



SCIREA Journal of Sociology

<http://www.scirea.org/journal/Sociology>

December 11, 2022

Volume 6, Issue 6, December 2022

<https://doi.org/10.54647/sociology84919>

The Great Earth Sangha: A Non-Anthropocentric Moral Imagination

Joseph Daniel Markowski Ph.D.

Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, United States

Email: markoj4@rpi.edu

§1. Introduction

This article explores the ways in which Zen master Dōgen's writings on Zen practice, in dialogue with Friedrich Nietzsche and Gary Snyder, can help assist, as Jason Wirth suggests, the cultivation of a non-anthropocentric moral imagination so as to address and mitigate environmental problems that are directly tied to anthropocentric value commitments. To set the stage for this inquiry, I proceed by following the lead of John Nolt, who attempts to refute anthropocentrism by appealing to arguments against ethical egoism, specifically the good Samaritan argument. By highlighting the limitations of this "truth-seeking" argument, I propose that a "way-seeking" moral imagination, specifically Dōgen's, is more fruitful for bringing about a cultural shift towards a more non-anthropocentric way-of-life. In doing such, I show how Dōgen's Zen, in dialogue with Nietzsche and Snyder, contributes to the non-anthropocentric perspective of ecocentrism, vis-à-vis a non-dual conception of 'wildness'.

§2. Anthropocentrism and the Ecological Crisis

In his essay, “The Historical Roots of the Ecological Crisis,” Lynn White Jr. maintains that the ecological crisis was engendered by Judeo Christianity, and the normative vision of anthropocentrism. According to this vision, humankind has inherent moral worth that is superior to all other beings; in other words, humankind is the ‘crown of creation’, which in turn substantiates their dominion over nature. According to White, since this normative ideology is the cause of the ecological crisis, it thereby follows that if we are seriously motivated towards ameliorating this crisis, we must address and overcome our human-centered perspective.

According to John Nolt, anthropocentrism is a metaethical extension of ethical egoism. The basic standpoint of ethical egoism maintains:

For any moral agent S, and any action Q, S ought to do Q if, and only if, doing Q is good for S.

By extending this normative perspective to the whole species level of *homo sapiens*, ethical anthropocentrism maintains that:

For any action Q, if there is a moral obligation to do Q, then doing Q is first and foremost good for humans.

Herein, this normative standpoint should not be interpreted as being completely exclusive in that only humans will be included as moral patients, mainly beings that are deserving moral consideration. Similar to ethical egoism, just because humans are regarded as being inherently more valuable than all other beings, that does not entail that non-human beings and entities will not be included in our decisions to act or formulate policies. From the standpoint of anthropocentrism, there is much about the more-than-human world that is worth valuing and protecting. However, that being said, according to anthropocentrism, such values are derived from and constructed by humans. Stated differently, the existence of moral patients is entirely dependent upon the existence of moral agents. Since humans are the only beings that possess the qualities and capacities of moral agents, it thereby follows that the existence of moral patients is solely dependent upon humanity. Thus, minus the existence of humans, the world lacks valuers; minus the existence of humans, the world is valueless.

It is in light of this metaethical standpoint that some scholars working in the field of environmental ethics have defended ethical anthropocentrism. Bryan Norton, for example,

maintains that all values are inextricably tied to human preferences and ideals (Norton, 1984). Thus, independent of human preferences and ideals, the world of non-human fauna, flora and elemental beings are rendered value neutral. Accordingly, this axiological standpoint has direct bearing upon environmental policies. All environmental policies, because they are motivated and shaped by values, will be oriented around human values, and human values alone, despite the fact that non-human beings and entities will be included within the value commitments of such policies.

Notwithstanding Norton's anthropocentrism, William Murdy's defense of anthropocentrism does not completely deny that non-human beings have preferences and interests that render them as valuers. However, he maintains that if X is a valuer, then X is naturally speciocentric. In his article "Anthropocentrism: A Modern Version," Murdy argues that if we agree that all species ought to be allowed to carry out their natural evolutionary role, then anthropocentrism, which is the philosophy that values humankind above that of any other species or being in nature, is 'natural.' In other words, since all species are naturally speciocentric (i.e. they value their own species more than others), it follows that humans ought to be anthropocentric. To comport ourselves otherwise would be unnatural and thus set humankind apart from nature.

There are many reasons why I believe both Norton and Murdy's anthropocentric conceptions of value ought to be resisted. In regards to Norton, his anthropocentric axiology clearly remains entrenched within a cartesian conception of the world. While his standpoint is not as crude as Descartes' whereby all animals are considered to be mechanical machines, his standpoint is blinded by the assumption that only human minds are capable of having preferences and values. The problem with this anthropocentric standpoint is that it simply does not comport well with our understanding of non-human animal behavior, vis-à-vis sentience. If we are going to take Norton's anthropocentric standpoint seriously, then we will have to maintain that sentient interests in avoiding pain are not values. However, because the consequent of this if/then conditional is *prima facie* absurd, we can conclude that Norton's anthropocentrism ought not be taken seriously. No doubt, there are epistemic hurdles for humans, vis-à-vis understanding the values of non-human species; however, such hurdles do not entail that no non-human species is a valuer.

In regards to Murdy, it seems as though he makes two pivotal errors in his normative defense of anthropocentrism. The first error pertains to his thesis that the members of a particular species are themselves, as valuers, speciocentric. His second error is tied to the naturalistic fallacy of deriving an ought from an is, vis-à-vis anthropocentrism. Beginning with the

former, while I do not deny that members of non-human species are valuers, I am skeptical that such members actually do value their species as a whole. In other words, while I do not doubt that various non-human animals have the capacity to value other beings and things, including beings outside of their own species (e.g., dogs that value human companions), I do not believe that this capacity of being a valuer entails that non-human species value their species as a limited whole, and thereby affirm such to be the center of their normative compass. In regard to the latter, I am skeptical of Murdy's insistence that all humans are inherently anthropocentric, particularly when we consider the values of various indigenous cultural traditions from around the world who do not champion an axiological hierarchy that is framed around human superiority. That being said, even if we concede that humans have a natural tendency towards anthropocentrism this does not entail that humanity ought to structure their values accordingly. In other words, there is no necessary reason that humans ought to value their species above all others just because it is the case that they are naturally inclined to do such.

Notwithstanding these challenges to Norton and Murdy, John Nolt maintains that the most direct philosophical path for refuting both egoism and anthropocentrism is by way of a 'Good Samaritan' argument. As Nolt explains:

The most direct way to attack both personal ethical egoism and ethical anthropocentrism is by a counter example. To construct a counter example in the egoist case, we must show that for some action A , I ought to do, though doing is A is not good for me. 'Is not good for me' does not mean 'Is bad for me'. Something that affects me indifferently is also not good for me. Hence to refute ethical egoism it suffices to show that I ought to do something that is merely indifferent to me. Similarly, to refute ethical anthropocentrism it suffices to show that for some action A , we ought to do A , though doing A is not good for any human. One example is all it takes. (Nolt 2013, 454)

In regards to ethical egoism, Nolt has us imagine a sure-footed hiker who encounters a frail stranger who trips and is about to fall off a steep cliff. The only action the sure-footed hiker needs to do is simply reach out and steady their position. According to Nolt, the sure-footed hiker ought to assist the frail stranger even though she/he/they will not reap any benefit from this altruistic act. Thus, since the sure-footed hiker ought to do an act that does not directly benefit them directly, Nolt concludes that the counterexample refutes egoism; and, by modifying the counter example whereby, instead of a frail human stranger, a stumbling sheep is about to fall down the cliff side and the only action the sure-footed hiker must do is reach

out and steady the stumbling sheep, Nolt contends that ethical anthropocentrism is refuted as well.

While I share Nolt's normative view that the sure-footed hiker ought to steady both the frail stranger and the stumbling sheep, it is not clear to me that these counter examples completely refute egoism and anthropocentrism. After all, the egoist could argue that the sure-footed hiker's actions, both in regard to the frail stranger and the stumbling sheep, were motivated out of a moral conscience whereby if they failed to steady the other from falling down the step cliff, they would feel badly. The fact that they would feel badly if they acted otherwise shows that the sure-footed hiker does reap a benefit from steadying both the frail stranger and the stumbling sheep. This counter argument to Nolt echoes a point that John Dewey makes in his book, *Outlines Of A Critical Theory of Ethics*, whereby he cites a story told of Abraham Lincoln.

The story is told of Abraham Lincoln that he once passed an animal in distress by the side of the road, and that after going by, he finally went back and got him out of the ditch. On being praised for his act, he replied that he did it on his own account, since he kept getting more uncomfortable as he thought of the animal in distress. (Dewey 1891, 28)

Like Lincoln, while hedonism may not be the motivating force that conditions the sure-footed hiker to steady the frail stranger and the stumbling sheep from falling down the cliff, we ought not think that the sure-footed hiker reaps no benefit.

While I do believe a cogent accumulative case can be made against egoism and anthropocentrism, I am less inclined to think that there are philosophical arguments that will completely refute them. Similar to the extreme skeptic in epistemology who will claim that we can never know anything to be true beyond all doubt simply because we can never know whether or not we are actually brains in vats, the egoist/anthropocentrist can proffer reasons and arguments defending their normative standpoints, mainly that humans are inherently more valuable than other beings, and that prudent environmental policies ought to recognize such. In regards to the extreme skeptic, rather than attempting to convince she/he/they, via argument, that we are not brains in vats hooked up to supercomputer, I am more inclined to show alternative ways of viewing and comporting ourselves with the external world of sensory experience that are more rich, dynamic and meaning enhancing. In other words, rather than restricting our 'knowledge of the external world' to a truth-seeking method, we might in fact find a healthier approach through a "way-seeking" practice. Thus, in regards to egoism and anthropocentrism, while I do applaud Nolt's efforts to resist both egoism and

anthropocentrism, I do not think his “truth-seeking” approach will prove successful. Ultimately, in the spirit of Dewey, I believe Nolt’s approach to the normative matter of egoism and anthropocentrism will be pragmatically strengthened by “way-seeking” alternatives.

§3. Way-Seeking Is ‘Wirth It’

What is a “way-seeking” philosophy, and how is it different from “truth-seeking” approaches, such as Nolt’s, vis-à-vis egoism and anthropocentrism? In their book *Thinking Through Confucius* (1987) David Hall and Roger Ames introduced the difference between truth-seeking and way-seeking approaches to philosophy. While truth-seeking approaches emphasize justification, vis-à-vis necessary and sufficient conditions, way-seeking approaches are concerned with realizing a path by which humans can flourish and live well.

No doubt, the practices of truth-seeking and way-seeking are not mutually exclusive; however, the practice of truth-seeking has defined the philosophical writings of professional scholars while the practice of way-seeking has found its voice outside of the halls of academia. Three philosophers that have embodied this later approach are Zen Master Dōgen, Friedrich Nietzsche and Gary Snyder. Specifically, in regards to their normative writings and moral imagination concerning the earth, the writings of these three thinkers open up a horizon for doing comparative philosophy whereby the cognitive biases of the 21st century, which favor egoism and anthropocentrism, can be critically examined; thus, allowing for a new vision and path towards value creation that situates the more-than-human world at the center. One contemporary philosopher that has helped foster a comparative dialogue between the three aforementioned thinkers, is Jason Wirth. For example, in *Nietzsche and Other Buddhas: Philosophy After Comparative Philosophy*, Wirth brings Nietzsche and Dōgen into dialogue together so as to philosophically address the normative nature of food, and our conceptions of nourishment, in light the impoverished nature of 21st century industrialized food systems; and, in *Mountains, Rivers, and the Great Earth: Reading Gary Snyder and Dōgen In AN Age of Ecological Crisis*, Wirth fosters a comparative inquiry between Dōgen and Snyder so as to reframe our sense of ecological values, specifically wildness, in the face of capitalist systems and ideologies that have, “captured almost everyone in its web” (Wirth 2017, xx). According to Wirth, “our unhinged relationship to the earth is a question of etiquette, of ethics, of finding a more sacred manner of wayfaring, of clear-eyed compassion for who and where we are”

(Wirth 2017, xvii). Herein, it is in light of Wirth's "way-seeking" scholarship that we shall turn our attention so as to address humanity's narrow, all-too-narrow, vision of self-interest that undergirds both egoism and anthropocentrism, and thereby sabotages our values in the process.

Our self-interest drives us to actions that in the long run betray the self-interest that fostered them. [...] The starting point for an etiquette of living that addresses the pernicious effect that we have not only on our supposedly individual selves, but also on the creatures with whom we share our being is therefore an earth awakening, a deep transformation of human consciousness. This is also the Buddha Way with its own practices of earth awakening foregrounded. (Wirth 2017, xxi)

Thus, it is to this transformation of consciousness that we shall attune our attention.

§4. Overcoming Anthropocentrism

While the values of self-interest vis-à-vis egoism, which are normatively embedded within anthropocentrism, can be critically questioned from a truth-seeking standpoint, as Nolt affirms, I contend that a way-seeking approach is more skillful in bringing about a normative transformation that is existentially embodied. From Dōgen's standpoint, such embodiment entails learning how to attune ourselves to the perspectives of other non-human beings. For example, as Graham Parkes states, "Dogen says that viewing the world from the usual anthropocentric standpoint is like 'looking through a bamboo tube at the corner of the sky'. For a fuller experience, he recommends entertaining the perspectives of other beings, such as mountains, drops of water, celestial beings, hungry ghosts, dragons, and fish" (Parkes 2009, p. 85). It is precisely this more-than-human perspectivism that Wirth invites us to consider, via comparative philosophy, so as to reveal an 'elemental' embodiment that constitutes the nature of all beings.

All beings are elemental. I use the term here in a provisional fashion to speak to the power of the poetic word to awaken in us an awareness that 'everything is elemental' and to do so in a soteriological manner. The elemental speaks simultaneously of the Mountains and Rivers, form and emptiness, that is, the dependently co-originating elements of the Great Earth, as well of specific places, specific bioregions, indeed, of the singularity of particular ecological communities. (Wirth 2017, 4)

Of the many ecological values that are salient to our rethinking and overcoming anthropocentrism, this elemental perspectivism affords a more nuanced moral imagination of ‘wildness’, vis-à-vis ecocentrism.

The philosophical standpoint of ecocentrism is a systems-based normative philosophy. In contradistinction to biocentrism, which maintains that the criterion of moral consideration is grounded in living organisms, ecocentrism recognizes that elemental beings and ecological systems/relationships are moral patients. Some of the leading thinkers that have advanced this systems-based normative outlook include Aldo Leopold¹, Holmes Rolston III², Baird Callicott³, Ned Hettinger and Bill Throop⁴. While there is a general consensus amongst these thinkers that elemental beings are deserving moral consideration, they are divided in regards to the very nature of systems-relationships proper. For example, while Leopold, Rolston and Callicott defend a “stability paradigm” for thinking about the good of ecosystems, Hettinger and Throop argue for an “instability paradigm” vis-à-vis wildness. By exploring Dōgen, Nietzsche and Snyder in dialogue together, their writings reveal that the latter, the instability paradigm, is more consistent with the philosophies of dependent co-origination (Skt. *pratītyasamutpāda*), impermanence (Skt. *anitya*) and emptiness (Skt. *śūnyatā*). However, contrary to Throop and Hettinger’s normative vision of wildness, vis-à-vis non-humanized, Dōgen and Snyder, as well as Nietzsche for that matter, affirm a non-dualistic conception of wildness whereby the separation between ‘civilization’ and ‘wilderness’ dissolves. The significance for this non-dualistic perspective is succinctly noted by Wirth:

Romantics pining for the missing woods is especially pernicious and also belongs to the heart of the prevailing ecological crisis. The fantasy of a return to pristine nature, untouched by fumbling and contaminating human hands, is destructive of both civilization, which imagines that it flourishes in opposition to the Great Earth, and the wild, which is being dominated and consumed to an unprecedented and unrestrained degree by contemporary imperial civilization. (Wirth 2017, 5-6)

¹ See Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1949).

² See Holmes Rolston III, *Conserving Natural Value* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

³ See Baird J. Callicott, *In Defense of the Land Ethic: Essays In Environmental Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989).

⁴ See Ned Hettinger and Bill Throop, “Refocusing Ecocentrism: De-emphasizing Stability and Defending Wildness,” In *Environmental Ethics: Readings in Theory and Application*, Sixth ed. Louis Pojman and Paul Pojman (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2012).

I am in full agreement with Wirth's assessment, and thus inspired by the ecological perspectivism of Dōgen, Nietzsche and Snyder. While I do not resist the preservation of natural lands which minimizes human interaction and impact – in fact, I celebrate such – I do not think we should confine our conception of wildness to such land-use policies. To affirm the divide between wildness and humanization is to deny, in so far as I can tell, the most dynamic mode of wildness that defines our human, all-too-human, lives, mainly the dynamic confluence of thoughts and emotions vis-à-vis our heart-mind.

There are many examples in Dōgen's writings that reveal an 'elemental' perspectivism that challenge the cognitive biases that are associated with anthropocentrism. For example, in the *Shōbōgenzō* fascicle, *Hotsu-Mujoshin*, "The Establishment of the Will to the Supreme," he proffers a philosophy of 'mind' whereby there is no essential dualism between man and nature, or sentient and insentient:

What is described as "the mind" is the mind as it is. It is the mind as the whole earth. Therefore, it is the mind as self-and-others. The mind in every instance – the mind of a person of the whole earth, of a Buddhist patriarch of the whole Universe in the ten directions, and of gods, dragons, and so on – is trees and stones, beyond which there is no mind at all. These trees and stones are naturally unrestricted by limitations such as "existence," "non-existence," "emptiness," and "matter." With this mind of trees and stones we establish the [bodhi-]mind and realize practice-and-experience – for the mind is trees and the mind is stones. By virtue of this trees as mind and stones as mind, thinking here and now about the concrete state of non-thinking is realized. (Dōgen 1994, 254)

Herein, the nature of Dōgen's 'elemental' perspectivism is directly tied to the practice of non-thinking (Jpn. *hishiryō*).

Unlike conventional thinking (Jpn. *shiryō*) which is positional and dualistic, and unlike 'not thinking' (Jpn. *fushiryō*) which is also positional, yet only in a negative sense of negating thought processes, non-thinking is non-positional. In other words, according to Thomas Kasulis, non-thinking neither affirms nor negates thinking itself, nor objectifies thoughts and mental experiences either implicitly or explicitly (Kasulis 1981). Accordingly, as Bret Davis succinctly states, "non-thinking is in truth an 'absolute nothingness' in the sense of an essentially indeterminate field of non-dual awareness, a field which underlies or encompasses the determination of thinking, not thinking and thinking of not-thinking" (Davis 2016, 218-219). As the above passage reveals, the realization of non-thinking is conditioned by the elemental nature of trees and stones; the experience of non-thinking is engendered by the

‘wild’ mind of the Great Earth Sangha. This conditional relationship between the realization of non-thinking and the ‘elemental wild’ of the Great Earth is philosophically distilled by Dōgen in his *Genjō Kōan* fascicle, “The Realized Universe,” wherein he states, “Driving ourselves to practice and experience the myriad dharmas is delusion. When the myriad dharmas actively practice and experience ourselves, that is the state of realization” (Dōgen 1994, 33). Accordingly, this conditional relationship between the ‘elemental wild-mind’ of the Great Earth and realization is not, as Wirth notes, “any kind of New Age fantasy of a lost and intrinsically beneficent and harmonious Eden” (Wirth 2017, 15).

The infinite ground of the Wild is not a thing, either in itself or as a series of representations originating in human subjectivity. Being mindful of things “just as they are” does not mean that one develops a special kind of seeing that can penetrate the illusions that bind others. It is, rather, a different kind of seeing and a different relationship in consciousness to the causes and conditions of karma. One does not break through to reality beyond a veil of illusion but rather overcomes one’s own ignorance (*avidyā*, literally, not seeing) regarding the interdependent play of causes and conditions. (Wirth 2017, 16)

Thus, this conditional relationship between the ‘elemental wild’ and the practice-realization of non-thinking is best summarized by the oft cited passage from Dōgen’s *Genjō Kōan*, “To learn the Buddha’s truth is to learn ourselves. To learn ourselves is to forget ourselves. To forget ourselves is to be experienced by the myriad dharmas. To be experienced by the myriad dharmas is to let our own body-and-mind, and the body-and-mind of the external world, fall away” (Dōgen 1994, 34).

The idea of the “elemental wild” that Wirth defends is also evidenced in both Friedrich Nietzsche and Gary Snyder. Beginning with Nietzsche, his philosophy of will to power reveals a perspectivism that celebrates the elemental. For example, consider the following passage from *The Will to Power*:

Greater complexity, sharp differentiation, the contiguity of developed organs and functions with disappearance of the intermediate members – if that is perfection, there is will to power in the organic process in virtue of which dominant, shaping, commanding forces continually extend their bonds of their power and continually simplify within these bounds: the interpretative growths. (Nietzsche 1968, 342)

Herein, the ‘elemental’ will to power that defines organic processes is what undergirds ecological systems and the preservation of life for all organisms. As André van der Braak

states in *Nietzsche and Zen: Self-overcoming Without A Self*, “Will to power is Nietzsche’s new conception of nature without the dualistic oppositions of subject and object, knower and known, epistemology and ontology. Instead, will to power conceives all of nature engaged in active interpretation” (Van der Braak 2011, 64). Herein, ‘active interpretation’ is non-anthropocentric; based upon his conception of will to power, Nietzsche recognizes that thinking is not an ontic quality that is unique to humans. Similar to Dōgen’s non-anthropocentric conception of “trees as mind and stones as mind”, Nietzsche includes the more-than-human-world within the ‘architecture of thinking’. For example, consider the following passage from *The Joyous Science*:

The time is past when the Church possessed the monopoly of reflection, when the *vita contemplativa* had always in the first place to be the *vita religiosa*...I know not how we could content ourselves with their structures, even if they should be divested of their ecclesiastical purposes: these structures speak far too pathetic and biased speech, as houses of God and places of splendor for supernatural intercourse, for us godless ones to be able to think our thoughts in them. We want to have ourselves translated into stone and plant, we want to go for a walk in ourselves when we wander these halls and gardens. (Nietzsche 2018, 180)

Herein, building upon Dōgen’s *Genjō Kōan* perspectivism, vis-à-vis the relationship between the ‘elemental wild’ and realization, Nietzsche’s ‘elemental perspectivism’ reveals that when the more-than-human-world of plants and stones actively practice and experience ourselves, that is the state of will to power. For this reason, Nietzsche’s normative vision for humanity is unambiguously non-anthropocentric. Hence his oft cited phrase from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, “remain faithful to the earth” (Nietzsche 1954, 13).

Turning our attention to Gary Snyder, specifically *The Practice of Wild* and *Mountains and Rivers Without End*, the way-seeking perspective he proffers embraces the ‘elemental’ in a way that avoids the dualistic distinction between ‘wildness’ and ‘humanization’ as some contemporary ecocentric philosophers affirm. According to Snyder, “No wild and tame, no bound and free, no natural and artificial. Each totality its own frail self...This, thusness, is the nature of the nature of nature. The wild in wild” (Snyder 1990, 111). This non-dualistic conception of ‘elemental wildness’ as Wirth explains, “Is also to be found in the depths of our minds, at the heart of language, repressed even within the heart of our metropolises” (Wirth 2107, 19).

In the spirit of Dōgen, Snyder waxes poetically, vis-à-vis ‘elemental mind’, in *Mountains and Rivers Without End*:

Mind in the mountains, mind of tumbling water,

mind of running rivers,

Mind of sifting

flowers in the gravels

At the end of the ice age

we are the bears, we are the ravens,

We are the salmon

in the gravel

At the end of the ice age (Snyder 1996, 123)

Thus, in keeping with Dōgen’s practice-realization of non-thinking, “To realize that the earth has the deep structure of your own mind is to realize that the mind has the same deep structure as the Great Earth. The realization is fully transitive and non-dual” (Wirth 2017, 8). According to Snyder, the realization of this ‘elemental mind’, vis-à-vis the Great Earth Sangha, ought not be viewed as way of thinking that stands in contradistinction to ‘truth-seeking’ scientific research and public/environmental policy. To think such would simply affirm an inherent dualism between ‘truth-seeking’ and ‘way-seeking’ that is similar to the dualism between ‘wildness’ and ‘civilization’. That being said, Snyder does believe that in order to generate a cultural shift from our current anthropocentric perspective towards a non-anthropocentric mode of existence, a ‘way-seeking’ path is ‘elementally’ pivotal. As Snyder states in “Mountains Hidden in Mountains: Dōgen-zenji and the Mind of Ecology,” this cultural shift is, “not the work of scientists. Their research is essential to us, but to change the way contemporary human beings live on earth is a kind of dharma work, a work for dedicated followers of the Way who because of their practice and insight can hope to balance wisdom and compassion and help open the eyes of others” (Snyder 2003, 163).

§5. Closing Remarks: The Mountains Are Constantly Walking

How does one teach a non-anthropocentric, ‘way-seeking’ philosophy, to an audience that has its anthropocentric values undergirded by a ‘truth-seeking’ perspective? Indeed, this seems to be a daunting pedagogical task; however, it is no more daunting than negotiating how to teach virtue to the unvirtuous. Between virtue-theories and ‘way-seeking’ philosophies, personal

character and comportment are central. Moreover, since virtue theories are most effectively explored through the stories and hagiographies of saints and heroes, perhaps the same pedagogical strategy, vis-à-vis cross-cultural comparative philosophy, will prove to be most effective in bringing about a shift in consciousness towards an Earth-Centered ethic and way of life for the 21st century. Fortunately, scholar-practitioners, such as Jason Wirth, have helped realize this cultural shift by comparatively exploring the writings and stories of Zen ‘saints/masters’, like Dōgen, in dialogue with philosophical heroes, like Nietzsche and Snyder. Between these ‘way-seekers’, it is quite clear how important the practice of attuning ourselves to the ‘elemental mind’ of this Great Earth is for overcoming humanity’s somnambulant self-interest, egoism and anthropocentrism.

One of the reasons why thinkers like Dōgen, Nietzsche and Snyder can assist in providing a shift in consciousness towards non-anthropocentrism is their ability to expand our moral imagination through poetic words and metaphorical prose. As Wirth notes, poetry is indispensable for dealing with the ecological crisis, mainly because of their expressive nature. In other words, poetry is not, “about something, but rather is in some manner the Wild in its manifold and dynamically evolving processes. It both awakens the audience to the Wild and reveals that the Wild, beyond all concepts and experiences, is always at play” (Wirth 2017, 27). Specifically, in regards to Dōgen’s writings, his use of poetry in various fascicles, such as “The Mountains and Waters Sūtra”, *Sansuigyō*, engenders a non-dualistic realization that the ‘sūtra’ is not limited to words on the page, nor is it to be anthropomorphically interpreted within the natural landscape of mountains and waters. As Wirth clearly notes, “Nature, in the sense of the Wild, is definitely not a book that can be theologically and philosophically deciphered as it was in the European Middle Ages. That disposition has been generally discredited by both philosophy and science” (Wirth 2017, 28). As I understand Dōgen, the words he expresses throughout the *Shōbōgenzō*, in this case “The Mountains and Waters Sūtra,” are to be realized non-dualistically. For example, consider the following passage that is framed around the poetic expression “The Blue Mountains are Constantly Walking”:

If we doubt the walking of the mountains, we also do not yet know our own walking. It is not that we do not have our own walking. When we know our own walking, then we will surely know the walking of the Blue Mountains. The Blue mountains are surely beyond the sentient and beyond the insentient. The self is already beyond the sentient and beyond the insentient. [...] The Blue Mountains master in practice the act of walking and the Est Mountain learns in practice the act of moving on water; therefore, this learning in practice is the mountains’

learning in practice. The mountains, without changing their body-and-mind, the face and eyes of mountains, have been traveling around learning in practice. Never insult them by saying that the Blue Mountains cannot walk or that the East Mountain cannot move on water. It is because of the grossness of the viewpoint of the vulgar that they doubt the phrase “the Blue Mountains are Walking.” It is due to the poorness of their scant experience that they are astonished at the words *flowing mountains*. (Dōgen 1994, 168-169)

Herein, a non-dualistic interpretation of the poetic expression “blue mountains are constantly walking,” specifically when framed in light of the *Genjō Kōan* passage, “Driving ourselves to practice and experience the myriad dharmas is delusion. When the myriad dharmas actively practice and experience ourselves, that is the state of realization” (Dōgen 1994, 33), is a metaphor for non-thinking via zazen. Our bodies, when positioned in the lotus posture, are no different than mountains; our breath, when regulated within the lotus posture, is no different than flowing waters and the sounds of valley streams; our thoughts that saunter through the lotus posture, via non-thinking, are themselves the ‘walking’. By comporting oneself in this manner, one becomes the “sutra” of mountains and waters; and, through such becoming, one realizes that, as Dōgen states in the *Shinjin-Gakudo* fascicle, “Learning the Truth with the Body and Mind:” “mountains, rivers and the Earth, and the sun, moon, and stars, are the mind [...] The whole Universe in ten directions is just the real human body” (Dōgen 1994, 249-253). Herein, this realization of the mind-and-body via zazen is itself, the elemental nature of the Great Earth Sangha. As Wirth poignantly notes, “In learning to breath more elementally, that is, in Zazen and other meditative practices, I realize that my breath, my mind, is not just my breath or my mind” (Wirth 2017, 8). From this non-dual, ‘elemental perspectivism’, realization is not a private matter self-interest; instead, “My awakening and realization confirms the awakening and realization of all beings. The awakening and realization of all beings confirms my awakening and realization” (Wirth 2017, 14). Thus, in the spirit of Aldo Leopold, the practice-realization of zazen is not only “thinking like a mountain,” but also “a mountain thinking like a human.”

Works Cited

- [1] Braak, André van der. *Nietzsche and Zen: Self-Overcoming Without a Self*. Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2011.
- [2] Davis, Bret. “The Enlightening Practice of Nonthinking: Unfolding Dōgen’s

- Fukuanzazengi.” In *Engaging Dōgen’s Zen: The Philosophy of Practice As Awakening*, edited by Tetsuzen Jason M. Wirth, Shūdō Brian Schroeder, and Kanpū Bret Davis, 199-224. Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2016.
- [3] Dewey, John. *Outlines of a Critical Theory of Ethics*. New York: Greenwood Press, 1969.
- [4] Dōgen. *Shōbōgenzō*. Translated by Gudo Wafu Nishijima and Chodo Cross. London: Windbell Publications Ltd., 1994.
- [5] Kasulis, Thomas P. *Zen Action/Zen Person*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1981.
- [6] Murdy, William H. “Anthropocentrism: A Modern Version,” In *Environmental Ethics: Divergence and Convergence*, 3rd edition, edited by Susan J. Armstrong and Richard G. Botzler, 280-287. New York: McGraww Hill, 2004.
- [7] Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book For All and None*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann. In *The Portable Nietzsche*, edited by Walter Kaufmann. New York: Viking Penguin Inc, 1954.
- [8] _____. *The Joyous Science*. Translated by R. Kevin Hill. London: Penguin Books, 2018.
- [9] _____. *The Will To Power*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale. New York: Vintage Books, 1968.
- [10] Nolt, John. “Anthropocentrism and Egoism,” *Environmental Values* 22 (2013) 441-459.
- [11] Norton, Bryan. “Environmental Ethics and Weak Anthropocentrism,” *Environmental Ethics* 6(2) (1984) 131-148; reprinted in Light A. and H. Rolston (eds). *Environmental Ethics: An Anthology*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2003.
- [12] Parkes, Graham. “Dōgen’s ‘Mountains and Waters as Sūtras’ (Sansui-kyō).” In *Buddhist Philosophy: Essential Readings*, edited by William Edelglass and Jay L. Garfield, 83-92. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- [13] White, Lynn. “The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis.” In *Reflecting On Nature: Readings in Environmental Ethics and Philosophy*, 2nd edition, edited by Lori Gruen, Dale Jamieson and Christopher Schlottman, 4-11. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.
- [14] Snyder, Gary. *Mountains and Rivers without End*. Washington, DD: Counterpoint, 1996.
- [15] _____. “Mountains Hidden in Mountains: Dōgen-zenji and the Mind of Ecology.” In: *Dōgen Zen and Its Relevance for Our Time*. Edited by Shōhaku OKUMURA. San Francisco: Sōtō Zen Buddhism International Center, 2003, 159-172.
- [16] _____. *The Practice of the Wild* (1990). Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2010.
- [17] Wirth, Jason M. *Mountains, Rivers, And The Great Earth: Reading Gary Snyder and*

Dōgen In An Age of Ecological Crisis. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2017.

[18] _____. Nietzsche and Other Buddhas: Philosophy after Comparative Philosophy. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2019.