 2000.

25 Kōdera summarizes : “This 'Great Doubt' haunted the young Dōgen in the second year of Kempō (1214), when he was fifteen years of age. Biographies tell that there was no one who could resolve this question for him. Thus begins Dōgen's journey in quest for the 'authentic teacher' who could resolve this 'Great Doubt'” (25).

26 K 117, Para. 1; DZZ 7: 2: 「徒滞名相之懷標」.

the school of Eisai, the founder of the Japanese Rinzai tradition. Thus his move to seek a “true master” in China is motivated by an endeavor that sustains an intellectual quest consistent with the use of “names and forms” instead of the typical Zen quest to overcome language once and for all and, thereby, theoretical discourse.

Therefore, it comes as no surprise that the first question that Dōgen queries is in regard to the tendency of the Zen school to free itself from language as such by proclaiming itself to be a “special transmission outside the scriptures.”²⁷ Whether historically accurate or not, Rújìng warns against the idea of “a separate transmission outside the scriptures” by maintaining that there could not be two teachings within the one and ultimate teaching of the Buddha.²⁸ This is to maintain, as a result, that there is no path totally absolved from language, as the early saying of Bodhidharma would have it.²⁹ Of course, supporting the use of language does not necessarily legitimize just any use of it on the path of the Buddhist practitioner. Immediately after Rújìng's response, however, Dōgen points out the importance of language as a means of intellectual discourse and puts forth a critical view with regard to the practice of other contemporary Zen teachers. Thus, he says:

They do not bother to explain to their students what they mean. Neither do they allow them to inquire how the buddhas convert people in their entirety nor to anticipate favorable recompense in the next incarnation.³⁰

Already in the next paragraph Dōgen puts forth his main question.³¹ To further emphasize

27 The strategic impact of a critique of the idea of a “special transmission outside the scriptures” could surely have further implications. Nevertheless, rather than taking this simply as a case in point of ideology, since it makes it much harder for Dōgen/Rújìng to keep a distance from other schools by giving up a significant and well-known tenet of the Zen tradition, choosing in particular this tenet of a “special transmission outside the scriptures” is also, if not primarily, founded in a *rationale* of greater importance.

28 See K 118, para. 2; DZZ 7: 2,4.

29 This is related to Dōgen's question in paragraph 14, about whether the name of Ch'an is of any use. See K 123: “Ju-ching replied: '[...] The Ch'an School is a false name that is lamentable indeed. It is the name bald-headed little beasts have been using.'”

30 K 118, para. 3; DZZ 7: 4: 「教字者無一卜度、遂則不問仏之始終、無期二生之感果。」

31 See K 119, para. 4: [Dōgen] said: “Good teachers, old and new, say, 'As a fish that drinks water knows whether it is cold or warm, so a man who has self-knowledge achieves awakening. This [self-knowledge] is the realization of the enlightened mind.'” Criticizing this [argument], Dōgen asked: “If this self-knowledge (*jichī*) is the authentic awakening, do all sentient beings have self-knowledge, and if so, can they be considered to be the authentically awakened tathagatas? Some say, 'Yes, all sentient beings, from the beginningless beginning, are the tathagatas.' Others say, 'Not all sentient beings are necessarily tathagatas.' Why is this so? If only those who

the importance of theoretical discourse, we can question why Dōgen would not ask in a very forthright way – instead of formulating ramifications of the main question and anticipating certain second and third level reasonings – whether the matter at hand would be such an obvious case which could be answered instead by pointing out the importance of practice? Or, on the flip side, why would Dōgen engage in theory, if in a typical Zen-like dialogue the matter at hand was most of all a rhetorical enunciation in a ritual-like verbal exchange in which a paradoxical, indirect, comical, or any other rhetorical means to rephrase the matter would even heighten Dōgen's acknowledgement? Rújìng's answer is admittedly quick and short and does not reply to all questions implied by Dōgen's utterance,³² but the clear point in his answer as well as in Dōgen's original question is the inconsistency of a dualistic conception of the self (as Buddha-nature) with the Buddha's original teaching of *anātman* (“non-self”). This dualist conception is implied by the Tendai school in proposing the idea of an original enlightenment and is accordingly criticized by Dōgen. And yet, there are a few remarks that could be read as excluding language and theory from the path to enlightenment, even if a limited preference for *zazen* (seated meditation) over purely theoretical approaches is vital for the Sōtō school; as is the face-to-face-transmission of their teaching. This is why Rújìng says at some point: “You must sit in meditation to pursue the Way as intensely as you would extinguish a fire in your hair.”³³ And, closely related, the diary reads:

Rujing taught: “The World-honoured One said, ‘While hearing and speculating is still like standing outside the gate, sitting in meditation is like an immediate return home and a quiet life therein.’” Therefore, sitting in meditation even for a moment or an instant will accumulate immeasurable merit.³⁴

Where, then, is one to place the dialogue between Rújìng and Dōgen? Do they stand outside the gate, or are they seated inside? Would they need to decide on one side of the gate or the other? The solution is immediately evident in Rújìng's statement: “Both sacred silence and

know that they are inherently awakened are the tathagatas, then those who do not think they are inherently awakened would not be tathagatas. Can such a theory be of the Buddha Dharma or not?” DZZ 7: 6.

32 “Ju-ching replied: ‘Saying that sentient beings are originally buddhas is the same as believing the heterodoxy of spontaneous origination. We cannot condone those who compare ‘I’ and ‘mine’ (*ware*) with the buddhas and who take the unattained as the attained and the unexperienced as the experienced” (*ibid.*). DZZ 7: 6.

33 K 137; DZZ 7: 44: 「直須教頭燃、坐禪弁道。」

34 K 137; DZZ 7: 44: 「堂頭和尚示曰。世尊言、聞思猶如於門外、坐禪直乃歸家穩坐。所以坐禪乃至一須臾・一刹那、功德無量。」

sacred teachings are the undertakings of the Buddha.”³⁵ Meditation practice is as important as the study of the sūtras and commentaries. However, it is not the study of just any scripture, as one can see in Dōgen's and Rújìng's explorations of the differentiations in terms of “full” and “partial” meaning that certain scriptures are supposed to convey.³⁶ Furthermore, Dōgen and Rújìng certainly do not spare the related discussion about Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna based on respective writings of either strand.³⁷ The dialogue goes on to distinguish the practice of Zen meditation itself. It is only through the framing of the practice based on certain texts and authors such as Nāgārjuna that effectively allows Zen meditation to be distinguished from the practice of other Buddhist and non-Buddhist meditation. Rújìng concedes similarities, before he specifies the Zen practice:

Although the sitting in meditation of arhats and pratyekabuddhas transcends attachment, it lacks great compassion. Therefore it is not identical with the sitting in meditation of the buddhas and patriarchs, who consider great compassion first, whereby they save all sentient beings.³⁸

In a similar manner, Rújìng points to the practice of “Hindu heretics,” “śravakas,” and others, before he articulates how to attain the “meekness of mind” necessary to save all sentient beings: “Ju-ching replied: 'The will of buddhas and patriarchs to drop body and mind is meekness of mind. This is the Seal put upon the mind of the buddhas and patriarchs.'”³⁹ Compassion and meekness of mind are essential to the composure of the

35 K 126; DZZ 7: 22: 「乃至聖默聖說、皆是仏事。」

36 See K para. 21; DZZ 7 para. 17.

37 See K para. 18; DZZ 7 para. 15, in which Dōgen utters his concern that any differentiation could collapse: “[Dōgen] asked: 'If we depart from the five desires and remove the five defilements, [this teaching] would be the same as the discussion of the scripturalists. Are we not then the practitioners of both Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna?’” See also K para. 19, 24; DZZ 7 para. 15, 20.

38 K 134; DZZ 7: 38: 「羅漢・支仏之坐禪、雖不著味、闕大悲。故不同仏祖大悲為先、誓度一切衆生之 坐禪也。」

39 K 135; DZZ 7: 38, 40: 「弁肯仏々祖々身心脱落、乃柔軟心也。喚這箇作仏祖心印也。」 See para. K 44 et. al. See K 120 para. 5: “Illuminate the mind only through the ancient teachings, and read sutras that contain complete meaning.” K 121, para. 7: “Ju-ching replied: 'Theories of former teachers, such as Nagarjuna, must be preserved and trusted; they cannot be heterodox. Pertaining to the hindrances of karma, the fetters will be transformed as you engage in diligent training.’” K para. 10: “Ju-ching recited: 'The nature of both the worshipping and the worshipped is void, and [in-between] is the spiritual correspondence and permutation of the Way, which is beyond intellectual comprehension.’” K para. 14: “[Dogen] asked: 'If the Great Way of all the buddhas and patriarchs cannot be confined to one narrow corner, why do we insist on calling it the Ch'an

Buddhist practitioner. This is nevertheless likewise true for most schools of the Mahāyāna tradition. This is why Rujing needed to specify the Zen practice in naming it, as Dōgen recollects, “dropping off body and mind.” Additionally there is one other area in which “names and forms” help to navigate the path to enlightenment. Giving verbal – partly idiosyncratic – expressions to distinguish a new practice or teaching can compensate for an immediate encounter with a teacher/master and retroactively provides a mutual acknowledgement of teacher and disciple. As Dōgen remarks upon “sorting through” a number of authoritative writings:

'Having come from a far-off land, and being little experienced, as I unroll [Ching-te] ch'uan-teng [lu], [T'ieng-sheng] kuang-teng [lu], [Chien-chung ching-kuo] hsü-teng [lu], [Chia-t'ai] p'u-teng [lu] and the sayings of the other masters, I have yet to come across anything like your verse on the bells. [...] It is because [the verse is] straightforward and yet rhythmical.' [...] [Rujing] taught with a smile: [...] I, the Senior Monk of T'ien-t'ung [Mountain], grant that you have the Eye. You must compose verses in this way.⁴⁰

Even if at this point the use of language in the form of poetic verse⁴¹ becomes highly dependent on the context, it is just as specific in its poetic expression, as one can infer from certain metaphors and key words used on such occasions (such as embedding the term “emptiness”, or “merging” the subject into some expressive presence as represented by onomatopoeia). Becoming part of the Zen tradition and thereby being contextualized within a theoretical discourse, even idiosyncratic phrases can “cause” – rather than only “make” – sense, insofar as they spontaneously elicit “lively instants” of comprehension between “kindred spirits.” Completely absolved of any kind of discourse, those moments of comprehension remain merely emotionally touching. Yet, as soon as they become the basis of a Zen master's teaching, certain words, phrases, or stories can present an inexhaustible source

School?' Ju-ching replied: 'We must not arbitrarily call the Great Way of the buddhas and patriarchs the Ch'an School. The Ch'an School is a false name that is lamentable indeed. It is the name bald-headed little beasts have been using. All the ancient virtuous ones of the past knew this.'

⁴⁰ K 136; DZZ 7: 42. “Straightforward” is *tanchoku* 端直 and “rhythmical” *kyokuchō* 曲調 in the Japanese text: 「道元出来於遠方之辺土、雖寡聞少見、今披伝灯・続灯・普灯、及諸師別録、未曾得有如和尚風鈴頌。道元何幸今得見聞。〈...〉故以然者、端直而有曲調也。〈...〉含笑示曰、〈...〉我天童老僧、許你有眼。你要做頌、便恁地做。」

⁴¹ The verse reads in full in K 191: “The whole body like a mouth, hanging in emptiness. Not asking whether the breeze be from south or north, east or west. For all alike, preach the *prajñā*, *tī-tīng-tung-liang*, *tī-tīng-tung*!” Kōdera quotes from Dōgen's collected works edited by Ōkubo Dōshū, vol. 1, p. 12.

of meaning such as Rújìng's (i.e. Dōgen's) “dropping of body and mind.” It is at this point that interjections of the kind encountered in “Busshō,” turn from enigmatic opacity to emblematic icons.

Comparison to Bendōwa

The second text worth comparing “Busshō” with is Dōgen's introduction to Zen (*Bendōwa*), since it brings to light more explicitly the deficiencies of language as a means of theoretical discourse, similar to the skepticism suggested in the quote from the beginning of this paper. As most practical minded readers of Dōgen know, he warns the Buddhist seeker of the true teaching against “word-counting scholars”⁴² in favor of authentic practice. At the same time, since *Bendōwa*, written in Japanese vernacular, is Dōgen's means of addressing a general audience and introducing it to Zen Buddhism, contrary to the above mentioned Zen dictum he must regard language as a proper means of convincing and persuading. This is clear from the change in his rhetoric, because it is much more splendid than in the *Hōkyōki*. For example, he points to the superiority of Zazen as follows:

Remember, even if the countless buddhas in ten directions, as numerous as the sands of the Ganges, tried with all their power and all their Buddha-Wisdom to calculate or comprehend the merit of one person's Zazen, they could not even get close.⁴³

Or note his turning to a set of questions that Dōgen anticipated in writing his introduction:

Now we have heard how high and great is the merit of this Zazen. [But] some stupid person might doubtfully ask, “There are many gates to the Buddha-Dharma. Why do you solely recommend sitting in Zazen?” I say: Because it is the authentic gate to the Buddha-Dharma.⁴⁴

In the same way as he praises the merits of Zazen, Dōgen places himself in an authoritative position in order to preach the new teaching: He reminds the reader of a time in China when Buddhism spread and a great number of “scriptural writings” supported an equal number of different schools of Buddhism. Judging their superiority or inferiority only based

42 W/A 16; DZZ 2: 467-68.

43 W/A 14; DZZ 2: 464: 「しるべし、たとひ十方無量恒河沙数の仏、ともにちからをはげまして、仏智 慧をもて、一人坐禅の功德をはかり、しりきはめんとすといふとも、あへてほとりをうることあらじ。」

44 W/A 14; DZZ 2: 464-65: 「いま、この坐禅の功德、高大なることを、ききをはりぬ。おろかならむ人、うたがうていはむ、仏法におほくの門あり、なにをもてかひとへに坐禅をすすむるや。しめしてはく、これ仏法の正門なるをもてなり。」

on the scriptures seemed impossible at this time. However, “following the arrival of Bodhidharma from the west, these entangling complications were cut away at their source”⁴⁵ by Bodhidharma's teaching Zazen. Dōgen's stating that he hoped to engage Zen practice in the same way in Japan puts him on par with Bodhidharma in China. Being asked about the 'latest' or 'ultimate' teachings in Japan, Dōgen reacts accordingly. The (anticipated) inquirer asks:

The teachings that are transmitted today in our own Hokke [i.e. Tendai] and Kegon schools represent the ultimate Mahāyāna teaching. Not to mention the teachings of Shingon [...] that the genuine enlightenment [...] is attainable in a single sitting. [...] [Dōgen simply maintains:] This is beyond the comprehension of Dharma-teachers who study words.⁴⁶

While a few passages in the *Bendōwa* explicitly warn against theory and debate, or suggest the move into practice because of their highly rhetorical and ideological character, the importance of language becomes visible, nevertheless, though on a different scale. As Dōgen says:

When even for a short period of time you sit properly in samadhi, imprinting the Buddha-seal in your three activities of deed, word, and thought, then each and every thing throughout the dharma world is the Buddha-seal, and all space without exception is enlightenment.⁴⁷

And in another instance, in the passage following upon his demand “not to debate the superiority or inferiority of one teaching or another,” he adds:

[M]en have flowed into the Way drawn by grasses and flowers, mountains and running waters. They have received the lasting impression of the Buddha-seal by holding soil, rocks, sand, and pebbles. Indeed, its vast and great signature is imprinted on all the things in nature, and even then remains in great abundance.⁴⁸

45 W/A 11; DZZ 2: 462: 「祖師西来ののち、直に葛藤の根源をきり」.

46 W/A 16; DZZ 2: 467: 「いまわが朝につたはれるところの法華宗、華嚴教、ともに大乘の究竟なり。いはむや眞言宗のごときは、〈...〉その談ずるむね、〈...〉一座に〈...〉正覺をととなふ」.

47 W/A 11; DZZ 2: 462-63: 「もし人、一時なりといふとも、三業に仏印を標し、三昧に端坐するとき、遍法界みな仏印となり、尽虚空ことごとくさとりとなる。」

48 W/A 11, 16-17; DZZ 2: 467: 「草華山水にひかれて、仏道に流入することありき、土石沙礫をにぎりて、仏印を稟持することあり。いはむや広大の文字は、万象にあまりて、なほゆたかなり、転大法輪、又一塵にをさ

Dōgen introduces an all-encompassing form of language when he writes of having “received the lasting impression of the Buddha-seal” and its “vast and great signature,”⁴⁹ which is imprinted on all beings through the practice of Zazen. This cosmological notion of language is different from any other form, since it is ontologically prior to any verbal enunciation, both in the theoretical discourse and in the idiosyncratic form of expression mentioned with regard to Rújìng's verse. This possibility of language occurs directly, however, in the immediate practice of sitting meditation and becomes visible in “deed, word, and thought.” Thus it is necessary to distinguish this form of language from Dōgen's perspective on sitting. It can be taken for granted that basic tenets of Kegon metaphysics are the starting point for Dōgen when articulating the practice of Zazen.

In fact, many passages in *Bendōwa* evoke in their rhetoric concepts such as the “non-obstruction between all beings” as well the “non-obstruction between principle and beings,”⁵⁰ wherein the practitioner is set in relation to the multiplicity of all beings, as one being among the myriad beings and as manifesting the principles of non-obstruction.⁵¹ Moreover, Dōgen emphasizes the singular dynamism and the momentariness of life realized in meditation. His coining this as “zazen only”⁵² encompasses the unity of practice and enlightenment in the very act of sitting. What then does the still posture of *zazen*, which neither practice nor enlightenment obstructs, imprint on all beings? What kind of meaning does it convey? The “vast and great signature” indicates the mere and immediate presence of all beings preceding their representation through limited means such as language. In the same vein, Dōgen lauded Rújìng's verse for expressing the being of the bell in the immediacy of its ringing.

4. Exposition (II): Undermining the theoretical discourse in “Busshō”

Having come this far, it could be thought that theoretical discourse is not undermined by Dōgen's cautioning against debating the teachings, even if his own reasoning becomes more

まれり。」

49 Jap. *butsuchin wo bonji suru* 「仏印を稟持する」 and *kōdai no monji* 「広大の文字」. This requires further elucidation with regards to the source from which Dōgen takes these expressions and ideas – possibly Esoteric Buddhism (jap. *mikkyō*)? – or if they are entirely borne by his (later on more explicitly stated) idea of language.

50 Jap. *jiji muge* 事事無碍, and jap. *riji muge* 理事無碍, respectively.

51 See his apology of *zazen* in the paragraphs 11 to 14 (W/A 11-14 and DZZ 2: 462-464).

52 Jap. *shikan taza* 只管打坐.

ideologically biased. Even so, does Dōgen himself suggest how these different forms of language relate i.e. idiosyncratic enunciations, the imprinting of the Buddha-seal, and theoretical discourse? Returning to the “Busshō” fascicle provides an approach to this question.

Interjections of the masters

“Busshō’s” theoretical discourse returns to themes set out in both *Hōkyōki* and *Bendōwa*, while it sets forth with the reinterpretation of the main notion of “Buddha-nature”. An encompassing interpretation of the fascicle is beyond the scope of this paper, but existing, even divergent, examinations of Dōgen’s reinterpretation suggest it to be coherent and consistent based on most parts of the text. However, despite the possible coherence and consistency of Dōgen’s theoretical discourse, the necessity to piece the discourse together from the “Busshō” fascicle in a discontinuous way leads, no doubt, to the conclusion that Dōgen’s writing is far from a treatment of the notion of Buddha-nature in a scholastic fashion; it is not a systematic treatise on this term. The fragmented structure of “Busshō” is partly due to its transmission and redaction, partly due to the repeated alternation of quotation and comment whereby the quotes of esteemed teachers of the tradition are ordered along an ascending timeline.⁵³

For a theoretical reconstruction, however, the opaque interjections, and the semantic-syntactic enclosures that were singled out above, present a greater challenge. Precisely the entwining of two different usages of language, theory-formation and theory-contestation, means Dōgen’s style in the “Busshō”-fascicle is similar to the previous case where Dōgen’s question about the essence of Śākyamuni’s words invokes a blatant *kōan*-like response – “What it is this that thus comes?”⁵⁴ – thus undermining the intelligibility of the text. Upon referencing the source of the quote, Waddell and Abe add in their footnote that “What it is this that thus comes?” “indicates the manifestation of Buddha-nature itself beyond any predication or definition.”⁵⁵ If this hint of Waddell and Abe’s was sufficient to “understand” the meaning of the passage, the fascicle could have ended at this point. Nevertheless, to “indicate”, or to point “to” Buddha-nature does not hinder Dōgen from making use of predicates to determine Buddha-nature as “living being, all kinds of living beings, of

53 See Steineck’s translation of “Busshō” (2002b) in which conflicting parts are separated.

54 W/A 61; DZZ 1: 14.

55 W/A 61, fn. 5.

species,”⁵⁶ or even to define: “The words entire being [shitsuu] mean both sentient beings and all beings. In other words, entire being is the Buddha-nature.”⁵⁷

Furthermore, the oscillating movement between interjection and theory continues, since Dōgen quickly moves away from theoretical discourse and relocates the statement about Buddha-nature spatio-temporally: “Just at the very time when things are thus, both the inside and outside of sentient beings are, as such, the entire being of the Buddha-nature.”⁵⁸ Though Dōgen moves further away from the predicative form of determination, he links the next statement as an explanation of the previous sentence, saying: “This is so [...] for ‘You attain my skin, flesh, bone, and marrow.’”⁵⁹ Thereby he steps beyond the spatio-temporal relocation in the anonymous here and now and addresses the very facticity of the reader. In the next sentence he finally moves back and continues in a theoretical fashion, demanding proper discernment in linguistic terms:

You must understand that the “being” that the Buddha-nature makes entire being is not the being of being or non-being. [...] Nor does the term entire being mean emergent being, or original being, or mysterious being, or anything of the like, much less conditioned being or illusory being. It has nothing to do with such things as mind and object, substance and form.⁶⁰

In fact, as lucidly as Dōgen makes use of categorical discernments, equally splendid is his vocabulary expressing logical relations, including syllogisms, counterfactual hypotheses, causal relations and the like. To sum up, it seems rather unreasonable to infer from the repeated interjection of *kōan*-like phrases, quotes, or passages that Dōgen ultimately wants to overcome language in part or in its entirety. Instead, it seems rather important to acknowledge the ongoing oscillating movement between interjections and theory, whereby the theoretical discourse is as much irreducible as the interjections rely on the theoretical discourse.

56 W/A 61; DZZ 1: 14.

57 *Ibid.*: 「悉有の言は、衆生なり、即有なり。すなわち悉有は仏性なり」.

58 *Ibid.*: 「正当慙麼寺は衆生の内外すなわち仏性の悉有なり。」

59 W/A 61; DZZ 1: 14-15: 「汝得吾皮肉骨髓なるがゆえに。」

60 W/A 61-62; DZZ 1: 15: 「しるべし、いま仏性に悉有せらるる有は、有無の有にあらず。〈...〉悉有の言、さらに始有にあらず、本有にあらず、妙有等にあらず。いはんや縁有・妄有ならんや。心境・性相等にかかはれず。」

Contesting the truth of the masters

After a long interpretation of the initial quote of Śākyamuni Buddha “All sentient beings without exception have the Buddha-nature” as originally meaning a “monistic” (or “non-dualistic”) rather than a “dualistic” concept of Buddha-nature,⁶¹ Dōgen cites another Zen master, National teacher Ch'i-an of Hang-chou, who re-expresses Buddha-nature in almost the same dualistic rendering as Śākyamuni: “All sentient beings *have* [italics mine] the Buddha-nature.” Dōgen suggests, again, a monistic re-phrasing of Ch'i-an's wording and comments on it as follows:

Even if the National teacher did not accede to a perfect expression to his understanding just as it was, that does not mean there will not come a time when he will do so.⁶²

Dōgen's later comment suggests that ultimately a verbal expression, one's understanding, and the concept of Buddha-nature collide. However, even inappropriate expressions are not futile, as he then goes on to explain:

Nor does it mean the expression he uses at this time is ineffectual or devoid of essential meaning. Again, although he himself has not necessarily grasped the truth he embodies in himself, he is nonetheless possessed of the four elements, five skandhas, and skin, flesh, bone, and marrow body [of the Buddha-nature]. Sometimes, in this way, a perfect expression of truth may take a lifetime to make. Sometimes, one may be engaged for several lifetimes in expressing the truth perfectly.⁶³

This is not however, the final word, since Dōgen goes on to praise another master, Ta-kuei, who preaches: “All sentient beings have no Buddha-nature.” These seemingly contradictory words of Ch'i-an's proposition make Dōgen rethink and note:

The words 'have' and 'do not have' are totally different in principle. It is

61 Even if the main argument of the paper does not rely on ontological concepts of “dualism” or “monism,” the present usage of terms such as “non-duality” etc., is admittedly loose. While the author is not readily content with the way Dōgen is quickly – through the historical and geographical distance from India – somehow subsumed under the “Eastern” tradition of Advaita-Vedanta, further investigation is required to determine what to make of the concept of “non-duality” in contradistinction to whatever – mostly “Western” – “monism” is criticized by it.

62 W/A 86; DZZ 1: 34: 「国師たとひ会得を道得に承当せずとも、承当の期なきにあらず。」

63 *Ibid.*: 「今日の道得、いたづらに宗旨なきにあらず。又、自己に具する道理、いまだかならずし もみづから会取せざれども、四大五蘊もあり、皮肉骨髓もあり。しかあるがごとく、道取も、一生に道取することもあり、道取にかかれる生生もあり。」

understandable that doubts should arise as to which utterance is correct. But in the Buddha Way, 'all sentient beings have no Buddha-nature' is alone preeminent.⁶⁴

How is it possible that two different Zen masters suggest opposing views? And is it not the case that Dōgen saves the rational intelligibility of his account by drawing a clear line in favor of one of these contradictory propositions with regard to Buddha-nature? Unlikely as it may seem, Dōgen goes on to adjust his position in relation to both Ch'i-an's and Ta-kuei's statement. In this new vantage point both statements appear insufficient, as Dōgen explains in accord with a third statement on Buddha-nature by Po-chang:

Therefore, whether it is 'have Buddha-nature' or 'have no Buddha-nature,' both end up by disparaging the Three Treasures [of Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha.] But regardless of the disparagement, you cannot get by without making an utterance.⁶⁵

Po-chang's comment that both the affirmative and the negative statement about Buddha-nature are insufficient suggests that any proposition is insufficient. This is a stance that Dōgen can subscribe to only half-way. However, since Po-chang cannot express the insufficiency of any proposition, unless he remarks on it critically, it legitimizes the attempt to express what his predecessors tried to express despite the fundamental insufficiency of any possible proposition. In other words, every statement about Buddha-nature disregards its being "entire being." Any determining statement makes sense only through its simultaneous implicit or explicit negation and is thus insufficient. Linguistic means cannot completely overcome what Dōgen tries to avoid: to express Buddha-nature in a differential way. But, as Dōgen underscores, "you cannot get by without making an utterance." Thus Dōgen himself concedes, despite the insufficiency of those statements:

Now let me ask Ta-kuei and Po-chang: 'It may well be disparagement, but has the Buddha-nature been really preached or not? Even granting it has been preached, wouldn't the Buddha-nature be totally implicated in the preaching? Any preaching of it would have to occur together with the hearing of it.'⁶⁶

The insufficiency of any statement with regards to Buddha-nature sets a different score for

64 *Ibid.*: 「有無の言理、はるかにことなるべし、道得の當不、うたがひぬべし。しかあれども、一切衆生無佛性のみ佛道に長なり。」

65 W/A 87; DZZ 1: 35: 「しかあればすなはち、有仏性といひ、無仏性といふ、ともに謗となる。謗となるといふとも、道取せざるべきにはあらず。」

66 W/A 87-88; DZZ 1: 35: 「且問你大瀉・百丈しばらくきくべし。謗はすなはちなきにあらず、仏性は説得すやいまだしや。たとひ説得せば、説著を罣礙せん。説著あらば聞著と同参なるべし。」

judging the adequacy of what has been said. While in the foregoing, Dōgen sided partly with the proposition “sentient beings have no Buddha-nature,” he now remarks on Ta-kuei critically:

Moreover, I must ask Ta-kuei: 'Even though you articulated that all sentient beings have no Buddha-nature, you did not say all Buddha-natures have not sentient beings, or that all Buddha-natures have no Buddha-nature. Still less could you have seen, even in your dreams, that all Buddhas have no Buddha-nature. Now let's see if you can come up with a response!⁶⁷

Dōgen's sentences in response to Ta-kuei appear to be purely random permutations of the original statement with each instance semantically encapsulated and at the same time syntactically entirely open to any reconfiguration. While Dōgen's insertion “still less could you have seen, even in your dreams...” can be read as a critique of Ta-kuei's one-sidedness in that it simply negates Śākyamuni's initial statement, it could also be taken as a hint towards a change of rational standards: how one can proceed after an initial positive proposition, followed by a negative proposition and finally ending with the statement that either way is insufficient? The “logic” of dreams would offer new options by way of association.⁶⁸ How then could Ta-kuei's response to Dōgen look similar? Dōgen himself offers an answer at the very end of the fascicle:

In expressing further the Buddha-nature [...] the Buddha-nature is a fence, a wall, a tile, a pebble. When expressing it beyond this [you can only say] 'What is this Buddha-nature?' Do you fully understand? Three heads! Eight arms!⁶⁹

5. Conclusion: Reexpressing »Buddha-nature« in and beyond theory

What remains of theoretical discourse, if Dōgen's final statement about Buddha-nature is something like an exclamation? To be sure, the ending of the fascicle leaves the reader

⁶⁷ W/A 88; DZZ 1: 35.

⁶⁸ It would still be very possible to read all these statements in light of Dōgen's initial interpretation. The question, though, is whether this is important to Dōgen's point. It would be necessary to deploy the initial sentence at which Dōgen hints before he explains in detail the way he tends to interpret the relevant passage of the Nirvāṇa Sūtra. »This that thus comes« is finally the starting point to lay out a deeper examination of how *name*, *meaning* and the thing *meant* are structured and correlated in the case of Buddha-nature.

⁶⁹ W/A 96; DZZ 1: 43-44: 「さらに仏性を道取するに、〈...〉牆壁瓦礫なり。向上に道取するとき、作麼生ならんかこれ仏性。還委悉麼。三頭八臂。」

startled. It is not even clear if the words “three heads” and “eight arms” are elliptical expressions to complete the phrase “Buddha-nature is...”. Absolved of the grammatical order and semantic context, they seem enigmatic. They do, however, have a strong emblematic sense for those who know they refer to wrathful forms of Buddhist icons. Can they be meant to conclude and seal the question “What is Buddha-nature?”?

Reflexivity in restaging the dialogue on »Buddha-nature«

As has been maintained from the beginning, theoretical discourse and its permanent undermining are each irreducible. This is why the final expression does not mark the end of the discourse by a definite disambiguation of the term “Buddha-nature,” but rather opens up space for interpretation by stopping short. In other words, the final line “Do you fully understand? Three heads! Eight arms!” is the very moment in which the text as a final turn points beyond itself to address the reader. This is particularly the case for the reading practitioner, less so in the case of the philosophically minded scholar. The ending recalls the beginning of the fascicle in which Dōgen relocates the discussed matter within space and time by citing “*You* (italics mine) attain my skin, flesh, bone, and marrow.” Moreover the interrelation of text and reader is also implied in the earlier, more opaque phrase “What is this that thus comes”? By pointing beyond itself at the very end, the text establishes a reflexive relation in itself as a whole.

More precisely, the textual reflexivity consists both of a macro- and a microstructure. The grounding macrostructure consists of two external relations and the self-relational structure built up through their interlocking. In the *first* movement, “Busshō” restages the original dialogue of a Zen-like disciple-master encounter within the text in multiple replications of transmitted dialogues on Buddha-nature such as the examples given of having or not-having Buddha-nature. Here an external relation becomes effective through the text's placement within the horizon of tradition. This external anchor forms the entry point for Dōgen's comments joining the dialogue. However, the *second* movement consists in establishing a dialogue-like relation from within the text reaching out beyond the text in addressing its reader as it does at the very end of “Busshō.” This is no mere repetition of an old dialogue to comment on, but the initiation of a new dialogue that is open to evolve beyond the given confines.

The self-relational structure is constituted through the interlocking of repetition and initiation i.e. the isomorphy of what is copied from tradition and what is reinstated as a continuation of the Zen transmission from within the text serves as evidence and instantiation of reflexivity. In other words, the reflexivity of the texts is built on taking back

the mere representation of tradition in continuing the permanent and open-ended dialogical transmission in the very presence of its reading. This macrostructure embeds the oscillating between the theoretical and the *kōan*-like discourse as the reflexive microstructure of the text. Since Dōgen comments – at times extensively – on the quotes and cited dialogues, he invites the reader to join in the dialogue in a linear fashion of theoretical discourse. Within its linearity the text remains self-contained, however, since – time and again – Dōgen throws in *kōans* left uncommented on, the text seals itself off and the reader is thrown back onto himself, repeatedly. Insofar as this is, again, isomorphic with the working of traditional *kōans*, the reinstatement of semantic dead-ends within the text constitutes a reflexive structure, since this strategy is not simply copied through quotation, but renewed within the process of commenting.

The question remains as to what sets the discourse in motion in the first place? Why start and keep on moving? “Busshō” starts the discourse within the timeline of Zen genealogy's 'historically' earliest statement of Śākyamuni. Citing the statement as a quote from a scripture that bears actual historical facticity sets the beginning of the discourse on an imaginary timeframe. What though keeps it in motion, if the discourse has been ongoing forever? And why should the Zen school not set an end to further entangling discussions about Buddha-nature? As Dōgen has stated before: “But regardless of the disparagement, you cannot get by without making an utterance.” On several occasions, Dōgen demands the one he criticizes to come forth with yet another expression instead of leaving it unspoken.

Enacting reflexivity in reexpressing the term of “Buddha-nature”

In fact, Dōgen singles out a special term for words that form authentic statements: he names them *dōtoku* (or *dōte*) which translates as “expression” or “perfect expression of truth.”⁷⁰

70 Jap. *shobutsu shoso ha dōtoku nari* 諸仏諸祖は道得なり. For a detailed analysis cf. Müller 2013: 249-321. The respective expressions are 道得, 道取, 道著, and 道. For an English translation of the fascicle “Dōtoku” see Sakamoto 1983. Watsuji Tetsurō, who is falsely taken to be the discoverer of “Dōgen, the philosopher,” can be credited for being the first to elaborate Dōgen's idea of language (see Müller 2009; an English translation of Watsuji's *Shamon Dōgen* is now available in Bein 2011). This is what Kim (2004) systematically draws on in his doctoral thesis. Most contemporary analysis of Dōgen's idiosyncratic use of language point to Kim's (1985) seminal examination without ultimately explaining the import of Kim's basic idea of non-duality: “All in all, total exertion is Dōgen's appropriation of the traditional Mahayana principle of nonduality/absolute emptiness; it is the core of the realization-kōan and, for that matter, of single-minded sitting. The dynamics and mystery of words originate precisely from this fundamental postulate of total exertion. When language and thought are appropriated in the context of total exertion, only then can they serve realization without confronting their ultimate limitations and unlimited possibilities. Dōgen clearly recognizes the possibility that language, despite its aspect as a tool of duality, can partake in nonduality; only thus does language become 'expression' (*dōtoku*)”

Compounds such as *dōshu*, and *dōjaku* for the act of uttering the expression, or simply *dō* for authentic words that were transmitted, are closely related. In 1242, a year after the “Busshō” fascicle was completed, Dōgen wrote the “Dōtoku” fascicle, which begins: “All Buddhas and patriarchs are able to perfectly express the truth.” While these expressions are – in most instances of the text of Busshō – formed in the same way as conventional language contained in the theoretical discourse, in what way are they different from “names” and “forms”? Since they signify instances of oral articulation as most occurrences show, they convey a sense of situational, spontaneous, immediate expression that goes unhindered by the sclerotic tendency of written words. The way the “scriptualists” make use of language in their reliance on – most probably written – words and letters, displays a reification and substantialization of language. Yet, Dōgen is critical of the scriptualists, not necessarily of the scriptures. One can then say that the scriptualists make use of the regular rational discourse which is based on language being an expedient means. And language as an expedient means most usually has the structure of the predicative and definitive form of affirmative propositions.

On similar grounds Dōgen makes use of language for his conceptualization of Buddha-nature as entire being (jap. *shitsuu*). This sets the schema for his interpretation of continuously cited variations. However, in reinterpreting those statements as situational, spontaneous, and immediate expressions, he continues shifting the semantic base of the argument. Even more important is that the openness and situational relatedness of these expressions affect the status of the claim “Buddha-nature is entire being” and the whole argument evolving from it. While it is possible to run a discussion along logical, objective, and theoretical routes, which makes sense on many levels, Dōgen shows at the same time that the status of the sentence as a well-defined and predicative determination is not an ultimate unshakeable bedrock of unchanging meaning.

Dōgen's constant reminder that the practitioner needs to learn and study can be taken in two directions. On the one hand it echoes back to the call to keep on uttering verbal expressions – in the present case – about Buddha-nature. Even if it means to slander, it is the only way to partake in the given discourse: Attempt to express! And on the other hand, he does not accept, in most cases, given convictions and unanalyzed beliefs. Every concept that is presented needs some re-expression. How does one arrive at that? This injunction points in the opposite direction of the continued efforts of learning and studying. It is directed at the reader of his texts, since the reading of his texts is no less demanding than the attempt for proper expressions. As indicated by the microstructure of reflexivity, Dōgen fashions most fascicles through permanent shifting between adjacent and seamlessly presented levels of theory and *kōan*-like rhetoric. These discursive dead ends, semantic gaps, or syntactic

disruptions force the reader to readapt and rearrange the semantic field of the theoretical discourse.

By joining the dialogue in the reading, re-reading and re-expressing, the reader instantiates single occurrences of a particular idea. In correlation to renewed efforts to articulate the meaning of Buddha-nature, the discontinuity of the theoretical discourse results, as has been pointed out above, in a form of reflexivity within and through language imminent to the text at hand.⁷¹ In other words, continual disruptions in the text on the level of syntax and semantics generate momenta of reflexivity, because the shift in the theoretical discourse does not allow for a linear reasoning. At best, it can be balanced by a continual reshaping of the theoretical coordinates. In other words, the text relegates the matters discussed to the reader. Reflexivity here is, however, not meant in the sense of the symmetrical reflection of a perfect mirror. The latin *reflectere* means more generally to “bend back,” “turn backwards,” “turn about,” or “turn away,” whereof symmetry is only an extraordinary form of reflection. Thus, reflecting what has been said through jagged, unpolished, or crooked expressions of “Buddha-nature” results in deflecting and dispersing the original meaning of the word, while the meaning’s originality itself is nothing but a projection.

Philosophy, theoretical reflection and reflexivity

The initial questions were: Is Dōgen a philosopher? Or can we only consider his *writings* as being philosophical? Although Dōgen himself warns the Buddhist seeker of the true teaching against “armchair philosophers,” or – in his rendering – against “word-counting scholars” whose speculations are detached from a thoroughgoing practice, we can now see that such questions are not futile, depending of how they are answered.

Of course, Dōgen points out “that for a Buddhist the issue is not to debate the superiority or inferiority of one teaching or another, or to establish their respective depths. All he needs to know is whether the practice is authentic or not.” Because the one and only way to judge the authenticity of Buddhist practice is to practice oneself, it seems difficult to maintain that Dōgen is a philosopher, unless one can reconcile the importance of argumentation, dialogue and writing with the validity of silent practice. And since Dōgen was devoted to religious practice and his teachings were inextricably linked to the bodily practice he advocated, the label “philosopher” is, indeed, inadequate for Dōgen.

While Dōgen's *Shōbōgenzō* bears resemblance with philosophy both in regard to questions of cosmology, ontology, epistemology, or ethics, and also in regard to rationally intelligible

71 This is not limited to Dōgen's texts, but holds true for jokes, riddles, and *kōan*-collections alike.

strategies for approaching these issues, it lacks a definite set of terms and a coherent account of systematic thinking. The way he treats single terms such as Buddha-nature helps explain why reexpressing and rearticulating win over the attempt to provide a conclusive definition. The permanent semantic shifting through repetition and initiation of the dialogue puts emphasis on the open end of theoretical reflection in which reflexivity is presupposed. Thus, contrary to the common notion of philosophy based on its systematicity of reflection and its comprehensive account of results, Dōgen places the emphasis on the enactment of reflexivity. And this is what “Busshō” displays in the interlacing of theoretical discourse and opaque interjections. In other words, Dōgen shares with philosophy what is at its core: reflexivity itself – however, a reflexivity that is correlative to immediate and spontaneous acts of articulation.

Philosophy can be done in a straightforward way in thinking through particular questions and themes in the mode of systematized reflection. However, from the beginning, philosophy was a reflexive enterprise on multiple levels such as self-questioning, being critical of the philosophic enterprise itself, as well as questioning the self which practices philosophy. While these analogies need further elaboration, reflexivity in Dōgen can also be located on multiple levels. Engaging in the world as a self-engagement with the text, theoretical discourse enfolds as the self-expression of the learning self. Beginning with self-relational learning of the Buddha Way, through to Dōgen's notorious criticism of previous generations of Zen-Masters and their expressing “Buddha-nature,” up to the reflexive structure of the text itself, reflexivity is all-pervasive in Dōgen's writings.

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