

**A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE SPIRITUALITY OF
ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS
AND DOGEN'S ZEN BUDDHISM**

by

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DEDICATED

to

**Dr. Moon Ho Kim, and his wife Yoon Sook Choi
for their support and encouragement
and above all
for their love**

ABSTRACT

During the past fifty years, a significant encounter has taken place between representatives of Zen Buddhism and Christianity, particularly Roman Catholicism. A number of Catholics and others in Asia, Europe, and the United States have attempted to bridge the gap between the traditions of Buddhism and of Christianity. These attempts have touched upon substantive issues in the lives of Christians, who have reached out to Zen Buddhism and found that Zen spoke to them.

The major purpose of this dissertation is to compare and find the similarities and differences between the spirituality of St. John of the Cross and Dogen's Zen Buddhism as representative elements in the Christian contemplative and Zen meditative traditions. Because it is an exploration of similarities and differences between religious worlds that allows one to criticise and renew one's awareness of one's own tradition. As Hoeler argues, the very purpose of dialogue is to seek differences because they are "grist for the mill."¹

I adopt the approach of attempting to understand these writings from within their own philosophical structures in elucidating the nature of mystical experience. In the course of the comparison, a number of parallels as well as differences are discussed at the phenomenological level. It will be seen that these two traditions share virtually similar diagnoses of the nature of the unreformed aspirant, and that they teach similar strategies for purification. It also will be seen that they have different meditative techniques, ultimate aims, and views of ultimate reality. However, I will conclude that the spiritualities of St. John of the Cross and Dogen's Zen are 'different,' due to the fact that they have a different ontological reality, namely 'God' and the 'Buddha-nature.'

In fact, both the similarities and differences will help to determine both the possibilities and limitations of the cross-cultural study of spirituality. The thesis will also provide insight into how such a comparison may contribute both to a cross-cultural study of spirituality and Christian faith. I will compare these two spiritualities in terms of the following categories: (1) anthropology; (2) spiritual path; (3) characteristics of spiritual or meditative experience on the path; (4) ultimate goal/horizon

Moreover, since spiritual or mystical experience is different from ordinary experiences, this thesis will demonstrate how spiritual and mystical experience can be understood. It will also be demonstrated that an all important fact about mysticism is an experiential reality and that we cannot expect only reason or logic to pass judgement on the validity of mystical cognition.

The format of this dissertation has three main parts. Chapters one to three discuss the nature of the spirituality of St. John of the Cross and Dogen. In chapters one and two, I will give essential background information on the life, writings, and theological background of the spiritual life of St. John of the Cross so that his works can be seen as an account of a broad range of contemplative phenomena. Chapter three provides the spirituality of Dogen's Zen and discusses the main themes of Dogen's spirituality, including **anatta**, **dukka**, **anicca**, meditation, and enlightenment. These three chapters

¹Harry Hoeler, "Dialogue: Towards a Definiton," *The Unitarian Universalist Christian*, 45, No. 2-4 (1990), 117.

are essential for the later comparison. Chapter four compares these two traditions. A detailed comparison is undertaken in the following areas: The notion of the 'self,' meditation as a way of achieving mystical aims, the notion of faith, the nature of mystical experience of 'union with God' and Dogen's **satori**, and the theological and metaphysical implications of 'nothingness.'

This thesis aims to help the dialogue between Christianity and Zen Buddhism and to open up the somewhat neglected area of Christian-Buddhist dialogue.

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ABBREVIATION

In the Sanjuanist (St. John of the Cross) works I will be relying on the Spanish edition of the works: (1) San Juan de la Cruz. **Obras Completas**, textual revision, introductions ,and notes to the text by Jose Vicente Rodriguez. Doctrinal introductions and notes by Federico Ruiz Salvador. 2nd ed. Madrid: Editorial de Espiritualidad, 1980, (2) **Vida y Obras de San Juan de la Cruz**. Biography by Crisogono de Jesus, revised and augmented with notes by Matias del Nino Jesus. Editions of the works and notes by Luciano Ruano. 4th ed. Madrid: 1972, (3) **Introduccion a San Juan de la Cruz: El Hombre los Escritos, El Sistema** by Federico Ruiz Salvador O.C.D. 1968.

Unless otherwise noted, all English translations of John’s writings are taken from: (4) E. Allison Peers, Ascent of Mountain Carmel. New York and London: Burns & Oates, 2001, (5) Crisogono de Jesus Sacramentado. The Life of St. John of the Cross. Translated by Kathleen Pond. London: Longmans, Green and co., 1958.,(6) God Speaks in the Night: The Life, Times, and Teaching of St. John of the Cross. Translated by Kieran Kavanaugh, O.C.D. Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1991,(7) Kieran Kavanaugh, John of the Cross: Doctor of Light and Love, (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1999, (8) The Collected Works of Saint John of the Cross. Translated by Kieran Kavanaugh, O.C.D. and Otilio Rodriguez, O.C.D. Revised edition. Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1991, (9) The Complete Works of Saint John of the Cross. Translated and edited by E. Allison Peers, from the critical edition of Silverio de Santa Teresa. New Edition, revised. 3 vols. Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1953.

I will use the following scheme of abbreviation in referring to the Sanjuanist works:

- A..... The Ascent of Mount Carmel (**Subsida del Monte Carmelo**)
N..... The Dark Night (**Noche oscura**)
C..... The Spiritual Canticle (**Cantico espiritual**)
F..... The Living Flame of Love (**Lame de amor viva**)
P..... The Precautions (**Cautelas**)

Introduction

No one can deny the enormous diversity within spirituality and its traditions. The issues spiritual diversity raises, whether theological or philosophical, cannot easily be set aside. In a world in which there are close interactions between the various spiritual traditions, the complex philosophical and theological issues raised by spiritual diversity merit serious thought and careful response.

However, since there are diversities of spiritual and religious traditions which raise various difficult issues, a fundamental questioning is unavoidable. The question is whether the experiences of various spiritualities from different times and places can be regarded as essentially the same. For instance, some religious writers argue that there are a number of divergences in the interpretation of spiritual experience, but that these are due to doctrinal and cultural factors, and that the seemingly different experiences do refer to the same Reality. On the other hand, some writers oppose this view, for this does not by itself necessarily imply that these experiences all come from a common source, from the same ontological reality (God, the Absolute).

Thus if a person starts with the assumption that there is a common element in all religious traditions, then that person assumes a fundamental unity in religious traditions. On the other hand, if a person comes with the assumption that there is always a difference between religious traditions, then that person assumes a fundamental diversity among religious traditions. However, a person can approach the dialogue without assuming that there is a common ground or that there are necessarily differences. This approach does not assume a fundamental unity or diversity. Lastly, one can assume both similarities and differences, which assumes that there are both similarities and differences among religious traditions.

In fact, questions will arise such as are there any factors that are able to adjudicate whether different spiritual experiences do refer to the same Reality or to different Realities. If there are such common or different factors, on what basis can they be established? What is the most legitimate method of finding such factors? To what extent are we really able to do this? These are the main themes of my study that I will examine throughout my thesis.

The central point to be considered in this context is: to what extent is it legitimate to compare a heuristic concept derived from one religious tradition with the spiritual experience of other traditions or cultures. For example, to analyse Christian spirituality by Christian standards is fair enough, but it is another thing to attempt to give theistic spirituality a special place in the scheme of things by allowing theological bias to intrude into what should be an impartial study.

Research Method and Methodology

Whatever different approaches there may be, general phenomenological features shared by John and Dogen are clearly in need of analysis. Because in comparing two different spiritual traditions, the phenomenological features of each spirituality are important for one cannot be adequately compared with another without taking phenomenological features into account. Thus in order to compare whether there are any common factors or divergences among diverse spiritual traditions, first it is necessary for them to speak for themselves and on their own terms. This is the reason why we should provide the spirituality of Dogen and John of the Cross in their own terms. Without discussing these spiritualities as they are described by their representative voices, such speculation is unhelpful and even irresponsible. It is from the data of the spirituality as described and understood by believers themselves, that we can gain a better insight into a discussion of different spiritual traditions. It is also from the data of spirituality that we can assess the possibilities of common factors or differences within different spiritual traditions.

However, studying these topics without specific themes would be vast and without limit. Thus it needs to be confined to certain specific subjects and authors. Choosing among specific themes and authors, I will address certain subjects which are most directly connected with the goal of my study. The subjects will be: the concept of human nature, the method of contemplation, the phenomenological nature of mystical experience, and the goal of mystical experiences. These are the themes that I will concentrate on in my thesis which are fundamentally connected with the comparative study of spirituality.

My study, thus, will begin with an investigation of the experiences and teachings of mystics from both East and West in a phenomenological analysis. Such an approach, however, will still leave us with the question of which assumptions about mystical phenomena are correct, and which particular “explanatory inference” seems to have the best chance of success. My phenomenological analysis, however will offer tentative phenomenological characters, in that it will provide a theory about the experiential content of particular mystical ways of being.

The two main spiritual traditions I have chosen are those of St. John of the Cross and Dogen’s Zen Buddhism. Within the philosophical literature on mysticism, the writings of both St. John of the Cross and Dogen Zenji are accepted as canonical mystical works, and both were considered to be on a pinnacle of spiritual achievement within their respective traditions. Moreover, each of them represents a theistic mysticism of the West (Christianity: St. John of the Cross) and a non-theistic or monistic mysticism of the Far East (Zen Buddhism). In fact, John of the Cross is one of the most careful and methodical mystical theologians of the Christian tradition. John has been named “Doctor of the Church,” and even outside the confines of Roman Catholicism is usually accepted as a great theologian of Christian mysticism, in meeting the problem of providing a systematic description of mystical states and experiences. I therefore feel that John’s doctrine can be taken as a standard example of orthodox western mystical theology, accepted as such by a large mainstream segment of the Christian tradition. I believe that John’s writings contain a fairly accurate description of a range of experience associated with Christian mysticism.

On the other hand, Dogen’s Zen presents the experience of Reality or Oneness which is non-theistic or monistic compared with Christian mysticism. Thus it can represent, in my view, a non-theistic religious experience and monistic mystical experience of the Far East. Moreover, it does not only contain the elements of Eastern religious thought, but also it contains Eastern culture, ways of thinking, and philosophy, as well as Eastern ways of life. In its origins Zen developed from the cross-fertilization of speculative Indian Buddhism with the concrete, earthy spirit of the Chinese people. The followers of Zen claim that they are transmitting the essence of Buddhism, that they have stripped Buddhism of all its external doctrinal and historical paraphernalia and

have penetrated the spirit of the Buddha himself.

Thus studying Dogen's Zen is not merely studying Buddhism. Rather it is studying part of the entire culture and philosophy, and religion of the East. Thus it is a combination of philosophy, religion and life. I therefore feel that Dogen's Zen can be taken as a good example of Eastern religious tradition. I believe that the teaching of Dogen's Zen contains a description of a range of experience associated with Eastern religious mysticism.

The following is a detailed explanation of my study. In the first three chapters, I attempt to construct descriptive portraits of the ways of life advocated by John and Dogen, utilizing textual evidence. In the first chapter, I will include essential background information on the life, writings, and theological background of spiritual life of St. John of the Cross so that his works can be seen as an account of a broad range of contemplative phenomena. In the second section of the first chapter, I will outline John's notion of the fundamental structure of the human person, which generally follows the scholastic philosophy of his day, but with certain significant modifications.

In chapter two, I will trace the successive stages of spiritual development according to John's account, noting that contemplation begins as a vague, transitory, almost imperceptible sense of peaceful recollection, and gradually develops in intensity through definite stages and crisis points, culminating in a state of almost continual mystical consciousness which, in the case of Christian mystics, generally has a phenomenologically theistic character.

In chapter three, I will introduce the life, writings, and historical and social background of Dogen. In the second section of the chapter, I will outline Dogen's understanding of human nature which generally follows the Buddhist understanding of human beings. In the following section, I will examine the process as well as the nature of detachment by which the **Satori** experience is known, and consequently its phenomenologically non-theistic character.

These portraits will reveal that both of these ways of life involve the maintenance of : an attitude of non-attachment, an awareness of the Divine as a pervasive unity encompassing all things, the characteristics of mystical experience as a loss of a sense of oneself as a separate individual, and a general mood of serenity and joy.

In the final chapter, I will draw my conclusion by comparing the spiritual experiences of John and Dogen examined in the previous chapters and discussing whether these two mystical experiences can be regarded as fundamentally different. I will begin this with an examination of descriptions of two mystical ways of being which bear some similarities to one another. However, although I find that there are sufficient similarities between these two mystics, I will argue that they are not identical, by demonstrating that they each have a different mystical foundation which is essentially different.

The examination of the spirituality of St. John of the Cross and Dogen's Zen Buddhism presented in the previous chapters will provide the primary source material for our discussion while the differences in their respective traditions, theologies, and outlooks add breadth and diversity to that material. In other words, their experiences on certain themes will be the basis to justify mystical differences between John and Dogen. Also, the views of John and Zen will help to build up my own views which will be examined in the light of John and Zen's spiritual views.

In fact, in comparing these two different spiritual traditions, the methodology will be basically phenomenological analysis. And their differences and similarities will be discussed in terms of their different traditions and worldviews. Their differences and similarities on certain themes will show the gap between theistic understanding and non-theistic or monistic understanding.

However, in addition to the 'difference' in John's and Dogen's mysticism which is seen within a phenomenological analysis, there will be a description of the distinct characteristics of the mystic's ontological status since mystical experience is different from non-mystical experience. Thus the nature of mystical awareness as well as experience will be discussed briefly compared with non-mystical awareness. For instance, after comparing the concept of true-self between John, and Dogen, there will be an explanation of the meaning of true-self in Dogen and John to clarify the difference between mystical concepts and non-mystical concepts of the 'self.'

Therefore, while discussing the mystical accounts of Dogen and John, we will notice that our ordinary and subject-object approaches are inadequate means for understanding the nature of mystical experience.

Moreover, in comparing mystical experience, particularly in the discussion of the concept of “nothingness” in John and Dogen, the question of the possibility of finding a common criterion among different mystical experiences will be raised, because John and Dogen used their own terms in different contexts. For instance both Dogen and John assert that mystical experience can be known when there is the overcoming or negation of the duality of subject and object, or the union of subject and object. Thus mystics argue that thought-processes and philosophical presuppositions may not be fully adequate for examining mystical experience.

In conclusion, in the final section there will be a summary of the themes which I have discussed throughout each chapter. In summarizing these themes, I will reaffirm some of them which I think to be most important concerning the goal of this study. Also I will suggest possibilities for the future study of mysticism and their limitations. Especially, I will concentrate upon and reemphasize the facts related to my own position in terms of interpreting mystical experience. In this thesis, however, the phenomenological comparison between John and Dogen will primarily be concerned with the modes or structure of experiences, rather than philosophical or ontological questions.

Defining the Term Mysticism

Since the spirituality of mystics involves certain types of mystical experience, it is necessary to define the meaning of ‘mysticism’ or ‘mystical’ in the study of spirituality. Thus we, first, should define the meaning of ‘mystical’ in this thesis. In fact, since there are many different kinds of mystical experiences, there have already been many discussions of the difficulties involved in various classical definitions of mystical experience. Psychological vs. philosophical characterizations, Christian vs. non-Christian understandings, Jesuit vs. Dominican definitions, and several resultant syntheses provide the contemporary critic with a great number of possible ways into the circle. For instance, S. Radhakrishnan has remarked that

A study of the classic types of mystical experience disclose an astonishing agreement which is almost entirely independent of race, clime, or age. An ultimate inward similarity of the human spirit does not mean an absolute identity of mystical experience. There are individual variations within the large framework. In the East, for example, the mysticism of the Upanishads, of the Bhagavadgita, of Samkara, of

Ramanuja, of Ramakrsna, of Zen Buddhism, of Jalaluddin Rumi are different one from the other. Similarly in the West, the mysticism of Plato and Paul, of Proclus and Tauler, Plotinus and Eckhart differ from one another. The variations are not determined by race, climate, or geographical situation. They appear side by side within the same circle of race or culture, developing different tendencies and traditions.¹

However, almost without exception each of these available definitions has been framed in conscious opposition to one or more of the other proposed definitions.

Characterizing the nature of mysticism in general, it is said to be that awareness which surpasses the “normal” boundaries of ordinary human experience because it transcends ordinary notions of time, order of being, and states of consciousness and therefore speaks analogically of trans-rational or trans-empirical perception. Thus while theological discourse may be seen to be thoroughly historical and contingent, and scriptural discourse as revealed text is the transaction of the temporal by the transcendent, mystical discourse occurs when human experience is said to be “lifted” beyond itself, into the transcendent, and later analogically expressed in terms of personal realization.

In this respect, mystical discourse speaks in such terms as recollected awareness, intuitive cognition, and contemplative knowing which describe the epistemological processes that take human knowing outside of its normal boundaries into a trans-temporal realm. It is an awareness that is said to be either “without an object,” or to be in touch with an “object” that is invisible, intangible and inaccessible to sensory contact, but conscious of a whole. This object is understood to be a limitless, inexhaustible, infinite and incomprehensible divine totality.

For the sake of clarity, it might help to focus our attention immediately upon a few classical and contemporary definitions of “mystical theology” and “mysticism.” St. Bonaventure (1217-1274) defined mystical theology as “the raising of the mind to God through the desire of love.”² For Jean Gerson (1363-1428), mystical theology is “the experimental knowledge of God through the embrace of unitive love.”³ St. Teresa of Avila (1515-1582) defines mystical theology as “the soul is completely suspended in

¹S. Radhakrishnan and Charles Moore, *A Source Book in Indian Philosophy*, (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton: University Press, 1957), 64.

²Harvey D. Eagan, *Christian Mysticism*, (Pueblo Publishing Company, New York, 1984), 4.

³*Ibid.*,

such a way that it seems to be completely outside itself. The will loves; the memory... is almost lost; the intellect does not work discursively... but is not lost... it is as though amazed by all it understands because God desires that it understand, with regard to the things His Majesty represents to it, that it understands nothing.”⁴ Finally, St. John of the Cross (1542-1592) defines mystical theology as “contemplation is the mystical theology which theologians call secret wisdom which St. Thomas says is communicated and infused into the soul through love.”⁵ These classical definitions underscore an experience of God that is somehow direct, immediate, intuitive, and beyond the normal workings of the intellect and senses. However, it should be noted that these classical definitions equate mystical theology with mystical experience.

On the other hand, contemporary writers define mysticism as the wisdom or knowledge which cannot be exhaustively explained in naturalistic term. William James, in his book, **Varieties of Religious Experience**, explains that to a great extent mystical experience separates our “normal waking consciousness, rational consciousness as we call it...from potential forms of consciousness entirely different.”⁶ Other well-known examples include Richard Bucke who speaks of “intellectual illumination quite impossible to describe,”⁷ and more recently, Michael Sells explores techniques used by Western mystics to speak about that which cannot be conventionally understood.⁸

Further, Robert Ellwood writes “mystical experience is experience in a religious context which is immediately or subsequently interpreted by the experiencer as encounter with ultimate divine reality in a direct non-rational way which engenders a deep sense of unity, and of living during the experience on a level of being other than the ordinary.”⁹ Proudfoot points out that “the subject’s identification of his experience as mystical entails the belief that it cannot be exhaustively explained in naturalistic

⁴St. Teresa of Avila, “The Book of Her Life,” in *The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila*, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh, O.C.D., & Otilio Rodriguez, O.C.D. (Washington, D.C.: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1976), Chap 10, No 1, p 74.

⁵St. John of the Cross, “The Spiritual Canticle,” in *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh, O.C.D., & Otilio Rodriguez, O.C.D. (Washington, D.C.: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1964), stanza 27, no 5, p 518.

⁶William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, (New York: Collier Books, 1961), 305.

⁷Richard Maurice Bucke, *Cosmic Consciousness: A Study in the Evolution of the Human Mind*, (New York: E. G. Dutton, 1969), 72-75.

⁸Michael Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsayings*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994). 78.

⁹Robert Ellwood, *Mysticism and Religion*, (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice Hall, 1980), 11.

terms.”¹⁰ Proudfoot continues:

The mystic’s identification of his experience requires a commitment to a certain kind of explanation or, what comes to the same thing, the exclusion of a particular kind of explanation. He must identify his experience under a certain description, and that description must preclude naturalistic explanation.¹¹

In all these cases, the word ‘mystical’ implies a fundamental distinction between a domain of everyday normal waking experience and a domain of experience that is more fundamental or central. Thus ‘non-ordinariness,’ in its use as a defining trait for mystical experience, refers specifically to this sense of not being explainable within a conventional, naturalistic context. Thus ‘non-ordinariness’ as referring to the characteristic of mysticism appears to accord well with the breadth of experiences we refer to as ‘mystical.’ Love mysticism, and monistic mysticism may differ, but they all involve experiential processes perceived by us as departing in some way from the conventionally explainable.

In addition to ‘non-ordinariness,’ there is another important element which characterizes the ‘mystical,’ that is, the ‘sense of the ultimate.’ If the trait of ‘non-ordinariness’ depends on a distinction between experiential processes that are naturalistically explainable and those that are not, the ‘sense of the ultimate’ refers to the content of the experience and reflects a similar distinction, but one that is drawn between the derivative and the foundational. Paradigmatic mystical experiences deal with ultimate issues such as God or ultimate reality and truth.

They culminate in ecstatic fulfillment, **unio mystica**, **samadhi** or **kensho**. They are, in a word the ‘sense of the ultimate.’ Monistic mysticism, for example, typically aims to reveal the nature of reality or truth itself. Love mysticism emphasizes a mystic’s personal relationship to supra-mundane objects of devotion, like Christ, that are associated with ultimate or foundational life concerns. The ‘sense of the ultimate’ as a defining trait highlights what seems to be this collective interest in experiential content with a basic primordial significance.

Thus the trait of the ‘sense of ultimate’ defined here appears to characterize

¹⁰Wayne Proudfoot, Religious Experience, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 110.

¹¹Ibid., 185.

mystical experience. Much of the language that James uses to describe what he calls the “noetic quality” of mystical experience points to the ‘sense of the ultimate.’ Here the qualities that seem to be most important for James are “states of knowledge.” Moreover, other writers do not necessarily speak of a noetic quality, but the traits of the mystical they do use seem also to suggest the ‘sense of the ultimate.’ Rudolf Otto, for example, speaks of “**mysterium tremendum**,” and Paul Tillich refers religious experience in general to “ultimate concern.” Stace writes about “unitary-consciousness.” Thus no matter what position these and other writers on mystical experience might take regarding the nature of the experiences themselves, the coherence of the linguistic category seems to be based in large part on the ‘sense of the ultimate’ in mystical experience.

However, the object or ‘ultimate’ of a mystical experience does not necessarily imply that the object of the experience must be a theistic ‘God’ or personalistic in character. Zen **satori** emphasizes the everyday ingredients of our experiential life, not God or angelic beings. Mystical texts often reveal a dissolving of boundaries between the divine and the mundane in the converse direction wherein “the extraordinary, the transcendent, the unimaginable, reveals itself as the common.”¹²

Considering such general characteristics of mysticism, I will use the word ‘mysticism’ or ‘mystical experience’ which implies the following characteristics: (1) Unitive Ecstasy: unitive ecstasy is described by those who experience it as a state in which there is no separation between subject and object, the self and its Other, inside or outside. There is an inward affinity between the transcendent “object” and the self, an attraction and absorption which leads to mutual interpenetration and communion.

(2) Intuitive Cognition: Mystical experience is represented in mystical literature as a state of insight or illumination into the depths of a truth inaccessible to the discursive intellect, but immediate to contemplative or intuitive awareness. This contact is experienced as possessing an intrinsic authority and as bringing enlightenment and transformation to human beings. Those who have experienced this state report attaining the highest knowledge possible.

(3) A Sense of the Sacred Numinous: those who experience this mode of

¹²Michael Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsayings*, 7.

consciousness express the sense that the whole of existence is rendered transparent to the transcendent, and the inherent beauty, radiance and luminosity of ultimate reality is perceived as immanent, pervading all being.

(4) Ineffability and Paradox: In mystical experience, conventional human language cannot convey the full meaning or the subjective impact of mystical experience. No precise or determinate idea, no particularized image, can represent or report the experience of the mysterious Other into which human consciousness plunges during mystical experience. Ultimate Reality can be experienced but it cannot be told fully in ordinary language nor given full expression through intellectual conception. The only language available to the mystic appears to be paradox, unbridgeable even by metaphor or figurative language.

These characteristics of mystical experience encompass a number of narrower understandings, so that we can discern with some confidence what is not mystical. First of all, as we have already mentioned, the experience which we must distinguish from mystical concerns is the experience which fails to achieve the character of something ultimate in value and being.

Second, we must exclude from the context of the mystical self-hypnosis, medieval mind-control, brainwashing, or any form of manipulation of persons. For instance, the drug-induced “religious experience,” would be eliminated as mystical experience. Further, a form of natural albeit altered state of consciousness which must also be kept distinct from properly mystical experience is that of telepathy, hallucinations, clairvoyance, and similar psychic phenomena which have been popularly mislabeled as mystic powers or taken by serious Christian apologists as signs of inward mystical experience.

Considering such general characteristics of mysticism, I will use the word ‘mysticism’ or ‘mystical experience’ as an immediate experience of something ultimate in value and being of which one can become intuitively aware. Gershom Scholem defines a mystic as “a man who has been favored with an immediate, and to him real, experience of the divine, of ultimate reality, or who at least strives to attain such experience.”¹³ Particularly, my emphasis and point of view agree with the view of

¹³Gershom Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*, (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 5.

Geoffrey Parrinder, who writes: “theistic mysticism seeks union with God but not identity. Monistic mysticism seeks identity with a universal principle, which may be called divine though that would imply a difference from the human.”¹⁴ The essence of mysticism is thus understood to be experience of the ultimate in which one can be aware of intuitive and sacred cognition and which brings the elevation and reintegration of the human person “above” temporal existence.

¹⁴Geoffrey Parrinder, Mysticism in the World's Religions, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 15.

Abbreviations

In the Sanjuanist (St. John of the Cross) works I will be relying on the Spanish edition of the works: (1) San Juan de la Cruz. **Obras Completas**, textual revision, introductions ,and notes to the text by Jose Vicente Rodriguez. Doctrinal introductions and notes by Federico Ruiz Salvador. 2nd ed. Madrid: Editorial de Espiritualidad, 1980, (2) **Vida y Obras de San Juan de la Cruz**. Biography by Crisogono de Jesus, revised and augmented with notes by Matias del Nino Jesus. Editions of the works and notes by Luciano Ruano. 4th ed. Madrid: 1972,(3) **Introduccion a San Juan de la Cruz: El Hombre los Escritos, El Sistema** by Federico Ruiz Salvador O.C.D. 1968.

Unless otherwise noted, all English translations of John's writings are taken from: (4) E. Allison Peers, Ascent of Mountain Carmel. New York and London: Burns & Oates, 2001, (5) Crisogono de Jesus Sacramentado. The Life of St. John of the Cross. Translated by Kathleen Pond. London: Longmans, Green and co., 1958.,(6) God Speaks in the Night: The Life, Times, and Teaching of St. John of the Cross. Translated by Kieran Kavanaugh, O.C.D. Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1991,(7) Kieran Kavanaugh, John of the Cross: Doctor of Light and Love, (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1999, (8) The Collected Works of Saint John of the Cross. Translated by Kieran Kavanaugh, O.C.D. and Otilio Rodriguez, O.C.D. Revised edition. Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1991, (9) The Complete Works of Saint John of the Cross. Translated and edited by E. Allison Peers, from the critical edition of Silverio de Santa Teresa. New Edition, revised. 3 vols. Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1953. Even though a great deal of investigation remains to be done, the following points seem well established.

I will use the following scheme of abbreviation in referring to the Sanjuanist works:

- A..... The Ascent of Mount Carmel (**Subsida del Monte Carmelo**)
- N..... The Dark Night (**Noche oscura**)
- C..... The Spiritual Canticle (**Cantico espiritual**)
- F..... The Living Flame of Love (**Lame de amor viva**)
- P..... The Precautions (**Cautelas**)

CHAPTER ONE

THE SPIRITUALTY OF ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS

I. Background

A) Biography

In order to understand the spirituality of St. John of the Cross, it is imperative to understand something about him as a person and the religious context in which he lived and wrote. A clue to interpreting him is that his writings are consistent with both his lifestyle and personal experience.¹

However, there are several major problems in studying the life of St. John of the Cross. First, unlike St. Teresa, John did not write autobiography, and his surviving works contain few explicit references to himself and his activities. Second, his first biographies, written more than thirty years after John's death, were partly polemical works published in the midst of a great ideological struggle within the Discalced Carmelite group over the nature of its vocation. Third, the earliest testimonies concerning his life and virtues, were heavily influenced by a cultural view of sanctity common to the sixteenth and seventeenth century ideas prevalent in Spain.²

Though we have this difficulty, there are well-documented works which are still the most scholarly recognized biographies of John of the Cross.³

1) CHILDHOOD AND ADOLESCENCE: LIFE OF POVERTY

St. John of the Cross was born in 1542, in the small town of Fontiveros, Spain. His

¹Steven Payne, John of the Cross and the Cognitive Value of Mysticism: An Analysis of Sanjuanist Teaching and its Philosophical Implications for Contemporary Discussions of Mystical Experience, Synthesis Historical Library, vol. 37, ed. Norman Kretzmann, (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publisher, 1990), 3ff.

²See E. Allison Peers, "General introduction to the works of St. John of the Cross," in Ascent of Mount Carmel (Burnes & Oates: London, New York, 2001).

³See my 'Abbreviation.'

father, Gonzales de Yepe, came from a wealthy family of silk merchants. While on a business tour, he came to Fontiveros and there he met Catalina Avarez, a young orphan girl who worked as a weaver. Despite Catalina's poor background, Gonzalo fell in love with her and they were married in 1529. The family of Gonzalo, however, rejected his marriage with a poor, orphan girl and they disinherited him. They began their life together in poverty. They had three sons: Francisco, Luis, and Juan (who later became St. John of the Cross).

The family of Gonzalo was extremely poor when John was born. Crisogono says: "He first saw light in surroundings of poverty and hard work. The house was humble, its furniture, such as there was, was plain, the food none too plentiful. The children could not even eat their fill of wheaten bread, for often enough only barley bread appeared on the family table, and even of that there was not always sufficient to go around."⁴

When John was two years old his father died after a long illness which left the family penniless. Catalina decided to move to a more populated town, Arevalo, with the hope that things would get better there for her and her children. They lived there four years. After four years in Arevalo, they found it impossible to stay there. The same economic difficulties that had been responsible for the exodus from Fontiveros, forced Gonzalo de Yepes' widow to move house once more and again to set out on her travels in search of a means of livelihood for herself and her children.⁵ Catalina once again had to move. Catalina and her children moved to Medina del Campo in 1551. As far as Catalina's family was concerned, all that they hoped for was "to find a moderately stable solution to their painful economic situation . . . This is the third time they had to travel in search of sustenance: Toledo, Arevalo, Medina."⁶

John lived in Medina from age nine to twenty-two (1551-64). In Medina, John entered a charitable institution where orphans, and occasionally children from very poor

⁴Crisogono de Jesus, *The Life of St. John of the Cross*, trans. Kathleen Pond (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958), 3. See also Harvey Eagan, S. J. *An Anthology of Christian Mysticism*, (the Liturgical Press Collegeville, 1991), 450-455.

⁵Kieran Kavanaugh, *John of the Cross: Doctor of Light and Love*, (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1999), 39-41

⁶*God Speaks in the Night: The Life Times and Teachings of St. John of the Cross*, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1991), 12.

families received food, clothing, lodging, and some elementary education.⁷ Later on, John worked as a nurse and alms-collector in a hospital for poor people with contagious diseases. While working in the hospital, he also got the opportunity to attend the Jesuit college in Medina del Campo, founded only eight years earlier. The years, in all probability, in which he attended the school were 1559-63. There he must have studied Greek, Latin and Rhetoric, which certainly must have awakened his inborn poetic talents.⁸

As we look briefly upon John's early life, the experience of poverty and misery that John underwent must have greatly influenced his doctrine of **vacio** (empty) or **renunciacion** (renunciation). Federico Ruiz Salvador says: "The poverty that Juan de Yepes experienced in his early childhood and youth has become proverbial. Biographers, poets, theologians, and psychologists find in it traces of heroism and, above all, a source for the **nada** (nothing) that will become famous in his writings."⁹

It is true that all these experiences occurred in his developmental years and they played a significant part in forming his attitudes, convictions, and outlook on life. Moreover, his experience of **nada** became one of the pillars of John's entire system. Ruiz says, "union (with God) and renunciation are found in a relationship of unbreakable complementarity."¹⁰ The poverty and misery of his early life, it seems, taught John the value of renouncing everything for God.

However, the poverty and privations he endured in his early years did not ever make John of the Cross indulgent with himself in any way. When he completed his studies at the Jesuit school, he had a chance to have a secure future. Don Alonso Alvarez, the director of the hospital offered him ordination to the priesthood and the post of chaplain of the hospital. This would have given John the opportunity to help his poor mother and brother whom he loved.¹¹ However, he did not accept the offer. He renounced a worldly career which was very attractive for him. Instead, he joined, in 1563, the Camelite

⁷Ibid., 31.

⁸Crisogono de Jesus, *Vida y Obras de San Juan de la Cruz*, 6th ed. (Madrid, BAC, 1972), 38-41.

⁹God Speaks in the Night, 41.

¹⁰Federico Ruiz Salvador O.C. D. , *Introduccion a San Juan de la Cruz: El Hombre.los Escritos, el Sistema* (Madrid: Bibliotheca de Autores Cristianos, 1968), 314.

¹²Kieran Kavanaugh, *General Introduction to The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, revised edition (Washington DC: ICS Publications, 1991), 10.

Order by entering its newly founded novitiate house at Medina del Campo. There he studied the Carmelite rule and spirituality. John Welch says about John's studies at the novitiate:

In the novitiate house John probably studied the *Liber de institutione primorum monachorum*, also known as *The Book of the First Monks*, a work mandated for all Carmelite novitiates. This work was the first synthesis of Carmelite spirituality, and is second only to the *Rule of Carmel*. . . It is dated at approximately 1370. . . the author is thought to be Philip Ribot from Catalina who died in 1391. . .

Central to the account in the *Institutio*, or *The Book of the First Monks*, is the instruction given to Elijah in 1 Kings 17: 3-4: "Depart from hence, go eastward, and hide in the brook Carith, which is over against Jordan. There you shall drink of the torrent, and I have commanded the ravens to feed you there."

In commenting on this text the author shows that Carmelite life requires detachment which is freedom of heart, a renunciation of sin and self-will, a life of love of God and neighbor (hide in the brook of Carith, which through a Latin pun is related to hide in "caritate," or love). There the Carmelite will experience God (drinking the torrent and being fed by ravens).¹²

2) IN SALAMANCA

From 1564-1568 John studied at the Carmelite college in Salamanca, a school on a par with others in the great medieval tradition-Bologna, Oxford, Paris, and at the university received a through grounding in philosophy and theology.¹³ His religious superiors recognized his exceptional intellectual qualities by naming him prefect of studies in the provincial chapter in Avila in 1567.¹⁴ However, John experienced a deep spiritual dissatisfaction. Though he had intellectual achievements, he could not be satisfied with them. Instead John underwent a crisis of vocation and seriously thought of entering the Carthusian order which professed a more pronounced renunciation of the world and a life more dedicated to prayer and contemplation. Even while he was a student, his life of asceticism was apparent. He was attested to have been devoted, when not attending lectures, to sitting at his desk engrossed in his academic work, while he spent large parts of every night in prayer. He was reported to have fasted assiduously

¹²John Welch, O.Carm., *An Introduction to St. John of the Cross: When gods Die* (New York: Paulist Press, 1990), 4.

¹³Kieran Kavanaugh, *John of the Cross: Doctor of Light and Love*, 41.

¹⁴*God Speaks in the Night*, 78-79.

and practiced bodily mortifications.¹⁵ Colin P. Thompson says, “From the time he left Medina for Salamanca, already a Carmelite novice, his life was one of self-discipline and renunciation.”¹⁶

3) IN PRISON

One of the most severe sufferings John ever had in his life was the time when he was in prison. Through the misunderstanding and rivalry between the two branches of the Carmelite order, the non-reformed and the reformed, John became a victim. On the night of December 2, 1577, at the order of Jeronimo Tostado, a group consisting of Calced fathers, and armed men arrived where John stayed. They broke open the door, seized and handcuffed him, and took him to the Calced monastery in Toledo.

John was told to give up reform or face the consequences before the Visitor General, Fray Jeronimo Tostado. “The final goal was to get Fray John to abandon the Teresian reform, to go back on what he had done, and to wear the habit of the Calced Carmelites—something he was already doing before. Since he had been the first to join and because of his spiritual stature, they trusted that a renunciation on his part would mean the reabsorption of the reform into the order.”¹⁷

They tried to tempt him by offering some precious metals. They even offered him a good cell and a good library. However, John rejected all tempting offers and refused to renounce the reform. As a result, he was declared a rebel religious and imprisoned. He was closeted in a dark prison room nine feet long and five feet wide. It had no window; but only a loophole, three fingers wide, high up on the wall. His food was bread, water, and sardines. He was required to fast three days a week.¹⁸

Clearly this must have been a time of extreme physical, psychological, and spiritual suffering for John. This experience proved to be the greatest test of his life of renunciation. The indescribable privations and sufferings of the prison, however, did not defeat him. John overcome all the privations and sufferings of the prison. On the

¹⁵Michael Dodd, “John of the Cross: The Person his Times, his Writings,” in Carmelite Studies VI, ed. Steven Payne, (Washington, D.C.” ICS Publications, 1992), 48-50.

¹⁶Colin P. Thompson, The Poet and the Mystic: A Study of the Cantico Espiritual of San Juan de la Cruz, (Oxford University Press, 1977), 3.

¹⁷God Speaks in the Night, 162.

¹⁸Crisogono, The Life of St. John of the Cross, 102.

contrary, his spiritual life was enriched by these pains. The solitude of the prison gave John plenty of time to be alone with God in prayer and contemplation. Later on he told one of his penitents: “Daughter Ana, not even one of the favors given me by God could be repaid, not even my years in prison.”¹⁹ During this time of imprisonment, John experienced the very depth of what he called the mystical “dark night.” It was in this night of faith that he composed some of his most powerful poetry, including some stanzas of “The Spiritual Canticle.”²⁰ The poetry is beautiful and inviting, but the prose can be prickly and painful as it calls one to surrender attachment and consolation in the cultivation of a life of love and prayer. It reveals the ecstasy of light and grace that comes as a gift to one who has surrendered every thing in the dark, often painful, solitude of a purifying and sanctifying night.²¹

However, in studying the life background of St. John of the Cross, one may find many different characters in John’s life. However, it seems to me that the most important theme in John’s life is the term **renunciacion** (renunciation) or **vacio** (emptying).

As Federico Ruiz rightly says, “only a person who has correctly understood his teaching on renunciation can come to an authentic comprehension of St. John of the Cross.”²² Thus without understanding the true meaning of John’s teaching on renunciation, the study of John’s spirituality will miss the point.

As we look upon John’s life it is clear that, for John, renunciation is the essential thought in his spiritual life. His concept of renunciation is based on the reality or the act of renouncing. He understands renunciation neither as a purely psychological nor as a metaphysical matter. He understands it moral as being global which is at the same time speculative and experiential. The meaning of renunciation in John’s doctrine will be determined by this coalescence of the psychological, moral and metaphysical.

Generally people tend to think that renunciation is a kind of ascetical effort demanded in the spiritual life. So, for most people, renunciation is a negative term. For John, however, renunciation is much more than asceticism. As Ruiz says, reducing

¹⁹God Speaks in the Night, 171.

²⁰Kavanaugh, General Introduction to *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, 30.

²¹A. Prol. 1.

²²Federico Ruiz, *Mistico y Maestro, San Juan de la Cruz* (Madrid: Editorial de Espiritualidad, 1986), 84.

John's concept of renunciation to the category of asceticism is a painful narrowing of horizons, even though this view is very generalized.²³ As his life showed, for him the act of renunciation is not a force to accept something or to abandon something rather it is a voluntary attitude. For John, renunciation is more than mortification or ascetical practice. It is a corollary of the choice made to love God.

For John, renunciation was a matter of choice. It is essentially an option and preference for and a choice of a higher good, that is love of God. In other words, when he renounced something he did not renounce it for itself. He renounced it for the sake of God's love. Renunciation for the sake of renunciation has little value. It is even impossible.

John is convinced that only a person, who is "kindled" by the love of God and who finds "satisfaction and strength in this love," will have "the courage and constancy" to renounce his appetites.²⁴ So one who is intent on renouncing his appetites for worldly things, should work to kindle in his spirit the desire for spiritual things, that is the love of God. Thus the secret key to renunciation is love, for there is a continual interplay between love and renunciation. It is because of our love for the Divine that we begin the process of attempting to live in renunciation; without this love we would neither want to do this nor be able to do it.

From this we can see that the key to understanding the radical Sanjuanist asceticism is love of the bride for her heavenly bridegroom- the love that makes her go out into the night, leaving all things, with no other love than the one that burns in her heart.

On the other hand, there is another important role of renunciation in John's mystical doctrine. According to John, beside the transcendence of God, God is also intimately present in everything created, especially in the human soul. "God sustains every soul and dwells in it substantially, even though it may be that of the greatest sinner in the world."²⁵

However, although God is present in the human soul, His presence is obscured and darkened, either totally or partially, by the consciousness of created things. The soul, in

²³Ruiz, *Místico y Maestro*, San Juan de la Cruz, 84.

²⁴A.1.14.2.

²⁵A.2.5.3.

other words, must be transformed in order for it to become conscious of its essential union with God. Therefore, in order to meet with God who is inside the soul, renunciation is a necessary process of the soul. It is an essential preparation for union with God. The soul “must be emptied (**se ha de vacir**) of all that can fall within its capacity” (Asc. II, 4, 2).

As far as the doctrine of St. John of the Cross on renunciation is concerned we should not forget that John’s problem is not with the creatures or with the things of this world, but with the desire for them. For John, creation is good. But human desires toward creation often are not. Instead of praising and worshipping God, the Creator, through His wonderful creation, one can see it only as the object of one’s desires. Here is the problem. Human desires, instead of being fixed on God, are directed toward the created things. Creatures become gods.

However, renouncing desires does not end in vain. If anyone renounces created goods, he or she will have their own rewards, apart from the value of renunciation for spiritual life and Christian perfection. A non-possessive attitude enables people to see things as they are, to get a deep and pure knowledge of them. It simply enables them to enjoy things better. We may say, then, that renunciation of desire has its own value.

To sum up, understanding of John’s writings requires an attention to the fact of his life. He was a man of renunciation, and that he was rigorous in his approach to the spiritual life. Indeed he was an austere man and ascetical in many ways. However, we should not miss that he was also a gentle man. He was known as a man of humor, and joy.²⁶ Although he was an austere man, he was known a person of inner peace and harmony. He loved the world generously and enjoyed it liberally. It is well known that he was particularly solicitous and engaged in ministering to those who were sick. All of his extant letters are full of indications that he was man of compassion and warmth.²⁷

²⁶Thomas Kane, *Gentleness in John of the Cross*, (Oxford: SLG Press, 1985), 1.

²⁷Kevin Culligan, “John of the Cross: A Personality Profile,” *Spiritual Life*, 37, no 4, (Winter 1991), 208.

II) THEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

A) INFLUENCE OF NEOPLATONISM

The spirituality of John of the Cross cannot be studied apart from his academic background. What is more, his mystical doctrine can be fully understood and appreciated only with reference to his theological, religious, and philosophical background. John began his higher education with the study of grammar, rhetoric, and the arts at Medina del Campo. In 1564, John began to attend classes at the university of Salamanca. For three years John followed the Arts course at the University.²⁸ Although we do not know precisely which courses John attended, it is quite certain that at this time he read widely in the mystical writers. Among the authors that he read were Augustine, Bernard, Pseudo-Dionysius, John Ruysbroeck, and John Tauler.²⁹

However, the religious culture in which John lived was both live and chaotic. European thought was at a turning point. This period was known as the era of the Counter-Reformation. The Spanish reformation brought an explosion of religious fervor at the time. Intense religious fervor often appeared in fanatical forms. It was estimated that one out of every eight people in Spain was a member of some religious order. Thus intense religious enthusiasm could become perverted, and many forms of superstition could prevail. Payne writes, “religious visionaries, ascetics, and stigmatics were the popular idols of the day.”³⁰

On the other hand, this period in Spain also was known as the period of the Spanish “Golden Age.” The influence of Erasmus was still strongly felt on the Iberian Peninsula.

²⁸Crisogono, *Vida y Obras de San Juan de la Cruz*, 38-41.

²⁹E. Allison Peers, *Ascent of Mountain Carmel*, xxxvi.

³⁰Steven Payne, *John of the Cross and the Cognitive Value of Mysticism*, 10.

Great writers such as Montaigne, Cervantes, and Suarez were still alive. This provided a foundation for some unification of theology and allowed for the growing influence of humanism in the sixteenth century.

The university of Salamanca, at this time, exceeded any academic institution in Europe. It was a place of great theological openness with chairs representing the schools of Thomas, Durandus, Scotus, and Visperas.³¹ For instance, the university of Salamanca had great scholars such as Luis de Leon, Juan de Guevara, Mancio de Corpus Christi, Enrique Hernaudez, Gregorio Gallo and his successors, Gaspar de Grajal, as well as many others of equal stature.

In such an academic atmosphere, the university of Salamanca taught the fundamental goodness of humanity and the expansion of human possibilities. As Perrin writes, “there was a growing awareness that theology was not just an abstract knowing of God through revelation, but that humanity participated in the life of God personally, and the ideal of that life was union with God.”³² Particularly, patristic and Pseudo-Dionysian mysticism flourished at the university in his day.³³ It is most probable that de Leon, who has been described as a “great humanist and mystical poet,” might have influenced John in the writing of his “most ambitious” poem, “The Spiritual Canticle,” which is dependent on the Song of Songs and was written, like all of John’s extant works, in his native tongue.³⁴

However, there was an intellectual split between Aristotelian Thomism (favored in the theology and philosophy department), and Augustinianism and Neo-Platonism in the departments of humanities and spiritual theology, though the intellectual atmosphere was remarkably open and exciting.³⁵

The statutes prescribed the reading and explanation of these doctors in their respective chairs but left the liberty to impose them or not to the professor. . . All

³¹Melquiades Andres Martin, “La teleologia en salamanca durante los estudios de San Juan de la Cruz,” In Juan de la Cruz, espiritu de llama” estudios con ocasion del cuaro centenario de su muerte (1591-1991), ed. Otger Steggink, (The Netherlands: Kok Pharos Publishing House, 1991), 215.

³²David Perrin, Canciones entre el alma y el esposo de Juan de la Cruz: A Hermeneutical Interpretation, (Ph.D. Diss., St. Paul University, 1995), 81.

³³Ibid., 218.

³⁴Willis Barnstone, Introduction to The Poems of Saint John of the Cross, trans. Willis Barstone (New York: New Directions, 1972), 11.

³⁵Willis Barnstone, Introduction to The Poems of Saint John of the Cross, 218.

systems were discussed, all opinions could be held. There were no limits beyond that of the faith.

When nominalism began to be the burning question in the universities of the centre of Europe, the cloisters of Salamanca had Masters brought from Paris to explain the new doctrines and four new Chairs were established—two for the nominalists and two for the realists. . . . In another field, that of pure philology and literature, the presence and the work of El Brocense and Fray Luis de Leon are the best proof of the rejuvenated atmosphere of humanism which was breathed in the Salamanca lecture halls.³⁶

Thus, we may say that John had contact with some of the best scholars of his day and John's university studies helped provide him with the intellectual framework for his later writings in mystical theology.

However, considering the varieties of opposing views being taught to John, the problem must have been particularly urgent for John when he was a student of philosophy at Salamanca. The main problem which John had to resolve was how to engage between the Augustinian anthropological system and Aristotelian axioms.³⁷ Mallory summarized briefly the problem involved:

For Augustine, all intellectual activity was purely spiritual communication, whereby the intellectual activity of the incorporeal mind bypassed the senses. The idea of immediate intellectual perception came under fire when the views of Aristotle were introduced in the west. The problem such an axiom causes for the epistemology of mystical experience is, how can what is supposed to be purely spiritual communication enter the soul while bypassing the senses? Where or how could purely supernatural communications be communicated to man? Thomas Aquinas attempted to reconcile Augustine's view with that of Aristotle by re-interpreting the concept of immediate knowledge of God to mean merely reflective knowledge.³⁸

It is most probable that John solved this problem by adopting an eclectic rather than accepting only one sided view.

Speaking on the current trend of philosophical thought, however, Platonism was the prevailing philosophic outlook when John of the Cross was studying at Salamanca. The merger of Neoplatonism and Christianity is nowhere more evident than in sixteenth

³⁶Crisogono, *The Life of St. John of the Cross*, 33-34.

³⁷Marilyn May Mallory, *Christian Mysticism: Transcending Techniques*, (Van Gorcum Assen /Amsterdam The Netherlands: 1977), 144.

³⁸Ibid.

century Spanish writers who quote from secular and sacred writers simultaneously and with the same authority. Plato and Christ received almost identical billing. Malon de Chaide gives Plotinus the same status as Augustine. Luis de Leon and Luis de Granada are thoroughly imbued with Neoplatonism.

The Neoplatonic writers who most influenced John of the Cross at this time were Augustine and Pseudo-Dionysius. Efen de la Madre de Dios states:

Perhaps his favorite Father was St. Augustine, . . . if anyone influenced St. John of the cross besides the books of the Carmel, it was St. Augustine.³⁹

Mallory states that John cites five explicit quotations from Augustine which is very unusual in the works of John because he almost never cites an author by name nor does he refer very often to any specific book of another author.⁴⁰ However, all of these quotations, according to Mallory, are not from the authentic **Soliloquia** of Augustine himself. Two quotations refer explicitly to the apocryphal **Soliloquia** and the other two quotations occur in the authentic works of Augustine.⁴¹

“. . . St. Augustine, talking with God in the **Soliloquies** said: ‘I found thee not, O Lord, without, because I erred in seeking Thee without that were within.’”(Canticle stanza 4) (pseudo-Augustine, **Soliloquia**. ch. 31) (2PG 40, 888) (Although a similar idea occurs in the Confessions, bk. X, ch. 27, nowhere does exactly this quotation occur).

“St. Augustine, talking with God in the **Soliloquies** said: ‘Miserable man that I am, when will my littleness and imperfection be able to have fellowship with Thy uprightness? . . .’” (Ascent 1.5.1) (pseudo-Augustine, **Soliloquia**. ch.2; also in the authentic **Soliloquia**, cf. Migne PL 40, 866).

“And it is to be observed that, as St. Augustine says, the question that the soul puts to the creature is the mediation that she makes by their means upon their Creator.” (Canticle stanza 5) (pseudo-Augustine, **Soliloquia**.ch.31) (PL40, 888) (Also found in Confessions, bk. X, ch 6).

“St. Augustine said to God: ‘Let me know myself, O Lord, and I shall know Thee.’”

³⁹Efen de la Madre de Dios, *San Juan de la Cruz*, (Zaragoza, 1947), 205.

⁴⁰Marilyn May Mallory, *Christian Mysticism: Transcending Techniques*, 134.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, It should be noted that the apocryphal **Soliloquia** is a pseudo-Augustine which is different from the authentic **Soliloquia** of Augustine. The apocryphal **Soliloquia** was written by the unknown monk(s) or cannons of the 13th century who wrote. It is a devotional work which contains many passages from both Augustine’s writings and Psalms used in the liturgical office.

“ (Night.1.12.5) (pseudo-Augustine, **Soliloquia**. ch. 1) (Also in the authentic **Soliloquia** I, ch. 2) (PL 32, 885)

“For, as St. Augustine says, love, makes all things that are great, and burdensome to be almost naught.” (Night. 2.19.4) (PL 38, 444)(not in the **Soliloquia**).⁴²

Assuming that the book of Augustine which John of the Cross always had in his cell was probably the **Soliloquia**, it was one of his most influential books along with the Bible. M. Bataillon suggests that this was one of the most popular books of devotion used by common people in Spain, as a reaction against the decline of the quality of preaching, which had become either too abstract and scholastic or too infantile.⁴³

Bataillon further states that this book was of capital importance because it contains certain themes of the Reformation such as; man can do nothing without God’s grace (ch.25). Emphasizing predestination, the book indicates that even the prayer of those who are predestined to condemnation becomes sin (ch.25) pseudo-Augustine, **Soliloquia**, 2PG40).. But because of predestination, the elect are protected by the omnipotent hand of God that all they do is turned into good, even the sins they commit which is highly questionable.⁴⁴

Moreover, the importance of the **Soliloquia** in the intellectual and spiritual formation of John is because it contains the vocabulary of pseudo-Dionysius’ ‘via negativa’ with several themes of Augustine’s and Gregory the Great’s mysticism. For instance, it has frequent reference to concupiscence and the misery of man’s fallen state. In man’s fallen state he is in prison and all man’s hope and desire should be in God (ch.23) (pseudo-Augustine, **Soliloquia** 883-884). The most striking point of this book is that in it the theme of ‘dark night’ occurs, used in the sense of Gregory the Great, namely the darkness of sin, and not in the sense of the darkness of contemplation.⁴⁵

However, one of the main reasons John made use of this book, especially chapter thirty-one, is because it clearly indicates the connection between Augustine’s mystical experience and the ‘via negativa’ and illumination through faith.⁴⁶

⁴²Ibid., It is important to note here that John had no idea that the **Soliloquia** were not the work of St. Augustine; the fact that this work was an apocryphal which was a later discovery.

⁴³M. Bataillon, *Erasmus en Espana*, vol 1, (Mexico & Buenos Aires, 1950), 344.

⁴⁴Ibid., 55-56.

⁴⁵Marilyn May Mallory, *Christian Mysticism: Transcending Techniques*, 138.

⁴⁶Ibid., 139.

As we noted, Augustine was the preferred writer of John of the Cross. Particularly, John learned the nature of love mostly from Augustine. In Augustine, the nature and dynamics of love were built upon the Neoplatonic dichotomy between the love of creatures and the love of God. From Augustine John learned the principle that governs his entire discussion of mystical love: that a person cannot love God and creatures simultaneously. However, there is no evidence that he read these philosophers either in the original Greek or in the Latin translations available at the time.⁴⁷

Moreover, there is another important influence of Augustine upon John, besides mystical love, that we have to mention here, that is, asceticism which John developed from the idea of original sin. Where did he find his insight for an asceticism which is more radical than anything found in Augustine's view? How could the so-called 'Augustinian Pessimism' lead to John's statement that the soul must be purified of all its desires and not in its desire? The theory has been recognized that this radicalization of Augustine's view came from a typical Carmelite source, namely the primitive Rule of the Carmel itself, The Book of the Institution of the First Monks. All John's biographers and commentators are convinced that John had read the book of Institution.⁴⁸

This book is of central importance because it contains four sorts of desires which the Carmelite monk must renounce: 1) all possessions, 2) the desire of the flesh, 3) contact with the world, especially women, and 4) love of oneself and of one's neighbour when this is not based upon love of God. On the topic concerning of the desire of flesh, this book summarizes briefly the teaching derived from Augustine about original sin.⁴⁹ It is this Carmelite book which leads John to develop his radical views on asceticism, proceeding from an extreme concept of the implication of original sin and concupiscence. This explains how John could have developed a more radical asceticism than Augustine's.

B) INFLUENCE OF DIONYSIUS

Pseudo-Dionysius, the Neoplatonic writer, was the most influential writer upon

⁴⁷William Ralph Inge, Christian Mysticism 8th ed, (London: Methuen and Co., Ltd, 1948), 78.

⁴⁸Marilyn May Mallory, Christian Mysticism: Transcending Techniques, 130.

⁴⁹Werling, N. G., "The Book of St. John," The Sword, 4 (1940), 153-154.

John after Augustine. John read the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius by saying that the Spanish mystic quotes Pseudo-Dionysius directly in regard to the ascetical hierarchy of purification, illumination, and union; the ray of darkness, and the knowledge of God through not-knowing. This triadic division of spiritual development has been very influential since Dionysius introduced it, and it is found in St. John of the Cross, who uses it as the framework upon which he sets out his doctrine of contemplative development.⁵⁰ Textual evidence supports that John quoted four times from pseudo-Dionysius (A.2.8.6; N.2.5.3; C.14.16; F3.49). Eulogio de la Virgen del Carmen argues that in the Ascent, chapter 9, John uses even the same biblical passages as those cited in the Mystical Theology, chapter 1, of pseudo-Dionysius.⁵¹

As Colin P. Thompson says, behind John's fundamental idea that, in order to approach God, a person must renounce desires, will, and intellect and travel instead a road of darkness lies the unmistakable substratum of Dionysian theology.⁵² According to Dionysius God is above all being and knowledge of the divine essence is possible only through absolute negation. No human words or concepts could ever adequately describe God and the closer a person approaches God, the deeper the darkness he encounters.⁵³ Thus in the Dionysian's distinction between affirmative and negative theology they are not opposed to one another. Nor is it a claim to the falseness of the discourse of affirmative theology. Rather, it is an undoing or a disorienting of a language which can

⁵⁰See *Canticle*, The Theme, 415. Those who follow the Dionysian tradition, have usually understood purification (or purgation) to mean the abandonment, through progressive non-attachment, of all created being, and the subsequent surrender of oneself to God. Illumination has been understood as the soul's entry through love into the divine darkness in which God dwells in inaccessible light.

⁵¹Marilyn May Mallory, *Christian Mysticism: Transcending Techniques*, 141.

⁵²Colin P. Thompson, *The Poet and the Mystic: A Study of the Cantico Espiritual of St. John of the Cross*, 7-8.

⁵³ See Denys Turner's book, *The Darkness of God*. In this book, Turner describes the Dionysian concept of negation. For Dionysius, negation is not to be regarded as simply a denial of affirmation. Turner says that the Dionysian's negation is distinctive from the Aristotelians' whose negation is simply opposing of affirmation, whereas Dionysian's negation is the negation of the negation. It is a denial of all metaphysics which obscure and inhibit the divine's presence to the world. Not only is it a denial of all discourse, therefore, it is a denial of all sameness and all difference in order that one may finally be united with the hidden God of the "hidden mystical silence" who is beyond being. (p.36-40). Turner further discusses that we are not even able to discuss 'In what way do God and any creature differ? For if an answer could be given this implies that there is something which both God and creation possess in common, such that they differ in respect of it. However, there is nothing in common which God and creature possess. Therefore, "we cannot say what God is because we cannot express what that degree of difference is which falls between what we can say of God and what God is." Thus we have no language about our language about God. (p.43). Denys Turner, *The Darkness of God*, (University of Cambridge Press,1995), 32-45.

obscure God and thus, in Dionysius's understanding, the completion of all knowledge concerning the divine which again is non-being and not subject to referential uses of language as objects and entities are.⁵⁴ Thus, the ultimate culmination of apophatic theology is the denial of all discourse concerning God who is "beyond being, beyond all." Where the cataphatic affirms the likeness of the divine to beings, the apophatic affirms the radical dissimilarity and transcendence of God. Dionysius says: "Think not that affirmations and denials are opposed but rather that, long before, is that- which is itself beyond all position and denial- beyond privation."⁵⁵ Following the Dionysian concept of negation, St. John states:

The fact is that the more we take flight upward, the more our words are confined to the ideas we are capable of forming; so that now as we plunge into that darkness which is beyond intellect, we shall find ourselves not simply running short of words but actually speechless and unknowing . . . language falters . . . it will turn silent completely, since it will finally be at one with him who is indescribable.⁵⁶

However, though John had definitely been influenced by Dionysius, especially in the concept of negation, there are several fundamental differences between John and Dionysius regarding the mystical path. First, in his development of the theme of the 'dark nights' John adds another Christian note which was lacking in pseudo-Dionysius, namely the salvatic role which suffering can adopt in helping the Christian to achieve the likeness of Christ. The reason why this was absent in pseudo-Dionysius' mystical work is because he was not mentioning a salvatic way. Via negativa in pseudo-Dionysius was not so much the way to redemption.⁵⁷

Because of his concept of sin and the need of man for redemption, John insists on the theme of restoring the likeness of Christ, a theme which was lacking entirely in pseudo-Dionysius' mystical writing. This personal redemptive work of John serves as a means to adjust the metaphysical and objective style of pseudo-Dionysius' cosmological perspective. However, it must be noticed, that in the writing of John, The

⁵⁴Michael A. Sell, Mystical Languages of Unsayings (Chicago: the University of Chicago press, 1994), 8-12.

⁵⁵Pseudo-Dionysius Aeropagite, The Divine Names and Mystical Theology, translated from the Greek with an Introductory Study by John D. Jones (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1980), 16.

⁵⁶C.39.6.

⁵⁷Marilyn May Mallory, Christian Mysticism: Transcending Techniques, 148.

Living Flame of Love, John seems to change his view by accepting something of the original perspective of pseudo-Dionysius, in which the principle agent in man's divinization is the power of God's love rather than personal idea of God (Spouse of bride's mysticism). But even here, John brings this theme into a Christian doctrinal structure which was lacking in pseudo-Dionysius.⁵⁸

Second, in pseudo-Dionysius' mystical work the role of faith is not mentioned. This is particularly striking, since the 'model' or inspiration for pseudo-Dionysius, namely Proclus, asserts that man is not able to achieve union with God without faith. Proclus, a pagan philosopher, firmly believed in the complete fallen nature of man and man's inability to come to achieve divine union merely through his own 'eros **pronoetikos**'. Pseudo-Dionysius in his optimism believes that man is able to love God without help from God. Thus for pseudo-Dionysius faith is not necessary for union with God whereas faith becomes a central theme in the mystical path.⁵⁹

Moreover, it has been known among scholars that John had studied both St. Dionysius and St. Gregory together. The earliest biographer of John of the Cross, Jesus Maria Quiroga asserts that he mixed together with the scholastic material which he studied at Salamanca particular reading of mystical authors, especially St. Dionysius and St. Gregory. The other biographer, Crisogono also states that John read Gregory the Great's primary mystical work:

"It is not possible to doubt that the author of the *Spiritual Canticle* had read the **Moralia**, which was passed from hand to hand then among all spiritual persons as an excellent code of perfection."⁶⁰

Crisogono further states that John's method of doing biblical exegesis was similar to that of St. Gregory. He states:

"This is because his exegesis is generally symbolical in the manner of Saint Augustine, St Ambrose and St. Gregory and not as exaggerated as that of Origen and Clement of Alexandria. . . a continuation of the patristic exegesis of the best time."⁶¹

⁵⁸Ibid., 148-149.

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰Crisogono, San Juan de la Cruz, 35.

⁶¹Ibid., 59.

One of the main characters of John's influence by Gregory the Great can be found in the concept of darkness. The concept of 'darkness' in Gregory the Great has a completely different meaning than that of pseudo-Dionysius' darkness. For pseudo-Dionysius darkness is the abode of God. This divine darkness can be experienced in contemplation. For Gregory, darkness signifies the ignorance of sin. However, John has combined these two different concepts in formulating his own concept of darkness: being in sin (Gregory), and ray of darkness (pseudo-Dionysius).⁶²

However, there are some theologians who refuse to admit any definitive influence of Neoplatonism upon the mystical doctrine of John of the Cross. Bruno de Jesus-Marie states that there is no influence of Neoplatonism upon the essential lines of Johannine mysticism. "Those who endeavor to show that John of the Cross was dependent on Plotinus are greatly mistaken."⁶³ Jacques Maritain's challenge is even more specific. "The nothingness, emptiness, night, renouncement of all that can be known and comprehended, of which John of the Cross unceasingly teaches the necessity, has nothing to do with a dialectical purification in the Neoplatonist fashion."⁶⁴ The similarity, they argue, extends only to the form of expression. The religious content beneath the imagery, namely the mystical union of the soul and God, although admittedly symbolized under Neoplatonic imagery, is authentically Christian. The way toward mystical union and the nature of this union as described by the Neoplatonists are essentially different from the mystical union taught by John of the Cross.

Americo Castro, however, dean of Spanish historians, opposed their view by saying that Spanish mysticism is deeply rooted in the doctrinal tradition of Neoplatonism.⁶⁵ Dom Butler, also argues that there is a parallel between elements of the mystical philosophy of Plotinus and elements of Johannine mysticism.⁶⁶

This brief view of the scholarship on Johannine mysticism clearly indicates that there is no agreement between scholars on the question of whether Neoplatonism

⁶²Marilyn May Mallory, *Christian Mysticism: Transcending Techniques*, 133.

⁶³Bruno de Jesus-Marie, O.C. D., *St. John of the Cross*, ed, Benedict Zimmerman (London: Sheed and Ward, 1932), 268.

⁶⁴Ibid., "Introduction," 16.

⁶⁵Americo Castro, "Los Prologos al "Quijote", *Hacia Cervantes* 2nd ed. (Madrid: Taurus, 1960), 247.

⁶⁶Dom Cuthbert Butler, *Western Mysticism*, 2nd ed. (London: Constable and Co, 1927), 340.

aesthetically and doctrinally influenced the writings of John of the Cross.

I think, however, it is very hard to deny the possibility of the influence of Neoplatonism and Thomism on Johannine mysticism since John read and studied their philosophy. Rather, it is reasonable to say that John had developed his unique spiritual character while he was studying their philosophy. It seems to me that Johannine mysticism does not spring from Neoplatonism, but its literary descriptions of mystical experiences rely essentially on Plotinian principles.

Thus we may say that John learned and used a system of ideas, a set of symbols, and a religious language from Christian Neoplatonism to express his mystical experiences and to act as a guide for others intent upon the quest of Christian perfection. As Crisogono says, it is impossible to understand a single page in the writings of John of the Cross without taking into account his Neoplatonic philosophy.⁶⁷ What John of the Cross gained from his Neoplatonic education and from the mystical-literary tradition alive in sixteenth century Spain were the tools and instruments employed by his creative imagination.

C) INFLUENCE OF THE BIBLE

Beside the influence of Neoplatonism in formulating the mystical doctrine of John of the Cross, there is another important source by which John was outstandingly influenced in regard to his entire mystical doctrine. That is the Bible. John firmly believes that it has authority and is an authority concerning spiritual matters. When he wants to prove a mystical idea, he does not make an elaborate systematic argument in order to prove it philosophically or rationally; rather, he quotes the Bible as his support and authority. The authority of the Bible is self-evident for him and as such provides him with a solid foundation for his mystical system.⁶⁸ He uses words such as **autoridad, autoridades**, etc.

Although he never gives a detailed account of the presuppositions which make him believe in the authority (**autoridad**) of the Bible, he states some of the dogmatic principles which permit us to penetrate to the inner core of his belief regarding the Bible. P. Alfonso de la Madre de Dios, who was personally acquainted with John states that

⁶⁷Crisogono, San Juan de la Cruz, vol. I, 102.

'he had a great gift and facility for the exposition of the Sacred Scripture, principally of the Song of songs, **Ecclesiasticus**, Ecclesiastes, the proverbs and the Psalms of David.'⁶⁹ Fray Pablo de Santa Maria writes:

I consider it impossible that he could have spoken so well about all the virtues if he had not been most proficient in the spiritual life, and I really think he knew the whole Bible by heart, so far as one could judge from the various biblical passages which he would quote at chapters and in the refectory, without any great effort, but as one who goes where the Spirit leads him.⁷⁰

Any one who reads the writings of John of the Cross cannot help noticing the number of biblical texts found on every page of his writings. It is estimated that in John's writings there are about 1,500 quotations from the Bible, of which about two-thirds are from the Old Testament and the rest from the New.⁷¹ It is to be noted that John quotes from almost every book in the Bible and he mentions that the Bible is the main source of his works.⁷² In the prologue to the *Spiritual Canticle*, John asserts that he uses the Bible as an authoritative confirmation of his conclusions concerning the human-divine relationship. In the Prologue of *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* John declares:

I shall not rely on experience or science, for these can fail and deceive us. Although I shall not neglect whatever possible use I can make of them, my help. . . will be Sacred Scripture, at least in the most important matters, or those which are difficult to understanding.⁷³

Some of those who lived with John have testified that the Bible was John's primary reference. According to Rodriguez, John of the Cross was more a man of the Bible than of the cross:

Those who know a little about the life and writings of St. John of the Cross may immediately picture him with the Bible in hand. I dare to say this would be more natural and true to life than representing him with the cross. In as much as he was a believer, mystic, and writer, he lived the Sacred Scripture. From it he drew experience, doctrine, and language. He read, mediated, contemplated, and analyzed

⁶⁸A.2.21.6.

⁶⁹Quoted from, E. Allison Peers, *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, General Introduction, xxxviii

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, xxxix.

⁷¹Ruiz, *Mistico y Maestro*, San Juan de la Cruz, 47.

⁷²A. Prol. 2.

⁷³*Ibid.*

it; he sang it and commented on it.⁷⁴

Thus it is not surprising that when he came to write his works, John found the main support of his teaching in the Bible.

Though the Bible was an important source of his teaching and writing, John used the Bible not only as a source of his works, but also to express, confirm, and illustrate his own experiences and teachings. When John reads the Bible, he sees reflected and described in it his own experience. He understands the experiences narrated in the Bible as his own experiences or the experiences of every individual Christian. As Welch says “certain biblical stories are chosen by his imagination because they themselves are symbolic expressions of mysteries which make John mute.”⁷⁵ Therefore, Gaudreau rightly points out that “it cannot be said that John of the Cross uses the Bible as an exclusive source of his doctrine. Rather, he uses it to confirm and illustrate his teaching.”⁷⁶

1) The Allegorical Interpretation

Although John makes use of the Bible continually in his writing and bases his mysticism on the interpretation of the Bible, we should not forget that his use of the Bible is characteristic of his age and literary environment. In sixteenth century Spain allegory and the accommodated sense of the Bible was a sanctified literary procedure. He saw that the whole Bible illustrates the spiritual journey of the individual soul. The Bible is the mirror of a person’s life with God. The loving covenant that God made with the people of Israel became, for John, God’s loving covenant with an individual soul.

A number of Roman Catholic scholars have commented on John’s method of biblical interpretation.

Colunga says that John is a follower of medieval exegesis and makes use of the allegorical and accommodational methods of interpretation which were predominant in his time, but that he does not know anything about a scientific, historical, and exegetical interpretation based on the letter of the sacred text. Colunga further states that John uses

⁷⁴God Speaks in the Night, 365.

⁷⁵Welch, *An Introduction to St. John of the Cross: When Gods Die*, 24.

⁷⁶Marie M. Gaudreau, *Mysticism and Image in St. John of the Cross* (Bern: Herbert Lang, 1976), 60.

the words of the Bible to express his own ideas without paying attention to what the words mean in the Bible.⁷⁷

Garcia, however, does not agree with Colunga. Garcia claims that John does not make use of the allegorical method but rather that his interpretation conveys the real meaning of the text and applies to it an accurate and convenient exegesis without twisting its meaning.⁷⁸ However, it seems Colunga is correct in his interpretation if John is judged on purely biblical and exegetical grounds rather than on mystical bases. Because of the clarity of his exposition and the soundness of his criticism based on rigorous scholarship.

The allegorical meaning John discovered, however, was always attached to the literal meaning. Allegory is harmless as long as it remains a free literary device.⁷⁹ But when it becomes authoritative, when only that poetical sense of the Bible is true of which the majority approves, then allegory and the accommodated sense become tyrannical.⁸⁰ Gasper de Grajal, John's probable teacher, suggests that John's sympathies lay with the Scripturist group.

As we view John's understanding of the Bible, it is certain that Scripture and personal experience form the most important bases of his doctrine. Scripture serves as the authentic touchstone for his doctrine; he uses Biblical texts to illustrate his points, and he is willing to disavow any opinion which might be incompatible with Scripture or with the teachings of the Church.

D) OTHER SOURCES

St. John of the Cross was well aware of the mystical tradition. According to Ruiz Salvador, John read extensively on mystical, spiritual, and devotional themes, even though it is difficult to identify the works he read because, excepting the Bible, he does not generally refer to his sources.⁸¹ P. Gabriele de Santa Maria Magdalena said that even though John's own contribution was to be so outstanding as one day to win him the title

⁷⁷Albert Colunga, "San Juan de la Cruz Interprete de las Sangradas Escrituras," *Ciencia Tomista*, 63 (1942), 275-276.

⁷⁸Felix Garcia, "San Juan de la Cruz y la Biblia," *Revista de Espiritualidad*, 45 (1952), 372-385.

⁷⁹Edwin Hatch, *The Influence of Greek Ideas on Christianity* (New York: Harper and Row, 1957), 82.

⁸⁰Ibid.

⁸¹Federico Ruiz Salvador O. C. D. , *Introduccion a San Juan de la Cruz: El Hombre, Los Escritos, el Sistema*, 94.

of a doctor of the Universal Church, John owed much to his predecessors.⁸² Robert Richmond Ellis also agrees that John's mystical doctrine reflects several religious and philosophical traditions.⁸³ Allison Peers writes in this regard:

John read widely in medieval mystical theology and assimilated a great part of what he read. The influence of foreign writers upon Spanish mysticism, though it was once denied, is to-day generally recognized. It was inevitable that it should have been considerable in a country which in the sixteenth century had such a high degree of culture as Spain.⁸⁴

We can briefly identify some schools which appear to have directly influenced John of the Cross. In his thought and structure, John was influenced by Aquinas and the Scholastics (e.g., transformation in God through beatific vision as the final end of human life, the development of theological virtues, actual and habitual graces). Some elements of his mysticism display the thought of Augustine and Neoplatonism (apophatism, mystical darkness, the soul as the image of God). Several stages and images show both the Rhineland and German Mystics (e.g., the three signs of the soul's entry into the mystical state, degrees of love). Some themes, problems, and language emerge from the earlier Spanish Mystics (e.g., Bernardino de Laredo's work: The Ascent of Mount Sion may have suggested to John the title of his work the Ascent of Mount Carmel). Finally, there are even symbolic and linguistic influences from Islam.⁸⁵

These may suggest that whole authors influenced St. John of the Cross. However, we should be very careful that John actually quoted specific authors only in a few cases. Scholars have had much more difficulty in saying anything definite about the sources of John's doctrine.⁸⁶ "Unlike his contemporaries in Spain and else where, John never gives us string of quotations, except in the case of Holy Scripture. Nor with the exception of a few patristic passages, all from the Breviary, does he even mention authors by name,

⁸²A Benedictine of the Stanbrook Abbey, Medieval Mystical tradition and Saint John of the Cross (Westminster, Maryland: The Newman Press, 1954), 13-14.

⁸³Robert Richmond Ellis, San Juan de la Cruz, Mysticism and Sartrean Existentialism (New York: Peter Lang, 1992), 4.

⁸⁴E. Allison Peers, General Introduction, 16.

⁸⁵Kavanaugh, introduction to The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross, 35.

⁸⁶*Ibid.*, 575.

with the exception of Pseudo-Denys and St. Thomas.”⁸⁷

However, it seems very clear that John of the Cross did borrow from the mystical tradition preceding him. Thompson may be right when he says that John of the Cross is indebted to the accumulated tradition rather than to specific authors and sources.⁸⁸ A Benedictine of Stanbrook Abbey rightly places John in the full current of mystical tradition:

He (St. John of the Cross) is at once original and traditional, and certain figures of speech and expressions had long become the common property of all spiritual theologians. We find the same language century and after century; all the later writers draw upon the earlier authorities, and as says his most able modern editor (P. Silverio de Santa Teresa): ‘We have not read St. John of the Cross long before we find ourselves in the full current of mystical tradition.’⁸⁹

We may say, then, that John had so thoroughly absorbed the thought of his predecessors that he might not himself have known the exact origin of the particular expressions and analogies he uses, many of which had already become commonplace in medieval mystical literature.

However, there is a reason for John’s unconcern with careful references to the incidental details of the scholastic theories he uses. The reason is that many of those for whom he was writing were poorly educated by today’s standards, and would not have been able to follow complicated philosophical or theological arguments.

John is, of course, an intelligent author, who consistently tries to present the theoretical underpinnings of his system, but he is primarily interested in providing sound spiritual advice for his readers. We can understand why he seldom bothers to check his non-Scriptural quotations or to correct minor inconsistencies and repetitions in his texts. John’s interests are primarily practical, rather than theoretical, and the development of his ideas, especially in the Canticle and Flame, is often more organic than deductive.

Therefore, we cannot expect to find in John a direct answer to contemporary philosophical doubts about the epistemic value of mystical experiences; many of the

⁸⁷A Benedictine of the Stanbrook Abbey, 23.

⁸⁸Thompson, The Poet and the Mystic, 8-9.

⁸⁹A Benedictine of the Stanbrook Abbey, 23.

modern philosophical issues surrounding mysticism would not have been within his intellectual horizon.

We may say, then, that John's university studies helped him with the intellectual framework for his later writings in mystical theology. It is clear, at any rate, that he had contact with some of the best intellectuals of his day, and was exposed to a broad spectrum of opinions on a variety of issues. Thus John's contemporaries considered him a learned and first-rate scholar, and throughout his life John had extensive contacts with academic communities.

III) ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS'S UNDERSTANDING OF HUMAN STRUCTURE

Since John's doctrine rests upon a certain notion of the fundamental structure of the human subject, it is crucial to study John's interpretation of the human person. However, John's writing, like himself, is a product of the sixteenth-century world. Though his dynamic view of person is derived primarily from his personal experience, his account of the structure of the soul draws heavily upon the scholastic theories and terminology of his day. Thus any theory of his understanding of the structure of the human person must recognize that his philosophical psychology is drawn both from the scholasticism of his day as well as his own experiential knowledge of spiritual development. Without knowing this, one will face certain hermeneutical problems.

Some commentators have misinterpreted his writings as if he were a contemporary author, and have read him with present-day meanings.⁹⁰ Others, even those who are familiar with scholasticism sometimes are mistaken by assuming too rapidly that St. John of the Cross was fundamentally a Thomist.⁹¹ Recent scholars argue that John disagreed with Aquinas on a number of substantive issues. Although his basic intellectual framework was undeniably scholastic, he did not merely rearticulate the scholastic tradition. Rather, he modified received views in order to deal with the spiritual life more clearly and accurately.

A) THE SOUL AS PERSON

Throughout his work, John refers to the human being as "the soul" (**el alma**). The human being, which John usually refers to as the soul, is clearly for him an integrated reality.⁹² He calls it one **suppositum**, a unified whole or one essential being.⁹³

⁹⁰Bernadette Roberts, The Experience of No-Self: A Contemplative Journey (Boulder, CO: Shambhala, 1982), 200-204.

⁹¹ See, Bede Frost, Saint John of the Cross: An Introduction to His Philosophy, Theology and Spirituality (New York: Harper & Bros., 1937); Thomas Merton, The Ascent to Truth (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1951); Leonardo A. McCann, The Doctrine of the Void: The Doctrine of the Void as Propounded by St. John of the Cross in his Major Prose Works and as Viewed in the Light of Thomistic Principles (Toronto: Basilian Press, 1955).

⁹²Julia Ching argues that the Hellenistic philosophical concepts of the "self" were introduced into Medieval Christian theology. It becomes obvious in the definitions given to the words "soul" (Latin: anima) and "person" (Greek and Latin: persona), and these two words, though maintained to be different,

Following the Platonic tradition, for John the word **alma** signifies the whole man, body and soul. It is clear in John that the two parts of the human person constitute one fundamental reality (**dos partes son un supuesto**) such that, even if there are temporary, sensual rebellions of one against the other, each part shares what the other one receives.⁹⁴ First of all, it means the spiritual and life-giving faculty or power; secondly, **alma** signifies that which is vivified by this power, in other words the body. The body, then, is subsumed under the soul. It is the soul which, properly speaking, possesses a body, “she does not live in the body, but rather gives life to the body”⁹⁵ Thus the word “soul” (**alma**), John’s most common term for the human subject, ordinarily refers to the total person, but places the accent on his “interiority and spirituality”; that is to say, for John the human subject’s physical nature is also included in the meaning of “soul,” even though he considers the body to be of secondary importance. John states:

The inferior part (of the soul) which is the sensitive part of man...the superior part which is the rational: in which two parts are enclosed all the harmony of powers and senses of the whole of man.⁹⁶

However, in some passages, John could be misunderstood in connection with this view. He does talk of the soul as essentially separate from the body, culminating in the soul viewing its own flesh as a prison. He remarks for instance that “the presence of the soul in the body resembles the presence of a prisoner in a dark dungeon.”⁹⁷ **‘ella esta en el cuerpo como un gran senor en la carcel, sujeto a mil miserias’**.⁹⁸ This metaphor, most probably of Orphic ancestry, is adopted by Plato and expands into the metaphor of burial and entombment, so dear to Plotinus.⁹⁹

Although John’s view of soul and body seems to be pervaded by an outmoded Neo-Platonic dualism, John also claims, quoting Paul, that the body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. Thus he utilized both Christian-biblical and Platonic views, thus falling heir

are sometimes used almost interchangeably. Julia Ching, “Paradigms of the Self in Buddhism and Christianity,” *Buddhist Christian Studies*, 4 (1984), 33.

⁹³N.1.4.2. See also Kieran Kavanaugh, *The Collected Works of Saint John of the Cross*, 84-85.

⁹⁴N. 1.4.

⁹⁵C.8.3.

⁹⁶Ibid., 25.6.

⁹⁷A.1.3.3.

⁹⁸C.18.1.

⁹⁹Sebastian A Matczak, *God in Contemporary Thought*, (New York: Learned Publications, Inc 1977), 578.

to the resulting tensions between them. For example, he says that once God infuses the soul in the body, the soul is in it as in a dark prison.¹⁰⁰ But such a dark prison-body is also the temple of the Holy Spirit. The concepts of body and soul are very clear, not in their relation to each other but in their need of purgation or purification.

However, one important thing we should mention here is, the difference between John's understanding of body-as-prison and the Neo-Platonic dualistic view of soul-body.¹⁰¹ Though their dualistic structures seem to be the same, their goal as well as their structural contents are quite different. For John, the soul is like a captive in a mortal body subjected to passion and appetites because of original sin whereas in the Platonic system, the soul is rooted in a Plotinian concept of fall, in which the soul descends from the intelligible real to the domain of matter because of its lusting for embodiment.

However, according to John, the soul is not a prisoner in the body even if there are some obstacles to a peaceful union of soul with body (**la union del alma con el cuerpo**), obstacles found throughout temporal and natural reality. The fall, in the Platonic system however, is not to be confused with the Christian doctrine of original sin. In the Plotinian fall the soul descends from the intelligible realm to the domain of matter, due to the seduction of ignoble matter upon the soul, which lusts for embodiment.¹⁰²

For Plato, the role of the philosophy is to effect the purification of the soul and its liberation from the body, by the moral and intellectual asceticism of education. Philosophy serves to suppress the desire and evils of the body, the madness which infects the soul. Thus in the Platonic tradition philosophy possesses therapeutic powers: it effects the purification of the soul and its liberation from the body, suppressing the desires and evils of the body.¹⁰³

This notion of the therapeutic role of philosophy, however, is alien to John. The only fall John comprehends is original sin,¹⁰⁴ the fall of mankind from its primitive

¹⁰⁰A.3.23.4.

¹⁰¹Medieval neo-Platonism posited a hierarchical division in the human mind that separated potentially divine from inherently mundane forms of knowledge. The human being was conceived as a composite made up of a higher immortal soul, a lower mortal soul, and a carnal body. For Plato the point of tension in human spiritual life was not between the body and the two soul, mortal and immortal, but between the mortal body and mortal soul together, and the superior, eternal soul. Maureen Flynn, "The Spiritual Uses of Pain in Spanish Mysticism," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, (1996), 260.

¹⁰²R.A. Herrera, *St. John of the Cross*, (Editorial de Espiritualidad: Madrid, 1968), 50-55.

¹⁰³Ibid., 54.

¹⁰⁴The most extensive reflection on the issue of original sin and its effects upon human nature is found in

rectitude. This fall is reflected in the human race through its debilitating effects. Originally, “the sensory part of their souls was truly subjected and ordered to reason”.¹⁰⁵ But with original sin, this hierarchical government is overthrown, and the soul is thrown into captivity to the body. John does agree with Plato and Plotinus in affirming that the present state of the soul (as imprisoned) is **de facto**, not **de jure**. This present condition does not faithfully mirror human nature; man is neither what he once was nor what he should be. Because some catastrophe had occurred in the dawn of pre-history by which man has been severed from his true self.¹⁰⁶

However, for John, the remedy of the soul is different from Plato. Since Plato recommends the practice of philosophy, which put liberation and purification within our grasp, opening the way to participation in the divine nature, John denies the possibility of this process of liberation by philosophy. John recommends the practice of emptying instead of the practicing of philosophy recommended by Plato. The practice of emptying, however, cannot be successfully attempted if man depends on his own efforts alone. Given God’s participation in the process the contemplative, already aided by the discipline of his religious community under the tutoring of its superior, is able to begin the ascent of the mount of perfection.¹⁰⁷

For John, the individual can be said to take the initiative but this initiative is ultimately a situating of himself in potency to divine action. Only God can initiate the vertical ascent of the soul. There is no ladder among created things to bring man to union with God. We must, John insists, rely on the ladder which God has given us: namely, faith.¹⁰⁸

However, for John, the soul in herself, in her being or substance, is pure and spotless, the perfect image of God. It is only in her rational being, i.e., in her potencies with which she apprehends the world that she is contaminated by sensual things, the world, etc. Sin is the accumulation of the sensations, desires, passions and appetites, etc.,

The Spiritual Canticle. “Even as by means of the forbidden tree of Paradise she was ruined and corrupted in her human nature through Adam, even so upon the Tree of the Cross she was redeemed and restored, by His giving her the hand of His favour and mercy, through His death and passion, and raising the barrier that came from original sin between the soul and God” (Canticle 23.2).

¹⁰⁵A.3.26.5.

¹⁰⁶Ibid., 57.

¹⁰⁷N.2.16.4.

¹⁰⁸A.2.8.5.

which are drawn into the soul by the power of her rational being and affect only her rationality, not her inner core or substantial nature. The soul then acquires sin but she is not herself sinful, consequently the process of purification is only a cleansing of the rust of sin which accumulates as a crust on the outward part of the soul.¹⁰⁹ Thus in purification the substance of the soul is not touched. It is as beautiful and perfect as when God created it. As a matter of fact John does not teach that the body itself and its natural appetites are in themselves sinful. It is the will which sins and perverts these desires to wrong ends. Sin is therefore spiritual in origin, and it should be noted that John did not teach that matter itself is evil.

Thus, according to John, sin can be classified only as sensuous. Without accepting that the soul is the apex or divine spark in the sense of pantheistic and monistic mysticism, John yet agrees with the basic apex or spark idea that the soul in herself is pure and that sin is only the rust that she acquires in her exile on earth.¹¹⁰

Moreover, John's understanding of human nature is based on the belief that the body somehow impedes the complete experience of God, a view he shares with St. Thomas Aquinas who believes that the vision of God cannot be experienced naturally in this life, because the soul united to the body knows only through advertence to phantasm, which cannot serve as "the created likeness" of any spiritual substance.¹¹¹ However, John never taught that the body is evil.

However, John is careful in these instances to qualify claims that can run away toward dualism. The soul seems (**parecia**) to fly away from the body, and in the ascetical life the soul must in some fashion abandon the body. These qualifiers keep John's bold defenses of asceticism from falling over into dualism.

In fact, the negativity of the body in John's mystical account is in no way a precursor to seventeenth and eighteenth-century Jansenism. The separateness between the spirit and the flesh found in Jansenism is not necessary to contemplation. This type of rigor is not at all compatible with John's asceticism.¹¹² Of course, there are temporary sensual rebellions of one against the other, but it is clear in John that the two parts of the

¹⁰⁹N.2.6.1; N.2.10.2.

¹¹⁰According to John the soul is the creation of God and not a Divine spark from God's being. A.1.9.1.

¹¹¹Aquinas Thomas, *Summa Contra Gentiles III*, trans by Anton C. Pegis (New York: Doubleday & Co., Image Books, 1955-1957), 47.

¹¹²Daniel A. Dombrowski, *St. John of the Cross*, (State University of New York Press, 1992), 91.

human person constitute one fundamental reality. John was, in fact, influenced by hylomorphism, but as we have seen he was more consistent than either Aristotle or Saint Thomas Aquinas in his refusal to adopt a monopolar theism.¹¹³

B) HUMAN BEING: SENSORY AND SPIRITUAL PARTS

St. John of the Cross makes a clear distinction, not between body and soul, but between the sensory and spiritual parts of the person. The soul, John says, has both a “sensory” and a “spiritual” dimension. The “sensory part” of the soul includes not only the senses but also the body and sensory appetites.¹¹⁴ This sensory, or lower, part possesses two groups of sense faculties: the five external senses and the internal senses of imagination and phantasy.¹¹⁵ These faculties are called “exterior” because they deal with material or corporeal objects rather than immaterial knowledge which belongs to the interior, or spiritual, faculties of the soul. The sensory part of the soul is “inferior” to the “spiritual” which is said to be “superior” and “interior.”¹¹⁶

The spiritual part is interior because it possesses those faculties which deal with the universal aspects of reality that do not exist in nature but which must be intellectually abstracted from sense experience. Following the Augustinian tradition, John holds that there are three spiritual faculties: memory, will, and the intellect, which are the potencies of the rational or spiritual part of the soul. Payne says that this same tripartite division is common in many of the mystics of the church.¹¹⁷

In the light of these definitions, it may be said that in John’s terminology “soul” can be divided into two parts: the sensory part of the soul is the basis of the five senses, while the spiritual part of the soul is the seat of the three functions, intellect, will and memory. It also may mean three different things: 1. Soul as the higher part, or spirit; 2, soul as the unity of the “spiritual” and “sensitive” part; 3. soul in the general sense of

¹¹³Ibid.,

¹¹⁴Kieran Kavanaugh, *The Collected Works of Saint John of the Cross*, 88.

¹¹⁵A.2.11.1; 2.12.1,3.

¹¹⁶A.1.13.10; 2.2.2. These designations of superior and inferior, interior and exterior are only figures of speech and do not actually refer to spatial relations within the soul. It becomes confusing when in one place John says that the sensory part, including the internal senses, is “exterior” (i.e., in relation to the spiritual); but then says that the internal senses are “interior” (i.e., in relation to the external senses).

¹¹⁷Payne, 23. Payne includes such important authors as Bonaventure, Ruysbroeck, Catherine of Siena, and Teresa of Avila.

comprehending man in his totality.¹¹⁸

In distinguishing between the higher part, spirit, and the lower part, soul, John follows the Platonic tradition, although he is also under Aristotelian-Thomistic influence.¹¹⁹ When God infuses the soul into the body, she is like a blank tablet where nothing is painted, and only through the senses is the soul able to know.¹²⁰ It is clear, then, that both Plato and Aristotle, as mediated through the Christian tradition, are combined to produce the psychological-anthropological foundations for John's doctrine. It was indeed upon the scholastic understanding of the soul that John developed his own mystical theology. By dismantling the classical model of the **anima**, he attempted to isolate the pure core of the transcendent spirit from the mind and its sensory apparatus. This means, first of all, systematically stripping away from the superior soul all information derived from the five bodily senses.¹²¹

The logic of this system of sensible and spiritual faculties involves the foundational principle that each faculty has a **modus operandi** limited, in and of itself, by its natural and proper operations. We should notice here that the spiritual and sense dichotomy plays a crucial role in John's system. It forms the foundation for John's interpretation of the Pauline distinction between the "old" and "new" man.¹²² Most of the time John seems to use this notion of the two "parts" or "levels" of the soul primarily to speak about two basic and opposing orientations of the individual, either toward God or toward the satisfaction of selfish inclinations. All of these points will be explained more fully in the following analysis of the structure of the soul according to St. John.

However, it is important to remember that even in the complex division into various faculties, there is the fundamental unity of the human person. To lose sight of this unity of the human person, in John's understanding of the soul, is to run the risk of falsely reading a dualism into his doctrine. The sensory and spiritual parts of the person "form one **suppositum**" (**un supuesto**), in which each part "usually shares according to its

¹¹⁸Bede Frost, *St. John of the Cross*, 121.

¹¹⁹Bernard McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism: Origins to the Fifth Century*, vol. 1 of *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism*, 4 vols. (New York: Crossroad, 1991), 243-259. Here Bernard describes that the spiritual faculties of Aquinas and Aristotle are two-fold, whereas, Augustine's position is three-fold: the intellect, memory, and will.

¹²⁰N.1.3:3.

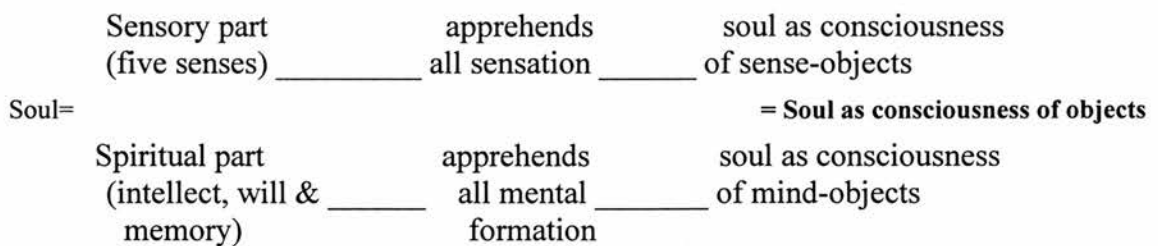
¹²¹Maureen Flynn, "The Spiritual Uses of Pain in Spanish Mysticism," 267-268.

¹²²A.2.19.11.

mode what the other receives.”¹²³ The following diagram shows John’s view of human structure.

Structure of the Soul		
Sensory Part: Exterior		Spiritual Part: Interior
External Senses	Internal Senses	Spiritual Faculties: Memory Intellect Will
Sight Hearing Taste Smell Touch	Phantasy Imagination	

Thus John’s soul may thus be functionally described in terms of consciousness: soul is the consciousness of objects, both sensory and mental. The following diagram will help to clarify the point:



1) The Sensory Part of the Soul

As pointed out above, the sensory part (**la parte sensitiva**) of the soul consists of the body, the external and internal senses, and the sensory appetites. The external and the internal senses are to be “exterior” in that they are concerned with the powers of

¹²³N.1.4.2; 2.3.1.

perception, that is, with knowing corporeal objects in the world.¹²⁴ The sensory appetites are a function of the senses in that they are natural affinities for those appropriate satisfying objects perceived by the faculties.¹²⁵

a. The Body as Part of the Soul

St. John of the Cross did not say much about the body. The body is not a central concern in John's thought. For John, the body is not something other than the soul. The human person is body and spirit together in unity. However, he believes that the body is very important because it affects a person's spiritual development. Thus the body is essential to the soul's spiritual development. It is first of all through the body and its sensory faculties that the soul becomes acquainted with God. Through its senses, the soul experiences the traces of God's image etched within creation. Moreover, the body is the medium of the soul's participation in the church on earth.¹²⁶ As a temple of the Holy Spirit, the body serves God and through this service the body reaches its fulfillment in this life as a completely integrated part of the soul when the soul comes to move fully in love.¹²⁷

However, there are some negative effects which the body can bring to the soul. Since the body is temporal and has fleshly existence, it can bring problems to the soul. The body, because of its sensual weakness, tends to frustrate the spiritual development of a person.¹²⁸ For example, by taking pride in one's "beauty, grace, elegance, bodily constitution, and all other corporeal endowments" the body can inhibit spiritual growth.¹²⁹

Following the teaching of St. Paul concerning the antagonism between the spirit and the flesh, John insists that the body must be mortified in all of its temporal, sensual desires and satisfactions.¹³⁰ Alain Cugno, commenting on John's doctrine concerning the body, declares that mortification is not a means of reaching God, but is the "consequence" of the soul's love for God and God's love for the soul.¹³¹

¹²⁴A.2.8.4; 2.10.3.

¹²⁵Kavanaugh, *The Collected Works of the St. John of the Cross*, 47-9.

¹²⁶C.40. 5-7.

¹²⁷C. 28.8.

¹²⁸C.3.1.10.

¹²⁹A.3.21.1.

¹³⁰A.2.17.8.

¹³¹Alain Cugno, *Saint John of the Cross: Reflections on Mystical Experience*, trans. Barbara Wall (New

John's understanding of the human body, then, is by no means purely negative. For John the human body is a source of certain difficulties as well as being essential in the spiritual life. John's solution, however, is not to reject the body, but rather to bring it into harmony with the other constitutions of human nature. In this way, the human person, as an integrated being is able to participate in mystical "union" with God.

b. The External Senses

The five external senses are presented by John in this order: sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch. The first three faculties are important in John's writing insofar as they provide for certain kinds of religious experiences such as "vision," "locutions," and "spiritual feeling." And the purpose of the external senses is to receive the stimuli, or sense impressions, of particular objects to be transmitted to the internal senses.¹³² John believes that all our natural knowledge of the world is ultimately derived from sensory experience. Thus John adopts an empiricist position regarding man's unaided cognitive abilities. In this sense, he is not a Platonist.

2) The Internal Senses: Phantasy

Besides five external senses, there are two internal senses in John's sensory part of the soul. The internal senses are imagination and phantasy. These internal senses mediate between the external senses and the spiritual faculty of intellect. However, since intellect cannot directly receive material forms or their sense impressions, it needs immaterial forms to be produced from the information provided by the senses. Thus, phantasy collects the impressions of external objects received through sight, hearing, taste, touch, and smell, and converts them into a mental image or phantasm. Thus phantasm makes it possible for the intellect to abstract an immaterial intelligible form from the impression received by the senses. Phantasy therefore acts as a mediator between sense impression and the intellectual acts of conception, judgement, and reasoning. This will be explained in more detail in the section on the intellect.

The Imagination, is the mind's power to construct new and more complex images from the materials contained in phantasy. Thus, for example, we can imagine a man with a horse's head, or a blue lemon, for although such things do not exist their

York: Seabury, 1982), 126.

components do; but we cannot imagine a two-sided triangle or a colour not derived from the constituents of the rainbow because they fall outside our perceptual experience. However, even though the imagination can construct new and more elaborate images, it can do this only because these things have previously been experienced through the exterior senses.

Thus following the Thomist theory of knowledge, John says that imagination can only work on such things as fall within our perceptual experience. He states: “The soul is like a **tabula rasa** (clean slate) when God infuses it into the body, so that it is ignorant without the knowledge it receives through the senses, because no knowledge is (naturally) communicated to it from any other source.”¹³³ Thus for John, natural knowledge, which depends on the senses, is elaborated from the images and phantasms of external objects and terminates in intellectual apprehension. But it is evident from the whole process of cognition that knowledge cannot be had without an immediate sense experience; that is, without the phantasm or species of the internal senses. Therefore, John continues, not just any kind of sense experience suffices for providing knowledge, that is, for uniting the intellect with the object known, but that which enables the interior sense to produce its species or image.

Moreover, the phantasy and imagination work together through the agency of memory. Through the mediation of memory, images are taken from phantasy and placed in the imagination for constructing new images and “stringing them together” into an imagistic line of thought.¹³⁴ These new forms or images, like the images from which they were constructed, are stored in the phantasy, not in memory. We notice here that the integral unity of the human person in John’s understanding of the human structure. Neither the sensory nor the spiritual powers are able to function properly without each other’s help.¹³⁵

a. The Internal Senses and Meditation

Finally, these two internal senses play an important role in meditation. For John the term “meditation” refers mostly to a discursive form of prayer. Meditation is the

¹³²A.1.3.2.

¹³³A.1.3.3.

¹³⁴A.2.12.3.

¹³⁵A.2.8.5.

discursive use of words and images in mental prayer.¹³⁶ John describes meditation as:

A discursive act using forms, figures, and images, imagined and fashioned by these senses for example, the imagining of Christ crucified, or at the pillar, or at another station (**paso**); or of God seated with great majesty upon a throne; or the imagining and considering of glory as a beautiful light, etc.¹³⁷

Thus the purpose of meditation is to bring the soul to knowledge and love of God. Especially, it is for the “spiritual beginner” who has not yet entered the loving knowledge of God which is contemplative prayer. It provides him with knowledge of God, and raises desires to higher things. It is therefore a sensitive means by which beginners dispose their spirit and habituate it to spiritual things.

Concerning meditation Kavanaugh describes that John follows a line from Aquinas to Aristotle. He states:

Aristotle held that rational thought, which for him is quite distinct from imagination, cannot exist apart from imagination, the soul never thinking without an image. To understand actually, the intellect needs the act of imagination. Aristotle’s theory that the operations of thinking are always dependent on acts of imagination, does not imply that imagination is always accompanied by abstract or rational thought; sometimes imagination may be active without judgement or reasoning, as will be seen later in initial contemplation.¹³⁸

Thus for John, meditation is the work of the faculties in using forms, figures, and images by the senses. However, since God is immaterial so that He cannot be represented by sensible things, meditation will suffer from the limitations present in all thought using “forms and figures.” And finally meditation must be left behind at a certain point in the spiritual life. For the mind is preoccupied with its forms and images and, we are not capable of direct knowledge of God’s essence through meditation.

F. Cordero, in his article “**La teología espiritual de Santa Teresa de Jesús, reaccion contra el dualismo neoplatónico,**”¹³⁹ interprets the instructions of John of the Cross about not praying by meditating actively on any specific intellectual content or

¹³⁶Kieran Kavanaugh, *The Collected Works of Saint John of the Cross*, 97.

¹³⁷A.2.12.3.

¹³⁸Kieran Kavanaugh, *The Collected Works of Saint John of the Cross*, 97.

¹³⁹Cordero, F. “La teología espiritual de Santa Teresa de Jesús, reaccion contra el dualismo neoplatónico” *Revista Espanola de Teología*, vol. 1 (1970), 3-38.

with imagery as implying a rejection of man's material or bodily existence. Cordero further states that this teaching about rejecting rational activity or the use of the imagination in prayer is the central aspect of the '**via negativa**,' originating with Pseudo-Dionysius.¹⁴⁰

3) The Spiritual Part of the Soul

We are now in a position to consider the second level of operation in the soul. The sensitive part receives information through the sense organs and, by means of its five exterior corporeal senses and two internal corporeal senses, prepares the material for further assessment. This further assessment occurs at the second level of operation which John calls the higher part or spiritual part of the soul. This spiritual part possesses the three faculties of intellect, memory, and will. This threefold division breaks from Thomism (intellect and will) with John's inclusion of memory. However, there are different opinions among commentators upon John's departure from Thomism. One Carmelite writer claims that there is a real distinction between the intellect and the memory in John's doctrine, but admits that he does not know why John made it..

He suspects that it was due to John's following in this the English Carmelite, John Bacon, who taught that the proper object of the intellectual memory was the particular past as past, which St. Thomas denies in that the intellect is concerned not with the particular but with the universal. Another writer argues this assertion and insists that John does not make a real distinction, in a philosophical sense, between intellect and memory, and that the difference between Thomas and John on this question is only apparent not actual. It is not easy to find an exact reason why John separated himself from Thomas in this matter. But one apparent thing is that John did not write primarily as a philosopher but as a guide to the higher reaches of the spiritual and mystical life, and that as such he naturally adopts the traditional Augustinian division of the faculties which is common to all spiritual writers, who treat the subject, not from the ontological point of view, as does St. Thomas, but from a psychological, spiritual, and practical

¹⁴⁰Via negativa in pseudo-Dionysius is the way to experiencing God's transcendence by accepting the impossibility of the human intelligence to grasp God, and by striving to approach this transcendent God through cooperation with the power of the divine eros which penetrates all of creation and attracts it to the source of all eros, the Father of all. Marilyn May Mallory, Christian Mysticism: Transcending Techniques, 120-125.

view point.¹⁴¹ Thus John considers the intellect as being distinct from memory. The special function of the intellect is to perceive the intelligible world, i.e. the inner “forms” of things, of which the senses only perceive the outward matter, whereas the memory, with the imagination, is to picture in phantasm or images the things perceived by the intellect and to keep them in mind.

a. The Spiritual Faculties: Intellect.

For John, though the spiritual and sensory parts of the soul are in unity, the spiritual faculties are the primary locus of contemplative development. Because the spiritual faculties are the focus of transformation and union, they draw much greater attention from John than do the sensory faculties. Kevin Culligan points out:

Because natural knowledge, memories, and affective or emotional experiences cannot in themselves transform the person in God, these faculties must be freed from distinct ideas, memories, and experiences to receive God’s loving knowledge in contemplation which elevates the person to divine union.¹⁴²

For this reason, the sensory part of the soul, which knows and experiences only the finite, must become fully subject to the spiritual part in which love of God and divine wisdom are communicated. And this is the reason why John gave more importance to spiritual faculties than sensory faculties.

The intellect, for which John commonly uses the term (**entendimiento**), usually translated understanding, is the highest power of the soul. Because by it man apprehends the true nature of things by abstracting from them all that is of the particular in order to grasp the universal and makes all things his own after his own manner. Thus the intellect is concerned with knowing reality through the formation of universal concepts or ideas. This universal knowledge of reality is immaterial and can only be acquired through a process which abstracts universal forms from material objects. John states:

“he must have the phantasm and figures of objects present in themselves or in their resemblances; in no other way can he gain knowledge for as philosophers say: **Ab objecto et potentia paritur notitia**. That is: from the object that is present and the

¹⁴¹Bede Frost, *St. John of the Cross*, 129-131.

¹⁴²Kevin Culligan, “Mysticism, Transformation and Spiritual Disciplines: The Teaching of St. John of the Cross,” *Spiritual Life* 30 (Fall 1984), 137.

faculty, knowledge is born in the soul.”¹⁴³ For “the order in which the soul gains knowledge is through forms and images of created things, and the manner by which it gains this knowledge and wisdom is through the senses.”¹⁴⁴

The senses, however, can perceive only corporeal objects which, being material forms, are unknowable by the intellect and lacking in universal application. As Copleston puts it:

Through sensation we can apprehend only particular men or trees, for example, and the interior images or phantasm of men or trees are always particular. Even if we have a composite image of man, not representing any one actual man distinctly but representing many confusedly, it is still particular, since the images or parts of the images of particular actual men coalesce to form an image which may be ‘generic’ in respect of actual particular men but which is itself none the less particular, the images of a particular imagined man. . . the image of a man must be either of a man who has or of a man who has not some hair on his head. If the former, it does not in that respect represent bald men; if the latter, it does not in that respect represent men who are not bald. . .¹⁴⁵

The sense impressions of material objects must therefore be transformed into an immaterial form which is intelligible to the intellect and this process is called ‘abstraction’ by the scholastics. John says that the five external senses only apprehend the outside of things, that which is material and physical about them; the interior senses only grasp the images or phantasm of things; the intellect alone is capable of apprehending the “forms” and substances of things which are of a spiritual, immaterial nature which “the sensitive part has no capacity to receive.”¹⁴⁶ Speaking in terms of “abstraction,” John says that intellect comes to the interior sense of imagination and phantasy “as if to a port or place of provision, in order to give and to receive” (A.2.16.4), and adds that the role of the intellect is “to form the intelligible species (**inteligencias**) and remove from them the iron of species and phantasm (**del hierro de las especies y fantasias**).”¹⁴⁷

Thus, for John, the intellect interacts with internal senses to produce a mental image

¹⁴³A.2.3.2.

¹⁴⁴A.2.17.3.

¹⁴⁵Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, 8 vols. (Westminster, Maryland: Newman Press, 1946-1966), vol.2: *Mediaeval Philosophy: Augustine to Scotus* (1950), 389.

¹⁴⁶N.1.10.4.

¹⁴⁷A.2.8.5.

of things. This mental image, converted from sense impressions, is called a phantasm. This phantasm is a quasi-material image and needs a further conversion in order for it to be apprehended by the spiritual faculty of intellect which knows universal concepts and not particular, concrete objects.

In the process of conversion from phantasm to universal concept, the intellect first reflects upon the phantasm and then forms an idea about the nature of the object. The nature of the object is thereby known through this abstraction by reflection upon the phantasm.¹⁴⁸

In this process of abstraction John, following Aquinas, divides the intellect into an active and a passive intellect. The active intellect illuminates the phantasm and abstracts from it some knowledge which is intelligible to the passive intellect whose task it is to form the universal concept. Thus, for example, by “illuminating” a particular mental image of a human being, the active intellect “renders visible the intelligible aspect of the phantasm,” and produces in the intellect the universal concept of man as a rational animal; this is a concept of man’s essence, and therefore covers all human beings. This abstracted knowledge is called, by the followers of Aquinas, the “impressed intelligible species.” This species is an immaterial form which makes intelligible the nature of a particular thing one has perceived so that a universal idea of a thing can be formed in the passive intellect.¹⁴⁹ The universal idea, or concept, is in turn called the “expressed intelligible species.”¹⁵⁰

According to this account, then, the normal cognition process occurs when the passive intellect is informed by the “intelligible species of sensible things”, a species abstracted by the active intellect from the corresponding phantasm.

However, according to John, there are two ways in which the intellect can receive knowledge, the one natural and the other supernatural. The natural is all that the intellect can understand whether by means of the bodily senses or by its own act. The supernatural is all that is given to the intellect above its natural ability and capacity.¹⁵¹ It exceeds the natural power of the intellect. It is knowledge that the intellect could never

¹⁴⁸A.2.8.5.

¹⁴⁹Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, vol 1, 79, 3 (New York: Benziger Bros, Inc 1947), 1301.

¹⁵⁰*Ibid.*, vol 1. 79. 2-4.

¹⁵¹A.2.10.2.

attain by its own efforts because such knowledge is not gained through sense experience of the things themselves or their representations. The natural power and capacity of the intellect do not extend to such things and for that reason, says John, they are known in a supernatural manner.¹⁵²

There is a further division of knowledge received supernaturally. The supernatural knowledge that is received through the external or internal senses is called corporeal supernatural knowledge; that which is received directly into the intellect without the intervention of the senses is called spiritual supernatural knowledge. The spiritual supernatural knowledge is again subdivided into distinct, particular knowledge and that which is confused, general and dark. Finally, the distinct, particular knowledge is of four kinds: visions, revelations, locutions and spiritual feelings; the general and dark knowledge, however, is of one kind only, which is contemplation that is given in faith.¹⁵³ A diagram will make this clear.

Intellect receives Knowledge		
Naturally	Super-naturally	
By use of senses and faculties	Corporeal	Spiritual
	Through exterior and interior senses	Through Contemplation
	Visions. Revelations. Locutions. Spiritual taste.	

¹⁵²A.2.3.1.

¹⁵³A.2.10.4.

Moreover, there is another important theory of John's doctrine of cognition which concerns the participation of the subject in the object of cognition. The key to this theory is the notion that the subject somehow participates in the object of his cognition, that the mind in its own way becomes whatever it knows. According to Aquinas and his followers including John, in the production of the expressed intelligible species by the passive intellect, the faculty of intellect becomes intentionally the object of its knowledge.

In the process of cognition these forms, while existing physically, or ontologically, in the extramental object, enter the knowing subject and became, intentionally, his own forms. They do not become the forms of that subject physically, since this would make the subject become ontologically whatever he knows—e.g., a man would thus become a young black cat. But the forms become intentionally his, and he becomes intentionally whatever he knows.¹⁵⁴

To draw an example of knowing a tree, one could say that, although the tree has material existence outside the intellect, by knowing it, the intellect takes the form of the tree into itself according to its own immaterial way of understanding. The consequence of this knowing is such that the tree now has an immaterial existence within the mind which possesses knowledge of it.¹⁵⁵

This union, however, is not a physical or ontological union, otherwise the knowing subject would physically become the object known. The subject, through its intellect, becomes one with the form of the object intentionally, although the subject and object continue to remain themselves.

b. Insufficiency of the Intellect

Though the intellect is an important means for knowledge in John's doctrine, it has its own limit. It has insufficiency and incapacity for attaining union with the divinity by its own power. John gives two reasons for its insufficiency.

¹⁵⁴ *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, (New York: McGraw Hill, 1967-1979), s.v. "Knowledge, Process of," by J. F. Doncel.

¹⁵⁵ St. John follows the Thomistic notion of obediential potency. Regarding the spiritual faculties, especially the intellect, this means that while the normal use of the spiritual faculties is limited, they do have the natural possibility of union with God. We can come to know and love God and this is within our faculties' capacities. But we cannot use a natural source to come to this union. We have a capacity for full union, but that union is not within our powers to effect. See Elizabeth Wilhelmsen, Cognition and Communication in St. John of the Cross, (New York: Lang, 1985), 6ff.

For, if we speak of natural knowledge, since the intellect cannot know anything except what is contained in and is presented in the forms and images of things received through the bodily senses- which things, we have said, cannot serve as means-it cannot make use of its natural knowledge.¹⁵⁶

This statement premises the whole theory of the nature of intellectual cognition which, in the state of the union of body and soul, depends on the senses. Consequently what intellect gains through the senses is nothing more than natural things, indeed material things, which lack any essential relation or proportion of likeness to divinity. Therefore intellect, which in this life is ordained to the knowledge of such things, is excluded from the possibility of attaining the divine essence.

If we speak of supernatural knowledge, so far as is possible in this life by its ordinary power, the intellect in its prison of the body has no disposition or capacity for receiving clear knowledge of God. Such knowledge does not belong to this state; and one must either die or not receive it.¹⁵⁷

This statement clearly explains that the divine essence is excluded as long as the soul is limited to the body. John repeatedly emphasizes:

Therefore no supernatural apprehension or knowledge in this mortal state can serve as a proximate means to the lofty union of love with God. Whatever the intellect can understand, the will experience, and the imagination portray is, as we have said, most unlike and disproportionate to God.¹⁵⁸

For John, there is no ladder among any finite, knowable things that can render God knowable to the intellect.¹⁵⁹ John insists:

Creatures, earthly or heavenly, and all distinct ideas and images, natural or supernatural, that can be the objects of a person's faculties, are incomparable and unproportioned to God's being. God does not fall under. . . genus and species, whereas, according to theologians, creatures do. And the soul is not capable of receiving clearly and distinctly in this life what does not fall under. . . genus and species.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁶A.2.8.4.

¹⁵⁷Ibid.

¹⁵⁸A.2.8.5.

¹⁵⁹John states that: "no creature or knowledge comprehensible to the intellect can serve it as a proximate means for the divine union with God" A.2.8.0.

¹⁶⁰A.3.12.1.

It is very clear to John that creatures are nothing compared with God. John realizes that reason has its limitations because nothing, strictly speaking, equals God, and therefore not even the efforts of the most rational human being can fully comprehend God.¹⁶¹ They are therefore incapable of filling the spiritual faculties' infinite capacity for knowledge and love. Therefore, the soul is called to leave behind all particular knowledge in order to journey farther towards union with God. Consequently, only God can give infinite fulfillment to the spiritual soul.¹⁶²

Here we can see that John's understanding of the intellect follows Aquinas' view. As Thomas says, one of the most important consequences of our natural ordering toward knowledge of the sensible through the forms abstracted from phantasm is that we can have no "essential" knowledge of God or spiritual substances while united to the body. Because they are not material, such substances cannot be sensed; hence no phantasm of them can be constructed from which the active intellect could produce a concept of their essence.¹⁶³

However, even though the intellect is unable to have essential knowledge of God, Thomas, recognizes the possibility of some limited natural knowledge of God. According to Thomas, since God is the cause of created things, it is possible to attain some knowledge of Him. Thomas says:

. . . Because (sensible things) are His effects and depends on their cause, we can be led from them so far as to know of God whether he exists and to know of Him what must necessarily belong to Him, as the first cause of all things, exceeding all things caused by Him.

Hence we know. . . His relationship with creatures so far as to be the cause of them all; also that creatures differ from Him, in as much as He is not in any way part of what is caused by Him; and that creatures are not removed from Him by reason of any defect on His part, but because he super exceeds them all.¹⁶⁴

Thus, according to Aquinas, we can know that there is God, who is not only immaterial, but also wise, powerful, loving, and so on. Though this is not essential knowledge of God, it is at least within our natural capacities which make use of ordinary sensible species.

¹⁶¹A.1.5.

¹⁶²A.3.11.1-3.

¹⁶³Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, Q. 12.

Following Thomas' view, John also recognizes the possibility of some limited natural knowledge of God. John does not talk in any detail about inferring God's existence from that of the world, but he does talk of the harmony and beauty of creatures as pointing to their Creator.¹⁶⁵

c. The Intellect and Renunciation

As I already mentioned earlier in this chapter, renunciation is the most important theme for understanding John's doctrine. Without knowing about renunciation, the study of John's spirituality would be in vain. The same would apply in studying John's concept of the intellect.

For John, as I noted in the previous section, the intellect must be emptied of everything relating to sense (**todo lo que puede caer en el sentido**), because all ideas and images, natural or supernatural, received and understood through the intellect are incomparable and unproportioned to God's being.¹⁶⁶ There is no ladder among any finite, knowable things that can render God knowable to the intellect.

There is also another important reason why John emphasizes the necessity of emptying the intellect. By accepting the Thomistic theory of knowledge, John says that "two contraries cannot exist in the same subject."¹⁶⁷ As Thomas says:

The reason for this is that it is impossible for one and the same subject to be perfected at the same time by many forms of one genus and diverse species, just as it is impossible for one and the same body at the same time to have different colors or different shape. Now all intelligible species belong to one genus, because they are perfections of one intellectual faculty: although the things which the species represent belong to different genera. Therefore it is impossible for one and the same intellect to be perfected at the same time by different intelligible species so as actually to understand different things.¹⁶⁸

John points out that God allows nothing else to dwell together with Him. Thus John maintains that the intellect cannot be simultaneously informed by natural knowledge and the substantial knowledge given in contemplation.¹⁶⁹ This means that, only when a

¹⁶⁴Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, 12, 12.

¹⁶⁵C.4.3.5.

¹⁶⁶A.3.12.1.

¹⁶⁷A.1.6.1.

¹⁶⁸Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, 85, 4.

¹⁶⁹For John, though the intellect by its own power extends itself only to natural knowledge, it has a

person has finished emptying himself of all forms and apprehensible images, can God give substantial knowledge to the soul.¹⁷⁰ John explains the nature of this way of emptying: In order to journey to God the intellect must be perfected in the darkness of faith, the memory in the emptiness of hope, and the will in the darkness and absence of every affection. **(se ha de perfeccionar el entendimiento en la tiniebla de la fe, la memoria en el vacío de la esperanza, y de enterrar la voluntad en la carencia y desnudez de todo afecto para ir a dios)**¹⁷¹ The negative way in Johannine mysticism means that a person must void the natural operations of the soul. The void is total and uncompromising, equal to the Plotinian dictum: cut away everything. So that when everything unlike and unconformed to God is cast out, the soul may receive the likeness of God.¹⁷² A person's intellect, therefore, must be empty and annihilated of all these apprehensions so that it can perceive everything with universality.¹⁷³

For John, the power of rational reflection was no more than another psychic illusion. John had profound doubts about the value of consciousness as a source of revelation. Along with many of his radical colleagues of the sixteenth century he believed that self-consciousness prevents us from seeing anything beyond our own private minds.¹⁷⁴

In support of his teaching that the intellect must not hold on to any particular knowledge, John quotes a phrase from St. Paul (2 Cor. 6:10): "having nothing, yet possessing all things." However, John gives the Pauline phrase a Plotinian interpretation. Having nothing means that the spirit is purged and annihilated of all particular knowledge, not understanding anything, and remaining in emptiness and darkness **(purgado y aniquilado acerca de todas particulares aficiones e inteligencias, que en este no gustar nada ni entender nada en particular, morando en su vacío, oscuridad y tinieblas)**.¹⁷⁵ Thus the spirit is prepared to receive all. The Pauline nothing

potency for the supernatural whenever God wants to raise it to a supernatural act. John says explicitly that God communicates knowledge directly to the passive intellect in contemplation. For example, John speaks of the soul becoming deiform in contemplation and being raised from the natural to divine. This means, that it cannot be gained only by ascetical effort to suppress all particular desires, but requires the intervention of God. (see *Ascent* 3.2.8; 2.15.2).

¹⁷⁰It should be noted that John sometimes uses the terms "substantial" and "essential" as synonyms. See, *Ascent* 2.5.3; *Canticle*. 14. 14.

¹⁷¹A.2.6.1.

¹⁷²A.2.5.4.

¹⁷³N.2.8.5.

¹⁷⁴Maureen Flynn, "The Spiritual Uses of Pain in Spanish Mysticism," 269

¹⁷⁵*Ibid.*

—all polarity becomes in John the Neoplatonic polarity of **Nada-Todo**. Here is an example of the Pauline opposition between the flesh and the spirit transposed into the vocabulary of Neoplatonism.

It was John who emphasized complete suspension of the intellect which brought his theology into conflict with traditional Western philosophy. It was John's theology which distrusted the human intellect in conceiving the nature of God which brought the most challenges to Western metaphysics prior to twentieth-century philosophical developments. John had profound doubts about the value of intellect as a source of revelation.¹⁷⁶

d. The Intellect and Faith

For John, since the intellect itself is incapable of conceiving or receiving the likeness of divinity, it does not suffice for reaching divinity in revealed truth. John, therefore, asserts that faith alone provides the only proportionate and proximate means to divine union.¹⁷⁷ Faith is the only means by which the intellect can be transformed into divine union with God because faith can transcend the natural operations of the intellect, and the normal ways of understanding.¹⁷⁸ It is worth recalling at this point the distinction between faith and knowledge. Our human knowledge derives from sense perceptions and is a body of organized scientific information, whereas "faith ...is a habit of the soul, certain and obscure."¹⁷⁹ Therefore, "All that. . .the intellect can receive and understand in this life is not, nor can it be, a proximate means to union with God,"¹⁸⁰ because they are not appropriate means to achieve the desired end.

Therefore, faith is the appropriate means because faith is grounded in revelation from God, and the intellect needs to be transformed by the virtue of faith in order to be united with God. Faith is required to strip consciousness of all content. Faith possesses an essential likeness to God, for which reason it is capable of uniting the intellect with

¹⁷⁶Ibid., 269-270.

¹⁷⁷For Dionysius, and also for John, union presupposes faith and love. The human is thus called in faith and love to commune with the divine realities. Thus for Dionysius, in order to have union with God one must abandon "all the senses and the intellectual energies and everything that is sensible or intelligible, everything that is not and that is," and raise oneself "in unknowing toward union." See Louis Bouyer, "Pseudo- Dionysius and the Mysticism of the Fathers," *A History of Christian Spirituality*, (New York: Seabury Press, 1982), 410-412

¹⁷⁸A.2.3.3.

¹⁷⁹A.2.3.1.

God.¹⁸¹ John states:

Faith . . . alone is the proximate and proportionate means by which the soul is united with God; for such is the likeness between faith and God that there is no other difference except either to see God or to believe in him.¹⁸²

In speaking of the nature of faith, John clearly states that faith transcends the order of creatures and the limitation of any modality because it is supernatural in essence, possessing an essential likeness to divinity. That is why it can lead the intellect to union with divinity. Thus, for John, faith's transcendence over every limited modality is based on its essential likeness to divinity, on the fact that it is substantially supernatural.

Faith is said to have and cause a likeness to God for two reasons: first, because of its proportion to God; secondly, because of the state it produces in the intellect. The first reason is objective, since faith unites the intellect with God by proposing to it that which truly exists in God. The second reason is especially interesting, and it is typical of the concept of faith that is presented consistently in the works of John. He says that faith bestows on the intellect a likeness to God because as God in himself, in his intimate nature, is darkness to the intellect, so faith obscures and darkens the intellect. However, this faith is not a mere belief in images and concepts, a belief in a revelation made merely in terms which man can understand and for this reason, which merely enters by hearing; but the faith concerning which John speaks is an experience of divinity, of what these words of the creed inadequately symbolize. From this it can be seen once more that faith is mystical intelligence, which is confused or obscure.¹⁸³

Moreover, for John, faith is analogous to an infinitely brilliant light. It is an infused, excessive light whereby the intellect attains to divinity by a light that is not proper to itself. Thus God is manifested to the intellect through the divine light. The reason why the virtue of faith surpasses every created nature and every intellect is the divine light that is present in faith. With this we arrive at a precise concept of the essential likeness attributed to faith.

Faith, thus, causes a darkness and emptiness in the intellect according to its natural

¹⁸⁰A.2.8.4.

¹⁸¹Maureen Flynn, "The Spiritual Uses of Pain in Spanish Mysticism," 270.

¹⁸²A.2.8.5.

¹⁸³N.1.10.6.

way of operation, which is that of reasoning and imagination, withdrawing it from the things of sense and from its low manner of working, reason being a defect of the intellect, in order to bring it to, and perfect its highest capacity, that of intuitive contemplation, the act of pure intelligence, as John calls it.¹⁸⁴

Thus faith purifies, empties and perfects the intellect by informing it with a new knowledge which does not depend upon processes of reasoning and the like but solely upon God. Faith itself blinds the intellect of any other knowledge, and it can also be the effect it causes. Namely, it brings the dark night and causes more faith in the soul. In this sense the term faith is part of the active night of the spirit; it is the active cultivating of our effort, our openness, and our surrender of the intellect to God in Christ.¹⁸⁵

As far as the relationship between faith and intellect is concerned, we may see some important characteristics between them. That is, light and darkness are so intimately related to the virtue of faith that either one can be predicated of faith with equal justification. John uses a doctrine which was common in his day:

Faith, say the theologians, is a habit of the soul which is both certain and obscure. The reason for its being an obscure habit is because it makes us believe in truths revealed by God Himself, which truths are above every natural light and exceed all human understanding without any proportion.¹⁸⁶

In other words, faith has two different functions, light and darkness, in relation to the intellect. Through faith the intellect enters into the inner dynamism of that excessive light in which God manifests himself to the soul. This infused light takes control of the intellect. It overwhelms and oppresses the intellect,¹⁸⁷ meaning the natural light of the intellect that, in a given situation, wavers helplessly before the unknown. This excessive light extinguishes the natural light of the intellect, as the light of the sun overwhelms all

¹⁸⁴William Johnston, *Mystical Theology: The Science of Love*, (Orbis Books: Maryknoll New York, 1998), 134.

¹⁸⁵A.2.8.6.

¹⁸⁶A.2.3.1.

¹⁸⁷A.2.3.1. Dombrowski argues that there is no necessary opposition in John's thought between faith and reason. When both terms be properly understood, faith is not only consistent with, but actually is included in the latter. If "faith in God" refers to a belief that God exists, or to having a theoretical conviction that God exists, then one can easily see that "to believe" is equivalent to "to think with assent." To a large extent John of the Cross borrows from the scholastics the idea that faith included at least three parts: knowledge (notitia), assent (assensus), and trust (fiducia). And it is important to note that John of the Cross was not willing, like Luther, to subordinate the first two parts to the third. Cited in Daniel A.

other lights, so that they do not seem to be lights at all.¹⁸⁸

Nevertheless, the intervention of the excessive light which brings the intellect to the essence of the divine at the same time obstructs the intellect. It produces darkness to the intellect. Why? It can be understood by explaining the natural tendency of the intellect. The intellect, when it wants to know the essence of things presented to it, abstracts, analyzes, and penetrates the essence. But in the case of the virtue of faith, this natural tendency of the intellect has no value. Rather darkness envelops the intellect.

In the light of such remarks, several authors have naturally misunderstood John's notion of faith. They believe that the notion of faith in John is basically anti-cognitive, and that he advocates a blind acceptance of Church teaching without attaching any specific meaning to it. John obviously presupposes the scholastic teaching that faith is the virtue by which we assent to revealed propositions on the authority of the revealer, God. Thus he defines faith as a certain and obscure habit by which we "believe divinely revealed truths which transcend every natural light and infinitely exceed all human understanding," and speaks of the "articles" and "truth" of faith.¹⁸⁹

Moreover, John frequently asserts that faith informs, teaches and illuminates the soul. If faith were simply a bare assent for the sole purpose of emptying the mind, it would not matter whether the articles of faith to which one assented were true or false. The main reason John asserts such a strong emphasis on the "darkness" and "emptiness" of faith is largely because of the continuity he sees between this virtue and the "general knowledge" passively imparted to the soul.

4) The Spiritual Faculty:

a. Memory

For John, memory is a cognitive spiritual faculty, like the intellect, although separate from it in structure and function. He follows the Augustinian tradition by classifying memory as a distinct spiritual power.¹⁹⁰ His view differs from that of Thomas

Dombrowski, *St. John of the Cross: An Appreciation*, 91-92.

¹⁸⁸A.2.3.1..

¹⁸⁹A.2.1.1.

¹⁹⁰The Augustinian division into three faculties held utilitarian appeal for John since they could be evenly matched with the three theological virtues of faith (intellect), hope (memory), and love (will); see Augustine, *De Trinitate*, 12.4.7.



who understands that memory is not a power distinct from the intellect.¹⁹¹ Though John follows the Augustinian tradition, he diverges somewhat from Augustine. Memory, for John, is a faculty of the spirit which works in close co-operation with the imagination and the exterior corporeal senses. Memory is, first of all, an ability to recall the past, to retrieve what one has already learned and experienced. Thus memory has the capacity to recall past knowledge and experience. The memory is able to remember (**acordar**), to forget (**olvidar**), to consider (**pensar, considerar**), or to put aside and withdraw from (**vaciar**) its particular objects.¹⁹² However, memory has more power than just to recall the past. It is far more than a recording machine. Not only does it recall past experiences; it also has the equally important function of looking forward to the future. Memory is the source of our anticipation. We anticipate the future on the basis of evidence we already possess.¹⁹³

Because of their similarity in function and limitation, for John the memory and intellect need the same process of purgation, illumination, and transformation.¹⁹⁴ John states:

The memory cannot at the same time be united with God and with forms and distinct knowledge, and since God has no form or image comprehensible to the memory, the memory is without form, figure, or phantasy when united to God.¹⁹⁵

Thus, in order to attain union with God memory, like intellect, must be emptied of all forms that are not God because it is preoccupied with certain thoughts and ideas. One must renounce all from the memory and withdraw affection from all.¹⁹⁶ This detachment is primarily in contemplative prayer, but not exclusively. But the active withdrawal of memory in hope means being recollected and open moment to moment to a deeper experience of God. It means not letting our memory limit or dictate our future

¹⁹¹Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 1.79.7. Aquinas, following Aristotle, said that the spiritual faculties are two-fold: the intellect and will.

¹⁹²A.3.3.5.

¹⁹³Desmond B. Tillyer, *Union with God: The Teaching of St John of the Cross*, (Mowbray: London & Oxford, 1984), 44.

¹⁹⁴A.3.7.1. John's concepts of purgation, illumination and transformation were influenced by Dionysius. See Kevin Culligan, "Mysticism, Transformation and spiritual disciplines: the teaching of St. John of the Cross," *Spiritual Life* 30 (Fall 1984), 137.

¹⁹⁵A.3.11.2.

¹⁹⁶A.3.2.4-13.

experience of God ¹⁹⁷

Lastly, unlike Thomas and Augustine, who teach that concepts and knowledge are retained in the memory, John insists that memory is neither a receptacle nor an archive for the soul's knowledge. Instead, John teaches that there are two archives from which memory recalls concepts and knowledge: phantasy and the soul.¹⁹⁸ These keep one's concept and knowledge even when the soul is in union with God.

It should be remembered that memory, for John, is not the receptacle of particular knowledge, but more like the capacity of focal awareness to recall knowledge stored in the sense faculties or in the soul itself.

b. Will:

For John, the will is the power of the spirit which makes us essentially human. In principle, the will is the arbiter and governor of the whole personality, gathering up and directing the powers of the soul. The point here is that whereas all else in creation is subject to the law of cause and effect, human beings are able to break out of that process by rational thought and action. We are endowed with free will, able to make free choice of our own volition. Or at least ideally this is so. However, because of sin, and its consequences, the curse of the old Adam plays havoc with the scope for freedom held by the will. In other words, though the will should be the governing principle in our lives, its strength to choose rightly is undermined by the influence of natural desires, appetites, and passions.

Therefore, in order to better understand John 's doctrine of the will, we need to examine the nature of passions and appetites which are directly related to the will.

5) The Natural Passions and Appetite

By following the scholastic understanding of human faculties, John sees two different kinds of appetite; sensitive appetite and appetite of the will. The will, being a spiritual faculty, is different from sense appetites which incline to particular things that the soul perceives as goods to possess.¹⁹⁹ According to Thomas, the will is an

¹⁹⁷A.3.2.1-4

¹⁹⁸A.3.7.1.

¹⁹⁹Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 1.82.2. For John the term appetite means the sensory appetite. He does not use the term "will appetite." Instead, he speaks of "spiritual appetites." (N.2.11.3). However, it is important to note that John sees a cooperative project between love and will, on one hand, and

intellectual appetite and, like the intellect, is interested in the universal aspect of reality.²⁰⁰ Thus it is the will which seeks purely rational and spiritual goods, since these are not within the structure of sensory appetites.

However, since the soul is influenced by appetites (**apetitos**) and experiences within itself, “hunger” (**hambre**), “affections” (**afeciones**), “longings” (**ansias**), and “desires” (**deseos**) for the things of this world which give her satisfaction and pleasure (**gusto**), the appetite of the will tends to incline toward these things, enjoys their possession, fears their loss, and suffers from losing them.²⁰¹

Appetite and desire are neither good nor bad. They are morally neutral. For John, the natural appetite or natural desire itself does not harm the soul. When appetites pass from the sensitive nature into the will they become “inordinate,” which threatens the spiritual life.²⁰² This causes both positive and private damage; they not only “weary, torment, darken, defile, and weaken” a person, but also “deprive him of God’s spirit.”²⁰³ Thus, when John talks about renouncing the soul of its appetite, he is referring to “inordinate” and “voluntary” appetites. John states:

We are dealing with the denudation of the soul’s appetites and gratifications; this is what leaves it free and empty of all things, even though it possesses them. Since the things of the world cannot enter the soul, they are not in themselves an encumbrance or harm to it; rather, it is the will and appetite dwelling within it that causes the damage.²⁰⁴

Accordingly, two important points should be noted. First, it is specifically “inordinate appetite” which dwells in the will which harms the soul. Second, it is the desire or the appetite which dwells in the soul which brings harm to the soul, not the things of the world. In other words, unruly appetites and desires may limit or harm an individual soul. Thus the appetites must be controlled by the will in order to take part in mystical union.

A distinction between voluntary desires and involuntary desires in fact, was made

knowledge and intellect, on the other. (F.3.49).

²⁰⁰Ibid., 1.80.2.

²⁰¹Luis de San Jose, OCD, *Concordancias de las Obras y Escritos del Doctor de la Iglesia San Juan de la Cruz* (Burgos: El Monte Carmelo, 1948). 48.

²⁰²A.3.2.9. When an appetite seeks satisfaction in anything other than God, it becomes “inordinate.”

²⁰³A.1.6.1.

²⁰⁴A.1.4.2.

by Aquinas and influenced the spiritual life of John of the Cross. However, according to R. M. Adams, this distinction was not always understood. Adams says, “when Fenelon distinguishes between voluntary and involuntary desires, it seems to be a distinction between voluntary choices, intentions, and resolutions, and involuntary inclinations that “we know we have, not because we decide on them but because we feel them.”²⁰⁵

²⁰⁵Cited from David Sanderlin, “Charity According to St. John of the Cross,” Journal of Religious Ethics, vol 21, (Spring 1993), 94.



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worldly possessions. This deprivation is called the night of senses. Secondly, the journey to God moves through the darkness of faith which voids the mind of all particular knowledge and all apprehensions, in the sense of the Dionysian “Divine Dark” of unknowing, of the apparent ‘blindness’ of faith and mystical insight when considered from the point of view of reason. Thirdly, the point of arrival is a ‘Night,’ namely, God, a Being who surpasses all human knowledge. Hence the whole of the spiritual life can in a sense be called a Night. The soul must pass through these three nights in order to reach union with God.²⁰⁷ However, the Night never really ends. One never really emerges from it once one has entered, except perhaps in the ultimate state of union. But completely perfect union can in any case not be achieved in this life.

The image of the ‘Night,’ however, for John is not a symbol of a thing, but of a function. The night as the image of a function is perhaps the best way he could symbolize the soul’s prerequisite determination to not-know, for the Unknowable is possessed by not-knowing. As John says, “To come to the knowledge you have not you must go by a way in which you know not.”²⁰⁸

This function of the night in John follows logically from a few basic Neoplatonic metaphysical principles. John accepted the Neoplatonic insight and built his mystical doctrine upon it. If nothing else, Neoplatonic and Johannine mysticism preserve a logic which is absolutely consistent.²⁰⁹ The Neoplatonist is convinced that the deeper he is involved within the material world, the less capable will he be of making the ascent to the supreme good. Thus the Neoplatonist argues that a human being must disengage himself from all commerce with the bodily. He must journey through a night.

Following the Neoplatonic concept, John firmly believes that there is nothing temporal, sensible, or human that can serve as a proportionate means toward union with God. The problem that John faces is the problem that has challenged many philosophers: how to relate the individual free subject to the rest of reality? The answer that John found is the answer formulated by Plotinus and the entire mystical-literary

²⁰⁷A.1.2.1. Edith Stein, *La Ciencia de la Cruz* (San Sebastian: Ediciones Dinor, 1959), 71.

²⁰⁸A.1.13.11.

²⁰⁹Earlier Christian Neoplatonists preceded John with their insight into the necessity of the nakedness of the understanding as a necessary precondition for the contemplation of beauty. Clement of Alexandria, for instance, and Augustine both adhered to this conviction, and from them it passed on to Pseudo-Dionysius and through him to the mystics of the Middle ages and finally to Spain in the sixteenth century. See

tradition. What human beings think they discover about themselves is not true reality, but the shadow, the image, the appearance of truth, goodness, and beauty. Human beings cannot find the Perfect Good within any human or finite experience. A human being is essentially a soul imprisoned in matter who yearns for the knowledge and love of God.

But God is beyond the visible universe. If God cannot be experienced within the human, finite condition, then the only recourse is to escape the human condition, to voluntarily undertake a journey through a night in which all that is not God is abandoned. Plotinus wrote regarding the journey through the night:

We must withdraw from all the externals, pointed wholly inwards; no leaning to the outer; the total of things ignored, first in their relation to us and later in the very idea.²¹⁰

The journey to God, according to Plotinus, therefore is a negative way: a denial, a disengagement, an annihilation of everything that is not God. And for this to be accomplished one must “cut away everything.”²¹¹

By accepting this view, John believes that the ‘Dark Night’ is the necessary and indispensable way toward union with God. The dark night symbolizes the discontinuity between the human and the divine. The night alone makes the ascent to God secure because man is not united to God by anything that he naturally understands, imagines, enjoys, or feels. John insists that “**Y por cuando toda cualquier criatura y todas las acciones y habilidades de ella no cuadran ni llegan a lo que es Dios, por eso se ha de desnudar el alma de toda criatura y acciones y habilidades suyas, conviene a saber: de su entender, gustar ys sentir, para que echado todo lo que es disimil y disconforme a dios, venga a recibir semejanza de dios,**” a human must strip himself of all creatures and of his actions and abilities (of his understanding, taste, and feeling) so that when everything unlike and unconformed to God is moved, his soul may receive the likeness of God.²¹²

The first function of the ‘Dark night,’ then, will be the reduction of all multiplicity. What separates the soul from God is multiplicity. Thus in John’s mysticism the dark

Crisogono, *San Juan de la Cruz*, vol II, 51.

²¹⁰Plotinus, *The Enneads*, trans by Stephen MacKenna. 2nd ed. (London: Faber and Faber, 1956), 6.9.7.

²¹¹Ibid.,

night is the reduction of multiplicity. He uses the metaphor of sunlight and the window to symbolize the connection between purification and vision.

A ray of sunlight shining upon a smudgy window is unable to illumine that window completely and transform it into its own light. It could do this if the window were cleansed and polished. The extent of illumination is not dependent upon the ray of sunlight but upon the window.²¹³

There is another important theme concerning the night, that is, the release of appetite. It is not enough just to remove multiplicity. The power of appetite which clings to anything down here must be renounced. Giving up creatures is not the essential purgative function. John states: “For we are not discussing the mere lack of things. We are dealing with the denudation of the soul’s appetites and gratifications. **“Por que no tratamos aqui del carecer de las cosas; sino de la desnudez del gusto y apetito de ellas.”**²¹⁴

Release of appetite is a further application of the Neoplatonic principle of either-or. It is impossible for a person to desire creatures and God simultaneously because the force of desire is divided; it becomes weaker than if it were completely fixed on one object. Appetite which fixes itself upon creatures is sapped of its strength and therefore has less force to make the flight to God.²¹⁵

Lastly, there is another important reason why the night is fundamental necessity in John’s spiritual path. For John, the hardness of the spiritual journey and the infrequency of the higher mystical experiences are not due to the human being’s essential structure, but rather due to his existential condition which is alienation from God. John interprets

²¹²A.2.5.4.

²¹³A.2.5.6.

²¹⁴A.1.3.4.

²¹⁵A.1.10.1. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, appetites in themselves are natural and necessary to human beings. The asceticism of the appetites, in John’s theology, primarily refers to disordered appetites. He explains this in Chapter Three of book One in *The Ascent*. But this is not entirely the case. His advice in Chapter Thirteen of book one is a broader asceticism. It is minimizing pleasurable sensory experiences and creating a kind of sensual vacuum. He writes, “Y de esta manera ha de procurar dejar luego mortificados y vacios de aquel gusto a los sentidos, come a oscuras.. He suggests that the soul should be inclined toward the most difficult, most distasteful, least pleasant, least consoling, etc. This is not asceticism for asceticism’s sake, however. Clearly, it is for the primary purpose of shaking off the stranglehold that our attachments have. I believe that it has a secondary purpose too. Such a minimization of pleasurable experience tends to center the soul for contemplative prayer. Sensory overload, even if one is detached, is very disturbing to deep contemplation. See also Alain Cugno, *St. John of the Cross: Reflections on Mystical Experiences*, trans. Barbara Wall (New York: Seabury Press, 1982), 50-71.

this condition theologically as the result of “original sin”, and sees the disorder of the appetites and passions as the most devastating aspect of this “fallen’ state. Because this disorder blocks the reception of God’s communications, John requires the night as a means of renunciational process of the journey toward divine union. Thus, Margaret Wilson sees night as “the mediator who has brought the lovers together.”²¹⁶

However, if we see the night as negative and pessimistic, we miss the essence of it. Though the night seems negative and pessimistic in its function, it also has positive and creative functions. Paradoxically, it is the night that guides the lovers to meet God by emptying all things, being stripped of everything. We are led through the darkness to greater light. The night is the necessary counterpart of the light. Light is revealed only through darkness.

Concerning John’s dark night, we may conclude that the night is a fundamental necessity of John’s spiritual path. The night is a means by which both appetite and multiplicity are detached. Without the night as a means to proceed to union with God, no one can achieve the goal. As Federico Ruiz says, “only a person who has correctly understood his teaching on renunciation can come to an authentic comprehension of St. John of the Cross.”²¹⁷ Since this renunciation places it as it were in darkness and nothingness it is called night.

1) The Night as a Function of Purgation

What the Neoplatonists call the reduction of multiplicity, John of the Cross will term as the effort of the soul to become most like God in purgation. In imitation of the negative way of Plotinus and Pseudo-Dionysius, the dark night in John plays a purgative function

According to John, the soul inevitably experiences great trials and tribulations in the dark night. John equates these sufferings to the suffering of souls in purgatory.²¹⁸

John states:

A painful disturbance involves many fears, imaginings, and struggles within a man.

²¹⁶Elizabeth Teresa Howe, “The Crowded Night: The Concatenation of Imagery in the Dark Night of Saint John of the Cross,” *Studia Mystica*, vol 8 (1985), 61.

²¹⁷Though Federico Ruiz uses the word renunciation, its meaning includes the concept of the night.

Federico Ruiz, *Mistico y Maestro, San Juan de la Cruz*, 84.

²¹⁸A.1.2.1.

Due to the apprehension and feeling of his miseries, he suspects that he is lost and that his blessings are gone forever. The sorrow and moaning of his spirit is so deep that it turns into vehement spiritual roars and clamoring, and sometimes he pronounces them vocally and dissolves into tears (if he has the strength and power to do so); although such relief is less frequent. . . . It fills all one's deep affections and energies with indescribable spiritual anguish and suffering. . . . As Job says, the soul is withering within itself and its inmost parts boiling without any hope.²¹⁹

However, for John it is not the night itself that produces them, rather it is the soul's attachment to the things of the world, its desire for sensory gratification, and its resistance to God's love that bring it suffering and desolation.²²⁰ It is not God's will that a man be disturbed by anything, or suffer trials, for if he suffers trials in the adversities of the world it is because of his weakness in virtue.²²¹ When divine and human join together, it produces human suffering because God strikes the soul in order to renew the soul and divinize it.²²²

For John, the purgation of the soul is a necessary prerequisite for achieving union with God. This purgation is divided into four stages. As the later chart indicates, the process of each purification is twofold. There is an "active night of the sense" and a "passive night of the sense."²²³ There is an "active night of the spirit" and a "passive night of the spirit."²²⁴ All four of these degrees are necessary in this process of the purification of the soul. In other words, the process of purgation is a continuum in which the truth of contemplation as well as the delight of union are prefigured in the joy of darkness, and, at the same time, the ultimate union requires the constant watchfulness of purgation.

Louis Dupre declares that John's active purgation of the soul through "abnegation and mortification" is followed by a passive purgation that involves an advanced mystical experience that is not available to the ordinary person.²²⁵

John, then, accepted the orthodox Roman Catholic doctrine of Purgatory. Instead of

²¹⁹N.2.9.7.

²²⁰A.3.16.6.

²²¹A.1.7.4.

²²²Harvey Egan, S.J. *An Anthropology of Christian Mysticism*, (The Liturgical Press Collegeville, 1991), 459.

²²³This twofold process is carefully developed in the *Dark Night*.

²²⁴Ibid.

²²⁵Louis Dupre, "Christian Spirituality Confronts the Modern World," *Communio: International Catholic Review*, vol 12.3 (Fall, 1985), 339.

waiting to suffer there after death, John believed that the eschatological sufferings of the life hereafter could be brought to one's present life on earth. Thus John believed that what he suffers now are instead of the sufferings of the future life.²²⁶ John then believed that passing through purgatory experience in the present life was an anticipation of the eschatological promise of the vision of God. And this purgatory experience is possible through the work of the Holy Spirit. These are the essential ideas which form the center of the doctrine of mystical purgation in John.²²⁷

In fact, John believed that the purgation of the soul is a sign that God is working in a mystic's life.²²⁸ However, it is not easy to know whether God is working in the soul of a mystic when he is passing through the first stage. Because it is possible that the devil, using his cunning and evil tricks, is trying to play a role in the mystical process and to deceive the mystic with visions, voices, and a sense of pleasure or displeasure.²²⁹ For this reason, visions, voices, etc., must be regarded with suspicion. One should never trust them completely.²³⁰

B) Beginners and the Active Night of the Senses

1) The Stages of the Mystical Path

There are necessary steps for John to achieve union with God. John conceives of spiritual progress as a set of stages, in each of which the soul requires a different type of guidance and different rules for spiritual practice, and in each of which we have different types of experience and a different view of things, necessitating constant reorientation.

Following Catholic tradition, John usually associates the three stages with the three ways; thus the "purgative way" corresponds to the state of beginners, the "illuminative way" to that of proficients, and the "unitive way" to that of the perfect.²³¹ They are at the same time successive and simultaneous stages, since the last one cannot be attained

²²⁶N.2.6.6.

²²⁷Frost, Saint John of the Cross, 365-367.

²²⁸N.1.9: 7-8.

²²⁹A.2.6.7.

²³⁰Ibid., 2.27.6.

²³¹N.1.9.6. Other mystics use schemes made up of different number of stages. For example, St. Teresa uses a sevenfold scheme of progression in her book *The Interior Castle*. Suso uses a ninefold scheme in his 'Colloquy of the Nine Rocks.' However, one cannot necessarily find Eastern mystic such as Dogen, to conform to these schemes.

without passing through the second, or the second one without passing through the first, but the experience of the three continues to exist in the last one and none of them is ever completely discarded in favor of the next one. This classification antedates Christian contemplation. It is a very ancient one, which was already present in Origen and Dionysius.²³²

However, John uses some of the other gradations, not in opposition to the threefold way, but in seeing the mystical journey from another perspective. Such are the seven degrees of love (C.26.3), used by Augustine, Bernard, and the Victorines, and '**los diez grados de la escala mistica de amor divino segun San Bernardo y Santo Tomas.**'²³³ To these John adds his own analysis through the dark nights, active and passive, of sense and spirit, originally, though with many traditional elements. For the most part, however, John refers to only two major divisions of the night; the night of the senses and the night of the spirit

One should know that a soul must ordinarily pass through two principal kinds of night which spiritual persons call purgations or purifications of the soul in order to reach the state of perfection. . . .

The first night or purgation. . . concerns the sensory part of the soul. The second night. . . concerns the spiritual part. . . The first night is the lot of beginners, at the time God commences to introduce them into the state of contemplation; it is a night in which the spirit of man also participates. . . The second night or purification takes place in those who are already proficient, at the same time God desires to lead them to the state of divine union. This purgation, of course, is more obscure, dark, and dreadful.²³⁴

As we look at it, it moves gradually from the stage of beginners to the stage of proficient

However, it should be noted that such stages of progress can only ever be 'ideal-typical', that is, that they represent only a broad generalisation or rough scheme. Sometimes a lower state may coexist with or alternate with a higher; or on rare occasions it is possible for the mystic to skip a stage completely. For example, in some passages he suggests that a person's spiritual progress is exactly proportionate to his

²³²Jean Danielou, *Origen*, trans W. Mitchell (London, New York, 1955), 293-314.

²³³N.2.19.20.

²³⁴A.1.1.1-3.

degree of moral and psychological progress. But other passages indicate that emotionally immature people sometimes enjoy “higher” or more particular religious experiences than their better adjusted companions.²³⁵ He recognized that people have dispositions with regard to their spiritual need and that this must be revered. The spiritual path, even as he outlines it in a delineated and progressive way, is understood as unique in each individual.²³⁶ It is therefore an error to suppose, as some have, that one can easily determine whether a person has reached a given stage of the spiritual life simply on the basis of the occurrence or non-occurrence of some particular phenomenon which John associates with that stage.

Steven Payne points out several characters of John’s prose treatises which can easily disorient the unwary reader. First, according to Payne, John is prone to describe each stage in overly simple and idealized language. Second, John often states “the most that God communicates to a soul” in any given stage (canticle 14 & 15.2). John does this in order to give wide descriptive coverage to each stage. He does not mean to imply that each person will experience everything that he mentions concerning contemplative development. Finally, John’s description of a stage can vary depending upon the perspective that he is writing from. For example, when describing souls in the state of proficients, he will emphasize their virtue from the perspective of beginners, but he will stress the necessity of continued purgation when he addresses them within the context of contemplative prayer. In other words, John does not arrange the spiritual path and stages in their proper chronological order. Payne argues that “these three reasons are not consecutive stages of religious development,” as some authors assert, “but different aspects of the whole journey; God is always offering Himself to the soul in one way or another, while faith and the complete mortification of the appetites are tasks of lifetime.”²³⁷

Consequently, there is some difficulty of interpreting John’s various stages and nights.²³⁸ There is some disagreement on interpreting the number and order of the stages

²³⁵A.2.22.19.

²³⁶A.2.17.2.

²³⁷Steven Payne, *John of the Cross and the Cognitive Value of Mysticism*, 133.

²³⁸See Orville Clark, “The Optics of Nothingness,” *Philosophy Today* 16 (Winter 1972), 244-45. He argues that John has three stages of purgation: the “night of sense,” the “night of spirit,” and the “night of faith.” See also Inge, William Ralph, *Christian Mysticism*, (New York: Scribner’s, 1899), 224-227. He

in John's system among scholars. For example, Chapman argues that since "the active and passive are two sides of the same phenomenon," there are only two nights in John's stage,²³⁹ whereas Juan de Jesus Maria argues that there are four purgations: the active night of sense, the passive night of sense, the active night of the spirit, and the passive night of the spirit.²⁴⁰ The following chart seems to follow what we have discussed about John's arrangement of mystical stages.

Active Night of Sense	Purgative Way: State of Beginners
Passive Night of Sense	Illuminative Way State of Proficients
Active Night of Spirit	
Passive Night of Spirit	
	Unitive Way State of Perfection

On the other hand, there are some other mystics who do not use the three stages of the mystical path. Some mystics use a different number of stages. For example, St. Teresa, in her book **The Interior Castle**, uses a sevenfold scheme of progression.²⁴¹ Some mystics do not use schemes of progression at all. Therefore one cannot necessarily expect other mystics such as Eastern mystics, or Nature-mystics, to conform to these

also argues that John has three stages of purgation which are different from Clark: the night of sense, the night of faith, and the night of memory and will. And Payne who cites these scholars, in "The Philosopher and the Mystic," 129-37 criticizes Clark by saying that Clark mistakenly transforms the second "reason" into a final stage of the spiritual life.

²³⁹Dom John Chapman, OSB, *Spiritual Letters*, (London: Sheed & Ward, 1935), 80.

²⁴⁰Juan de Jesus Maria, "El Diptico Subida-Noche," In *Sanjuanistica* (Rome: Collegium Internationale Sanctorum Teresiae a Jesu et Joannis a Cruce, 1943), 47.

²⁴¹St. John of the Cross, *The Spiritual Canticle*, Commentary, 26, in *The Collected Works of St. John of*

schemes.

2) The Active Night of Sense

By following the purgative way, the beginner enters the "active night of sense."²⁴² It is the dusk that precludes the sheer darkness of contemplative faith.²⁴³ It means not only the correction of obvious habits of sin, but also the willing restraint of sensuous satisfactions which in themselves may be morally quite legitimate but which can all too easily trap the soul in complacent routine. In this night, the soul should do all it can to purify and perfect itself in order to meet the divine gift of God's love. In the active night of the senses, the sensory self should prepare for transformation through renunciation, detachment, and mortification by which inordinate desires are withdrawn from all natural objects and reordered toward God as their one true goal.

During the process of this night, the soul suffers a terrible aridity and dryness; it can no longer find the consolation and sweetness which it used to have in spiritual things. It undergoes many trials, worries and annoyances, of various kinds, interior and exterior. It is profoundly conscious of an inner emptiness; it feels that God has deserted it and suffers the agonies of separation from the Beloved, and of seeing its own utter unworthiness.²⁴⁴

However, one should know that this process of purification is not self-rejection, but a renunciation of one's sinful nature and will toward sin. In other words, the appetites and desires are not destroyed, rather they are reordered from fleeting finite satisfactions toward the one true source of lasting fulfillment.²⁴⁵ Thus, for John it is not the mortification of the flesh, but of desire that is paramount. It is a "night" in virtue of

the Cross, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh & Otilio Rodriguez (London: Nelson, 1966).

²⁴²Even though John wrote about what he believed to be a universal goal, i.e., nakedness of spirit, he believed that it is not entirely accessible to or even understandable by all. Though few people will reach this in their life, God's will is that all reach it. (F.2.27). Louis Dupre declares that John's active purgation of the soul through "abnegation and mortification" is followed by a passive purgation that involves an advanced mystical experience that is not available to the ordinary person. Louis Dupre, "Christian Spirituality confronts the Modern World." *Communio: International Catholic Review* 12.3 (Fall), 1985, 339. Thus, John's starting point is with people who are already substantially practicing detachment from sensible gratifications and living a life of prayer. John calls these souls beginners. F.2.27.

²⁴³A.1.2.5.

²⁴⁴N.1.7.3.

²⁴⁵It is necessarily a habitual effort to renounce and mortify the appetites in order to achieve union with God. Unless this renunciation is achieved, the soul can not reach the top. A.1.5.6.

being a privation of ordinary pleasures and sensible consolations(**gustos**).²⁴⁶

Thus, the active night of the sense does not aim at insensibility but rather at liberating the soul from the dark prison of self-centered gratification into a freedom to choose the true good. John is not interested in obliterating desire but in tuning it finely. Merton writes that the active part of John's dark night involves "the removal and extinguishing of a lesser light in order that pure light may shine in its place."²⁴⁷

It refers, however, not only to a Night of the five bodily senses, but also to a purification of what St. John calls the "interior sense". i.e., the imagination, which is employed in the meditative exercises pertaining to the stage of 'beginners' described earlier.

The chief task of the soul, therefore, in this "active night of the sense" is to exercise herself both in the trials and the bitterness of mortification and in meditation on spiritual things. And here, one important fact we should remember concerning the true meaning of the active night of sense is that it is a voluntary restraint of the senses.

In the night of the sense John gives the beginner certain counsels for conquering his appetites and overcoming his imperfections.²⁴⁸ However, the soul's efforts cannot fulfill its goal because the soul is unable to purify itself completely by itself and partly because the efforts are often motivated by self gratification. Denys Turner, in his book, writes in this regard:

And so for John there is an 'ascetical self.' It is the product of our best efforts, supported by everything there is in us by way of generosity and goodwill, indeed of love of God. But it is a poor, precarious and self-contradictory structure, built up out of the combination of quasi-moral forces, more or less 'possessive' desires and wishes, bound together by the countervailing force of an ascetically imposed will.²⁴⁹

Thus, any person who denies attachment to the senses receives compensation in a more refined satisfaction of a higher sensitivity. John therefore, asserts that the passive night is necessary for those who practice active asceticism in which no one can accomplish

²⁴⁶ A.1.3.2.

²⁴⁷ Thomas Merton, *Disputed Questions*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, 1960), 212-213.

²⁴⁸ A.1.13.3. The painfulness of the Night of Sense lessens considerably as we progress, but it never disappears entirely until final union, because the lower part of the soul cannot be fully purged until the higher part is also fully purified.

²⁴⁹ Denys Turner, *The Darkness of God*, 236.

pure detachment.

3) The Passive Night of Senses

The passive night of the sense is the most critical point of all in John's spiritual development because it represents the transition to a predominantly contemplative mode of prayer. In John's view, all later phases of the mystical life are simply a further unfolding of what begins here. Through this passive night of sense one advances to the "illuminative way". The soul, in this phase, moves from the stage of a beginner to that of a proficient. At this stage the soul must be led in a way entirely contrary to the way wherein it was led at first. The soul has no part to play in what it experiences.

Thus, the soul ceases to communicate through the senses. At this point in the life of prayer, people frequently find that they are unable to meditate or reflect effectively as they once did. As a result, the world of ordinary prayer and meditation becomes dry since sensory satisfaction and ease no longer accompany it as they previously had.²⁵⁰ The reason for the dryness is that the spiritual faculties are not sensitized to this more subtle, interior encounter that God is now giving to the soul.²⁵¹ Through this nourishment the spirit grows stronger and more alert, and becomes more solicitous than before. The considerable spiritual pleasures which compensated the soul during the active night of the senses are now taken away by God. John states:

....a person at this time should be guided in a manner entirely contrary to the former. If, prior to this, directors suggested matter for meditation, and he meditated, now they should instead withhold this matter, and he should not meditate. For, as I say, he is unable to do so even though he may want to, and were he to try he would be distracted instead of recollected. If previously he sought satisfaction, love, and devotion, and found it, now he should neither desire nor seek it, for not only does he fail to procure it through his own diligence, but on the contrary he procures dryness. Through the activity he desires to carry on with the senses, he diverts himself from the peaceful and quiet good secretly being given to his spirit. In losing the one good, he does not gain the other, for these goods are no longer accorded through the senses as before.²⁵²

At this time, however, God acts to bring to an end the active night of the senses by

²⁵⁰N.1.8.3.

²⁵¹N.1.9.4.

²⁵²F.3.33.

plunging the soul into the unknown where it cannot use its faculties to make any response to its new God-given situation. Unlike the active entry into the night of the senses, “in the passive way an individual does nothing, for God accomplishes the work in him, while he acts as the recipient.”²⁵³

As E. W. Trueman Dicken has pointed out, John ‘s distinction between active and passive night is primarily a logical one, indicating what an individual can do with his own powers, with God’s help, and what an individual cannot do but must receive from God.²⁵⁴ John states:

God begins now to communicate Himself, no longer through the channel of senses, as formerly, in consecutive reflections, by which we arranged and divided our knowledge, but in pure spirit, which admits not of successive reflections, and in the act of pure contemplation, to which neither the interior nor the exterior senses of our lower nature can ascend. Hence it is that the fancy and the imagination cannot help or suggest any reflections, nor use them ever afterwards.²⁵⁵

The soul is now setting out on a journey towards the incomprehensible and ineffable “nothing” (**nada**) and hence naturally feels confused and disoriented. This is a critical time. It is a real crisis for the soul that frequently spreads frustration, dissatisfaction, and aridity throughout the whole of one’s life. Sometimes, because of one’s own ignorance, or because of misunderstanding on the part of spiritual directors, one may render oneself incapable of receiving these divine communications through one’s extreme agitation, worry, and resistance, and through one’s natural tendency to try to fight the suffering and to try to meditate as before.

Consequently, one may believe that only direct knowledge of God can now satisfy the mystic; and in order to receive this knowledge, he or she has to be emptied of all that pertains to the senses (interior and exterior). Therefore, instead of trying to meditate discursively, and to search for spiritual sweetness and satisfaction, one should now be content with a simple, loving faith and absorption in God.²⁵⁶

John presents “three signs” for discerning whether an individual is in the passive

²⁵³A.1.13.1.

²⁵⁴E. W. Dicken, The Crucible of Love: A Study of the Mysticism of St. Teresa of Jesus and St. John of the Cross, (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1963), 370.

²⁵⁵N.1.8.5.

²⁵⁶N.1.10.2.

night of sense and should stop discursive meditation and move on to contemplative prayer:

The first is the realization that one cannot make discursive meditation nor receive satisfaction from it as before. . . .

The second sign is an awareness of a disinclination to fix the imagination or sense faculties upon other particular objects, exterior or interior. I am not affirming that the imagination will cease to come and go, but that the person is disinclined to fix it purposely upon extraneous things.

The third and surest sign is that a person likes to remain alone in loving awareness of God, without particular considerations, in interior peace and quiet and repose. . . .²⁵⁷

However, John asserts that the first sign alone is not sufficient because the inability to meditate could be due to spiritual laxity or some physical or psychological disorder. Thus, in order to prevent these dangerous traps, John asserts that one must have the third sign which is loving awareness of God before leaving discursive meditation.²⁵⁸

To leave safely the state of meditation and sense and enter that of contemplation and spirit, the spiritual person must observe within himself at least these three signs together.²⁵⁹

Thus, during the passive night of the senses, not only does the created 'self' disappear but the God-object representation disappears before the loving awareness of God's real presence within the soul. This passive night, therefore, is the orderly change of 'knowing' about' God into 'knowing' God which gathers up the first stage and fulfills it in a movement of grace in which nothing is lost, so that all that has gone before is transfigured in the darkness.

As a result of the passive night of the senses, we may conclude that souls grow in a deep knowledge and experience of God. What was "almost unnoticeable" at first (A.2.13.7), or an experience of "painful concern and solicitude" for God (N.1.9.3), increasingly becomes an awareness of the presence of a general loving knowledge of God.²⁶⁰ This knowledge can even blossom into transitory, but profound, experience of

²⁵⁷A.2.13.2.

²⁵⁸A.2.13.6.

²⁵⁹A.2.13.2-4.

²⁶⁰A.2.13.7.

spiritual absorption, which John calls “touches of union.”²⁶¹

C) Illumination: Contemplative Prayer

According to John, as we noted above, the passive night of the senses takes the soul beyond its own activity in prayer and is a period of transition into the life of infused contemplation. Thus, the passive night of the senses is also known as Illumination, which is distinguished by “passive” contemplation rather than meditation. This illumination can be described primarily as the move of the individual soul from an active to a passive form of knowledge.

However, “knowledge” must be understood not necessarily as some new information but as a different, transformed way of seeing the world. It is the move from a dialectical form of prayer to a contemplative form of prayer. While John believes that discursive prayer is useful for beginners, ultimately it impedes a “substantial knowledge” of God. Thus, distinct thoughts and images are to be eliminated, not because they are false, but because they are limited and obscure a “deeper” understanding of the divine. John says:

It is in this way, then, that God instructs the soul and makes it more spiritual, communicating spirituality to it first of all by means of outward and palpable things, adapted to sense, on account of the soul’s feebleness and incapacity, so that, by means of the outer husk of those things of sense which in themselves are good, the spirit may make particular acts and receive so many spiritual communications that it may form a habit as to things spiritual, and may acquire actual and substantial spirituality, which is completely removed from every sense.²⁶²

According to John, contemplation is the pure gift of God’s very self to the soul. It is the mystical theology which theologians call secret wisdom because it is secret even to the understanding which receives it. It is that by which God enlightens the understanding. It is communicated and infused into the soul through love.²⁶³ It is a state of direct perception, without the necessity of apprehensions being channelled through particular reflections, forms or figures. It is the transformation of consciousness in which the mystic enters into a connatural relationship with his or her beloved in which subject-

²⁶¹A.2.24.4.

²⁶²A.2.17.5.

²⁶³N.2.17.2.

object relations are broken down.

It is so subtle that, in the beginning, it can be misunderstood by one who is used to working with words, ideas, concepts, and affections in prayer. Contemplation, however, is none of these. Rather the soul acts in a passive way by being a receptacle for God's love and grace. Contemplation is the dark awareness in faith of God's loving presence within one's soul

Thus, in contemplation, the person has nothing to achieve, for God accomplishes all. We cannot comprehend the experience by means of any familiar categories of understanding. The earlier meditative methods are no longer requisite to the soul. In a sense, one must strive in order not to strive. In the contemplative moment there is no striving, only the knowledge and love of God.

In this regard, we better notice that there are three different types of contemplation in the history of the idea of contemplation. We discuss them here briefly in order to understand and clarify the notion of contemplation in John's spirituality.

The first is philosophical or natural contemplation. This is the intellectual contemplation common to philosophers, Christian or non-Christian. It has to do with rational or intellectual illumination, achieved through man's natural effort.

The second type is acquired contemplation. In acquired contemplation, the action of God is dark and, consequently, hidden from the soul. This contemplation is also known as active contemplation. This type belongs to the religious realm but not to mystical experience. Thus it is a kind of contemplation due to man's own striving and labor. It is man's activity, not the Holy Spirit's. Thus, it is a kind of contemplation which man can achieve by religious experiences and practices such as meditation, asceticism, etc.²⁶⁴

The third type is infused contemplation. This is the highest degree of ascent, or the human search for divine contemplation. It is passive because man's efforts cease to play a role in its achievement. It is a result of God's gift and not of man's efforts. It is achieved in the depth of the darkness of faith, or in the Dark Night of the Spirit, where all is quiet, calm, and peaceful and where the potencies of the soul are at rest. At this stage the soul can do nothing else but rest and wait for the work of the Holy Spirit, for

²⁶⁴Thomas Merton, The Ascent to Truth (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Co., 1951), 50-70.

His infusion of perfection and love.²⁶⁵

In fact, in contemplation, the natural self is transformed through a developmental process which is a process of divinization under the power of God's loving grace. According to John this is true human development which is a free gift to humans of God's very self, not earned or merited. There is nothing the soul can do to effect such transformation.²⁶⁶

The mystics, on the other hand, perceive Divine Reality through the "spiritual sense" (**sentido espiritual**) which approximates to higher intuition or mystical illumination, and which is received by way of the "Divine Spark" within which connects us to God. This is a ray of darkness, a mysterious, almost ineffable state of pure consciousness. John calls this an "unknowing" rather than knowledge:

I entered into unknowing
Yet when I saw myself there
Without knowing where I was
I understood great things;
I shall not say what I felt
I or I remained in unknowing (**no sabiendo**)
Transcending all knowledge (**sciencia**).²⁶⁷

John calls this "ray of darkness" as "confused" not because it is not clear, but on the contrary because it is an apprehension of reality itself. Hence it cannot be rationally received and analysed. Rather it is received in the will rather than the understanding. Whereas the understanding cannot comprehend it, the will can respond to it.

As a result of contemplation, according to John, the soul receives various benefits. These benefits include self-knowledge, knowledge of God, and love of neighbor. Having self-knowledge, the soul finds its weakness and misery as a sinner and becomes

²⁶⁵N.2.5.1. John, as a Thomist, believes that since God is essentially incomprehensible we cannot attain to knowledge of him through our finite or natural faculties. The beginner has to use the natural faculties to acquire some sort of understanding of God and to kindle desire for a greater understanding; but the more advanced mystic receives direct knowledge of the Divine, granted by grace, and henceforth the way to still further realisation will lie in transcending the knowledge of both the sense and the spiritual faculties in the Night of Spirit.

²⁶⁶N.2.6.1.

²⁶⁷St. John of the Cross, 'Stanzas Concerning an Ecstasy Experienced in High Contemplation', stanza 1, 5, 6, in Kavanaugh & Rodriguez, 718-719.

truly humble before God. This humility, in turn, inspires love of neighbor.²⁶⁸

1) The Active Night of the Spirit

As the night of the sense comes to an end the active night of the spirit begins. As the night of the sense is intermittent in the preliminary stages of the mystical way from an early stage so the night of the spirit soon becomes intermittent with illumination as it gradually increases in intensity. One passes out of illumination into this second night, which will take one from the state of “proficient” to that of “perfect”, to the unitive way.

Whereas the passive night of the senses indicates the transitional phase of entry into contemplation, the active night of the spirit represents a relatively stable, peaceful period in the life of prayer, often lasting years, before the passive night of the spirit.²⁶⁹

In the night of the spirit, all attachment to personal joys, however spiritual, must be left behind; it is the last painful tearing away of the self from a limited perspective on life. The higher part of the soul, having acquired mastery over the inferior part, must now itself be surrendered completely to the divine.²⁷⁰

As the senses and imagination were purified in the first Night, so in the latter are purified the understanding, memory and will. It is in this stage of the soul’s progress that active detachment of the higher faculties is above all necessary. This involves the reorientation of the intellectual faculties of understanding, memory and will towards the will of God. These three are the ‘higher faculties’ or ‘spiritual faculties’ of Christian mysticism. John describes the goal of the active night of the spirit:

The manifest conclusion is that, when a person has finished purifying and voiding himself of all forms and apprehensible images, he will abide in this pure and simple light, and be perfectly transformed into it. This light is never lacking to the soul, but because of creature forms and veils weighing upon and covering it, the light is never infused. If a person will eliminate these impediments and veils, and live in pure nakedness and poverty of spirit. . . his soul in its simplicity and purity will then be immediately transformed into simple and pure Wisdom, the Son of God. As soon as natural things are driven out of the enamored soul, the divine are naturally and supernaturally infused, since there can be no void in nature.²⁷¹

²⁶⁸N.1.12.4.

²⁶⁹N.2.1.1.

²⁷⁰N.2.6.6.

²⁷¹A.2.15.4.

To achieve this, however, one needs to empty his or her spiritual faculties through the pursuit of the three theological virtues—faith in the understanding, hope in the memory and love in the will. These three theological virtues cause the appropriate faculty to enter into a state of darkness in which detachment from spiritual possessions takes place. John states:

Faith in the understanding, causes an emptiness and darkness with respect to the understanding; hope, in the memory, causes emptiness of all possessions; and charity causes emptiness in the will and detachment from all affection and from rejoicing in all that is not God....Faith, although it brings certainty to the understanding, brings it not clearness, but obscurity....As to hope, there is no doubt but that it renders the memory empty and dark with respect both to things below and things above.... Charity causes emptiness in the will with respect to all things, since it obliges us to love God above them all; which cannot be unless we withdraw our affection from them all in order to set it wholly upon God.²⁷²

What is happening in the active night of the spirit is the simplification of the soul's desiring upon God. The understanding, having been fed in the past by meditation and now finding that source of information closed to it, settles down in the habit of faith. Recognizing that intellectual knowledge is not the proximate or proportionate means of knowing God in union, the soul rests content in the obscure knowing which resides in the habit of faith.

Moreover, the reorientation of the understanding and faith in the night of the spirit, applies equally to memory and hope. The soul is to cease to regard sensual delights as the stay of memory, but to empty the memory of all such possessions in order to hold fast to God in hope. The ability of the imagination in particular to feed the memory with the remembrance of the good things of God's grace in the past is ignored and the memory, deprived of this sensual support, reorientates itself to the pursuit of the virtue of hope.²⁷³

For the transformative work to proceed, each of these functions must be emptied. In their phenomenal state, intellect, memory and will are impure; they lack the ability to relate themselves to their unitive divine ground. Through non-discursive

²⁷²A.2.6.2-3.

²⁷³A.3.2.3..

contemplation, an attitude of dis-identification with the soul's objects, John wishes to empty or purify the soul's three functions of their vagaries. Thus, understanding is emptied and obscured by faith, which leads toward a union of the understanding with Divine Wisdom. Memory is emptied and separated by hope, which prepares it for union with God. Will is emptied and annihilated in terms of affections and appetites by charity, which makes it ready for union with God.²⁷⁴

Phenomenal intellect _____ intellect imbued with faith
Phenomenal memory _____ memory permeated by hope
Phenomenal will _____ will become **caritas**

However, faith, hope and **caritas** are not three **praxes**, but three descriptive nuances for consciousness undergoing transformation under a single praxis: contemplation. John explains how one practices faith, hope and charity in their purity. It is non-discursive contemplation:

If the spiritual person directs his intellect in faith according to the doctrine given him (i.e. imageless, non-discursive contemplation) it is impossible for him not to instruct his other two faculties simultaneously in the other two virtues. For these faculties depend on one another in their operations.²⁷⁵

When this takes place at the beginning of union, the loss of the imaginary forms which have fed the memory causes this faculty to become inert, its self-awareness suspended during the moments of union. As the saint says, under the influence of this experience a person 'may forget even to eat or drink, he may forget whether he has done such and such a thing, whether he has seen something or whether he has not seen it; and he makes many mistakes in the course of his everyday, outward behaviour'.²⁷⁶

However, this is a temporary phenomenon which disappears when contemplation becomes habitual. To advance in this reorientation of the memory toward hope, the soul must take care not to seek to store up or collect in its memory any impressions, however apparently worthwhile, from the senses.²⁷⁷

²⁷⁴N.2.21.11.

²⁷⁵A.3.1.1.

²⁷⁶A.3.2.8.

²⁷⁷A.3.2.6.

Here, we should notice that until the soul has become adjusted to this new level of consciousness, the soul should experience times of agonising, desperate suffering and horrifying darkness, even more terrible and tormenting than the first night. This night is much darker than the night which preceded it since it removes everything both in the intellect and in the senses.

However, this process of the emptying of the faculties does not mean that we do not allow our higher faculties or our senses their natural mode of operation on their appropriate levels; on the contrary, this is necessary if we are to fulfill the divine will in practical action in everyday life. What is important is to be detached from these faculties and the communications received through them, to recognise their limitations and rise above them.

Moreover, during this stage, the habits and virtues of the active night of the senses are not lost. The soul continues to practice them with a detachment from sense which means we are not swayed either way by pleasure or pain. The soul continues to practice a life of virtue, rejecting temptation to sin and ordering all things around obedience to the will of Christ and his church. But one does so without any desire for or dependence on sensual satisfaction or distress at sensual deprivation.²⁷⁸

2) The Passive Night of the Spirit

The passive night of the spirit follows after the soul has spent years basking in the consoling darkness of contemplative prayer. It does not immediately follow the night of the senses. It follows after the active night of the spirit. When the active night of the spirit is achieved, the soul reaches a state of vacuum, emptiness, nakedness, or nothingness. (**nada**). In this state of the passive night of the spirit, the soul no longer works. Nothing from the outside or inside world is perceived. The soul has not only overcome the conflict between the sensitive, or lower part, and the spiritual part, or higher part, but she has also overcome the conflict within the spiritual part itself. The faculties of the soul, will, understanding, and memory are totally passive and emptied. They are now purified.²⁷⁹

However, in the passive night of the spirit, in spite of the soul's progress,

²⁷⁸A.2.1.1.

²⁷⁹N.2.13.11.

imperfections and evil habits still reside in the soul. Thus they are far from perfection.

John states:

These proficients. . . have the so-called **hebetudo mentis**, the natural dullness everyone contracts through sin, and a distracted and inattentive spirit. The spirit must be illumined, clarified, and recollected by means of this night.

All those who have not passed beyond the states of proficients possess these habitual imperfections which cannot, as we said, coexist with the perfect state of union of love.²⁸⁰

Because these imperfections and disorders are still rooted in the spirit, the spirit must enter this purgation of the passive night in order to be cleansed and freed from them. And since the purgation of the first night of the sense cannot reach these habitual imperfections, this purgation of the passive night of the spirit is necessary.

However the difference between these two purgations- the night of the sense and passive night of the spirit- is like the difference between pulling up roots and cutting off a branch.²⁸¹ Since the pain of this second purgation is so horrible and frightful for the soul who receives it, it cannot be compared to anything. In this purgation, the ability for discursive meditation is taken from it, and the gift of precious communion in contemplative faith seems to be annihilated:

God has set a cloud before it through which its prayer cannot pass.²⁸² Not only is the outer, sensible dimension of the house of prayer stilled, but the very spring of inner spiritual vitality seems to have been sealed. Thus there is a crushing sense of powerlessness and seeming futility, opposite to the previous climate in which all the powers of spiritual awareness had really flourished to an extraordinary degree.

Consequently, the soul is conscious only of its unlikeness to God, and so “it appears clear to the soul that God has abandoned it and, in his abhorrence of it, has flung it into darkness”(N.2.6.2); “the soul is not able to believe that God loves it, nor that there is or will ever be reason why he should do so” (N.2.7.7).

Thus the soul feels alienated not only from the love of God but also, because it arises out of a perception of one’s seemingly manifest disfigurement of sin, from all

²⁸⁰N.2.2.2.

²⁸¹N.2.2..1.

²⁸²N.2.8.1.

one's friends and from the whole of creation. Like Job, or Jeremiah of the Lamentations, one feels oneself to be a blight on the earth, one belongs nowhere.

However, though John's teaching on the passive night of spirit seems unduly pessimistic, we should know that in proportion as our suffering increases, so does our joy and love; the more we know the darkness, the more we see the light. This suffering thus is something which the mystic both fears and loves, because he knows it as the way in which the love of God purifies the beloved soul. This conception of purgatory is immanental, for in it the soul's concern is with conditions within itself its joys and sorrows are within. For this reason, this night is paradoxically called a "happy night."

Nevertheless, one should recognize that this is a spiritual realism and not a psychological sickness. It should not be taken in a too superficially psychological sense. John declares without hesitation that the soul perceives its real impurity and unworthiness of God. John firmly believes that the dark night of the spirit is a true knowledge of one's real experience.

On the other hand, one of the most distinctive and important features we should mention in this period are the appearances of extraordinary phenomena. It is during this passive night of the spirit that the extraordinary epiphenomena of mysticism are most frequently experienced. John states that proficients are subject to "raptures and transports" (N. 2.1.2), and frequently behold "imaginative and spiritual visions" (N.2.2.3) or "apprehend certain extraordinary words, sometimes from imagined persons" (A.2.2.1).

John explains a number of possible reasons which cause these extraordinary epiphenomena. First John believes that, in many cases, these phenomena are the contemplative's psychic products. He believes that they are produced by a lack in the contemplative's psychic integration.²⁸³ John states that these extraordinary experiences of rapture and ecstasy are indicative of the immature state of those in the dark night of the spirit.²⁸⁴ Second, John believes that some kinds of these phenomena, which are mostly produced by a contemplative's immature psychic state, can also be produced involuntarily through the intervention of God, angel, devil, or some unconscious force

²⁸³N.2.1.2.

²⁸⁴C.13.6.15.

at various stages of the cognitive process. However, though John does believe that God and other spiritual beings can bring such apprehensions to the soul, he does not agree that everything which appears to be of supernatural origin actually is so.

Consequently, since several different occasions of extraordinary phenomena occur in contemplatives, John sees the necessity of criteria for distinguishing authentic from inauthentic experiences. However he does not describe these criteria in detail, since he believes that it is a waste of time to determine which experiences are from God. He holds, on the contrary, that a person should reject such phenomena. Unlike many of his contemporaries, John sees little spiritual value in extraordinary phenomena

3) Summary of John's Contemplative Path

To sum up in John's contemplative path, as we have seen, there is a genuine sequence in the different phases of the night.

However, we should recognize the integral connection and continuity between the different stages. More precise would be the claims that all meditative activity includes some passivity, say the sort of passivity required in reading, and that one must actively work to put oneself in a contemplative position where one can be receptive to divine inflow, infusion, manifestation, illumination, illustration, and so forth, but without the aids of the senses. For example, there is a continuity between the night of the senses and the night of the spirit; they do not exist as utterly separate moments on the spiritual path. At the outset of his writings, John alludes to the fact that even in the night of the sense, there is an experience of the night of the spirit. As we have seen, it is only during the passive night of the spirit that the issues of purification which were to be attended to in the night of the senses, e.g., inordinate sensual appetites, are truly removed from the soul.²⁸⁵

Thus the night of the senses begun in the earlier phases only comes to perfection in the radical refinement of the spirit. The logically distinguishable aspects of the night do not fall into hard-and-fast categories: the onset of the night of the sense occurs before the onset of the night of the spirit, but both will later continue side by side. The earlier dialectic between the passive night of the sense and active spiritual discipline serves

²⁸⁵N.2.2.1.

rather to accommodate sense to spirit than to unite spirit to God.²⁸⁶

There are thus broad overlaps between the various stages; they do not have clear dividing lines. As Schnapper mentions, the various stages of mystical advancement “...represent rallying points in which the previous phase finds its consummation but where, at the same time, lies embedded the seed for further growth. Thus each step stands for a new level of development and a new departure; one conditioning and, in a transmuted form, being contained in the other.”²⁸⁷ Thus it should not be taken to mean that when one passes from meditation to contemplation one permanently crosses a divide that precludes return. John is quite clear that the habit of contemplation builds on the habit of meditation. Even the most spiritually advanced person periodically needs to return to meditation.²⁸⁸

The road to spiritual perfection is gradual in John’s contemplation, starting with ascetical discipline, intellectual rigor, and discursive meditation. The transition from the lowly communication of meditation to the higher communication of contemplation can be understood only if one realizes that a second night or purgation, that of the spirit, is needed to supplement the ascetical night of the senses.

D) Union with God

The highest stage of John’s contemplative path is the stage of union, which he also calls spiritual marriage. This refers to the successful outcome of the whole purgative and illuminative process. This state of union is nothing less than the divinization of the soul through participation in the divine life.²⁸⁹

However, in order to understand the union of the soul with God, we have to understand John’s fundamental concept of the relationship between God and the soul . For John, God resides in the soul even before the soul realizes it. Here we can see that John also accepts the immanent theology of mysticism in general. But for John immanent theology is balanced by transcendentalism. Thus there is a tension in John’s

²⁸⁶N.2.2.1.

²⁸⁷Edith B. Schnapper, *The Inward Odyssey* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1965), 19.

²⁸⁸A.2.15.

²⁸⁹The nature of union with God and its essence is described more fully in *The Spiritual Canticle* and most fully in *The Living Flame of Love*. In his prologue *The Flame*, John writes about the difficulty of describing the nature of such a state and decides only to write about it when he himself is feeling particularly inspired. See Prologue in *Flame of Love*.

mystical theology between these two concepts.

In respect to immanental theology, John believes that God is present in the soul though a person is in mortal sin.²⁹⁰ There are three different types of God's presence in the soul in John's immanental theology. The first presence of God is called the "essential presence," which means God's presence in all souls, either sinners or saints.²⁹¹ By this means God is present in all creatures. This essential presence of God makes God the ground of all being and existence.

The second type of God's presence is that God resides in the soul by grace. God resides in all persons by his grace, except in those who commit mortal sin. John, however, does not mention whether a forgiven person receives back this gracious presence.²⁹²

The third type of God's presence is called "spiritual affection," by which God makes the soul enjoy and recreate herself.²⁹³

John distinguishes these three presences of God into two modes of union, calling the first "substantial", "natural" or essential union, and the second "supernatural" union. The former is ontologically given, the latter is acquired through psychological transformation. Essential presence or union, then, is the union all souls enjoy by the very fact that they are. God, qua being, preserves his creatures in their being; all manifestation shares the life of its Principle and in this way is united to It.

By contrast, "supernatural union", for John is conscious realization of God's essential presence. Thus supernatural union actualizes in conscious life what is naturally given in being. It adds nothing to essential union. The prefix "super" refers only to John's belief in the presence of a cosmic complicity in the process of transformation.²⁹⁴

On the other hand, John is aware that there is a fundamental gap between God and the human soul, that is, the transcendental side of God. John is completely aware that

²⁹⁰C.1.7.

²⁹¹Ibid.,11.3.

²⁹²Ibid.,

²⁹³Ibid.,

²⁹⁴Concerning the nature of John's mystical union, Sanson asserts that the natural presence becomes supernatural when the soul, responding to the call of the Word dwelling in its center, remains in poverty and nakedness of spirit. He affirms that through the practice of spiritual nakedness, the experimental union with this natural presence of God is effected. Joseph Ferraro, "Sanjuanist Doctrine on the Human Mode of Operation of the Theological Virtue of Faith," 270.

the unworthiness of a soul cannot reach God. Thus there is no way in which such a soul can be united with the infinite being of God. There is no likeness between what is and what is not.²⁹⁵ John states:

Now all the goodness of the creatures in the whole world compared with the infinite goodness of God can be called evil, since nothing is good save God only. A soul, then, which sets its heart on the good things of the world becomes extremely evil in the sight of God... This soul will be incapable of union with God.²⁹⁶

It is obvious, then, that John's mystical union is in tension between the transcendental and immanent concepts of God as well as the essential and supernatural union of God. His theology is balanced by these two concepts. It is these tensions that we should consider in order to understand the nature of union with God.

1) How Union is Fulfilled

a. Love: As The Means of Union

Then, the question arises, how does John deal with these tensions? John relieves this tension without destroying it by means of love. Love is the essential element of John's mystical union with God. For John, love is the only way to overcome the antithesis. Love does so, paradoxically, by effecting a synthesis, a synthesis which in overcoming the antithesis does not destroy it. In love, God can overcome the immanent and transcendental. Also, love stands for a deep transformation of human intentionality which touches psychological structure at its root and turns it toward the principle as the only adequate object of its energy. Love is a mystery. It is the mystery of love that all sinners who are still unworthy can be united with God. Love is a bridge which is placed between God and the soul.

Love, for John, is the transforming power and cohesive agent in divine union. And thus love is the means towards transformation. In John's words:

In discussing union with God, we are not discussing the substantial union which is always existing, but the union and transformation of the soul in God. This union is not always existing, but we find it only where there is a likeness of love. . . It exists

²⁹⁵ A.1.4.4.

²⁹⁶ A.2.4.5.

when God's will and the soul's are in conformity. . . When the soul rids itself of what is unconformed to the divine will, it rests transformed in God through love.²⁹⁷

Again, the question which arises is how can this be so, how can this occur? According to John love is possible because love creates a similitude to the object encountered in love. It is love that creates the likeness necessary for union with the divine. The dynamic transference of love can make its object into the likeness of the lover. John states: Love causes equality and likeness and even brings lower the object of its love.²⁹⁸ Thus love is a medium, an instrument. It is the ladder which makes possible the ascent of man to God. He firmly believes that only a love fixed in God has the power to set one free from all things which are not God. He is firmly convinced that if one fixes one's love in God, then such a love, because of its divine object, becomes itself divine and exalted to equality with God. In the same way, if one's love is fixed upon lesser objects, one becomes equal with them and hence separated from the Creator.

Thus the person who seeks union with God should seek to love God above all else. And it is for this reason that John advocates a purification of the soul in relation to the senses and attachment to creatures. John says:

In order that we may the better prove what has been said, it must be known that the affection and attachment which the soul has for creatures renders the soul like these creatures; and, the greater is its affection, the closer is the equality and likeness between them; for love creates a likeness between that which loves and that which is loved. . . And thus, he that loves a creature becomes as low as that creature, and, in some ways, lower; for love not only makes the lover equal to the object of his love, but even subjects him to it. Hence in the same way it comes to pass that the soul that loves anything else becomes incapable of pure union with God and transformation in Him. For the low estate of the creature is much less capable of union with the high estate of the Creator than is darkness with light. . .

All the being of creation, then, compared with the infinite Being of God, is nothing. And therefore the soul that sets its affections upon the beings of creation is likewise nothing in the eyes of God, and less than nothing; for, as we have said, love makes equality and similitude, and even sets the lover below the object of his love. And therefore such a soul will in no wise be able to attain to union with the infinite Being of God; for that which is not can have no communion with that which is.²⁹⁹

²⁹⁷ A.2.5.3.

²⁹⁸ A.1.5.1.

²⁹⁹ A.1.4.3.

Here, we have a clue that John's concept of love reflects the twofold aspects; one towards creation and the other towards God. Anders Nyrgen, in his study of Augustine's concept of love, analyses two different concepts of love: "**Caritas**" and "**Cupiditas**." "And he makes a distinction between "**Caritas**" and "**Cupiditas**." **Caritas** is the Platonic "heavenly Eros" which is directed upwards towards God, whereas **Cupiditas** is "vulgar Eros which is directed downwards towards the world."³⁰⁰ Here we find that John's concepts of love are very similar to Augustine's. Thus we have a clue that John's concepts of love have been influenced by Augustine.

However, John focuses his whole life on the love of God and rejects love for the world. Any love for other things must be held within love for God, so that any attachment which love brings is attachment to God, and not to things in themselves, outside love for God.

In regard to the nature of love, both loves are rooted in man's desire thus they are of the same nature. Both loves are egocentric and anthropocentric. Even if the love of God is oriented upwards, still it is of the same nature as that love directed downwards. Though the object of the love is God, it does not change the nature of this love.³⁰¹

In fact, the most important thing regarding this love in John's mystical theology is that man has the power to reach God by using this type of love, though it is still egocentric love, no matter how great is the gap between the human and the divine. In other words, though love is egocentric in nature, it can be used as a ladder to bridge the abyss between God and man and it can be used to divinize human nature in its highest form of religious expression.

However, since the nature of love is egocentric by nature, its purification as well as progression is essential. In practice, this means being prepared to place second in our lives all loves except love for God, to cut down to size, or if needs be to reject, any other love which threatens to undermine or compromise our love for God, and to use self-denial and repentance where appropriate, as means of purifying our affections if other attachments get in the way of our attachment to God, believing that such a

³⁰⁰Nyrgen, *Agape and Eros*, trans by Philip S. Watson. 2nd ed, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1953), 498-500

³⁰¹N.2.13.

sacrifice will be blessed with a new understanding of God and a new love for God as the fruits of a growing attachment to him. St Bernard in his treatise On Loving God sets out four stages of love which illustrates John's point. These are:

loving oneself for one's own sake,
loving God for one's own sake,
loving God for God's sake,
loving oneself for God's sake.

Here the progression from selfish to selfless love is clearly set out, in which love for God gradually takes over control of our life so that in the end all is loved for God's sake. St Bernard, however, points out that very few people reach the fourth stage; it is the equivalent of John's understanding of union with God.

Thus we can conclude that in John's mystical union, love is understood as the means of fulfilling its goal. By mystical love, the unworthiness of the mystic is overcome, and it is in this love that union is made possible. And this mystical love enables one to empty and purify the mind of all things but love for God. Moreover, when the soul is illuminated by this love, the soul awakens herself to God and recognizes that God is already present within her in the divine presence, i.e., essentially, by grace, and by affection.³⁰² Thus in John's mystical theology, love is the real key to understanding mystical union.

Here, we can see that in John's concept of mystical union both faith and love are means of union with God. However, their approaches are different. Love produces the union of likeness by its native power and by reason of its psychological quality. Consequently, it can lead the soul to the height of union and likeness which is called transforming union, as we have seen. Thus John calls this union with God a "union of likeness" which is the "union and transformation of the soul with God, which is not being wrought continually, but only when there is produced that likeness that comes from love."³⁰³

In this respect, love is unique. It differs from faith. Since faith, in its nature appears

³⁰²C.11.4.

³⁰³St John of the Cross, Ascent of Mount Carmel, trans. and ed. By E. Allison Peers (Kent, England: Burns & Oates, 1987), Book II, 5.3. 75-76.

to be entirely self transcending, love includes its own element of genuine attainment and rest. Unlike faith and hope, love is not required to ‘deny’ itself in anticipation of totally other fullness, because its unitive function in no way inhibits its self-transcendence.

Nevertheless, love must also be a process of progressive perfection. The movement towards God is by a secret ladder of contemplation in which every step, from first to last, is a certain degree of love:

Contemplation is an infused and loving knowledge of God which enlightens the soul and at the same time enkindles it with love, until it is raised up step by step even to God as Creator: for it is love alone which unites and joins the soul with God.³⁰⁴

John thus teaches two features of love in vital tension. On the one hand, it is the essence of spiritual perfection-“the state of perfection, which consists in the perfect love of God”(N.2.18.4.)- but at the same time it admits of an infinite range of quality and so is always open to growth. For this reason there is no surfeit of love. When love is the center of the soul in God, it never blocks the drive towards its own increase:

Love is the inclination of the soul and the strength and power which it has to go to God, for, by means of love, the soul is united with God; and thus, the more degree of love the soul has, the more profoundly does it enter into God and the more it is centred in him.³⁰⁵

b. ‘Union with God’ as God’s Grace

However, we should note that this union of the divine with the creature through love is not accomplished merely through the act of individual. According to John, this progressive reformation or return of the creature to the divine is the result of divinizing grace. It is accomplished by the grace of God. As Jacques Maritain states; “Grace ordines us to the vision of the divine essence, of Deity itself, which is above all being, whereas by nature we are ordained only to the knowledge of things in general and the being of sensible things.”³⁰⁶

³⁰⁴N.2.18.5.

³⁰⁵F.1.13.

³⁰⁶Jacques Maritain, The Degree of Knowledge (London: Geoffrey Bles: The Century Press, 1917), 316.

This divinizing grace, however, is characterized by two aspects. And this twofold aspect of grace is paradoxical in John's work. On the one hand, it is God's grace that allows the soul to ascend the mount of perfection. Yet on the other hand the soul must be purged of all of its inordinate desires, of all images and loves. In this regard, it depends on God's grace and human free will.³⁰⁷ As we have seen, one of the nights is the variable interplay of activity and passivity, of self-realization and dispossession of self. As Gaudreau says, it is "the action or **modus operandi** on the part of the divine and the **modus operandi** on the part of the creature as a manifestation of the creature's liberty."³⁰⁸ Indeed, Gaudreau continues, "the dialectic between liberty and divinizing grace will not be transcended until the image goal is reached, until the transforming union of love has taken place."³⁰⁹ As John states: "God communicates Himself most to that soul that has progressed farthest in love; namely, that has its will in closest conformity with the will of God."³¹⁰

On the other hand, however, Crisogono with Arintero and Garrigou-Lagrange argue that the theological virtue of faith can exist without grace. They logically concluded that the presence of sanctifying grace was not necessary for the presence and operation of faith as a theological virtue. Crisogono says that supernatural life can have two modes of development: one human, the other superhuman. One of the reasons of this identification of the mode of grace and that of the soul is the impossibility of distinguishing supernatural operations from natural operations, according to Crisogono. It matters not says, Crisogono, the nature of the former be essentially distinct from that of the latter, since the mode of all of them are identical.³¹¹ However, Ferraro argues with this view by saying that the affirmation of Crisogono of a perfect development of grace without leaving the natural human mode of operation reduces itself to the same defect of confusing the natural with the supernatural and of unwillingly and unknowingly, in our opinion, falling into Pelagianism.³¹² In *The Living Flame of Love*, John clearly talks of the insufficiency of the human modes of operation for reaching God. The human

³⁰⁷William Johnston, *Mystical Theology*, 208.

³⁰⁸Marie M. Gaudreau, *Mysticism and Image in St. John of the Cross*, (Bern: Hervert Lang, 1976), 174.

³⁰⁹*Ibid.*, 185.

³¹⁰A.2.5.4.

³¹¹Joseph Ferraro, "Sanjuanist Doctrine on the Human Mode of Operation of the Theological Virtue of Faith," 274-277.

mode of operation not only is disproportionate to this theological virtue but serves it as an impediment.³¹³

Now we should consider in more detail how these two dimensions of action and passivity, or as Gaudreau mentions the dialectic between human liberty and divinizing grace, are understood in John's mysticism of the relation between the Divine will and the human will. For John true freedom of the soul is not to be found in the seeking of its independence but in understanding the fact of its dependence on God. For John, however, dependence on God does not mean that man loses inherent freedom of choice, for this would bring a lessening rather than a perfecting of his nature.

John answers the above question in the Thomistic manner. John states that the distinction between the Divine and human wills should be made between the First Cause and Reason of all acts and those secondary, natural and voluntary causes which operate in creatures. The necessary and initial Mover in all cases is God, without whom there would be no secondary causes or movements:

And just as by imparting movement to natural causes He does not prevent their acts from being according to their nature, so in moving voluntary causes He does not deprive them of their voluntary character, rather, He is the cause of this voluntary character they possess, since He acts in each thing according to the nature he has conferred upon it. (*Summa Theologica*. I. 1xxxiii, I).

Thus, God as First Cause of all things, enables our will to choose freely, so that its choice is its own activity as of a secondary cause. At the same time, insofar as our will is not contrary to the will of God, we are using that which, whilst it is within our own power to use, is only so by the gift of God. So St. John says,

The state of this divine union consists in holding the soul according to the will with total transformation in the will of God, in such a manner that there may be nothing in it which is contrary to the will of God, but that in all and through all its movement may be solely that of God.³¹⁴

Thus human freedom is enhanced in the degree that the will chooses that which is

³¹²Ibid., 284.

³¹³A.2.4.4. 7; 15.1.

³¹⁴A.1.11.2.

conformed to the will of God. John emphasizes this matter in his words on detachment from desires.

The strength of the soul consists in its faculties, passions and appetites; all of which are governed by the will. Now when these faculties, passions and appetites are directed by the will toward God, and turned from all that is not God, then the force of the soul is kept for God, and so comes to love God with all its strength.³¹⁵

Here, we must be careful to note that John's teaching on the passivity of the soul is of a different character from that of the Eastern mystics in which the soul is wrapped in a self-induced state of physical and mental immobility. John's passivity is far from being passive in the sense of "doing nothing", willing and desiring nothing. Rather, it is the highest activity of which the soul is capable, the deliberate and sustained effort of the soul to suffer, in the sense of to allow, all that God may will to effect in it. John says in the Night of Faith:

Here the faculties are at rest, and are working, not actively, but passively, by receiving that which God operates in them. . . we say that the soul does not work, not because it does not understand, but because that which it understands is not a result of its own industry, but is a receiving of that which is given to it.³¹⁶

E) The Characteristics of Mystical Union

1) Christ as the Object of Union

In fact, the most essential feature of 'union with God' is focused and achieved in Christ. The essence of John's mystical union can be fulfilled when this love is applied to Christ as its object. To John, Christ is understood as the most perfect object of this love. Christ is expressed as the bridegroom of the spiritual or purified soul.. John's mystical union of love is best realized in the terms of Paul: "I live, now not I, but Christ lives in me." Thus John's mysticism is the expression of this love for Christ. In Christ the tension and eager desire of man to reach God is overcome in perfect unity.³¹⁷

John himself has a theological dilemma, the tension between a philosophical

³¹⁵A.3.16.2,6.

³¹⁶A.2.7,8.

³¹⁷William Johnston, Mystical Theology, 209.

Neoplatonic concept of God as abstract non-historical deity and a Judeo-Christian personalistic concept of God as personal and historical divinity, and he has solved this tension by focusing one's love in Christ which is to direct the highest human quality towards that which can be apprehended not only as the transcendent God but also as the immanent God revealed in history.

Hence John's mystical union is Christocentric. If one treats the mystical union with God without reference to Christ, a certain danger will be involved. For example, some studies of John's mysticism, which emphasize only mystical union with God and ignore the Christocentric element of the union, create the impression that John's mysticism is in the same line as that of Eckhart and is almost evaporated into metaphysics in which the historical Christ and his significance for Christianity have no meaning.

Union with Christ, therefore, is nothing more than to enjoy the Father through the Son and to enjoy the Son as the gift of the Father. For John real mystical union is the fulfillment of one's longing to be united with Christ.

However, John's Christocentric mystical theology is sometimes criticized by both Christians and non-Christians. They argue that John's mystical theology seems to have a contradiction within its own contemplative structures. Granted, that John's notion of mystical union focuses on Christ and in that sense is specifically Christian, it must still face the further crucial question: how is that dimension of the Christocentric mystical union related to the actual practice of 'dark', non-conceptual, 'contemplative faith'?

The problem arises in a practical way from two different points of view. On the one hand, there are many non-Christian practitioners of meditation who claim to find in John's mystical union an adequate formulation of their own experience. Their conclusion is that the experience in each case is identical, and that therefore John's mystical experience can hardly be different from that of Buddhism or Hinduism. Thus John's mystical union is simply an instance of the universal mystical way and has no distinctiveness.

On the other hand, there are Christians devoted to the life of prayer who find John's doctrine of dark faith a very inadequate means of prayer. They even find a destructive influence from it. For example, Ross Collings quotes a letter from Abbot Columba Marmion who wrote a letter to a Carmelite nun, "I have read St. John of the Cross

attentively. His writings are not suited to my soul. They take from me my liberty in my dealings with God. My inclination is to find everything in Jesus and through Him. He is the 'Way' which the Father has given us, it is by Him that we must go. When I try to make my mental prayer in the 'void', putting aside all the beautiful words, images and comparisons which Jesus used in His teaching, I am paralyzed."³¹⁸ The writer here seems to find a contradiction between the doctrinal faith of Jesus as the 'Way' which the Father has given us and 'the void' of the dark night of faith.

The problem seems to arise from its source in the dualistic teachings of John's mystical theology. On the one hand, John's cardinal affirmation teaches that nothing that can be comprehended by man, nothing that is an achieved part of his experience can have any immediate resemblance to God. In order to reach a profound relationship with God which requires 'pure' and 'simple' loving attention, one needs to set aside all particular images and concepts. Thus even particular conceptions or images of Christ must be transcended by pure faith. On the other hand, John allows such images or concepts of Christ for beginners. John teaches that meditation on the humanity of Christ is necessary for beginners since beginners need to kindle their love for God by sensuous devotion.³¹⁹ John thus states:

Meditation is a discursive action wrought by means of images, forms and figures that are fashioned by the interior senses, as when we imagine Christ crucified or bound to the column, or at another of the stations. . . . All these imaginings must be cast out from the soul, which will remain in darkness, so that it may attain to divine union; for they cannot be a proximate means of union with God.³²⁰

As this passage indicates, John allows the use of forms and imaginings of Christ for meditation but at the same time he rejects using such forms and imaginings when God does intervene for the ascent of the ladder of contemplation. In other words, John sometimes recommends or prohibits such particular imaginings and forms depending on the spiritual level of the soul.

Consequently, it is clear in John's doctrine that the more profoundly contemplative

³¹⁸Ross Collings, O.C.D. *The Way of the Christian Mystics* (The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota, 1990), 112.

³¹⁹*Ibid.*,

³²⁰A.2.12.3.

the faith, the more it becomes free of any particular mode of revelation or form and more purely an absolute reaching out of the human spirit to the absolute hidden ground of being.

However, as we shall see, the full evidence of John's own writing indicates that his apophatic way of darkness is wholly Christological. At every moment of its development, even in its darkest contemplative form, faith is the "faith of Christ my Spouse", "because it is from Christ." The Spiritual Canticles trace the mystical ascent from its very beginning to its consummation in Spiritual Marriage, and the whole dialogue is between the soul as Bride and the Spouse, identified clearly as Christ. It is a hymn of longing for God, but always with the recognition that it is the love of Christ which is the way into the life of God:

Here we can see that John's mystical union seems to have contradictory statements. So it can be asked: how is it possible to hold that (1) the soul, when it is on the contemplative ladder, must resolutely leave behind forms or images, even the Christ image and (2) that the apophatic way of darkness is wholly Christological?

The question is, then, how can we combine such contradictory statements? The crucial question, then, must follow; what is the specific role of Christ in contemplative faith? What does John mean by Christological in the apophatic way of darkness? In what sense can this be true when, in the formless experience, there is no clear determination of the object of faith as Christ? John simply answers the questions by saying that even when particular images and ideas of Christ cease and are willingly abstained from by the soul, the reaching out of loving faith towards the same person is not at all diminished. Even if the soul is in conceptual darkness, it is with respect to a preceding commitment of imagination and heart to Christ.

Thus even in deprivation of soul the heart is not lost to Jesus. Rather, the soul is more deeply convinced of the presence of the Christ who is the object of her spiritual journey. Though there is no clearly defined object, the contemplative's meaning is intensely and obviously informed with the presence of Christ, therefore, it is called mystical knowledge which is different from ordinary knowledge.

Thus, as sometimes misunderstood in the darkness of faith in contemplation, the soul is not an empty mind. Paradoxically, in the deprivation of specific concepts of

Christ the soul gains an even truer mode of knowledge of Christ:

If the impediments and veils of creaturely forms were completely removed, the soul would then find itself in a condition of pure detachment and poverty of spirit and, being simple and pure, would be transformed into simple and pure Wisdom, which is the Son of God.³²¹

Zwi Werblowsky criticizes John's attitude as "anti-cognitive" and interprets him as rejecting all knowledge of whatever kind. However, as we noted, John does refer to union as giving us a very real knowledge of Christ, even if this type of knowledge cannot be compared to our ordinary means of understanding. If, in union, there were no 'knowledge' of any kind, as Zwi Werblowsky understands John's concept of true knowledge in union, there would be no consciousness of the experience. The mind would be a complete blank and in effect 'annihilated'; but, as we have seen, John does not mean to imply this. Zwi Werblowsky, then, fails to understand the true meaning of John's concept of knowledge in union or to distinguish between different types of knowledge.³²²

As we have seen, John's teaching of detachment is a good example of his frequent use of paradox. Through emptying ourselves, we are filled. Through emptying our conceptual and formal images of Christ, we gain real knowledge of Christ.

2) God as 'Nothingness' (Nada)

On the other hand, John's mystical experience which is characterized as union of love with God is not directed toward an attractive lovable object. For John, love cannot exist so long as it remains an object to be possessed. It is born only in the letting go of all grasping and being grasped. The way up the mountain of God's love, as John describes in The Ascent of Mt. Carmel, is the way of "**nada, nada, nada.**"³²³ If God is to be loved as God himself loves, it will happen only in the dark corridors of nothingness. For John, only in devastating loss does a truth to be grasped come rushing back out of the void. Love takes wing where calculation ends.

Thus for John's mystical path, God has been revealed in "darkness, and

³²¹A. 2.15.4.

³²²R. J. Zwi Werblowsky, "On the Mystical Rejection of Mystical Illumination", Religious Studies, vol I (1965-6). 20-28.

nothingness.’ Indeed, at a high stage in the mystical life, faith is like thick darkness or like night; and God also is like night to the soul. In other words God is light in Himself but darkness to us; God is all in Himself but nothing to us. This is the dark night. It is brought on by the light of God, but it is like an experience of nothingness. In other words, the highest “touches of union” are like looking at the sun; the experience is certainly direct and immediate, but cannot be clear and continuous because of the limitations of mortal existence.³²⁴ Here are the words of John:

This dark night is an inflow of God into the soul, which purges it of its habitual ignorance and imperfections, natural and spiritual and which the contemplatives call infused contemplation or mystical theology. Through this contemplation God teaches the soul secretly and instructs it in the perfection of love without its doing anything or understanding how this happens.³²⁵

Here every word is important. It is an inflow of God Himself. In other words it is a direct meeting with God. It is a ‘nothingness’ experience in which a subject-object duality is transcended. In this experience of ‘nothingness’, dualistic characters are overcome. Thus although there is separation between God and the mystic in his mystical union, John also speaks of a unitive element in mystical union. John describes its unitive characteristic as **nada**. This overcomes all the usual barriers between the individual and the Absolute. Again, this action of God is both purgative and illuminative. It purges the soul and at the same time teaches the soul. And the soul does not understand what is going on: that is why it is in the night of nothingness. And the great lesson taught to the soul is perfect love.

Indeed it is drawn to that which appears as nothing. John speaks of approaching a naked God, stripped of all distinctions, leaving behind “everything perceived and understood.” In experiencing union with God, he speaks of letting go of every concept of God. Here ‘nothing’ means that one must give up not only the desire for material things but also the desire for knowledge. In this regard, to suggest that such faith is a context, as Steven Katz does, is confused. As Marechal writes, the “pure, direct, non-

³²³A.12.4.1.

³²⁴A.2.5.2.

³²⁵N.2.5.1.

symbolic affirmation, lived rather than thought, of the Absolute.”³²⁶ In doing so one enters into a cloud of unknowing and becomes nothing in a cognitive or spiritual way. Thus, John says, images are set aside and a passivity of the mental processes, the will, and the intellect are effected so that the soul should be pure and filled only with love for the beloved.³²⁷ And yet one gives up this knowledge for a more sublime knowledge which can be called faith or wisdom or enlightenment. And this, being a knowledge of God, can be called all. It is due to the fact that since God is beyond subject-object reality, John experiences God as **nada**. He recognizes the utter poverty of all language about God. When one encounters the matchless glory of the divine, one finds oneself not simply running short of words but actually speechless and unknowing.

John wrote his mystical account with the intensity of his mystical experience which led him to boldness of language, to poetic and imaginative statements rather than to trapping the experience in exact words, which would have been impossible. Nearly all scholars agree that the main characteristic of nondual mystical experience is the mystic’s sense of unity or “non-difference” with God or Ultimate Reality.

3) Union with God as ‘Differentiated’ in Character

It is not easy for John to describe the nature of mystical union. In the Prologue of The Flame he mentions the difficulty of describing the nature of such a state. He says that it is quite ineffable, and far transcends what words can tell of it. He admits that it is beyond all that can be said or thought. John thus wanted to write about it when he was inspired; when the lord had “uncovered some knowledge and bestowed some fervor.”³²⁸

Having outlined the difficulty of describing the nature of mystical union, our descriptions of its characters are at least limited and partial. First, John speaks of the soul being transformed and enlightened in so high a degree as to make it seem to be God. The divine presence transforms the finite. The entire finite realm is transformed and elevated. As a result, the soul is no longer troubled by the things of the world by which it had been so tempted: wandering imagination, or inordinate appetites and passions. The soul has overcome his or her useless hopes, joys, sorrows, and fears. Thus

³²⁶Joseph Marechal, S.J., Studies in the Psychology of the Mystics, Algar Thorold trans, (Albany: Magi books, Inc, 1964),127.

³²⁷A. 2.5.8.

³²⁸F.Prol.1.

the soul has become mature both emotionally and psychologically.³²⁹ John says, in this state the soul knows “the creatures through God and not God through the creatures; to know the effects through their cause and not the cause through the effects; for the latter knowledge is secondary and this other is essential.”³³⁰ The world is viewed from a divine perspective. Moreover, the soul continues to have compassion for others but since “this transformation of love now resembles the angels,” her compassion is no longer accompanied by the feeling of compassion although “she possesses its work and perfection.”³³¹ The soul now lives “according to the manner of the state of innocence which Adam possessed.”³³² The soul now is divinized and its acts are Divine acts; it becomes God by participation; it is “more divine than human.”³³³ The soul does not need to reflect in a natural way in order to make decisions and take action as she formerly did. Since her spiritual faculties are now divine, her knowledge and love are directly, supernaturally infused by God. Thus the soul and God become equal (**Igualidad**).

However, it is important to note that for John, God still remains removed while yet simultaneously flooding the being of the creature. God is in the soul and yet God remains removed from the soul. There is an opening in the soul of an emptiness of the divine. And in this way the divine presence is felt through its absence. In other words, God is intimately close to the soul through God’s infinite remoteness. Paradoxically, it is through God’s absence that God is present to the soul. As a result, God cannot be reified.

Therefore, this union between the soul and God is not a union of nature or essence .John even dares to say that the soul is elevated above God.³³⁴ Here, we find an important and problematic theological element concerning the relationship of the self and God. Mystics speak of union between them; Christian theology maintains an eternal distinction. Does John compromise this doctrine? Does John teach the dissolution of the self in divine union as some Eastern religions teach (monism as opposed to theism)?

³²⁹C.26.18.

³³⁰F. 5.5.

³³¹C.20.21.10.

³³²N2.24.

³³³F.1.13.

³³⁴C.27.1. Perhaps it means that it passes beyond God as he is conceived by us.

Some of John's passages could be taken to imply this, and we need to examine whether or not he strays from the orthodox view.

John seems to be aware of this matter. From the beginning of the Ascent he laid the basis of an answer-namely, that although they are the same, God and the believer retain essentially different modes of being,

A ray of sunlight is striking a window. . . if it (the window) be wholly pure and clean, the ray of sunlight will transform it and illumine it in such wise that it will itself seem to be a ray and will give the same light as the ray. Although in reality the window has a nature distinct from that of the ray itself, however much it may resemble it, yet we may say that window is a ray of the sun or is light by participation.³³⁵

Even in the consummation of marriage according to the flesh, the two become one flesh, as says the Divine Scripture, so when this spiritual Marriage between God and the soul is consummated there are two natures in one spirit and love of God. . . wherein is effected such union of the two natures and such communication of the Divine nature to the human that, while neither of them changes its being, each of them appears to be God³³⁶

The substance of the soul, although it is not the substance of God, for into this it cannot be changed, is nevertheless united in Him and absorbed in Him, and is thus God by participation in God, which comes to pass in this perfect state of the spiritual life, although not so perfectly as in the next life.³³⁷

These passages indicate that for John the eternal distinction between God and creatures is maintained: just as the window is luminous with the light that strikes it so that it becomes indistinguishable from the light though without ceasing to be a window, in the same way man divinized by God remains a man-and is only God by participation.³³⁸ Moreover, John says that even the Beatific Vision of God in heaven, when the soul has become "wholly assimilated to God," will not be because "the soul will come to have the capacity of God, for this is impossible"³³⁹ Thus for John this union is not a pantheistic immersion into undifferentiated unity in which the personhood of the soul is absorbed into the being of God in an absolute manner that would

³³⁵A.2.5.5.

³³⁶C.27.2.3.

³³⁷F.2.3.

³³⁸According to Zaehner, though there are many kinds of union, not always religious, the two main forms are monistic and theistic. In monistic union the self is merged into the One and loses its identity; in theistic union, personal identity is retained, but the soul is transformed in union with God.

³³⁹N.2.20.5.

destroy the uniqueness of her own being.

However, though John clearly maintains the distinction between God and creatures, there is another important principle that should be mentioned concerning love which also regulates the theology of union, for that love brings about a likeness between the lover and the loved. The tension between these two principles, the first creating a separation, the second a joining-together, is not hard to see.

This tension can be stated in this way: In the union of love with God how is it possible to think these two assertions simultaneously, (1) the soul and God are one; (2) the soul and God are and remain essentially distinct? If the soul is divinized by the gift of God, how can the soul not be God? If we do not answer this question, John's mysticism would be reduced to one of these alternatives: either God would fade away and be swallowed up by men, or man would fade into divinity. In either case nothing could be more foreign to John's thought.

Thus in order that both these things may be better understood, we must understand what participation of the soul in union with God means in John's mysticism, so that the two assertions, the identity and the difference between the soul and God- can both be valid. And in order to achieve this, we must look more closely at what John meant by the soul's transformation in God.

Colin P. Thompson having carefully examined the theme of participation and transformation in the **Cantico**, found four conclusions:

- (1) San Juan is not afraid to use terms like transformation, absorption and participation. Some of his expressions seems very bold, with possible pantheistic interpretation, and the soul exalted to divinity.
- (2) Whatever union is achieved in this life, it is but an imperfect shadow of the beatific vision, where it is experienced fully.
- (3) Traditional images are used to describe the union: the sun's ray shining through glass, coal and fire, starlight and sunlight, dew burned up by fire. If pressed too literally they have dangerous implications: More attacks them because they suggest annihilation of the soul. Dew, for example, is burned away; yet it represents the soul.
- (4) San Juan distinguishes the soul's substances from God's and places likeness or oneness at another level. But he does not always state this explicitly, and when he does not, his remarks could be given a pantheistic construction.³⁴⁰

³⁴⁰Thompson, *The Poet and The Mystic*, 163.

As Thompson pointed out, the statement that God and the soul are different in substance is an important safeguard in John's mysticism. Zaehner also agrees, quoting a passage from Suso's Little Book of Truth which concludes:

'If anything remained in man, and was not entirely poured out of him, then the Scripture could not be true that say: God is to become all things to all things. Nevertheless, his {the faithful servant's} being remains, though in a different form, in a different glory, and in a different power.' After issuing forth from God, each creature has its own separate essence which it will retain: 'the stone is not God, and God is not the stone, although the stone and all creatures are what they are through Him.'³⁴¹

On the other hand, Stace argues that when John speaks of "union with God" as "differentiated unity," he is merely imposing a high-level interpretation on an experience of "undifferentiated unity." According to Stace, all introvertive mystical experiences are states of pure consciousness without content. For instance, Stace argues that the introvertive description given by John indicates that it is a theistic interpretation of monistic experiences according to theistic theology. Particularly, by appealing to John, Stace tries to show that the introvertive state which John calls "union with God" is actually "the bare unity of the manifold of consciousness from which the manifold itself has been obliterated, and therefore provides no support for theism."³⁴² Stace maintains nonetheless that experience is "distinguishable though not completely separable" from its interpretation, and goes on to say that:

. . . if a mystic speaks of the experience of "an undifferentiated distinctionless unity," this mere report or description using only classificatory words may be regarded as a low-level interpretation. But this is being more fussily precise than is usually necessary, since for all intents and purposes it is just a description. If a mystic says that he experiences a "mystical union with the Creator of the universe," this is a high-level interpretation since it includes far more intellectual addition than a mere descriptive report. It includes an assumption about the origin of the world and a belief in the existence of a personal God.³⁴³

³⁴¹R. C. Zaehner, *Mysticism Sacred and Profane* (Oxford, 1961), 21.

³⁴²Michael Stoeber, "Introvertive Mystical Experiences: Monistic, Theistic, and The Theo-Monistic," *Religious Studies*, vol 29 (1993), 86.

³⁴³Walter T. Stace, *Mysticism and Philosophy*, (London: Macmillan, 1960), 37.

Based on this hypothesis, Stace concluded that “union with God” is not an uninterested description of any human being’s experience” but “ a theistic interpretation of the undifferentiated unity.”³⁴⁴ Thus theistic mystics theistically misinterpret monistic experiences.

However, Stace’s view of an undifferentiated unity contradicts, of course, with John’s mysticism. John claims that becoming God or merging with Him in some way is impossible. If John’s mystical experience was in essence the same as Eckhart’s, why does John never speak of “undifferentiated unity.” For example, in John’s account, there are purely theistic descriptions depicting dynamic experiences of a personal Deity. Particularly, John characterizes his experiences in the Trinitarian dimension of certain contemplative experiences. John indicates that the three Persons play different roles in certain contemplative states. It seems reasonable to suppose that there is something in the phenomenal character of these states which gives rise to such an interpretation, and that it is not merely superimposed upon an experience of undifferentiated unity.³⁴⁵

Unfortunately, Stace does not explain in any detail how one distinguishes high-level from low-level interpretations. The quotation above indicates that an interpretation is “low-level,” (and thus “for all intents and purposes. . . just a description”) if it employs “only classificatory words” and concepts, but “high-level” if it involves “far more intellectual addition,” such as assumptions about the existence of problematic entities or the occurrence of certain states of affairs. However, this is not much help without some further account of what makes expressions merely “classificatory.”

Thus, Stace’s claim that theistic mystics encounter in introvertive experience only this impersonal Real seems to have no foundation. Stace’s whole approach seems to show a decided bias toward monism, since he begins by adopting the quotation from the Mandukya Upanishad on “pure unitary consciousness” as a classic “low-level” description of introvertive states, and uses it as the standard for determining how much in other reports are purely descriptive.³⁴⁶ In this regard, Stace does not take the theistic description of these states seriously enough. Stace has not shown that extrovertive experiences always involve an apprehension of a relatively neutral “Unity” in all things

³⁴⁴Ibid., 103-104.

³⁴⁵C.1.5.13.

³⁴⁶Stace, *Mysticism and Philosophy*, 94-105.

which the Christian mystic merely interprets as an awareness of God.

However, we cannot deny the fact that the statements which in effect call the soul God form a dangerous basis for the Christian theologian. They bring the suspicion of pantheism and John could hardly escape being criticized as a pantheistic mystic.

However those who appreciate John's full theological system and the tradition from which it sprang can argue strongly that such statements must always be interpreted in the light of the fundamental distinction in substance between Creator and creature.³⁴⁷

Thus we can have the conviction that by following Christian tradition, John's understanding of transformation does not involve the dissolution of the individual's identity. In this regard John's mystical union is characterized as panentheism rather than pantheism. The key tension in John's panentheism consists in: the consciousness of the fact that all creatures have their life and duration in God, but this is a consciousness that must be balanced against the awareness of how creatures are distinct from God, an awareness which prevented John from becoming a pantheist.

Secondly, concerning the soul's participation in God, we should note the extraordinary intimacy achieved by God in the gift of himself. Here, John compares this intimacy with the concept of a flood. The soul is invaded by God as water invades everything before it. This flood is the flood of God's voice. Man is thus assailed and flooded by God's voice as by a river or torrent. He states:

It must be known that the soul feels herself to be assailed by the torrent of the Spirit of God in this case, in such a manner, and taken possession of thereby with such force, that it seems to her that all the rivers of the world are coming upon her and assailing her, and she feels that all her actions are whelmed thereby, and all the passions which she had aforesaid.³⁴⁸

However, it is important to note that for John, God still remains removed while yet simultaneously flooding the being of a creature. For that reason God remains God. He

³⁴⁷Clement of Alexandria (2nd century) and Origen (3rd century) are both early witnesses to the Christian tradition, with roots in Greek philosophy but under the discipline of Christian revelation. Origen was the first writer to interpret the union symbolized in the Song of Song between Bride and Bridegroom as between the Word of God and the individual soul—an interpretation which was to become immensely influential. Consequently, John's mysticism is to be understood in the context of the tradition. Orthodox Christian mysticism must be theistic, so that the metaphysical distinction between creature and Creator is maintained.

³⁴⁸C.13.9.

holds himself infinitely remote from the soul. By giving himself, he disappears. God is in the soul and yet God remains removed from the soul. Paradoxically, God is not in the believer, according to John, inasmuch as God is in the believer. His being remains distinct, says John. God gives himself and withholds himself at the same time- God truly gives himself and yet remains out of reach.

Again, paradoxically, the soul receives God and yet does not, and thus languishes in pain. There is an opening in the soul of an emptiness of the divine. And in this way the divine presence is felt through its absence. God is intimately close to the soul through God's infinite remoteness. Yet the subject of discourse is not an "entity" or "being".

For God is transcendent and yet immanent. In other words, to claim that John is a pantheist is at least to claim that there is a strong commitment on his part to divine immanence, in contrast to an almost exclusive concern in traditional theology for divine transcendence. John's belief in divine immanence has led Brennan to call his position "almost pantheistic" and to refer to his "so-called pantheism." However, these are somewhat imprecise ways of putting John's pantheism.³⁴⁹ Pantheism should be understood as God's transformative presence. Although we do not have the same nature as God, we are somewhat identical to (**mismo**) God, just as a window in a sense is the ray of the sun by participation (**participacion**). John goes so far as to claim that to become one with God by participant transformation makes the soul appear to be God.³⁵⁰

Another important character in union with God is the establishment of a certain "permanent" and "substantial" union with God. In this union, the soul experiences a continual intimate spiritual embrace in the substance of the soul.³⁵¹ Thus John compares this experience as a bed in which the beloved wakes from time to time. He states:

It does not, however, always experience these awakenings, for when the Beloved produces them, it seems to the soul that He is awakening in its heart, where before he remained as though asleep. . . He is usually there, in this embrace with His bride, as though asleep in the substance of the soul. And it is very well aware of Him and ordinarily enjoys Him.³⁵²

³⁴⁹Daniel A. Dombrowski, *St. John of the Cross*, (State University of New York Press, 1992), 115-117.

³⁵⁰A. 2. 14. 21.

³⁵¹C.22.5.

³⁵²F.4.14.15.

Elsewhere John insists that although the soul is always in this sublime state of spiritual marriage, the faculties are not always in actual union.³⁵³ In other words, John seems to believe that even for the person who experiences awareness of God in a spiritual marriage which is considered mystical, the soul is being experienced without any harm to consciousness of the external world.

John also mentions that since a person in this state becomes “divinized,” spiritual marriage involves a further manifestation of the mystery of the Incarnation at least in part. In other words, the soul in this state acquires a deeper knowledge of the hypostatic union by being raised to an analogous condition; the soul experiences both humanity and divinity within herself. The soul experiences a certain taste of Christ’s relationship to the Father: the Father giving himself wholly in speaking his Word, begetting his Son;³⁵⁴ the Son wholly given back in loving obedience to his Father;³⁵⁵ and that self-giving of both personified in the Holy Spirit, which is also the full self-giving of God to man.³⁵⁶ Even more the soul participates in some way in the inner life of the Trinity:

Even as God is giving Himself to the soul with free and gracious will, even so likewise the soul, having a will that is freer and more generous in proportion as it has a greater degree of union with God, is giving God in God to Himself, and thus the gift of the soul to God is true and entire³⁵⁷

Nevertheless, although the soul experiences and participates in the inner life of the Trinity in this state of spiritual marriage, it does not yet give an individual the complete possession of the Beloved which he seeks. Thus no height reached in this life can compare with the bliss of the beatific vision after death. Beyond this life, therefore, lies a realm of experience unreached by the soul in the mortal body.³⁵⁸ For this, the soul needs the final step in the spiritual journey, passing through death to eternal life with God.

As we have studied John’s mystical union so far, John’s mystical union specially

³⁵³C.26.11.

³⁵⁴A.2.22.5; C.36.5.

³⁵⁵A.2.7.11; C.36.5.

³⁵⁶C.39.3. Compare C. 13, 11; 37; F. 1,3-6.

³⁵⁷F.3.78.

³⁵⁸The last five stanzas of the Spiritual Canticle relate to this final vision of God, so that the author of the Spiritual Canticle is only including in his teaching another element from the tradition.

emphasizes a developing relationship of love between the individual and God. John teaches us that human beings are fundamentally in a state of spiritual and psychological destruction. And they need to develop through discursive prayer and efforts at self-reform a new life. If one succeeds, one will develop a new contemplative mode of awareness, which will one day blossom into the experience of uniting with God in the state of spiritual marriage. With this union, one has achieved the highest stage of development possible in life.³⁵⁹ Thus John naturally makes the goal of the mystical life to be a final consummation of the relationship in which the whole human person participates, body and soul. In this sense, John's mystical union can be called a relational mysticism. The foregoing summary of the spirituality of St. John of the Cross is by no means complete. However, I believe it covers those areas of his teaching with the greatest bearing on contemporary philosophical controversies about the nature and significance of mysticism and religious experience.

³⁵⁹F. Prolo.3.

CHAPTER THREE

THE SPIRITUALITY OF ZEN BUDDHISM: DOGEN

In order to understand the mysticism of Dogen's Zen it is imperative to understand something about him as a person and the religious context in which he lived and wrote. A clue to interpreting him is that his writings are consistent with both his lifestyle and personal experience. There are well documented works which are the most scholarly recognized for Dogen's Zen. I have used mostly the following books: (1) Dogen Zenji Zenshu, 道元禪師全集, The Complete Works of Zen Master Dogen, Ed. Okubo Doshu, 2 vol, (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobo, 1969), (2) Chinese Translation of Dogen's Complete Works of Shobogenzo, 正法眼藏註解全書, (Tokyo: 長野印別東京支社, Association of Shobogenzo's Translation 正法眼藏註解全書刊行會, 昭和三十一年.¹

I. Dogen's Life

A) Early Childhood

Dogen was born in 1200 in an aristocratic family in Kyoto.² His father, Koga Michichika held a high government office. The Koga family were descendants of Prince Tomohira.³ Dogen lost his father at the age of two. After his father's death, he was raised by his mother and his half brother Michimoto.⁴ It is not difficult to believe that

¹Also I will use following biographies and translations: Thomas Cleary, Shobogenzo: Zen Essays by Dogen, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1986). Hee Jin, Kim, Dogen Kigen-Mystical Realist, (The University of Arizona Press, 1975). Gudo Wafu Nishijima and Chodo Cross trans, Master Dogen's Shobogenzo, (London: Windbell Publications Ltd, 1998). Kazuaki Tanahashi ed, Enlightenment Unfolds: The Essential Teachings of Zen Master Dogen, (Shambala: Boston & London, 1999). A Primer of Soto Zen: A Translation of Dogen's Shobogenzo Zuimonki, Ed & Trans by Reiho Masunaga, (Honolulu: East-West Center Press, 1971). Kazuaki Tanahashi, Moon in a Dew Drop: Writings of Zen Master Dogen, (North Point Press: San Francisco, California, 1985).

²Kazuaki Tanahashi ed, Enlightenment Unfolds: The Essential Teachings of Zen Master Dogen, (Shambala: Boston & London, 1999), 13.

³Hee Jin Kim, Dogen Kigen-Mystical Realist, (The University of Arizona Press, 1975), 20.

⁴Ibid.,

Dogen must have received a careful literary training since he was young.

At the age of seven, in 1207, his mother died. On her deathbed his mother called him and requested him to seek the truth of Buddhism by becoming a monk to relieve the suffering of humanity. Unlike the case of his father's death which took place at the age of two, his mother's death must have been a serious blow to his fragile and sensitive mind. His grief was profound and this experience must have left an unforgettable impression upon Dogen's tender mind which in turn determined the direction Dogen took in his subsequent spiritual journey.⁵

Such an extremely early experience of emptiness may become determinative, as it was for St. John of the Cross, creating a restlessness and an ache that cannot be satisfied by normal life. Just as adopted children often feel compelled to search for their genetic parents as a way of knowing what is real about their origins, Dogen was motivated to search for what was even more real in the vacuum left by his biological parents.

Nishijima makes the connection between Dogen's mother's death and his setting out upon the spiritual path with profound sensitivity:

The early death of his mother was a shock, but I feel that the more important effect of her absence was that it filled him with longing: a longing for something most of us find in the touch of our mother's skin, but which, in Master Dogen, became a longing for truth.⁶

Dogen moved from his experience of emptiness as a deep yearning for his mother's skin to the experience of emptiness in the heart, to the experience of emptiness of all things, in which one is no longer a separate, isolated person, but part of the entire phenomenal universe.

After the death of his mother, Dogen was adopted by an older brother of his mother, a powerful aristocrat, who wanted him to become his heir. At this juncture Dogen had to decide either to accept his uncle's desire or to become a monk as his mother had requested. This was another crisis for Dogen. He had a conflict between his decision and his uncle's desire. Eventually he decided to be a monk thinking that studying Buddhism was at once to fulfill his duty to his uncle. His conscious spiritual search can

⁵Ibid., 21.

⁶Gudo Nishijima, *To Meet the Real Dragon*, (Surrey: Windbell Publications, 1992),33.

be confirmed by the report that he escaped during the night -before the ceremony that would have made him an heir-in the spring of his twelfth year, to enter the monastery of his uncle, Ryokan Hogen, at the bottom of Mt. Hiei. Later, he wrote that filial piety should not be limited to one's parents alone but extended to all sentient beings.⁷ Thus he demonstrated his personal initiative and interest in seeking for a spiritual resolution to the experiences of emptiness motivated by the deaths of his father and his mother

Right after his decision, Dogen went to the Senkobo, one of the best Buddhist centers at that time. He was then ordained (1213) a Buddhist monk by Koen, the chief abbot of the Tendai school. Thereafter he devoted himself fully to the religious life and the study of sacred writings.⁸ Dogen's personal experience of emptiness at this time moved into the question of spiritual truth

However, while he was studying the scriptures at the Buddhist center, he faced many insoluble questions. Instructed in the Japanese Tendai sect of Buddhism on Mt. Hiei, Dogen became preoccupied with an inner contradiction in the Tendai point of view, a contradiction that expressed the conflict in his own experience of emptiness. One particular passage puzzled him throughout his stay at the Tendai temple of Mt. Hiei.

Both exoteric and esoteric teachings explain that a person, in essence, has true dharma nature and is originally a body of "Buddha nature." If so, why do all Buddhas in the past, present, and future arouse the wish for and seek enlightenment?⁹

The question, which no one could answer was the Mahayana doctrine of original enlightenment (**hongaku**) and acquired enlightenment (**shikaku**) This question was a challenge to the traditional thought of Mahayana Buddhism, that is the identity of **samsara** and **nirvana**. Thus Dogen questioned, if the more essentialistic versions of the theory of original enlightenment were true, it makes no difference what we do since all are expressions of original enlightenment or the Buddha-nature.

There is no need to exert myself to practice the Way of the Buddha because whatever I do is already the way of the Buddha; I can resign myself to any

⁷Ibid., 22.

⁸Ibid., 25.

⁹Kazuaki Tanahashi, *Moon in a Dew Drop: Writings of Zen Master Dogen*, (North Point Press: San Francisco, California), 4.

unpleasant event or circumstance that I encounter by saying that it is my **innen** (or karma). The second interpretation would be the position of absolute freedom: since I am a manifestation of Buddha-nature, and since the Buddha-nature is unconditionally free, everything I do is a manifestation of Buddha-nature; I am therefore entirely free to do whatever I like. Although these two positions seem to be diametrically opposed, they were often uncritically combined.¹⁰

His persistent search for an answer to the above question finally led him to go to another place. He left and brought the question to Koin (1145-1216). Dogen, however, found even Koin could not answer his question. Koin provided an answer to the question of what the mind for enlightenment is but did not explain why. Koin, however, recognized Dogen's earnestness and referred him to Eisai (1141-1215), who had returned from China with Rinzai Zen and taught a new way of enlightenment.¹¹ Later he would recall these times as a regrettable mismatch between his profound quest for Buddhahood and the questionable authenticity of his Japanese masters.

About this time, the time of Eisai's death in 1215, Dogen entered the Kenniji temple, over which Eisai had been presiding. There is no historical evidence that Dogen actually met Eisai even though Soto historians have often stated that Dogen received personal instruction from him.¹² At that time Kennin-ji temple was not only the center for Zen but also for other schools of Buddhism such as Tendai and Shingon. At any rate, Dogen heard Rinzai Zen Buddhism for the first time. In the Kennin-ji Dogen was taught **koans** in the strict manner of Rinzai.¹³ In Kennin-ji temple Dogen met Myozen, became his pupil and received instruction from him. A warm relationship grew up between them. Dogen respected Myozen, and his systematic knowledge about Zen Buddhism was acquired from Myozen.¹⁴ Hee-Jin Kim states about this period of Dogen with Myozen:

It may be a fair judgement to say that Dogen's systematic knowledge about Zen Buddhism was acquired from Myozen who was the highest ranking disciple and the successor of Eisai at the Kennin-ji temple. Thus six years' study under Myozen must have been as strenuous as that he had had at Hiei, constantly encouraged and

¹⁰David Putney, "Dogen: Enlightenment and Entanglement," *Buddhist Christian Studies*, vol 17, (1997), 29.

¹¹Takashi James Kodera, *Dogen's Formative Years in China*, (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), 26.

¹²N. Waddell, "Dogen's Hokyo-ki" I, *Eastern Buddhist*, vol. 10, 2, (October, 1977), 105.

¹³Takashi James Kodera, 26-30.

¹⁴Kazuaki Tanahashi, *Enlightenment Unfolds*, 17.

assisted by a warm personal relationship with his master.¹⁵

Yet Dogen could not be satisfied in his religious quest by Myozen. Dogen found fault with it because it lacked the focus, power and clarity he needed to resolve his inner turmoil. As was shown above, the complex of experiences of emptiness that culminated in his mother's death led to a high degree of inner ferment within Dogen. Perhaps as a result of this dissatisfaction, the desire for study in China, which had been originally suggested by Koin, might have been created in Dogen's mind. In any case, it was at Kennin-ji where Dogen's dissatisfaction with domestic Buddhism created in him the desire to search for true Buddhism in the land of the Ch'an patriarch.¹⁶

B) Dogen's Study in China

Finally, Dogen's fateful trip to China took place in 1223 with Myozen and others. After a difficult voyage, they landed early in April. While Dogen stayed on the ship, he met an old Chinese monk who visited the ship in order to get Japanese **shitake** (a kind of mushroom for soup), for he was the kitchen steward. While having a conversation, Dogen asked him to stay overnight. However, this old monk declined Dogen's invitation for he had to return his monastery immediately after he bought the **shitake**. At that moment Dogen could not understand why he should return so quickly. However, Dogen, in conversation with the old monk, realized that in Zen daily work in the kitchen is a religious practice that can lead to enlightenment.¹⁷

The meeting with the old monk must have been a decisive event in Dogen's subsequent life and thought. Prior to the meeting Dogen thought that the practice of Dharma was primarily the study of the sutras and of the practice of **zazen**. However, from the encounter with the nameless old monk, Dogen's conception of Buddhism changed its foundation. Dogen learned the true teaching of Buddhism from the old man. Dogen knew that the old monk embodied the true tradition in Chinese Ch'an which, since the days of the fourth and fifth patriarch and of the master Pai-chang, regarded not only sitting in meditation and reading the sutras, but also daily life, as exercises and

¹⁵Hee-Jin Kim, 28-29.

¹⁶Ibid., 31.

¹⁷Takashi James Kodera, 37.

manifestations of enlightened behavior.¹⁸ Dogen later recalled this incident and wrote that he was greatly indebted to the old monk.¹⁹

Moreover, during this time Dogen began to think about the contrast between practice and language, between deeds and words, between activities and expression, and more specifically about the place of words and letters (**monji**) in the scheme of things. Unlike other Zen Buddhists, Dogen realized the limits and dangers of language, particularly the possibility of using it in spiritual matters by understanding the “reason of words and letters” (**monji no dori**).²⁰

At this point it is noteworthy to recall the condition of Buddhism in China. It was during the Sung period (1127-1279) that Dogen visited China. Buddhism had been declining in those days. It is easy to understand Dogen’s disappointment about the condition of Buddhism. Having experienced such a disappointment, Dogen wanted to return home.

During this time Dogen stayed at the temple **Tient-t’ung-szu** under **Wu-chi**, a monk of the Lin-chi School of Zen. Dogen devoted himself fervently to religious practices. And yet, despite extreme efforts, he did not gain the seal of enlightenment. After a two –year stay, Dogen left once more and visited various nearby Ch’an monasteries. He went to Ming-chou, Hang-chou, and then to Wan-shou Monastery on Ching Mountain.²¹ In his journeys, Dogen visited the “Five Mountains” and had a chance to study the characteristics of the “Five Houses” of Chinese Ch’an Buddhism. By visiting many Chinese monasteries, Dogen gained a first-hand acquaintance with Chinese Buddhism, but did not find the right master. As he was coming back to Tient-t’ung-szu, he found out about his master **Wu-chi**’s death and he was greatly saddened.²²

At this point Dogen met an old monk who informed him that a monk Ju-ching, (1163-1268) had been appointed abbot of Mt. Tien-t’ung-szu monastery by the Chinese royal Court and the monk told him to see Ju-ching. On May 1, 1225, Dogen finally met his new master Ju-ching.²³ Dogen recognized Ju-ching to be an authentic teacher.

¹⁸Ibid., 38-39.

¹⁹Hee-Jin Kim, 35.

²⁰Ibid., 33

²¹Takashi James Kodera, 49.

²²Hee-Jin Kim, 37.

²³Takashi James Kodera, 52.

(**shoshi**). Ju-ching was the person Dogen had been looking for since he had harbored the ‘Great Doubt.’ For Dogen, an encounter with the right master was the most important thing for a student. Dogen had a conviction that searching for truth depended on a master’s ability and competence. For Dogen, the encounter with an authentic teacher and the final resolution of his ‘Great doubt’ were one and the same thing. He once said that “without meeting a right master, you do not hear the right Dharma.” He knew by his own experience how difficult it was to encounter a right master, and thus how difficult it was to know Dharma.²⁴ Dogen wrote in **Gakudo Yojinshu**:

On the necessity of seeking the authentic teacher in studying the Way under a master, the ancients say, ‘If your initial aspiration is not authentic, all attempts are futile.’ How true these words are! Does the success in the practice of the Way depend upon whether the teacher is authentic or not? The potential is like the material and the teacher is like a craftsman. Even the best material cannot be transformed into a masterpiece without a good craftsman... You must realize that the truth or falsity of enlightenment is contingent upon the rightness or wrongness of the teacher...²⁵

Ju-ching was said to have been admired throughout the Buddhist world and at the Sung court. Also he was well known for his devotion to Buddhism and for the strict, even severe, training he gave his monks. He had had a fervent passion for zazen ever since his entrance into Zen life.²⁶ His personal character and thought has been clearly described in both **Hokyoki**, and **Shobogenzo**.

Under the supervision of Ju-ching, Dogen devoted himself to the study and practice of meditation. Finally, a decisive moment of enlightenment came upon Dogen. He had an enlightenment experience during an early morning zazen meditation period on a certain day of the **geango**, (i.e., the three-month intensive meditation period between April 16 and July 15). This event did not happen by accident but as the result of a long spiritual journey.²⁷ At this moment the unsolvable question that had been with him ever since his residence on Mt. Hiei was resolved.

²⁴Ibid.,

²⁵Cited in Takashi James Kodera, *Dogen’s Formative Years in China*, 51. See also in *Shobogenzo* “Gakudo yojinshu”, in *The Complete Works of Zen Master Dogen (Dogen Zenji zenju)*, Okubo Doshu, ed. (Tokyo:Chikuma Shobo, 1969), vol II, 255-6. (Here after cited as DZZ).

²⁶N. Wadell, “Dogen’s *Hoyo-ki*” I, *Eastern Buddhist*, vol 10, 2, (October, 1977), 112.

²⁷Ibid., 44.

Regarding Dogen's enlightenment experience, Ju-ching claimed that "dropping the body and mind" played a crucial function in enabling Dogen to arrive at his enlightenment. Dogen wrote that through dropping the body and mind, he gained face-to-face transmission.²⁸ The casting-off of the body-mind amounts to the negation of a dualistic dichotomy between body and mind, and instead the grasping of a higher perspective which subsumes both in unity. It is a negation in a sense, but it is a radical affirmation as well as a transformation of body and mind in another sense. Here we can see that Dogen's thought of the 'negation of a dualistic dichotomy body and mind' is closely connected with Hui-neng's understanding of mind.

It must be noted, however, that although Ju-ching's emphasis upon single minded sitting led Dogen to the culmination of his long quest for the Dharma when he 'dropped the body and mind,' there is no 'dropping the body and mind' in Ju-ching's collected sayings. Rather, Ju-ching used the expression 'dropping the dust from the mind,' which is pronounced in the same way in Japanese but differently in Chinese: **shen-hsin t'o-lo** for 'dropping the body and mind' but **hsin-ch'en t'o-lo** for 'dropping the dust from the mind.'

According to Kodera, it is highly probable that Ju-ching used 'dropping the dust from the mind,' because it appears in Ju-ching's **ho-shang yu-lu**, and the excerpts from Dogen which were brought from Japan to China by Dogen's disciple used this expression in order to conform to the common understanding of Ju-ching's teaching among his Chinese disciples.²⁹ Kodera explains the implication of the difference which brings an enormous consequence:

If it is indeed true that the 'dropping the body and mind' is original to Dogen, it describes his moment of enlightenment very differently from Ju-ching's 'dropping the dust from the mind. While Ju-ching's expression aims at the restoration of the original state of the mind by removing defilement from it, Dogen's expression assumes nothing to which an original state of purity needs to be restored. Ju-ching's 'mind' from which the dust is to be dropped may be analogous to the kind of Buddha-nature that was understood in the way in which the earlier quotation from Mahāparinirvāna sūtra was conventionally read. Dogen's phrase, on the other hand, leaves nothing from which the body and mind are to be dropped...If so, the final solution of Dogen's 'Great doubt' could not be attributed in its entirety to the

²⁸Shobogenzo, "Menju," DZZ I, 450.

²⁹Takashi James Kodera, 106-107.

instruction given to Dogen by Ju-ching on T'ien-t'ung Mountain.³⁰

However, though there is a difference, it is undeniable that Ju-ching's word played a crucial role in Dogen's enlightenment. Dogen wrote that he was able to hear T'ien-t'ung (Ju-ching) talk about the dropping, and he perfected the way of the Buddha.

Thus we see that, though there is a difference, Dogen's thought preserved the teaching of his master, and this teaching preserved a unique form of Buddhism, which differed from that of the contemporary Lin-chi tradition.³¹

On September 18, 1225, Dogen received official certification by Ju-ching; the patriarchal succession. Ju-ching bestowed upon Dogen a document bearing the lineage of the authentic transmission of the Bodhisattva Precepts by the Buddhas and Patriarchs. This bestowal marks the official beginning of Dogen's inheritance of the lineage of the Ts'ao tung School of Ch'an, that was claimed to have been transmitted from Sakyamuni Buddha through Ju-ching.³² The following passage describes its legitimacy:

On the eighteenth day of the ninth month in the first year of Pao-ch'ing of the Great Sung, the Former Abbot T'ien-t'un Ju-ching instructed: the Precepts of the Buddha are the vital matters of the School. They were transmitted at Grdhrakuta Mountain, Shao-lin (Monestry),³³ Ts'ao-chi³⁴ and tung Mountain. It was transmitted from the Tathagata down through me. Now, I bestow this upon my disciple, Dogen, a monk from Japan. Here culminate my transmission.³⁵

This passage gives immediate evidence that the lineage of Dogen is legitimized by linking the origin of the Ts'ao-tung School to Sakyamuni Buddha through Bodhidharma and the Sixth Patriarch of Ch'an, Hui-neng. Moreover, Dogen is added at the end in order to confirm that his lineage transmission is legitimately linked to the above lineage:

The Lineage was thus bestowed upon me, Dogen, on the eighteenth day of the ninth month in the year of Pao-ch'ing of the Great sung, by the Former Abbot of Chinese monastery of T'ien-t'ung Mountain. Attendant Tsu-jih, guest Tsung-tuan, another attendant Kuang-ping among others attended the ceremony which was known

³⁰Ibid., 107.

³¹William R. LaFleur ed, *Dogen Studies*, (University of Hawaii Press, 1985), 26.

³²Takashi James Kodera, 64.

³³From Bodhidharma to Hui-k'o

³⁴The Sixth Patriarch, Hui-neng, left the Temple of the Fifth Patriarch for Ts'ao-chi.

³⁵Cited in Takashi James Kodera, 65. See also *Shobogenzo*, DZZ II, 29.

throughout Ch'an in the Pao-ching era of the Great Sung³⁶.

Here we can see, as I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, that legitimate lineage transmission is considered crucially important in Dogen for it confirms the genesis of Zen tradition. Thus Dogen's emphasis was very clear on the unbroken transmission of the Bodhisattava Precepts from Sakyamuni Buddha through the Indian and Chinese Buddhas and Patriarchs. It agreed with Ju-ching's view that the only authentic transmission of the Dharma is through the direct face-to face transmission from one enlightened person who has transcended the duality of his body and mind to another who also has same experience. In 1227 Dogen told Ju-ching of his decision to return to Japan.

II) THE ESSENTIAL TEACHINGS OF DOGEN THOUGHT

A) The Historical and Social Background of the Kamakura Period

Before we study Dogen's thought, it is necessary to analyse the historical and religious background of Dogen's period. Since Dogen's thought, like any other intellectual endeavor, was at least partially conditioned and influenced by the historical and religious conditions of that period. we should know at least the historical and religious conditions wherein Dogen lived.

The first half of the 13th century, in which Dogen lived and died, had several important features: 1) a power struggle between nobility and warriors 2) the corruption of Buddhism 3) traditional folk movements among the common people.³⁷ In the early Kamakura period there were two opposing social powers: the rising military class the **samurai** and the declining court aristocrats. While the aristocrats were declining, the military class was still powerful culturally and even economically

These two ruling classes actually took power, and they were preoccupied with the expansion of their own self-interest. The peasants were hopeless and attempting rebellion against the oppression and exploitation of the ruling classes. Such a socio-cultural chaos was aggravated by natural calamities, robberies, violence, murders etc.³⁸

Under such circumstances, many new sects of Buddhism had arisen. Broadly

³⁶Ibid.,

³⁷Hee-Jin Kim, 14.

³⁸Hee-Jin Kim, 16.

speaking, there were three main sects central to this new Buddhism: the Nenbutsu sect, the Zen sect, and the Nichiren sect. The Nenbutsu sect emphasized chanting to the Buddha in order to be born into the Land of Happiness. There were three minor branches of this sect: **Jodo-shu**, **Shin-shu**, and **Ji-shu**. The Second, the **Zen** sect, had its emphasis on **zazen**, which involves the act of sitting in emphasizing without thinking. The third, the **Nichiren** sect taught that persons can be saved by reciting some titles of the important Sutra.

However, under such circumstances, Buddhism was nearly powerless, and had no interest in the people's need. Traditional Buddhism, as a religion for noble-men, had become corrupted into a kind of esoteric practice or collection of magical rites.³⁹ Moreover, Buddhism had become associated with the Heian aristocracy. Buddhism, thus, had no power to redeem such a chaotic society according to the people's needs through its stress on a sense of impermanence accompanied by fatalistic escapism. The sense of impermanence rather became a part of a masochistic acceptance of an escape from brutal reality.⁴⁰

In this period, the Buddhist doctrine of the Three Ages was widely accepted. The Three Ages were: The Age of Right Dharma in which the genuinely authentic Dharma prevails, the Age of Form in which mere forms of the Dharma dominate, and the Age of Decayed Dharma in which the Dharma is entirely decayed.⁴¹

In addition, the folk tradition of Japan was part of the socio-cultural effects of this period; the tradition of mountain asceticism and purification was deeply rooted in the Japanese folk mentality.⁴² Such was the general trend of the time in which Dogen lived, and he took issue with it in his diagnosis of the religious situation. Dogen employed the doctrine of the Three Ages in his writing. However, while he appropriated the doctrine, he used it differently. He rejected romantic pessimism in human nature, for to him human nature possessed the elements of both greatness and wretchedness.

Here Dogen rejects the fundamental doctrine that human nature degenerates as time passes. Particularly, he attacks the other religious leaders who maintain that man's

³⁹Ibid.,

⁴⁰Ibid., 17

⁴¹Ibid.,

⁴²Ibid., 18.

wretchedness and helplessness are an “unchangeable” objective fact which can only be changed by faith in the other-power of Amida-butsu. Instead, Dogen insisted that they are a changeable subjective factor. Therefore, for Dogen, the crucially important religious problem is not an objective determination of what human nature is, but rather it is the subjective appropriation of whatever is given in human nature.⁴³

Dogen thus implicitly challenged all the religious leaders of the Kamakura period who based their efforts for making the Buddhist myth relevant to the conditions of historical reality upon the conception of the Age of Decayed Dharma, which was proving to be a wrong diagnosis of the situation. For Dogen such a wrong diagnosis was due to a misunderstanding of the doctrine of Three Ages. Dogen asserted that the doctrine of the Three Ages should be understood simply as a convenient means. And Dogen by having a correct understanding of the doctrine, i.e., man is great or wretched not by external conditions but by his attitude in dealing with them, could give a right diagnosis by which each individual could be enabled to confront their crisis.

B) Dogen’s (道元) Understandings of Human Being

1) General Understanding of Human Being in Traditional Buddhism

According to traditional Christian doctrine, human beings alone have the **imago dei** through which they, unlike other creatures, can directly respond to God. This is essentially related to Christian personalism, in which God is believed to disclose himself as personality and in which a dialogical I-Thou relation between humans and God is essential.

In Buddhism, however, there is no such “I-Thou” relationship between God and humans. In Buddhism, salvation or liberation does not depend on a personal relationship with God. In other words, Buddhism does not teach a personal relationship with an other “objectified Being” regarding human liberation or salvation. Instead, in Buddhism, a human is a “thinking animal,”⁴⁴ a being endowed with the capability of carrying out the Dharma. In Buddhism a particular notion of human being lies in its capability to

⁴³Ibid., 20.

⁴⁴Nakamura Hajime, *The Ways of Thinking of Eastern Peoples* (Tokyo: Japanese National Commission for UNESCO, 1960), 108-10. In Sanskrit *manusya* is etymologically connected with “mana,” which means “to think.”

attain enlightenment. In other words, Buddhism teaches that a human's dignity, distinctness, and special significance among creatures lie in a human's possibility of self-transcendence. It is by transcending the human limitation that one comes to realize human birth-death as an essential part of a wider problem. And this self-transcendence is possible only through self-consciousness on the part of human beings. In other words, only a human, who has self-consciousness, can realize self-transcendence.

Here, it is noteworthy to mention the doctrine of "transmigration" in respect to "self-transcendence." In Buddhism humans are in **samsara**, the endless round of transmigration from one form of life to another. According to traditional Buddhist doctrine it is said that **shujo** (both human beings and sentient beings) transmigrate through six realms of existence: **naraka-gati** (the realm of hell), **preta-gati** (the realm of hungry ghosts), **tiryagyonigati** (the realm of animals), **asura-gati** (the realm of fighting spirits), **manusya-gati** (the realm of human existence), and **deva-gati** (the realm of heavenly existence). According to this concept human beings are connected with these six kinds of sentient beings. The essential teaching in this connection, which includes human existence, is that these six kinds of sentient beings are all interpreted as transmigrating in one and the same dimension, the dimension of generation-and-extinction.⁴⁵

Here we can see that the Buddhist understanding of the human problem and liberation is directly connected with transmigration in these six realms. This is why Buddhists can say that one can attain nirvana only by freeing oneself from this endless round.⁴⁶

Consequently, we see that there is no discrimination between humans and other sentient beings. All beings, including human beings and sentient beings, are equal in regard to their nature. This implies that Buddhism does not give a special or superior position to humans over against other sentient beings with regard to their salvation. However, though there is no distinction between humans and other sentient beings in nature, only human beings are able to attain self-transcendence because only human

⁴⁵Masao Abe, Steven Heine ed, *A Study of Dogen*, (State University of New York Press: Albany, 1992), 36. This understanding implies that there is a basic dimension common to human beings and other sentient beings. This common dimension may be said to be *shometsusei*, the generation-extinction nature, i.e., a human's "birth-and-death" is a form of generation-extinction that is common to all sentient beings.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 36-7

beings have self-consciousness.

2) Human Being As Body- Mind (身心) (Shin-jin)

In general, dualism has framed Western metaphysical speculations: supernatural/natural, reality/appearance, being/becoming, knowledge/opinion, self/other, subject/object, being/becoming, form/matter, mind/body and so forth. Thus separateness is required in explaining the essential interpretation of the world. Here a thing is characterized by discreteness, finality, and independence.⁴⁷

However, in Eastern thought, “polarism” has been a major principle of explanation in metaphysics. In polarism (referring to a symbiosis), the unity of two organismic processes requires each as a necessary condition for being what they are. Each participant in existence is “so-of-itself.” It means that each particular is self-creative yet can only be accounted for by its symbiotic relationship with every other particular. For example, the notion of “self,” has a polar relationship with “other.” Each particular is a consequence of every other. Thus each particular is both self-determinate and determined by every other particular. Each pole can be explained by reference to the other. Consequently, in this perspective the world is interpreted as organismic, as well as a set of processes which are characterized by interconnectedness, interdependence, and mutuality.⁴⁸

The implications of this dualism/polarism distinction are important in the question of what is a human being. Particularly the most significant implication of this dualism/polarism distinction lies in the perceived relationship between mind and body.

Therefore in Oriental tradition especially in the Chinese tradition, body and mind are not regarded as separate. The mind-body relation is understood to be an internal one in the Orient. Thus mind and body are interdependent facets of a single phenomenon, rather than two separate phenomena in an external relation to each other. In internal relationships, the two relatents are intrinsically and necessarily part of each other..

Regarding internal relationships, physical form is frequently portrayed as a disclosure of some intellectual condition:

⁴⁷Thomas P. Kasulis, Self as Body in Asian Theory and Practice, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 160.

⁴⁸Ibid.,

Where a person is able to be correct and tranquil, His skin will be ample, His sense will be keen, He will have protruding muscles And strong bones. He will be able to bear up the circular firmament and walk on the square earth.⁴⁹

a. Dogen: Body-Mind (身心) (Shin-jin)

Following this Oriental view of mind-body philosophical understanding, Dogen teaches that body and mind are not separate. Both mind and body are indispensably associated with man's whole being. Thus in Dogen's view it is very non-Buddhistic to see body and mind as if they are separable. In Dogen's view, thus, body and mind share their fortune with each other. He states:

You should consider carefully that the Buddha-dharma has always maintained the thesis of the non-dual oneness of body and mind. Nevertheless, how can it be possible that while this body is born and dissolves, mind alone departs from body and escapes from arising and perishing?...The body and mind are united with the world as a whole. The body-mind unity at the level of psycho-physical constitution is now extended to the cosmic dimension which is characterized by such.....⁵⁰

Therefore, for Dogen, since body and mind are inextricably interconnected, it is impossible to separate them. Consequently, the exaltation of the mind at the expense of the body is a weak spirituality. Thus, spirituality necessarily involves the unity of body and mind. Spirit-matter is a single complex, parallel in structure.

Dogen, in his discussion of the story about the transmission of enlightenment from the first Chinese Ch'an patriarch to his disciples, points out direct interconnections between mind-body and enlightenment. According to the story, when Bodhidharma asked his four disciples about the nature of their enlightenment, he answered their replies by saying the first "attained me in my skin"; the second, "in my flesh"; the third, "in my bones"; and the fourth, "in my marrow." The traditional interpretation shows that each succeeding answer indicated a deeper level of insight.

However, Dogen disagreed with the traditional interpretation by saying that to penetrate any part of that field is to penetrate the whole since the master's enlightenment is predicated on a unified mind-body field.

⁴⁹Thomas P. Kasulis, Self as Body in Asian Theory and Practice, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 167.

⁵⁰Cited in Hee Jin Kim, 129. See also Shobogenzo, "Bendowa," DZZ I

Remember, the Patriarch's skin, flesh, bones, and marrow are beyond shallowness and depth. Even if there is superiority and inferiority in understanding, the Patriarch's words are only about getting me. The point here is that the expression "you have got my marrow" and the expression "You have got my bones" are both beyond sufficiency and insufficiency, whether in teaching people or in receiving people, whether in picking up weeds or falling into grass. The Patriarch's expressions, for example, are like picking up a flower and like transmitting the robe. What the Patriarch expresses for the four disciples is, from the beginning, utterly the same.⁵¹

Thus for Dogen enlightenment itself is not simply a mental achievement. It is an illusion if one sees that the mind is permanent and independent from the perishable body.

Now that the body-mind is united as a whole being, it becomes the vehicle of understanding. Therefore, for Dogen, the problem of understanding, whether it is "empirical" or "transcendental," involves invariably the whole being of man which Dogen calls "the body-mind," "**Shin-jin**"(身心).⁵²Here, it should be noticed that "**Shin-jin**" ("body-mind") consists of two words, "**shin**" ("body") and "**jin**" (:mind"). One must notice two things. First, as appropriately translated, "**Shin-jin**" is one word.

In the fascicle **Shinjingakudo** (身心學道) (Learning through the body mind), Dogen concentrates upon describing the inseparability of body-mind. Although he discusses the body-aspect and the mind-aspect individually, he prefaces his explanations by stating that each aspect represents a focus of concentration for the purposes of learning. He says that "learning through the mind" must be united with "learning through the body"- **shinjitsunintai** (**shin** , 'truth,' + **jitsu** , 'reality', + **jintai** , 'human body- literally, 'the real human body'). This translation is intended to reflect Dogen's use of the term as representative of the body-aspect of **shinjingakudo** (learning through the body-mind).

Consequently, if the body and mind are posited as separate entities, they are "generated" as abstractions. Once this separation is "generated" or "extinguished," even in the form of a hidden presupposition, it creates a more explicit gap between noesis and noema. The ongoing activity of neutralization is most important to Dogen. Whereas

⁵¹Mater Dogen's *Shobogenzo*, Gudo Nishijima & Chodo Cross trans, book 3, 37-38. (Here after cited as *Dogen's Shobogenzo*). See also *Shobogenzo*, "Katto," DZZ I, 133.

⁵²Hee-Jin Kim, 127-130.

hotsubodaishin refers to the dynamic activity of the mind-aspect, **shinjitsunintai** is concerned with the dynamic activity of the body-aspect.

Moreover, for Dogen, the body-mind is not only united in the person, but is also united with the world as a whole. Therefore, the human body participates in man's inner world as well as in his external world. In turn, both outer and inner worlds participate in each other through the human body. The body, mind, and the world are interwoven with one another making a boundary between them almost impossible.⁵³

Thus the body-mind unity is extended to the cosmic dimension which Dogen has characterized as "the body-mind of **Tathagata**," "the body-mind of the Buddha-way," "the body-mind of the three realms and the realms of heaven and men," The body and mind are the entire universe: "The body-mind in Buddhism is grasses, trees, tiles and stones; wind, rain, water and fire."⁵⁴ Dogen insists that the non-dual teaching of the body-mind concept is essential to the Buddha's teaching. Thus for Dogen, the human body is connected in man's outer world as well as in his inner world, and in turn, both the outer and inner world participate in each other through the human body

Given the integral nature of the mind-body complex, since the universe is the Buddha's embodiment, it also must be the Buddha mind. As the Buddha's body-mind, the entire cosmos is essentially or primordially already enlightened. In this respect Dogen writes:

Therefore from the establishment of the mind until the attainment of realization, both realization and practice are inevitably done together with the whole Earth and together with all living beings. Some doubts may arise in regard to this: when we seek to clarify that which seems to be mixed into ideas that are unknowable, such doubting voices are heard; but we should not wonder whether the state of oneness is the situation of other people. This is a teaching to be understood, and so we should recognize that when we establish, and practice, the mind of the buddhas of the three times, the principle is inevitably present that we do not let our own body-mind leak away. To have doubts about this is actually to disparage the buddhas of the three times.⁵⁵

Dogen expresses this dynamic quality of non-duality as **Zenki** (全機), a term which he

⁵³Hee-Jin Kim, 128.

⁵⁴Shobogenzo, "Hotsu mujoshin," DZZ I.

⁵⁵Dogen's Shobogenzo, Gudo Nishijima & Chodo Cross trans, book 4, 217-218. See also Shobogenzo, "Yuibutsu-yobutsu," DZZ I.

took from the Chinese Ch'an master Hung-chih.⁵⁶ The first letter, **Zen** means "all" and expresses the totality which is simultaneously the observable universe and the observer of that universe-the "seeing" that is the Buddha nature. And the second letter, **ki**, which means "loom" refers to any working mechanism, and expresses the continuous dynamism of the whole. One of his passages clarifies the meaning of **Zenki**, 全機:

Life can be likened to a time when a person is sailing in a boat. On this boat, I am operating the sail, I have taken the rudder, I am pushing the pole; at the same time, the boat is carrying me, and there is no I beyond the boat. Through my sailing of the boat, this boat is being caused to be a boat-let us consider, and learn in practice, just this moment of the present. At this very moment, there is nothing other than the world of the boat: the sky, the water, the shore, have all become the moment of the boat, which is utterly different from moments not on the boat. So life is what I am making it, and I am what life is making me. While I am sailing in the boat, my body and mind and circumstances and self are all essential parts of the boat; and whole earth and the whole of space are all essential parts of the boat. What has been described like this is that life is the self, and the self is life.⁵⁷

Consequently, it is fundamentally non-Buddhistic in Dogen's view to treat human body and mind as if they were separable.

b. Dogen: The Notion of The Human Body

Dogen does not consider the human body as a hindrance to the human cognitive process or an entity which is a separate being outside mind, rather Dogen emphasizes the human body as an important as well as inseparable locus in and through which understanding and enlightenment are attained. In Dogen's words,

This body is nothing but an aspect of one unity which is composed of dharmas. Do not regard this body merely as an aspect of the composed but rather regard it as being composed of all dharmas.⁵⁸

The body, therefore, as "an aspect of one unity," is presented within the horizon in toto. That is, it appears as sharing the nonprivileged horizon wherein "all dharmas" are presented equally. Dogen consistently and intentionally uses the phrase, "the body-

⁵⁶Ibid., "Shinjin gakudo." DZZ I.

⁵⁷Dogen's *Shobogenzo*, Gudo Nishijima & Chodo Cross trans, book 2, 286.

⁵⁸Cited in David Shaner, "The body-mind experience in Dogen's *Shobogenzo*: A phenomenological perspective," *Philosophy East & West*, (January 1985), 31.

mind” in which, the word “body” always precedes the word “mind.” He further states that we quest with the body, practice with the body, attain enlightenment with the body, and understand with the body. All this is summarized in his statement: “The Way is surely attained with the body.”⁵⁹

Such assertions about the body, however, are not meant to place the physical above the mental in any metaphysical scheme of things, but rather to reject one’s ordinary way of thinking which separates “subjective” and objective.”

In fact, the concept of “mind” which is only concerned with the mind as a means to understand the nature of knowledge would not fit within Dogen’s context. For Dogen, mind is not merely mental, much less merely rational. For Dogen, the human body not only participates in man’s inner world and external world, but also the inner and external world participate in each other through the human body.

Emphasizing such an importance of the body Dogen says: “There are two ways to study the Way: one is to understand it with the mind, the other with the body.”⁶⁰ Concerning understanding with the body, he says:

Shingakudo (身學道) is to learn the Way with the body. . . The body comes forth from the study of the Way, and what originates from the investigation of the Way is likewise the body. The entire universe is precisely every human body (**Shinjitsunintai**); birth-and-death, coming-and-going are the genuine human body. By moving this body, we shun the Ten Evils, uphold the Eight Precepts, devote ourselves to the Three Treasures, and enter the monk’s life through renunciation. This is the real study of the Way; consequently it is called the authentic human body.⁶¹

Here we should consider the real meaning of the body in Dogen’s thought. He speaks of two kinds of body, “the naked body,” prior to the process of transformation, that is the body as an object, and the “human body,” which signifies the living body.⁶² The true body signifies the body which is beyond the dichotomies of body and mind, subject and object. This true body, the authentic body, does not only transcend the epistemological dichotomies of subject and object, but also encounters the self and other, the individual

⁵⁹Hee Jin Kim, 78. See also *Shobogenzo*, “Zenki,” DZZ I.

⁶⁰Ibid., 131.

⁶¹Ibid., 132.

⁶²Shigenori Nagatomo, *Attunement through the Body*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 162-7.

and the environment.⁶³

By studying the Way, according to Dogen, this true body comes forth. In other words, without an act of understanding, the true body cannot come forth, but rather the body remains with physiological drives. Thus the body with physiological drives should be rejected by the purification of emptiness, and only thereafter does the “nakedness” of bodily existence become a truly authentic body. Then the body-mind becomes free from dualistic shackles and authentically able to deal with self and the world.

Therefore, studying the Buddha Way is not possible only by learning Buddhist sutras and meditating on Zen “**koans**.” For Dogen, studying the Buddha Way is not a matter of the accumulation of knowledge. In this regard he states:

Studying the Buddha Way is studying oneself. Studying oneself is forgetting oneself. forgetting oneself is being enlightened by all things. Being enlightened by all things is causing the body-mind of oneself and the body-mind of others to be shed. There is ceasing the traces of enlightenment, which causes one to forever leave the traces of enlightenment which is cessation.⁶⁴

Here, Dogen uses the word “**narau**” for “studying,” which literally means “repeated practice”(演習). Here Dogen is explaining a kind of studying as “repeated practice” which requires a total bodily participation. The Buddha Way, for Dogen, is not a matter of the intellectual or mysterious experience one can gain, but a mode of being, particularly through repeated body-mind practice. Thus studying the Buddha Way means embodying the Buddha Way as one’s own mode of being. Since the Buddha Way is not an object of cognition, it does not stand as a being over against the self, the cognitive subject.

In this regard, Merleau-Ponty’s body scheme helps to understand the existential character of Dogen’s body-mind. In his **Phenomenology of Perception**, Merleau-Ponty explains the interconnectedness between, and the inseparability of action and perception. Both modalities action and perception, mutually presuppose each other, in the sense that action signifies an extension of the self towards the world, while the modality of

⁶³Yasuo Yuasa, *The Body: Toward an Eastern Mind-Body Theory*, S. Nagamoto and T.P. Kasulis. Trans. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), 49-74.

⁶⁴Shobogenzo: *Zen Essays by Dogen*, Thomas Cleary trans. (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1991), 32.

perception implies the presentation of the object to the self. In other words, both modalities designate an experience as action-perception, encompassing both subject and object, by means of which the somatic cogito reaches out towards the object of experience and, at the same time, receives the object of sense perception.

3) Dogen's Concept of Mind

Buddhism, like other Indian religious and philosophical traditions, approaches the problems of man and the world from the "psychological" standpoint so that the primacy of mind has been acknowledged in one way or another as the fundamental basis for Buddhist thought. Thus the activity of mind is the most important factor in determining man's action as well as life.

Thus in Buddhism, from its beginning, the notion of the mind has been considered the most important theme, particularly in respect to man's liberation. Nyanaponika clearly pointed out the psychological emphasis in Buddhism: "In the Buddhist doctrine, mind is the starting point, the focal point, and also, as the liberated and purified mind of the saint, the culminating point."⁶⁵ Buddhism, however, extends its meaning of mind beyond conventional concerns to embrace physical, metaphysical, and ethical issues.

In fact, there were many different Buddhist traditions regarding concepts of the mind. From its earliest period through Abhidharma and Vijnanavada Buddhism to the present, Buddhism has presented many theories of the mind. Especially in the analysis of mind, multiple categories are developed to explicate in detail the workings of the mind. Hee-Jin Kim presents various issues in the Buddhist tradition regarding the concept of the mind:

"the twelve **nidana** of functional interdependence (**juni-innen**); the unity of the six sense-organs (**rokkon**), the six sense-objects (**rokkyo**), and the six consciousnesses (**roku-shiki**); various interpretation of the mind (**citta-man-vijnana**; **shi-i-shiki**); various attempts at the classification of mental functions; controversies over the distinction of the mind (**shin'o** or **shinno**) and mental functions (**shinjo**) and their relationship; Abhidharma analysis of dharma; Vijnanavadin's eight consciousnesses (**hasshiki**) developed from the six consciousnesses; controversies over the original purity of the nature of mind, and so on and so forth."⁶⁶

⁶⁵Nyanaponika Thera, *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation*, (London: Rider & Co, 1962), 21.

⁶⁶Hee-Jin Kim, 139-40.

The concept of the mind whether it is pure or defiled originally, or both, or neither was debated among the Buddhists from the beginning of their history. For example, according to Katsumata the primitive Buddhists believed that the mind was originally pure and illusions were foreign defilements. If there was controversy between these two, the general tendency would have recognized the original purity of the mind and would have regarded the phenomenal natures of the mind as both pure and defiled.⁶⁷

However, the original purity of the mind, both in Mahayana Buddhism and the **tathagata-garba** tradition, has been characterized as “no-mind.” For example, the original mind was expressed as ; (**acitta; mushin; 무심; 無心;**),⁶⁸ emptiness (**sunyata; ku; 공; 空**), **tathagata-garbha**, Dharma-mind (**dharma-citta; hossho-shin; 법심; 法心**), buddha nature (**Buddhatva; bussho; 법성; 法性**), one mind (**eka-citta; isshin 일심一心**), thusness (**tathata; shinnyo; 심여; 心彌**). Thus in approaching the nature of the mind, Mahayana Buddhism was rather metaphysical compared with other Buddhist approaches which were ethical or psychological.

However, since there were many debates concerning the nature of the mind throughout the history of Chinese Buddhism there was no common consensus among them. Whalen Lai affirms that though there was much debate about the nature of the mind, particularly on whether core consciousness is pure mind itself or not , there was no consensus.”⁶⁹

Whalen Lai says that the transition from Consciousness-Only to Mind-Only is a “uniquely Chinese development.”⁷⁰ Whalen further states that the assertion of Mind-only was advocated against Consciousness-Only. The “Mind” in the Chinese understanding is pure and absolute without defilement. He states:

The Indian Buddhist philosophy generally holds the opinion that the illusion of the world corresponds to a deluded, tainted consciousness, and seldom ever asserted that the phenomenal world and the mind are “by nature good.”⁷¹

⁶⁷Ibid.,

⁶⁸I translated “Acitta” into Japanese, Korean and Chinese.

⁶⁹Whalen Lai, “Ch’an Metaphors: Wave, Water, Mirror, Lamp,” *Philosophy East and West*, vol 29, no 3, (July 1979), 243.

⁷⁰Whalen Lai, “The Meaning of ‘Mind-only’: An Analysis of a Sinitic Mahayana Phenomena,” *Philosophy East and West*, vol 27, no 1, (January 1977), 79.

⁷¹Ibid.,

On the other hand, having inherited Mahayana Buddhist thoughts of the mind, Dogen wrote extensively on this subject of “mind” in many chapters of Shobogenzo Dogen once said,

“Explaining mind and explaining nature is the root of the Buddhist Way. . . If there is no explaining of mind and nature, there is no turning of the wheel of the Law, no awakening or practice, no simultaneous attainment of the Way by all beings, and no Buddha nature in sentient beings.”⁷²

To study with mind means to study with the various aspects of the mind, such as conscious mind the cosmic mind, the transcendental mind. After resonating with the way and arousing the thought of enlightenment, take refuge in the great way of the Buddha ancestors and devote yourself to the practice of way- seeking mind.⁷³

The idea of mind, however, with which Dogen was deeply concerned, had the sense of the nature or intrinsic logic of things not the reason for, but the principal, meaning, or truth, of them. This was not the same as what we ordinarily mean by the term “mind.” It was not dealing with simply a subject-object structure of mind.

However, the customary meaning of a word should not be negated in order to understand Dogen’s concept of the mind. He did not reject the importance of the conscious mental activities of the mind, but rather he recommended study of them. Dogen does not negate the conscious level of perception for the sake of enlightenment. In other words, Dogen’s doctrine of the mind is embedded in the conscious level of perception. Dogen’s understanding of the mind, thus, does not negate the ordinary conscious mind, but constitutes only a portion of Dogen’s conception of mind.⁷⁴

Dogen emphasizes the importance of the conscious level of perception in the “Hotsu-bodaishin.” He states:

It is through the **citta**, discriminating mind that we are awakened to the Bodhi mind. . . Without the discriminating mind, (conscious mind) we cannot awaken to the Bodhi-mind. This doctrine does not mean however, that the discriminating mind is the same as the Bodhi-mind. Rather it is by using the discriminating mind that we awaken to the Bodhi-mind.⁷⁵

⁷²Dogen Zenji’s Shobogenzo, Kosen Nishiyama and John Steven trans, vol II, (Nishiyama Shobo: Kawata Press, 1977), 52. See also Shobogenzo, “Sesshin-Sessho,” DZZ I.

⁷³Kazuaki Tanahashi, Moon in a Dewdrop, 87.

⁷⁴Hee-Jin Kim, 70.

⁷⁵Yuho, Yokoi trans. Zen Master Dogen: An Introduction with Selected Writings, (New York and Tokyo: Weatherhill, 1976), 107. See also Shobogenzo, “Hotsu Bodai-shin,” DZZ I. References to citta, we should

Of these aspects of the mind the arising of the thought of enlightenment (**bodashin**). Invariably employs the conscious mind....The aspiration to enlightenment cannot be awakened without this conscious mind. I do not mean to identify this conscious mind directly with the thought of enlightenment, but the latter is engendered by the former.⁷⁶

In fact, Dogen has classified three different kinds of mind; conscious mind, cosmic mind, and transcendental mind. The conscious mind is generally said to be the **citta**, as mentioned above, which refers to discriminating mind (as normal consciousness). The cosmic mind is said to be “unconsciousness.” And the transcendental mind is said to be the Bodhi-mind or enlightened mind with which Dogen was deeply concerned.

For elucidating these three different kinds of mind, it is necessary to make a clarification concerning three key terms used in Mahayana Buddhism, particularly in the Awakening of Faith, since Dogen’s concept of the mind mostly echoes this sutra.

There are three key terms used in Mahayana Buddhism in regard to the concept of mind. These are “mind”(心), “thoughts” (念), and act of “consciousness”(識).⁷⁷ This distinction is crucial for understanding both Dogen and Mahayana Buddhism for they claim that “the essence of the mind is free from thoughts.”⁷⁸

The sutra makes a distinction between the act of “consciousness,” and it interprets the act of the “consciousness” by using five different names.

The first is called the “activating consciousness”
The second is called the “evolving consciousness”
The third is called the “reproducing consciousness”
The fourth is called the “analytical consciousness”
The fifth is called the “continuing consciousness.”⁷⁹

All these consciousnesses are regarded as normal functions of the human psyche. However, one important thing that should be kept in mind is that all these acts of consciousness are acting in the state of non-enlightenment. The sutra says,

note that this can be translated as ‘heart’ as well as ‘mind’ and that Dogen’s concept therefore concludes the affective as well as cognitive.

⁷⁶Cited in Hee-Jin Kim, 131.

⁷⁷In Dogen this consciousness divided in two different functions. As I indicated above, *citta* refers to normal consciousness and cosmic mind refers to unconsciousness.

⁷⁸Yoshito Hakeda, trans. The Awakening of Faith, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), 27.

⁷⁹Ibid., 47-8.

The mentality which emerges in the state of non-enlightenment, which incorrectly perceives and reproduces the world of objects and, conceiving that the reproduced world of objects is real, continues to develop deluded thoughts, is what we define as acts of consciousness.⁸⁰

It is quite obvious here that the term “consciousness” is used of the normal human psyche, which is different from original mind. These activities of “consciousness,” as being the same as our common perception, are explained in the third sentence of the above passage. Regarding the third, the text explains that it reproduces the entire world of objects as a mirror which reproduces all material images. It produces the images when confronted with the objects of the five senses.

Here we can notice that the act of consciousness is working with and through the five senses.⁸¹ All these acts of consciousness through the five senses, (i.e., of perceiving, imagining) are considered normal functions of common sense, which emerges in the state of non-enlightenment. Thus it may be concluded that the act of consciousness is different from the function of the mind.

Further, the sutra differentiates between “thought” and “mind.” The distinction is made clear in the sutra. Regarding “original enlightenment,” the sutra differentiates the meaning and says, “the essence of Mind is free from thoughts.”⁸² Here thought is said to defile the elements of the mind. The sutra says,

Since they are far away even from subtle (deluded) thoughts, they are able to have insight into the original nature of Mind.⁸³

The point is made here that “thought” deludes the original mind. It can contaminate the original mind. Thus so far we may conclude that the concept of mind has been interpreted differently from “thought,” and “consciousness.” In relation to the above discussion of “consciousness” no specific distinction has been made between the concepts of “thought” and “consciousness.” One might conclude that the Sutra regards “thought” as a generic name for all the acts of consciousness mentioned.

⁸⁰Ibid., 45-7.

⁸¹Ibid., 48.

⁸²Ibid., 37.

Following the general theory of the Mahayana Buddhist concepts of “thought” and “mind”, Dogen yet goes beyond them in being deeply practical and existential which is characterized by denying dualistic oriented views of the mind.

First of all, Dogen sees the mind (心) as the totality of psycho-physical realities. Here the word (‘心’) in Chinese literally means the ‘heart.’ Thus for Dogen, the mind does not merely signify ‘reason’ in general sense. Rather, it includes both reasoning and feeling. It is wholistic in function. For Dogen ‘mind’ points to an ontological mode of experiencing which is held to be most authentic to reality as it is. It is believed that this mode of being is pure, non-discriminative and unitive. This nature of the mind has its roots in the well-known formula of the Diamond Sutra: A is not A, therefore A is A. It is well expressed by contemporary scholars:

In order to see through true green, true red, one must go through a spiritual transformation, one must go through the phase of negation; pasture is not pasture, red is not red. Then one can truly appreciate the greenness of the pasture and the brilliant redness of a flower.⁸⁴

Rejecting the dualistic view of the mind, Dogen severely criticized Senika’s view. Dogen explains:

What you have just said is certainly not the Buddhist Dharma but rather the view of the non-believer Senika. That view holds that we have in our body an intellect or mind, that distinguishes things as good or bad, right or wrong, pleasurable or painful, bitter or sweet. When our body dies, the mind separates from the body and is reborn somewhere else. Although our body dies, the mind lives in another place. Like this, it exists eternally. Such is the teaching of the non-believer Senika. If you think such a theory constitutes the Buddhist teaching, you are even more foolish than someone who picks up a roof tile and thinks it is a gold coin.⁸⁵

In this passage we can see that Dogen’s critique of Senika is due to his monistic hypostatization of mind and essence as changeless and timeless in contradiction to body and existence as changing and temporary. Since Dogen strongly asserts the interdependence between body and mind, he can hardly accept Senika’s view of the

⁸³Ibid., 39.

⁸⁴Kogetsu Tani and Eido Tai Shimano, *Zen Wort Zen Schrift*, (Zurich: Theseus Verlag, 1990), 156.

⁸⁵Dogen Zenji’s *Shobogenzo*, Kosen Nishiyama and John Stevens trans, 155. See also *Shobogenzo*, “Bendowa,” DZZ I.

mind which is unaffected by the vicissitudes of the bodily existence. What Dogen actually criticizes is the logic involved in the dualism between body and mind, between reality and appearance, in Senika's view. From such a perspective we see why Dogen criticized Senika. Dogen writes:

In Buddhism, mind and body are one; then how can it be that the mind abides and the body perishes? If the body and mind were originally one, but now different then the Buddhist teaching would be false. Furthermore, do not think that the cycle of life and death should be eradicated-that is a serious mistake. It must be clear that Mind is the original gate to the true teachings of Buddhism and it includes the entire essence of phenomena, which cannot by any means be divided into different aspects such as body or mind, life or death, enlightenment or nirvana....Therefore do not differentiate between body and mind, life or death and nirvana.⁸⁶

Thus Dogen's position is made clear by way of criticizing Senika's view which held to the self-identical reality of mind and essence over against the accidental advent of body and existence. Dogen avoids any monistic and dualistic position on the mind, and he consistently holds to the non-dualism of mind and matter, mind and body, spirit and mind. In this non-dualistic conception of mind, ontology and epistemology are actually united in Dogen. In other words, in this non-dualistic conception of the mind, both knowing subject and known object are united, yet transcended at the same time.

This is Dogen's interpretation that "The triple world is mind-only." Thus for Dogen the entire universe of the external world is mind. He equalizes mind with "mountains, rivers, the sun, the moon, and the stars. Yet it is not just coextensive with them nor in proportion to them, but transcends the sum total of them.

Dogen expresses this theory in detail in the doctrine of "mind-only" (a Buddhist "idealism") and in the metaphor of reflection only. For Dogen human mind is a sentient mirror which, when made tranquil, reflects simultaneously the "totality" of its internal and external experience. In this sense the mind is a reflector of the reflected universe, so the universe appears in the mind as a reflection. In ordinary mind, however, since the mind is agitated by needs, volition, and thoughts, the mind fails to see the reflection as a mere reflection, but sees it as "real."

Ordinary mind thus does not observe, for instance, that the object beheld by the eye

⁸⁶Ibid., 156.

is a creation of his organs of sight, is his own, but responds to it with a “need” to possess or avoid that to which he is inextricably united. But when mind becomes stilled, the mind can view all experiences and all “objects” simultaneously and know them as reflections, as aspects of itself. In this regard Dogen states:

If you are in a boat, and you only look at the riverbank, you will think that the riverbank is moving; but if you look at the boat, you will discover that the boat itself is actually moving. Similarly, if you try to understand the nature of phenomena only through your own confused perception you will mistakenly think that your nature is eternal. Furthermore, if you have right practice and return to your origin then you will clearly see that all things have no permanent self.⁸⁷

This state of mind is well described metaphorically in the words of the seventh-century master Fa Tsang:

The so-called Ocean Mirror symbolizes the innate Buddha Mind. When illusions are exhausted within, the mind will become serene, limpid, and the infinite reflections of all phenomena will appear at one time. This may be compared to the stirring up of ocean waves when the wind blows; and their subsidence when it stops, leaving a calm and pellucid surface where all reflections may be clearly seen.⁸⁸

Tranquil mind thus becomes aware that its experiences of the universes of the physical universe are not external objects, but reflections that arise through its own physiological processes, and it therefore reflects a simultaneous totality with which it feels one. For the Buddhist, however, the mind-only doctrine is a challenge to man to recreate both himself and the cosmos. In other words, ordinary mind, the reflector, can be transformed by the discipline of thought, so that the reflection is also transformed. If the reflector, the mind, becomes infinite, clear, so do the reflections. The physical world is “a projection” of this ordinary mind and can actually be transformed.⁸⁹

For Dogen, thus, body and mind, birth and death, and the objective world such as mountains, rivers, earth, and the subjective world of passions, blindness, unenlightenment are nothing other than mind-nature. All dharmas—the myriad forms of

⁸⁷Dogen Zenji's *Shobogenzo*, Kosen Nishiyama, and John Stevens trans, 2. See also *Shobogenzo*, “Genjokoan,” DZZ I.

⁸⁸Garma C.C. Chang, *The Buddhist Teaching of Totality: The Philosophy of Hwa Yen Buddhism*, (University Park: Penn. State University Press, 1974), 125.

⁸⁹*Ibid.*, 183.

the universe-are merely this one mind.⁹⁰ Accordingly, the mind is identified with some important terms such as thusness (**tathata**; **shinnyo**), the Dharma-nature (**dharmata**; **hossho**), the Buddha-nature (**buddhata** or **buddhatva**; **busscho**), absolute emptiness, etc.

Thus Dogen writes:

There is no state-not even bodhi or nirvana-that is different from the essential state of mind. All dharmas, myriad phenomena and accumulated things, are totally just the one mind, without exclusion or disunion. All these various lineages of the Dharma assert that myriad things and phenomena are the even and balanced undivided mind, other than which there is nothing; and this is just how Buddhists have understood the essence of mind.⁹¹

Here “the One mind” should not be understood in a numerical sense as in “one among many.” Rather this “One mind” indicates a sense of unitive immediacy of experience. In other words, it should not be supposed that there is plurality outside it to define or circumscribe its oneness.⁹² It is prior to such differentiation. Thus the quantitative sense of “one” is irrelevant here.⁹³

However, Dogen’s understanding of the mind-only doctrine does not maintain that all existence is reducible to mind. The mind-only doctrine does not ignore the existence of the reflected objects which stir reflections in the reflecting human mind. Thus Dogen’s understanding of the mind is both knowing subject and the known object, yet it transcends them at the same time. In this non-dualistic concept of the mind both ontology and epistemology are interconnected. To Dogen, thus, mind is at once knowledge and reality, at once the knowing subject and the known object, yet transcends them at the same time. In this non-dualistic conception of mind what one knows is what one is and ontology, epistemology, and soteriology are inseparably united.

Dogen discusses this matter in his commentary on a dialogue between the

⁹⁰Dogen Zenji’s *Shobogenzo*, Kosen Nishiyama and John Stevens trans, 150.

⁹¹Dogen’s *Shobogenzo*, Gudo Nishijima & Chodo Cross trans, book 1, 15-16. See also *Shobogenzo*, “Bendowa,” DZZ I.

⁹²David Drake, “The Logic of One-Mind Doctrine,” *Philosophy East and West*, vol 16, no. 3 & 4, (July-October, 1966), 207.

⁹³Kenneth Ch’en, *Buddhism in China: A Historical Survey*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), 311. Dogen’s understanding of “one mind” doctrine seems to carry no doctrinal difference from the general tenet of Tendai (Chines: T’ien t’ai) Buddhism which suggests that “one thought is the three thousand worlds.”

seventeenth patriarch and his disciple Kayashata. Seeing wind bells ringing at the four cornerstones of the temple. Kayashata was asked by his master: “what is ringing, the wind or the bells?” Kayashata replied, “neither the bell nor the wind is ringing but my mind is ringing.” “What do you mean by that?” asked the master. Kayashata answered: “that which is endowed with tranquility.”⁹⁴ Kayashata’s answer correctly stresses the enlightened mind. And he was approved by his master in answering with tranquility of the mind which implied a subjective means of perception.

However, Dogen says that it is misunderstood if people think that Kayashata’s answer is about cognition based on sound. Dogen rejects such a view for it is simply subjective “idealism.” Dogen reformulates the answer: Although the bell, the wind, and the sound are transformed in the human ear, and finally into a human experience of “sound,” the wind, bell, and sound still exist. Thus Dogen does not negate the existence of the reflected objects though they are merely “reflections.”

Finally Dogen analyzes that inasmuch as these three factors are empty, the ringing of the mind is neither the ringing of the air nor ringing of the bell nor ringing of the mind, but is the ringing of the bell, the ringing of the air, and the ringing of the ringing each abiding in its own Dharma-position as an expression of thusness and emptiness.⁹⁵

Here we should note that Dogen’s special emphasis upon the importance of mind-only is different from that of a narrowly conceived subjectivistic idealism. For Dogen, understanding with the mind does not imply in the least subjectivistic and solipsistic predilections. Dogen discusses the classical Buddhist statement that “The triple world is mind-only; there is no dharma other than the mind. Mind, Buddha, and sentient beings—these three are no different from one another.” He argues that we should not say that “The three worlds” and “mind-only,” as if there were two separate beings. Rather we should say the triple world of mind-only and the mind-only of the three worlds. It is total realization of the total Tathagata. This is why the triple world is mind-only” is also equated with “all things themselves are ultimate reality,” the koan realized in life”, etc.⁹⁶ Dogen writes:

⁹⁴Dogen Zenji’s *Shobogenzo*, Kosen Nishiyama and John Stevens trans, 60.

⁹⁵*Ibid.*,

⁹⁶*Shobogenzo*, “Sangai Yuishin,” DZZ I. 49-50.

The mind alone is beyond one or two; it is beyond the triple world and beyond leaving the triple world; it is free of error; it has thinking, sensing, mindfulness, and realization and it is free of thinking, sensing, mindfulness, and realization; it is fence, walls, tiles, and pebbles and it is mountains, rivers, and the Earth. The mind itself is skin, flesh, bone, and marrow; the mind itself is the picking up of a flower and a face breaking into a smile. There is conscious mind and there is unconscious mind; there is mind in which the body is present and there is mind in which no body is present; there is mind before the moment of the body and there is mind after the moment of the body.⁹⁷

Having difficulties in expressing the truth of the Dharma within common language, particularly, the mind-only doctrine, Dogen expresses this truth in the poetry of metaphor.

Dogen, thus, was very cautious in expressing the truth in common language, particularly the language expressed in mind-only doctrine. For Dogen, it is dangerous to name reality for names become quickly compounded into systems divorced from experience. Thus Dogen finds it more useful to evoke reality in such metaphors. Dogen makes this point in elucidating master Gensha's teaching, "all the entire universe is one bright pearl." Dogen explains:

This 'One Pearl' is still not Its name, but It can be expressed so, and this has come to be regarded as Its name. 'The One Pearl' is what refers directly to That which is beyond the measurement of years, for in Its extending endlessly over the past, It also extends over the present and into the future. Even though we have a body at this very moment and we have a mind at this very moment, they are the Bright pearl. They are not the some vegetation sprouting up here or there, nor are they 'mountains and rivers that arise from a duality like that of Heaven and Earth': they are the Bright Pearl.⁹⁸

As we have considered the mind-only doctrine of Dogen, we can notice that he followed some particular Buddhist traditions such as the Hua-yen doctrine of "The triple world is mind-only," as well as the doctrine of the **Tathagata-garba** tradition; "embrace the dharma world." However, he finds weaknesses in these two strands of Buddhist idealism: the advocacy of mental phenomena by the school of consciousness-only, and the **tathagata-garba** tradition of mental essence. Particularly, he attacked more

⁹⁷Dogen's *Shobogenzo*, "Sangai Yuishin," Gudo Nishijima & Chodo Cross trans, book 3, 47.

⁹⁸*Shobogenzo: The Treasure House of the Eye of the True Teaching*, Humbert Nearman trans, (Shasta Abbey: Mountain Shasta California, 1996), 65.

rigorously the monistic tendency. For he believed that the monistic tendency is not necessarily the fate of philosophical idealism in Buddhism. From this point of view Dogen rejects these views. In this regard Hee Jin Kim states: “Dogen guards himself against those inherent weaknesses of the two strands of Buddhist idealism: the advocacy of mental phenomena (**shinso**) by the school of consciousness-only and that of mental essence (**shinsho**) by the school of the **tathagata-garba** both are vulnerable to the dualism of phenomena and essence.”⁹⁹In this sense he sought the middle way in his own method. Dogen defined concept of the mind in three ways (1) as the knowing subject over against the known object, (2) as the mind over against the body, and (3) as the nature or essence of the mind over against the functions of the mind or over against the mind-body totality.¹⁰⁰

However, it has been acknowledged that the Buddhist absolute, “one mind” or **tathata**, is particularly seen as something similar to the Tao (道, The Way or Truth). Whalen Lai studied the historical development of this concept of “mind- only,” and found out that its roots are in different Indian schools and it has adopted the Taoist concept of mind together with the mind-nature (**hsin-hsing**, 心性) association made by Mencius. In this sense “one mind” is influenced by the Chinese concept of the Tao.

It is obvious that Dogen’s concept of mind seems to go beyond a traditional understanding of the doctrine of **tathagata-garba**. Moreover, it is important to note here that the endorsement of Dogen’s mind doctrine was due primarily to a conviction derived from his experience. It is highly difficult to use language which is based on discriminatory thinking to express this “state of reality” which is claimed to be “beyond words and letters.”

Dogen’s primary concern was not in trying to offer a theory about mind. Rather his exposition of mind is more an expression of his experience. The basis for his exposition of mind is his experiential realization in practice. Thus it is difficult for those who have not had experience to understand properly. The doctrine of mind-only should therefore not be treated as a mere system of speculative philosophy, but as a religious experiential exposition and insight. Since religion always begins with someone’s experience, such is

⁹⁹Hee Jin Kim, 149.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., 150.

the case with Dogen's concepts and spirituality.

Particularly, for Dogen, "one mind," is not to be understood as a concept within a conceptual system, but as the experience of the practitioner himself.

C) Dogen's Understanding of Human Being As a "Self"

1) Self As Impermanence 無常 (MUJO)

For Dogen, studying the self is one of the most important themes in understanding the Buddha-way. According to Dogen, to study the self is to study the Buddha-way. The following passage indicates the most direct inroad into the question and the study of the self:

To study the Buddha-way is to study the self; to study the self is to forget the self; to forget the self is to be verified by myriad dharma; and to be verified by myriad dharma is to drop off the body-mind of the self as well as the body-mind of the other. There remains no trace of enlightenment, and one lets this traceless enlightenment come forth for ever and ever.¹⁰¹

According to this passage, one cannot search for the self somewhere outside the self. The only place to start is one's own self. However, this passage also tells us that one does not encounter an enduring substantial thing called "self," when one studies the self. What, then, does one find? Instead of finding the so called "self," one finds the myriad dharma, the ten thousand things of the world and thereby forgets the self that one did not find. Consequently these myriad dharmas verify and confirm one's activity and this leads one to drop off body-mind, and finally dropping off body-mind leads the transparency of enlightenment to enter. This passage, in fact, implies Dogen's understanding of the nature of the self as well as the way to achieve enlightenment. For Dogen, the self is never some kind of substantial object, something which we can find.

In respect to the concept of the "self" Dogen followed the Buddha's teaching of "existence" which is characterized by the three marks: **dukkha** (suffering), **anitya**, (無常 **impermanence**), and **anatman** (no-self, 無我, *muga*). **Anitya** is a word composed of 'not' and 'permanence', while **anatman** is composed of 'not' or 'no' and 'eternal essential self'.

The Buddha addresses this subject:

¹⁰¹Philip Kapleau, The Three Pillar of Zen, (New York: Anchor Books, 1989), 322.

Whether Buddhas arise, O priests, or whether Buddhas do not arise, it remains a fact and the fixed and necessary constitution of being, that all its constituents are transitory (**anitya**). . .when he discovered and mastered it, he announces, teaches, publicizes, proclaims, discloses, minutely explains, and makes it clear, that all the constituents of being are transitory.

Whether Buddhas arise, O priests, or whether Buddhas do not arise, it remains a fact and the fixed and necessary constitution of being, that all its constituents are misery (**dukkha**). This fact a Buddha discovers and masters, and when he has discovered and mastered it, he announces, teaches, publishes, proclaims, discloses, minutely explains, and makes it clear, that all the constituents of beings are misery.

Whether Buddhas arise, O priests, or whether Buddhas do not arise, it remains a fact and the fixed and necessary constitution of being, that all its elements are lacking in a ego (substantial, permanent self-nature, **anatman**).¹⁰²

As the above passage indicates, all things flow and nothing is permanent. Following this teaching, Dogen believes what is true of the world in general is also true of human existence, like the existence of all things, is impermanent, transient, and already in the process of dissolution. The self is no less impermanent or transient than the world. This realized, is selflessness. "When the transient nature of the world is recognized, the ordinary selfish mind does not arise."¹⁰³ Thus one is nothing other than one's change; to exist as anything is impermanence. There are no basic, enduring facts of existence. There is no Buddhist Absolute in the sense of a metaphysical entity or immutable essence.¹⁰⁴

According to Dogen, however, one tends to think that one is not impermanent. One tends to deny that the self is not impermanent. Thus if we perceive such an inconstant world which is forever in flux as constant, and our self as fixed within it, we will inevitably hold to a distorted understanding or judgement. And this tendency, which shows an attachment to self, will lead to suffering. What we think of as our mind, the mental activity and representation going on more or less automatically in our heads, is not what we truly are, is not the self. According to Dogen, we see empirical objects as

¹⁰²Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, and Charles A. Moore, ed. *A Source Book in Indian Philosophy*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), 273-274.

¹⁰³Dogen, "One hundred and Eight Ways to Enlightenment," Yuho Yokoi trans, *Zen Master Dogen: An Introduction with Selected Writings*, 48.

¹⁰⁴Gregory Spearritt, "Don Cupitt: Christian Buddhist?" *Religious Studies*, vol 31, (1995), 362.

appearance only, a name and form arising from the particular of each moment of awareness.

2) Dogen's Metaphysical Presupposition of Reality

In respect to the concept of the self, Dogen sees the entire world as not unchangeable nor immovable. According to Dogen's metaphysics, there are two different kinds of categories in terms of seeing reality as being and becoming. These different categories might have articulated reality in two different forms in which reality has been articulated either as units of space (atoms, substances) or units of time (events, moments) as the basic entity of individual. Therefore there are two different kinds of metaphysical forms; process metaphysics and substance metaphysics. In respect to these two forms, Dogen rejects substance metaphysics and accepts a form of process metaphysics. In other words, Dogen sees reality not as a constant substance, but rather as a form of process.

Every thing, in fact, is an event or moment rather than a substance. For Dogen, each and every aspect of human life is constituted as "event" or "occurrence." It is, however, not an event within the framework of any spatio-temporal world, which is understood as a stable constant.

In this regard P. T. Raju rightly points out that what we take to be an enduring object "is really a series of aggregates of events following the same pattern. A part from, a thing is nothing. It is a whole of parts. A chariot is nothing but its parts. Man is nothing but the parts that constitutes him."¹⁰⁵

Thus, according to Dogen, every thing is flowing, which describes the fact that all things, including human beings, are dynamic or active. The whole world in which human beings live is composed not of inanimate objects and dead matter, but moves, and lives. Dogen states:

Now when dragons and fish see water as a palace, it is just like human beings seeing a palace. They do not think it flows. If an outsider tells them, 'What you see as a palace is running water, 'they will be astonished, just as we are when we hear the words, 'Mountains flow'.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵P.T. Raju, Structural Depths of Indian Thought, (Albany: State University of New York, 1985), 150.

Thus, for Dogen, all things flow means that every unit of being is an activity. In this respect, there is no “constant self,” “the way the self arrays itself is the form of the entire world.”¹⁰⁷

In this regard, there is much agreement regarding the concept of “all things are flowing” between Dogen and Whiteheadian process philosophy. A.N. Whitehead, the father of modern process philosophy, and Charles Hartshorne, his pupil are agreed in denying any absolute self-identity throughout any series constituting a living being. They hold that all life is a process of becoming in which there can be no absolute and separable self-identity in the form of a persisting ‘entity’. As Hartshorne has put it:

The only strict concrete identity is seen as belonging to the momentary self, the true unit of personal existence, as Hume and James rediscovered long after the Indians, Chinese, and Japanese. Each momentary self is a new actuality, however intimately related to its predecessors. It is self-enjoyed rather than self-interested. All aim beyond the present is interest taken by one momentary self in others. A kind of ‘altruism’ is thus the universal principle, self interesting being but the special case in which the other momentary selves in question form with the present self a certain chain or sequence. But this chain has not absolute claim upon its own members. Only the cosmic Life has absolute claim.¹⁰⁸

Moreover, Whitehead well explained an understanding of the universe as a unitary system and process. He writes:

In the place of the Aristotelian notion of the procession of forms, it (modern physics) has substituted the notion of the forms of process. It has thus swept away space and matter, and has substituted the study of the internal relations within a complex state of activity. This complex state is in one sense a unity. There is the whole universe of physical action extending to the remotest star cluster. In another sense it is divisible into parts. We can trace interrelations within a selected group of activities, and ignore all other activities. By such an abstraction, we shall fail to explain those internal activities which are affected by changes in the external system which has been ignored. Also, in any fundamental sense, we shall fail to understand the retained activities.¹⁰⁹

Here we see that Whitehead and Hartshorne are agreed in denying any absolute self

¹⁰⁶Kazuaki Tanahashi, *Moon in a Dewdrop*, 104.

¹⁰⁷Kazuaki Tanahashi ed, *Enlightenment Unfolds: The Essential Teachings of Zen Master Dogen*, 70.

¹⁰⁸Charles Hartshorne, *The Logic of Perfection and Other Essays in Neo-classical Metaphysics*, (Chicago, Open Court Publishing Co, 1962), 18.

¹⁰⁹A.N. Whitehead, *Modes of Thought*, (New York: The Free Press, 1966), 140-4.

identity throughout any series constituting a living being. A person consists of a series of momentary selves, each intimately related to the preceding self. Thus it is not difficult to imagine that the concepts of Whitehead and Hartshorne are influenced by Buddhist thought, and up to a point there is much agreement between Dogen and Whiteheadian process philosophy.

Dogen, thus, refused the idea of a permanent ego, or **atman**. Dogen severely criticized the Senika heresy as a misunderstanding of genuine Buddhist teaching because Senika believed in the immutability of **atman** or selfhood, and in the perishability of the body, a view which is equal to the Platonic immortality of the soul or the Cartesian concept of the thinking ego.¹¹⁰ However, Dogen's idea of the self as **anatman** (no-self) does not mean that the self is nothing, which would lead to nihilism. On the contrary, if the self is understood as a real, permanent being, this would commit the fault of eternalism.¹¹¹

However, we should not miss the point here that the Buddhist concept of selflessness does not reject the self at the common sense level. The Buddha never rejected the idea of the self, for he himself used the first-person pronoun "I" all the time. The Buddha's actual concern about the self was to give instruction on how to get rid of one's ego-clinging nature. Thus the Buddha's teaching about the self was primarily a therapeutic device. There is no philosophical teaching about the self in the Buddha's teaching. His teaching of **anatman** or no-self was actually for meditational purposes, for the purpose of liberation.¹¹² The reason why the doctrine of no-self has been a controversial topic is due to philosophers of Buddhism who treated it as a philosophical concept rather than as meditational.¹¹³

Thus in Buddhism there is no denial of the self at the common sense level. Thus at the conventional level, things do exist. However, the existence or 'true nature' of anything at a deeper level is undiscoverable. The question of the existence of the self, thus, must be answered from two different standpoints. At the common sense level, Buddhism does not deny the existence of the self. But from the viewpoint of liberation

¹¹⁰Masao Abe, Steven Heine ed, *A Study of Dogen*, 44.

¹¹¹Joan Stambaugh, *The Formless Self*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 20

¹¹²Garma C.C. Chang, *The Buddhist Teaching of Totality*, 75.

¹¹³*Ibid.*, 76.

and the 'true-nature' of the self, Buddhism denies the **atman**, the self as a permanent and unitary being. Thus the self is impermanent.

3) Concept of "Dependent Origination"

In accepting this no-self doctrine of basic Buddhism, Dogen developed his own idea of the self. Dogen's idea of the self as impermanent is due to his view of reality. His view of reality is based on the doctrine of the **pratitya-samutpada**,¹¹⁴ which is the fundamental doctrine of Buddhism. According to the doctrine of **pratitya-samutpada**, everything is thought to be interdependently existing. The Buddha is recorded as saying: "Those who see 'dependent origination' will see the dharma; those who see the dharma will see me; those who see me will see the dharma." Thus according to this principle, beings are not considered to be independent substances, but interconnected, mutually conditioned, dependently co-originated beings, or beings of causal relativity.

Following this view, Dogen says, "In essence, all things in the entire world are linked with one another as moments."¹¹⁵ This basic principle, the **pratitya-samutpada**, applies to all beings without exception, so it is the universal principle for Buddhism.

Consequently, whatever is arises and ceases. Everything is related with one another so that one cannot exist without another. The Buddha says:

When this exists, that comes to be;
On the arising of this, that arises.
When this does not exist, that does not come to be;
On the cessation of this, that ceases.

Here, since "this" and "that" are completely interconnected, without "this," "that" is impossible to exist. In this regard, D.T. Suzuki says that individual are recognized only when they are thought of in relation to something not individual. In other words, he explains, they are individuals so long as they are related to others. Thus when an individual being is singled out, it ceases to be an individual. There is no such thing as an independent self because individuals are so intimately related to one another.¹¹⁶

Martin Buber, has expressed this Buddhistic idea of interdependency in terms of

¹¹⁴It can be translated as "dependent origination," "inter-relationality," or "conditioned-co-origination."

¹¹⁵Kazuaki Tanahashi, *Moon in a Dewdrop*, 78.

¹¹⁶Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, *Essays in Zen Buddhism*, (London: Luzac and Company, 1933), 239.

personal relationships. Buber emphasizes not only that authentic being is found in participation, but that in this relationship one goes beyond oneself. He writes:

The individual is a fact of existence in so far as he steps into a living relation with other individuals. The aggregate is a fact of existence in so far as it is built up of living units of relations. The fundamental fact of human existence is man with man. What is peculiarly characteristic of the human world is above all that something takes place between one being and another, the like of which can be found nowhere in nature. Language is only a sign and a mean for it; all achievement of the spirit has been incited by it. Man is made man by it; but on its way it does not merely unfold, it also decays and withers away. It is rooted in one being, in order to communicate with it in a sphere which is common to them but which reaches out beyond the special sphere of each. I call this sphere, which is established with the existence of man as man but which is conceptually still uncomprehended, the sphere of 'between'. Though being realized in very different degrees, it is a primal category of human reality. This is where the genuine third alternative must begin.¹¹⁷

Both Buber and Buddhist ideas agreed on the view that individuality exists in relation to others. A most penetrating state of interrelationship prevails here. However, the difference lies when Buber emphasizes the level of communal life, whereas Buddhists including Dogen also extend it to an ontological level. Penrose, on the other hand, considers this idea in his quantum theory by understanding the universe as co-relational. He writes:

Individual particles then do not have a 'state' on their own, but exist only in complicated 'entanglements' with other particles, referred to as co-relations. When a particle in one region is 'observed', in the sense that it triggers some effect that becomes magnified to the classical level, then R must be invoked-but this apparently simultaneously affects all the other particles with which that particular particle is correlated.¹¹⁸

In attempting to explain a relational characteristic of being, quantum physics may be helpful. Quantum theory well explains the co-relations of each particle. We may apply this scientific truth to the realm of the communal life of individuals.

To sum up, all things are interdependent. Everything depends on everything else and all things affect each other. In other words, to say that everything is devoid of

¹¹⁷Martin Buber, *Between Man and Man*, R. G. Smith trans. (London: Kegan Paul, 1947), 144.

¹¹⁸R. Penrose, *The Emperor's New Mind: Concerning Computers, Minds, and The Laws of Physics*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 297.

selfhood is to indicate that it has no definitive nature, or determinateness. Nothing, then, can be truly existent if it is indeterminate or indefinite.

However, inter-determinateness does not necessarily mean that each being has not its own existence. Rather it is a different perspective. Dogen's understanding of no-self should be understood in this way. For example, in quantum physics the micro-phenomena of matter can be seen either as particles or waves. More accurately: as having particle-like properties or wave-like properties. In other words, matter cannot be measured exactly at the same time.¹¹⁹ A ten pound stone weighs such only when it is measured on the ground. It would not be the same weight if it were weighed in an orbiting satellite.

This example shows that there is nothing definitive in nature. Everything is in relation to a particular condition of reference. One's determinateness is valid only in terms of certain conditions. In this sense everything is relative. "This fact of indeterminateness is also called relativity-X is X only in relation to Y under certain conditions."¹²⁰

An important point we should mention here is that when Dogen says everything is in relation so that there is no definitive nature, he is speaking from the perspective of "authentic view" (I will discuss it latter). If a thing is observed under different conditions, it appear to be opposite to another thing. Thus we may conclude that Dogen's theory of relation is not based on ordinary perception.

4) Co-Dependence as The Middle Way (中道)

Moreover, in Dogen, the relation of "this" and "that" is applied not only to the realm of beings, but it also applies to being and non-being. Thus being and non-being as its negation are interpenetrated and inter-structured. In other words, there is no such thing as an absolute independent being. In this regard, being is not absolute but relative to non-being, and non-being is not absolute but relative to being. Thus being is being only in relation to nonbeing. Thus any attempt to understand being as a constant, independent being is an illusion.

In this regard, Dogen's understanding of the self lies between self and non-self. Self

¹¹⁹Garma C.C. Chang, The Buddhist Teaching of Totality, 82.

¹²⁰Ibid.,

does exist insofar as there is non-self. Self is understood in this inter-structured nature of self and non-self. In this sense self is self only in relation to non-self. Thus the self is true-self insofar as it is de-centered, and grounded with the other, or not-self. However, the de-centering of self does not mean the self is merely not-self, the “other.” Consequently, the ordinary nature of self is neither self nor not-self, but in the “between” of self and its “not.”

However, this “between” is not the median or the quantitative middle of both, but the qualitative line of both. Likewise fire is fire because it burns things, but the ordinary nature of fire is not-burning because fire cannot consume itself. Thus it can be said that fire is burning because of not-burning. Thus the nature of fire is in the “between” of burning and not-burning.

Thus the original nature of the self is not in its self-centered nature but in its de-centered “not.” In other words, the original nature of self or true-self cannot be claimed as either self or not-self, but only as neither self nor not-self. In this regard, Nagarjuna’s understanding of “co-dependent nature” or the “middle way” as Sunyata would clarify the meaning of the self. Nagarjuna says:

That which is dependent origination we call ‘Emptiness’ (Sunyata, 空)-it is a useful indicator (**prajñaptir upadaya**), just that is the Middle Way.¹²¹

From this “Middle Way” perspective, self is simultaneously both self and not-self. Both being and not-being are affirmed as they belong together. Thus the Middle is neither mere nothing nor nothing negative. In this sense, it does not exist, yet nor does non-emptiness exist. Thus the “middle path” is in no sense a third truth between or in the middle of eternalism and nihilism. Nirvana and samsara are thus co-extensive although not of course in a naïve physical, or even metaphysical, sense, for both are Sunyata.

However, Nagarjuna’s intention was primarily soteriological, while his method was primarily negative. Thus Nagarjuna’s denial was not a denial of a way of release as suggested by his opponents.¹²² According to Don Cupitt, who also agrees with

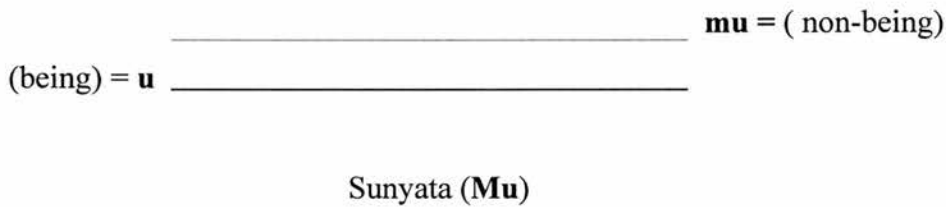
¹²¹ David J. Kalupahana, *Nagarjuna: The Philosophy of the Middle Way*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986), 18.

¹²² Gregory K. Ornatowski, “Transformations of “Emptiness”: On the Idea of Sunyata and the Thought of

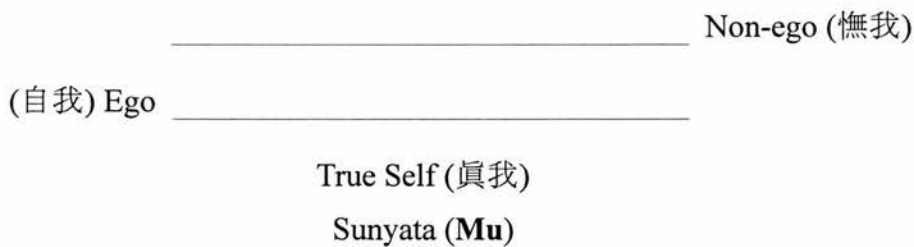
Nagarjuna’s thought, such a concept of ‘emptiness’ is the overcoming of dualities as a soteriological approach.¹²³ In this respect, it is the original nature of both affirmation and negation, both being and not-being.

Therefore, the “Middle” is not a thing that can be treated as a substantially existing matter. It is rather the original nature of being, which is nothing. In this respect, Nagarjuna’s concept of the “Middle” cannot be equated with the **via negativa** of Christian mysticism. Although both use the same term “Nothing” they use it in different meanings. For instance, the mysticism of St John of the Cross, adopting the **via negativa**, speaks of Nothing as Ultimate Reality, thus it still has a presupposition of a thing named Nothing as God.

Masao Abe has expressed the originality of the self as the “Middle Way” with the following diagram:¹²⁴



Likewise, Dogen’s concept of the original nature of the self can be drawn with the following diagram:



In the beginning of **Genjo-koan** (現成公案: Present achievement by koan), Dogen expresses this idea of the “true self” as “Sunyata” which contains the gist of a Buddhist

Abe and the Kyoto School of Philosophy,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, vol 34:1 (Winter 1997), 97.

¹²³Don Cupitt, *The Time Being*, (London: SGM, 1992), 127-130.

¹²⁴Masao Abe, *Zen and Western Thought*, William R. Lafleur ed. (London: Macmillan Press, 1985), 87.

basic principle.

In that period of time when Buddhas gave voice to the teaching on existence in all its variety, there is illusion and enlightenment, practice and training, of birth, of death, of 'Buddhas', of ordinary beings.

In that period of time when it is no longer relevant to speak of an 'I' along with its 'whole universe', there is no illusion or enlightenment, no Buddhas or ordinary beings, no being born, no extinction.

Because the path to Buddhahood naturally springs forth from a feeling that there is 'too much' of one thing or 'not enough' of another, there is 'birth and extinction', there is 'ordinary being' and 'Buddha', Yet, even though this is the way things are, still, we feel regret at a blossom's falling and loathe to see the weeds envelop everything.¹²⁵

The first paragraph states the duality and differentiation of birth and death, illusion and enlightenment, and practice and training. Thus this paragraph emphasizes "is" or a positive nature of being.

In the second paragraph we can see its emphasis on "is not." It emphasizes the non-duality and non-differentiation of illusion (sentient beings) and enlightenment (Buddhas) and arising and perishing. This is the negation of "is." Thus it emphasizes the non-duality as well as "is not," which is the nature of non-being.

However, the third paragraph states that the Buddha-way transcends "is" and "is not" or being and non-being. Yet in the final sentence, we can find an implication that since the Buddha-way is "Sunyata," it can transcend and include both duality and non-duality as well as self and non-self. Thus all things simply are as they are (suchness).¹²⁶

Following Nagarjuna's concept of the "Middle way," Dogen's notion of the self as "Sunyata" rejects two metaphysical extremes. According to Dogen, 'all-being' is not 'emergent-being' (**shi-u**, 待有), nor 'original being, nor mysterious being', nor any such thing. It has nothing to do with things such as mind, sense organ and sense object, nor with essential nature or form. For Dogen, the "being," as Buddha-nature, is not the "being" of "being and non-being."¹²⁷ In this regard Dogen explains the nature of Sunyata:

The fifth patriarch says, "The buddha-nature is emptiness, so we call it being

¹²⁵Shobogenzo, "Genjo-koan." Hubert Nearman trans, 53-4.

¹²⁶Joan Stambaugh, *The Formless Self*, 4.

¹²⁷Shobogenzo, DZZ I, 14.

without.” This clearly expresses that emptiness is not non-existence. To express that the Buddha-nature is emptiness, we do not say it is half a pound and we do not say it is eight ounces, but we use the words “being without.” We do call it “emptiness” because it is void, and we do not call it “being without” because it does not exist; because the Buddha-nature is emptiness, we call it “being without.”¹²⁸

For Dogen, “all being,” as Buddha-nature, is not being coming into existence out of nothing, nor eternal “being.” Dogen believes that the Buddha taught neither eternal nor emergent “being,” but rather, “co-dependent.” However, “co-dependent” itself is not “relational being.” This means that there is no such “being,” which can be identified as “co-dependent.” Nor is “being” a subtle, mysterious power or essence, nor is it merely an illusion. “All being” is not therefore a mere product of the mind, nor is it mind itself. Nor is it limited to the “object of experience.” What Dogen is actually trying to say is that he is rejecting the dichotomy of the absolute.

5) The Concept of Nothingness or Sunyata

Here, it is worth noting the meaning and role of “Nothingness” or “**Sunyata**” in Buddhism since the concept of Nothingness or **Sunyata** or “**Mu**” (無) is central to Buddhism. However, before we discuss the notion of ‘Nothingness’ or ‘**Sunyata**,’ we have to recognize that there is difficulty in understanding properly the meaning of **sunyata**. This derives from at least three factors: (1) **sunyata** takes on a variety of meanings throughout Buddhist history; (2) these meanings have always existed within particular religious contexts and as part of a larger religious path and, therefore, lose their content when extracted from these religious contexts; and (3) translating these overall meanings in their religious context into logical English terms and concepts is difficult at best and often adds to confusion in understanding properly.

Further, **sunyata** has also been described as referring to (1) a religious attitude or state of awareness; (2) a focus of meditation; (3) a manner of ethical action; or (4) a statement about reality, corresponding to the Buddhist notion of the interrelated nature of all existing things.¹²⁹ Given these difficulties, the major translations of the term ‘**sunyata**’ have varied and have included such English expressions as “emptiness,”

¹²⁸Dogen’s *Shobogenzo*, “Bussho,” Gudo Nishijima & Chodo Cross trans, 10.

¹²⁹Gregory K. Ornatowski, “Transformations of “Emptiness”: On the Idea of Sunyata and the thought of Abe and the Kyoto School of Philosophy,” 93-94.

“nothingness,” and “voidness.”

There are ten similes of “**sunyata**,” written by a Chinese Buddhist scholar, which illustrate certain of “**sunyata**”’s most important characteristics:

1. Emptiness implies non-obstruction. . . like space or the void, it exists within many things but never hinders or obstructs anything.
2. Emptiness implies omnipresence. . . like the void, it is ubiquitous; it embraces everything everywhere.
3. Emptiness implies sameness. . . It makes no differentiation anywhere.
4. There is no limitation. This means it is open so that there is no limit for it.
5. It has no appearance. It means that it presents no appearance accessible to the ordinary mind.
6. It has no defilement. It means its purity and perfection.
7. It is unmoved and permanent. This means that it is without perishing and arising.
8. It is empty of being. It means that it is impossible to measure.
9. It is empty without emptiness. This means that it does not attach to itself.
10. It has nothing. This means it has no possession also it is not able to possess.¹³⁰

Concerning the historical influences on “**sunyata**,” Robert Sharf asserts that the notion of “**sunyata**” in Zen Buddhism reflects a clear influence from **Yogacara** and **Huayen** thought.¹³¹ Also the notion of “**sunyata**” seem to have been influenced by the Neo-Taoist idea that regarded the Tao as “nothingness” or the pure potentiality from which all things come forth.¹³²

On the other hand, with nothingness, or **Sunyata** as Absolute, Nishitani distinguishes between a “relative nothingness,” and an “absolute nothingness.” The former is set in opposition to being; the latter is at bottom one with being. The first points to nihilism; the second, to emptiness, with which it is convertible. And this emptiness is not metaphysical esoterism, of course, but moral philosophy. For example, it calls for an “absolute openness, “ an imperative of Zen. Again, emptiness “in its original form” is in “self-emptying,” a “divine perfection.”¹³³

¹³⁰Shinichi Hisamatsu, “The Characteristics of Oriental Nothingness,” *Philosophical Studies of Japan*, 2, (1960), 31.

¹³¹Robert Sharf, “Whose Zen? Zen Nationalism Revisited,” James Heisig and John Maraldo, eds, *Rude Awakenings: Zen, the Kyoto School, and the Question of Nationalism*, (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 1995), 40-44.

¹³²M. Nagao, *Madhyamika and Yogacara: A Study of Mahayana Philosophy*, ed, and trans. L. S. Kawamura, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 214-215.

¹³³Keiji Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, Jan Van Bragt tran, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 96, 105, 59.

Thus “**sunyata**” or **Mu** is not the exact counterpart of the Western concept of “non-being.” Generally speaking, since Western philosophy is built around the concept of being, being consequently sets itself up in distinction to all other beings and things. Descartes’ **cogito ergo sum** at once epitomized and entrenched this dualism in the Western mind. Thus in the Western context “**mu**,” or “nothingness” is generally understood as negation of being. In the Western mind, the word ‘nothingness’ generally connotes a pejoratively negative condition. In this general sense it is perceived to be the opposite of “fullness.” Yoshinori Takeuchi rightly points out the different use of “nothing” between West and East. He says:

Whenever discussion arises concerning the problem of encounter between being and non-being, Western philosophers and theologians, with hardly an exception, will be found to align themselves on the side of being. This is no wonder. The idea of “being” is the Archimedean point of Western thought. Not only philosophy and theology, but the whole tradition of Western civilization has turned around the pivot.

All is different in Eastern thought and Buddhism. The central notion from which Oriental religious intuition and belief as well as philosophical thought have been developed is the idea of “nothingness.” To avoid serious confusion, however, it must be noted that East and West understand non-being or nothingness in entirely different ways.¹³⁴

In this regard Nishida also says, “I think that we can distinguish the West to have considered being as the ground of reality, the East to have taken nothingness as its ground.”¹³⁵

According to Nishitani, emptiness or nothingness is the principle to distinguish Buddhism from other religions, particularly Western religions, such as Christianity and its Platonic antecedent. He further states that the primary difference between Buddhism and traditional Western ontology is that the latter “considers the fundamental question only of being and never calls ‘nothingness’ into question radically.”¹³⁶ He states:

Generally, “nothingness” is made to stand in contrast of “being”, functioning as negativity in that relationship, and is thus conceived as something which “is”

¹³⁴Yoshinori Takeuchi, “Buddhism and Existentialism: The Dialogue between Oriental and Occidental Thought.” Water Leibrrecht, ed. *Religion and Culture: Essays in Honor of Paul Tillich*, (New York: Harper, 1959), 292.

¹³⁵Nishida Kitaro, “The Nothingness Beyond God,” *Dialogue and Alliance*, 1 (Fall, 1987), 70

¹³⁶Keiji-Nishitani, “The Standpoint of Sunyata” (Part Two), Jan Van Bragt trans. *The Eastern Buddhist*, New Series, VI (October, 1973), 59.

nothingness. In Western thinking, this seems to be especially conspicuous. It is even so as regards what is thought of as nihilism in the so-called nihilism. Insofar as one stops at such a way of thinking, nothingness is only a concept, a nothingness merely in thought. (In Buddhism, on the other hand), absolute nothingness, in which even that which “is” nothingness is negated, is not nothingness merely thought but nothingness which can only be lived.¹³⁷

In Buddhism, however, **Mu or Sunyata** is not simply understood as the opposite of **U** (有: being). But **mu** is **mu**, not the negation of **u**. Rather it is the essence of things as they are. Nothingness is Isness. Isness is Nothingness. Nothingness is Suchness. It is the original nature of things. It is between “is” and “not.” Therefore, it is misunderstood if **mu** is translated as non-being as understood in the West in general which connotes negation or privation of some thing.

Sunyata suggests therefore that although things in the phenomenal world appear to be real and substantial outside, they are actually tenuous and empty within. They are not real but only appear to be real. . . all things are empty in that they lack a subsisting entity or self-being.¹³⁸

According to Zen, understanding of **Mu** is characterized as:

Mu is not one-sidedly derived through negation of **u** (being). **Mu** is the negation of **u** and vice versa. One has no logical or ontological priority to the other. Being the complete counter-concept to **u**, **mu** is more than privation of **u**, a stronger form of negativity than ‘non-being’ as understood in the West.¹³⁹

According to Abe, the main difference between Zen Nothingness and Western Nothingness is that the latter is understood dualistically, whereas in Zen **mu** and **u** are understood non-dualistically. In this regard, Abe rejects what he calls the Western ascription of “ontological priority” to being over nonbeing:

Some Western tinkers such as Paul Tillich would insist that. . . non-being is, logically and ontologically, dependent on being and not vice versa. Hence the priority of being over non-being. This assumption must be challenged: ‘The priority of (**u**) over (**mu**) non-being is not ontologically justifiable. . . Herein, we see the essential difference in understanding the negativity of beings, including human

¹³⁷Keiji Nishitani, “The Personal and the Impersonal in Religion” (Part One), Jan Van Bragt and Seisaku Yamamoto trans. *The Eastern Buddhist*, New Series, III (June, 1970), 81-82.

¹³⁸Garma C. C. Chang, *Buddhist Teaching of Totality*, 60.

¹³⁹*Ibid.*,

existence, between the West and the East, especially as exemplified in Buddhism". . . "Priority" in this context seems to mean for Abe the direction of the derivation of one concept from another. Tillich's comments imply what Abe calls a "one-sided derivation" of nonbeing (**mu**) from being (**u**), nonbeing (**mu**) being the one sided negation of being (**u**). Tillich himself says: "Nonbeing is dependent on the being it negates." There seems to be a logical necessity at work here: "there would be no negation if there was no preceding affirmation to be negated."¹⁴⁰

In regard to the concept of "**Mu**" or Nothingness, Dogen says:

The term "thusness" embraces both of these aspects of reality-the relative existence of things and the emptiness of absolute existence of particular things. These two perspectives are referred to as two facets of thusness-that which is unchanging (absolute emptiness) and that which accords with conditions (relative existence). The term "thusness" itself alludes to the simultaneous realization of emptiness and existence, experiencing directly and openly without fixed conceptual glosses, seeing everything as being simply "thus."¹⁴¹

Thus, according to Dogen, "nothingness" should not be thought of dualistically, as some "thing" which is the negation of being; nothingness and things are co-extensive.

In fact, "**sunyata**" permeates and epitomizes Mahayana thought as well as Dogen's. It expresses the core of Mahayana.¹⁴²

If there is one teaching that is peculiar to Buddhism alone among all the world's religion, I would say it is the principle of **Sunyata** (Voidness or Emptiness). If I were to choose the one doctrine among others that best represents the core of Buddhism, I would also choose the principle of **Sunyata**. If someone were further to ask me what is the Buddhist doctrine that is most difficult to explain and comprehend, most misunderstood and misrepresented, I would again say it is the principle of **Sunyata**. The importance of **Sunyata** in every field of Mahayana Buddhism cannot be overstressed. . .¹⁴³

Therefore, the understanding of **Mu** in Dogen is completely non-dualistic: absolute **Mu** and ultimate reality are completely identical. **Mu** and Being are completely non-dualistic. Thus it is not to be regarded beyond the antinomy of being and non-being but

¹⁴⁰Thomas Dean, "Masao Abe on Zen and Western Thought," *The Eastern Buddhist*, vol 23, no 1, (Spring 1990), 94-95.

¹⁴¹Shobogenzo "Hossho, in *Shobogenzo: Zen Essays by Dogen*, Thomas Cleary trans, 36.

¹⁴²Keiji Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, 183.

¹⁴³Garma C.C. Chang, *The Buddhist Teaching of Totality*, 60.

rather gains its ultimate status by virtue of its being metaphysically prior to non-being.¹⁴⁴ Here we can see a deeper understanding of “nothingness” in Dogen. The “nothingness” which Dogen understood is neither a nihilistic nothingness nor an ontological non-being in opposition to being, but rather a reality that surpasses the categories of being and non-being.

To sum up Dogen’s understanding of the self, true self lies in the double negation of the ego-self (the self known only as an object to itself)¹⁴⁵ and also the negation of that negation, which is actually the affirmation of absolute or true Selfhood as emptiness or nothingness. Dogen claims that this transcends all reasons and objectifying logicalizations and can only be opened up in the existence of body-mind dropping off. As such, this can only be expressed by paradox. Dogen therefore affirms that birth-and-death itself is enlightenment. The paradox of “being self while not being self,” or the self-awareness that emptiness is self, is for Dogen’s Zen Buddhism the most fundamental or original meaning of man’s existence.

D) Dogen’s Understanding of Being-Time (Uji:有侍)

Dogen’s concept of “being and time” is decisively important, since it provides the matrix within which Dogen’s thought is conducted and it also challenges us to leave our fundamental presuppositions which, as the matrix of our thinking, we take for granted without being conscious of them. However, in order to understand his concept of Being-time, first we should understand that he does not merely aim to philosophize about time in the sense of speculative and systematic reasoning. In other words, Dogen does not intend to offer a theory about time. Rather his explanation of time is more an expression of his deep **zazen** practice. Thus his explanation of time is based on the realization of his practice.

The problem of time has been an essential part of Buddhist thought. In regard to the problem of time, mainstream Buddhism has two assumptions: one is that time has no independent existence but is dependent on dharma; the other is the concept of “time flow,” which is related to the mutuality of space and time in that every event is time as

¹⁴⁴Thomas Dean, “Masao Abe on Zen and Western Thought,” *The Eastern Buddhist*, vol 23, no 1. (Spring 1990), 93.

¹⁴⁵See my diagram above.

well as flowing.¹⁴⁶

Moreover, various formulations and issues have come out in regard to the concept of time throughout the history of Buddhism. The **Sarvastivadin** and the **Sautrantika** were the most representative views in early Buddhism regarding the concept of time. In fact, Dogen developed his own concept of time. He developed two different aspects of time; one is what most people perceive namely time as coming and going, and passing away. Dogen does not deny the aspect of time that flies by. In this aspect of time, when the present moment is affirmed, it negates the past and future. Here one understands time as something stationary. One conceives time as something separate from me, as something that exists separately from me. Dogen writes about the ordinary view of time which has its own limit:

For example, it was like crossing a river or crossing a mountain. The mountain and the river may still exist, but now that I have crossed them and am living in a jeweled palace with crimson towers, the mountain and the river are as distant from me as heaven is from the earth.¹⁴⁷

This passage shows the separateness between the subject and the places that one traverses, it also separates present time from the places where one resides. For Dogen this common sense view of time is not totally wrong, but it does not completely comprehend being-time. It shows only one direction. For Dogen, time seen only in its going-and-coming aspect is the unenlightened person's view. This unenlightened view of time will fundamentally remain in delusion unable to affect the immediate presencing of being-time. This unenlightened view of time is the constant frame of reference by which any change is to be explained. Here, the time is understood as a linear concept. Time is represented as a straight line which has one directionality (this concept of linear time can be referred to Dogen's ordinary peoples' experience of time which I will discuss later). In this linear concept of time, every event is discernible in reference to time represented as a line. No event can be the same within this linear time. Thus within this linear conception of time, every event is numerically discernible.

This linear concept of time has been advocated by contemporary logicians. They

¹⁴⁶Hee-Jin Kim, 184-5.

¹⁴⁷Dogen's *Shobogenzo*, "Uji," Gudo Wafu Nishijima and Chodo Cross trans, book 1, 111.

characterize linear time as past, present and future. They claim that time can be reduced to before and after. One of the important points in this claim is that they presuppose a spectator who can freely go back and forth in linear time and understood time as a constant. Thus they presuppose some time-free area so that one can dissociate from time and be able to see and argue about time at a distance.

On the other hand, Dogen speaks of another aspect of time, namely the abiding aspect of time, **juhoi**, dwelling in a dharma-situation. This abiding in a dharma-situation is unique in that it does not lie outside of time. Rather, “the present moment (**nikon**) affirms itself while negating past and future and at the same time negates itself while affirming past and future time.”¹⁴⁸ Here the concept of time as “something separate from me” is overcome. Dogen is challenging us to authenticate whether time is something existing by itself in which events take place, or whether time as merely coming and passing has any experiential ground. What really is, is the immediate presencing here and now of being-time.

Therefore, nothing can be excluded from being-time. If something is not being-time, it simply does not exist. Thus for Dogen, time and existence are inseparably one, which is the necessary corollary of the impermanence of the Buddha-nature. There is no thought or thing that exists independent of time because time is dependent on dharma. That is, time and being arise together, in dependence on each other, and anything at all that exists is time, and it is the effulgence (**sogon**) of itself, in other words, it is **nirvana** and **samsara** co-inhering. This is why Dogen identifies time and existence. For Dogen, being is disclosed as time, and time is disclosed as being. Since every thing is dharma and since time is dependent on dharma, time is existence. Thus if time is studied only as moving away from us (**hikyō tobi saru**), we end up with nonsense, for we make a separation (**kangeki**) between us, our existence, and time. The fascicle of **Uji** begins with the following passage:

A former Buddha once said a verse, standing atop of a soaring mountain peak is for the time being. And plunging down to the floor of the Ocean’s abyss is for the time being; Being triple-headed and eight-armed is for the time being. And being a figure of a Buddha standing sixteen feet tall or sitting eight feet high is for the time being; Being a monk’s traveling staff or his fountain scepter is for the time being. And

¹⁴⁸Joan Stambaugh, The Formless Self, 33.

being the pillar supporting the Temple or a stone lantern before the Meditation hall is for the time being; Being the next-door neighbor or the man in the street is for the time being. And being the whole of the great earth and boundless space is for the time being.¹⁴⁹

For Dogen each thing is a unit of time. In fact, all things do not exist in time, but all things are time. We must understand it in an indiscriminate manner. For Dogen, there is no distinction in the original word between “being” and “beings,” and “is” and “are.” Thus the time is itself the being. Being is time and time is being which “flies” in its coming and goings, in its dynamism of jumping into itself and jumping out of itself.

Thus, time and being are but two aspects of the same thing, which is the interrelationship of **anicca**, ‘the ever-changing flow of time’ and **anatta**, ‘the absence of any permanent self existing within or independent of this flow of time.’ The particularities of the world and the particularities of time are not two different sets of entities but one and the same. Thus there is no difference between being and time. Beings are time and time is beings. Neither category has any form of ontological priority. A moment is equally being and becoming.¹⁵⁰

Dogen says, “For the time- being here means time itself is being, and all being is time.”¹⁵¹ Dogen uses the term “being-time” (有特; literally means ‘existence,’ and ‘time’) to express this idea. Thus, for Dogen, being-time is understood as the expression of the direct or immediate disclosure of the eventfulness of all things or the immediate moment. In this respect, all the various aspects of human life are being-time and nothing else.

Here we see a dualism between space and time which is discarded in Dogen’s thought. Space and time are so inseparably interpenetrated in our perception of the external world that one without the other ruins the whole structure of our perception. Generally we tend to posit certain stable constants as the ultimate points of reference.

For example, modern mathematical physics presupposes beings as constant things. In regard to modern mathematical physics, Heidegger discusses the fundamental characteristics of mathematical physics. He says:

¹⁴⁹Shobogenzo, “Uji,” Hubert Nearman trans, vol 1, 177.

¹⁵⁰Dogen Kigen, “Being Time: Dogen’s Shobogenzo Uji.” Trans by Norman Waddell, The Eastern Buddhist 12,1 (May 1979), 114-129.

It lies neither in its rather high esteem for the observation of ‘fact,’ nor in its ‘application’ of mathematics in determining the character of natural processes; it lies rather in the way in which Nature herself is mathematically projected.¹⁵²

What Heidegger argues is that modern science has characterized a thing as factual, experimental, and measuring. What is a thing? Heidegger replies:

Rather, modern natural science, modern mathematics, and modern metaphysics sprang from the same root of the mathematical in the wider sense. Because metaphysics, of these three, reaches farthest—to beings in totality—and because at the same time it also reaches deepest toward the Being of beings as such, therefore it is precisely metaphysics which must dig down to the bedrock of its mathematical base and ground.¹⁵³

Heidegger thus suggested that this kind of sense of Being which mathematics has access to is due to its mode of epistemological cognition. Heidegger says that the outcome of such an epistemological approach in modern mathematics is due to its presuppositions which are based on the Cartesian ontological view. It gives access to an entity as extension. The entity which Descartes is trying to grasp ontologically and in principle is with his ‘extension.’¹⁵⁴ Heidegger points out that such an epistemological view of being see the thing as a “constantly remain.” He says:

Accordingly, that which can be shown to have the character of something that constantly remains (as **remanens capax mutationum**), makes up the real Being of those entities of the world which get experienced. That which enduringly remains, really is. This is the sort of thing which mathematics knows. That which is accessible in an entity through mathematics, makes up its Being.¹⁵⁵

However such an idea of Being as constant presence conceals any other mode of disclosure of beings within the world. Such an epistemological setting which is underlined by the subject-object orientation is critically examined by Heidegger, and replaced by him by the disclosing capability of the Being of Dasein. Heidegger argues

¹⁵¹Kazuaki Tanahashi ed. *Enlightenment Unfolds*, 69.

¹⁵²Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson. trans, (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 62.

¹⁵³Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, David F. Krell, ed, (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), 249.

¹⁵⁴Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 95.

¹⁵⁵*Ibid.*, 96.

that access to an entity is not first gained between a knowing subject and its object. He says:

But a '**commercium**' of the subject with a world does not get created for the first time by knowing, nor does it arise from some way in which the world acts upon a subject. Knowing is a mode of Dasein founded upon Being-in-the-world.¹⁵⁶

Here we find a similar point between Heidegger and Dogen in terms of "knowing." As in Heidegger, for Dogen knowing is primarily not an activity of a cognitive subject. One cannot get to authentic knowledge by cognitive activity of the mind. Rather one's true knowing is gained by enlightenment, the process of release of any conscious hold on the self.

Now here is a crucial point for Dogen. How is all of human life to be viewed? Each thing is not a static "thing," but an "event" or "occurrence." Every and each aspect of human life is understood by Dogen as an "event" or "happening" or "occurrence." It is, however, not an event within the framework of any spacio-temporal world, which is understood as a stable constant.

Thus Dogen's understanding of being and time is not an identity realized objectively from the point of view of the ego-self nor can it be realized through philosophical insight. His identity of being and time can be realized through authentic awareness which can be achieved through **Satori** experience. It is understood in a dimension that transcends the ordinary dimension of time. This experience, however, is not supernatural or divine, as distinguished from human.¹⁵⁷ It can be realized through the true Self, which is not the ordinary self-ego. Dogen says that the identity of being and time is the "principle of **Uji**, which is realized by "the Self prior to the universe's sprouting any sign of itself."¹⁵⁸ This Self is freed from life and death, from being and nonbeing. It is at once the whole universe and the whole expanse of time. In order to achieve this Self, one needs to break through all self-centeredness, that is by the casting off of body-mind in religious practice, namely, **Zazen**.

Here in order to understand Dogen's thought of the "true Self" and the total exertion

¹⁵⁶Ibid., 62

¹⁵⁷Masao Abe, *A Study of Dogen*, 117.

¹⁵⁸Shobogenzo, "Sansuikyo," DZZ I, 258.

of time- being, we need to trace his philosophical treatment of time. When Dogen says that “to study the self is to forget the self,” he actually indicates the way to achieve the true Self. The phrase “forgetting the self” entails the loss of the self as epistemological object, and the loss of the experience of an independent self. It suggests a transcending of the self’s ordinary perspective, namely everyday awareness. Nagamoto has summarized Dogen’s notion of transcending self:

Dogen’s experience of casting off body and mind refers to a region deeper than the empirical ego, and hence the transformation. . . must alter the nature of the region in which the ego functions.¹⁵⁹

In his fascicle “**Uji**,” Dogen explores the existential dimensions and ramifications of a philosophy of time. Here, he classified two different notions of time; ordinary peoples’ experience of time and enlightened experience of time.¹⁶⁰ Heine, in his book, employs the term “inauthentic” to indicate the experience of ordinary people.¹⁶¹ I will borrow his term to use “inauthentic” for ordinary peoples’ experience of time and “authentic” for enlightened peoples’ experience of time. These notions of time have been expressed in three different stages of time experience: the first is experienced by ordinary people, namely ordinary awareness, which is by nature dualistic in structure. The second is contemplative awareness, which is characterized as negationistic of the subject-object duality. The third is non-dualistic structural awareness, which is experienced by enlightened people. Dogen writes this theory of experience in his fascicle “Genjokoan.” He writes:

When all dharmas become the Buddha-dharma, there is illusion and enlightenment, there is practice, there is birth and death, there are buddhas and sentient beings. When all dharmas and the self are without a self, there is neither illusion nor enlightenment, neither buddhas nor sentient beings, neither birth nor death. Because the Buddha-way transcends abundance and simplicity, there are generation and extinction, illusion and enlightenment, being and buddhas.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁹Shigenori Nagamoto, *Attunement Through the Body*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 144.

¹⁶⁰Dogen’s *Shobogenzo*, “Uji,” Gudo Wafu Nishijima and Chodo Cross trans, book 1, 111..

¹⁶¹Steven Heine, *Existential and Ontological Dimensions of Time in Heidegger and Dogen*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985), 144.

¹⁶²K.Tamaki, ed. *Shobogenzo*, “Genzokoan,” (Tokyo: Daizo Shuppan Kabushiki Kaisha, 1993-4), 94.

This passage echoes the famous saying by the Chinese Zen master Ch'ing-yuan Weishin:

Thirty years ago, before I began the study of Zen, I said "mountains are mountains, waters are waters." After I got an insight into the truth of Zen through the instruction of a good master, I said, "mountains are not mountains, waters are not waters." But now, having attained the abode of final rest (That is, Awakening), I say "Mountains are really mountains, waters are really waters"¹⁶³

In the above passages, we find three different stages of experiences. As I already mentioned above these are; ordinary experience or everyday awareness, self-less or non-dual awareness, and transcendent or enlightened awareness.

1) Dogen's Understanding of Ordinary Awareness

The first line of the above passage, "there is illusion and enlightenment, there is practice, there is birth and death, there are buddhas and sentient beings," is Dogen's synonym for ordinary awareness. According to Dogen, ordinary awareness is referred to as the standpoint of "sentient beings" or "delusion," which experiences itself as an enduring substance, over against an external phenomenal world, which appears to the self (**Jiko**; 自己) as an object.¹⁶⁴ Dogen writes about the character of ordinary awareness in detail. He states:

Ordinary people, unlearned in Buddhism, think that being-time sometimes takes the form of a demon, sometimes the form of Buddha. It is like the difference between living in a valley and then wading through a river and climbing a mountain to reach a palace. That is, the mountain and river are things of the past, left far behind and have no relation to living in the present. . . . Because the thinking of unenlightened people is not based on proper understanding of being-time they cannot discover the True Law.¹⁶⁵

He referred to ordinary awareness as expounding the mind by normal mind. Dogen says this in his **sesshin-sessho** (説心説性), literally explaining mind and explaining nature),

¹⁶³Masao Abe, *Zen and Western Thought*, 4.

¹⁶⁴Hee-Jin Kim, *Dogen Kigen: Mystical Realist*, (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1987), 279.

¹⁶⁵Dogen Zenji's *Shobogenzo*, "Uji," Kosen Nishiyama and John Stevens trans, vol I (Nakayama Shobo, 1975), 69.

There is expounding the mind and expounding the nature by normality. . . nevertheless, ordinary folk who do not penetrate the mind and do not master the nature, in their ignorance, not knowing expounding the mind and expounding the nature and not knowing discussion of the profound and discussion of the fine, say, and teach to others, that the truth of the Buddhist patriarchs should not include these things.¹⁶⁶

The ordinary people's experience of time tends to think that time is something that proceeds uniformly from the unknown past to the unknown future eternally regardless of the actualities of reality and life. It is similar to what Bergson understood as "spatial time," which is time organized spatially or segmentally. Here, past, present, and future are clearly different modes of time and are usually understood to move uni-directionally from past through present to future. This linear sequence of time emerges from the conception of many "diachronically" diverse time periods such as "the times of ancient and modern times," which appear to occur "one after another."¹⁶⁷ Penrose explains in physical terms that unidirectional time is merely an experience of the ordinary senses not of materiality. He says,

All the successful equations of physics are symmetrical in time. They can be used equally well in one direction in time as in the other. The future and the past seem equally well in one direction in time as in the other. The future and the past seem physically to be on a completely equal footing. Newton's laws, Hamilton's equations, Maxwell's equations, Einstein's general relativity, the Schrodinger equation—all remain effectively unaltered if we reverse the direction of time.¹⁶⁸

Penrose continues that the unidirectional flow of time is what our perceptions tell us, which is a phenomenon of our consciousness.¹⁶⁹

In this view time and existence are regarded in a dualistic manner in which the actualities of the universe are simply the arising and perishing, or the coming and going, of "appearances" in temporal succession. It tends to posit time as the constant frame of reference by which any change is to be explained. Such a view must be said to represent an unreal understanding of time based on objectification and conceptualization. To say

¹⁶⁶Dogen's *Shobogenzo*, "Sesshin-sessho," Gudo Wafu Nishijima and Chodo Cross trans, Book 3, 52.

¹⁶⁷*Ibid.*, 275.

¹⁶⁸R. Penrose, *The Emperor's New Mind: Concerning Computers, Minds, and The Laws of Physics*, 302.

¹⁶⁹*Ibid.*, 384.

that temporal events are “parts” of temporal succession or duration does not tell the whole truth of the mystery of time. Here time is experienced as an external reality, which is something completely unconnected to oneself. If time is understood as an external reality, which is anticipated, experienced, and remembered as a phenomenal object, then understanding, in the sense that knower and known are unified, is by implication impossible. Referring to the common sense view of time, Dogen says:

Do not think that time is merely flying by; do not only study the fleeting aspect of time. If time is really flying away, there would be a separation between time and ourselves. If you think that time is just a passing phenomenon, you will never understand being-time.¹⁷⁰

The experience of time by ordinary people is based on the positional structure of everyday awareness, which posits the individual dharma-position outside of itself. Such a differentiation between the knower as “I” and the known as “object” obstructs an experience of dharma-position-immediate moment. In his “**Genjokoan** (現成空案),” Dogen elaborates on the epistemological implications of everyday awareness:

When a man is sailing along in a boat and he moves his eyes to the shore, he misapprehends that the shore is moving. If he keeps his eyes fixed on the boat, he knows that it is the boat which is moving forward. Similarly, when we try to understand the myriad dharmas on the basis of confused assumptions about body and mind, we misapprehend that our own mind or our own essence may be permanent.¹⁷¹

Thus ordinary awareness, when it perceives an object, creates the appearance of an enduring self in the experiential field of the observer. And it meets a world consisting of individuals, which have an essence or self nature, and possess attributes. For Dogen this is very simplistic and concretistic. Ordinary awareness believes that things are what they appear to be. To sum up, ordinary awareness is characterized as an experience of the separation of the self and the phenomenal world.

¹⁷⁰Dogen Zenji's *Shobogenzo*, Kosen Nishiyama and John Stevens trans, vol I, 69. See also *Shobogenzo*, “Uji,” DZZ I.

¹⁷¹Dogen's *Shobogenzo*, Gudo Wafu Nishijima and Chodo Cross trans, book 1, 34. *Shobogenzo*, “Genzokoan,” DZZ I.

2) Ordinary Awareness As A Dualistic Structure

On the other hand, while ordinary awareness discloses the separation of the self and the phenomenal world, it also assumes the phenomenal world as a dualistic structure. In other words, while the former designates the opposition between the subjective function of the self and the phenomenal world as its object, the latter reflects the dualistic structure of the phenomenal world itself. Thus it divides realities as either existing or not existing; human beings are either enlightened or unenlightened. This dualistic view of ordinary awareness therefore corresponds to existential dualism, which regards the phenomenal world as the observing object. It experiences itself as an independent entity referred to as self.

Thus when Dogen inquires into the world with an ordinary awareness perspective, he encounters a multiplicity of mutually exclusive oppositions, which can be structurally reduced to a model of affirmation and negation, that is, basically a binary world. In his fascicle, **Sansuigyo**, this dualistic view of ordinary awareness is explored between the self and its environment. Here Dogen paraphrases ordinary awareness as the "people outside the mountains" which indicates a differentiation between the self and its environment. Dogen says,

People out of the mountains never sense it and never know it-people who have no eyes to see the mountains do not sense, do not know, do not see, and do not hear this concrete fact. . . The Blue mountains are already beyond the sentient and beyond the insentient ¹⁷²

Here "people out of the mountains" indicates people alienated from their environment. On the contrary, the mountains symbolize the enlightened mind which experiences the world as it is. Thus there is disconnection between the mountains and the person. Moreover, such alienation of the self from its environment goes beyond self alienation . Dogen says, "if we doubt the walking of the mountains, we also do not yet know our own walking. When we know our own walking, then we will surely also know the walking of the blue mountains."¹⁷³ Here, Dogen makes an interconnection between the

¹⁷²Dogen's *Shobogenzo*, Gudo Wafu Nishijima and Chodo Cross trans, Book 1, 168. See also *Shobogenzo*, "Sansuikyō," DZZ I.

¹⁷³Ibid.,

inability of knowing mountains and the incapability of knowing oneself as the result of self- alienation.

However, since ordinary awareness presupposes a dualistic structure it assumes a correlative structure. This means that particular beings cannot be conceived as isolated individuals. Although ordinary awareness experiences itself as separated from the world and others, it does not exist separately from others. Rather, they are always determined in relation to and opposed by other particular objects. In this respect they always presuppose a mutual relationship. i.e., I can recognize this chair, when I see its delineation indicating to me what-it-is as well as what-it-is not. Thus correlative structure is by nature dialectical. It cannot be conceived without the presupposition of its opposite, and difference.

Expressing this structure in Hegelian terminology, “to appear to ordinary awareness, a something has to be what-it-is in relation to what-it-is-not as well as other appearance.”¹⁷⁴ Although it is dualistic in nature, ordinary awareness is existentially in-relation because of the interdependency of subject and object nature. In other words, the self necessarily relates to its object when it experiences the knower of the object. This interdependency between subject and object echoes the Buddhist concept of co-dependent arising.¹⁷⁵

However, this dualism between time and existence is rejected by Dogen. Because such a view does not see the connection between self and dharma. Since ordinary awareness has seen the subject and object as independent individuals, it is impossible to find the dharma; as a consequence, the dharma escapes. Dogen’s identification of being and time is quite different from those positions which separate being and time. According to Dogen, time is not externally posited as something but it is internalized in the very structure of existence. Thus no existence is possible without time.

3) Authentic Awareness As Enlightened Awareness

On the other hand, in contrast to time experienced by ordinary awareness, in which the individual experiences “I” as phenomenal object, there is an authentic time which is characterized by an internal relationship between self and time. When ordinary

¹⁷⁴G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenologie des Geistes*, (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1970). 58.

¹⁷⁵See my section on The Self as Dependent Origination.

awareness experiences time as an external reality, which is something completely unconnected to myself, authentic time, on the contrary, experiences myself with time, namely unified with time.

According to Dogen, enlightened mind experiences time as the immediate now. In Dogen's own terminology, "all- there-is is being-time" (Uji, 有待). Dogen interprets this "immediate now" as authentic time.¹⁷⁶ This means that there is no linear continuity of time experiences in authentic time. There is no "before" and "after," there is only the present moment. Although events occur "prior to the dharma-position," all previous events are included within the immediate now. We would not see time as a one dimensional linear continuum; rather we would see the multi-dimensional and interpenetrative nature of time. From this experiential "immediate now" we would come to understand more about the nature of time. Dogen states in "Uji."

That is to say, from today it passes through a series of moments to tomorrow; from today it passes through a series of moments to yesterday; from yesterday it passes through a series of moments to today; from today it passes through a series of moments to today; and from tomorrow it passes through a series of moments to tomorrow..¹⁷⁷

Thus to read "Uji" as Being-time stands for the primordial conception of time or time/being. Abe similarly observes that the present is trans-temporal in that it encompasses "all three tenses from their deeper basis."¹⁷⁸ Accordingly Dogen rejects the concept that time is external to activity, rather time is expressed in the activity of the self. Thus Dogen changes the notion of time as a pre-experiential continuity. Instead of placing the event located in time, time is located in the event.

Thus the fundamental difference between ordinary experiencing of time and authentic time is that the former assumes a separation between existence and time, while the latter discloses that "within me there is to be time; since I already exist, time should not pass."¹⁷⁹ Authentic awareness not only negates the content of ordinary awareness, it also rejects the fundamental subject-object structure. Thus it is pre-

¹⁷⁶Hee-Jin Kim, *Dogen Kigen: Mystical Realist*, 1987 eds, 272. Abe refers this immediate now as "absolute present," which is without a beginning and an end. Masao Abe, *A Study of Dogen*, 100-1.

¹⁷⁷Dogen's *Shobogenzo*, "Uji," Gudo Nishijima trans, 112.

¹⁷⁸Masao Abe, *A Study of Dogen*, 99.

¹⁷⁹Hee-Jin Kim, *Dogen Kigen: Mystical Realist*, 1987 eds, 273.

reflective awareness because only in pre-reflective experience are subject and object unified and, consequently, transcended. Kasulis characterizes this experience as “an un-objectified presence.”¹⁸⁰

Masao Abe supports the view that this authentic experience of time can be experienced through the negation of the egocentric self. Through this experience one can transcend the horizontal dimension of time and go into the vertical depth of time whereby one perceives absolute nothingness as the true Self. This vertical depth of time, according to Abe, is what Dogen understands as authentic time which “involves the complete negation of the egocentric self, that is, casting off of body and mind.”¹⁸¹ Abe continues,

As the horizontal dimension of time is now seen without particular beginning or end, the vertical dimension of time is a depth without a particular bottom. As a bottomless depth it cannot be objectified, but can be reached only non-objectively through the existential realization of no-self, which is indeed the true Self.¹⁸²

Thus the linear time of past, present, and future which are distinctively different tenses of time in the horizontal dimension, are understood as absolute present by the realization of the true Self. In other words, Abe says, “with the realization of no-self at the absolute present as the pivotal point, past and future are realized in terms of their mutuality and inter-penetration, that is, their reciprocity and reversibility.”¹⁸³

However, Dogen also speaks of authentic time experience and ordinary experience without clear boundaries because it is deeply rooted in the mutual connection between “enlightenment” and ordinary life.¹⁸⁴ Every step of everyday life is to be seen from the pre-supposition-less position because every being is not a static, fixed status but a lively mode of being. To express Zen’s world in a word, it is authentic everydayness. We start from everydayness and move to authenticity, but we once more move forward to everydayness. What does it exactly mean? The first everydayness is our ordinary thinking which is filled with various presuppositions, some of which are noticed and

¹⁸⁰Thomas P. Kasulis, *Zen Action-Zen Person*, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1981), 75.

¹⁸¹Masao Abe, *A Study of Dogen*, 100.

¹⁸²*Ibid.*,

¹⁸³*Ibid.*,

¹⁸⁴Because for Dogen every thing is interconnected. No single being can exist independently. In following Buddhist notion of co-dependent arising, Dogen sees interconnection between enlightened experiences

some are unnoticed as such. The second is the sphere of Enlightenment” which is nothing but a presuppositionless state. The third everydayness is the everydayness seen without presuppositions. To put it differently, we must go through the following steps: 1) everydayness, 2) authenticity or primordiality, 3) everydayness. In this regard, the third everydayness is same as an authentic awareness. When authentic awareness sees “Mountain are really mountains, waters are really waters,” it is not talking objectively about things as the first everydayness. Nor, on the other hand, are such statements about mountains and waters symbolic assertions about the reality. Rather it is talking about mountains and waters as its own Reality.

In this sense, for Dogen, “enlightenment” is to be seen from this pre-supposition-less view. The enlightened person is the one who can see reality as-it-is, that is as “pre-supposition-less.” Thus, the third stage of everydayness is the everydayness where we directly and immediately encounter every piece and bit of a daily thing in its authentic or primordial mode, which is possible by casting off the presuppositions of our everyday life. In our ordinary view, we are full of presuppositions, thus we cannot encounter that which is there. We impose conceptual devices such as “thing,” “substance,” “essence,” “being,” and so on, because we take them for granted. These conceptual devices already color the given in a certain manner. By doing so, they prevent our direct and immediate encounter with the given.

However, in enlightenment we view from a lively mode of being. In this sense, enlightenment is not a stage one is pursuing. It is rather an ordinary everyday life experience in the primordial or authentic manner. Thus for Dogen, enlightenment is not like a stable state to which we can cling once we get it. Enlightenment is the condition for an authentic mode of existence of being. Thus, for Dogen enlightenment is a matter of being rather than possessing; one is enlightened not one has enlightenment. Dogen’s epistemological model is well described in his “**Zenki**” fascicle. It is said,

Life can be likened to a time when a person is sailing in a boat. On this boat, I am operating the sail, I have taken the rudder, I am pushing the pole; at the same time, the boat is carrying me, and there is no I beyond the boat. Through my sailing of the boat, this boat is being caused to be a boat-let us consider, and learn in practice, just this moment of the present. At the very moment, there is nothing other than the world

and ordinary experiences. See my “Co-dependent Arising” section above.

of the boat, which is utterly different from moments not on the boat. So life is what I am making it, and I am what life is making me. While I am sailing in the boat, my body and mind and circumstances and self are all essential parts of the boat. What has been described like this is that life is the self, and the self is life.¹⁸⁵

His epistemology is totally dependent upon his immediate environment. Independence of being is totally rejected in Dogen's epistemology. The action of a person's sailing makes the boat "a boat." In other words, every single entity cannot stand alone. The boat, sailing, and person, are united in terms of their own identity. In other words, each of these beings can have their own individuality when all of them are united with each other. The boat can be a boat as long as it is with a person as well as sailing, and vice versa.

Thus, as we can see through this passage, Dogen's epistemology is multi-dimensional in character. Its multi-dimensional character is involved in time and space. In this fascicle, the multiple dimension of space is presented. The boat, person, river, sailing, and all other space are interconnected in the event of "a-person-sailing-a-boat." Thus in order to be make the event, all dimensions of space are involved. Consequently, a dualistic model of one-to one relationship is rejected. Rather, the concept of "co-dependent arising" is advocated. In this sense, Dogen's epistemological model is based on the Buddhist world view, particularly in the concept of fluidity of space.

The action of sailing a boat is defined by the river, the shore, the person, etc. In other words, an event can be an event by virtue of other events or things. No single event or thing can exist or have meaning without the other. Dogen sees an event or thing more in the sense of a situation or environment wherein the meanings of a thing or a person arise. In this sense it is dynamic, more specifically, it is dynamic interdependence.

To sum up, Dogen's epistemological structure is very different from Western epistemological analysis in general. His epistemology does not start from a pre-given subject who perceives the world. This is a structure which is shared by most Western epistemologies. In Dogen's view, on the other hand, the subject is seen more as an integral process in the constitution of the world. As we have seen, it is accompanied by

¹⁸⁵Dogen's *Shobogenzo*, "Zenki," Gudo Wafu Nishijima and Chodo Cross trans, 286.

the rest of its environment. In this process the subject understood as an independent individual, data-collecting center is rejected for a more interrelated and integrated subjectivity whose existence is radically grounded in the so-called world of reality or the objective world itself. In our ordinary awareness we objectify everything from our subjective point of view. In that way, we represent something given. We conceptualize and analyze it. In this way we do not touch reality directly. Representation or conceptualization is characteristic of our ordinary way of thinking. In the state of ordinary, subject-object consciousness, when mountains are identified as mountains and thereby differentiated from waters, and vice versa, “mountains are understood as mountains in that they are objectified. In such a consciousness, mountains or reality is not understood as mountains in themselves. Mountains are mountains only insofar as they are objectively looked at from our subjective point of view and are not grasped in themselves. Thus there is a duality of subject and object in this understanding.

This is not what happens in Dogen’s authentic awareness. By contrast authentic awareness goes beyond such a representational way of perception. When the subject-object dichotomy is overcome, we not only attain a direct realization of the Pure subjectivity that lies at the round of that dichotomy, we also discern that ‘mountains and waters disclose themselves, no longer as object from our subjective vantage point. Rather, they disclose themselves as they really are, in their ‘Reality’ as mountains and waters.

E) Dogen’s View of the Buddha-Nature (Bussho, 佛性)

The most striking character of Dogen’s understanding of the Buddha-nature is his unique interpretation of the traditional phrase. He quotes a passage from the **Nirvana Sutra** (Northern version) well-known to all Buddhists: **issai no shujo wa kotogotoku bussho o yu su: nyorai wa jojunishite henyaku arukoto nashi**, “All sentient beings without exception have the Buddha-nature: The Tathagata abides forever without change.”¹⁸⁶ Dogen found an inadequate reading in this phrase. This phrase, which is the general Mahayana statement, has usually understood the Buddha-nature as a concept relating to one’s potential for realizing the truth of Buddhism or something which we have inherently. However, Dogen was not satisfied with such an interpretation. For

Dogen, the Buddha-nature is not a potential or natural attribute, but a condition of body and mind at a present moment or as the very expression of that truth. Thus Dogen does not see the Buddha-nature as something we have inherently in our body or something that we might realize in the future.¹⁸⁷ In this way his approach to the Buddha –nature differs from others who sought to show that all beings necessarily have or necessarily lack the potential for realization. Dogen criticizes such a view as the sentimental thinking of the common man. Dogen says,

There is one group which thinks as follows: The Buddha-nature is like the seed of a plant or a tree. As the rain of Dharma waters it again and again, its buds and sprouts begin to grow. Then twigs, leaves, flowers, and fruit abound, and the fruit once more bears seeds.¹⁸⁸

Unsatisfied with this traditional reading, the view that all sentient beings have (有) the Buddha-nature, Dogen goes beyond it, by reading the passage as, “All sentient being, and all-being is the Buddha-nature.” Here Dogen restructured the grammatical syntax. Instead of using the verb “possess,” Dogen reinterprets it as “is.” Thus he changes it to read as, “all sentient being is the Buddha-nature.” This change of reading is possible because the Chinese character 有 (有) means both “to be” and “to have.” In this sense, 有佛性 can be interpreted either, “have Buddha,” or “is Buddha.” However, Dogen interpreted the Buddha –nature as not something to possess or something to have, rather it is a condition of both sentient and insentient beings. Thus Dogen, interprets it as “衆生即佛性, 佛性即衆生,”¹⁸⁹ (all sentient being is the Buddha-nature, and the Buddha-nature is all sentient being). Dogen differentiates the meaning of “have” and “is” as follows:

The Buddha-nature of which the National Master speaks is like this. If it is not like this, it is not the having Buddha-nature of which we speak in Buddhism. The point expressed now by the National Master is only that all living beings have the Buddha-nature. Those who are utterly different from living beings might be beyond having the Buddha-nature. So now let us ask the national Master: “Do all buddhas have the Buddha-nature, or not?” We should question him and test him like this. We

¹⁸⁶Masao Abe, *A Study of Dogen*, 35.

¹⁸⁷*Dogen's Shobogenzo*, “Bussho,” Gudo Wafu Nishijima and Chodo Cross trans, 1.

¹⁸⁸*Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁸⁹正法眼藏註解全書, vol 3, 71.

should research that he does not say “All living beings are the Buddha-nature itself,” but says “All living beings have the Buddha-nature.” He needs to get rid of the have in have the Buddha-nature.¹⁹⁰

Here Dogen avoids the duality of subject (sentient beings) and object (the Buddha-nature possessed by them), the duality which regards the Buddha-nature as a potentiality to be actualized in the future, and the duality of means and end, where practice is taken as a means and realization of Buddha-nature as the end.¹⁹¹ James Kodera states the definite meaning of the grammatical rearrangement of the terms.

Dogen rejected the interpretation that there is an eternal element of the Buddha-nature in all sentient beings, who are subject to constant change. Rather, he proposes that all things that are sentient are the Buddha nature.¹⁹²

This is a fundamental difference from the thought of John. Whereas in John, the duality of subject (human being) and object (God) is not avoided. Dogen in this way displaces any logocentric conceptualization of Buddha-nature as a substance or “thing” and shifts discourse from the doctrinally metaphysical towards the experientially existential.

Dogen changes the usual reading of the passage to avoid the dualistic notion that the Buddha-nature. . . is something within them, possessed by them, and different from them.¹⁹³

According to Abe Masao and Norman Waddell, Dogen criticized the inadequacy of the traditional reading of the phrase at two points. First, the traditional reading implies an anthropocentric perspective which is confined to sentient beings, and does not include insentient beings. Second, the traditional reading contains a dualistic concept between the Buddha-nature and sentient beings. Such duality implies that the Buddha-nature is a potentiality which to be a realized in the future.¹⁹⁴

In rejecting the anthropocentric perspective, Dogen declares the absolute inclusiveness of the Buddha nature within which sentient as well as insentient beings

¹⁹⁰Dogen’s *Shobogenzo*, “Bussho,” Gudo Wafu Nishijima and Chodo Cross trans, 22.

¹⁹¹John T. Brinkman, “The Simplicity of Dogen,” *The Eastern Buddhist*, vol 27, no 2, (Autumn 1994), 41.

¹⁹²James Kodera, *Dogen’s Formative Years in China*, 62.

¹⁹³Abe Masao, trans, “*Shobogenzo* Buddha-nature,” *The Eastern Buddhist*, series 2, 8(2), (1975), 97.

¹⁹⁴Abe Masao, “Dogen on Buddha-nature,” *The Eastern Buddhist* vol, 4, no 1, (1971), 32.

are equally subsumed. In this respect, Dogen follows the universalism of the **tathagata-garbha** tradition in advocating the theory which claims that the Buddha-nature is possessed by all sentient beings.¹⁹⁵ Here Dogen identifies the Buddha-nature with the entire phenomenal universe. This is what Dogen means by “all existence.”

It is evident in this view that Dogen presents a new theory of the Buddha-nature by declaring that all existences are the Buddha-nature. It is important to note here that Dogen’s “all beings are the Buddha-nature” is not an ontological assertion. Rather, it is an existential function. It serves to point to a transformation in our way of seeing ‘all beings’, that is, in our way of being in the world- from the existential perspective of the self-absorbed, self-alienated, estranged, anxious ‘ego-self’ way of existing to the enlightened, liberated, non-attached ‘true-Self’ way of existing. Here, in this existential interpretation, ego-self and true-Self do not function as ontological referring terms but as existential qualifiers of modes of human existence.¹⁹⁶

In other words, Dogen sees the Buddha-nature as sentient being itself viewed in its “thus-ness” (Tathata) or “is-ness” as opposed to its determined “what-ness.” The Buddha-nature is manifested at the very moment of attainment. The structure of our logical, conceptual thinking compels us to ask: either we always possess it or else we first acquire it through attainment. However, Dogen’s koans stress the impossibility of acquiring or becoming the Buddha-nature.

Dogen does not see the phenomenal universe as a publicly observable object of cognition, existing apart from its viewers, but as a realm in which the subject as viewer and the object as viewed are inextricably connected with one another. According to Dogen, the world which we think of as something into which we are born is inseparable and interconnected with us.¹⁹⁷ Dogen sees the self and the world as co-dependent arising:

An ancient Buddha said, “Mountains, rivers, and the Earth, and human beings, are

¹⁹⁵The Universality of the Buddha-nature whether this should be attributed to all sentient beings without discrimination or only to certain types of beings, was hotly debated among different Buddhist sects. There were two different schools on this issue: the one which asserts the universality of the Buddha-nature in all sentient beings, that is, the *tathagata-garbha* tradition and the other is the consciousness-only sect, which holds that there are “five groups” of sentient beings which are classified according to their “inherently existing seeds.” Hee-Jin Kim, 1975 ed, 161.

¹⁹⁶Thomas Dean, “Masao Abe on Zen and Western Thought,” 110-111.

¹⁹⁷See my section on “co-dependent-arising.”

born together. The buddhas of the three times and human beings have always practiced together.” Thus, if we look at the mountains, rivers, and Earth while one human being is being born, we do not see this human being now appearing through isolated superimposition upon mountains, rivers, and Earth that existed before (this human being) was born.¹⁹⁸

Here, Dogen does not recognize the “all-existence” that is the Buddha-nature to be existence in any abstract ontological sense. All being is not a mere product of the mind, nor is it “mind” itself. Nor is it limited to the particular product of sense organs, to sense experience, or to objects of sense experience, all of which are impermanent. It is neither universal nor individual. Thus Buddha-nature as “all being” cannot be identical with any kind of essential nature or with some kind of internal essence that must be uncovered. Dogen is methodologically eliminating every possible ontological interpretation of Buddha-nature.¹⁹⁹

As Steven Heine has expressed it, Dogen’s method represents “the process of the decentering of all signs-so that they function flexibly and provisionally as symbolic discourse without reference to an absolute or transcendental signified.”²⁰⁰ He does not analyze the notion of being and the Buddha nature conceptually. He says that “all-being” has nothing to do with dualities such as mind and the objects of mind. He avoids the duality of subject as sentient beings and object as the Buddha-nature. In other words, the non-duality of subject and object can be expressed either through the denial of a subject which exists independently of its objects, or through the denial of objects existing independently of a perceiving subject.

Thus Dogen’s concept of “all-being” as the Buddha-nature indicates the non-dualistic oneness of the viewer and the viewed, Buddha-nature and enlightenment, and the identity of practice and attainment.²⁰¹ Dogen clearly states this non-dualistic view between all sentient beings and the Buddha-nature in terms of his concept of the mind. He states:

¹⁹⁸Dogen’s *Shobogenzo*, “Yuibutsu-yo-butsu,” Gudo Wafu Nishijima and Chodo Cross, trans. 217.

¹⁹⁹David Putney, “Dogen: Enlightenment and Entanglement,” *Buddhist-Christian Studies*, vol 17, (1997), 32.

²⁰⁰Steven Heine, *Dogen and the Koan Tradition: A Tale of Two Shobogenzo Texts*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 20.

²⁰¹Dogen’s *Shobogenzo*, “Bussho,” Gudo Wafu trans, 11-13.

The meaning of “all living beings,” as described now in Buddhism, is that all those that have mind are living beings, for minds are just living beings. Those without mind may also be living beings, for living beings are just mind. So minds all are living beings, and living beings all have the Buddha-nature. Grass, trees, and national lands are mind itself; because they are mind, they are living beings, and because they are living beings they have the Buddha-nature. The sun, the moon, and the stars are mind itself; because they are mind, they are living beings, and because they are living beings they have the Buddha-nature.²⁰²

Therefore, Dogen’s notion of the identity between the Buddha-nature and all existences is completed through the non-dual oneness of the mind. In this non-dual structure of the mind, “all existences” are “sentient beings” and “sentient beings” are the “Buddha-nature.” Dogen’s notion of the identity between the Buddha-nature and all existences should not be understood as merely formal identity. This identity is expressed in terms of “neither identical nor different.” Dogen has expressed it as follows: “It is not a matter of unity, but neither is it a matter of variance; it is not variance, but neither is it identity; it is not identity, but neither is it multiplicity.”²⁰³

Thus in Dogen’s view the identity between all sentient beings and the Buddha-nature should not be equated with pantheism for the Buddha-nature is more than the naïve identity of the Absolute and the relative.²⁰⁴

1) The Buddha-Nature as Non-Existence

There is another aspect of the notion that “all sentient-being is the Buddha-nature,” that is, the Buddha-nature as non-existence (無佛性, **mu-bussho**).²⁰⁵ Traditionally, it was interpreted as the absence of the Buddha-nature, analogous to non-being as antithetical to being. However, since all existences are the Buddha-nature, the word “non-existence” should not be interpreted as the absence of the Buddha-nature.²⁰⁶ Rather, it is an expression which rejects the notion that there is a Buddha-nature over and above a being’s phenomenal existence. In his fascicle, “Bussho,” Dogen emphasizes the idea of **mu-bussho**, no-Buddha-nature, by quoting and reinterpreting various words and conversations of old Zen masters. Dogen writes:

²⁰²Ibid., 22.

²⁰³Dogen’s *Shobogenzo*, “Zenki,” Gudo Wafu trans, 286-7.

²⁰⁴Hee-Jin Kim, 1975 ed, 165.

²⁰⁵It literally means, no Buddha-nature.

²⁰⁶Hee-Jin Kim, 1975,ed, 169.

The words preached by Sakyamuni are, “all living beings totally have the Buddha-nature.” The words preached by Dai-I are, “All living beings are without the Buddha-nature.” There may be a great difference between the meaning of “have” and “are without” as words, and some might doubt which expression of the truth is accurate and which not. But only “All living beings are without the Buddha-nature” is the senior in Buddhism.²⁰⁷

This passage seems to contradict the teaching of the traditional doctrine. However, it has a deep meaning. Dogen’s idea of “no-Buddha-nature” does not contradict the true meaning of Buddha-nature, but “no-Buddha-nature” indicates that it should be understood in its absolute sense, which is free from both “Buddha-nature” and “no Buddha-nature.” The basic structure of the no-Buddha-nature is beyond the opposition of Buddha-nature and no Buddha-nature. Dogen is not interested in having or not having the Buddha-nature but with the Buddha-nature in itself, which is non-substantial.²⁰⁸ Dogen writes:

This one who goes beyond the Buddha is the “non Buddha.” When you are asked what the non-Buddha is like, just consider: We do not call him/her the non-Buddha because she/he exists before the Buddha, nor do we call him/her the non-Buddha because she/he exists after the Buddha; nor is she/he the non-Buddha because she/he out reaches the Buddha. She/he is the non-Buddha only because she/he goes beyond the Buddha. This non-Buddha is known as such because she/he drops off the Buddha’s body mind.²⁰⁹

Thus, non-existence of the Buddha-nature should not be understood as a dualistic antithesis to existence, but as a non-dualistic structure. This is characterized as Buddha-nature-emptiness. We must trace the no-Buddha-nature that is beyond the opposition of Buddha-nature and no Buddha-nature. It can be expressed as Buddha-nature-emptiness. However, this Buddha-nature-emptiness is not just some kind of empty space or gaping abyss. Here emptiness is not “no” in a sense that can be equated with any specific thing or with that thing’s negation. This emptiness should not be understood as some kind of potentiality in the Aristotelian sense of the structure of **dynamis-energeia**.²¹⁰

This view is well expressed in the koan in which Shinsai of Joshu answered both

²⁰⁷Dogne’s *Shobogenzo*, “Bussho,” Gudo Wafu trans, 23.

²⁰⁸*Ibid.*, 13.

²⁰⁹Joan Stambaugh, *The Formless Self*, 16.

yes and no concerning whether the dog has the Buddha-nature or not. In the story a monk asks the Great Master Shinsai of Joshu, “Does even a dog have the Buddha-nature or not?” The master Joshu says, “It is without.” The monk says, “all living beings totally have the Buddha-nature. Why is the dog without?” Joshu says, “Because it has karmic consciousness.” In another case a monk asks Joshu, “Does the Buddha-nature exist even in a dog or not?” This time master Joshu says, “It exists.” The monk says, “It exists already-then why does it forcibly enter this concrete bag of skin?” Joshu answers, “Because it knowingly commits a deliberate violation!”²¹¹ Dogen comments on the dualistic interpretation of master Joshu’s answer, and explains that Joshu’s answers are the expression of the thusness of the Buddha-nature. Therefore, the issue is not whether the dog has the Buddha-nature or not, but to express and teach the non-dual elements of the Buddha-nature.²¹²

In explicating this dialogue, Dogen again emphasizes the nature of the Buddha-nature expressed as “non-existence” as not the ordinary sense of non-existence, analogous to non-being as antithetical to being. Dogen’s understanding of the Buddha-nature as non-existence is to be understood in terms of “emptiness” or **Mu**. Because since the concept of ‘non-being’ is not the ordinary sense of absence of being, it should not be equated with a dualistic consciousness structure of being. In other words, Dogen’s concept of the non-existence of the Buddha-nature is based on his concept of absolute **Mu**. Dogen’s concept of **Mu**, however, does not follow the logic of logico-metaphysics and of grammatology. Following the general Buddhistic notion of logic, Dogen’s concept of **Mu** is grounded upon ontologico-existential experience and intuition. This ontologico-existential experience of being is called ‘emptiness’ or ‘nothingness.’ Here the concept of ‘nothingness’ is neither ‘is-ness’ nor ‘not-is-ness.’ This is the dialectical logic of “is-ness” and “is-not.” This ‘between’ is not the quantitative sense of the middle of both since it is dialectical in character. Rather this middle is the existential sense of a middle between two poles. Thus this emptiness or nothingness can be either ‘is-ness’ or ‘not-is-ness.’ It transcends the ordinary sense of beings, but at the same time it embraces the ordinary sense of duality.

²¹⁰Ibid., 25.

²¹¹Dogen’s *Shobogenzo*, “Bussho,” Gudo Wafu, trans, 23.

²¹²Ibid, 27-30.

This dialectical concept of emptiness or nothingness echoes with Nagarjuna's concept of "co-dependent arising" as "emptying."²¹³ Shohei Ichimura states:

Dogen's dialectical thinking. . . can best be analyzed and comprehended on the basis of the "dialectical context" out of which Nagarjuna and his followers justified the Madhyamika approach. It is my contention that Buddhist thinkers, whether of Indian, Chinese, or Japanese origin, have invariably made such a dialectical context the basis of their insight into and demonstration of sunyata, and hence that it is this dialectical context that transcends every and any form of cultural and linguistic heritage.²¹⁴

Further, Ichimura well illustrates this Nagarjuna concept of co-dependent arising of emptying as a dialectical function by giving a comparison between "light" and "dark." Although the two concepts are opposite to one another, they are dependent on one another for their existence, yet not the same. Thus they are co-dependent on each other, since they have no independent existence. In this respect, they are simultaneously "existent" and "non-existent."²¹⁵ This dialectical logic between "existence," and "non-existence," or "affirmation," and "negation" is used in Dogen's concept of "emptying," namely, the non-existence of the Buddha-nature.

However, such a dialectical logic of emptiness should not be seen as the universal Buddhist understanding of emptiness. Some Buddhist traditions seem to have a different concept of emptiness, which is in contrast to the co-dependent arising of Nagarjuna.²¹⁶ However, it is important to note here that Dogen's notion of the non-duality of subject and object or 'emptiness' points to the single remaining reality which is the phenomenal world of direct perception. In other words, Dogen's notion of non-duality is not a theoretical statement, but rather it is an expression of an existential reality. The important point here is not so much whether Dogen reinterprets the statement in a new theoretical framework: it is not that Dogen simply re-interprets the old version with a

²¹³See my "Dependent Arising" section above.

²¹⁴Shohei Ichimura, "An Approach to Dogen's Dialectical Thinking and Method of Instantiation," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*, (1986), 66. Moreover, there are two different readings of emptiness. The first reading of emptiness sees co-dependent arising as an "emptying" and affirming or dialectical process. The second reading of emptiness sees co-dependent arising as a process of endless negation and deferral. This view denies the dialectical logic of emptying and insists on the logic in continual negation, "is not" "is not."

²¹⁵Ibid., 73.

²¹⁶Gadjin Nagao, *The Foundational Standpoint of Madhyamika Philosophy*, (Albany: State University of

new conceptual framework of his own. Dogen's new interpretation of non-dual oneness is possible only through the experiential basis of his practice.²¹⁷ What Dogen does mean here is that the new interpretation is not intelligible through intellectual reasoning. It can be attained only in an authenticating practice. In other words, experience is a primary factor in the understanding of Dogen's concept.

2) The Buddha Nature and Practice

Since experience is an essential factor in the understanding of Dogen's idea of "All-being is the Buddha-nature," it cannot be fully understood apart from his idea of the oneness of practice and enlightenment. Dogen clearly explained that the truth of the Buddha-nature is directly dependent on practice.²¹⁸ Dogen has expressed this need of practice in a metaphor in his "**Genjokoan**," essay. It is said:

Zen Master Hotetsu of Mayoku-zan mountain is using a fan. A monk comes by and asks, "the nature of air is to be ever-present, and there is no place that air cannot reach. Why then does the Master use a fan?" The Master says, "You have only understood that the nature of air is to be ever-present, but you do not yet know the truth that there is no place air cannot reach." The monk says, "What is the truth of there being no place air cannot reach? At this, the Master just carries on using the fan, The monk does prostrations."²¹⁹

This passage implies that the Buddha-nature cannot be understood without actual practice. As the passage indicates, the ever-presence of the air does not necessarily mean one's using a fan. In this regard Dogen writes:

New York Press, 1989), 59.

²¹⁷This non-dual oneness experience is the same as what Dogen refers to as "authentic awareness." See the above section on "authentic time as enlightened awareness."

²¹⁸Dogen had a serious struggle concerning the necessity of practice. There was a dilemma in Mahayana Buddhism, particularly in the Tendai school where Dogen started his studies of Buddhism, between the ideas of original enlightenment and acquired enlightenment. The dominant Tendai theory of the Buddha-nature at the time of Dogen was the conception of "original enlightenment (Hongaku)." The most defining characteristic of the hongaku conception was its affirmation of phenomenal reality. It was the belief that all things and events right before one's eyes were a manifestation of the a priori enlightened state that extends everywhere, and it finally neglected religious practice. On the other hand, acquired enlightenment distinguished between practice and enlightenment. This dualistic approach tended to make the former a means to the latter as an end. However, Dogen rejected both sides by finding that original enlightenment was a naturalistic heresy that believes the human mind itself was Buddha by equating the given human mind to the true enlightened mind. Dogen also rejected acquired enlightenment for it is dualistic and as emphasizing various stages of practice which are by nature teleological. See Masao Abe, *Dogen Studies*, 65.

²¹⁹*Shobogenzo*, "Genzo-koan," Gudo Wafu Nishijima and Chodo Cross trans, 36-7.

The real experience of the Buddha-Dharma, the vigorous road of the authentic transmission, is like this. Someone who says that because the air is ever-present we need not use a fan, or that even when we do not use a fan we can still feel the air, does not know ever-presence, and does not know the nature of the air. Because the nature of air is to be ever-present, the behavior of Buddhists has made the Earth manifest itself as gold and has ripened the long river into curds and whey.²²⁰

What Dogen emphasizes is that the truth of non-duality cannot be achieved without practice. In other words, it requires human effort to embody the truth of non-duality. In this sense, the truth of subject-object non-duality and the practice of subject-object non-duality are not separable in terms of the Buddha-nature. Thus, the Buddha-nature is not something one possesses from birth, but rather something one attains through practice.²²¹

According to Abe, Dogen has overcome three dualities through the oneness of non-dual practice combined with “all-being is the Buddha-nature.” First, Dogen rejects subject-object dualistic structure by reinterpreting “All sentient beings have the Buddha-nature” into “All sentient being is the Buddha-nature.” Here, the Buddha-nature is not an object which can be realized by a subject. Since the attainment of the Buddha-nature is always realized from the standpoint of the oneness of practice, all “sentient being is the Buddha-nature,” it constitutes a non-objectifiable subjectivity. In dualistic structure, the subject and object are opposed each other, but in this non-dualistic structure, subject and object are identified. Also the realization of “All sentient being is the Buddha-nature” is not anthropocentric, which excludes all beings other than humans. Therefore this non-dualism is based on a cosmological structure.²²² Second, the duality of potentiality and actuality is overcome. In a dualistic structure, the Buddha-nature is understood as a potentiality to be actualized sometime in the future. But in non-dualistic oneness, the Buddha-nature can be manifested at each and every moment in every movement of all beings. Thus the distinction between the Buddha-nature as a potentiality and Buddha-hood as an actuality is overcome.²²³ Third, the duality of means and end is rejected in Dogen’s non-dual oneness. For Dogen, practice is not a mean

²²⁰Ibid.,

²²¹Ibid., 2-5.

²²²Masao Abe, *Dogen Studies*, 66.

approaching enlightenment as an end. Practice is not merely a means to approach enlightenment. Practice itself is an embodiment of enlightenment. Practice and realization are one.

To think practice and realization are not one is a heretical view. In the Buddha Dharma, practice and realization are identical. Because one's present practice in realization, one's initial negotiation of the Way in itself is the whole original realization.²²⁴

In this regard Dogen followed the "sudden" tradition of Hui-neng (638-713 A.D.), who denied that wisdom and meditation are different and that the practice of meditation can properly be conceived of as a means for the attainment of Wisdom. For Hui-neng and Dogen, practice is enlightenment.²²⁵ Practice now is not simple practice but 'practice in realization.' Dogen says,

In the Buddha Dharma, practice and realization are identical. Because one's present practice is practice in realization, one's initial negotiation of the Way in itself is the whole of original realization. . . . As it is already realization in practice, realization is endless; as it is practice in realization, practice is beginningless.²²⁶

However, we should notice that Dogen's equation of practice and enlightenment is linked only to the second aspect of practice. For Dogen the practice of Zen is to allow no duality of effort and attainment. The concept of **shusho-itto**, ("the oneness of practice and enlightenment") and the concept, **Shusho-fu'ni** ("the non-duality of practice and enlightenment") refer to the above passage in the Bendowa.²²⁷ It is not a statement of the identity of two stages that establishes definition but a presentation of a simple oneness (**itto**) explicated by a dynamic negation of all modes of mediation. Thus the 'non-duality of practice and enlightenment' transcends all dichotomy even that inherent in the elements of contrast. Dogen realized that if the absolute is not present totally to the finite moment, if the end is not already present and if there is not total

²²³Ibid., 66-7.

²²⁴Norman Waddell and Abe Masao, trans. "Dogen's Bendowa," *Eastern Buddhist*, 4 (May 1971), 144.

²²⁵Yampolsky Philip B, trans, *The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), 135.

²²⁶N.A. Waddell and Abe Masao, trans, "Bendowa," *Eastern Buddhist*, vol 4, no 1, (1971), 130.

²²⁷John T. Brinkman, "The Simplicity of Dogen," 48.

availability of the absolute in the particular moment of practice, then no number of finite steps will lead one to ultimate reality perceived in the intuition of **satori**.

For Dogen, though all monks may do the practice of enlightenment not all practice is the transmission of the Law, because there are different levels of practice. In this regard Dogen distinguishes between two aspects or two types of practice: zazen in general and zazen based on the transmission of the Buddhas and patriarchs. Dogen states:

In General, in the Western Heavens and the Eastern Lands, that the Buddha-Dharma has been transmitted has always meant that sitting buddha has been transmitted. That is because sitting buddha is the pivotal essence. When the Buddha-Dharma has not been transmitted, sitting dhyana Zazen has not been transmitted. What has been transmitted and received from rightful successor to rightful successor, is only this principle of Zazen. Those who have not received the one-to-one transmission of this principle are not Buddhist patriarchs. Without illuminating this one dharma, we do not illuminate the myriad dharmas, and do not illuminate the myriad deeds. Those who have not illuminated each dharma, dharma by dharma, cannot be called clear-eyed, and they are not the attainment of the truth. . . This being so, even since ancient times, few people have known that Zazen is Zazen.²²⁸

The significance of Dogen's identification of practice and enlightenment cannot be overlooked. First of all, it is an attempt to remove the dualistic distinction of means and ends. Practice is not to be seen as a mere method to achieve enlightenment. It is within the practical mode of experience that enlightenment is authorized. For Dogen, even in an initial step of practice, one can realize the Buddha-nature. Secondly, the identification of practice and enlightenment signifies an on-going process which gives rise to the necessity of continuous practice. This is because enlightenment is not considered different from practice. Rather, practice identifies dynamic experience itself. Dogen says, "Both the moment of initial resolution and the moment of attaining highest enlightenment are the Buddha Way; beginning, middle, and end equally are the Buddha."²²⁹ Third, the identification of practice and enlightenment implies the fact that enlightenment requires practice for its own cultivation. In other words, the enlightenment experience is to be developed by its practice.

²²⁸Dogen's *Shobogenzo*, "Zazenshin," Gudo Wafu trans, 99.

²²⁹*Ibid.*, 67.

To sum up, Dogen emphasizes both the practice of enlightenment as a means to achieve its goal, and practice and enlightenment are identified as an authenticated experiential dimension. In other words, enlightenment needs practice in order to achieve its goal. Without practice there is no enlightenment. However, this practice is not merely a means it is also enlightenment. In this regard, the experience of enlightenment is not to be sought as a future goal realized through correct practice. The context used to state with emphasis that practice and enlightenment are one centers on the mind of the practitioner as one of an imperceptible mutual presence to, a simple participation in the myriad things of the universe.

III Dogen's Understanding of Enlightenment (Satori) (Wu 無)

Since the attainment of a particular unitive mystical state of consciousness, a **satori** experience, has always played a major role in Zen, “**Satori**,” “**Wu**,” or “enlightenment” is at the heart of Dogen's Zen. Ever since the time of Siddharta Gautama, Buddhism has kept enlightenment as a religious solution to the fundamental problem of human existence. Enlightenment, thus, is regarded as the best means for human salvation which is conceived as a departure from the fundamental activities of ordinary consciousness characterized as egoistic attachments, substantialism, differentiation, etc. Indeed, the possibility of understanding and interpreting enlightenment at all becomes a major philosophical problem among Zen scholars as well as Zen schools. What, then, is this enlightenment experience? Is it one, or many? The exact characteristics of this experience are a matter of some dispute among scholars of Zen and mysticism.

Although it is generally recognized within Zen that a master can prove an authentic satori experience, the setting for and the means of achieving this experience are points of disagreement between Zen masters.²³⁰ For instance, while the Rinzai school asserts that these experiences can come instantaneously, Soto Zen identifies Satori with a conscious state which results only from long practice of formal meditation, namely, Zazen.²³¹ However, descriptions of satori experiences within the Soto Zen literature vary from perceptual recognitions of the Buddha-nature inherent in mundane objects to

²³⁰D.T. Suzuki, *Essays in Zen Buddhism*, 30-50.

²³¹Though both schools disagree with each other in some points, many Zen masters of both traditions recognize that extensive preparation is required to achieve satori.

descriptions of meditative states which fit with recent theories of “pure consciousness events,” states purportedly devoid of all phenomenological content.²³²

Enlightenment is generally defined as incommensurable with psychological activities. Traditionally enlightenment is generally viewed as realization of a universal truth that necessarily transcends psychological activities. The Chinese word **Wu** means “to awaken to the fact,” or, loosely, “to understand.” This word is used in Zen tradition to denote the inner experience of awakening to the **Prajna**-truth, which is not the same as that of **Cheng-teng-chueh**, which is the final and perfect enlightenment of Buddhahood.²³³ D.T. Suzuki illustrates the characteristics of enlightenment experience from one of the Chinese Zen masters Kao-feng. Suzuki writes:

I felt as if this boundless space itself were broken up into pieces, and the great earth were altogether levelled away. I forgot myself, I forgot the world, it was like one mirror reflecting another. I tried several koans in my mind and found them so transparently clear. I was no more deceived as to the wonderful working of Prajna.²³⁴

Here, the enlightenment experience is characterized as “I forgot my self,” which is the same as Dogen’s notion of **muga** (無我), “no-self.” This **muga** involves a denial of the legitimacy of movements of the conscious mind as well as the activities of the ego, which include judgement, objectification, and other thoughts that are commonly called differentiated thoughts. These differentiated thoughts are based on dualistic thinking such as subject-object, mind-body, and good-bad. Moreover, enlightenment experience is characterized as **fudoshin** (不動心), or “motionless mind.” Unlike what this term suggests, **fudoshin** does not mean a mind of emotion-lessness. Rather, it signifies a mind of non-dual and undifferentiated awareness.

Sung Bae Park has well explained enlightenment experience as the dynamics of “brokenness” and “breakthrough,” as a non-dual mind nature. He states:

In China, the experience of enlightenment is expressed by such terms as **wu**, **chiao**, and **chien-sheng**. In Japan, it is expressed by **kensho** and satori. In colloquial

²³²Robert Forman, *The Problem of Pure Consciousness*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980). 98.

²³³Chang Cheng-Chi, *The Practice of Zen*, (Connecticut: Greenwood Press Publishers, 1978), 120.

²³⁴D.T. Suzuki, *Essays in Zen Buddhism*, (London: Rider and Company, The Anchor Press Ltd, 1970), 251.

Korean vocabulary, enlightenment is denoted by **kkaech'im**. This term is ultimately derived from the ancient verbal root **kkaeda**, which means 'to awaken,' 'to become sober,' 'to become aware,' 'to be hatched or born anew,' 'to return to life,' 'to wake up,' or to break.' This has two major derivatives: **kkaejida**, 'having been broken' or 'breakage,' and **kkaech'da**, to awaken.' The noun form of the latter, **kkaech'im**, is the Korean word for 'enlightenment.' Of special interest here is the relation between **kkaech'im** as 'enlightenment' and **kkaejim** as 'brokenness.' Now, the Korean concept of enlightenment assumes the meaning of 'breaking,' 'brokenness,' 'breakage,' to 'break,' or 'breakthrough.'²³⁵

Here, the experience of enlightenment is construed as the brokenness of one's dualistic consciousness structure and attachment to ego. And this "brokenness" signifies the existential meaning of emptiness or Sunyata,²³⁶ which can be identified with Dogen's "non-existence" or emptiness of the Buddha-nature.

In his book, Essays in Zen Buddhism, Suzuki describes the characteristics of enlightenment (**satori**).

- 1) Irrationality: enlightenment cannot be achieved by reasoning or defined by intellectual terminology. It cannot be explained logically. Since its experience is characterized as irrational, incommunicable, and inexplicable, it is impossible to conceptualize.
- 2) Intuitive Insight: Enlightenment experience has a noetic character. As the name of enlightenment in Chinese "**chien-hsing**" connotes, it is seeing into one's own nature. However its perception takes place in the interior part of consciousness. It is inner-mode consciousness. This inner-mode consciousness is an illuminating insight into the very nature of things.
- 3) Sense of Beyond: The enlightenment experience feels unity with a Being which is far greater than oneself. This is a unitive-feeling which is characterized as complete release or liberation.
- 4) Affirmation: The enlightenment experience perceives things as they are. It is direct perception. There is no dualistic perception between subject and object.
- 5) Feeling of Expansion: In this enlightenment one no longer experiences what is isolated, but rather experiences unity with all beings. The self experiences as if it is expanded to the universe.
- 6) Impersonal in Character: There is non-relational experience. This is non-theistic

²³⁵Sung Bae Park, Buddhist Faith and Sudden Enlightenment, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983), 123.

²³⁶Ibid.,

experience. There is no experience of God like in Christian Mysticism.²³⁷

A) Enlightenment as Attainment of the Buddha-nature

Here we should consider more specifically what does Dogen's enlightenment mean? This is closely related to his notion of the Buddha-nature. As we know already, Dogen's dilemma was with a Chinese reading of the Buddha-nature, or Dharma, which was conventionally read as: "All living beings totally have the Buddha-nature: The Tathagata abides in them constantly, without changing at all."²³⁸

Dogen argued, "if all sentient beings originally possess the Buddha-nature, why do they need to develop the mind for enlightenment and engage in ascetic practices in pursuit of it"? The unavoidable question that tormented young Dogen was, why are resolve and practice considered necessary if the original Dharma-nature is an endowment. In contrast to that, other doubt wonders how the Dharma-nature is said to be originally endowed if resolve and practice are indispensable. And why is the original Dharma-nature discussed if resolve and practice are indispensable? The error in such an abstraction derives either from confusing "what must be the ground or basis" and "what must be the condition or occasion" without distinguishing them, and thereby recognizing only the one side and disregarding the role and function of the other, or from mistaking both sides for one another.

For Dogen, "awakening," or what is called Dharma-nature and self-nature, is grasped as a reality which must be the ground of all sentient beings- and is understood as beyond the limits of time and space. But there is then a doubt about the necessity of our own resolve and practice in time and space which must be the indispensable condition for the awakening to this ground as ground. Here "awakening" or Dharma-nature, which must be the ground, is grasped abstractly as if it were an unmediated reality without any condition of resolve and practice. As opposed to this, the other standpoint puts too much emphasis on the necessity of our own resolve and practice in time and space, viewing them as if they were the ground itself, although they are originally no more than the condition. For instance, in his "Shinjingakudo (身心學道), Dogen criticized those who misunderstand the concept of **hongaku** by quoting Pai-

²³⁷D.T. Suzuki, *Essays in Zen Buddhism*, 1970 ed, 40-98.

²³⁸Dogen's *Shobogenzo*, "Bussho," Gudo Wafu trans, 1.

chang's saying, "if a person attaches to the understanding that, being originally pure and originally liberated, we are naturally buddha and naturally one with the way of Zen, (that person) belongs among the non-Buddhists of naturalism."²³⁹

How did Dogen directly overcome the problem of the relation between the original Dharma-nature and resolve-practice in the experience of casting off body-mind? The resolution of this problem is expressed here and there in Dogen's writings: "This Dharma is amply present in every person, but unless one practices, it is not manifested; unless there is realization it is not attained."²⁴⁰ Dogen also says,

The thought that practice and experience are not one thing is just the idea of non-Buddhists. In the Buddha-Dharma practice and experience are completely the same. Practice now is also practice in the state of experience; therefore, a beginner's pursuit of the truth is just the whole body of the original state of experience. This is why the Buddhist patriarchs teach, in the practical cautions they have handed down to us, not to expect any experience outside of practice. And the reason may be that practice itself is the directly accessible original state of experience.²⁴¹

Nevertheless, it remains to be explained how Dogen could be so critical of the idea of original enlightenment while at the same time accepting its most basic premises. One of the explanations of this is that the **hongaku** idea which Dogen criticized was somehow not the **hongaku** idea expounded in the Tendai literature. Rather, Dogen was criticizing the popular misunderstanding of that conception. In his fascicle, when Dogen is asked some questions regarding the nature of the Buddha-mind, he says that it was popularly believed that the nature of the mind was eternal and that once one was enlightened one no longer needed to practice.²⁴²

Concerning Dogen's understanding of original enlightenment, the idea that all beings are endowed with the Buddha-nature and acquired enlightenment, Kasulis asserts that Dogen's dilemma concerning these two concepts indicates the ambivalent position of the Tendai sect at that time concerning the tension between a doctrinal emphasis on original enlightenment on the one hand, and a practical emphasis on acquired

²³⁹Dogen's *Shobogenzo*, "Shinjin-gakudo," Gudo Wafu trans, 253-4.

²⁴⁰N.A. Waddell and Masao Abe, "Bendowa," *Eastern Buddhist*, vol 4, no 1, (1974), 129

²⁴¹Dogen's *Shobogenzo*, "Bendowa," Gudo Wafu trans, 12.

²⁴²*Ibid.*, 7.

enlightenment on the other.²⁴³

However, Kasulis' comment on this does not fully explain its scope. It should be noticed that Dogen's dilemma had occurred before his enlightenment experience. After his enlightenment experience, he re-interpreted the Buddha-nature. In other words, until he attained his enlightenment experience, he did not realize the true meaning of the Buddha-nature. Once having achieved enlightenment, a person would describe his enlightenment or Buddha-nature as "original" or "already there." Thus, these two concepts of enlightenment are not two different types of enlightenment, but they are two different ways of describing the "achieved" experience. While "original enlightenment" is focusing on the Buddha-nature of reality, "acquired enlightenment" stresses the practice of its achievement. In this sense, these two different terms are not opposed to each other, but correlate to one another. According to Dogen, enlightenment is both acquired enlightenment and original enlightenment.²⁴⁴ It is not the case that one side is considered primary and the other secondary. Rather both are indispensable and inseparable components of a dynamic relationship. This is indicated by the expression, "the oneness of practice and attainment," the "simultaneity" of Buddha-nature and becoming a Buddha, and the "unceasing circulation of continuous practice." To clarify it, awakening -and practice or becoming a Buddha are both indispensable, but the former is indispensable as the ground and the latter is indispensable as the condition. Attainment indispensable as the ground of human existence is expressed by Dogen's statement, "you say no (Buddha-nature) because Buddha-nature is emptiness."²⁴⁵ Buddha-nature is not a thing, it is in itself empty, non-substantial, un-objectifiable, and no thing. It is not a substantial ground in the ordinary sense. After having attained decisive enlightenment, Dogen re-read it as:

In short, total Existence is the Buddha-nature, and the perfect totality of Total Existence is called "living beings." At just this moment, the inside and outside of living beings are the Total Existence of the Buddha-nature.²⁴⁶

Here we can see the dramatic conceptual change of the Buddha-nature in Dogen. For

²⁴³Thomas P. Kasulis, *Zen Action Zen Person*, 66.

²⁴⁴Dogen's *Shobogenzo*, "Gyobutsuigi," Gudo Wafu, trans, 50-1.

²⁴⁵N.A. Waddell and Masao Abe, "Bendowa," *Eastern Buddhist*, vol 8, no 2, 108.

Dogen, the Buddha-nature is no longer an entity or a nature that one can possess. Rather it is none other than the eternally rising and perishing reality of the world. It is, as Mahayana affirmed, **samsara** is **nirvana** and **nirvana** is **samsara**. Dogen, in fact, attempted to reconcile original enlightenment and practice and to develop a critique of the variety of metaphysical interpretations that had evolved or might evolve from these doctrines and to suggest his own understanding of the doctrines.²⁴⁷ Thus all that is said of the Buddha-nature applies to ‘all things.’ In this regard Dogen writes:

What is the point of the World-honored One’s words that “All living beings totally exist as the Buddha-nature”? It is the words “This is something ineffable coming like this” turning the Dharma wheel. Those called “living beings,” or called “the sentient,” or called “all forms of life,” or called “all creatures,” are living beings and are all forms of Existence. In short, Total Existence is the Buddha-nature, and the perfect totality of total Existence is called “living beings.” At just this moment, the inside and outside of living beings are the Total Existence of the Buddha-nature.²⁴⁸

The Buddha-nature, thus, is nothing more than the realization of the true nature of reality. And this realization of all things or the Buddha-nature is enlightenment or the dropping of body and mind. Here we can see the connection between the Buddha-nature, enlightenment, and the dropping of body and mind. By means of this new interpretation, Dogen resolved the contradictions there had been in his previous understanding of the Buddha-nature. Dogen newly realized the importance of practice in relation to the Buddha-nature.

To sum up, Dogen is not concerned with differentiating the concepts of “original enlightenment” or “acquired enlightenment,” but with the actual “attainment of enlightenment” or “realization of the Buddha-nature.” Since the Buddha-nature is not objectifiable and unobtainable, it is wrong to talk objectively about whether or not one has the Buddha-nature. Dogen, thus emphasizes practice in the realization of the Buddha-nature. He states:

As for the truth of the Buddha-nature: the Buddha-nature is not incorporated prior to attaining Buddhahood; it is incorporated upon the attainment of Buddhahood. The Buddha-nature is always manifested simultaneously with the attainment of

²⁴⁶Ibid., 2.

²⁴⁷David Putney, “Dogen: Enlightenment and Entanglement,” 30.

²⁴⁸Dogne’s *Shobogenzo*, “Bussho,” Gudo Wafu trans, 2.

Buddhahood. This truth should be deeply, deeply penetrated in concentrated practice. There has to be twenty or even thirty years of diligent Zen practice.²⁴⁹

Dogen, thus, characterized enlightenment experience as an awareness of the Buddha-nature, as immanent in all things. Here enlightenment is seen as an experience of unity between the essence of Buddha-nature, oneself and the world. Dogen states:

In this world there are millions of objects and ...each one of them is, respectively the entire world-this is where the study of Buddhism commences. When one comes to realize this fact, one perceives that every object, every living thing is the whole, even though it itself does not realize it.²⁵⁰

Here Dogen's notion of enlightenment is seen as that which consists in a sensual recognition that all things are intimately connected through a fundamental unity which is the Buddha-nature.

B) How "Enlightenment" is Fulfilled

1) Meditative Practice As Different Levels of Enlightenment

Dogen seemed to understand that enlightenment is achieved at different levels. He discusses that there are various perspectives for seeing the world. For example, some beings see water as a jeweled ornament, some as wondrous blossoms; hungry ghosts see it as raging fire or pus and blood. These different perspectives depend on their present kinds of birth and form:

Thus, the views of all beings are not the same. You should question this matter now. Are there many ways to see one thing, or is it a mistake to see many forms as one thing? You should pursue this beyond the limit of pursuit. Accordingly, endeavors in practice-realization of the ways are not limited to one or two kinds. The ultimate realm has one thousand kinds and ten thousand ways.

When we think about the meaning of this, it seems that there is water for various beings but there is no original water- there is no water common to all types of being.²⁵¹

In this passage, Dogen refuses all ordinary ways of seeing the world. He insists on

²⁴⁹Abe and Waddell, trans, "Shobogenzo Buddha-nature," *Eastern Buddhist*, II, (1971), 88.

²⁵⁰Philip Kapleau, *The Three Pillars of Zen*, 310.

²⁵¹Kazuaki Tanahashi, ed., *Moon in a Dewdrop*, 97-8.

leaving behind ordinary human perspectives and experiencing. Instead, Dogen is trying to present other perspectives which our customary way of thinking movement simply cannot apply. Such is the case with Dogen's idea of viewing the world, Dogen applies it to various different interpretations of enlightenment. In his fascicle, "Genzo-koan,"²⁵²Dogen 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. Those who greatly realize delusion are buddhas. Those who are greatly deluded about realization are ordinary beings. There are people who further attain realization on the basis of realization. There are people who increase their delusion in the midst of delusion. When buddhas are really buddhas, they do not need to recognize themselves as buddhas. Nevertheless, they are buddhas in the state of experience, and they go on experiencing the state of buddhas.²⁵³

With this passage, Dogen demonstrates different views of people's interpretation about enlightenment experiences and agrees that there are different possible interpretations of illusion and enlightenment. For example, as the passage indicates if someone is deluded about his supposed enlightenment that he is enlightened, in fact, he is not. Moreover, there are persons who say they have more delusion within delusion and this might well mean that such persons have no idea that they are deluded. Finally, there are persons who attain realization upon realization. More specifically, Dogen states different views of enlightenment. He writes:

When all dharmas are seen as the Buddha-Dharma, then there is delusion and realization, there is practice, there is life and there is death, there are buddhas and there are ordinary beings.

When the myriad dharmas are each not of the self, there is no delusion and no realization, no buddhas and no ordinary beings, no life and no death.

The Buddha's truth is originally transcendent over abundance and scarcity, and so there is life and death, there is delusion and realization, there are beings and buddhas. And though it is like this, it is only that flowers, while loved, fall; and

²⁵²"Genzo," refers to the "direct experience of suchness which arises through the experience of the world in flux. The "ko" of "koan" means "public", "common to all" and the basic meaning of "an" is "to investigate." Thus the "koan" literally means the sustained investigation of what is common to all. Putting all these together the term "genzo-koan" might be translated as; an entanglement of wisdom, as a sustained investigation of what is common to all, realized in terms of the direct experience of suchness arising in the world of flux.

²⁵³Dogen's *Shobogenzo*, "Genzo-koan," Gudo Wafu, trans, 33.

weeds while hated, flourish.²⁵⁴

Here, Dogen seemed to understand enlightenment in different structures. However, there is disagreement among Buddhist scholars concerning the interpretation of these verses. One interpretation argues that these are different stages of enlightenment experiences. This interpretation insists that Dogen actually described three different levels of enlightenment experiences. On the other hand, Nishiari argues that these three movements were not three different stages of enlightenment, but the same enlightenment in different perspectives²⁵⁵

However, they seem to be misunderstood by each other. It seems to me that each interpretation is emphasizing a different aspect of Dogen's enlightenment. Nishiari's view is correct as long as he understands Dogen's enlightenment as self-realization of the Buddha-nature. Nishiari's view is correct that for Dogen enlightenment is not something like a stable state to which we can cling once we get it. Enlightenment is the condition for an authentic mode of existence of being. Thus, Nishiari's emphasis was upon enlightenment as a matter of being rather than possessing; one is enlightened not one has enlightenment.

On the other hand, another interpretation of Dogen's enlightenment as different stages was also correct for its focused on the practical level of enlightenment. Dogen understands enlightenment as a process from potentiality to enlightenment at a practical level

2) Cutting the Root of Thinking (Not-Thinking) as a Process of Enlightenment

Focusing on the practice of enlightenment, Dogen understands "cutting the root of thinking," as a process of enlightenment. Dogen describes the characteristic of "cutting the root of thinking" as:

By sitting, which severs the root of thinking and blocks access to the road of intellectual understanding. This is an excellent means to arouse true beginners mind. This is precisely a method of inducement for the beginner. Then you let body and

²⁵⁴Ibid.,

²⁵⁵David P Putney, The Nature and Practice of Freedom, (University of Hawaii: Ph.D dissertation, 1990), 297.

mind drop away and let go of delusion and enlightenment. This is the second aspect of studying the way.²⁵⁶

Here, Dogen suggests cutting the root of thinking as an excellent means for achieving enlightenment. According to Dogen, “cutting the root of thinking,” is not to think when involved in thought. Thought succeeds thought without interruption. On continuation of thoughts, one should not abide in any thought. If one thought abides, every thought will abide. In regard to the practice of no-thought the Sutra states:

To be untainted in regard to all sense-objects is called no-thought (**wu-nien**, 無念). If you constantly keep your own thoughts free from all sense-objects, then the mind will not arise concerning those sense-objects. If you don't cogitate (**ssu**, 無思) on the hundred things, thoughts will be exhausted and cast aside. But if one thought is cut off, then you will die and be born in another realm.²⁵⁷

Based on the above statement, one should allow the mind to flow freely without clinging to any of the thoughts or sense-objects which will obstruct one's path. Conversely, the absence of all thoughts indicates that the mind attaches to no object but engages rather in pure mirror-activity.²⁵⁸

Following the traditional idea of no thought in the Sutra, Dogen sees practice as basically “cutting the root of thinking” through the removal of the five hindrances. As a result, one gets progressively “purified” as defilements are eliminated. Practice then is seen as a means for cutting the root of thinking.²⁵⁹ Here the mind is seen as empty in its original state like a clear mirror or bright pearl. However, this clear state of the self is often obscured by the defilement of personal opinions and ideas. A defiled mirror-self does not allow a pure experience of reality. Thus eliminating personal ideas and opinions is necessary in order to experience the purity of the self as-it-is. By the practice of meditation this defilement of the mirror is gradually cleansed away.

Consequently, the purity of the mirror reflects and is reflected in other mirrors. Thus the whole universe which is seen in the mirror is somewhat dependent on the state of other mirror selves.

²⁵⁶Kazuaki Tanahashi, ed, *Moon in a Dewdrop*, 42.

²⁵⁷Neal Donner, In *Sudden and Gradual: Approaches to Enlightenment in Chinese Thought*, Peter N. Gregory, ed. (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1987), 202.

²⁵⁸Heinrich Dumoulin, *Zen Buddhism in the 20th Century*, (New York: WeatherHill, 1992), 110-112.

²⁵⁹Nagamoto Shingenori, *Attunement Through the Body*, 78.

Therefore, according to Dogen, this realization presents the existence of things arising through the process of Dependent Arising. Here one's true self or all existence is realized in co-dependent nature. Francis Cook describes Dogen's metaphor of "One Bright Pearl" as representing enlightenment experience in its co-dependent nature. Cook states:

To use Dogen's poetic image of the "one bright pearl," the world of conditioned co-arising is "one bright pearl" and each individual, by virtue of its relation to the whole, must also be "one bright pearl."²⁶⁰

Here the whole universe is seen as interconnected as one's own shining jewel is connected to and reflects the jewel-like mirrored nature of all others. Thus each individual is seen to be composed of an infinite number of interdependent bright jewels.

In this respect Dogen's idea of enlightenment as "cutting the root of thinking," co-dependent nature, echoes with idea of Shen-hsiu whose poem well illustrates the characteristics of enlightenment as "cutting the root of thinking":

The body is the Bodhi tree.
The mind is like a clear mirror standing.
Take care to wipe it all the time,
Allow no grain of dust to cling.²⁶¹

In this poem, realization is expressed as "cutting the root of thinking." In this step, one needs to eliminate the defilement of ideas and opinions in order to keep the mind clean. Keeping up meditation is necessary to keep the mirror clean. Here the problem is attachment to things. Thus enlightenment is achieved through detachment from the things attached. Consequently, "emptiness" comes as a result of "cutting the root of thinking," that is, detachment practice. Here enlightenment is regarded as a gradual process (漸悟), which emphasises gradual exercises and preparatory practices.

However, this form of denial of thinking is problematic. Although "cutting the root of thinking" denies thought, its denial of thought is itself a thought. In other words, "cutting the root of thinking" as the rejecting of thinking means the annihilation of consciousness, but this annihilation of consciousness itself is a form of thought. Thus,

²⁶⁰Francis Cook, "Just This: Buddhist Ultimate Reality." *Buddhist Christian Studies*, 9 (1989), 127-142.

non-thinking (without thinking) allows us to recognize “cutting the root of thinking” as itself a thought. This means that non-thinking is a more basic form of consciousness than “cutting the root of thinking.”²⁶²

3) Enlightenment as Non-Thinking (Without Thinking)

Dogen discusses master Yakusan’s **Zazen** to show the characteristic of enlightenment as “non-thinking”(without thinking)²⁶³ experience:

While Great Master Yakusan Kodo is sitting, a monk asks him, “What are you thinking in the still-still state?” The Master says, “Thinking the concrete state of not thinking.” The monk says, “How can the state of not thinking be thought?” The Master says, “It is non-thinking.”²⁶⁴

Since “cutting the root of thinking” focuses on the elimination of thoughts to make the mirror clear, its approach is dualistic and substantialistic because of its basis in the self and its thinking operation. However, “non-thinking” is based on a different non-dualistic and non-substantializing experience because it is formulated without any presupposition or assumption. This is why Dogen believes non-thinking to be more basic than “cutting the root of thinking.” This is, Abe calls, the “ultimate thinking” which “transcends thinking in the usual sense.” It represents a fundamental critique of the nature of thinking asserting that human thinking is essentially a substantive one. Thus, ‘non-thinking’ overcomes the dualistic and discriminate nature of or normal, subject-object structure of consciousness. It is beyond both thinking and not thinking. It is an ultimate or absolute thinking which transcends both relative thinking and relative not-thinking. It is a thinking which allows things to be disclosed as they really are, as they are in themselves. ²⁶⁵This presupposition-less character of non-thinking is well illustrated in a poem written by Hui-neng:

The Bodhi is not like a tree,
The clear mirror is nowhere standing.

²⁶¹Heinrich Dumoulin, *A History of Zen Buddhism*, 81-2.

²⁶²T.P. Kapsulis, *Zen Action Zen Person*, 73.

²⁶³There are two different translations in this term either “non-thinking” or “without thinking.” I will use both “non-thinking” and “without thinking” in same meaning.

²⁶⁴Dogen’s *Shobogenzo*, “Zazenshin,” Gudo Wafu trans, 91.

²⁶⁵Thomas Dean, “Masao Abe on Zen and Western Thought,” 84.

Fundamentally not one thing exist;
Where, then, is a grain of dust to cling?

While Shen-hsiu's poem indicates the realization of enlightenment as "cutting the root of thinking," by which one needs to eliminate the defilement of ideas and opinions in order to keep the mind clean. Hui-neng's poem presents the negation of the first. In Hui-neng's poem which echoes Dogen's idea of "non-thinking," enlightenment is based on a totally different structure. Its realization is non-dualistic in character. In Shen-hsiu's poem the mirror should be cleansed in order to be "empty," in which the action of practice is involved. But in the Hui-neng's poem, there is no such mirror to polish.

While "cutting the root of thinking" presupposes the existence of an original mirror, there is no original existing mirror to polish in without-thinking (non-thinking) practice. Thus in "without-thinking" structure, no special exercises of concentration are needed because here the problem is not attachment to things. For Hui-neng, as well as Dogen, without-thinking is no other than the direct sight of one's Buddha-nature. Originally self-nature is free from all duality. Original nature, thus, is inherently enlightened, it is **prajna** and "of itself in **samadhi**."²⁶⁶ Here enlightenment is not coming as a result of the practice of eliminating thoughts. Rather, it is awareness of self-nature as free from all duality. This non-dual awareness of self-nature is the Buddha-nature and this awareness of the Buddha-nature is called "emptiness."

Without- thinking is emptiness. Not-thinking is the denial of thinking. In that **ku** transcends the distinction between subject and object and being and nothingness, to say that without- thinking is "crystal clear" (as Dogen does in "Zazenshin") is justified.²⁶⁷

Therefore, according to Dogen, it is not necessary first to engage in contemplation in order to attain wisdom since contemplation and wisdom are one and the same. Dogen's non-thinking as emptiness, then, was a direct insight of the Buddha-nature. This

²⁶⁶Hui-neng's distinctive character appears in his commentary on the Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch, which gives an example of Ch'an reactions to Indian meditative techniques. In Indian Buddhism, contemplation (samadhi) and wisdom (prajna) were recognized as components of spiritual cultivation whereas the Platform Sutra considered samadhi and prajna as states of mind present in all moments of thought instead of states of practice. The Sutra states that "the mind-ground that is without distraction is the samadhi of the Self-nature. The mind-ground that is without ignorance is the prajna of the self-nature" See, Liu-tsu t'an-ching, Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch, Philip Yampolsky, trans, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), 164.

²⁶⁷T.P. Kasulis, Zen Action Zen Person, 72.

distinctive remark of a direct insight of the Buddha-nature is the fulfillment of original enlightenment.

However, non-thinking, as Suzuki notes, is different from mere mental vacuity. It is at least mind-filled-with-nothingness. The Sixth Patriarch, Hui-neng, told his disciples that it was a mistake to attempt to blank out thought; an individual wit blanked-out thought was no different, no more enlightened than a stump stone.

C) The Characteristics of the Enlightenment Experience

1) Enlightenment as 'Undifferentiated' Experience

This non-thinking experience shows a moment of experience as a unitary experience which has neither internal differentiation nor external boundary. Dogen has well illustrated this unitary experience of a non-thinking character in a metaphor of the fish and the sea:

When fish move through water, however they move, there is no end to the water. When birds fly through the sky, however they fly, there is no end to the sky. At the same time, fish and birds have never, since antiquity, left the water or the sky. Simply, when activity is great, usage is great, and when necessity is small, usage is small. Acting in this state, none fails to realize its limitations at every moment, and none fails to somersault freely at every place; but if a bird leaves the sky it will die at once, and if a fish leaves the water it will die at once. So we can understand that water is life and can understand that sky is life. Birds are life, and fish are life. It may be that life is birds and that life is fish. And beyond this, there may still be further progress. The existence of their practice-and-experience, and the existence of their lifetime and their life, are like this.²⁶⁸

With this passage, Dogen is presenting the importance of practice as well as the identity of practice and enlightenment. However, Dogen's intention in this passage has more than that. First of all, Dogen demonstrates that the unitary non-thinking experience is like a fish moving through water. A fish that swims in water is characterized like a fish that swims in water without being related with water. In other words, non-thinking experience is an experience with relation which is possible without experiencing the things being related. In non-thinking experience there is only one unit. Although there are two different units of things, they are experienced in unity as the relation of fish and

²⁶⁸Dogen's *Shobogenzo*, "Genzo-koan," Gudo Wafu, trans, 36.

water. Unitive experience is something we acquire when we embody it, but we do not need to consciously feel or think about it as we do it. It is like an artist whose acquired skill is embodied but about which he is not consciously aware when he or she performs an act. A dancer may not be conscious of his foot steps while he or she is performing a dance. A pianist does not constantly think about his fingers while he or she is playing the piano.²⁶⁹

This unitive experience which is the pinnacle of Zen has been referred to as a state of 'undifferentiated' unity or pure consciousness. Thus, "non-thinking" is not an ordinary sense of no-thought. It is not a state of mind where there is no thought or idea of anything. Rather it is an experience of No-Mind (無心)²⁷⁰ when a mind is filled with thoughts of this and that.

This non-thinking or no-mind does not single out or select. It lets things be as they are. But it is not bothered by them. It is free from thoughts. But its freedom is experienced in the midst of many thoughts. Actually, it would be more accurate to describe without-thinking as before thinking and cutting the root of thinking. In this initial moment of without-thinking, there is only the experience-of-looking-at-the-thing. Only subsequent to this moment does the mental act of thinking set in, wherein there emerges the sense of a subject looking at an object. Thus without-thinking is a mental process prior to this emergence of self and other in everyday life. Nishitani characterized this state of mind as non-discernment:

The mind we are speaking of here is the non-discerning mind that is the absolute negation of the discernment of consciousness or intellect. . . . In any case, the non-discerning mind at issue here is not something subjective in the manner of what is ordinarily called mind. It is a field that lets the being of all things be, a field on which all things can be themselves on their own home-grounds, the field of **sunyata** that I have called the field of the elemental possibility of the existence of all things.²⁷¹

As a consequence of non-thinking, one truly can experience the thing in itself or things as they are (**genjokoan**). This is what Dogen called "Thusness," or "**juhoi**," the

²⁶⁹Joan Stambaugh, *The Formless Self*, 127.

²⁷⁰Here we should notice that 'mind' does not refer to reason or intellect, Rather, it refers to the heart. Thus 'No-mind' does not necessarily mean no thoughts or no reasonings.

dharma-position or situation of a thing where it dwells:

As the saying goes, “A bird flies and it is like a bird. A fish swims and it looks like a fish. The selfness of the flying bird in flight consists of its being like a bird. The selfness of the fish as it swims consists of looking like a fish. Or put the other way around, the “likeness” of the flying bird and the swimming fish is nothing other than their true “suchness.” We spoke earlier of this mode of being in which a thing is on its own home-ground as a mode of being in the “middle” or in its own “position.” We also referred to its as **samadhi**-being.²⁷²

However, it is important to note here that in this passage, the experience of things as they are or Dogen’s “**juhoi**” or “thusness” can be realized in the mode of being in the “Middle Way.” However, this “Middle Way” is not the median or the quantitative middle of both, but the qualitative line of both.

Thus the “Middle” is neither mere nothing nor nothing negative. Rather it is the original nature of both affirmation and negation, both being and not-being. In this regard, Dogen’s understanding of things lies between being and non-being. Being does exist insofar as there is non-being. Being is understood in this inter-structured nature of being and non-being. In this sense being is being only in relation to non-being. Thus being is true-being insofar as it is de-centered and grounded with other, or not-being. Consequently, the ordinary nature of being is neither being nor not-being, but in the “between” of being and its “not.”²⁷³

This co-dependent nature of the “Middle Way” which is not a thing that can be treated as a substantially existing matter, but rather characterized as “de-centered” is called “Emptiness (空)” or “Nothingness (無)” in Buddhist terms.²⁷⁴ This means that there is no such “being,” which can be identified as “co-dependent.” Nor is “being” a subtle, mysterious power or essence, nor is it merely an illusion. “All Being” is not therefore a mere product of the mind, nor is it mind itself. Nor is it limited to the “object of experience.” What Dogen is actually trying to say is that he is rejecting the dichotomy of the absolute.

In this regard the experience of rejecting this dichotomy of the absolute is non-

²⁷¹Keiji Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, 181-2.

²⁷²*Ibid.*, 139.

²⁷³Keiji Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, 38.

thinking; this non-thinking is unitive; this unitive can be achieved only in the Middle Way”; this Middle way is co-dependent by nature; and this co-dependence of the “Middle Way” is called “emptiness.” Dogen explains the concept of emptiness in terms of “thusness.”

The term “thusness” embraces both of these aspects of reality—the relative existence of things and the emptiness of absolute existence of particular things. These two perspectives are referred to as two facets of thusness—that which is unchanging (absolute emptiness) and that which accords with conditions (relative existence). The term “thusness” itself alludes to the simultaneous realization of emptiness and existence, experiencing directly and openly without fixed conceptual glosses, seeing everything as being simply “thus.”²⁷⁵

Dogen claims that thusness transcends all reason and its objectifying logicalization and can only be opened up in the existence of body-mind dropping off. As such, this can only be expressed by paradox. Dogen therefore affirms that birth-and-death itself is enlightenment. The paradox of “being it-self while not being it-self,” or the self-awareness that emptiness is self, is for Dogen’s Zen Buddhism the most fundamental or original meaning of man’s existence. For Dogen, all things are in the field of emptiness in their truly authentic and original aspect. And such absolute nothingness cannot be thought but only lived. So it must be an existential conversion away from being a person-centered person.

However, it is important to point out here that Dogen’s ‘undifferentiated unity’ is expressive in character. For Dogen, dharma experience is more than a passive and passing experience. It is not simply experienced. Samadhi is not merely an observable experience in a time when non-objectification reigns. It can also be expressed in appropriate forms. Thomas Cleary states this about Yakusan’s non-thinking dialogue: ‘thinking about that which is not thinking’ can read ‘thinking about who isn’t thinking’ or ‘thinking about what doesn’t think.’²⁷⁶ According to Cleary, Yakusan’s dialogue permits the interpretation that Zazen consists of thinking about the self that isn’t thinking. Likely, Dogen writes in “**Zazenshin**,” “In non-thinking there is someone,

²⁷⁴Ibid., 153.

²⁷⁵Thomas Cleary trans, *Shobogenzo: Zen Essays by Dogen*, 36.

²⁷⁶Ibid., 21.

and that someone is maintaining and relying upon me.”²⁷⁷

2) Enlightenment as Dropping off the Body-Mind

Regarding the practice of “emptiness” in Dogen, we should not miss the point that non-thinking practice is not merely intellectual exercise. For Dogen, since both body and mind are in unity, enlightenment requires both body and mind, that is, dropping off the body-mind. In this respect enlightenment is no other than the self-liberating Self, since true entanglement in achieving enlightenment is the self. By this self-liberating from the entangled self the distinction of self and other, and subject and object is overcome.. In this regard Dogen writes about the true Way of learning the Buddha:

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. There is a state in which the traces of realization are forgotten; and it manifests the traces of forgotten realization for a long, long time.²⁷⁸

In this passage, Dogen emphasizes the logical connection for the attainment of the Buddha-nature between the self, the Buddha’s truth, and dropping off the body-mind. If I paraphrase it, it would be stated as; “To learn the Buddha’s truth is to learn the self; to learn the self is to forget the self; to forget the self is to drop off the body-mind.” Here “to drop off the body-mind” expresses the mental activity of without-thinking wherein “self” and also “other” are “forgotten,” because awareness of such distinctions is not present. No separate self is present to perceive “other” things. Rather, the self is all these things, and vice versa, in this moment. From without-thinking flows the only identifiable “reality,” namely the unceasing, ever-changing, impermanent unfolding of experience. From without-thinking/enlightenment, therefore, we see things as they really are (**genjokoan**).

Consequently, “to forget ourselves” is crucial. “To forget ourselves” is nothing other than to “let out our body and mind.” Thus for Dogen, in order to be enlightened, both the mind and body should have been dropped off (**datsuraku**, 身心脱落). The dropped off body and mind are thus the awakened body and mind which are freed from self

²⁷⁷Dogen’s *Shobogenzo*, “Zazenshin,” Gudo Wafu, trans, 91.

attachment.

However, one important thing to be noticed here is that Dogen makes the relevant connection that the “thinking of not –thinking,” or the release of objects of thought is to enter the mountains of practice, and non-thinking is discarding the world of attachment. In other words, non-thinking activity is not mere practice to transcend both thinking and not-thinking, it is an activity which requires both body and mind through zazen. It is not merely intellectual practice, but bodily practice as well.

Therefore, Dogen’s without-thinking practice as emptiness should not be understood as mystical contemplation or illumination. Moreover, it is neither philosophical meditation nor experience of mystical union. It is body-mind unified practice. In this respect, there is no enlightenment experience without dropping off the body-mind. It is an illusion if one sees that the mind is a permanent being independent from the perishable body. Thus studying the Buddha Way is not possible only by learning Buddhist sutras and meditating on Zen **koans**. For Dogen, studying the Buddha Way or enlightenment is not a matter of the accumulation of knowledge.

Thus what is the true meaning of “forgetting the self” as “dropping the body-mind”? Forgetting the self is not merely going into a state of unconsciousness, like a sleeping state, but rather it means that one’s self -center of consciousness is totally loosened up and the self is spread out to the entirety of the horizon of consciousness.²⁷⁹

This studying the self as dropping off of body-mind is directly engaged in the practice of **zazen** (literally “sitting-Zen”), which is Zen meditation in a sitting form. Enlightenment for Dogen, thus, is not a matter of the intellectual or mysterious experience one can gain, but a mode of being, particularly through repeated dropping off of body-mind practice. Thus studying the Buddha Way means embodying the Buddha Way as one’s own mode of being. Since the Buddha Way is not an object of cognition, it does not stand as a being over against the self, the cognitive subject.

D) Dogen’s Understanding of Zazen (坐禪)

Since meditation is practiced by almost all Buddhists, with some schools putting

²⁷⁸Dogen’s *Shobogenzo*, “Genzo-koan,” Gudo Wafu trans, 34.

²⁷⁹David Edward Shaner, *The Bodymind Experience in Japanese Buddhism: A Phenomenological Perspective of Kukai and Dogen*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985), 48.

more emphasis on it than others, Dogen recognizes **Zazen** ²⁸⁰ as a common means by which alone all the Buddhas and patriarchs have attained enlightenment:

The Sutras say that the many patriarchs and the many buddhas, who dwelt in and maintained the Buddha-Dharma, all relied on the practice of sitting erect in the samadhi of receiving and using the self, and esteemed this practice as the right way to disclose the state of realization.²⁸¹

And yet, Dogen is most explicit in ascribing primacy to **Zazen** as he often emphasizes **shikanta-za** (“just sitting” or “seated meditation only”). For Dogen, meditation is fundamental to all consciousness for it is the prototype of religious thought and action. In zazen-only(**shikan-taza**), the whole body of his religio-philosophical enactments is fulfilled. Thus for Dogen **Zazen** is not merely one of many spiritual practices, but it is the very best of all practices. That is to say, in Dogen’s whole work both practice and theories or otherwise are comprehensively completed through **Zazen**. Concerning the primacy of **Zazen**, Dogen states:

In the study of the Way, the prime essential is sitting meditation (**Zazen**)... Although even the ancients encouraged both reading and just sitting, they still encouraged sitting wholeheartedly. And though there have been people whose awakening was opened by words, those too were situations in which the opening of awakening was due to the accomplishment in sitting. The true attainment is due to the sitting.²⁸²

However, Dogen emphasizes that the very practice of sitting is enlightenment itself. For Dogen insists that the quintessence of meditation, **shikan taza**, or just sitting, is the actualization (**genzo**) of enlightenment, the actualization of Buddha-nature. “The man in Zazen,” says Dogen,

Conforms totally in himself to the genuine Buddha-Dharma, and assists universally in performing the works of the Buddhas. . . circulating the inexhaustible, unceasing, incomprehensible, and immeasurable Buddha-Dharma inside and outside throughout the universe. . . this unperceived mutual assistance occurs in the stillness of **samadhi** beyond human artifice, and is in itself realization. . . the principle of realization. . . functions unceasingly. Because of this, when even just one person, at

²⁸⁰The term Zazen literally means “seated meditation.”

²⁸¹Dogen’s Shobogenzo, “Bendowa,” Gudo Wafu, trans, 4.

²⁸²Thomas Cleary, *Record of Things Heard from the Treasury of the Eye of the True Teachings*, (Boulder: Prajna Press, 1980), 14.

one time, sits in **zazen**, he is performing the eternal and ceaseless work of guiding beings to enlightenment.²⁸³

Thus for Dogen, practice is not to be thought of as instrumental, as something done in order to achieve enlightenment. However, the identity of practice and enlightenment does not deny that there is cultivation, transformation and progress in Zen practice. Practice is necessary for enlightenment because not to practice is eo ipso to withhold oneself from engagement with whatever is in front of one at the moment.

In fact, it is Dogen's intention to guard against the kind of mind that becomes egoistically attached to its own progress. It is not a denial of Zazen's result but a caveat addressed to the meditator and the quality of his attitude. Zazen does effect transformation, and it contributes to the realization of innate Buddhahood. However, doing Zazen with attachment to results is self-defeating. In other words, Zazen must be practiced with an empty will.

Further, in **Genzo-koan**, Dogen describes the characters of meditation and enlightenment as truly discrete, yet ultimately one. He characterizes this identity as inter-penetrative of man and totality. This identity of meditation (**zazen**) and enlightenment is unity yet diversity. He describes this character in a metaphor. He states:

A person getting realization is like the moon being reflected in water: the moon does not get wet, and the water is not broken. Though the light of the moon is wide and great, it is reflected in a foot or an inch of water. The whole moon and the whole sky are reflected in a dew-drop on a blade of grass and are reflected in a single drop of water. Realization does not break the individual, just as the moon does not pierce the water. The individual does not hinder the state of realization, just as dew-drop does not hinder the sky and moon. The depth of realization may be as the concrete height of the moon. The longness and shortness of its moment should be investigated in large bodies of water and small bodies of water, and observed in the width and narrowness of the sky and the moon.²⁸⁴

Meditation and enlightenment are separate beings, like water and the moon, but when they are placed in relation, they come into unity by reflecting one to the other. A person in **Zazen** is still a person, a dew-drop, but one who can reflect totality, the moon within

²⁸³N. Waddell and M. Abe, "Bendowa," *The Eastern Buddhist*, (May 1971), 134-7.

²⁸⁴Dogen's *Shobogenzo*, "Genzokoan," Gudo Wafu trans, 35.

himself. This unity is not possessed by the individual mind as “the moon does not get wet” though within a dew-drop and the individual mind does not lose itself as “the water is not broken.” This reflection is the same and yet different from the moon and water. This is what Dogen calls unity yet diversity between practice and enlightenment. This is the true meaning of identity between **Zazen** and enlightenment. Thus this identity can be characterized as reflective or experiential-unity as well as ontological diversity.

Further, this identical unity between **Zazen** and enlightenment is said to be “undefiled.” Dogen quotes what Nan-yueh Huai-jang answered to Hui-neng, “practice and enlightenment are not obliterated but undefiled.”²⁸⁵ In other words, it is not separated by the dualism of enlightenment and meditation in the means. Also, this unity of meditation and enlightenment is called “practice based on enlightenment” rather than “practice prior to enlightenment.” This is what Dogen calls “original enlightenment.” In other words, **Zazen** is not to seek for enlightenment. **Zazen** itself is enlightenment. **Zazen** is not a means to an end, a technique by which one might achieve enlightenment. The meditation which seeks to attain enlightenment is “acquired meditation”.

Dogen differentiates this distinction by illustrating the story of polishing a tile to make a mirror:

Nangaku promptly fetches a tile and polishes it on a rock near Baso’s hut.
Baso, on seeing this, asks, “What is the master doing?”
Nangaku says, “Polishing a tile.”
Baso says, “What is the use of polishing a tile?”
Nangaku says, “I am polishing it into a mirror.”
Baso says, “How can polishing a tile make it into a mirror?”
Nangaku says, “How can sitting in Zazen make you into a buddha?”²⁸⁶

Here, **Zazen**, likened to the act of polishing the tile is not an act to become a Buddha, but to unfold true reality. In this sense meditation is not an act to make enlightenment, but it is an act of detachment. Meditation is not an act to “become the Buddha,” but it is an act to “disclose the Buddha-nature.” To say that one practices zazen in order to become an enlightened person is like a person who practices medicine to become a

²⁸⁵Ibid., “Bendowa,” Gudo Wafu, trans, 15.

²⁸⁶Ibid., “Kokyo,” Gudo Wafu, trans, 258.

doctor.

Thus Dogen wants us to know that we are originally enlightened and we actualize that enlightenment through practice. In this respect, enlightenment is not a matter of achievement by one's own effort, it is matter of actualization through Zazen. Thus for Dogen, Zazen authenticates the enlightenment already there. The important issue, thus, is not whether to meditate or not but how to do it.

Dogen's identification between practice and enlightenment has often been contrasted with the early Buddhist approach which traditionally stressed stages both in meditation and in the attainment of the path leading to liberation. There were two different traditions in early Buddhism in regard to this notion of stages of both in both meditation and attainment. Hinayana schools have been characterized by Chinese Buddhist masters as "gradual" teachings which are contrasted with the "sudden" teaching expounded by Hua-yen, T'ien-tai (Tendai) and Ch'an (Zen) schools in China. It has been argued that the foundations for both the "gradual" and the "sudden" teachings were laid by the Buddha, himself, and that the approach taught to a particular student depended on the attainment, ability, and commitment of that student.²⁸⁷

In this regard Dogen resonates with the "sudden" tradition of Hui-neng, who denied that wisdom and meditation are different and that the practice of meditation can properly be conceived of as a means to attainment of wisdom. For Hui-neng, meditation (Dhyana) and Prajna (wisdom) are one. Hui-neng rejects the view that separates dhyana and prajna as different. Hui-neng insists that where there is prajna there is dhyana and vice versa. He states:

Equanimity (dhyana) and wisdom are basically one—they are not two. Equanimity is the basis “本” (substance). Wisdom is the function 用 (use) of equanimity. Where there is wisdom, equanimity is within it. Where there is equanimity wisdom is within it. If you are aware of what this means, the knowledge of equanimity and wisdom is one and the same.²⁸⁸

Hui-neng further gives an example of a lamp with light. He states, “having the lamp you

²⁸⁷John R. McRae, *The Northern School and the Formation of Early Ch'an Buddhism*, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1986), 151.

²⁸⁸P Fung and G Fung, trans, *The Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch on the Pristine Orthodox Dharma (T'an-Ching)*, (San Francisco: Buddha's University Church, 1964), 36.

can have light, but without lamp, there must be darkness, because the lamp is the basis(substance) and light is the use(function) of the lamp. Though there are two names, their bases are the same.”²⁸⁹Therefore, it is not necessary first to exercise contemplation in order to achieve wisdom since **prajna** and **samadhi** are one and the same.²⁹⁰

To sum up, the whole point of **zazen** is to liberate the self from the constitutions it imposes on ordinary people’s thinking. The problem of human life is basically dualistic and is often rooted in and grows out of divisions in the psyche which can be overcome by the initial experience of Zazen. From this experience of emptiness, through the practice of zazen, one finds a unity with all that is, so that one no longer goes through life trying to separate oneself from it. Thus the experience of emptiness leads one in a constructive direction and becomes an expansive awareness of all things. It is important to note that through the experience of emptiness one can overcome anthropocentrism as well as egocentrism. Human beings are not privileged over and above, or in any way apart from, the rest of the phenomenal world.

²⁸⁹Ibid., 60.

²⁹⁰Neal Donner, Sudden and Gradual Approaches to Enlightenment in Chinese Thought, 332.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE SPIRITUALITIES COMPARED: DOGEN AND JOHN OF THE CROSS

Introduction

In this final chapter, I will compare the spirituality of John and Dogen. However, in comparing these two mystics, we need to work on the basis of data which are described and understood by the mystics themselves. Thus it is necessary for them to speak for themselves and in their own terms in comparing their spiritualities. Comparing spirituality without having input from mystics' own voices is unhelpful and even irresponsible. It is from the data of spirituality as described and understood by mystics themselves, that we can gain a better insight into comparing mystical traditions. It is also from the data of spirituality that we can assess the possibility of common factors or differences within different mystical traditions. This is the reason why I provided the spirituality of Dogen and John of the Cross in previous chapters.

In comparing these two different spiritual traditions, I will use my findings from St. John of the Cross and Dogen's Zen to engage with certain accounts of the nature and common features of spirituality. I will not attempt to force or interpret either spirituality by the norms of the other. This means that we cannot judge others by our standards. However, this does not mean that we cannot approach the other through our own personal experience or belief for ultimately no interpretation is possible without some personal element.

In this chapter, as I mentioned in the beginning of the thesis, I will compare our two figures by phenomenological analysis. However, I will not merely attempt to interpret their spirituality in terms of what these mystics say, allowing each spirituality to be articulated in its own right, but also in terms of what they seem to mean, what deep structures they seem to be pointing to.

In comparing them, the differences and similarities of these two spiritualities will be thoroughly compared. I will compare them through the ways in which their spiritualities seem to diverge or converge at the phenomenological level. I will seek both similarities and differences as important data, allowing each spirituality to be articulated in its own right. The findings on Dogen's Zen and John's spirituality indicate both similarities and differences in their goals, their approaches to Ultimate Reality, and their practices.

However, while I am comparing these two mystical accounts, I will conclude that their spiritualities are different in kind. Their 'difference,' is due to their different spiritual foundation. In other words, the fundamental difference is that they are based on a different 'ultimate reality.' For John, Ultimate Reality is God, whereas for Dogen's Zen, it is the "Buddha-nature" or "Void." In doing this, I will also suggest my own view by saying that there is a great deal of continuity on the surface as well as discontinuity beneath.

Moreover, utilizing basic phenomenological categories, I will attempt to offer accounts of those features which are true to the descriptions provided by both John and Dogen, and suggest that these mystical features are different from non-mystical experiences. That is, Ultimate Reality cannot be grasped through intellectual understanding, but rather through personal and direct experience or intuitive apprehension. Life and meditation or contemplations are inseparable.

I. Anthropology Compared

A) Human Nature:

1) God's Image vs Buddha-Nature

As we examined in the previous chapters concerning the anthropologies of St John of the Cross and Dogen, both describe the ego as regarding itself as the center of existence. Further, both emphasize one's innate spiritual quality and potential. Dogen views self-nature as dynamic, it is "void," and the "Buddha-nature". It has the power to realize itself. It is realized through direct seeing. On the other hand, St. John sees human nature as "God's image". Following the story of the Bible, John depicts a human

being as created in the image of God, that is, a person who possesses divine qualities, and is destined to become God by participation. The true vocation of a human being is to participate in the life of the holy Trinity. There is in a human being an openness to transcendence, to God.¹

Both John and Dogen agree that there is an essential nature of the soul or true-self. and they emphasize that one's true nature is free from duality. In Dogen, when a person realizes his true self-nature, there is no separation between subject and object, between oneself and the other, whereas John believes that one can become 'original man' like an Adam before the fall. Adam and Eve, before the fall were unified with God. The Scholastics called their condition the state of innocence or the state of integrity or the state of original justice. St. Thomas said that Adam was truly contemplative.² Thus both authors emphasize the fact that we should return to our original nature in order to be a true human being

Concerning that true nature, both Dogen and John use a mirror as a metaphor to illustrate the state of one's true nature. In Dogen a clear mirror is a metaphor for the Void or Emptiness, without limitation, attachment, discrimination, and duality. All Buddha-nature is Emptiness. St. John also speaks of the soul as a mirror that reflects the glory of God, the brightness of the Lord. For St. John, when a Christian mystic looks into a mirror, into his or her own mind and heart, he reflects God's image. For Dogen, when he looks into his mind or mirror, he sees his true or self-nature.

Further, both Dogen and St. John not only emphasize the innate human essential nature, they also insist that human beings have the capacity for self-transcendence. The experience of feelings of "emptiness" or "enlightenment" in Dogen, and the experience of feelings of "unity" or "oneness" in St. John suggest that a human being has the capacity for self-transcendence. St. John used the term "becoming one with Christ" or the term "union." If the self is renounced, then a human being as divine image, may

¹As Hellenistic reflection in philosophical theology turned from the subject of God to that of the human being, the human person as image of God takes on an inner core of spiritual substance. Cited in Julia Ching, "Paradigms of the Self in Buddhism and Christianity," *Buddhist Christian Studies*, 4 (1984), 33. According to Boethius, human soul is "an individual substance of a rational nature." St. Thomas Aquinas further developed this definition to explain that "individual substance" is that which is complete, subsists by itself, and is separated from others.

²William Johnston, *Mystical Theology: The Science of Love*, 145.

become transformed by grace and become like God. Dogen used the metaphor of a drop of water in the ocean becoming a part of the ocean to express this transcendental aspect.

However, both authors differ in achieving their goal. In order to achieve true-self, Dogen insists that one needs to “forget oneself”. In this regard, the way to be a “true-self” is to “forget the self”. On the other hand, for John since the soul is by nature the image of God, it should return to its original state achieved by unifying with God. John insists that this state is essentially self-unified and pure. John comments: **“Porgue en la sustancia del alma, donde ni el centro del sentido ni el demonio puede llegar, pasa esta fiesta del Espiritu Santo; y por tanto, tanto mas segura, sustancial y deleitable, cuanto mas interior ella es, porque cuanto mas interior es, es mas pura.”** This feast takes place in the substance of the soul, where neither the center of the senses nor the devil can reach. Therefore, the more secure, substantial, and delightful it is the more interior it is, because the more interior it is, the purer it is.³

For John interiorization, sinking into the depth of the soul, is a return to the primitive state of the soul, which may be seen as the return to the state of “the Garden of Eden” which in Dogen’s terminology would be called true-self. Thus the interiorization of the soul through unification with God is a return to the essential nature of the soul. Merton points out that this true self is constituted by God at the center of one’s being. God “begins to live in me,” Merton explains, “not only as my creator, but as my other and true self.” This true self remains ultimately as hidden and unknown as God; it too can only be known apophatically, in darkness and in trust.⁴

2) Human Nature as Impermanence

Although the human self is seen as intrinsic potential “self nature” both Dogen and John, agree on the fact that a human being is impermanent by nature. In John’s writings there is no word which strictly speaking has the same meaning as ‘impermanence’. However, since John’s mystical theology assumes that a human being is a mortal and temporal being, it echoes with the concept of “impermanence.” To say that man is

³Padre Silverio de Santa Teresa, Ed, O.C.D, *Living Flame of Love*, 2nd ed, (Burgos: El Monte Carmelo, 1940), F 1, 9.

⁴Belden C. Lane, “Prayer Without Language in the Apophatic Tradition,” *Studia Mystica*, vol 17, no 2, (1996), 15.

created is to say that he is a creature subject to mortality. The doctrine of creation is the biblical 'no' to eternalism. Since man is created he is doomed to perish. The doctrine of man's creaturehood is the biblical stand against eternalism. In the Bible, there is the metaphor of dust. The word 'dust' is a symbol for the fact that man bears the nature of created things. Just as created things perish, so man perishes. Following the biblical passage of the creation of human beings, John believes that there is no creature which has no end. In this respect, when John speaks of existence of an immortal soul or unique self, it is in actuality emotionally expressing an experience rather than asserting an ontological theory.

In this regard Barth has well stated the characteristic of the Christian concept of human creaturehood.

Creaturely reality means reality on the basis of **creatio ex nihilo**, creation out of nothing. Where nothing exists-and not a kind of primal matter-then through God there has come into existence that which is distinct from Him. . . Everything outside God is held constantly by God over nothingness. Creaturely nature means existence in time and space, existence with a beginning and end, existence that becomes, in order to pass away again. Once it was and once it will no longer be. . . the creature is threatened by the possibility of nothingness and of destruction, which is excluded by God -and only by God. If a creature exists, it is only maintained in its mode of existence if God so wills. If He did not so will, nothingness would inevitably break from all sides. The creature itself could not rescue and preserve itself.⁵

This doctrine of **creatio ex nihilo** implies the impermanence of all things apart from the Creator who maintains them by the power of His word in existence. It is doctrine that best expresses the truth of man's creaturehood. It is this doctrine teaches that humans are ontologically **anatman** (Buddhist language) in conformity with John's view of human beings. As they were created out of nothing by His power, so they vanish into nothingness at His word. As all things, including humans, have been created out of nothing, so all things, including humans, stand **vis-à-vis** the threat of non-being. To be created means, in a John's context, that no thing have any intrinsic being; beings exist only by virtue of their inter-relatedness with other beings. The traditional Catholic formulation that things exist only insofar as they are related to God, may in this context

⁵Karl Barth, Dogmatics in Outline, (London: S.C.M. Press, 1949), 55.

be understood in the sense that inter-relatedness is the ultimate condition for being among all beings insofar as they are. Recognition of this characteristic of creaturely being in John's mysticism corresponds to the concept expressed by Dogen's **anitya** and leaves no room for a notion of eternalism.

By contrast, for Dogen, his metaphysical claim that all things are impermanent is rooted in the teaching of the Buddha.⁶ The Buddha emphasized the impermanence of phenomena and the absence of any ultimate enduring nature to anything. Thus for Dogen the self is no less impermanent or transient than the world. Thus one is nothing other than one's change; to exist as anything is impermanence.

However, although John's view seems to support Dogen's view of 'self', there is a difference between the two. John is really expressing the basic Christian doctrine that God's creative activity sustains reality in existence. In John's language, God gives being to creatures as a loan. In John, there is an ontological dependence of the finite world on God. It means that created beings have no independent ontological status. But it does not deny that created beings have individual identity; it simply precludes the idea that this separate reality is ontologically autonomous.

On the other hand, Dogen has elaborated the concept of impermanence in a two-fold way. First, impermanence identifies the character of human existence, and is the source of suffering. On the other hand, if rightly understood, impermanence is actually that which makes liberation possible. Human beings, like the existence of all things, are impermanent, and thus in the process of dissolution.

According to Dogen, this idea of impermanence leads to anxiety and fear of loss, and especially the loss of one's own life: "Our present body, we should realize, consists of a temporary union of the four elements and the five aggregates. Therefore, we are always afflicted with the eight kinds of suffering."⁷ Thus for Dogen, the metaphysical claims of 'impermanence' provide an explanation of both the problem of

⁶Dogen uses the boat analogy to point out the illusion of recognizing the impermanent as something permanent. If one keeps his eyes on his "boat" (turn to himself) and ceases to follow external dharmas (things), he will realize that he and all dharmas are without permanent self and thus awaken from the illusion that his own self is permanent. In *Bendwa*, Dogen explains to refute the so-called Senika heresy, which insists that while the body is perishable the mind-nature or self is immutable.

⁷Dogen, *Zen Master Dogen: An Introduction with Selected Writings*, trans by Yuho Yokoi, (New York: WeatherHill, 1976), 73.

human beings and its solution.

3) Human Dilemma: Original Sin vs Ignorance

In addition to being impermanent by nature, there is another fact concerning the human status and that is the problem of human dilemmas. Both Dogen and John agree on the fact that a human being is defiled by attachments or inordinate desires. Both authors agree that the soul or the mind is attached to inordinate desires or cravings. Thus the problem is that the unenlightened human being exists with mental defilements and disordered priorities. Both describe the unenlightened person as unfree, deluded, constantly craving, and forever unsatisfied. They agree regarding the central psychological problem of the un-reformed or un-awakened mind, which is characterized as attachment. This is a fundamental problem which all human beings face. Consequently, a self grasps all things and at the same time a self is captured by these objects.

Thus both Dogen and John agree on the fact that the problem is one of self deception. When man acknowledges this status as “self-attachment” as a problem he can enter the realm of religion and undertake a true quest for his self.

In Dogen, this self-attachment means that the self exists within a matrix of subject-object duality. As Buddhism generally recognized, Dogen states such a human reality as delusive passion, i.e., as those mental functions which disturb the mind and heart such as covetousness, anger, ignorance, and false views. Dogen’s sketch of the human predicament centers upon the interdependent functioning of the aggregates that creates the illusion of “self.” This produces karmic fruits, which, in turn, reinforce the incorrect view of the “self.” Thus a man’s ordinary self knows itself only as object and thus does not know the true self. Therefore, according to Dogen, the origin of delusive passion is illusion, which causes suffering; that is man has lost sight of his Buddha-nature, True-Self. Because of illusion, man not only offends against his True Self, but he thinks of all things as dualistically opposed. Viewing things in terms of subject and object, he is deluded and tortured by his passions.

On the other hand, John asserts that we have disordered wills and have appropriated life-experiences through various forms of deluded egoism. John calls such a state the

“old man” (**hombre viejo**).⁸ The old man is the morally imperfect person who has given self over to inordinate attachments for the things of this world. John says that these sins are a result of man’s original sin. The old man lives in the “fallen” state that has plagued humanity since the sin of Adam. John calls the person in this fallen condition “animal man,” “earthly man,” “sensual man,” “man born of flesh,” and “sick man.”⁹

Thus, both agree that the origin of a defiled mind is a falling away from the true source of self, and that this is a fall from man’s original state. In discussing original sin, Dom A. Graham suggests that the problem is that man identifies the separative ego, which is separated from the true self, as the true self. Thus the false ego, when it sees itself as the center, tries to interpret everything in terms of itself.¹⁰ Thomas Merton explains that the original sin is related to our identity. He states:

The tragedy is that our consciousness is totally alienated from this inmost ground of our identity. And in Christian mystical tradition, this inner split and alienation is the real meaning of original sin.¹¹

Thus the difference between Dogen and John is that for John the concept a false self is caused by original sin, while Dogen recognizes that the illusion of the false self is caused by ignorance. Dogen does not believe that man has fallen. In Dogen, there is no such concept of “original sin.” Man does not need a redeemer; he must awaken from his dream state. Rather, man is ignorant of his real nature.¹²

For Dogen, however, ignorance does not mean simply “not knowing.” It is not merely an intellectual lack of knowledge. Rather ignorance pertains to our fundamental attitude toward life or experience of life. In this regard, ignorance involves duality. The basic duality is that of the ego and that which the ego conceives of as totally other than itself. The ego, however, not only conceives of itself as separate but also as final, as ultimately responsible for all deeds, thoughts, and speech. The ego takes itself to be an absolutely independent entity. This is the fundamental problem of human existence:

⁸A.1.5.7.

⁹“Animal man”: A. 2. 19. 11; “Earthly man”: A. 3. 26. 3. “Sensual man”: A. 3. 26. 3,4; “Man born of flesh”: A. 3. 26. 7; “Sick man”: N. 2. 16. 10-12. Cf D’Souza Gregory, *The New Man According to Saint John of the Cross*, (Mysore: Printed at Kadambari, 1986), 2.

¹⁰Dom Aelred Graham, *Zen Catholicism*, (New York: Marcourt, Brace & World, 1963), 47.

¹¹Thomas Merton, *Zen and the Birds of Appetite*, (New York: New Directions, 1968), 12.

¹²William Johnston, *Mystical Theology: The Science of Love*, 206-207.

duality. Everything is seen to be in opposition to something else. In this respect, ignorance is as Suzuki defines “Ignorance is an other name for logical dualism.”¹³

B) Self-Nature:

1) God’s Creature vs Dependent Co-Origination

Moreover, there is another fundamental difference between these two authors regarding the concept of the self. In John’s mysticism, a human being is understood to be created by God and is characterized as basically an ontological entity. This is essentially what John means by “soul” which exists as a continuing unity and identity of self-awareness.

Since John’s concept is based on the doctrine of God’s creation, one is no longer nothing or at one with nothingness. In this sense, the human soul insofar as it is a reality created by God is inherently disjunctive. Ultimate reality for John is a subject distinct from us. God as the creator sets up as a concern an essential split between the maker and the made. Since God has created something there is something instead of nothing.

Indeed, the doctrine of God’s creation attempts to explain how God could both create all things and be absolutely distinct from them in nature. Thus the doctrine of God’s creation provides a dualism fundamentally distinct from the monism of Dogen’s Zen. And its dualism is foundationally irreconcilable with the monism of Dogen’s Zen. Louth writes:

The doctrine of **creation ex nihilo** implies that the most fundamental ontological divide is between God and the created order, to which later both soul and body belong. The soul has nothing in common with God; there is not kinship between it and the divine. Its kinship is with its body, in virtue of their common creation, rather than with God. Contemplation can no longer realize a kinship with the divine.¹⁴

Finally, this notion of God implied the conjunctive role of the individual. Thus, according to John, a human’s fundamental nature has no ultimate role to play in the creation and preservation of realities. No ultimate self-realization would reveal oneself

¹³D. T. Suzuki, *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism*, (New York: Grove, 1964), 52.

¹⁴Andrew Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 76-77.

to be the originator of objective realities. The self as a creature of God, needs divine help and sustenance, and is a sinner requiring Divine mercy. The self cannot be changed by greater effort. In this regard God is the absolute end of Man. Even by death the self cannot be wiped out. There is no escaping the self. Not even death can free one from being what one was created to be by God.¹⁵

However, while John's notion of the self is based on God's creation, Dogen's notion of the self is based on the doctrine of **pratitya-samutpada**, dependent co-origination. The doctrine of dependent co-origination describes a process of efficient cause. The process itself has no cause, nor does it depend in any way on the Buddhas who merely reveal it to us. Even the gods and demons are caught up in this circle of life, and, along with animals and plant life, reincarnate in either the upper heavenly realms or the lower purgational realms.

Pratitya-samutpada explains the process of the cause in twelve steps. Like the snake biting its own tail, the cause leads back to the beginning of the cycle. Each causal cycle explains one life, in other words, one enduring identity from its inception and birth on through not only death but also future lives. The first link in the chain is ignorance. Ignorance is also the effect resulting from the last link in the chain, which is aging and dying, both in this and future lives. The Buddha's teaching for this karmic plight is to begin at the beginning and overcome ignorance with knowledge of the nature of suffering and release as in the four Noble Truths. When ignorance ceases, the first link in the chain produces no second link, and so on until there is no dying, death, or rebirth, and one is finished with samsaric existence.

This notion of dependent co-origination was an answer as to why humans apprehended phenomena and themselves as enduring identities. Instead of enduring things or entities, there was a process of efficient cause that gave rise to an experience of enduring natures. They are all empty of substance and being. Therefore, Dogen, following this doctrine of Buddhism in general, believes that there is no underlying substance as in the Aristotelian sense of the term; rather all is in a state of flux governed by a primordial, desire-driven way of being aware

¹⁵Emyr Vaughan Thomas, "D. Z. Phillips, Self-Renunciation and The Finality of Death," Religious Studies, vol 28, (1992),38.

2) Substantial Nature vs Non-Substantial Nature

Thus since John's doctrine of self is based on God's creatures, it implies that there is a genuine distinction between each self and all other selves since God created different entities, while Dogen's doctrine has no distinction between the self and Reality.

Following St. Thomas Aquinas, John's theology implies "individual substance" which is complete, subsists by itself, and is separated from others.¹⁶

For John, with Aristotle, an individual is regarded as a separate being from other things. The body and soul are distinct but integrated; a whole human. Souls, like bodies, are apart from other souls; they are disjunctive. However, most importantly, this disjunctive nature is not merely an appearance as Dogen regards. It is a fundamental presupposition about the basic, defining nature of a human person. A human being as a soul is considered as an individual entity. A human soul has been made as he is, and always will be. In other words, the soul characterizes a person as ultimately grounded in distinctive individuality.

The individual as a human being is the subject of a sentence not its predicate. The individual is regarded as something substantial. Thus, according to John, a human being is conceived of as a person who has an inherently unique, singular, and separate presence in a world of many such presences. This distinctive nature was not an appearance concealing a different ultimate nature, it is the foundational presupposition about the basic, defining nature of a human person. The soul, unlike Dogen's was not based metaphysically on identity with God, but rather on its distinctive uniqueness.

Thus John's notion of the self, cannot be identified with Dogen's notion of the self. Here, in John's thought, the self is understood dualistically. The self is shaped by rational thinking, through which it observes the stream of consciousness-the various sensations, emotions, desires and conceptions. Thus reason plays a central role which objectifies the self and places it over against every other reality, including the world and God.

By contrast, Dogen see a person as a no-self. Dogen's Zen is a religion of **anatman**,

¹⁶According to Boethius, a human soul is "an individual substance of a rational nature." St Thomas Aquinas further developed this definition to explain that "individual substance" is that which is complete, subsists by itself. Julia Ching, "Paradigms of the Self in Buddhism and Christianity," Buddhist-Christian

or no-self. Following the doctrine of dependent co-origination, there is no real enduring and identical self that passes through life's many diverse experiences. According to Dogen, what we call "self" is only a temporary, momentarily changing compound. There is no substantive individual (**anatta**) for the individual is ultimately one with all other individuals. Such characteristics of the interconnectedness of all entities are illustrated in Fa-tsang's poem:

In each and every reflection of any one mirror you will find all the reflections of all the other mirrors, together with the specific Buddha image in each, without omission or misplacement.¹⁷

What makes this mutual interpenetration of all selves and entities in the total universe possible is the fact that "All is Mind," Mind only; and equally importantly, no self or entity has any self-inclosed, independent reality of its own. Hui-neng's poem expresses the nature of the reality as the Mind:

There is no Bodhi-tree
Nor stand of mirror bright.
Since all is void,
Where can the dust alight?¹⁸

That is to say, Hui-neng did not allow even the mirror of the bright, empty Wisdom-mind. However, this "All is Mind" assertion is not intended to destroy mental individuality (selfness) but to enhance it. It gives our little individual minds the assurance that we, as spiritual-mental beings, are not orphaned in the universe, but are integral to it, part and parcel of a spiritual whole.

Thus there is no distinction between disjunctive-conjunctive duality in Dogen while John sees a person as an individual unity which is divided into body and mind. Dogen views self-nature as dynamic, it is "void," and the "Buddha-nature".

In this case, all humans, either in this life or more likely in a future existence, are in emptiness. Thus this doctrine of the no-self is allegedly the fruit of the effort to analyze

Studies, vol 4, (1984), 33.

¹⁷Garma C. C, Chang, *The Buddhist Teaching of Totality*, 24.

¹⁸D.T. Suzuki, *The Zen Doctrine of No-Mind*, (London: Rider, 1949), 22.

individual existence-not just human, but all elements of existence. Hence, while John's theology strengthened the individual's substantiality which tending to a dualism of soul and body, Dogen's Zen insists on the individual's lack of substantiality, thus, strengthening a sense that there is no self.

In seemingly stark contrast with this notion of the self, John's mysticism is understood to affirm the worth of the individual person, construed at least somehow or other as a self, uniquely created by God, whereas since Dogen's notion of the self is based on dependent co-origination, it is a non-anthropological perspective. In other words, self cannot be confined only to persons

Paul Tillich, in his earnest effort to understand Buddhism in relation to Christianity, finally concluded that the quintessential difference was just at this point: that Buddhism was fundamentally determined by an ultimate norm of the "formless self," as Tillich puts it, whereas Christianity was committed to the value of individual selves in communion with God.

However, the self that Dogen is talking about is the self that has attained realization; it is by no means the ordinary self. In this respect, Masumi Shimizu pointed out that the No-self doctrine should not be understood merely in a literal sense. Rather it should be understood with the help of the Emptiness doctrine of Nagarjuna, which emphasizes the dialectical identity of **Samsara** and **Nirvana**.¹⁹ Nagarjuna says, "The self is not different from the stages (**skandhas**), nor identical with them; (there is no self without the states), nor is it to be considered non-existent. "The Religious significance of 'emptiness' is comparable to that of 'no-self', for both are expressions of dependent co-origination."²⁰

And also: "The self does exist, the Buddhas have declared; they have taught the 'no-self' doctrine too; they have finally taught that there is neither self nor non—self."²¹ Murti writes about these dialectical characters of the self in Buddhism:

Buddha's teaching is adjusted to the need of the taught as the medicine of the skilled physician is to the malady of the patient. He does not blindly. . . prescribe

¹⁹Julia Ching, "Paradigms of the Self in Buddhism and Christianity," 42-3.

²⁰Gregory K. Ornatowski, "Transformations of "Emptiness": On the Idea of Sunyata and The Thought of Abe and The Kyoto School of Philosophy," 95.

²¹T. R. V. Murti, The Central Philosophy of Buddhism, (London, Allen & Unwin, 1960), 206-7.

the remedy to all and sundry. He corrects those with a nihilistic tendency by affirming the self, as there is continuity of karma and its result; to those addicted to the dogmatic belief in a changeless substantial **atman** and who cling to it, he teaches the 'no-self doctrine' as an antidote; his ultimate teaching is that there is neither self nor not-self as these are subjective devices.²²

In sum, the question of the existence of the self must be answered from two different standpoints. At the common sense level, Dogen does not deny the existence of the self. But from the viewpoint of liberation and Emptiness, Dogen denies the **atman**, the self as a permanent and unitary being. Thus it must again be emphasized that such Dogen's terms a no-self, and no mind should in this connection be taken as existential and experiential, rather than as metaphysical. Their ontological significance must be set aside for the moment. Dogen's paradigm, thus, focuses more in accord with the Buddhist dharma, or more specifically the notion of "thusness."

John's paradigm bases its metaphysics on how we as individuals conventionally experience ourselves and our world in day-to-day life. To begin a metaphysics here is to begin with ourselves as we live and breath, work and play in a world that we generally do not experience as having ourselves created. It is consistent with both everyday experience and what would seem to be the primordial dualism of our cosmos.

3) Human Body: Dualistic vs Cosmic

Concerning the concept of human nature in Dogen and John, there is an another important theme that we should address, that is the understanding of the human body. For both Dogen and John the self is a unity of body and mind. For John, a human being is a soul as a "bipartite unity" which consists of both a sensual and a spiritual entity. A human soul, thus, is distinguished between mind and body. However, beneath the complex divisions into various faculties, passions, appetites, and so on, there is fundamental unity of a human person.

On the other hand, Dogen regards body and mind as both constituent principles of the person, so difficult to separate that they can be said to be substantially united in the whole; the corporal body is equal to the mind as a principle which constitutes the real essence of the person. Moreover, both of them believe that the body is not merely a

²²Ibid., 207.

necessary part of a human being as a whole, but also that the body is very important because it affects a person's spiritual development. Thus for both Dogen and John, the body is essential to the mind as well as the soul. In John, it is first of all through the body and its sensory faculties that the soul becomes acquainted with God. It is the medium of the soul²³

However, there is a fundamental difference between Dogen and John concerning the concept of the human body. First of all, it is important to point out that Dogen does not think of body and mind in dualistic terms. Unlike John's teaching, Dogen does not oppose mind and body, while John sees them as opposites in terms of the spiritual process. For Dogen, they are inter-dependent and belong to each other in an integral manner. Equally fundamental to man's existence are the polar coordination and interdependence of body and mind. One cannot exist without the other. Actually, the 'self' that is seeing is not merely the mind, not merely the body, but the unity of body and mind that is the whole self.

In his fascicle "**Shinjin Gakudo**," Dogen contends that the human body is undivided in self and other, the entire world of the ten directions. The human body comprises not only the union point of the self-qua-subject and the self-qua-object, but also the place where self and other, individual and environment encounter each other. Thus the body-mind unity is extended to the the world as a whole. The body, mind, and world are so interconnected with one another that making a boundary between them is impossible.

Thus Dogen emphasizes that the human body is an important means in and through which understanding and enlightenment are achieved. Thus for Dogen, the human body is a primary locus of realizing the true self, while John does not consider the body as a means of realization. This is due to his metaphysical presupposition about the human body, in which body-mind unity is extended to a cosmic dimension.

The peculiarity of the body in Dogen's Zen is expressed in meditation which is considered an almost indispensable prerequisite for obtaining enlightenment. Meditation

²³We should notice that John is not perfectly consistent and occasionally uses the term "soul" to refer only to the spiritual part of the person. Thus the term "soul" has two meaning in John: as a whole person and as a spiritual part of a person.

is not merely a mental and inner discipline, but it is accomplished in unison with the body. Body and mind cooperate. It indicates the wholeness of the psychosomatic “gestalt” of the disciple sitting in meditation. Therefore, the function of the body is crucial in Dogen’s Zen, Dogen states in this regard:

That body-and-mind comes to us and expresses as the truth our own body-and-mind. At just the moment of speaking, the state of expressing the truth comes and expresses our own body-and-mind. It may be that with this life we can express the body which is the accumulation of past lives.²⁴

Dogen’s emphasis on the primacy of the body is expressed in a statement such as: we quest with the body, practice with the body, attain enlightenment with the body, and understand with the body. However, such assertions about the body are not meant to place the physical above the mental in any metaphysical scheme of things, but rather to reject one’s ordinary ways of thinking which characterize “subjective” and “objective.”

Moreover, while John sees the human body as “corrupted” by original sin but at the same time as the temple of Holy Spirit, Dogen speaks of two kinds of body: the “naked” body” and “true body.” Contrary to John, Dogen does not see the body as “corrupted” by original sin. Although Dogen agrees that our “naked” body should be purified, he does not see the human body as “corrupted.”

On the other hand, concerning the body, John makes a clear distinction not between body and soul, but between the sensory and spiritual parts of a person, while Dogen makes a distinction between body and mind. However, for John, the sensory part of the soul is “inferior” to the “spiritual” which is said to be “superior” and “interior.” The spiritual part is superior because it possesses those faculties which deal with the universal aspects of reality which must be intellectually abstracted from sense experience, while the sensory part is the lower part of the human being because it is concerned with material things. Thus the core or the center of the soul lies in its spiritual part.

Consequently, in John’s mystical theology, contrary to Dogen’s, the body is not a central concern. John considers the body to be of secondary importance. Although John

²⁴Dogen’s *Shobogenzo*, “Gyoji 2,” Gudo Wafu Nishijima trans, 182.

does not emphasize a body-soul dichotomy, he focuses upon the basic disharmony of the total body-person because of original sin. This is based on his theological doctrine that a human's physical nature is "weakened" and "corrupted" by Adam's fall.

Here again we find that John's theology has been strongly influenced by Catholic tradition as well as Neoplatonism which overemphasized the dualistic aspect of human existence, the tension between spirit and flesh. The dualistic tendency, propounded in an extreme form by Plato and upheld in a mitigated version by Aristotle, has widely influenced John's mysticism. However, John does not accept the "Platonic" view of the soul sharply distinguished from the body and imprisoned by it, as Thomson alleges.²⁵

Here we can find fundamentally different views in Dogen and John regarding the human body as a means of spiritual process. John rejects the body for being of a sensible nature so that it cannot quest for the vision of God, while Dogen emphasizes the human body as a central means for realizing the Buddha-nature. Dogen regards the human body as a potential means to achieve the Buddha-nature. Thus, concerning the method of spiritual process, John has a tendency to go 'from mind to body,' while Dogen goes 'from body to mind.'²⁶

Further, John recommends the practice of emptying in order to achieve union. In this regard, Alain Cugno is right in stating that the mortification of the body is not a means of reaching God, but is the "consequence" of the soul's love for God.²⁷ Here we can see that John's method of purification is rational and dualistic. Here the body is considered as passive, and is to be mortified in order to be a dwelling place for God. Here the dualistic relationship between **psyche** and **soma** is plagued with problems of interaction.

On the other hand, however, Dogen sees purification primarily as the cessation of ignorance which leads to the cessation of all disturbing and mental activities. Because of the interdependence of all things, the end of ignorance brings about the end of the inordinate desire for life. Thus for Dogen, purification is primarily recognized as "emptying the mind," while John emphasizes on mortification of the body. Thus the

²⁵Colin Thompson, *The Poet and The Mystic*, 158-9.

²⁶It is important to note here that in some Hebraic thought there is a closer relationship between body and mind than is sometimes found in the thought of St. John of the Cross.

²⁷Alain Cugno, *Saint John of the Cross: Reflections on Mystical Experience*, 126.

difference is that in Dogen, the body is regarded as of central importance while John considers it as secondary, and indirect.

C) Metaphysical Presupposition: God-Relational vs Emptiness-Non-Dual

The reason for there being a different concept of human nature between Dogen and John lies in the different metaphysical presuppositions of their world view. These different metaphysical presuppositions affect one's experience, goal, and salvation. The basic difference between Dogen and John is so clear cut and go great that it seems that no reconciliation can be affected. In regard to the differences between Buddhism and Christianity, Latourette describes:

Both Buddhism and Christianity cannot be true. Christians must be grateful for whatever in Buddhism is akin to their faith and for lives that, judged by Christian standards, are noble. Yet if they are adequately informed on both Buddhism and the gospel, they must be aware of striking, basic, and irreconcilable contradictions.²⁸

The primary difference between Dogen and John is that the latter bases his theology on being and non-being relations, while Dogen's Zen is based on "Absolute Nothingness", which transcends both being and non-being. We cannot overlook the basic differences in this respect between the Dogen and John positions.

Concerning anthropological presuppositions, Dogen believes that a human's predicament is bound by conditioned existence in samsaric life. Dogen emphasizes the impermanence of phenomena and the absence of any ultimate enduring nature to anything, namely, 'emptiness.' Thus Dogen sees empirical objects as appearance only, as names and forms arising from the particular of each moment of awareness, whereas St John presumes that everyday phenomena have essences, and presumes that all existences are enduring entities. This means that there is no eternal substrate of any kind in the realm of physical, mental or mystical phenomena. In this regard, Dogen follows Nagarjuna's distinction of reality:

The Buddha's teaching of the Dharma is based on two truths:

²⁸Kenneth Scott Latourette, Introducing Buddhism, (New York: Friendship, 1956), 55.

A truth of worldly convention
And an Ultimate truth.²⁹

On the level of ultimacy, there is no “entity” that persists throughout all these transformations, there is no irreducible continually persisting atomic particle that undergirds all the processes of nature, and there is no soul or mind that has an eternal existence above this flux of emergence. There is nothing, all is voidness.

At the conventional level, the level of ordinary life, since we have sense organs we have phenomena through which we have sense experience. At this level, what we experience is relative and is not of absolute existence but an experience of phenomena.

Emptiness and the phenomenal world are not two distinct things. they are, rather, two characterizations of the same thing...to view emptiness in this way is to see it neither as an entity nor as unreal-it is to see it as conventionally real.³⁰

According to Dogen, on the non-substantiality of existence, everything is nothing but a collection of impersonal aggregates. Here, the aggregate is a fact of existence in so far as it is built up of units of others. Thus the fundamental fact of human existence is a human with other beings. Robinson describes the concept of existence in Buddhism in which existence is determined by its context. He writes:

The term exist has been used here in two senses: (1) to occur at one time after arising and before ceasing and (2) to exist at all times without beginning or end. The second sense is impossible given the Buddhist position that no substance exists apart from its modifications. The Upanisads say that the clay is real and the pots are mere modifications created by “naming.” The Buddhist says that no clay ever exists apart from particular forms, so the unchanging substratum is unattested and does not exist. Existence in the first sense means manifested existence, and no form of Buddhism has ever denied that common sense things exist in this relative way, though there has been continual apprehension lest this admission lead people to believe in the second, absolute kind of being.³¹

Thus, when Dogen says that self is **anitya**, **anatman**, and **dukkha**, this means existence

²⁹Nagarjuna, trans and commentary by Jay L. Garfield, *Mulamadhyamakakarikas*, Chapt. 24, vol 8, (New York: Oxford Press, 1995), 296.

³⁰*Ibid.*, 305.

³¹Richard H. Robinson and Willard L. Johnson, *The Buddhist Religion: A Historical Introduction*, 3rd ed, (Belmont, California: Wadsworth Pub, 1982), 29.

in the sense of the contingency and flux of existential life. What is denied is existence apart from the existential flux of life. While John finds 'existence' to be dependent on God's creation, Dogen finds 'existence' to be dependent on the contingency and part-whole construction of its presence in individual awareness events.

D) Resolution for True-Self: God-Dependent vs Self-Dependent

In resolution both Dogen and John agree that the problem of man's self can never be properly solved in any rational manner. Thus both agree on the need for the reformation or awakening of the spiritual aspirant. In fact, both describe the necessity of the awakened mind or mind being reformed. Both claim that the resolution of the problem requires an emptying of the self, and with it a turnabout from the standpoint of reason and its logical thinking. Thus both traditions use similar topics of meditation to induce similar mental and spiritual states of awareness, such as human nothingness.

For instance, "Emptiness" in Dogen's terms and "dark night" in John's terms denote that the essence of one's being and Ultimate Reality are beyond concepts and knowledge. Consequently, man cannot deal with his ultimate existential problem in a rational manner by means of cognition or reason. In Dogen's "Emptiness" and John's "Union with Christ," apprehension comes through intuitive and personal experience.

However, having different anthropological assumptions, Dogen and St John differ in solving the problem. Concerning the resolution of the human dilemma, De Silva describes the fundamental difference between Christianity and Buddhism:

In Buddhism Dukkha is finitude and finitude is Dukkha; they are identical. Existence and evil are the same. In Buddhism the basic malady of man is finiteness and the suffering it implies. In Christianity the malady is sin. So the Buddhist quest is for deliverance from finiteness, from existence itself. For Christianity salvation is from sin on which suffering is dependent. When sin is conquered the structure of finiteness will change and suffering will be transformed. But Christianity knows that such a transformation of suffering is only partly possible in space and time.³²

Following this Buddhist assumption, Dogen presupposes the basic malady of man is finiteness and the suffering it implies, while John teaches the malady of sin. So the

³²Lynn A. De Silva, "The Christian Solution to the Problem of Man in Relation to Buddhism," a paper presented at A Consultation on Buddhist-Christian Encounter, Edited by U. Kyaw Than, (Rangoon: 1961), 61.

Dogen quest is for deliverance from finiteness, from existence itself, while for John salvation is from sin on which suffering is dependent. When sin is conquered the structure of finiteness will change and suffering will be transformed. In this regard, the two mystics offer opposing solutions to humanity's problems.

In Dogen the very duality of subject and object, which is the foundation of human reason, is itself problematic. Thus the "emptiness" or the "Buddha Nature" can be reached through prajna, transcendental wisdom, which is obtained through meditative experience.

By contrast, for John, true-self can be achieved through the divinization of man. It is necessary in the first place to bear in mind that man is essentially a creature. Since John's metaphysical presupposition is based on God, as the Ultimate Reality, it, therefore, espouses a solution to the problem of sin that lies outside the created world. For John, the narcissism of the "old man" has to die so that the transformed, self-giving new creation may emerge. Thus, the problem can be solved by stopping the disordered will from grasping for gratifications which perpetuate our narcissistic illusion, and by overcoming the false self in order to provide us with a spiritual posture through which infused grace elevates the soul to the true end for which it was created. And in order to achieve this, the soul should cultivate detachment by letting go of everything as it arises. Thus John's spirituality requires asceticism, recollection, and meditation since God can be grasped only through love, union, and contemplation

True human development is ultimately a process of divinization and when the soul is completely emptied and egoistically "lost" unto itself, it finds its true self as that of being immersed in the divine mystery. For John, this is true human fulfillment. We become true human, fully human, only as we become God by sharing in the divine life.

On the other hand, since his metaphysical foundation is based on the Buddha-nature, Dogen's spirituality has everything to do with breaking ignorance and seeing impersonal aggregates through zazen. In Dogen there is no concept of salvation. What prevents a person from fulfillment and the greatest good is not sin but ignorance. Only as we rid ourselves of this delusion and arrive at **anatman** or non-self, floating in a sea of absolute non-duality of self and other, can we realize the Buddha-nature as well as True-Self. Thus spiritual discipline in Dogen aims at individual enlightenment, and it

effects not salvation but self-awakening.

Here, Dogen fundamentally differs from John in saying that the way of enlightenment is to break the cycle of ignorance. Not surprisingly, the antidote to such ignorance is insight, not obedience. Thus in Dogen, since the self is man's problem, the solution is that man must conquer the self by realizing his emptiness or true-self. Man must awake from man's problematic ego-self into "True-Self" or "Absolute Emptiness." This is a negation or death of the ordinary self which means the awakening or actualization of the "self that-is-not-self."

E) The Meaning of 'True-self' in Dogen and John

However, we can notice that the concept of true human nature or 'true-self' found in John and Dogen are different. For instances, for Dogen, 'true-self' is understood in relation to the substance of thought; thoughts are taken to be the functioning of **tathata**. In this way, **tathata** becomes equivalent to the primal or original nature, that to which one awakens when one sees into one's own mind. Even though Dogen makes references to **tathata**, he has his own term of the truth of things; namely, **genjokoan**, things being present as they are.

Therefore, Dogen has his own term for the true-self; namely, **genzokoan**, "things being present as they are." Hence, Dogen denies that there is illusion; there are only the delusions we inflict on ourselves. From this standpoint, even a dream as dream is **tathata**; if someone should take it to be other than it is, the interpretation, not the thing, is the locus of falsehood.

For Dogen, thus, the major cause of falsehood is our mistaken interpretations of what appear. The world is not fundamentally illusory; it is our own delusions that prevent us from seeing the way things are. Accordingly, we come to know the 'true-self' when we see into our own minds. Understood in this way, the True self is the metaphysical Absolute, especially as perceived in mystical experience. Here we see the convergence of a "smaller" self, or "absolute nothingness" that is identified with the universal Buddha-nature, and especially realized in mystical enlightenment.

On the other hand, for John, since he acknowledges that human self is a creature of God, the way to live an authentic human life (true self) is to live according to one's authentic "self," which is image of God, the inner core of spiritual substance. However,

the image of God became difficult after the “Fall,” because it was taken by the presence of evil. Because humanity did not follow the right order of their nature, their true self, as created by God, in God’s image, became “disordered” in its relationship to its own self and its creator. Thus for John the true self, the image of God, should be redeemed by and in Jesus Christ. As St. Paul declared, “We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the sinful body might be destroyed.” (Rom 6;6).

In comparison, it is clear that in John’s mystical account the true self is strengthened in an individual’s substantiality as God’s redeemed creature while tending to a dualism of soul and body, and Dogen’s Zen insists on an individual’s lack of substantiality, thus strengthening the non-dualistic nature of the Buddha-nature. Dogen’s teaching, thus, tends to represent the self dialectically, either as the existential self of momentary experience without any substrate, or as the metaphysical self which is one with the universe.

1) The Meaning of ‘True-Self’: Mystic vs Ordinary Sense

At this moment, however, it is important to note that the true human nature or ‘true-self’ found in mystical experience is different from our ordinary understanding of the self. Both mystics agree on the fact that our ordinary experiencing of the ‘self’ though experienced as ‘real,’ is not a ‘true-self’ experience. There is a hidden true self beyond this false one. The problem lies in the fact that man identifies and realizes his ‘false self’ as a ‘true self’. In this regard, for the mystics, ordinary experience of the self as ‘real’ is regarded as ‘untrue’ experience.

As we have seen, according to Dogen, the physical object we see through our ordinary awareness is an illusion thus not ‘true.’ Similarly, awareness of true-self is not a self-consciousness or a self-knowledge, nor is it anything akin to intellectual intuition. Rather, it is the point at which such a self and such knowledge are emptied. This self-awareness is a non-analytical knowing. It is a completely non-reflective knowing. In this regard, the meaning of the true-self in the mystics differs from non-mystical or ordinary meanings.³³

Thus in Dogen’s and John’s mystical awareness, truth is not to be understood as

³³Stephen Morris, “Beyond Christianity: Transcendentalism and Zen,” The Eastern Buddhist, vol 24, no 2

some variation from formal standards of truth, but rather as an experiential reality. For John and Dogen awareness of 'true-self' may not be connected to a conception of truth as a relationship between ideas and things, though words, ideas, and mental images may evoke the quality of truth whereby self-consciousness responds appropriately to what-is.

For example, in Dogen's account, the concept of 'true-self,' which focuses on the Buddha-nature, is not in some correspondence to sensual facts. In other words, mystical explanations often contain reference to a transcendent being or beings who are in principle inaccessible to rational analysis.³⁴ If one applies a mystic's notion of 'true-self' to his or her life, he or she will realize that the mystical understanding of 'true-self' is not abstract and theoretical, but is grounded in contemplative practice. Thus an awakening of the true-self is not by philosophical knowledge but by a total break through, by which the self turns back to the true original self, without any influence from the outside, solely on the basis of the realization of immediate experience.³⁵ In this regard a fundamental resolution goes down to the root of human nature.

Generally speaking, natural science, on the contrary, deals with objective truth, that is with a truth which is independent of whoever observes it and which inheres in the object. It is understood to be detached from the subjectivity of the observer.

Mystical awareness of true-self, on the other hand, cannot be so detached from the observer. From a scientific point of view this precludes it from being 'real truth.' However, the significance of 'true-self' in mystical awareness lies precisely in the subject's engagement with it, which does not mean that it is not objective in any sense. A very fundamental characteristic of Dogen's understanding of mystical awareness, for example, is that mystical awareness does not start from a pre-given subject who roams about in the world "perceiving" things. This unquestioned and naturalistic "subject" is essentially understood as an agent who collects data, investigates the world, judges about reality, and makes assertions about whether some statements are true or false. This is one epistemic paradigm shared by most Western epistemologies in general. In Dogen's Zen, however, the subject is seen more as an integral process in the

(Autumn 1991), 57.

³⁴Philip Clayton, "Explanation from Physics to the Philosophy of Religion," *Philosophy of Religion*, vol 26, (1989),101.

³⁵Heinrich Dumoulin, *Zen Buddhism in the 20 th Century*, 44.

constitution of the world.

For Dogen, this pre-existing subject has to undergo a vigorous investigation. In that process the subject understood as an independent individual, data-collecting center is rejected in favor of a more interrelated and integrated subjectivity whose existence is radically embedded in the so-called world of reality or objectivity world itself. In such an alternative view, “objective” can be grasped not as in relation to “subject” for the subject himself has been put into question in the first place. Thus subject is not an independent being but is seen rather as a cognitive subjectivity who in himself the “object” is an integral part.

In this regard Dogen’s notion of ‘true-self’ seems to be a direct violation of the Aristotelian notion of correspondence. When Aristotle considers the definition of truth, he speaks of the correspondence between mind and things. According to correspondence truth, the mind is the receptor of percepts and adjusts itself to what the senses report. Thus the correspondence is really between thoughts and sense experiences, not thoughts and things. Thus truth is not an entity, nor is it a property of statements. On the contrary, truth is a relationship of some sort between language and the world.

Thus according to the correspondence theory, a proposition is true if there is a fact to which it corresponds, if it expresses what is the case. As Aristotle says, “to say of what is that it is not, or of what is not that it is, is false, while to say of what is that it is, or of what is not that it is not is true.”³⁶ For example, “It is raining here now” is true if it is the case that it is raining here now; otherwise it is false. Therefore the correspondence theory does convey the central notion that language relates to the world by way of correspondence or non-correspondence.³⁷

However, there seem to be some problems in this theory of truth. First, there is uncertainty about what in the world is the basis for correspondence. In other words, truth would seem to fit with correspondence theory as long as the conventional ‘fact’ to which truth corresponds can be rendered as reality. Correspondence theory has some

³⁶Aristotle, “Metaphysics,” *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, Richard McKeon ed, (New York: Random House, 1941), Bk. 1, Chap. 7, 749.

³⁷Charles A. Baylis, “Truth,” in *Dictionary of Philosophy*, Dagobert D. Runes ed, (Totowa, New Jersey: Rowman & Allanheld, 1983), 337-338.

uncertainty about the world or fact which corresponds to language. In other words, the world or reality which corresponds to the statement is unclear, for one wants to know what about the world or reality corresponds to any given statement. An initially naïve view is that facts correspond to statements, but Sommers points out the problem with using facts when he writes:

For one primary meaning of 'fact' is "what a statement, when true, states (Strawson). Another meaning is simply "true statement." Either use presupposes a meaning for 'true'; 'fact' in either of these two senses cannot be used to define truth. It is moreover obvious that what a statement states cannot be the objective relation responsible for this truth. Those who wish to identify "something in the world" as the correspondence relation for truth, choose badly if they choose facts.³⁸

If a 'fact' is interpreted as stated by Sommers, a 'fact' cannot be in the world, and thus, cannot be a proper object for correspondence between word and world. Again, since correspondence theory supposedly relates languages and the world, it is unclear what aspect of language corresponds to the world. Also it is unclear what kind of world corresponds to language. In other words, the relation between language and the world is not clear. Some one might suggest that sentences are what correspond. However this cannot be the case for there are many types of sentences such as questions, commands, and paradox.

When speaking of mystical statements, one may argue that many such statements turn out to be false, if one analyzes truth and falsity according to a correspondence theory. As already observed, since a mystic's concept of truth differs from the ordinary concept of truth, the notion of truth suggested by correspondence theory cannot be justified.

The crucial question is not whether the mystical experiences, 'true-self,' corresponds to ordinary experiences, but rather whether the statements of mystics fulfill their intended purpose. If they fulfill the mystic's intention, there are no grounds for debate about the reliability of mystical statements. This is in fundamental difference from Dogen's position. Since Dogen rejects the notion of false things, the distinction between

³⁸John S. Feinsbrg, "Truth: Relationship of Theories of Truth to Hermeneutics," *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, and The Bible*, Earl D. Radmacher and Robert D. Preus eds, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 8.

the two correspondences tends to collapse.

On the other hand, however, although mystic's awareness of the 'true-self' is different from an ordinary one, it ultimately rests on a correspondence theory. Because mystic's 'true-self,' for instances, corresponds to what is the case according to their mystical framework. Even if mystics statements are sometimes not logically coherent, such statements rest on a correspondence theory. For they were not merely presenting views they experienced as true because the experiences of 'true-self' were better (for being transcendent) than ordinary ones. Nor were they claiming to hold the tenets of the faith, for example, only because they thought such concepts cohered with one another. Instead, they claimed that what they reported corresponds to what is the case although it is not ordinary.

For instances, when Dogen and John wrote about their mystical experiences which correspond to reality, then the crucial question is whether or not they succeeded. In fairness to their statements, the interpreter should not assess what was said according to some of other theory of truth. Even though mystics' experiencing of reality is not the same as what most of us ordinarily experience, it is illegitimate to complain if some of mystics' statements do not correspond to reality, since correspondence would not have been mystics' intention.

In this regard, Pitcher has distinguished two different kinds of correspondence. The first kind is called correspondence-as- correlation. This theory states that one object or set of objects is correlated to another object or set of objects according to some rule which relates them. The other kind of correspondence is correspondence-as-congruity. This is a relation according to which two things agree with or are in harmony with one another. In this regard truth is a relation between word and world.³⁹ Thus it is misguided to ask that mystical awareness of 'true-self' should be verifiable or justifiable according to a theory of truth derived from a non-mystical context.

In fact, mystics (John and Dogen) were not merely presenting views they thought to be true. Nor were they claiming to hold the tenets of their truth and their mystical experiences only because they thought such concepts cohere with one another. Instead,

³⁹Ibid.,

they claimed that what they experienced corresponded to what is the case according to their mystical framework. If the mystics were trying to write statements which correspond to their reality, then the crucial question is whether or not they succeeded. In fairness to mystical statements, the interpreter should not assess what was said according to some other theory of truth. In this regard, we cannot explain mystical truth by anything other than mystical criteria, just as we cannot, for example, explain aesthetic appreciation in scientific terms, or by any means other than aesthetic criteria. Non-mystical theories of truth seem to fail to represent fully the realities of mystical experience.⁴⁰ Concerning the nature of the transcendent, Coburn rightly pointed out that the transcendent is logically precluded from entering into causal relations with finite things. Thus to call anything a cause is to distinguish it from what it causes, and from the causes of that of which it is not the cause. To make such an attribution is also, at least in the case of efficient causes, to place the alleged cause in a chronological relationship with its effect. However, the transcendent is without features that distinguish it from other things, and it is not located in time.

In this regard, it seems to follow that mystical truth is also logically precluded from entering into explanatory relations with finite things, and, a fortiori, from entering into explanations of beliefs about the transcendent. In other words, mystical truth, being transcendent in character cannot be the same as truth which can be explained in chronological relationship with its effect.⁴¹ Coburn states:

Second, if belief in the transcendent were true, then the aspect or dimension of reality believed in would be logically precluded from entering into causal relations with finite things. Hence it couldn't play a role in explaining anything on the best current account of what explanation involves. So a person's recognition of the fact that the transcendent plays no role in explaining his belief in the transcendent could neither provide a basis for thinking this belief was ill-founded nor in any way undermine it.⁴²

Coburn, thus continues by accepting mystical experience as revelatory of the transcendent, Coburn says:

⁴⁰William P. Alston, "The Autonomy of Religious Experience," *Philosophy of Religion*, vol 31, (1992),70.

⁴¹Robert C. Coburn, "The Idea of Transcendence," *Philosophical Investigations*, 13:4 (October, 1990a), 322-337.

⁴²*Ibid.*, 331.

No correlation can be established between the existence of such experiences and the reality of their intentional objects. Nor has anyone ever developed in a plausible way the idea that the best explanation of the occurrence of such experiences requires the truth of the belief they give rise to.⁴³

An important point about mystical truth is that in the particular case of mystical perceptions which give rise to the idea of the transcendent, one can make an even stronger claim that it is impossible that any causal explanation of those experiences could ever require the truth of that belief.

There are several important facts we should consider in order to understand mystical awareness of true-self. These facts would also explain reasons why non-mystical concepts of truth cannot explain mystical awareness of true-self. First, mystical awareness of truth seem to imply that mystical 'true-self' is not based on ordinary logical (reason) consistency of statement.

For mystics, instead, 'true-self' is understood as engagement with a certain order of reality which is known subjectively. This means though mystic's truth is logical in a sense, it does not necessarily rely on logical consistency. Mystics' understanding of 'true-self' is premised upon the perspective that higher degrees of consciousness, which transcend reason in new forms of knowing, do not rest upon rational consciousness. Schuon describes the provisional nature of rational knowledge in the following manner:

To say that a truth is situated "beyond logic can only mean one thing, namely that it does not provide in its formulation the data which would allow logic to resolve an apparent antinomy; and if it does not provide those data, it is because they are too complex or too subtle to be expressed in a single formulation, and also because it would be disproportionate and useless to provide these data, given that the formulation in question has the virtue and the aim of awakening intellection in those who are capable of it."⁴⁴

As we have seen from both Dogen and John, enlightenment experience or 'true-self' can be achieved through Zazen (Dogen) or loving union with God (John). Both mystics emphasize engagement or participation. They are not primarily concerned with the

⁴³Ibid., 327.

⁴⁴Frithjof Schuon, *Logic and Transcendence*, (N.Y.: Harper and Row, 1975), 90.

establishment of information such as in Scripture reading, but with bringing human beings into engagement with Reality.

Both Dogen and John assert a practical discipline in terms of achieving ‘true-self’ experience rather than logical consistency. Suzuki writes on this regard:

The reason why Zen is so vehement in its attack on logic. . . is that logic has so pervasively entered into life as to make most of us conclude that logic is life and without it life has no significance.⁴⁵

He puts this in other words when he writes: “The great fault with us all is that we force logic on facts whereas it is facts themselves that create logic.”⁴⁶ For Dogen as well as Zen in general, logic has its place and its consistency is not final in itself unless that consistency arises from life. For both Dogen and John mystical awareness is regarded as the result of an intended purpose. True-self for them was not merely agreement with logical consistency.

Instead, through the effort of practical discipline, mystics fulfill their intended purpose. In John, for instance, the word “God” does not refer to or stand for anything. The concept of belief in God is not acquired in an intellectual manner. Rather, as John teaches, one comes to an understanding of the grammar of the word “God” in the practice of loving God. Particularly, union with God can be fulfilled through the practice of the virtues of faith, hope and love. Thus mystical truth is perceived through the eye of contemplation rather than by the acquisition of knowledge or the exercise of reason.

Dogen, on the other hand, clearly explains that mystical awareness of the ‘True-self’ is a result of intention which is directly dependent on practice. Dogen has expressed this need of practice in a metaphor in his “**Genjokoan**,” essay:

Zen master Hotetsu of Mayoku-zan mountain is using a fan. A monk comes by and asks, “the nature of air is to be ever-present, and there is no place that air cannot reach. Why then does the master use a fan?” The master says, “You have only understood that the nature of air is to be ever-present, but you do not yet know the truth that there is no place air cannot reach.” The Monk says, “what is the truth of

⁴⁵D. T. Suzuki, *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism*, (New York: Grove, 1964), 74.

⁴⁶D. T. Suzuki, *Zen Buddhism*, William Barrett ed, (New York: Doubleday, 1956), 224.

there being no place air cannot reach? At this, the Master just carries on using the fan, The monk does prostrations.⁴⁷

This passage implies that the ‘True-self’ cannot be understood without actual practice. What Dogen emphasizes is that the truth of non-duality cannot be achieved without practice. Thus studying the ‘True-self’ is not possible only by learning Buddhist sutras and meditation on Zen “koans.”

Thus for Dogen, learning the ‘True-self’ or enlightenment is not a matter of the accumulation of knowledge, but it is a mode of being, particularly through repeated body-mind practice. Reason, which is often considered to be the highest level of knowing in contemporary thought, plays a far lesser role in mystical epistemology because of its status as both partial and provisional in nature. Since the ‘True-self’ is not an object of cognition, it does not stand as a being over against the self, the cognitive object. As Tracy says, “in the practical concerns of its unfolding” both releases a subject from some particular contingency and reaches toward a form of realization.⁴⁸

Second, another important fact in understanding the ‘true-self,’ which is hardly explainable by non-mystics, is the goal of mystical discourse. The matter of intention is of crucial import. One must determine the mystic’s intention in giving his report. If the mystic intends to give an exact report and does not, then there is an error, but if he intends to give an approximation and to use it for some other purpose than scientific theory, etc. such as to teach a spiritual lesson, there is no reason to assume that imprecision in such a case is falsehood.

The primary intention of mystical discourse of John and Dogen in fact is to modify and transfigure the nature of the person who engages in and encounters it. Thus mystical discourse strives for something beyond mere ideation. It is basically transformational rather than propositional. Its message is not so much propositional as it is instrumental. As a work of art, mystical discourse does not so much seek to capture reality as it “really” is, as to extricate the reader from that which is considered to be inessential and illusory, and simultaneously to reveal that which is most significant.

⁴⁷Dogen’s *Shobogenzo*, “Genzo-koan,” Gudo Wafu Nishijima and Chodo Cross trans, 36-7.

⁴⁸David Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope*, (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987), 58.

It is not that a mystic's discourse does not have definitive content, but that the goal and function of that content is directed toward transformation in a person. Warnke points out the transformative meaning of mystical discourse as compared with a work of art:

The truth of works of art is a contingent one: what they reveal is dependent on the lives, circumstances and views of the audience to whom they reveal it. Indeed, for Gadamer the point of hermeneutics is precisely to destroy 'the phantom of truth severed from the standpoint of the knower'...the point here is that while works of art have normative authority over those that read them or view them and so on, in the sense that understanding is primarily an understanding of truth, none the less, the content of this normative authority or, in other words, the content of the claim works of art impose on their audience, cannot be specified outside of the particular situations in which the works are seen, read, etc.⁴⁹

Thus such an intention of mystical discourse implies that the significance of mystical statements cannot be translated into rational or logical terms without loss of meaning. For the aim of mysticism is to experience the truths embodied in them intuitively. Mystical discourse, therefore, seeks to extend and transform the horizon of the individual in such a way that reality itself is grasped differently.

Dogen, for example, used **koans** as a means to grasp 'true-self.' They are introduced to the disciple in order to bring about a higher state of realization. The primary goal is first to effect enlightenment through the radical turn-about of the disciple, a complete conversion of one's whole personality, which allows the individual to let go of discursive, logical and dualistic thought and move on to the realm of non-thinking. It is in this state of being that the truth of Zen is said to be comprehended and its paradoxes resolved.⁵⁰ Thus, the 'true-self' known by John and Dogen is perceived through the eye of contemplation rather than by the acquisition of knowledge or the exercise of reason. Reason, though is often considered to be the highest level of knowing truth, plays a far lesser role in mystical truth.

However, a mystic's different method of attaining true-self does not of course mean that mystical awareness of 'true-self' is purely a matter of the 'subjective' nor that it is

⁴⁹Georgia Warnke, *Gadamer: Hermeneutics, Tradition and Reason*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), 66-67.

⁵⁰Kazuaki Tanahashi ed, *Enlightenment Unfolds*, 32.

irrational. The mystics' contexts do not eliminate certain connections with the philosophical project. Mystical explanations are criticizable and in principle falsifiable even for the believer. Experience and reason need not be construed as incompatible. Like other epistemic responses, it should be manifested to the extent justified by the setting –whether it requires agnosticism regarding individual beliefs, criticism of underlying assumptions, or the search for better arguments on behalf of religious truth claims, and the cognitive status of religious truth claim. However, the difference is that the mystics experience takes places in “doxastic practice.”⁵¹ This means that in order to evaluate the true value of mystical experience , we need to have a legitimate method which is reasonable to measure the experiences.

2) Criteria of Mystical Experiences in Dogen and John

Thus both John and Dogen insist that they can examine their experience by using their own verification methods under which they are justified in believing those experiences in order to determine whether the conditions specified have been met. It should be noted that the tests employed by John and Dogen are not in the context of philosophical debate, but rather in pastoral practice.

For instance, John uses different kinds of criteria for distinguishing veridical from non-veridical mystical apprehensions. John consistently insists that an experience cannot be authentic contemplation if it involves particular images and ideas. For John, contemplative perceptions which are truly of divine origin should involve a depth, sublimity, and delight which others perceptions lack. On the contrary, mystical perceptions which produce “spiritual dryness and an inclination to self-esteem” are less likely to be valid mystical perceptions.⁵² Instead, for John, contemplative perception should produce physical and psychological well-being, and also the virtue of wisdom, charity, humility, fortitude, and so on.

For John, however, attending to what can intelligibly be said about the mystical experience reveals its intimate association with the Church and the mystic's life of faith. In other words, the view that a mystic is characterized as a solitary, individualistic soul who undergoes an essentially private experience, which in turn enables him or her to

⁵¹William P. Alston, 72-73.

circumvent his or her religious tradition, is in the end a failure to attend to what one is allowed to say when talking of or about mystical experience. John insists that the veridicality of alleged mystical perception can be evaluated by checking whether the experience is coherent, whether its effects are beneficial for the recipient and others.

As Dionysius argues the legitimate intelligibility of mystical experience is valid when it is intimately associated with the church and the mystic's life of faith. Thus mystical experience and the mystic's talk of Reality can only be understood when philosophers know what it is permissible to say about Reality. In this respect, Wittgenstein's grammar or communion of language has an important role to playing understanding mystic's account.

When John speaks of union with God, it will resonate not by the imposition of an empirical philosophy, but by attending to the place these words have in his life. When John talks of having entered into "union with God", in order to understand such a claim, one must listen to what one is permitted to say of "union" and of "God" in context

According to John, therefore, to be a mystic is to belong to and take part in a community in which a mystical experience has significance. Thus the mystical experience and the mystic's talk of God can only be understood when a philosopher listens to what it is permissible to say about "God", about "union", and much more. Because, for John, the mystical experience has its meaning in such an ecclesial and communal context. There is no access to the divine nor to "objective reality" nor to our own subjective states of mind independently of our life and language. And language was used with this in mind. Therefore, paying attention to what the mystical life means for John involves paying attention to its conceptual links with the Church and the communal life of the mystic. He makes it clear that he does not believe individual mystical experience, certainly not its own, is sufficient unto itself for describing mystical states and separating the genuine from the inauthentic. Thus it is the social dimension of verification which is stressed, as opposed to a strictly individual discernment.

On the other hand, to justify doctrinal claims to truth, Dogen also appeals to the

⁵²A.2.24.7.

tradition. For Dogen, mystical experience that is authenticated by tradition is the primary source of justification. Dogen says, "It is apparent that the Patriarchs never denied the chain of causality....Do not teach that causality does not exist; this is untrue and conflicts with the Law transmitted by the Buddha and Patriarchs. Only those ignorant of the true teaching support such views"⁵³ In other words, a doctrine can be verified as correct if it can be found to be the teaching of the Buddha and Patriarchs. The authority of tradition is so powerful that Dogen can simply sum up the matter by saying: "The preceding are the compassionate teachings of the Patriarch Nagarjuna. We should gratefully accept and heed these words."⁵⁴

However, Dogen acknowledges that in spite of the continuity of tradition, there are those who hold mistaken and distorted views. "Unfortunately many matters have proclaimed the teaching based on their own limited mistaken views... They distorted the teachings to conform to their own misguided interpretation which they contested to be true Buddhism."⁵⁵

Thus for Dogen, tradition, "the Buddhas and Patriarchs," supplies the standard by which to judge the truth of doctrine. Dogen says, "Anyone who wishes to determine if a teaching is correct or not should use the standards of the Buddhas and Patriarchs. They are the true masters of the wheel of the Law whom we should consult."⁵⁶ Thus for Dogen, the **Shobogenzo** holds that the content of correct belief and practice has been accurately transmitted from the Buddhas through centuries of tradition. "I also learned from a sutra that the Patriarchs transmit the Dharma free of error."⁵⁷ "It is not difficult to authenticate a doctrine even if removed by centuries from the Buddhas and Patriarchs."⁵⁸ However, Dogen does not deny that at least some of the historical transmitted doctrine is based upon the word or confession of that same transmission. The divergence and plurality of belief is an often mentioned and much lamented fact in the **Shobogenzo**. But Dogen responded that the others have received it incorrectly, and that the truth runs like a single unbroken thread down through the centuries. He says,

⁵³Masao Abe and M. Waddell trans, The Eastern Buddhist, (1983a), 97.

⁵⁴Ibid., 98.

⁵⁵Ibid., (1983b), 16.

⁵⁶Masao Abe and M. Waddell trans, The Eastern Buddhist, (1977), 23.

⁵⁷Ibid., 100.

⁵⁸Ibid., (1983b), 72.

“Shakyamuni’s eye and Treasury of the true Law and supreme enlightenment was only rightly transmitted to Mahakasyapa, and no one else. The right transmission surely passed to Mahakasyapa.”⁵⁹ Apparently those who hold a correct viewpoint and those who adhere to incorrect doctrine both believe that their view is true, and both verify that view by reference to the tradition.

3) Mystic’s Language as Contextual

However, since the meaning’s of mystical truth is different from our ordinary understanding of truth, they have different forms of expression from our ordinary forms of expression. Concerning the interpretation of Zen’s notion of Sunyata, Ornatowski explains Streng’s understanding of its interpretation in which the meaning of Sunyata should be regarded in at least three ways. He explains:

(1) Sunyata takes on a variety of meanings throughout Buddhist history; (2) these meanings have always existed within particular religious contexts and as a part of a larger religious path and, therefore, lose their contents when extracted from these religious contexts; and (3) translating these overall meanings in their religious context into logical English terms and concepts is difficult at best and often adds to the confusion in understanding properly.⁶⁰

Moreover, Dogen understands his notion of truth as context-dependent. In his fascicle “Things beings present as They Are” (**Genzokoan**), Dogen follows the Yogacara view that the fish is correct in his belief that the ocean is an emerald-like palace and the **deva** in heaven is correct in his belief that the ocean is a glittering string of lights, and the person far out at sea is correct in his belief that the ocean is a great circle. The fish, the person, and the **deva** are each authenticating what is actually experienced, given their respective context.

Thus to suggest that the language of the mystic is a context out of which an image of the divine is constructed is to not do justice to religious belief, nor more specifically to mystical experience, for it is to suggest that there is a reality from which it is theoretically possible to judge the adequacy of the mystic’s language. An analysis of mysticism, and of its epistemology, is an exploration of the context in which such a

⁵⁹Ibid., (1977), 23.

⁶⁰Gregory K. Ornatowski, “Transformations of “Emptiness,” 93.

concept as Union with God” or “Emptiness” is formed.

For instance, when John claims to have entered into “union with God”, one must listen to what one is permitted to say of “union” and of “God,” in terms of a communal context. In other words, one should know the language of words or statements used in context in order to understand their meaning. Religious truth thus cannot reside in a private way of experiencing the world. Therefore, according to John and Dogen, certainty of truth cannot be evaluated apart from a particular context where in language has been used.

In this regard, Kenneth Pike’s emphasis on the context of the religious language supports John’s and Dogen’s understanding of mystical experience as being connected with a communal context. For him context is crucial to an understanding of a particular linguistic world. A complete understanding of religious language can be accomplished within the context of real-life human interaction with religion and religious experience.⁶¹

Wittgenstein, on the other hand, also rightly points out the important notion of the context in which religious language used. Wittgenstein asserts that mystic’s language has meaning within a particular social context and it reflects that context. Within the particular social context, any system of signs can be regarded as a language function. Thus Wittgenstein found that understanding is a function of the way language operates in each particular circumstance in which language is actually used. In this regard, there is no standard meaning which is the meaning of any given word; there is only the meaning of a word or sign in relation to its specific use. Therefore, the meaning of a specific language or word is dependent upon the context, the language games, in which the language is employed.⁶² Wittgenstein was, therefore, very critical of the philosophical use of metaphysical statements. In his book, he calls attention to the varied ways in which such words as “good”, “just” or “self” are used. Such words have no meaning in themselves. To say that “X” exists” means, not that X has being and existence in itself, but simply that X has meaning. In other words, by saying, “X exists”

⁶¹Kenneth Pike, *Linguistic Concepts; An Introduction to Tagmemic*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), 15-18.

⁶²Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1967), 3rd ed, 8-15.

we are not presenting a proposition which is dealing with X per se but we are presenting a particular use of language.”⁶³ the function of the words, therefore can be varied depending on their context.

George Lindbeck, also insists that the question of religious truth can only be raised once meaning is established.⁶⁴ Lindbeck differentiates three models for construing religious statements: the cognitive-propositional, the experiential-expressive and the cultural-linguistic.

According to Lindbeck, what is propositionally true within each religion is inapplicable outside that particular set of contexts. So defined, the context of religion allows us to ask, for instance, “what is Christian?” rather than “Is Christianity true?”⁶⁵ One can ask the latter question only if one adopts the cognitive propositional model. One particular religion could then be said to be superior or inferior on the grounds that its foundational beliefs are true. For Lindbeck, thus, doctrine may be said to be propositionally true, not individually and in isolation but as part of a religious whole, on what he thinks to be a coherence theory of truth. Thus doctrines of creation, and redemption and others are understood as rules for ensuring coherence in worship and social context.⁶⁶

Thus any religious truth can only be “intransystemic,” not valid for all linguistic systems and cultural contexts. Religious truth, therefore, only arises where meaning is established and meaning depends on its use in context. Lindbeck thus assumes that different religious traditions provide different contexts for religious uses of language. As Wittgenstein asserts, it does not allow talk of language in general. He defines religions as “comprehensive interpretive schemes, usually embodied in myths or narratives and heavily ritualized, which structure human experience and understanding of self and world.”⁶⁷ Consequently, for Lindbeck religion is not primarily a set of beliefs or symbols. He says, “it shapes the subjectivities of individuals rather than being primarily a manifestation of those subjectivities. It comprises a vocabulary of discursive

⁶³Ibid., 58.

⁶⁴George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Post Liberal Age*, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984), 64.

⁶⁵Ibid., 101.

⁶⁶Ibid., 67.

⁶⁷Ibid., 32-33.

and non-discursive symbols together with a distinctive logic or grammar in terms of which this vocabulary can be deployed.”⁶⁸ For Lindbeck, the cultural-linguistic model is very important for it makes language logically prior to experience and stresses the applicability of specific languages to context. In this regard, Lindbeck writes about the relationship between religious experience and its cultural and linguistic context:

Human experience is shaped, molded, and in a sense constituted by cultural and linguistic forms. . . to become religious involves becoming skilled in the language, the symbol system of a given religion. . . . A religion is above an external work, a **verbum externum**, that molds and shapes the self or of pre-conceptual experience.⁶⁹

It follows for Lindbeck that we can say nothing about any ultimate referent in religion and theology, in abstraction from the cultural-linguistic context of religious users of God-talk, Nirvana-talk and the like. Thus we can only say with confidence, within each context, how such “propositions” compose coherent wholes. To support this model Lindbeck rejects the bounds of the common assumption that all religious people are somehow responding to the same sense of cosmic transcendence prompting their different modes of personal transformation.

Further, Streng also asserts that “words and expression-patterns are simply practical tools of human life, which in themselves do not carry intrinsic meaning and do not necessarily have meaning by referring to something outside the language system.”⁷⁰ Thus “meaning” is found within system, not in relation to some external reality. Streng states:

Those who accept words as literal representations of “real entities” will become emotionally and intellectually attached to the “names” and thereby simply produce more fabrication of name-entities. Those who know that words together with the emotional attachment accompanying mental actions are “empty” of real self-existence become unattached to the name-entities. The distinction, then, is not one that refers to specific characteristics or a unique essence. Rather, it is a difference of attitude or awareness about oneself in relation to existence. It is foremost an epistemological difference, which becomes an ontological difference insofar as

⁶⁸Ibid., 33.

⁶⁹Ibid., 34.

⁷⁰Cited in Randall Nadeau, “Frederick Streng, Madhyamika, and the Comparative Study of Religion,” *Buddhist-Christian Studies*, 16 (1996), 69.

knowledge determines what one becomes.⁷¹

Thus for Streng, the religious language used to describe the reality must be understood as analogically, not literally. Cupitt, on the other hand, affirms that the primary function of language in Zen Buddhism is to ‘stir intelligence, and enhance life and return us into the world of signs refreshed and delighted.’⁷² He acknowledges, for example, that in ‘carving up’ the world to make it intelligible, language inevitably alienates one thing from another. He sees a need to re-integrate a number of the dualisms that our culture has created and thus Zen’s strategy of using riddles and paradoxical language can be interpreted as an understanding of this fact.⁷³

In this respect, it is difficult to see how mystics of one tradition can know enough of what is meant religiously by using the key terms of another tradition to judge that their own categories surpass in adequacy those of the other. For instance, John’s mystical experience of ‘nothingness’ declares his experience as a call to participation with God, while Dogen may feel directed to awaken the Buddha-nature; and the allegedly “same” experience therefore must mean something different. For Dogen, the word ‘Nothingness’ is not to indicate a ‘no-thing’ as used in the ordinary sense. Rather, it is intended to clarify the true nature of reality. Thus, ‘Nothingness’ is intended to be an expression which negates ascribing being to reality. In this respect, we cannot judge between John and Dogen by simply asking whether the statement about God or the Buddha-nature is the same or not, and true or false. Because true for John would be unprofitable to Dogen. As Wittgenstein stated earlier the truth of assertions made within a framework depends on whether or not they satisfy the standards which apply to them. For example, in order for there to be truth in a mathematical statement, it must satisfy certain criteria internal to mathematical framework. Consequently, mystical truth, according to its own mystical context, has its own criteria of truth value and certainty.⁷⁴

In short, the most fundamental error in the philosophical approach to mystical truth is a confusion in the meaning of the terms for ‘truth.’ Though an analysis of a

⁷¹Ibid., 69-70.

⁷²Don Cupitt, *What is Story?*, (London: SGM, 1991), 138.

⁷³Ibid., 129-130.

⁷⁴Michael Scott, “Framing the Realism Question,” *Religious Studies*, vol 36, (2000), 465.

philosophical truth may suggest something about the mystical truth, nonetheless, the concept of the truth of non-mystics is not the same as the truth expressed by mystics. For the primary function of mystical language is to aid an inner dynamic compelling one towards the self-transformation which is mystical experience. In this regard, it is not what is said, but how it is said that is essential.

Moreover, such an analysis (dualistic or philosophical) indicates nothing about the concepts of truth expressed by mystics, nor does it specify anything about mystical criteria and standards of truth. As we have found in Dogen and John, the reality which they experienced is very different from their ordinary experience of reality. Since the mystical is wholly different from the sorts of things we usually experience and talk about, it cannot be put into any non-mystical category or be defined by means of correspondence theories.

The crucial question is not whether mystical ways of attaining mystical truth correspond with non-mystical or philosophical ways of analyzing truth, but rather whether the mystics' way of approaching Reality fulfills their intended purpose. If the mystics fulfill their intention, there are no grounds for debate about the reliability of mystical truth. In other words, an appeal to mysticism as "subjective" or "illusion" according to an ordinary person's experience is beside the point. Mystical truth must fulfill its intended purpose, and that purpose has nothing to do with making statements that correspond with reality.

II CONTEMPLATIVE PATH COMPARED

A) Meditative Practice:

The term "meditation" is widely used in Dogen and John's mysticism. In both mysticisms, meditation which is the technique of focusing the mind is regarded as preliminary to a higher form of mental discipline that involves the overcoming of all specific objects of thought and leads to a goal. For example, Dogen used meditation as a means to still the mind by excluding thoughts and feelings.

Within John's mystical theology, however, a distinction is drawn between "meditation" and "contemplation," the former involving the mental exercises focused

upon specific objects and the latter involving unfocused mental effort. However, both in John and Dogen, the meditation finally leads to an attainment of intuitive wisdom or knowledge, which Dogen calls “enlightenment”, and St. John calls “union with Christ.”

However, for both Dogen and John, meditation is a means to open up one’s mind and expand one’s consciousness. Johnston says. “Both promote a kind of psychic wholeness and unification.”⁷⁵ Thus both Dogen and John agree on the fact that meditation brings a unity of personality through a process of concentration. In both John’s and Dogen’s meditations, the “mind”-defined in a general sense as an internal faculty capable of experiential knowledge-serves as a means of mystical progress.

Phenomenologically then, both Dogen and John are similar in that they both involve the focusing of the mind through meditation in order to exclude from the mind other thoughts and distractions.

1) Meditation: Discursive Prayer (John) vs Not-Thinking (Dogen)

However, in John’s meditation, unlike Dogen’s, a discursive form of prayer is used as an important means, while Dogen’s meditation is characterized by being objectless. John uses prayer as a means to communicate and relate with God, while Dogen’s meditation focuses more on a non-dual approach and detachment. In this regard, Dogen’s meditation is fundamentally different from John’s. For Dogen meditation is primarily focused on the elimination of ideas, images and opinions, while John emphasizes relatedness to God.

Concerning the necessity of meditation, according to John, we need concrete symbols because the mind cannot be directed to the contemplation of spiritual realities unless we begin our journey with material things of sense. John, thus, affirms that even seemingly bizarre images of God can be disclosed. To those properly instructed and initiated, these concrete images communicate the unseen reality of God. John, thus, calls theology that makes affirmations about God cataphatic or affirming theology. In this respect, the positive form of images in meditation expresses the procession of all things from God: since all things come from God, they reflect their source. Since the divine Source shares its goodness, beauty, and truth with all creation, we can thus affirm

⁷⁵William Johnston, The Still Point: Reflections on Zen and Christian Mysticism, (New York: Fordham

that images and symbols can manifest God.

On the other hand, since Dogen's metaphysical assumption reflects on the all encompassing oneness of reality drawn together in the Buddha-nature, his meditation basically serves to realize this oneness of reality. In denying the experience of duality in meditation, Dogen's meditational experience implies the elimination of personal images and forms, while John uses imagination and forms. Since the notion of person necessarily entails duality as John's mysticism indicates, it is unacceptable in Dogen's highest mystical experiencing of reality. Dogen's Zen does not use the term "prayer", because Dogen's Zen does not rely on a theistic Supreme Being. William Johnston jumps up the characteristic of Zen meditation as unified personality. He writes:

Zen meditation is a process of unification in which the whole personality is harmonized in a oneness which reaches its climax with a complete absence of subject-object consciousness in satori.⁷⁶

Thus, contrary to the discursive characteristics of John's meditation, Dogen's meditation is characterized as "not- thinking." Dogen's not-thinking is essentially a negating of all mental acts. Thus Dogen understands meditation as a process of "not-thinking." Dogen writes, "By sitting, which severs the root of thinking and blocks access to the road of intellectual understanding."⁷⁷ Thus Dogen sees meditation as ultimately "not- thinking" through the removal of the five hindrances. As a result, by one's being progressively "purified," defilements are eliminated. Here the mind is seen like a clear mirror. However, since the mind is often distorted by the defilement of personal ideas, these personal ideas need to be eliminated in order to experience the original state of the mind. In this respect, Dogen's idea of meditation as "not-thinking" echoes the idea of **Shen-hsiu** in which the characteristics of meditation of "not-thinking," is well illustrated.⁷⁸

According to **Shen-hsiu** poem, meditation is an act of detachment from the things attached. Keeping up meditation is necessary to keep the mirror clean. Thus the first

University, 1970), 76.

⁷⁶Ibid., 4.

⁷⁷Kazuaki Tanahashi, ed. *Moon in a Dewdrop: Writing of Zen Master Dogen*, 42.

⁷⁸See chapter 3 in the section of "cutting the root of thinking as a process of enlightenment."

aspect of meditation, working towards “not-thinking,” can be seen as the work of elimination.

2) Contemplation vs Non-Thinking

However, while John’s meditation refers to a discursive form of prayer, with extensive use of mental imagery, at a certain point in the spiritual life, meditation must be left behind to make way for a higher form of prayer, namely, contemplation. Because as long as the mind is preoccupied with forms and images, it cannot receive the imageless communication which God is ready to impart in contemplation. Thus objectless meditative practice is demanded, that is contemplation. In this stage, the soul wants and is drawn to a more intimate knowledge of God, and use of imagination in prayer is experienced as utterly inadequate and frustrating to the soul. John states:

A person at this time should be guided in a manner entirely contrary to the former. . . .If previously he sought satisfaction, love, and devotion, and found it, now he should neither desire nor seek it, for not only does he fail to procure it through his own diligence, but on the contrary he procures dryness.⁷⁹

The considerable spiritual pleasures which compensated the soul during the active night of the senses are now taken away by God. Thus, the soul ceases to communicate through the senses.

However, one of the distinctive characters of John’s contemplation compared with Dogen is that in John’s contemplation does not require, could not require, the abandonment of all activity; it requires the abandonment of sorts of activities which are not conducive to union. Especially in the early stages of the spiritual life a great deal of activity is required. But even later on one should do everything appropriate to achieve union. This appropriateness includes a concentrated activity whose purpose is receptivity. In this regard, John’s meditative practice is different from Dogen’s in that John uses prayer, meditation, and contemplation interchangeably, while Dogen’s meditative practice uses the term meditation. Frost states:

The maximum of the positive, grace-aided activity of the soul is not directed to

⁷⁹N.2.4.6.

bringing about an empty inactivity, but the fullest activity of which it is capable, that in which the whole being harmonized and united in one act of desiring love is capable. The active and passive states do not simply succeed one to another, the former being left entirely before the latter is entered upon, but that the passive state is one in which the activity of the operation of God gradually coincides with the activity of the soul... activity is child's play in comparison with this passivity of the soul which, far from being a "doing nothing," is, in reality, the highest activity possible to us...It may be said, then, that contemplation is both acquired and infused, but not that acquired contemplation differs in kind from infused contemplation...⁸⁰

John is well aware of the fact that by emphasizing active attempts at passivity we might misunderstand that we are responsible for contemplation. Therefore, John thinks it important to emphasize that we be passive (**pasiva**) or negative (**negativa**) with respect to God, the latter signifying the fact that contemplation is always on God's terms, not ours.⁸¹ In short:

God must place the soul in this...state. Nevertheless, an individual must insofar as possible prepare himself.⁸²

It should be clear that for John a human being can receive knowledge from God and this knowledge can be mediated through the senses, as in visions; but it is more likely to be received, and more productively received, in a spiritual way. Thus John says that God is the doer in all contemplation.

However, for Dogen, although the elimination of all thoughts is a necessary process of meditation, it is not complete. This first stage of not-thinking prepares the way for the second stage: A move from "not-thinking" to "dropping off body and mind."⁸³

Although "not- thinking" eliminates defilements, there is no self realization of the Buddha-nature. Therefore for Dogen, the beginner must go another step. For Dogen though "not-thinking" is the annihilation of consciousness, this annihilation of

⁸⁰Bede Frost, Saint John of the Cross, 166, 262-3, 340, 352.

⁸¹A.3. 13.

⁸²A.3. 2.

⁸³Dogen had learned objectless meditation in China. His manual for the method shows the influence of a Chinese text of the Sung period (960-1279), see Heinrich Dumoulin, Zen Buddhism in the 20th Century, 113.

consciousness itself is a form of thought. Thus another form is required, that is, “without-thinking.” This without-thinking or non-thinking is a more basic form of consciousness than “not-thinking.” Without-thinking is basically distinct from not-thinking in that it assumes no intentional attitude whatsoever. Here the cognitive structure within which meditation practice occurs has changed radically from one defined by defilements to one defined by the Buddha-nature.

Here, we find a similar structure in Dogen and John. As John’s meditation has to be left behind in order to step forward, so does Dogen’s. Both meditations present different stages of development in their meditative process. While John’s meditative practice develops from meditation to contemplation, Dogen’s meditative practice develops from “not-thinking” to “without-thinking.”

However, the difference between Dogen’s ‘without-thinking’ and John’s contemplation is that while John’s contemplation is focused on denial or elimination of thoughts and images, Dogen’s without-thinking is not mere denial of thoughts and images. It neither affirms nor denies, accept nor rejects, believes nor dis-believes. In fact, it does not objectify either implicitly or explicitly. “Without thinking” (**hishiryō**) is not simply “not-thinking.” Rather, it is the foundation of mind that encompasses mindfulness and mindlessness- all forms of mind- and thus actualizes mind in its entirety.

In this respect, Dogen’s without thinking is completely different from John’s contemplation. For John, negation is applied only to what is not apt to God. In this sense John’s negation is relative. In this regard, “meditation”, and “contemplation” act interchangeably in John’s mysticism. Unlike in Dogen, prayer, meditation, and contemplation are interrelated and inter-dependent: through meditation. One should not negate everything in order to achieve the goal because John’s detachment depends on one’s relation with God. In other words, one should negate something which obstructs the soul from having a relationship with God. Thus in John’s mysticism, detachment is not an absolute means for union with God. It is necessary in the sense that God requires. In other words, God may infuse one though he/she is not completely detached.

Dogen’s meditative practice considers both concentration and mindfulness as techniques to induce psycho-physiological changes and to attain enlightenment. John’s

meditative practice, meditation, or contemplation, on the other hand, is viewed less as a valuable technique, than as a means for deepening one's relationship with God. Taizan Maezumi pointed out the non-dualistic character of Dogen's non-thinking:

In sitting it is very important not to have your own ideas or thinking. . . And with that state of mind, sit. Eliminate all kinds of mental activities, don't even think of becoming Buddha. That's what he (Dogen) meant. . . By sitting concentrating in zazen we empty ourselves and at the same time we are able to empty the object. So the subject object relationship is eliminated altogether. . . That's the kind of zazen he talks about. That's shikan-taza.⁸⁴

In fact, "without-thinking" is based on a different non-dualistic and non-substantializing experience because it is formulated without any presuppositions. According to Dogen, thinking and not-thinking are both "doing something." Since Dogen's detachment is non-goal-oriented, even any mental intention should be eliminated. The necessity of "without-thinking" in Dogen's detachment is to negate any logocentric conceptualization of the Buddha-nature as a substance or "thing." For Dogen, the direct realization of enlightenment takes place in deconstructed contemplative experience-i.e., the unknowing of Zen awakening. Dogen even added a fundamental mode of awareness: "Have no designs on becoming a Buddha."⁸⁵ Dogen, thus, calls for a radical detachment from any thinking. Thus the shift to non-thinking is the essence of Dogen's contemplative detachment.

Therefore, in Dogen's without-thinking, there is no such mirror, the mind, to cleanse. While contemplation practice presupposes the existence of the soul or the mind, there is no original existing mind to cleanse in Dogen's without-thinking practice. This is the reason why, for Dogen, enlightenment is an awareness of self-nature as free from duality.

3) Meditative Practice: As a Means to Realize Ultimate Reality

However, for Dogen and John, the elimination of all thoughts and images in contemplation is not a merely an exercise of spiritual asceticism like one who acts with the belief that it is to gain moral purity or just to cleanse the soul. The emptying of the

⁸⁴H.T. Maezumi, and B.T. Glassman eds, On Zen Practice, (Los Angeles: Center Publications, 1977), 39.

⁸⁵Ibid.,

mind through contemplation is primarily focused on “elimination.” The word, “elimination” has the implication of meaning that something should be “eradicated” or “unveiled” in order to find something “hidden” or “unknown.” For Dogen and John then, contemplation is basically a means to “realize” Ultimate Reality, rather than to “gain” or to “possess it.” It is realization rather than possession.

In this respect, their mysticism can be regarded as an immanent-structured mysticism. John’s mystical theology assumes that God is hidden in the human soul, while Dogen believes in the Buddha-nature of human nature.

According to John, God is “hidden within the soul.” God’s presence is hidden because of human consciousness which is obscured by sin and inordinate desires and appetites. Thus the soul itself is the dwelling place of God. Here, a fundamental question cannot be ignored. If God is in the soul, why do we not experience Him? Answering this question, John says that God is calling us to His secret chamber and in order to find Him we have to forget all possessions and all creatures because John believes that no one can attain God’s presence without purification of the soul. This is the reason why John insists upon the necessity of purification of the mind through the contemplation. It eradicates all that is not God from the soul so that it may become all that is God. John states:

Wipe away, O spiritual soul, the dust, the hairs, and the stains, and cleanse your eyes, and the bright sun will illumine you, and you will see clearly.⁸⁶

On the other hand, in discussing the Buddha-nature, Dogen rejects the traditional view of the Buddha-nature as a potential for realizing in the future. Dogen quotes a passage from the **Nirvana Sutra** (Northern version): “all living beings totally have the Buddha-nature: the Tathagata abides in them constantly, without changing at all.” Dogen found an inadequate reading from this phrase. Because this phrase indicates the Buddha-nature as a concept relating to one’s potential for realizing the truth of Buddhism or as something which we have inherently. For Dogen, the Buddha-nature is not a potential or natural attributes, but a condition of body and mind at the present moment. It is self-

⁸⁶F.3.38.

sustaining, so it needs no one to cultivate it.⁸⁷

Thus, for Dogen, the Buddha-nature is not something to possess or something we have, rather it is to realize it. Therefore, for Dogen and John contemplative experience of the “Buddha-nature” or “Union with Christ” is a “matter of realization.” For them, realizing the Ultimate Truth is not a matter of something to “gain” or “possess.” For Dogen, it is a matter of “self-awakening,” while John understands it as “realizing the presence of God.” The Ultimate Truth, is already there, yet we have to realize it. It is hidden in that we have to realize it by contemplation.

For John, then, God is within us. God is present in the human soul, yet we have to find Him through contemplation because He is hidden, whereas in Dogen, it is not within us, but rather it is “I” itself. Therefore, we have to realize it through “self-awakening.” Dogen says, “if it were something attained through such things, it would have constantly been with you from birth, yet why is it you haven’t yet awakened to Buddhism.”

a. Parallel Structure between Dogen and John

In fact, we can find that there is an important structural convergence concerning the mystical meditative practice in Dogen and John. Both Dogen and John distinguish two different modes of mystical experience. John distinguishes between “essential” and “supernatural” union, while Dogen distinguishes between “unrealized,” and “realized” Buddha-nature. According to John, “essential” union is what is substantially given to all souls. It is the union that all souls enjoy by the very fact that God preserves his creatures in their being. John states:

God sustains every soul and dwells in it substantially, even though it may be that of the greatest sinner in the world. This union between God and creatures always exists. By it, He conserves their being so that if the union would end they would immediately be annihilated and cease to exist.⁸⁸

By contrast, “supernatural union” is the union which is realized through contemplation in which God infuses himself to the soul. It is supernatural because it cannot be reached by ordinary modes of thinking and life. In other words, it can be fulfilled only when the

⁸⁷David Putney, “Dogen: Enlightenment and Entanglement,” 30.

⁸⁸A.2.5.3.

soul is transformed. John states:

In discussing union with God, we are not discussing the substantial union which is always existing, but the union and transformation of the soul in God. This union is not always existing, but we find it only where is a likeness of love...it exists when God's will and the soul's are in conformity...When the soul rids itself of what is unconformed to the divine will, it rests transformed in God through love.⁸⁹

The union with God that John is primarily concerned with is then the union that comes from love, namely "supernatural" union.

On the other hand, we find this same pattern in Dogen's Zen. According to Dogen, all beings are Buddha-nature, however, unless there is realization, it is not attained. Thus there are two different concepts of enlightenment in Dogen; realized enlightenment, and unrealized enlightenment. Realized enlightenment is the mind which attains enlightenment by Zazen practice. Unrealized enlightenment is the mind which is not awakened yet remains in ordinary people. Regarding unrealized enlightenment Dogen says that, although the Dharma is simply present in every person, unless one practices it, it is not manifested; unless there is realization, it is not attained."⁹⁰

Thus there are parallels between John's essential and supernatural union and Dogen's realized and unrealized enlightenment. John's essential union can be a parallel with Dogen's unrealized enlightenment. And John's supernatural union can be a parallel with Dogen's realized enlightenment.

In this respect, Dogen and John have a common fact in that both presume an immanent-yet-unrealized Reality which is evoked in the contemplative aspirant. Thus both John and Dogen demand a contemplative practice in order to fulfil what is potential in human nature so that it becomes actual.

4) Two Different Meditative Objects: Dualistic vs Non-Dualistic

However, in realizing Ultimate reality, Dogen and John are different in their mystical objects. For John, being in dualistic structure, God is understood as a potentiality to be actualized. Here, God is understood as that which is to be realized in present life as well as the future by a subject. Thus there is a fundamental distinction

⁸⁹Ibid.,

between God as an object to be realized and the human soul as a subject to realize it. Here the duality of means and end is applied. For John, being in dualistic structure, the subject and object are opposed to each other. Although John insists that there is no longer a duality in mystical union, God is still understood as a distinct object. Thus it does not mean that there is no distinction between the soul and God. God and the soul become one in participant transformation and the soul appears to be God more than a soul, yet, there is a distinction between God and soul as separate entities. John says,

Indeed, it is God by participation. Yet truly, its being is naturally as distinct from God's as it was before, just as the window, although illumined by the ray, has an existence distinct from the ray."

Y aun es Dios por participacion; aunque es verdad que su ser natualmente tan distinto se le tiene del de Dios como antes, come tambien la vidriera le tiene distinto del rayo estanto de el clarificada.⁹¹

On the contrary, for Dogen mystical 'object' or content of experience is understood as the True Self. Since the Buddha-nature is the object, the subject-object dualistic structure is overcome. In this respect, it is not the same object as in the object of John. The distinction between the Buddha-nature as a potentiality and Buddha-hood as an actuality is overcome. Thus, Dogen rejects a subject-object dualistic structure by reinterpreting "All sentient beings have the Buddha-nature" into "All sentient being is the Buddha-nature."

Therefore, there is an ontological difference between Dogen and John in terms of the mystical 'object'. While John's object is understood as the separate distinctive Absolute Being, Dogen's mystical object is regarded as a non-separated self not separated from ourselves. Thus John is fundamentally dualistic. In John's mystical union, there is an ontological object which is the Supreme as a separate 'object,' while Dogen is monistic in terms of the mystical object. Here, unlike John, the Buddha-nature is not an object (excepting in a practical sense) which is to be realized by a subject. Since the realization of the Buddha-nature is always realized from the standpoint of the oneness of practice, all "sentient being is the Buddha-nature," it constitutes a non-

⁹⁰N. Waddell and M. Abe, "Dogen's Bendowa," *Eastern Buddhist*, vol 4, (May 1971), 129.

objectifiable subjectivity. Thus, while in John's dualistic structure, the subject and object are opposed each other, in Dogen's non-dualistic structure, subject and object are identified. And in this non-dualistic oneness, the Buddha-nature can be manifested at each and every moment in every moment of all beings.

Since John's mystical object is God as a separate ontological Being, it is relational and receptive or passive in character. On the contrary, since Dogen's mystical experience is self-awakening in character, it is not experienced in a personal-relation. In this respect, it is non-relational. It is not receptive. It comes not from somewhere but from self-within. Thus, unlike in John, it is not anthropocentric, which excludes all beings other than human beings. It is based on a cosmological structure. Thus, for Dogen, Reality is experienced as neither a Lord-self duality, nor a "union" in the strict sense of the word.

Consequently, in Dogen's account, the Absolute does not transcend our everyday world. In this regard, in Dogen's system, 'reality' is witnessed as transcending-immanence. It suggests that although there are two domains-Absolute and relative-each is present in the other. Dogen teaches that the enlightened person realizes that the highest state –the Absolute, the Buddha-nature- is the same as the relative.

Therefore, the difference between Dogen and John in terms of mystical object is that in John, the experience is differentiated unity, while Dogen's experience of the 'True Self' is undifferentiated and not separated from ourselves. In this regard, Stace seems to fail to distinguish between the experience itself and its interpretation, the ontological scaffolding of the experience. It is one thing to describe an experience and quite another to analyze the factors underlying the experience.

5) The Nature of Mystical Objects in John and Dogen

However, concerning the object of mystical experience, mystics say that despite its perception-like quality, a mystical object is not an empirical object which can be characterized in terms of color, shape, weight, genus and species. In this regard, it is meaningless to talk of such an object as an object in an ordinary dualistic sense, but it is still an object which is ontologically as Absolute Being.

⁹¹A.2.5.7.

Thus it is clear from their descriptions that the objects of mystical experiences are transcendental and spiritual. Yet that transcendence is, at the same moment, known as a profound immanence fully present to the experience of the mystic. Thus the “object” of the mystics’ quest is not some theoretical knowledge of an Absolute-in-abstraction, but the fulfillment of the desire to know, in order that they may come to love what they know.

For instance, John speaks of God as a separate ‘object’, but the ‘object’ is fully to be known only by becoming one with it, and in this state there is no duality. Although John experiences God as non-dual unity, it does not signify that there is no object which is a separate distinctive object. John says, “It is a total transformation in the Beloved in which each surrenders the entire possession of self to the other. The soul becomes divine, becomes God through participation.”⁹² John presents no hesitation in speaking of contemplation or its object as “good,” “divine,” “satisfying,” “loving,” and so on; he does not argue that such terms are inapplicable, but only that they do not fully capture the reality encountered. John says, “this is a peculiarity of a thing that is immense: all the expression of excellence, grandeur, and goodness are fitting but do not explain it, not even when taken together.”⁹³

Dogen, on the other hand, does not say that his experience is an experience of Buddha-nature as an object, but he says “I am Buddha-nature.” Dogen’s account states that there is no object in this experience, as the usual subject-object dichotomy “drops off” when the mystical experience occurs. The notion of the Buddha-nature in Dogen’s mystical experience should be understood in its absolute sense, which is free from a dualistic antithesis to an ordinary object, and is a non-dualistic structure. The Buddha-nature is not just some kind of an object. Here the Buddha-nature is not an object in a sense that can be equated with any specific thing.

In this regard, Dogen emphasizes the idea of **mu-bussho**, no-Buddha-nature. However, Dogen’s idea of “no-Buddha-nature”⁹⁴ does not contradict the true meaning of Buddha-nature. In fact, “no-Buddha-nature” should be understood in its absolute sense,

⁹²C.22.3.

⁹³C.38.8.

⁹⁴See “mu-bussho” section on Dogen’s chapter.

which is free from both “Buddha-nature” and “no-Buddha-nature.” In other words, Dogen’s notion of the Buddha-nature as an object is not in having or not having the Buddha-nature but with the Buddha-nature in itself, which is non-substantial.

Consequently, in Dogen’s account, the Absolute does not transcend our everyday world. In this regard, in Dogen’s system, Reality is witnessed as transcending-immanence. It suggests that although there are two domains-Absolute and relative-each is present in the other. Dogen teaches that the enlightened person realizes that the highest state –the Absolute, the Buddha-nature- is the same as the relative.

Here we can see that mystics’ meditative objects are different from our ordinary concept of objects. These realities, in fact, cannot be regarded as merely ‘subjective’ or not ‘real’ as the non-mystic does though dualistic, analytical, and materialistic philosophy. However, for mystics these spiritual realities are just as real as physical reality. Thus there is a different concept of ‘objectivity’ in mystical experience. The question is intimately bound up with what constitutes ‘subjective’ and ‘objective.’ What do we mean by the words ‘objective’ or ‘subjective’ when we refer them to mystical experience?

As we have seen, it is important to note that mystics reject the dualism which has set up a dichotomy between the inner self and the outer world, the so-called ‘subjective’ and ‘objective,’ as a proper scheme to define the meaning of objectivity in mystical awareness. Dualism generally has assumed that if knowledge has no outer referent able to be empirically located, it must be purely ‘subjective,’ just psychological or the result of other inner drives. The empirically detectable objects of our everyday world are considered to be ‘objective’, and where the existence of something cannot be empirically proven or logically demonstrated, it is considered ‘subjective.’ I can hardly accept this view, as it implicitly assumes that Western analytical methods of understanding, the supposed ‘objectivity’ that one is leaving behind, are value-free. As Winch argues, rationality itself is context-or culture-dependent, and we cannot therefore pass judgement as to what is pure ‘objectivity’ for members of an alien culture or belief-system. Thus there is no one standard of ‘absolute objectivity’ which will explain all systems of thought and conviction.

Defining the meaning of objectivity, then, has its problem in dualism, in the rigid

separation of the inner from the outer, and in the assumption that the outer world as apprehended by our senses has a greater claim to 'objectivity' than the inner world. Thus there is an attempt to find an outward, so-called 'objective' referent to whom or to which mystical knowing refers. However, since God or the Absolute is beyond the subject-object domain, and cannot be empirically detected, or proved to exist, such attempts fail. According to such a dualistic view point, since God or the Absolute are not empirical facts, mystical knowing has tended to be considered as merely psychological, inward, or 'subjective'.

As we have seen from Dogen and John, a dualistic or ordinary concept of 'objectivity' is not valid. Mystics insist that 'objectivity' cannot be confined to dualistic structures of 'within' and 'without'. For example, according to Dogen's mystical awareness, all things are interconnected, all planes or levels of beings are interrelated in an all-embracing unity which is the ground of all. Thus in Dogen, the Absolute is a mode of human consciousness, an experience: "The Buddha-nature is within."

However, though Dogen's Zen sees the Absolute as subjectivity, it does not see It as subjective, i.e., in or relative to an ego-subject. It is pure consciousness. Though we experience It within, "within" is adverbial, not adjectival, locating and modifying the experience, not It.

Even John's mystical awareness, which tends to lean more towards dualism, emphasizes that in mystical union with God, we see the Divine in all things, including both the outer world and the inner self. Even where there is a degree of dualism in mystical union, it is not a rigid dualism but a duality within unity. Since God is absolute, God is neither objective nor subjective in an ordinary sense. The Absolute must transcend all relative determinations. Thus, our ordinary categories of 'objectivity' and 'subjectivity' dissolve in the light of what we may call mystical awareness.

At the height of a mystic's experience, there are not two things separated by dualism, but one thing which is united with an object. Both Dogen and John promote some kind of psychic wholeness and unification in mystical awareness. Both of them express these experiences of wholeness as 'nothingness' (**nada**). Dogen says, "when one comes to realize this fact, every object, every living thing is a whole, even though it

itself does not realize it.”⁹⁵Both of them agree that mystical experience transcends subject-object.

Dogen’s “Emptiness” and John’s “Union with Christ,” cannot be classified as ‘objects’ in an ordinary sense as apprehended through intellectual and rational understanding or through dualistic human concepts. Rather Dogen’s and John’s apprehension of the mystical object comes through intuitive and personal experience. In Dogen the very dualism of subject and object, which is the foundation of human reason, is problematic.

The ordinary sense of ‘objectivity’, thus, cannot be applied to mystical awareness. No longer can we divide mystical awareness into two mutually exclusive categories of psychological subjective awareness and objective referential awareness. In contrast to such a dualistic assumption, the inner and the outer are ultimately one in mystical knowing. The concept of subjectivity and objectivity, thus, should not be confined only to the basic identification of the outward with the ‘objective’ and the inward with the ‘subjective.’

Thus, there is no guarantee in asserting that physical objects which are to be experienced by the ordinary five senses are the only objective realities. In this regard as Phillips argues, religious belief required no external justification, for to attempt to provide such justification is to impose the standards and categories of one mode of discourse (e.g., the scientific, empirical, or rationalistic) onto another mode.⁹⁶

However, it is not correct to insist that the mystical knowing of spiritual realities is just a matter of subjectivity because spiritual realities are not the same as the realities that we experience in the ordinary world. There is no justification to reject an ‘objectivity’ of spiritual realities because they do not follow the dualism of inner and outer characters. For mystics who have experienced spiritual realities, they are just as real as physical reality. Speaking in our ordinary sense which we use to describe the world of empirical things, it is not quite correct to say that spiritual realities are just a feeling or an inner ‘state’ and thus subjectivity. Hence it is mistaken, as the ‘reductionist’ argues, that religion is an entirely psychologically-generated product

⁹⁵Philip Kapleau, *Three Pillars of Zen*, 310.

⁹⁶D. Z. Philip, *Faith and Philosophical Enquiry*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970), 125.

because there are spiritual realities that transcend the dualism of inner state and outer thing.

As Smith argues the idea of objective study should be abandoned whenever persons are the central focus of academic research. According to Smith, studying persons as objects is irrational because the knowing mind is human which is not outside and cannot get outside. Moreover, he argues that all objective knowledge in the humanities is inherently oriented towards the alienation of persons from each other, because objective knowledge is predicated on the duality of subject and object. He asserts that the dualism inherent in objective study demands that researchers alienate themselves from their subjects, thus making a separation and depersonalization.⁹⁷ If the objective study of persons should be abandoned, how much more certain would be to the study of mystical experience

However, a number of criticisms have been made of the mystics' approach. The criticisms center on the dual claim that any contention supported by appeal to direct experience needs, but cannot generate, agreed testing procedures for validating genuine claims and eliminating non-genuine ones.

Empiricists, for instance, insist that mystics must either give up the claim that their allegedly direct experiences do not require the validation of some sort of testing procedures or abdicate the existential claims based on those experiences. The goal is to isolate those kinds of experience for which valid warrants can be specified so that knowledge of the world can be achieved. From the empirical point of view, to use 'truth' to describe only pure experience, unadulterated by conceptualizing is to muddle categories.

However, concerning the objectivity of mystical experience, Carnap correctly asserts that the religious object should not be considered prior to the adoption of the framework. Carnap suggests that if one adopts a framework, then in most cases, one will be bound to admit the existence of entities described within it.⁹⁸ He states:

To recognize something as a real thing or event means to succeed in incorporating it

⁹⁷Cited from Scott Daniel Dunbar, "The Place of Inter-Religious Dialogue in the Academic Study of Religion," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, vol 35: 3-4, (Summer-Fall, 1998), 456-457.

⁹⁸Michael Scott, "Framing the realism question," *Religious Studies*, 36 (2000), 454-458.

into the system of things at a particular space-time position so that it fits together with the other things recognized as real, according to the rules of the framework.⁹⁹

Thus, for Carnap, to accept the existence of things is to adopt the relevant framework: 'to accept the thing world means noting more than to accept a certain form of language, in other words, to accept rules for forming statements and for testing, accepting or rejecting them.'¹⁰⁰ According to Carnap's argument, the object of God's existence can be interpreted in one of two ways. It can be interpreted within a theistic framework. Or, the question can be interpreted in a practical sense, giving rise to a debate about the advantages and disadvantages of adopting a theistic framework.

Le Poidevin, defends Carnap's argument by saying that the question "does God exist?" can be given the same form as a general question: 'Is there an x such that x created the universe, is perfectly good, revealed himself to the chosen people of Israel, etc.?'. Thus the question about God's existence can be regarded a special case of a general question, because the class of entities described that fall under this description contains only one member. To attempt to evaluate the objectivity of mystical awareness from within a philosophical framework based on dualism is, in fact seems to miss the point. It is to assume that the categories of meaning of one mode of discourse can be applied to other philosophical or mystical systems. The objectivity of mystical experience must be investigated in terms of its own criteria of intelligibility and 'rationality.'

To sum up, the object of mystical experience is known, not as the result of any philosophical presupposition, but by intimate association within the mystic's life. There are many attempts to describe the validity of mystical awareness though they do not always emerge successfully. In fact, not only are many of them not provided with adequate arguments or proof for the veracity of mystical knowledge, but further they cannot verify the truth of these experiences by any of the normal processes of empirical checks and evaluations. Dualism had to wrestle with this problem over many centuries, particularly Cartesian philosophy has been preoccupied with questions of epistemology, with the question of the validity of our ordinary empirical knowledge.

⁹⁹In R. Carnap, *Meaning and Necessity*, 2nd ed, (Chicago IL: University of Chicago Press, 1956), 207.

III. The Notion of Detachment in Dogen and John

Every great spiritual tradition has the experience of detachment as part of its spiritual path, and in both Dogen and John detachment is a key to their spiritual assessment. For both of them, detachment is to adopt transformation not as a one-time event, but as a way of life that consists in ever-expanding awareness, continual letting-go of attachments and increasing freedom and service to Being-itself.

In fact, in fulfilling spiritual detachment, both John and Dogen agree that one should detach from sense-experience and let go of intellection. This involves detachment from everything. Again, in both the process has certain similarities. One goes beyond the discriminating intellect to a realm of silence which can be described as emptiness, nothingness and darkness. Going forth from one's self one may pass through a period of apparent meaninglessness and of great suffering called the great doubt or the great death in Dogen and the dark night in John. This is a period of purification and leads to awakening or enlightenment in which one becomes one's true self.

A) Function of Intellect or Ordinary Mind in John and Dogen

1) Positive Function of Intellect or Mind

Concerning the function of the intellect or mind, both Dogen and John suggest that ordinary mind is to be seen as a part of whole function. It must be viewed as a tool, ideal for certain projects, dangerous when misused. It is only one function of the human organism. For both John and Dogen, our ordinary consciousness is so profoundly distorted that we cannot see reality itself which is right before us.

Therefore, it is recognized as deficient, just as one hand is incapable of grasping the whole body. However, both Dogen and John do not destroy ordinary mind at all. Rather both Dogen and John regard it as limited. Dogen refers to three different kinds of mind. He states:

“To learn with mind” is to learn with all the kinds of mind that “all the kinds of mind” means the mind called **citta**,¹⁰¹ the mind called **hridaya**,¹⁰² the mind called

¹⁰⁰Ibid., 208.

¹⁰¹The Sanskrit citta means thought, intention, reason, intelligence.

¹⁰²The Sanskrit hridaya means the heart (especially as the seat of emotions and mental activity). Broadly hridaya can be interpreted as the unconsciousness or sub-consciousness mind.

vridhdha.¹⁰³

For Dogen, thus, it is not wrong to use the ordinary mind if it is used properly. For Dogen, rationality is an integral part of Zen practice.¹⁰⁴ According to Hee Jin Kim, Dogen uses terms for “reason” 284 times in the Shobogenzo.¹⁰⁵ Dogen states:

Ancient masters used expedient phrases, which are beyond understanding, to slash entangled vines: People who say this have never seen a true master and have no eye of understanding....The illogical stories mentioned by you, not for buddha ancestors...I have personally seen and heard many people like this in song China. How sad that they do not know about the phrases of logical thought, or penetrating logical thought in the phrases and stories.¹⁰⁶

To be sure, understanding for Dogen is not merely intellectual assent to a truth but rather its authentication with the whole of one’s person. In Dogen’s term, one understands neither with mind alone nor with body alone, but with one’s “body-mind.” But it is wrong to believe that one can reach ultimate reality through ordinary mind. One does not put on a pair of skates to climb a mountain. Such an act would be comical, and the results disastrous. Suzuki writes:

Let the intellect alone, it has its usefulness in its proper sphere, but let it not interfere with the flowing of the stream. If you are at all tempted to look into it, do so while letting it flow. The fact of flowing must under no circumstances be arrested or meddled with.¹⁰⁷

For Dogen the ordinary mind¹⁰⁸ is to be negated not because it obliterates reality but because it has a dualistic view of reality. For Dogen the ordinary mind or intellect in John’s term gives an illusion of reality because it is a dualistic consciousness. To break the illusion is to break the spell of objective thought, and thus the hold of dualism.

On the other hand, John also does not deny our ordinary intellectual activity. For

¹⁰³The Sanskrit vridhdha means grown up, experienced, wise. See also Dogen’s Shobogenzo, “Shinjin-Gakudo”, Gudo Wafu trans, 247-248.

¹⁰⁴Hee Jin Kim, Dogen Kigen: Mystical Realist, 1987 ed, 55.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., 271.

¹⁰⁶Kazuaki Tanahashi trans, Moon in a Dew Drop, 100-101.

¹⁰⁷D.T. Suzuki, Essays in Zen Buddhism, vol 1, (New York: Grove Press, Inc, 1961), 19.

¹⁰⁸Dogen does not use the term “intellect” as it is used in John. Rather Dogen uses the term “ordinary mind,” which almost has same meaning of the term “ordinary intellect” used in John. See my section on “mind” in Dogen’s section.

John a human being can receive knowledge through his creaturely senses or from God, and that knowledge from God can be mediated through the senses. John is not an opponent of rationality in any simple and straightforward sense. John compares right reason to the temple of God, and insists repeatedly that the person desiring union with God must be guided by reason.¹⁰⁹ John says that God

. . . is ever desirous that man insofar as possible take advantage of his own reasoning powers. All matters must be regulated by reason save those of faith, which though not contrary to reason transcend it.¹¹⁰

John says that we hear the truth about God revealed by Christ through ordinary cognitive activity, such as reading and interpretation of Scripture, and we understand these truths in a limited way, insofar as the knowledge of God is infinite. Thus John does not require the annihilation of reason, but only the recognition that what the mystic receives in contemplation cannot be attained by our unaided rational powers.

Thus for John, we need not empty our intellect of all comprehensions whatsoever, with our minds blank. Throughout his work, John acknowledges that we may possess such things as thoughts, memories, visions, and material possessions, provided we are not attached to these things as the source of our happiness.¹¹¹ John, thus, holds that practical intellectual activity does not prevent a person from being united with God: ‘a man is not required to cease recalling and thinking about what he must do and know, for, since he is not attached to the possession of these thoughts, he will not be harmed.’¹¹²

John then is somewhat influenced by the apophatic tradition, but John on the whole avoids the excess of this tradition and endorses a concept of faith that accommodates practical intellectual activity.

2) Negation of Intellect or Ordinary Mind

However, both John and Dogen deny our ordinary intellectual functions in terms of knowing or uniting with God. During the period of intense mystical union itself, the individual “cannot actually advert to any other thing” because the intellect is being

¹⁰⁹A.1.8.3.

¹¹⁰A.2.22.13.

¹¹¹A.1.3.4.

¹¹²A.3.15.1.

informed by God and is therefore not receptive to being actually informed by the species of creatures. During these moments the mystic is unable to exercise his ordinary concepts of material objects. For example, throughout the Ascent John repeatedly emphasizes that “the intellect cannot profit from its natural knowledge” because “everything that the intellect can understand is most unlike and disproportioned to God”¹¹³ He therefore says that the intellect must be “blinded” and “stripped” of its natural knowledge.

However, since John admits that we are naturally capable of some distant knowledge of God¹¹⁴, why does he stress that such knowledge “cannot profit” the soul? Why does he say that, in order to arrive at mystical union, the faculties in general, and the intellect in particular, must be “cleansed and emptied of everything relating to sense (**todo lo que puede caer en el sentido**), divested and liberated of everything clearly apprehensible (**todo lo que puede caer con claridad en el entendimiento**),” because “nothing which the imagination can imagine and the intellect receive and comprehend in this life is or can by a proximate means to union with God”?¹¹⁵

First, John negates our ordinary intellect due to its limit in reaching to union with God. For God transcends our ordinary intellectual knowledge. A philosophical principle which John never tires of repeating is that God is infinite and creatures are finite. A person must void the natural operations of the soul. The mind must be free of any particular forms or figures or images. John explains the nature of this negative way: “In order to journey to God the intellect must be perfected in the darkness of faith.”¹¹⁶ The only thing which has proportion or essential similitude with the infinite is the infinite itself. God is therefore incomprehensible to the understanding.

Second, John’s insistence on divesting the intellect of “particular knowledge” is demanded by the epistemological theory he adopts. One important implication of the Thomistic account of knowledge is that “one’s attention cannot be given to many things at once, unless they are related to one another in such a way that they can be taken as one,” as when, for example, we consider head, hands and feet as parts of a whole human

¹¹³A.2.8.4.

¹¹⁴See my section of “intellect” in chapter 1.

¹¹⁵A.2.9.1.

¹¹⁶A.2.6.1.

body.¹¹⁷

John maintains, therefore, that the intellect cannot be simultaneously “informed” by natural knowledge and the “substantial knowledge” given in contemplation. Thus the claim that natural knowledge “cannot profit the soul” simply means that while the intellect is single-mindedly preoccupied with creatures it is unreceptive to the “obscure knowledge” of God; on the other hand, during the time God operates directly on the possible intellect, all other thoughts are banished.¹¹⁸

Here we can see the difference between Dogen and John regarding the negation of ordinary intellect or mind. First, Dogen denies ordinary mind because it gives a dualistic view of reality, while John denies it because it cannot reach a transcending God. According to John, the intellect has to be suppressed in order to experience God. For John to experience God is beyond discursive reasoning. Awareness of God, John states, is an experience which is distinct from intellectual knowing. John’s awareness is an absorption in God, in which he is known by direct perception, without the necessity of apprehension by means of particular reflections. It is God’s infused activity above intellect and thought. John states:

The spiritual knowledge now communicated to the mystic is not confined to any particular matter of reason, imagination or sense-perception...to know nothing, then, as St. John says, is to know all, i.e. to empty oneself of all particular ideas and images, is to apprehend all things seen in their true light, through that principle which is their ground or basis.¹¹⁹

This amounts to a loss of ordinary-consciousness, a power of rational analysis and so on. Thus in his contemplation account, John distinguishes between particular knowledge, which is found in rational discourse, and dark knowledge on the other hand.¹²⁰

For Dogen, on the other hand, negation of logical thinking or ordinary mind is to

¹¹⁷See my section of ‘intellect’ in John’s chapter .

¹¹⁸A.2.14.11.

¹¹⁹Deirdre Green, “St. John of the Cross and Mystical ‘Unknowing,’ ” *Religious Studies*, 22 (1986), 32.

¹²⁰John distinguishes between distinct and particular knowledge on the one hand and vague, dark and general knowledge on the other. This latter is pure faith, and the skilled director will guide the contemplative away from distinct and particular knowledge to the vague, dark and general knowledge of pure faith. John, faithful to the apophatic tradition, tells the contemplative to leave all distinct knowledge in order to enter into the vague, obscure and loving knowledge that is the cloud of unknowing. This loving knowledge is nothing less than a dark vision of God.

grasp the living reality of life which cannot be entirely captured by intellectual analysis. As Enomiya-Lassalle says, dialectical thinking and logical reasoning are the greatest obstacles to achieving satori.¹²¹ Dogen's Zen is not the doctrine of transcending God, rather it is the doctrine of Being transcending all antitheses, Being in which there is no before and after, no here and there, no this and that. Thus negation of logical or dualistic thinking ultimately aims to bring about a radical and fundamental change of the basic mode of being of the self. A person who identifies entirely with ordinary mind naturally shrinks from anything that threatens his individual permanence.

The negation of thought in Dogen is an instrumental measure to effect a state, where no "self" presence obtains, thereby allowing and fostering a realization that it never "substantially" obtains in the first place. Riesenhuber explains in this regard:

The object-hood of what one is aware of depends on the reflexive self-possession of the ego, which uses this world of distinct object to assure its own unconditioned standing. Now if consciousness renounces this reliance on objects, in a gradual process of purification, then the ego-which as determined by reflection and reference to objects is different from the deeper true-self abandons itself and sinks into the depth of the self or the mind which lie at a level prior to all subject-object division.¹²²

Dogen thus rejects ordinary mind because it is reflective awareness. Further, in contrast to ordinary mind, authentic awareness rejects the fundamental subject-object structure of cognition. Since ordinary mind when it perceives an object, creates the appearance of an enduring self in the experiential field of the observer, it believes that things are what they appear to be. By contrast, authentic awareness is pre-reflective awareness because there is no subject and object separation; rather in authentic awareness the subject and object are unified and, consequently, transcended.

Second, another difference is that John's emphasis on negation of the intellect is based on the assumption that, in mystical union, God takes on the role played by the active intellect in ordinary knowledge, and informs the possible intellect Himself, producing an obscure apprehension or dark knowledge. For when any created intellect sees the essence of God, the essence of God itself becomes the intelligible form of the

¹²¹H. M., Enomiya-Lassalle, Zen-Way to Enlightenment, (New York: Taplinger, 1968), 15-16.

intellect. Hence it is necessary that some supernatural disposition should be added to the intellect in order that it may be raised up to such a great and sublime height

Thus John writes that while “the intellect by its own power extends itself only to natural knowledge, it has a potency for the supernatural whenever Our Lord wishes to raise it to a super natural act.”¹²³ In several places he says explicitly that God communicates knowledge directly to the passive intellect in contemplation, and in innumerable other statements take this view of the intellect’s role in contemplation for granted.¹²⁴

In other words, for John, unlike Dogen, the negation of the intellect is not simply emptying the intellect. It is an act to receive God’s infused supernatural knowledge. Thus in John’s case, God has the power to give mystics sublime knowledge. It is a recognition that what the mystic receives in contemplation cannot be attained by our unaided rational powers. This means, of course, that it cannot be acquired solely by the unaided ascetical effort to suppress all particular thoughts and desires, but requires the intervention of God.

It also means, despite what Stace says, that the mental state of the recipient is not simply identical with what is left of consciousness after emptying the mind of all empirical contents.

B) The Notion of “Self –Negation”: Transformation vs Liberation

Detachment for emptying the self is primary to both Dogen and John. The death of the ego thus becomes the goal of detachment. Each author then goes on to make the demand for a radical letting go of the sense of having a self. The ego must die if one is to move to an experience that unites one with Ultimate Being. Each of these traditions has evolved various ways of identifying the path to self-transformation, through the experience of detachment. However, paradoxically, the self which is let go through detachment remains but is transformed. Thus in both traditions the detachment which lets go of all attachments is prerequisite to enlightenment.

As Forman points out the mystical pure consciousness is the process of forgetting. It

¹²²Cited in Heinrich Dumoulin, *Zen Buddhism in the 20th Century*, 115.

¹²³A.2.3.1.

¹²⁴A.2.32.4.

is a Hegelian **Aufhebung**, the simultaneous transcending and destruction of a state, which recognizes that state was necessary for the higher one to take place. Thus mystical knowledge is part of the necessary path that brings one to the place where that knowledge can be given up.¹²⁵

However, according to Dogen and John, in order to fulfil one's detachment, there is required a radical and fundamental change in the basic mode of being of the self. Thus the major aspect of detachment in both Dogen and John is self-negation or self-emptying. Both Dogen and John agree that the ego must die if one is to realize enlightenment. This negation of the ego is the key to both Dogen and John. John uses the term "Renunciation" which opens into the divine, while Dogen uses the term "Emptiness" which is the ground of reality. In both cases, as Merton says, "there must be a 'death' of that ego-identity or self-consciousness which is constituted by a calculating and desiring ego."¹²⁶

In this sense, they are familiar with the paradoxical words of the biblical statement, "lose your life, in order to gain it," and with the Pauline theology: "die, so that you may live." In other words, the transformation takes place at the profound level of the will. As one becomes disengaged from one's mental images and conceptions about the world, oneself, and the Absolute, the "center stage" mode of knowing, of self-understanding, dissolves. One no longer absolutizes the contents of one's consciousness. Even though one continues to be conscious, one no longer identifies oneself as the exclusive agent of knowing. Forman points out that a disengagement of consciousness is the process of forgetting.¹²⁷ As a famous Zen Buddhist aphorism put it, "If you see the Buddha on the road, kill him." The following story is worth recounting for explaining Zen's self-deconstruction.

Nan-in, a Japanese master during the Meiji era, received a university professor who came to inquire about Zen. Nan-in served tea. He poured his visitor's cup full, and then kept on pouring. The professor watched the overflow until he could no longer restrain himself. "It is overfull. No more will go in!" "Like this cup", Nan-in said, "you are full of your own opinions and speculations. How can I show you Zen

¹²⁵Bruce Janz, "Mysticism and Understanding: Steven Katz and His Critics," *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses*, 24/1, (1995), 92-93.

¹²⁶Thomas Merton, *Mystics and Zen Masters*, (New York: Delta, 1967), 242.

¹²⁷Bruce Janz, "Mysticism and Understanding: Steven Katz and His Critics," 92.

unless you first empty your cup?"¹²⁸

Thus, one aspect of this process ultimately entails "forgetting" the self. Cleary concisely describes Dogen's negations of the self:

Dogen says the way to enlightenment is to forget the self. The self in this sense refers to an accumulation of habits, including the habit of attachment to this accumulation as a genuine personality. Dogen calls this forgetting "shedding body and mind". . . Dogen states that delusion is a matter of experiencing things with the burden of self-the bundle of mental habits, ingrained views, which is identified with the self.¹²⁹

Here it should be noted that the dissolution of the self in Dogen is not merely aimed at eliminating mental habits such as thinking and not- thinking. It is not a denial of personality but a rejection of the empirical ego and a search for the true self.¹³⁰ According to Dogen, since the self is considered to be an illusion, what is involved is not the destruction of the self but rather liberation from the illusion of an ego.

Therefore, freedom is not the destruction of the "I" but the emancipation from the illusion of the "I." Thus according to Dogen this phenomenal, temporary ego must be forgotten so that one may attain to authentic self. In this perspective, Dogen's resolution of the self does not involve the destruction of the self, but rather a freedom from the illusion of an false ego. Merton writes:

It is not the empirical self which "possesses" **prajna**-wisdom, or owns "an unconscious" as one might have a cellar in one's house. In reality, the conscious belongs to the transcendental unconscious, is possessed by it, and carries out its work, or it should do so.¹³¹

Thus, the notion of self-dissolution in Dogen is not merely an ascetic function as in John whose self-emptying is primarily focused on spiritual purity.

On the other hand, according to John, self-emptying, is to purify in order to prepare for God's presence. John writes, "the illumination will not be perfect until the entire soul is

¹²⁸Dom Aelred Graham, *Zen Catholicism*, (Crossroad: New York, 1994), 47.

¹²⁹Thomas Cleary, *Shobogenzo: Zen Essays by Dogen*, trans, 29-30.

¹³⁰William Johnston, "The Notion of Man in Zen," *Studia Missionalia*, 19 (Rome, 1970), 98.

¹³¹Thomas Merton, *Mystics and Zen Masters*, (New York: Delta, 1967), 25.

entirely cleansed, clear and perfect". . . the self, consciousness, must be transformed- purified- until the subtlety of its receptivity matches the subtlety of God's presence."¹³²

In this way the person, by emptying himself or herself, can be filled by the richness of God.

Thus John's self-emptying is expressed in paschal language. The narcissism of the "old man" has to die so that the transformed, self-giving new creation may emerge. This experience of self-negation peaks when the soul experiences God in a dark night, which is experience of the sublime. For John, the renunciation of the self is an annihilation of self-identity based on the narcissistic appropriation of experience because the soul identifies with God's will. John's self-emptying, then, is primarily focused on unification with divinity. In this respect, for John the first thing to be aimed at in spirituality is not repentance for sin, but a turning of one's whole mind and body in the direction of God, since the origin of the deluded will and defiled soul lie in separation from God. Thus my true self, according to John, is my participation in God. There, all finite egos are transcended and included: preserved, transformed, redeemed, spiritualized, and realized.

Thus neither in Dogen's Zen nor in John's mysticism is there anything nihilistic. Rather, both assert that only by losing our false self can we find our true self. In both Dogen and John the process of self-negation is to "transcend" the self; yet John in practice insists on "the night of faith" in Christ while Dogen focuses on practices of "emptiness" through Zazen.

However, we find a different goal of self-negation in Dogen and John. Even though their approach looks similar, their goal is fundamentally different. In this regard, Merton describes the nature of self-detachment in both Buddhism and Christianity,

The only thing to do about it is to plunge right into the middle of contradiction and confusion in order to be transformed by what Zen calls the 'Great Death' and Christianity calls 'dying and rising with Christ.'¹³³

For John, the action of self-emptying is derived from God. It is the mystery of freedom

¹³²A.2.5.8.

¹³³Thomas Merton, *Zen and the Birds of Appetites*, (New York: New Directions, 1968), 51.

and love rather than something springing from our own spiritual self-interest. Thus John prefers to use words like transformation, absorption, participation, or inclusion of the self in God. In this regard, Merton writes:

It is a kenotic transformation, an emptying of all the contents of the ego-consciousness to become a void in which the light of God or the glory of God, the full radiation of the infinite reality of His Being and Love are manifested.¹³⁴

The core paradigm of emptying the self in John, then, is to deny oneself and convert to God with Christ, while detachment of the self in Dogen is to go beyond all duality of nothing and something. John understands self-emptying as follows:

Obviously one's journey must not merely exclude the hindrance of creatures, but also embody a dispossession and annihilation in the spiritual part of one's nature. Our Lord, for our instruction and guidance along this road, imparted that wonderful teaching-I think it is possible to affirm that the more necessary the doctrine the less it is practiced by spiritual persons-that I will quote fully and explain in its genuine and spiritual sense because of its importance and relevance to our subject. He states in the eighth chapter of St. Mark: **Si quis vult me sequi, deneget semetipsum et tollat crucem suam et sequatur me. Qui enim voluerit animam suam salvam facere perdet eam; qui autem perdidit animam suam propter me. . salvam faciet eam.** (If any one wishes to follow me my way, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his soul will lose it, but whoever loses it for me will gain it) [Mk. 8:34-35].¹³⁵

What is to be noted here is that the true obstacle to our spiritual journey is in our self not in the external world in or creatures. It is important to note that the emptiness which God requires is that of the renunciation of personal selfishness, not necessarily the renunciation of those created things which he has given us. In this regard, St. Augustine's teaching gives us an insight: if you want to find God, he says abandon the exterior world and reenter into yourself. However, do not remain in yourself, but go beyond yourself because you are not God.¹³⁶

In this respect for John detachment is a change of attitude toward our self. John says, "The first step to freedom of spirit is total renunciation of self-centeredness, or the

¹³⁴Ibid, 75.

¹³⁵A.2.7.4,5.

¹³⁶Joseph Card. Ratzinger, "Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger's Letter on Christian Meditation," *Buddhist-Christian Studies*, vol 11, (1991), 128.

narcissistic tendency, in both the sensible and spiritual realms.”¹³⁷

Therefore, while Dogen’s self-emptying is ultimately to realize the True-Self, John’s is to unify with God. Thus Dogen’s self-emptying requires self-awakening in order to realize the Buddha-nature. The most salient characteristic of consciousness to be emptied in Dogen’s detachment is a consciousness bound up with objects. To be enlightened, of course, objects of consciousness should be “no hindrance,” the trackless flight of birds across the empty sky.

However, this is different from mere mental vacuity. It is at least mind-filled with nothingness. It is not to attempt to blank out thought. D.T. Suzuki illustrates this type of no-mind, or mindless action by pointing to one of his cats and saying: “When that cat jumps down from the table to the floor to eat, it does not think, like a human being ‘I am hungry and want to eat that food, and will now jump down,’ no, it just jumps.”¹³⁸

Here the Taoist concepts of **Wu Wei** 無為 (literally “non-doing” or “non-action”) and **Wei Wu Wei** 為無為 (“acting through non-action) were deeply integrated into Dogen’s thought. A **Tao Te Ching** passage states:

The sage dwells in affairs of non-action (**Wu Wei**)... He acts but does not presume; He completes his work but does not dwell on it.¹³⁹

In other words, for Dogen, ‘non-attachment’ or ‘detachment’ did not mean having no goals or ends. According to Dogen, the real problem was attachment to one’s goal, not goals in themselves. Thus Dogen insisted that one’s awareness in the Buddha-mind must be maintained continuously. This attitude of detachment is revealed by the absence of any mental preoccupation with one’s goal during the activity or after the attempt to realize it is complete, whether or not the goal has been successfully realized. D.T. Suzuki states: “Zen emphasizes the purposelessness of work or being detached from teleological consciousness.”¹⁴⁰

¹³⁷Susan Muto, *John of the Cross for Today: The Ascent*, (Notre Dame, Indiana: Ave Maria Press, 1991), 51.

¹³⁸D. T. Suzuki, Erick Fromm, and Richard De Martino, *Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis*, (New York: Harper and Brothers), 46.

¹³⁹*Tao Te Ching*, Victor H. Mair trans, (NY: Bantam Books, 1990), 60.

¹⁴⁰D. T. Suzuki, *Essays in Zen Buddhism: Selected Writing of D. T. Suzuki*, William Barrett ed, (Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor, 1956), 51.

For Dogen, the negation of the self must not be dualistically differentiated as in John's mysticism in which the negation is offered as an opposition to the ordinary self. In this respect John's detachment is no more radical than Dogen's detachment. It differs insofar as it is theistic and retains differentiation. Enomiya-Lassalle compares the detachment of John with Zen:

No more radical. . . than that which enlightenment means and leads to. For enlightenment means to give up everything so thoroughly that only mere existence remains. One cannot go further in detachment.¹⁴¹

Thus for Dogen, the central task of self-emptying is to empty consciousness of its objects in order to ripen it for the self-revealing presence of the Buddha-nature-as-it-is. The goal of 'self-emptying,' then, is the liberation of individual selfhood from the static formulations and experiences of self-identity into the larger selfhood of self's denial. The way of "seeing" is being changed.

In fact, the necessity of the negation of the self has also been credited by modern theologians. The notion of a conscious self has been challenged by many as a false foundation. Modern deconstructionists assert that the autonomous ego should be removed from the central position accorded it since the Enlightenment. Derrida denies the concept of the self as a reality-founding ego. According to Derrida, the Cartesian sense of the ego has "collided with its own use of language only to awaken and not know who or what really it is"¹⁴²The autonomous self is no longer in existence for the deconstructionists.

According to David Tracy, such a de-centering process was begun by what he called the "post-theologians of secular culture" (Darwin, Marx, Freud, Nietzsche). They were very suspicious of the optimism concealed in the Western notions of rationalism and progress.¹⁴³They reject the Cartesian notion of the self and replaced it by the mode of continually constructing a self only by deconstructing all false notions of its own autonomous identity. Thus their reformation of the self which represents the post-

¹⁴¹H. M. Enomiya-Lassalle, *Zen: Way to Enlightenment*, (New York: Taplinger, 1968), 73.

¹⁴²Tracy David, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism*. (New York: Crossroads, 1981), 58.

¹⁴³*Ibid.*, 76.

modern awareness of truth describes the self as inadequacy, illusion, and the deception of consciousness.

C) Double Negation Character of 'Self Negation' :

1) Apophatic God vs Non-dual Emptiness

In fact, both Dogen's and John's self-emptying are characterized as a double negation which is well described in several different stages of process. The beginning stage is an assault upon the ego-self. The false ego has to be destroyed for us to be free. The clinging, grasping self must die. The destruction of the ego-self is not, however, simply a new intellectual insight, though it does involve a new way of seeing the world. It is an existential realization that the ego-self is fundamentally an illusion. In Dogen, when the false ego is removed by firm practice, the practitioner realizes that "Mountains are not mountain and waters are not waters." The 'ego-self's initial differentiation of mountains and waters is overcome. The discriminating mind that creates a world of illusion is destroyed and replaced by the realization of no-self. And this no-self experience brings liberation from anxiety and peace of mind. This is the first negation or stage of detachment.

In Dogen, this no-self experience, however, does not necessarily bring true-self experience. The practitioner realizes that the true-self is still unattained. The detachment is not yet completed. There still remains a differentiation between the first stage of the ignorance of ego-self and the newly attained realization of no-self. Although this awareness of no-self is different from ego-self consciousness, there is a danger of clinging to the experience of no-self. For one can objectify even the realization of no-self as a possession to grasp. When emptiness is objectified and grasped at, it ceases to be true emptiness. Even more, there is a danger of falling into nihilistic despair in the awareness of no-self.

Because of these dangers, Dogen's detachment demands a negating of even the differentiation between the two stages of ego-self and no-self. No one can be truly liberated until even the differentiation between the illusion of the ego-self and the awareness of no-self is overcome. Just as the illusion of the ego-self had to be negated, so also must the awareness of no-self be negated. This is a key point for Dogen's Zen.

In Dogen the resolution of the human dilemma can be solved when it undergoes the double negation of the ego-self, the negation of that negation. In the second negation one can transcend the non-duality of no-self and one can once again affirm particularity and individuality in the world, though in a different sense than before.

After the second negation, the final stages come. In the final stages, the world is affirmed as real, but now there is an awareness of the mutual interpretation and interdependence of all beings. This awakening overcomes the difference between the first two movements and includes both negations. In this stage, according to Dogen, “all forms of anxiety and all forms of attachment, open and hidden, explicit and implicit, are completely overcome.”¹⁴⁴ This is the awakening to the true self and the full realization of emptiness:

Because the Buddha- way intrinsically leaps out of plenitude and dearth, there is arising and perishing, illusion and enlightenment, sentiment being and buddhas. Still do flowers fall to our pity and weeds grow to our dis-pleasure.¹⁴⁵

What does Dogen mean by “leaps out?” Instead of synthesizing the first two stages, the final stage dynamically transcends them (neither “is” nor “is not”). Conze has classified the negation of Mahayana Buddhist logic as fourfold in character and very similar in structure to that of Dogen:

Considers four alternatives: (1) x (self) exists, (2) x does not exist, (3) x neither exists nor does not exist, and (4) x both exists and does not exist. Having reviewed these possibilities, the Buddhists then tend to reject all four as merely so many kinds of attachment.¹⁴⁶

In this pattern of the Mahayana tradition one-sided affirmation and negation have been rejected as erroneous because of some ‘non-dual reality’ which is free from both being and non-being. As we have seen, Dogen follows this fourfold negation which negates any intellectual affirmation or negation to which one could cling in order to bring about awakening. For Dogen, awakening is beyond affirmation and negation and yet includes

¹⁴⁴Leo D. Lefebure, *The Buddha and the Christ*, (Maryknoll: New York, 1993),72.

¹⁴⁵Cited in Joan Stambaugh, *The Formless Self*, 3.

¹⁴⁶Edward Conze, *Buddhist Thought in India: Three Phases of Buddhist Philosophy*, (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1962), 219.

both. Cupitt asserts that this double negation in terms of 'neither...nor' is the pivotal point for the realization of Mahayana emptiness.¹⁴⁷ Similarly, Tanahashi speaks of Dogen's negation:

Dogen. . . starts with an affirmative statement, then negates that affirmation, and concludes with a negation of that negative, which is a positive statement. Thus the first step is ordinary, "logocentric" discrimination, the second is denial of discrimination, and the third is beyond discrimination and denial of it.¹⁴⁸

Detachment of the mind (intellect) in Dogen, thus, is characterized by negations and negation of negations. Thus he demands a radical denuding of discursive meditation, to the extent of not even thinking what one is doing.

However, this structure of Dogen can be found similarly in John's theology. John makes affirmations about God in **kataphatic** or affirming theology: since all things come from God. The positive moment is affirming or **kataphatic** theology, which affirms statements about God. However, John asserts that it is misleading if one assumes a literal manner of understanding God and images since God remains radically other than any created reality; thus every image, symbol, and concept of God must also be negated. Thus affirmations about God are inconsistent and negations are true. This is what John calls apophatic theology for it negates any concept of God and images and reminds us how different God is from creation.¹⁴⁹

In this respect, John's apophatic negation, like Dogen's, is a double negation in character. For John the simple negation of any concept of God is not enough. John goes one more step. For John God can be neither affirmed nor negated. God neither is nor is not, because God is beyond being and non-being. God is beyond the categories of our affirmation and denial. Thus we should move up to the level of unknowing (**nada**) which is a union with God beyond all concepts and human affirmation and beyond all duality of subject and object.

Characteristic of this type of mysticism is the understanding that all finite determinations are not appropriate to and yet depend upon the infinite. Such a concept is

¹⁴⁷Don Cupitt, *After All: Religion Without Alienation*, (London: SGM Press, 1994), 103.

¹⁴⁸K. Tanahashi, *Moon in a Dewdrop*, 16-17.

¹⁴⁹Belden C. Lane, "Prayer Without Language in The Prophetic Tradition: Knowing God as Inaccessible Mountain-Marvelous Desert," 3-4.

gained by the mystic not only through negation of the finite world, but also through a second negation which includes human consciousness. Hence the mystic is able to see the world from outside the world's finite determinations, gaining a divine perspective.¹⁵⁰ By means of this double negation, God's transcendence does not mean the ultimate negation of the finite. Rather, it means a reaffirmation of the world. However, this can be realized when God is not compared to anything from within the finite world. Comparing God to something within a finite realm would denote a relation which means the profane taking over the sacred.

Thus the ultimate goal of double negation for John is the demanding move to deny a finite and limited perspective in order to embrace this from God's point of view. John states the reason that necessitates this double negation:

For it is a very easy thing to judge of the Being and greatness of God less worthily and nobly than befits His incomprehensible nature; for although our reason and judgement may form no express conception that God is like any one of these things, yet the very esteeming of these apprehensions, if in fact the soul esteems them, makes and causes it not to esteem God, or not to feel concerning Him, as highly as faith reaches, since faith tells us that He is incomparable, incomprehensible, and so forth. For, quite apart from the fact that the soul takes from God all that it gives to the creature, it is natural that its esteem of these apprehensible things should lead it to make a certain inward comparison between such things and God, which would prevent it from judging and esteeming God as highly as it ought. For the creature, whether terrestrial or celestial, and all distinct images and kinds of knowledge, both natural and supernatural, that can be encompassed by the faculties of the soul, however lofty they be in this life, have no comparison or proportion with the being of God, since God falls within no genus and no species, whereas the creature do, or so the theologians tell us.¹⁵¹

In developing this relation, John works out a logic of affirming and negating. In this respect, John's theology echoes Dionysian logic. Bernard McGinn describes the Dionysian logic:

1. God is x (true, metaphorically).
2. God is not-x (true, anagogically).

¹⁵⁰Louis Dupre, *The Other Dimension. A Search for the Meaning of Religious Attitudes*, (New York: The Seabury Press, 1979), 396-418.

¹⁵¹A.3.12.1.

3. God is neither x nor not-x (true, unitively).¹⁵²

Here, both spiritualities are composed of affirming and negating and then negating the alternative of affirmation and negation. It is a journey between yes (thinking), no (not thinking), and neither yes nor no and both yes and no (non-thinking). It is the unknowing realization of the serious play of contemplative deconstruction. Dogen's logic shows the negation of an illusory discriminating consciousness, denying the usual distinctions and categories of human thought and leading to the experience of Emptiness, reality itself. Only then can one return to affirm the world in a new sense.

2) Differences in Double Negation Character Between Dogen and John

However, although there is a similar logical structure in Dogen and John, there is fundamental difference of metaphysical paradigm between them. In Dogen's Zen, detachment can demolish all possible foundations, even ones based on voidness and presence, in order to demonstrate Buddhism's metaphysical 'non-foundation' of presence. In Buddhism as well as in Dogen, the metaphysical foundation itself lies beyond conventional awareness. In other words, mystical awareness reveals the genuine metaphysical foundation, a 'truth' that is distinguished from the truth of conventional awareness.

However, as William Johnston suggests, there is no total apophatis in John's mystical negation.¹⁵³ It always points back to affirmation. In John's mysticism, unlike Dogen, apophatic and kataphatic ways continually critique and revitalize each other. Thomas Merton argued:

We must affirm and deny at the same time. One cannot go without the other. If we go on affirming, without denying, we end up by affirming that we have delimited the Being of God in our concepts. If we go on denying without affirming, we end up by denying that our concepts can tell the truth about Him in any sense whatever.¹⁵⁴

For John, mystical awareness is grounded on a dualistic metaphysical foundation which

¹⁵²Bernard McGinn, The Foundations of Mysticism, The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism, vol I, (New York: Crossroad, 1991), 177

¹⁵³William Johnston, "The Experience of God in Christian Apophatic Mysticism," in Frederick Sontag and Darrol Bryant, eds., God: The Contemporary Discussion, (New York: Rose of Sharon Press, 1982), 365.

¹⁵⁴Cited in Belden C. Lane, "Prayer Without Language in the Apophatic Tradition," 21.

presupposes an ultimate disjunctive-conjunctive dualism. Although John's mystical awareness is found in the dark night, which is beyond discursive reason, its metaphysical foundation is dualistic. In other words, even though John negates all concepts, thoughts, and images in the spiritual process, he realizes mystical awareness in its dualistic metaphysical foundation: it characterizes a religion wherein an originator agency of realities, a Creator God, is conceived of as ontologically distinct from the realities of the created human soul.

God is neither this nor that, but this does not mean an ontological negation of God. Although God is beyond human capacity, God still exists. Though John's mysticism may claim to show a way to achieve an awareness that overcomes dualism by the presence of God, that awareness occurs in another dimension and does not yield an insight that negates the traditional dualism of Christian metaphysics.

Even though John uses predicates in emphasizing the apophatic characteristics of God, in much the same way that Dogen does, the mystical awareness of the presence of God does not turn the cosmos into an illusion with the realization that it is void that is found in Dogen.

Therefore, as the Christian tradition in general proclaims, John's detachment (**via negativa**) is primarily theo-centric. It is important to remember that the detachment of John is the answer to a personal call and in cooperation with the grace that comes with that call. John's detachment, thus, requires devotion to, submission to, and interpersonal experience of God. John gives three reasons for detachment. First, it allows the use of things to be reformed by love and reason. Second, through detachment desire can be cultivated. It cultivates the soul to the life of emptiness and self-giving. And this cultivation is for the sake of Christ. The soul is giving up all things for the sake of Christ. Thus spiritual detachment is identified as the way of Christ. Third, detachment brings the soul to equanimity in order to be united with God.

On the contrary, in Dogen, there is no such engagement with divine nature. It is to be present and awake in a new subjective consciousness, which is no longer concerned with what we have, but with what we really are. In other words, detachment for Dogen is to stop seeing dualistic existence and non-dualistic Being as opposites, and to start perceiving Being in existence. The meditative detachment of Dogen, thus, is one

whereby one's experiences and very identity are scrutinized under the two characteristics of all phenomenal reality; impermanence, and selflessness. Thus detachment for Dogen is primarily focused on breaking ordinary ways of perceiving reality. In this sense, detachment is a matter of consciousness. It is the de-absolutizing of our present thoughts thus allowing the content of our ordinary consciousness to be transformed. It is a matter of understanding reality. If anyone can see reality as it is, as they are, then he or she is detached from illusion.

IV. How 'Union with God' or 'Enlightenment' is Fulfilled

A) Faith: As a Means to Achieve the Mystical Goal

1) Faith As a Replacement of Intellect (John) vs Faith As a Presupposition for Awakening (Dogen)

While both John and Dogen emphasize detachment on their spiritual paths, they agree on the fact that the faith has an essential role in the process of detachment. What is, then, the relationship between faith and detachment? In order to have faith, one must detach from all human attachment according to John. Therefore, faith in God and detachment are inseparable. Thus those who approach God in faith must detach from all human knowledge, experience, imagination, and feeling about God, acknowledging that God is beyond them.

John's understanding of God gives us clear reasons why he emphasizes detachment and faith as important means to union with God. Following the Dionysian apophatic, for John God is totally beyond all comprehension and expression. He repeatedly insists on the transcendence of God. We cannot know God through our human ways of knowing and those who journey to God must necessarily detach from them. Then how do we know God? John asserts that the only way to God is through faith. It informs us of matters that we have never seen or known, either in themselves or in their likeness.

Moreover, for John, detachment is not a simple negation of faculties. Rather, it also requires a transformation of faculties. Human powers must become divinized. For transformative work to proceed, John amplifies his explanation of the emptying of the "spiritual part of the soul" by further dividing it into its three constitutive functions, intellect, memory and will. In their phenomenal state, intellectualizing, remembering

and willing are “impure;” they lack the ability to relate themselves to their unitive, divine ground. Thus understanding must be changed from human and natural into divine, and the will must learn to love God not with a natural human love but with a divine love, with the force and purity of the Holy Spirit.

Following Augustine and Aquinas, John holds that faith, hope and charity are the pre-eminent Christian virtues, directing man to his supernatural end, God, and raising man to supernatural life, so that man partakes of God’s nature and hence is united with God. John holds that man is united with God through faith in the intellect, hope in the memory, and charity in the will.¹⁵⁵ To empty the intellect, memory and will, John declares that detachment from these faculties should be replaced by faith, hope and charity.

Thus, for John, unlike Dogen, detachment is a replacement of other virtues. John integrates ordinary Christian virtues with the mystic’s union with God: We are united with God through faith, hope, and charity, not through intellect, will or extraordinary mystical visions. In the Ascent, he writes:

As we outlined for the sensory night a method of emptying the sense faculties of desire for their objects...so for this spiritual night we will present a method of emptying and purifying the spiritual faculties of all that is not God. By this method these faculties [intellect, memory and will] can abide in the darkness of these three virtues [faith, hope and **caritas**] which are the means and preparation for the soul’s union with God.¹⁵⁶

Thus John integrates faith, hope, and charity with the negative apophatic way of self-denial and self-detachment. John identifies this seemingly negative self-emptying with the positive virtues of faith, hope, and charity: faith causes a void of understanding in the intellect; hope begets an emptiness of possessions in the memory; and charity produces an emptiness of affections and joy in the will.¹⁵⁷

Faith, thus, according to John, ‘brings us to believe divinely revealed truths which transcend every natural light and infinitely exceed all human understanding.’¹⁵⁸ This

¹⁵⁵A.2.6.1.

¹⁵⁶A 2.6.6.

¹⁵⁷A.2.6.2.

¹⁵⁸A.2.3.3.

faith knowledge, however, is like God's knowledge of himself. Because John believes that the means by which one comes into union with God must bear a resemblance to God. For John, the likeness between God and faith is so close:

No other difference exists than that between believing in God and seeing Him. Just as God is infinite, faith proposes Him to us as infinite: as there are three Persons in the One God, it presents Him to us in this way; and as God is darkness to our intellect, so does dazzle and blind us.¹⁵⁹

John holds that we can be like God through faith in our intellect.¹⁶⁰ Christian faith, John declares, 'brings us to believe divinely revealed truths which transcend every natural light and infinitely exceed all human understanding.'¹⁶¹ John, citing Paul (Rom. 10:17), adds that faith is 'not a knowledge derived from the senses, but an assent of the soul to what enters through hearing.'¹⁶² When John says he who is to come to unite himself in union with God must not go by understanding or by attaching himself to pleasure, or to the sense, or to the imagination, but by believing His being, which does not fall into the understanding, or in appetite, or in imagination or any other sense, by not understanding, John means by human industry, and by believing he means the consent of the will to the motion of charity infused by the Holy spirit.

On the other hand, for Dogen, faith **shin** (信) or **shinco** (信仰)¹⁶³ is understood existentially as a predisposition of the heart. It is based on a conviction of the truth of the Buddha's teaching that invites the conditioned self toward the unconditioned real. In this regard, as Ergardt asserts, it is the initial stage of all learning, such as that expressed by a disciples' trust in his or her teacher. Thus those who would seek enlightenment by following the teaching of Buddhas are urged to have faith.¹⁶⁴ Morris J. Augustine, in his book, The Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana, also agrees on a fact that the faith in

¹⁵⁹A.2.3.5.

¹⁶⁰A.2.9.1.

¹⁶¹A.2.3.1.

¹⁶²A.2.3.3.

¹⁶³The word "faith" in English translations of Dogen's works is a translation of its Chinese originals. Dogen got the language and the idea from the Chinese who in turn were doing their best to translate the Original Sanskrit. Faith (Pali, *saddha*; Sanskrit, *sraddha*) is presented as the first of the five cardinal virtues of the Buddhist path. Faith is regarded the "seed" without which the plant of spiritual insight cannot begin to grow.

Mahayana Buddhism is the first and necessary stage by which every follower of the Buddha must pass through on his way of enlightenment. He concluded that faith is an act of will, in response to the permeation of Suchness, to seek enlightenment. It is a means to pursue disciplined practice in order to attain enlightenment. In this regard, faith is a necessary means which leads to practice, and practice in faith to enlightenment.¹⁶⁵

However, Dogen sees faith not only as a necessary predisposition for the journey to self-awakening but also as the very substance of that awakening. Dogen says:

Belief as a root, remember, is beyond self, beyond others, beyond our own intention, beyond our own contrivance, beyond outside influence, and beyond independently-established criteria; thus it has been transmitted intimately between east and west. Belief demonstrated with the whole body is called belief. It follows inevitably from the condition of Buddhahood, following circumstances completely and following itself completely. Unless the condition of Buddhahood is present, the belief is not realized. For this reason it is said that "The great ocean of the Buddha-Dharma is entered by belief itself." In sum, the place where the belief is realized is the place where Buddhist patriarchs are realized..¹⁶⁶

Thus, according to Dogen, faith is the beginning and end of detachment. The practice of detachment is possible by believing the fact that everyone is originally enlightened. Here, innate Buddha-hood and the identity of practice and enlightenment is worked by belief. In this respect belief is not only a prerequisite and accompanying attitude to the practice of zazen, but an "attainment" as well. Kapleau explains how Dogen's concept of faith is related with zazen:

At the same time, this sitting is entered into in the faith that it will one day culminate in the . . . direct perception of the true nature of this Mind. . . . In authentic sikan-taza neither of these two elements of faith can be dispensed with. . .¹⁶⁷

Thus we can see that in both traditions, faith is the principal foundation for the practice

¹⁶⁴Robert Traer, "Faith in the Buddhist Tradition," *Buddhist-Christian Studies*, 11 (1991), 87.

¹⁶⁵*Ibid.*, 89-90.

¹⁶⁶Dogen's *Shobogenzo*, "Sanjushichi-Bon-Bodai-Bunpo," Gudo Nishijima & Chodo Cross trans, 9.

¹⁶⁷Philip Kapleau, *The Three Pillars of Zen*, 7.

of detachment. While Dogen's practice of detachment is based on the faith that all beings are Buddha-nature, John's faith is an important means by which the soul can be united with God.

However, concerning the notion of Dogen's faith, we, must first notice that there are two distinct notions of faith in the Buddhist tradition, and each has a different understanding associated with it. There are, thus, two different notion of faith associated with the concept of enlightenment; doctrinal faith and patriarchal faith. According to doctrinal faith, one can become a Buddha, whereas patriarchal faith believes that "I am already the Buddha." Thus doctrinal faith is preliminary to enlightenment, whereas patriarchal faith is itself enlightenment.

According to Sung Bae Park, the traditional literature is marked by numerous references to faith and its importance for attaining nirvana. Having analyzed the early Buddhist texts, Park concludes that the Buddhist notion of faith includes practice and enlightenment in the sense of abiding firmly with resolute conviction in a state of clearness, tranquility, and freedom.¹⁶⁸

Park, however, attributes the notion of patriarchal faith to the Hua-yen scholar Li T'ung-hsuan, who lived in the seventh and eighth centuries and who wrote: "If anyone in the stage of the ten levels of faith does not believe that his own body is the same as the Buddha body and that there is no distinction between the causal state (gradual practice) and effect (enlightenment), then he has not realized the perfection of faith supported by wisdom."¹⁶⁹

Park identifies patriarchal faith with what is described as right faith. Only patriarchal faith can be truly non-backsliding, because unlike doctrinal faith it is not a function of will and reason but is grounded in suchness and dependent origination as a function of one mind: "Moreover, since the shift from the mind of faith to the mind of wisdom involves an irreversible transformation of the basis resulting in a qualitative change, an enlightened Buddha cannot fall back to the state of an unenlightened sentient being."¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁸Sung Bae Park, *Buddhist Faith and Sudden Enlightenment*, 1-3.

¹⁶⁹*Ibid.*, 21.

¹⁷⁰*Ibid.*, 48.

Here we can see that Dogen's notion of faith echoes with patriarchal faith in the fact that everyone is originally enlightened. As we observed already in Dogen, it is faith that all beings are Buddha-nature. Consequently, in the notion of faith in Dogen an objectification of the Buddha is denied, whereas doctrinal faith involves a subject-object relationship between a person and the Buddha and thus faith may take the form of having faith in or believing in the Buddha.

Dogen's faith, thus, presupposes a non-dualistic construction and asserts that the separation presupposed by doctrinal faith is "a false distinction made by the discriminating mind," which can only be eliminated by realizing "that it does not actually exist."¹⁷¹ In this regard Hee Jin Kim states:

Dogen does not imply that faith precedes enlightenment or is eventually replaced by enlightenment. Throughout the ongoing advance in enlightenment [**bukkojoji**] faith and enlightenment, believing and seeing are twin companion of emptiness and the Buddha-nature. . . . For Dogen, faith lies in original enlightenment, enlightenment comes from original faith.¹⁷²

These two basic ideas of faith and enlightenment actually suggest that faith is the beginning and end of practice. Here, innate Buddha-hood and the identity of practice and enlightenment are worked by faith. The practice of detachment is possible by believing the fact that everyone is originally enlightened. Here, practice is a function of enlightenment rather than preliminary to it.

In this sense faith is not cognitive belief, but connotes more a sense of engagement and anticipation. Here faith is no longer a means but an end. In this regard, Park rightly argues that faith is one with practice and enlightenment as well as a means to both:

The mark of true Mahayana Buddhist faith is its inseparability from practice and enlightenment. Thus, faith has a threefold structure. However, we can consider this structure from the perspective of both doctrinal and patriarchal faith. In the first case, faith leads to practice and practice leads to enlightenment; in the second, faith is practice and practice is enlightenment. Since the key point is the inseparability of faith, practice, and enlightenment, both positions are valid; yet I would argue that patriarchal faith is more in line with basic Buddhist insights concerning the non-dual nature of reality.¹⁷³

¹⁷¹Ibid., 52.

¹⁷²Hee Jin Kim, 1975 ed, 81.

¹⁷³Sung Bae Park, Buddhist Faith and Sudden Enlightenment, 55.

Abe also agrees with Park in this regard. Abe states: "In the Buddha Dharma, practice and realization are identical. Because one's present practice is practice in realization, one's initial negotiating of the Way in itself is the whole of original realization."¹⁷⁴ Perhaps the conceptualization of Buddhist experience as well as Dogen's Zen require using faith in two different senses. We recall that Park speaks of doctrinal faith and patriarchal faith to describe Buddhist experience. The practice of faith, while preceding as well as participating in some sense in enlightenment, may well continue for some time before one at least claims to experience enlightenment, as was true for Dogen. Thus, in giving instructions for practice, a Zen master advises his disciples not to seek enlightenment beyond practice, for practice itself is original enlightenment.¹⁷⁵

2) Faith: God vs Dharma

However, the faith of Dogen has completely different meaning from the Christian sense of faith. For Dogen faith is affirmed without reference to any divine reality. In John's spirituality, faith is necessarily demanded in the God who reveals and manifests himself. For John, faith is the bridge between God and human beings. Since no creature possesses an essential likeness with God, nothing in the created order can serve as the means towards union with God except faith. God's revealed word must be accepted unquestionably in faith. This faith itself is a grace, an unmerited gift given by God to man. The distinctive function of faith in John's mysticism is that it produces "likeness of God." In John, union with God is referred to as a "union of likeness" which is the "union and transformation of the soul with God, which is not being wrought continually, but only when there is produced that likeness"¹⁷⁶ Moreover, it is the Holy spirit who moves the will interiorly and supernaturally by His presence in it, making the soul believe the truths revealed by God.

However, for Dogen, faith is a necessary predisposition for the journey to self-awakening. Thus everything taught must be verified or falsified in the individual's own experience. The full responsibility lies on man himself. It is man's intention and

¹⁷⁴Robert Traer, "Faith in the Buddhist Tradition," 102

¹⁷⁵Hee Jin Kim, *Dogen Kigen-Mystical Realist*, (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1980), 79.

¹⁷⁶A.2.5.3.

action which matter. There is no need of mediation of any kind. Each one is his own refuge. It is non-theistic. It is faith that the Dharma is present universally, but due to our self-centredness it does not manifest itself to us. Unlike John, Dogen's faith is based on the impersonal principle of the Dharma's universal existence. There is no personal nature in Dogen's concept of faith.

Thus, in the case of Dogen's faith, Dharma always had existed, but by believing the fact that there is the Dharma one can discover the Way of the Dharma. In this sense, faith in Dogen is a means to discover the principle of the Dharma. Faith is to be understood as an intellectual affirmation of unverifiable propositions. Dogen states:

It is imperative for those who practice the Way to believe in it. Those who have faith in the Way should know for certain that they are unfailingly in the Way from the very beginning¹⁷⁷

Thus it is faith that enables one to enter the Buddha's path, but one has only made a start. Much has still to be done. First, one must believe in the Buddha's teaching. Second, one must understand the teachings thoroughly. Third, one must practice them according to what one understands. In this respect, both "believing" and "practicing" have to be achieved at the same time. When "to believe" and "to practice" are satisfactorily fulfilled, one has realized the ultimate truth.

B) The Notion of Grace between Dogen and John in the Path of Contemplation

1) God's Grace (John) vs "Self-power" (Dogen) **Jiriki** (自力)

Further, there is another important means of achieving the mystical goal. Generally speaking, comparing the means of achieving contemplation in Zen and Christian mysticism, the distinction is often made that the former is solely dependent on natural power or human effort, while the latter is regarded as graced by God. Christian mysticism, thus, is called supernatural or graced contemplation, while Zen is seen as acquired contemplation.

Concerning the means of achieving the goal of contemplation, John insists that

¹⁷⁷Shobogenzo, "Gakudoyojinshu," Cited in Hee Jin Kim, *Mystical Realist*, 1975, 81.

contemplation is not by our own effort, rather it is the gift of God, and the work of God's grace. Even if there is a cooperating work within man, John maintains the centrality of grace. Thomas Merton also agrees. He states:

Contemplation is a transcendent gift of God who, in His mercy, completes the hidden and mysterious work of creation in us by enlightening our minds and hearts, by awakening in us the awareness that we are words spoken in His own Word, and His creating Spirit dwells in us, and we are in Him. That we are in Christ and Christ lives in us. Contemplation is the awareness and realization and experience of what Paul has said: "I live, not me, but Christ lives in me."¹⁷⁸

Thus for John, in contemplation, God accomplishes all. Because this is farther than human forces can reach, since each thing has its own operation, according to the being which it has or the life which it lives.¹⁷⁹

According to John, there are two things which are above human capabilities, and these are: to dismiss the natural by natural ability, which cannot happen; and to touch and unite oneself to the supernatural, which is much more difficult, and to tell the truth, by natural ability alone, is impossible.¹⁸⁰ Not only do finite objects not serve as approximate means for union with God, but neither can natural human operations. In this regard, John's contemplation is supernatural mysticism. John states:

No matter how much an individual does through his own efforts, he cannot actively purify himself enough to be disposed in the least degree for the divine union of the perfection of love.¹⁸¹

Therefore, for John, it is God's grace that can accomplish contemplation. It is God's grace that allows the soul to ascend the mount of perfection. It is performed with the help of grace, while Dogen's is characterized by unaided nature alone.

As Ruiz asserts, the purifying action of the theological virtues must precede the infusion of grace by adapting man's nature to the supernatural. The dynamism of grace and God's presence in the soul through grace in the soul's center make this infusion, or passive experience of God possible. Ruiz states:

¹⁷⁸Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, (New York: Abbey of Gethsemani, Inc, 1961), 5.

¹⁷⁹A.3.16.6.

¹⁸⁰A.3.2.13.

¹⁸¹N.1.3.3.

“For John everything is passive which is accompanied without the intervention of bodily sense. . . the saint applies the term ‘passive’ to favor and graces which no one today would consider as such.¹⁸²

In this way the **via negativa** became radicalized to mean the denial of man’s nature and of creation in general. Following Dionysian apophatic tradition, grace as juxtaposed to human liberty, is no longer an irreconcilable paradox. Such a concept of grace does not really appear in Dogen who insists on cultivating an attitude of self-reliance. In this way the presence or absence of grace is the dividing line that separates the Christian mystic from his non-Christian counterpart. Enomiya-Lassalle writes:

In Zen this conversion is attained through one’s own power almost as a unique cause; whereas Eckhart emphasizes the effect of the grace of Christ in contrast to holiness by works which at this time was particularly in vogue.¹⁸³

He is his own saviour. Thus in Dogen’s Zen the “resolution” is strictly a product of one’s own effort. Dogen’s Zen does not have any “higher authority,” and so methodologically it is to be distinguished from John’s which relies upon God. H. Dumoulin also agrees with Enomiya-Lassalle by saying that Zen experience can be categorized as “natural mysticism” contrary to Christian mysticism which is characterized as a “supernatural mysticism of grace.”¹⁸⁴ Thus for John, grace is essential which is supernatural, while Dogen’s Zen is natural.

However, it is difficult, then, to see the theological foundation for a clear-cut distinction between prayer which can be taught and that which cannot. At any rate it is difficult to see why anyone should point to a certain stage in prayer saying: “Here starts the special grace: simple prayer is the border line, silence marks the advance into extraordinary prayer.”

If John meant that silent and wordless concentration in the absence of thoughts and images cannot be attained to by ordinary human endeavour, then he was wrong, as is

¹⁸²Federico Ruiz, “Cimas de Contemplacion: Exegesis de Llama de Amor Viva,” *Ephemerides Carm*, 13, (1962), 293.

¹⁸³H. M. Enomiya-Lassalle, *Zen Meditation for Christians*, trans, John C. Maraldo, (Lasalle, Illinois: Open Court, 1974), 147.

clearly proved by Dogen's zazen, which as far as concentration is concerned seems to be little different from John's counterpart. In this regard Friedrich Heiler states:

Although the descriptions of the stages of prayer, their number and their characteristics vary, yet there is no essential difference between the neo-Platonic, Sufi, Hindu, and Christian mystics; their basic psychological character is identical even with the stages of absorption in the Yoga and in Buddhism, though in the latter every notion of prayer, that is, communion with God, is excluded.¹⁸⁵

Thus according to Heiler, it seems difficult, perhaps impossible, to distinguish Christian contemplation from others. If, then, we wish to set Christian contemplation apart, we can only do so by a theological definition. And then the best definition is not that Christian contemplation is performed with grace and is supernatural, whereas the other is natural, but that Christian contemplation is found in that wisdom which arises from a deep love of God in Christ. This is the Thomistic definition, in which, I think, John's contemplation can be correctly understood. On the other hand, Dom Graham discusses this matter in another way. He says:

God's activity toward us, His 'realizing His own image, takes places at two levels—that of nature and that of grace: though the whole process is in fact a 'gracious' one, being independent of any merit on our part.¹⁸⁶

According to Graham, there is no contradiction between grace and nature. For him grace does not ignore nature and vice-versa. In other words, grace cannot be perfect without nature. Thus both cooperate with each other in terms of fulfilling their own goal. Also Johnston has questioned the correspondence between grace and nature:

We must study more carefully the Zen 'self-reliance'. . . . Time and again Western theologians have read into Zen a radical Pelagianism that has no place for grace and is incompatible with Christian trust in God. But is Zen really so Pelagian? Perhaps it is. But on the other hand, it is not impossible that this self-reliance has much in common with the renunciation of John of the Cross who demands a complete detachment from everything (even from thoughts and ideas of God) in order that one may rely on pure faith which is like the night of the soul.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁴Heinrich Dumoulin, *A History of Zen Buddhism*, trans, Paul Peachey, (Boston: Beacon, 1969), 282.

¹⁸⁵Friedrich Heiler, *Prayer*, trans. by S. McComb. (Oxford, 1958), 194.

¹⁸⁶Dom Aelred Graham, *Zen Catholicism*, 32.

¹⁸⁷William Johnston, "Dialogue with Buddhism," *Monchanin-Information*, 2, 7 (September 1969), 7.

Johnston, like Graham, also finds a relation between grace in John's detachment and nature or self-reliance in Zen. Both authors are dissatisfied with making a distinction between grace and nature. Both authors agree on the fact that grace does not eliminate human efforts as well as that nature, or human effort itself, is not enough to fulfill its goal. Johnston denies the division between the "traditional" grace-nature dichotomy.

At this point it is important to find out whether there is any concept of grace in Zen Buddhism especially in Dogen and how it differs from that of John. Generally speaking the concept of special grace dispensed by a Supreme Being is ignored by Zen Buddhism.

In Dogen, there is a sense of grace which is similar to that of John. Dogen does not only speak of **jiriki** "self-power" (自力), but he also often speaks of **tariki** "other power" (他力):

When you let go of your mind and body and forget them completely, when you throw yourself into Buddha's abode, when everything is done by the Buddha, when you follow the Buddha Mind without effort or anxiety- you break free from life's suffering and become the Buddha.¹⁸⁸

Johnston also writes about similar concept of 'other power' in Eastern contemplation. He writes:

In its final stages Eastern meditation too speaks of an incalculable factor, of some thing quite unpredictable- that is the ultimate enlightenment that no master can teach and no disciple can achieve unless it comes from a force outside which even in Zen, has been called 'grace.' But this is at the end. Before this stage is reached much has been taught by the wisdom of the Eastern guru.¹⁸⁹

Dogen has mentioned "done by the Buddha" which is similar to the concept of grace in John.

2) Grace as Personal (John) vs Impersonal (Dogen)

However, the 'done by the Buddha' should not be understood in a personal sense. According to Dogen, the concept of the Buddha is not regarded as an objectified

¹⁸⁸R. Masunaga, *Shobogenzo*, "Shoji," *The Soto Approach to Zen*, (Tokyo, 1958), 99

¹⁸⁹William Johnston, "Mystical Prayer- Can It Be Taught?" *Review for Religious*, 28, 6 (September 1969), 761.

Supreme Being as in Christianity. Rather the Buddha is regarded as the symbol of the Buddha-nature. When Dogen speaks of “other power” he does not mean to indicate the power of the Buddha in the sense of an objective Being, the one who existed historically a long time ago. Rather, ‘Dogen’s concept of grace or ‘other power’ may be likened to the reception of an omnipresent power of nature like a fish which lives by the power or grace of the ocean. Thus it is not grace in personal sense, rather it is the in a cosmic or natural sense which exists everywhere. It is intrinsic in the Buddha-nature. As fish can swim in the ocean, an aspirant can achieve enlightenment in the Buddha.

At this point, Suzuki’s explication of grace in Zen may help to clarify Dogen’s understanding of “other power.” Concerning the concept of the grace in Zen, Suzuki discusses the function of the “self-reliance” or “will power” of Zen. To achieve enlightenment is a function of the power of the will. He says, “enlightenment is an act of intuition born of the will.”¹⁹⁰ Thus Suzuki understands “self reliance” in terms of will-power to reach enlightenment. However, according to Suzuki, the ”will-power” of Zen does not indicate the ordinary- Western sense of the word. He states:

The rocks are where they are-this is their will. The rivers flow-this is their will. The plants grow-this is their will. The birds fly-this is their will. Human beings talk-this is their will. The seasons change, heaven sends down rain or snow, the earth occasionally shakes, the waves roll, the stars shine-each of them follows its own will. To be is to will and so is to become. There is absolutely nothing in this world that has not its will. The one great will from which all these wills, infinitely varied, flow is what I call the “Cosmic (or ontological) Unconscious,” which is the zero-reservoir of infinite possibilities.¹⁹¹

Suzuki understands the ‘will’ not only in the sense of an individual human faculty, but rather as the “cosmic” and “universal” intrinsic power of all beings. It is the Buddha-nature. In other words, “self-reliance or “will power” is not speaking in terms of the ordinary sense of self or will. Thus it is power which intrinsically exists in all beings. Hence, grace is the “will power” which is intrinsically possessed in nature as well as in the cosmos. Grace is already given in all beings as “will power.” In this sense ‘grace’

¹⁹⁰D.T. Suzuki, Fromm, Erich, and Richard De Martino, *Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis*, (New York: Grove, 1960), 45.

¹⁹¹*Ibid.*, 51.

and 'self effort' are two different aspects of the same coin. One's self effort to achieve enlightenment is possible because it is already given in "will power.'

In this regard, according to Zen, grace and effort are another expression of the Buddha-nature. Self effort is an action of grace. It is already graced-action. Every self effort is possible because the 'will-power' is already given. It is like a fish which swims in the ocean. The fish can swim because it is in the Ocean. Thus grace is intrinsically bound up with nature. In this respect, in Dogen's Zen as well as Zen in general, grace and the nature are intimately bound together.

Insofar as we are concerned, however, there is fundamental difference between the concept of grace in Dogen and John. In John, unlike Dogen, grace is not only intrinsically bound up with nature. Grace in John is also understood dualistically, while in Dogen, it is non-dualistic. Grace in John is supernatural, while in Dogen it is natural. In this sense grace in John is extrinsic while Dogen's is intrinsic. The reason why grace in John is dualistic while in Dogen it is non-dualistic is because for John God is regarded as Subsistent Being, and personal, while the Buddha-nature is understood as oriental nothingness. Thus there would not be a correspondence between John and Dogen in regard to grace unless there was some similarity between the God of John and the Buddha nature.

This different understanding of grace between John and Dogen is due to the fact that they have a different understanding of human nature. As we already observed in the above section, John sees human nature as a "corrupted" by original sin, while Dogen sees a human being as "no-self." For John, a human being cannot be saved by himself alone. It is only God who is able to save man from corruption. In John, grace is not understood in terms 'intrinsic' in nature. In other words, he is no concept that humans have self-power to achieve union with God.

V. Mystical Experiences in Dogen's Zen and St. John of the Cross

A) Mystical Experience:

1) Satori vs Union with God

For both Dogen and John the enlightenment experience or the experience of union with God promote a kind of psychic wholeness and unification. They both deal in some

way with the ultimate issues and mysteries of the cosmos that transcend conventional explanations. They both seek themselves within the domain of mystical experience which is not to be caught in the web of words; and both **Satori** and union with God are such. In both cases they seek a similar collapse of disjunctive –conjunctive dualism. For both, the enlightenment sought lies beyond the understanding of the conventional mind.

The result of enlightenment experience for both Dogen and John is that the self no longer lives from out of the self: the **principium** is now other than the “I.” It is some sort of all-encompassing, transcendent-yet-immanent absolute; and the mystic decides, sees, lives, and even exists through this new perspective. For both this new principle is neither abstract nor particular, but a “concrete universal.”

Hence, for both Dogen and John, mystical experiences are beyond concepts and knowledge. “Emptiness” in Dogen’s term and “dark night” in St John’s term relate to one’s being. For John, the true “dark night” is that of the Spirit, when the “subject” of all higher forms of vision and intelligence is itself darkened and left in emptiness. From the Dogen point of view, when a person realizes pure ‘void’ or pure being’ emptiness is no longer opposed to ‘fullness,’ but emptiness and fullness are one.

However, there is a difference between John’s essential union and Dogen’s enlightenment. Unlike Dogen, John’s union with God is explicitly personal in character. John understands “union” to mean a “union of likeness.” This is a union based on a duality of God and self, for this “supernatural union takes effect when God’s will and the soul’s are in conformity so that nothing in the one is repugnant to the other. Thus for John, mystical union is basically a coming together of two, opposite essences.

For John, thus, union means transformation of the soul into its divine prototype, deification in the true sense of the word. In this perfect union, the soul is entirely illumined and transfigured by the primal divine light; it takes on the form of light. The fervent communion of God and the soul has become immersion. Thus, the soul appears to be God and can possess what God possesses:

When God grants this supernatural favor to the soul, so great a union is caused that all things of both God and the soul become one in participant transformation, and

the soul appears to be God more than a soul. Indeed, it is God by participation.¹⁹²

John describes several times the transformation of the soul in union with God. He says the soul becomes divine.¹⁹³ It becomes a shadow of God.¹⁹⁴ It is clothed with God and bathed in divinity, not as though on the surface, but in the interior of the spirit, superabounding in divine delights.¹⁹⁵ Bernard McGinn describes the characteristics of Christian mystical experience as seeking the “presence of God.”:

Inspired in part by the seminal work of Joseph Marechal, but especially by my reading of the texts that have been accepted as mystical classics in the history of Christianity, both East and West, I have come to find the term “presence” a more central and more useful category for grasping the unifying note in the varieties of Christian mysticism. Thus we can say that the mystical element in Christianity is that part of its belief and practices that concerns the preparation for, the consciousness of, and the reaction to what can be described as the immediate or direct presence of God.¹⁹⁶

For John, the union with God, characterized as the “presence of God” also denotes the union of the Trinity. John adopted the prayer of Jesus in which the union implies union of the three persons in the Trinity, the hypostatical union of the Word with his humanity, the union of God and Christ with the human person. John adopts all these aspects of union and incorporates them into his concept of union with God. Louth has described the characteristics of the Christian experience of the presence of God:

In the dark night, the soul cannot see, but she can feel the presence of the Word: the Word gives the soul some sense of his presence. . . . And the senses that Gregory shows most interest in are precisely those that are concerned with presence: smell, taste, and touch or feeling. . . . It is important to note too that this presence is something which comes upon the soul: the soul does not find God, but rather is found by him.¹⁹⁷

Thus, for John, the presence of God is achieved beyond the realm of what can be

¹⁹²A.2.5.7.

¹⁹³C.22.3.

¹⁹⁴F.3.79.

¹⁹⁵C.26.1.

¹⁹⁶Bernard McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism*, vol I of “The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism,” (New York: Crossroads, 1992), 17.

¹⁹⁷Andrew Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys*, 94.

conventionally known or explained. It overcomes the God-human dualistic division which takes places in the rubric of conventional metaphysical understanding.

On the other hand, for Dogen, mystical experience is achieved as **Satori** experience. The Japanese word for enlightenment, **satori**, denotes a super-sensible knowing that goes beyond ordinary thinking. Dogen uses the word **kensho**, (見性) which means the vision of one's own nature. This is also called seeing into the essence of things. Awakened from illusion, liberated from anxiety one is filled with overflowing joy.

Thus, for Dogen, the experience of enlightenment is something to be obtained by intuition, an immediate kind of cognitive experience. To be sure, it is something cognitive, but not in the everyday narrowly rational, analyzing manner of cognition, rather, the knowledge is arrived at immediately, by a direct union of the knower with the known. Zen enlightenment, according to Merton, is not a recognition or seeing of the Buddha, but rather being the Buddha. It involves:

. . . unifying intuition of the basic unity of subject and object in being. . . this basic unity is not an abstract concept but being itself charged with the dynamism of spirit and love.¹⁹⁸

Thus it breaks through to a new dimension, the dimension of perfect unity exclusive of any kind of duality. By transcending being and nonbeing, one grasps the absolute reality transcending every duality.

Dogen spoke of this dimension as a sense of the immanence of the Buddha-nature in all things. We have seen this in his response to the question of whether or not all things have Buddha-nature, "all things are Buddha-nature." Dogen expresses this unified experience as:

In this world there are millions of objects and. each one of them is, respectively the entire world-this is where the study of Buddhism commences. When one comes to realize this fact, one perceives that every object, every living thing is the whole, even though it itself does not realize it.¹⁹⁹

This is also the experience of oneness with the universe, the dissolution of the subject-

¹⁹⁸Merton, *Zen and the Birds of Appetites*, 66-67.

¹⁹⁹Philip Kapleau, *The Three Pillar of Zen*, 310.

object dichotomy. In breaking through to Nothingness (無) all is realized in Nothingness, just as Nothingness is realized in the all.

However, this is not a new species of conceptual awareness, nor is it a knowledge of new or different facts and events in the world. It is rather an intuitive openness to the unity of the whole situation. This intuition, however, is primarily to indicate a non-dual, non-conceptual awareness of the situation at hand. This non-dual awareness is analogous to an awareness of “thus-ness”(Tathata) or “is-ness.” It offers no new “object” for perception. This non-dual awareness, thus, is the simultaneous holding of both subject-object empirical experience and a radical pre-subjective awareness of the common ground of all that is. Thus this mystical awareness does not ignore empirical experience. It experiences it as it is in terms of both ultimate and common sense. From this perspective one does not ignore or negate all finite mindsets, but rather, one de-absolutizes them through complete detachment.

In other words, it is a realization of the Buddha-nature and Ultimate Reality as such is un-objectifiable. If the original experiencing of the mystic is non-conceptual, it follows that it cannot contain an intentional object. In this respect Hisamatsu differentiates Zen from John:

The union is of course an element essential to holiness, but it presupposes as prerequisite a gap. There is no order of holiness possible without it. A holiness without such a separation may be considered as meaningless. Precisely because it is transcendent and greatly separated from us, holiness is to be reversed, worshipped, trusted, or believed in by us.

Zen nonetheless negates the transcendent and objective holiness greatly separate from us. Just as it does not recognize Buddha as existing separately apart from human beings. In this sense it can be properly called “non-holy.” By recapturing the holy Buddha which has been separated and far removed from human beings and realizing it within human beings, Zen tries to establish a human-Buddha that is “non-holy.” Neither searching for Buddha or gods outside man nor seeking Paradise or Pure Lands in other dimensions, Zen advances man as Buddha, actually as Pure land.²⁰⁰

However, though Dogen has a different metaphysical paradigm, it is not easy to define its essence. It may be a matter of religious mystical experience rather than theological

²⁰⁰Shinichi Hisamatsu, “Zen as the Negation of Holiness,” trans, Sally Merrill, The Eastern Buddhist,

discourse or discussion. It is hard to define an exactly confirmed conclusion with philosophical or theological discourse in terms of ultimate reality though it is necessary to try.

2) “Union with Christ” vs Buddha-Nature

a. Union with Christ as Connaturality

Further, for John, this union with God is achieved and highlighted through Jesus Christ our Lord. In this respect, John’s union is Christ-union. Christ is the bridegroom with whom the soul is united in mystical marriage. To understand John’s mysticism, it is of the greatest importance to remember that Christ the bridegroom is the eternal word of God, con-substantial with the Father. The union with God that John speaks of is a union through love and is the fruit of a journey of love. As John of the Cross states:

**Amado con amada,
Amada en el Amado transformada !**
Lover and lov’d, as one,
Lover transform’d in lov’d. . . !²⁰¹

This union of love can be described in terms of indwelling, as though the bridegroom is asleep in the center of the soul. Thus the union between God and the soul is a spiritual marriage. For John the union with God is a union of love between two persons, God and a human person, a union of two wills. Consequently, he writes:

In discussing union with God we are not discussing the substantial union that always exists, but the soul’s union with and transformation in God that does not always exist, except when there is likeness of love.²⁰²

Thus for John the union with God is the transformation of love by Christ. In this union of love each leaves and exchanges self for the other. Thus each one lives in the other, and both are one in the transformation of love. In John union is love-centered and relational. Here to love means to be equal with God (not ontologically). By loving God

New Series, 10 (May, 1977), 6-7.

²⁰¹“Songs of the Soul,” Allison Peers trans, 441.

²⁰²A.2.17.6.

we become like God. Through love both subject and object become one. Thus in John, the experience of Reality is based on a personal-loving relation.

The realm of mystical experience with Christ is therefore the realm of God's presence in a human soul through a love relationship. It is a Christ in which Reality is attained in a concrete and existential consonance with the knower. In this, one is attuned to or possesses an immediate knowledge of the presence of God. John says that in this state the mystic perceives the presence of God to the extent that, through this unique awareness, the entire finite realm is transformed and elevated. The divine presence transforms the finite. In this state the soul knows "the creature through God and not God through the creatures; to know the effects through their cause and not the cause through the effects; for the latter knowledge is secondary and this other is essential."²⁰³ Thus one is to know the divine as the divine is known in itself. The consummated marriage that John describes is a union in which the knower and known become one. As Maritain says "we not only experience our love of God, but it is God himself whom we experience in our love."²⁰⁴ Thus love and knowledge are fused together. John describes this perfected way of knowing as a knowledge from the divine itself:

This property of secrecy and superiority over natural capacity, which belongs to this divine contemplation, belongs to it, not only because it is supernatural, but also inasmuch as it is a road that guides and leads the soul to the perfection of union with God; which, as they are things unknown after a human manner, must be approached, after a human manner, by unknowing and by divine ignorance. For, speaking mystically, as we are speaking here, divine things and perfection are known and understood as they are, not when they are being sought after and practiced, but when they have been found and practiced.²⁰⁵

John speaks of the soul becoming "deiform" in contemplation, and being raised "from the natural to the divine," because in a way this is precisely what his epistemological theory implies; the relationship between God and the possible intellect is like that between form and matter, so that at the moment of this obscure contemplation, the mind

²⁰³Ibid., Stanza 4. 5.

²⁰⁴Jacques Maritain, *The Degree of Knowledge*, trans. Gerald Phelan, Fourth ed, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1959), 322-23.

²⁰⁵N.2.8.7.

is, in a certain sense, divinized.²⁰⁶ The “substantial knowledge” thereby produced in the possible intellect is “loving,” because it arouses an intense desire of God.²⁰⁷

Thus according to John, in union with Christ intellectual knowing is laid aside, for “the soul, absorbed and imbibed in that drink of love, cannot advert actually to any other thing.”²⁰⁸ As Plotinus says, “Awareness of this principle comes neither by knowing but by a presence overpassing all knowledge. Our way takes us beyond knowing.”²⁰⁹ John’s account echoes this view. “Particular knowledge, forms of things, imaginative acts, and any other apprehensions involving form and figure are all lost and ignored in that absorption of love.”²¹⁰ Because it is loving knowledge, it desires to know things in an intimate fashion and not merely as objects of consideration. Thus this knowledge is beyond the knowing of the discursive intellect and it should be distinguished from conceptual forms of knowing.

A union with Christ in John’s mystical experience in which the soul feels itself to be united with God in love can be understood as a climactic instance of affective “connaturality.” Along with John, Maritain asserts that God is known “through love, as infinitely transcending any human knowledge, or precisely as God.”²¹¹ In other words, for John, union with Christ as the knowledge of connaturality is a unique awareness of the presence of God. At the climactic stage of affective connaturality, the presence of God is felt most intimately by a mystic.

According to Jacques Maritain, connaturality is a kind of knowing which is a unique and special mode of knowing which differs from the conceptual and discursive types of knowing.²¹² Because Maritain argues that objective (discursive) knowledge always falls short of its goal in the attempt to commune with God. It is always incomplete because the soul desires to know things “not in idea, but in reality.”²¹³ For Maritain, Christian mystical knowing is a “connatural” type of knowing. The term

²⁰⁶A.3.2.8.

²⁰⁷A.2.5.3.

²⁰⁸C.25.7.

²⁰⁹Plotinus, *The Enneads*, trans. Steven MacKenna, 2nd Ed. (London: Faber and Faber, 1956), VI, 9,4.

²¹⁰C.26.17.

²¹¹Jacques Maritain, *The Range of Reason*, (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1953), 24.

²¹²Andrew Tallon, “The Heart in Rahner’s Philosophy of Mysticism,” *Theological Studies*, 53. No 4 (December, 1992), 700-30.

²¹³Jacques Maritain, *The Degree of Knowledge*, 8.

“connatural” is derived from the Latin “**conducere**”, and connotes a bringing together of natures. In the most general terms, this is a knowledge by means of affective and experiential familiarity.²¹⁴ One who possesses connatural knowledge acts more by inclination than by knowledge gained from external sources.

Connaturality presupposes a basic commonality, love and constancy of association so that over time we are able to grasp immediately God’s disposition and will. And in order to achieve this commonality between the knower and the known, the mystic must somehow be raised to a level of “co-naturalness” with God in order to gain a real noetic unity. In other words, in order to know God one must enter into a sympathetic relationship with the divine in which the knower finds identity with the thing known.

The basic assumption in this knowledge is a genuine commonality between the knower and the known. According to Maritain, objective knowledge always falls short of its goal in the attempt to commune with God. It is always incomplete because the soul desires to know things, as Maritain says, “not in idea, but in reality.”²¹⁵ Thus, knowledge gained through the means of affective connaturality is to be distinguished from discursive and conceptual forms of knowing. With respect to affective connaturality, it is considered superior to the knowledge attained by rational, scientific, and deductive means. And this is especially applicable in the case of mystical contemplation.

Through mystical contemplation and the means of affective connaturality the presence of God is felt to be immediate since, according to Maritain, love grows into an objective means of knowing and replaces concept as an intentional instrument uniting the intellect with the thing known. Maritain writes;

In this knowledge through union or inclination, connaturality or congeniality, the intellect is at play not alone, but together with affective inclinations and the dispositions of the will, and is guided and directed by them. It is not rational knowledge, knowledge through the conceptual, logical and discursive exercise of Reason. But it is really genuinely knowledge, though obscure and perhaps incapable of giving account of itself, or of being translated into words. St Thomas explains in this way the difference between the knowledge of divine reality acquired by theology and the knowledge of divine reality acquired by mystical experience. . .

²¹⁴Jacques Maritain, *The Degree of Knowledge*, 482.

²¹⁵*Ibid.*, 8.

For the spiritual man, he says, knows divine things through inclination or connaturality, not only because he has learned them, but, as the Pseudo-Dionysius put it, because he suffers them.²¹⁶

According to the doctrine of connaturality, one can truly know something through participation. As we find in John's mysticism, one knows Reality by entering into a type of union with it. In this regard, judgement of mystical knowing can only be made from within this relationship. As John asserts, the divine cannot be known as a causal agent or a God of explanations. Therefore, in this process the knower and the known become one and there arises inner assimilation.²¹⁷ For Maritain, God is known through love, as infinitely transcending any human knowledge, or precisely as God.

Thus we may conclude that the doctrine of affective connaturality asserted by both St Thomas and Jacques Maritain, with its understanding of an inter-subjective relationality between the soul and God, supports John's mystical knowledge experienced as from God. In other words, John's mystical experience in which the soul itself is united with God in love must be understood as a climactic instance of affective connaturality and a unique awareness of God. What is important in John's mystical experience is that John's mystical awareness is involved in a way of life in which love of God is considered paramount. This is to say knowledge of God is attained only by means of the love of God.

b. Ultimate Reality As the Experience of the Buddha-nature

Understanding mystical experience in Dogen as being from Ultimate Reality is impossible without understanding the meaning of "ultimate reality" that pervades Dogen's Zen. What we find in Dogen's account is a radicalization of the identification of ultimate reality with the world so that, in the end, there is nothing that is excluded from this ultimacy. Two of Dogen's expressions encapsulate this concept: they are **shobo jisso** and **genjo koan**. **Shobo** means "all things," and **jisso** means "reality." This phrase rejects an ultimate reality apart from the world of experience, and so if "Buddha" as a term symbolizes that reality, then all that we know is the Buddha in that form. The second term clarifies the intent of first term and is, in fact, synonymous with it. **Genjo**

²¹⁶Jacques Maritain, The Range of Reason, 24.

means “manifesting,” “presencing,” and the like. **Koan** means something like “ultimate reality.” For Dogen **genjokoan** is none other than prajna or “intuitive wisdom.” **Genjokoan** in a sense can be understood as the name of a **koan** which, when correctly grasped, indicates “things as they really are.”

Other commentaries on Dogen interpret the **ko** of **koan** as meaning “relative,” and **an** as meaning “absolute.” **Koan** therefore indicates the identity of relative and absolute. In other words, what we see before us is ultimate reality as the identity of relative and absolute.²¹⁸

Consequently, according to Dogen’s concept of Ultimate Reality, there are not two realities or things as we find in John’s mystical account. Such a different concept of ultimate reality makes the most fundamental difference from John. For Dogen, there is no ultimate reality prior in some sense to its appearance in the world and the world that it comes to inhabit. Thus there is no dualistic notion “revealing absolute reality,” which strongly implies a reality which has a distinguishable spiritual or metaphysical essence. For Dogen as well as Buddhists in general there is no such distinction between ordinary beings and transcendental ultimate beings. All are this ultimate reality, and Buddha-nature.

Therefore, the ultimate must be what is right in front of me. To use Dogen’s poetic image of the “one bright pearl,” the world of conditioned co-arising is “one bright pearl,” and each individual, by virtue of its relation with the whole, must also be “one bright pearl.” In this sense there is no ontological gap between the ultimate and all other ordinary beings as there is in John’s mysticism.

According to Dogen, there is a single reality and it is ultimate. In this regard there is no distinction between **nirvana** and **samsara**. This is the reason why **nirvana** is not separated from **samsara**. This is the reason why Dogen says that **samsara** is **nirvana** and **nirvana** is **samsara**. In the midst of **samsara**, we can fully realize the state of **nirvana** in which we are free from the living-dying process. However, this does not indicate a direct identity of **samsara** and **nirvana**. The identity of **samsara** and **nirvana**

²¹⁷Pierre Rousselot, S.J., *The Eyes of Faith*, (New York: Fordham University, 1990), 50-69.

²¹⁸Francis H. Cook, “Just this: Buddhist Ultimate Reality,” *Buddhist Christian Studies*, 9 (University of Hawaii Press, 1989), 135.

is possible only through the realization of enlightenment through zazen. Through the realization of enlightenment, **samsara** as it is, is **nirvana** and **nirvana** as it is, is **samsara**. Thus the concept of the ultimate in Dogen does not seem to conform to the usual concept of an ultimate, and hence it is different from John's.

Further, for Dogen this **genjokoan** (ultimate reality) proceeds from the pre-reflective experience manifested by without-thinking. In the moment of without-thinking, everything before oneself is present to the mind. Thus without-thinking is a mental process prior to the emergence of self and other things in everyday life. In fact, without-thinking is prior to the conceptualization of self and others. Dogen simply says that without thinking is before the operations of thinking, and not-thinking. We experience, via the operations of without-thinking "the object itself," that is, "the object as it really is." In other words, Ultimate Reality is realized in without-thinking. Indeed all things are expressed via without-thinking. From without-thinking/enlightenment, we see things "as they really are." (**genjokoan**).

Even though he does not deny the value of sense experiences or the operation of reason, Dogen understands that the senses and reason, when left to themselves, provide an inadequate account of reality, an account which is actually a kind of "ignorance." The "ignorance" of which Dogen speaks is an attachment to concepts and representations, and it is what John refers to as the sensory form in the mind which impedes the entering of a spiritual one. First of all, this ignorance is due to that consciousness-bound way of knowing. And secondly, it is due to a preoccupation with the contents of this consciousness: such as the ideas and representations we hold about the world, ourselves, and God which are presumed as inevitable by the intellect. This is why the "way of purification" which has its place both in Dogen's and John's writing necessarily includes a purification of one's thoughts; so that the mind might awaken to or "realize" the Real rather than remain trapped within an examination of the contents of its consciousness.

3) Experiential Differences:

a. Loving Relation vs Self Awareness

Here we find different characteristics of mystical experience in John and Dogen.

While John's mystical experience gives priority to the loving-relation with Christ, in which God's nature is incorporated into the very being of the individual who participates by connatural means of knowing, in Dogen's Zen the priority is given to self-awareness. In John's mystical union, the realm of the mystical is therefore the realm of an inter-subjective relationship. As John M. McDermott states, affective connaturality offers not only a new way of knowing but "a certain community of natures between the knowing subject and the object of knowing which is established as the basis of man's spiritual life."²¹⁹ What is important in mystical knowledge of John is that the love of God is considered paramount.

Thus, in John's mystical union, there is an "ontological likeness" between the knower and the known.²²⁰ One can come to a more perfect love of God and actually become like God in a union that is a transformation of the creature into the image of God. As John says, "Love produces such likeness in this transformation of lovers that one can say each is the other and both are one. The reason is that in the union and transformation of love each gives possession of self to the other, and each leaves and exchanges self for the other. Thus each one lives in the other and is the other, and both are one in the transformation of love."²²¹

However, in Dogen's mystical experience there is no such "ontological likeness" as can be found in John's, since the concept of ultimate reality is different from John, Dogen's mystical experience is characterized as seeing our own nature, 'as it is.'

Thus, while John experiences 'Ultimate reality' through union, Dogen achieves it through 'without-thinking'. According to John, the whole pattern of developing contemplative awareness is experienced as being united with a divine partner, whereas Dogen develops contemplative awareness through self-awakening. Since John's experience relies on the relation between God and the mystic, John still accepts the inevitability of a separation between knower and known, and this sense denies the possibility of immediate non-relational experiences.

Thus in John's mystical state Reality exists independently of his experience. That is,

²¹⁹Pierre Rousselot, S.J., *The Eye of Faith*, 16-17.

²²⁰Gerald A. McCool, S.J., *From Unity to Pluralism: The Internal Evolution of Thomism*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 1989), 64.

²²¹C.12.7.

Reality exists prior to unitive experience and will continue to exist after the experience. Thus John presumes that mystical experience is attained from within a God-human relation which is a subject-object duality, by a “con-forming” the knower’s mind with the object known. In this respect, God in John’s mystical experience has been made an object of theological reflection. For Dogen experiences of ultimate reality depend on one’s own consciousness. For Dogen, ultimate reality is not separated from us. Thus in Dogen’s account, there is nothing about Reality which would allow the mystic to distinguish it from herself or himself. Thus it is not relational as in John’s mysticism. For Dogen, ultimate reality is not separated from us.

Thus Dogen rejects the view that experience occurs through a “conforming” of the mind to the truth which is presented to it. Dogen rejects this view because the notion of “con-forming” has a consciousness bound denotation. The prefix “con” or “with” denotes a duality between the knower and that “form” which is known. This implies that Dogen’s Zen is neither theist nor atheist in the usual Western sense of the terms.

b. Theistic vs Monistic (Somatic)

There is an another fundamentally different character of Dogen’s mystical awareness compared to John’s mystical knowledge, that is, Dogen’s mystical awareness is somatic in character. In somatic knowing, one is not concerned with the cognition of a particular object or event, but rather in utilizing a bodily capacity or skill to perform a special task.. It is most likely with practical knowing, but the difference from somatic knowing is that practical knowing is involved with a cognitive knowledge of how to do something, while somatic knowing is a non-cognitive capacity of the body to perform a particular task. Thus there is no intention to adopt some mind-body dualism in somatic knowing. In this regard it is non-dualistic in terms of participating of action.

We can find such a somatic knowing character in Dogen’s zazen. As we have seen, in Dogen’s zazen, there is no dichotomy between body and mind in terms of attaining enlightenment experience. The most important feature in zazen is the unity between body and mind. The experience of enlightenment come through body-mind unity. For Dogen, thus, the notion of man’s understanding is indispensably associated with man’s whole being. Now that the body-mind is united as a whole being, it becomes the vehicle of understanding. Therefore, for Dogen, the nature of understanding, whether it is

“empirical” or “transcendental,” involves invariably the whole being of man which Dogen calls “the body-mind.” Dogen says that “learning through the mind” must be united with “learning through the body.”

Here we can see the fundamental difference between Dogen and John in terms of experiencing the ‘Absolute.’ In John’s mystical account, the human body is regarded as a ‘temple of Holy Spirit’ which is a dwelling place of God. Thus John considers the human body as an important organ for it is a tool or a place where God dwells.

Here the human body is regarded as a different being than the Holy Spirit. It is dualistically distinctive in character as well as in function. However, in Dogen’s Zen, the human body is regarded as the Buddha-nature. Ultimate reality and the human body is not separate as in John. It is the human body through and by which one can realize the Ultimate. Thus while John’s ‘Ultimate Reality’ (God) is experienced as the ‘Other Being’, Dogen’s Ultimate Reality is within one’s body. As Dogen claims “all sentient being is the Buddha-nature”.

It is, therefore, inseparable between body and mind in terms of awakening the Buddha-nature. Thus the cultivation of zazen is the most important means to achieve an enlightenment experience. It is the somatic attunement of body-mind which involves a psycho-physical complex, which signifies the collapse of reflexive consciousness, in which the mind guides the body into its posture.

In zazen through the mode of non-thinking consciousness, one overcomes the perception of things in terms of past, present, and future and experiences reality just as it is. In other words, there is no such a consciousness in an ordinary sense in zazen. Since “non-thinking” does not systematize concepts, it is a non-conceptual mode of consciousness. Dogen writes about the somatic function of zazen:

Only when one lets go of the mind and ceases to seek an intellectual apprehension of the Truth is liberation attainable. Enlightenment of the mind through seeing forms and realization of the Way through hearing sounds are simply bodily attainment. To do away with mental deliberation and cognition and simply to go on sitting, is the method by which the Way is attained anew. But this attainment of the Way is truly attainment through the body.²²²

To sum up, we can see the difference between Dogen and John is that Dogen tends toward spiritual realization, or unification, that is toward a return to basic underlying phenomenal appearances. Zen seeks a return to “original True-self.” A return to this , which is more real than appearances, requires a direct suppression of the multiple contingencies of the world, including the contingencies regarding self. John, however, seeks union with a transcendent God by participation and suggests that in God one finds true identity. As Bernard McGinn writes, the “mystical element in Christianity is that part of its belief and practices that concerns the preparation for, the consciousness of, and the reaction to what can be described as the immediate or direct presence of God.”²²³

Thus for John, it is clear that union is two different things becoming one. In this respect, John’s mysticism is about bringing the two poles of duality together within one immediate experience. This understanding of union assumes that God or the Absolute is fundamentally other and separate from us. Thus “union” with God is experienced as a coming together of two opposite essences.

However, this is not the type of Dogen’s mystical experience. For Dogen, mystical union is not a joining of two separate beings; it is rather, a realization of the perennial undividedness of Reality, the Buddha-nature. For Dogen as we already have seen, the Absolute and the relative are presently and perpetually “united.” Here the phenomenal and Absolute are mutually inclusive or “transparent” one to the other. Phenomena, thus, can be considered as merely delusive illusions that obscure Reality, or they can be considered as formally distinct manifestations of Reality. However, Dogen’s non-dualistic view does not deny reality to phenomena. Phenomena are real. Both the Absolute and the relative are real.

Therefore, while John’s mystical experience is characterized as a union between two: the mystic and Christ, or the mystic and the Absolute, in Dogen’s mystical experience the Absolute and phenomena or the relative are mutually included. In this regard, the difference is that while in Dogen’s mystical awareness, Reality is experienced as unity without differentiation between Absolute and phenomena, John’s

²²²Thomas Cleary trans, *Records of Things Heard from the Treasury of the Eye of the True Teachings*, 70.

²²³Bernard McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism*, 17.

reality is understood as unity with differentiation.

B) Two Different Notions of 'Nothingness' in Dogen and John

1) Nothingness: Personal vs Impersonal

Concerning the experience of 'nothingness' (無) in Dogen, there seems to be no such thing as a break of personal relations with a loving or personal character. Nor is there the radical turnabout of a conversion to a personal being. Rather, there is an impersonal experience of the True Self, considered to be identical with the original nature of the Buddha-nature and so with the cosmos, an experience which excludes duality. Following this cosmic view of Mahayana Buddhism as a whole, a Zen disciple understands the enlightenment experience as a non-personal contact with reality.²²⁴ The Zen master Yasutani Hakun explains in concentrated terms the experience of enlightenment:

Enlightenment signifies seeing through one's own essential nature, and this means at the same time seeing through the essential nature of cosmos and of all things. For seeing through the essential nature is the wisdom of enlightenment. One may call the essential nature truth if one wishes. In Buddhism from early on it has been called thusness or the Buddha-nature or the One mind. In Zen it is called Nothing, the one hand or the original face, differing epithets for an identical content.²²⁵

According to this view, the experience of nothingness is not personal because self and cosmos unite to form the ultimate non-personal reality. There is no equivalent of anything like the contemplation of John with its striving to know, love, and follow God. Similarly, the experience of enlightenment in Dogen is not called "God" and is not personified as it is in John. Thus Dogen's Zen may justify its impersonal character at the level of consciousness by the philosophical view that person-hood necessarily entails duality and is thus unacceptable in the highest stage of experiencing absolute reality.

²²⁴Heinrich Dumoulin, *Christianity Meets Buddhism*, (Lasalle: Open Court, 1974), 159.

²²⁵Heinrich Dumoulin, *Zen Buddhism in the 20th Century*, 134.

In this respect, it is irreconcilable with John's experience which is personal in character, rooted in divine mercy. Thereby it would be erroneous to say that the experience of nothingness in Dogen's Zen is the same as the experience of nothingness in John. Although they use the same word, "nothingness," it has different meanings. Just as there are two modes of truth, one through nature and the cosmos and the other through the manifestation of God, so there are two kinds of awakening. One is an acute realization of the unity of all things, that is Zen. Enomiya-Lassale states that the difference between Zen and Christian experience lies chiefly in the apersonal character of the Zen experience. He states:

Absolute and undivided being is experienced. . . the distinction resides in the fact that the Zen experience is an apersonal one, while the Christian experience is a personal apprehension of the absolute. The responsive feeling of the recipient is so different that there must also be some essential distinction in the phenomenon itself.²²⁶

For Dogen, however, since the experience of nothingness is non-dualistic, it can be neither affirmation nor negation of Absolute Being. It transcends both affirmation and negation. It is non-dualistic in character. Nothingness is not "no-existence" in an ordinary sense. It should not be misinterpreted as nihilism. Thus there is neither ontological negation nor affirmation of Absolute Being in Dogen's nothingness. It rejects both substantialism and nihilism. By transcending being and nonbeing, nothingness grasps the absolute reality transcending every duality. Merton has correctly pointed out the concept of nothingness.':

It {Zen} neither affirms nor denies, it simply is. One might say that Zen is the ontological awareness of pure being beyond subject and object, an immediate grasp of being in its 'suchness' and 'thusness.'²²⁷

In this sense, the experience of "nothingness" can be either personal and impersonal or it could include both personal and impersonal since it transcends duality. As Teilhard argues, in Zen the personal and the cosmic do not contradict each other and it can be

²²⁶Ibid., 136-7.

²²⁷Thomas Merton, *Mystics and Zen Masters*, 13-4.

both personal and impersonal.²²⁸

Zen does not offer pronouncements about the transcendental Absolute, but it does not deny it. It is the super-rational enlightenment experience which transcends the categories of logical thinking. And it is the dimension of perfect unity exclusive of any kind of duality. In this regard, there are other ways of interpreting the notion of ‘nothingness.’ Given a sufficiently sophisticated notion of the experience of the ‘nothingness’ (e.g., experience of God described by John, containing an infinity of attributes which are never fully explained by the human mind), one might affirm that John and Dogen are perceiving different aspects of the same Reality. As long as the experience of each did not seem to involve an exhaustive awareness of its object or to exclude the possible veridicality of the other’s experience, this approach could perhaps be defended with some success.

Perhaps the writing of Teilhard de Chardin can give a new insight into the possibility of interpreting the personal character of the experience of cosmic nothingness. For in Teilhard’s thought the personal and the cosmic do not contradict each other. According to Heinrich Dumoulin, Teilhard combines a cosmic outlook with a very explicit personalism. For Teilhard, Dumoulin quotes, the cosmos is “a personal Universe” and a “personalizing Universe.”²²⁹ He rejects the “widely accepted ideal that the All, even when expressed as Spirit, can only be impersonal.”²³⁰ “The Universe,” he writes, “is a vast thing, in which we would be lost if it did not converge upon the Person.”²³¹ In his book, *The Phenomenon of Man*, Teilhard explains that the Universe must develop and form the personal in order to have the capacity to admit man as person. The personal character of the world has its foundation in the personal being of ultimate reality. For him, God is personal and “hyper-personal.”²³²

The question of whether there are sufficient philosophical –metaphysical reasons for Teilhard’s theory to be applied to Dogen’s concept of nothingness as personal character must remain open here.

²²⁸Dumoulin, *Christianity Meets Buddhism*, 148.

²²⁹Ibid.,

²³⁰Ibid.,

²³¹Ibid.,

²³²Ibid., 149.

Moreover, De Silva finds a connection between the Christian concept of God and the idea of **Tathata** in Buddhism. De Silva maintains that **Tathata** and God seem to point to Ultimate Reality. For he believes that “God is ‘Being’ and not ‘a being’, and secondly that He is active and unfolding Being and not static being.” De Silva states:

The truth as conceived by Buddhism is impersonal and cannot be identified with the personal God of theism. I think the difficulty here is that when we talk of theism we think in anthropomorphic terms, as the ancient Hebrew people certainly did and even thought of Jehovah as the God of War. For this reason some theologians prefer to drop this misleading term theism and talk of a “God beyond theism”. This does not mean that God is impersonal; rather it means that God is suprapersonal. It means that ‘Being’ has some determinate character and is distinguishable from becoming and as such possesses the character of transcendence like Nibbana. But as active and unfolding Being, Being also has the character of immanence so that it is possible for us to say in the words of St. Paul,” we live and move and have our being in Him.²³³

Thus, by interpreting God as ‘Being’, who is transcendent in character, De Silva connotes God as supra-personal Being. He thus maintains that the Christian concept of God and the Buddhist concept of **Tathata** have common ground. However, he talks about the difficulty of expressing the Transcendent or of finding an adequate language to talk about God.

On the other hand, according to Indapanno, the conflicting concept of God in Buddhism and Christianity could be resolved if God was understood in terms of **Dharma**. For him, God is neither person nor spirit, because then he would be finite and measurable by standards of one kind or another. Rather he interprets God as “**Dharma** or nature in the sense of something non-constituent, unconditioned, or un compounded.”²³⁴ Thus for him by God or **Dharma** is meant “Absolute Truth.” Since God is complete in “itself,” so is **Dharma** complete in itself. To unite with God is similar to the realization of **Dharma** by a Buddhist. And this realization is attained when all feelings of self and selfishness are destroyed and one is freed from suffering.

²³³Lynn A. de Silva, “Christian Attitude to Buddhism: A Reply,” *Dialogue Old Series*, No. 13, (December 1967), 23.

²³⁴Buddhadasa Indapanno, *Christianity and Buddhism*, (Chiang Mai, Thailand: Sublime Life Mission, 1967), 74.

In this realization there is no ego-self left to die or to be born.²³⁵

Concerning the concepts of God and **Dharma**, Indapanno explains four aspects of **Dharma** by which he brings the concept of God into Buddhism. For Indapanno, these four are in one way or another aspects of God. These four aspects are: (1) **Sabhavadhamma**- the nature of things, (2) **Saccadhamma**-the Law of Nature, (3) **Patipattidhamma**- an obligation performed according to the Law of Nature. (4) **Vipakadhamma**-results of realization. According to Indapanno, the second aspect is identified with the position of God by seeing that **Dharma** as nature is God's creation or the result of his will. And **Dharma** as obligation is abiding by the will of God in order to attain to God, and **Dharma** as result refers to the highest thing that man can receive and is what Christians call "the grace of God."²³⁶

A significant character that we find in Indapanno's comparison between God and **dharma** is the inclusiveness of God and Dharma. They are one and the same thing, and everything has come from Dharma or God. Not only does nature in the form of natural phenomena manifest the will of God, but "in fact all natural phenomena constitute the very God."²³⁷ He states:

If there were anything else apart from God then God would not be perfect. Therefore, nature itself is included in the word God and there is also to be found Satan or the Devil, call it what you may. So we can see that the so-called God is what in Buddhism we call, '**Dharma**.'²³⁸

On the other hand, Streng argues that the intent of all religious belief and practice is human salvation. It is a solution to the problem of suffering or sin. Religious doctrines or concepts are used as symbolic terms in order to transform an individual from death to life, from bondage to freedom. The specific means for expressing and for actualizing this intent are historically and culturally diverse and cannot be reduced to a particular form or mechanism. Thus for Streng, religion is like an "umbrella." It is an overlapping "cluster of processes" that are weighted differently by different traditions.²³⁹ Streng says

²³⁵Ibid., 27-28.

²³⁶Ibid., 66-69.

²³⁷Ibid., 68.

²³⁸Ibid., 72.

²³⁹Frederick J. Streng, "Three Religious Ontological Claims: 'Being-Itself,' 'Nothingness within

that “the relation between religious data can be seen as a partial overlapping of elements in different expressions that establishes a continuity without having a single element common to every expression... The continuity of religious life is thus conceived in terms of a chain relationship rather than in terms of an essential hub radiating into various phenomena on the perimeter of a wheel.”²⁴⁰ Thus he placed the processes of ultimate transformation within a typological framework, describing a “complex” of “axiological structures” that included four “traditional ways of being religious” (personal encounter with the sacred, myth and ritual, ethical behavior set in a cosmic context, and mystical insight) as well as “humanistic” forms of ultimate transformation (social activism, rationalism, interpersonal relationship, art, and technology).²⁴¹ For example, Streng has outlined as following:

Judaism contains as axiological structures the belief in a creator God (A) and the ritual dimension of a seasonal cult (B); Hinduism is indifferent to the notion of a single creator (A) but is significantly grounded in cultic acts (B) while positing an axiological structure of inner realization through mystical insight (C); Taoism favors spontaneous action (D) in contrast to rites-based behavior (B) but shares the axiological structure of inner realization (C). Thus, Taoism, having the characteristics C and D, is related to Judaism, having the characteristics A and B, in a chain relation despite an absence of formal or structural identities.²⁴²

For Streng, thus, religion has no particular fixed referent. Rather it is a set or family of different religious processes which transform for an individual or community the dimension of ultimate value with other aspects of human experience.

Lastly, according to Hick, there are two possibilities of interpreting Reality. They are either **Personae**, the Real as personal, active, loving, judging Being, or **Impersonae**, the Real as impersonal, inactive, and quality-less Absolute. The information in the encounter of the Real is phenomenalized as either personal God or impersonal Tao, Nirvana, etc, depending upon the predominant culture-relative category and its associate

Somethingness,’ and ‘the Field of Emptiness,’” in *Traditions in Contact and Change*, ed. P. Slater and D. Wiebe, (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1983), 265-266.

²⁴⁰Frederick J. Streng, “The Objective Study of Religion and the Unique Quality of Religiousness,” *Religious Studies*, 6 (1970), 217-218.

²⁴¹Frederick J. Streng, *Understanding Religious Life*, 3d ed, (Belmont, California: Wadsworth, 1985), chaps 5-13.

²⁴²Cited in Radall Nadeau, “Frederic Streng, Madhyamika, and the Comparative Study of Religion,” 71.

concepts.²⁴³

However, in order for Hick to maintain that different phenomenological conceptions are in fact manifestations or images of the divine noumenon, he must posit significant 'continuity' which would lead a mystic towards one religious interpretation rather than another. Hick says, 'we cannot apply to the Real **an sich** the (ontological and epistemological) between them. This 'continuity' view, however, runs into a serious problem because there are great diversity, indeed seeming incompatibility, among conceptions or images of the divine (e.g., personal deity vs. impersonal principle). For this view, that the noumenon must actually itself be both personal and non-personal at the same time suggests an internal incoherence. It does not seem plausible to maintain that they all denote the same reality.

For instances, since Christian mystic (John) is encountering a personal God, and Zen Buddhism (Dogen) is conscious of an impersonal Void, we can say that they are ostensibly perceiving incompatible "objects," because both God and the Void are supposed to be "ultimate," and the unique "ultimate" could not be simultaneously personal and impersonal. Since it may not be possible to harmonize these two contrasting contemplative experiences in this manner, one might argue that the ostensible objects of these different experiences cannot all be simultaneously instantiated.

Rowe, thus, argues with Hick's view that the real can not have one or the other of

²⁴³Following Kantian epistemology, Hick believes that we cannot know a thing in itself. Thus Hick believes that there is nothing in the information from reality itself. Hick believes that none of the concrete descriptions that apply within the realm of human experience can apply literally to the un-experienceable ground of that realm. Thus, the noumenon is not directly experienced or known but rather only indirectly encountered in terms of concepts, structure, and different cultures. Here, we need to recognize that Hick's postulate has both an ontological and an epistemological corollary. Ontologically speaking, Hick's thus postulate proposes that there is a Real **an sich** that is the unifying ground of the foci (Real-for-us) of the various traditions. Epistemologically, Hick, thus, insists that his real **an sich** (divine noumenon) as the ground of religious experience and thought, making forms of religious experience across traditions veridical inasmuch as they all constitute our conditioned and limited access to the Real **an sich**. Hick elaborates on this epistemological dimension by suggesting, in conformity with his understanding of the conceptual-linguistic nature of religious experience, that the Real **an sich** impinge on culturally conditioned human consciousness. In this way, Hick manages to integrate the ontological and epistemological dimensions of his postulate. Although the Real **an sich** is postulated as an ontological reality, it is known only through the mediating conceptual schemes of religious traditions that in turn are shaped by diverse cultural histories. However, he identifies two clearly divergent types (personalist and impersonalist), whose conceptual schemes are very different, as ultimately refer to the same divine noumenon or Real **an sich**.

two contradictory properties. He says 'if Hick were to agree that the real is non-personal, this could create a serious difficulty for the assessment of religions favouring personal deities as opposed to religions favouring non-personal absolutes'.²⁴⁴ For if God is non-personal it follows that the theistic religions are fundamentally in error; and this would indeed be a very significant implication.

Responding to Rowe's argument, Hick insists that since God is the trans-categorical Real, God does not fall within the range of our human categories of thought. For Hick the trans-categorical Real cannot be said to be either personal or impersonal, good or evil, purposive or non-purposive, etc., because it is not the sort of thing that could be any of these.²⁴⁵ But if, the concepts of personality and impersonality do not apply to it, then, this view implies an element of 'discontinuity' between the Real **an sich** and phenomenal religious conceptions. Also if the Real is not personal simply because the concepts of personality and impersonality do not apply to it, then surely, nothing significant follows concerning its nature. Consequently, this view that the Real **as sich** cannot be directly experienced raises problems of its own. Hick's claim that the attributes experienced by mystics in its **personae** and **impersonae** apply to the Real as phenomena makes no sense. Hick's theory, thus, opens up contradiction. By denying any possibility of knowing the Reality in itself, Hick's makes a contradiction in his theoretical hypothesis. In this regard, Robert McKim rightly criticized Hick's epistemological problem:

If none of our concepts apply to the RR (Religious Reality) *an sich*, what is the justification for assuming that only a tradition which is salvifically effective-i.e., which helps with transformation of character-should be regarded as having a conception of the RR which is a product of genuine interaction between the RR and a faith community.²⁴⁶

Further, if, as Hick argues, one's experience is only phenomena and we have no ability to experience the Reality in itself, we have no grounds to claims that behind these varied religious phenomena lies an unexperienceable divine noumenon. And if we

²⁴⁴William L. Rowe, "Religious Pluralism," *Religious Studies*, vol 35, (1999), 149.

²⁴⁵John Hick, "Ineffability," *Religious Studies*, vol 36, (2000), 42.

²⁴⁶McKim Robert, "Could God Have More Than One Nature?" *Faith and Philosophy*, vol 5, no 4 (October, 1988), 383.

cannot say anything whatsoever about noumena, it is illogical to make any criteria for making a truth claim of religious phenomena as either **personae** or **impersonae**.

Nonetheless, at this point it is important to mention two different types of interpreting the concept of Nothingness in Buddhism. One of the main difficulties posed by dialogue about the concept of Nothingness is that it is interpreted by Buddhists themselves in quite different, indeed quite opposite ways. The concept of Nothingness, or Emptiness is understood very differently even by the first two great philosophical schools of Mahayana Buddhism.²⁴⁷

The first opinion held by Nagarjuna and the Madhyamikas sees “Emptiness” as primarily negative. In this case, since all the beings and facts of everyday life come into being and pass away, they neither exist nor do not exist. They are empty. Thus all positive statements about beings are impossible. Particularly, the question of the existence of an Ultimate Reality has no meaning. Masao Abe, however, objects to the view that Nothingness is all negative by asserting the fact that Emptiness is Suchness, **tathata**, as such it is there.²⁴⁸

On the other hand, however, the second great Mahayana school of Yogacara tried to solve the other aspect of interpretation, by a positive interpretation of Emptiness. Yogacara was not satisfied with the view that Madhyamika held it. Yogacara questioned the true meaning of the Madhyamika view that all beings and facts are empty, they have no being, precisely because they are not their own source but are identical, in varying ways, to the Absolute?²⁴⁹

In fact, Yogacara found a positive aspect in the interpretation of “Emptiness.” It has been said that Yogacara’s positive view of Ultimate Reality or “Suchness, was in fact a reaction to the seeming “negativism” of Madhyamika. Yogacara understood “Emptiness” not only in one way, in a negative sense, but it also understood that there is more than one way to see “Emptiness.” Yogachara understood the Buddha-nature in a positive sense with interest in an **alaya-vijnana** (storehouse consciousness). Thus it is

²⁴⁷Hans Kung, “God’s Self-Renunciation and Buddhist Emptiness: A Christian Response to Masao Abe,” Roger Corless and Paul F. Knitter. Eds, *Buddhist Emptiness and Christian Trinity*, (Paulist Press: New York/Mahwah, 1990), 39.

²⁴⁸Gregory K. Ornatowski, “Transformations of “Emptiness,” 95.

²⁴⁹*Ibid.*,95-100.

no accident that a new positive view of the Buddha-nature arose, wherein the Sutra of Queen Shrimala specifically identified the Buddha-nature as Not-Empty.²⁵⁰

Concerning these two different concepts of “Emptiness,” one can hardly reject the possibility of interpreting the concept of Nothingness in different ways; one can possibly interpret “Nothingness” either as impersonal being in the Buddhist sense or as personal God in the Christian sense.

To sum up, Dogen’s view of Nothingness follows on from Nagarjuna’s Madhyamika philosophy which interprets “Nothingness” as a non-dual continuum, that is, the Absolute and the phenomenal are perspectives and not separate ontological realms. And reality is an interconnected Whole, so that there is no independent self.

Thus, according to Dogen, Nothingness, a non-dual awareness does not deny reality to phenomena. For Dogen, phenomena are real. Both the Absolute and relative are real; they are each manifestations of Reality and are not separate from their ground. Thus the theoretical question of the relationship between the undivided Buddha-nature and the multiple sensible particulars of this world is answered in two ways. Phenomena are regarded as merely delusive illusions that obscure Reality or they can be considered as formally distinct manifestations of Reality.

Thus the Buddha-nature or the Absolute, and the particular phenomena of this world, are ontologically identical. They are two aspects of one and the same Reality.

On the other hand, for John the experience of “nothingness” denotes the essence of one’s being. Nothingness in John is not an ontological negation of Absolute Being, rather it is an apophatic description of beyond God experience. It is an affirmation of deity in negative terms. Thus ‘nothingness’ in John is far from atheism. In other words, it is a non-discursive expression of God in mystical experience. Thus there is an ontological affirmation of Absolute being at the bottom of John’s experience of nothingness.²⁵¹

2) Nothingness: Non-Dual Experience

For Dogen, since the experience of ‘nothingness,’ is beyond ontological affirmation

²⁵⁰Ibid.,

²⁵¹William Johnston, “All and Nothing: St John of the Cross and the Christian-Buddhist Dialogue,” The Eastern Buddhist, vol 28, (1988), 126.

and negation, nothingness is an expression beyond the category of ontological being. It transcends both “existence” and “non-existence.” In this sense Dogen’s ‘nothingness’ does not denote the essence of any ontological Being. There is neither negation nor affirmation of Absolute Being in Dogen’s Zen.

On the other hand, in John, the notion of ‘nothingness’ of God is seen as an **apophatic** description of God. Such a notion of ‘nothingness’ of God opened up ways interpreting the experience of God in non-dualistic senses. It opens up a possible interpretation of God as an impersonal or trans-personal Being. Since God is Absolute, He is neither objective nor subjective. He must transcend all relative determinations, one of which is limitation to one half of the subject-object duality. As we already observed, John has the limitation of having an affirmative interpretation of God as a personal God. John moves beyond the conception of God as a personal being because God is distinct from the world and may not be identified with it. God is immanent, but neither is the universe in him nor he in the universe. In this respect, Baruzi considers John’s mystical doctrine as heterodox. He affirms that John’s mysticism is both Christian and Catholic. He maintains that John’s mystical experience is not limited to Catholics. He sees in the doctrine of John a universal doctrine of mysticism and, for that reason, a doctrine whose validity reaches out beyond the borders of Christianity.²⁵²

In this respect, John’s mystical experience, at the point of greatest humility, seems to be surpassed by a non-dualistic awareness which transcends a Lord-self dualism. According to John, at the point of greatest humility, when the soul considers itself to be “nothing” and no longer finds any satisfaction in itself, it opens out upon a greater, all encompassing reality—the awareness of the very immanence of God in the soul. At this point John no longer speaks of union as a “union of likeness.” He no longer speaks of union as a “union of two wills.” Instead, he describes this highest reality in non-dualistic terms, as a kind of transparency of **todo**, “all,” and **nada**, “nothing.”

To put it differently, in attaining to **nada**, the spiritual person becomes empowered by transforming love, and transcends all spiritual and sensory realities. Or, in John’s own words which allude to the transparency in giving up self and attaining to **nada**, one

²⁵²Joseph Ferraro, “Sanjuanist Doctrine on the Human Mode of Operation of the Theological Virtue of Faith,” *Ephemerides Carmeliticae*, 22 (1971), 269.

“penetrates all things,” enters “bounds that have no mode, yet in substance possess all modes,” and “will possess all that God Himself has.” This is certainly different from a union of two wills. And it points to a different epistemological level than he had previously addressed; and thus it also points to a need for a different hermeneutical approach. This is an awareness in which God is no longer discoverable as an object. Thereby, John refers to God as “nothingness”, “emptiness,” and the “void” (**vacio**):

The path of Mount Carmel: spirit of perfection, nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing, even on the mount nothing. . . Neither this, not this, nor this. . . nor that, nor that. . .²⁵³

This final quotation finds parallels in Dogen who finds his enlightenment experience as a “nothingness.” which transcends this and that.

However, it should be observed that John’s apophatic notion of the ‘nothingness’ of God denotes God’s existence in negative terms. John’s apophatic theology, thus, does not negate the ontological as of God as an independently-existing Absolute Being. This is a fundamental difference from Dogen’s notion of ‘nothingness.’

Concerning the non-dual characteristic of God, Masao Abe suggests that what is able to embrace both Being and non-Being must itself be neither of these or, at least, both of these, although such recognition would be but a stage along the path to non-dualism. Nothingness is a non-dualistic whole which is as it is, before it is sliced up by the dualistic logic of Being and non-Being. It is not simply the negation of Being, but includes both Being and non-Being.

In this regard, Abe observes that it is problematic to speak of Tillich’s concept of God as the ground of Being as itself Being, and as embracive of non-Being. Abe asks how Being can be its own ground. Thus for Abe it is odd to see that Tillich’s interpretation of Being or God embraces both non-Being and itself. For Abe believes that the dualism of Being and non-Being is the form, and both require the “ground” which is neither, and can therefore give birth to both.²⁵⁴

²⁵³Cited in E. W. Trueman Dicken, *The Crucible of Love: A Study of the Mysticism of St Teresa of Jesus and St John of the Cross*, 78.

²⁵⁴Masao, Abe “Non-being and Mu: the Metaphysical Nature of Negativity in the East and the West,” *Religious Studies*, II, (June 1975), 181.

Moreover, explaining the characteristic of the infinite (God or the Absolute), Alan Watts asserts that the infinite must be understood as non-dual rather than One. Alan Watts insists that One and Many are both terms of number, and thus of finitude and dualism. Because One and Many are opposed, if the Many are reduced to One they disappear. But one and many can be reduced to the non-dual because, while they exclude each other, the non-dual includes them both. Because the non-dual infinite includes the possibility of the finite, of the object, of the other, it includes the possibility of significant relationship, of value, of personality, of lover and beloved. He writes:

The infinite and the finite are incommensurable but perfectly compatible. The mirror, without color in itself, does not reject color. Light, though essentially shapeless, does not obliterate shape. On the contrary, the very fact that the Self, the mirror, and the light are object less, colorless and shapeless is what makes them able to entertain objects, colors and shapes. This principle gives us the key to understanding the manifestation of the finite universe from the infinite.²⁵⁵

In this regard a wholly transcendent infinite can include the whole of the finite. As a triangle cannot be round; but a color-e.g., white-which wholly transcends shape, can exist in a shape: a triangle can be white. But the moment we set the infinite in opposition to the finite we destroy the finite and we get a conception of the infinite as a mere undifferentiated void from which the finite could never have arisen.²⁵⁶

If one separates God from the world, as prior to it in time, one wonders where the world came from and how. But in separating God from the world one not only destroys the world but does something to God which cannot be done to him. In other words, to separate God from the world, the infinite from the finite, as prior to it in time or as outside or around it in space, is only to bring God down into time, space and finitude. And the moment one brings God down into space and time there is neither time nor space for anything else.

God has no opposite, no "outside." He is other to us, but we are not other to Him. He is objective to us, but we are subjective to Him. He is neither in us nor out of us and in the world. The subject-object duality is grounded and transcended in God. Therefore,

²⁵⁵Cited in Peter Kreeft, "Zen Buddhism and Christianity: An Experiment in Comparative Religion," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, (Summer 1971), 525-526.

²⁵⁶*Ibid.*,

according to Allan Watts, God or the infinite must be interpreted as non-dual character, since non-dualism includes both dualism and monism or transcends both dualism and monism. Thus if one interprets 'nothingness' as non-dualistic in character, there is a possible interpretation of God as either personal Being or impersonal Being in John's mystical theology.

However, it is difficult to find out whether John's understanding of God as 'nothingness' is actually referring to Dogen's non-dual concept of 'nothingness.' We cannot be sure about actual meaning of the terms when John is using "neither this, not this, nor this, nor that." It may imply a meaning of "impersonal" in its ordinary sense, as the antonym of "personal."

Yet we cannot make positive statements about it. What we can say positively is that the meaning of "neither this, nor that" is an expression beyond the personal characteristic of God. In other words, it does not necessarily mean that it is the same experience as Dogen's nothingness. For Dogen's concept of 'nothingness' is not transcendent. It is neither transcendent nor immanent in the Western sense of these terms. At least, Nothingness is both transcendent and immanent, and at most neither, because it is beyond these categories. Nothingness is found underfoot, as it were, as the ground of everything in the everyday world. For Dogen, **Nirvana** is **Samsara**, **Samsara** is **Nirvana**: indeed, Nothingness, is the condition of the possibility of everything. Each and every thing is an expression of Nothingness itself.

Here in order to clarify the concept of nothingness in John, we need to trace the root of John's mystical theology which follows the Dionysian mysticism of '**kataphasis**' and **apophasis**.' Seels has discussed the Dionysian concept of **apophasis** and **kataphasis**:

Apophasis can mean negation, but its etymology suggests a meaning that more precisely characterizes the discourse in question: **apophasis** (unsaying or speaking away). The term **apophasis** is commonly paired with **kataphasis** (affirmation, saying, speaking-with). Every act of unsaying demands or presupposes a previous saying. **Apophasis** can reach a point of intensity such that no single proposition concerning the transcendent can stand on its own. Any saying (even a negative saying) demands a correcting proposition, an unsaying. But that correcting proposition which unsays the previous proposition is in itself a 'saying' that must be 'unsaid' in turn. It is in the tension between the two propositions that the discourse becomes meaningful. That tension is momentary. It must be continually re-earned

by ever new linguistic acts of unsaying.

At least three responses to the primary dilemma of transcendence are conceivable. The first response is silence. The second response is to distinguish between ways in which the transcendent is beyond names and ways in which it is not. In the medieval context, the most common appeal is to a distinction between two kinds of naming, between God-as he-is-in himself and God-as-he-is-in-creatures, for example, or the incommunicable deity as it is in itself, and the deity as it is in our mind...The third response begins with the refusal to solve the dilemma posed by the attempt to refer to the transcendent through a distinction between two kinds of name. The dilemma is accepted as a genuine **aporia**, that is, as unresolvable; but this acceptance, instead of leading to silence, leads to a new mode of discourse.²⁵⁷

Peter Kreeft discusses one aspect of this problem in terms of the relation between “nothingness” in Zen and the concept of God in Christianity. He contends that the central issue hinges on the interpretation of the Christian God and the Nothingness of Zen. The central theme depends on how one sees the Absolute or God whether as personal or impersonal. According to Kreeft, there is no distinction between “person” and “ego” in Zen while Christianity makes a distinction between these two. According to Christian belief, God is understood as three persons rather than three egos.

However, Kreeft argues that this understanding of God as three persons is not an adequate interpretation. Rather, he says that God must be understood as “nature” rather than as “person.” God is to be understood as “nature” which is God-head beyond the three-persons.²⁵⁸ If God is understood as “nature,” then, it will not contradict the nothingness in Zen although Zen does not affirm “nature.”

Kreeft’s suggestion, however, seems to be similar to the view of Merton. Merton has distinguished two different concepts regarding God’s nature, that is, God and God-head. According to Merton, God is used for our concept of essence. And the word “Godhead” refers to the ineffability of God which transcends our concept. Godhead is God’s “essential nakedness,” which goes beyond God. Merton argues that this “Godhead” is trans-personal in character.²⁵⁹

Both concepts of Merton’s “Godhead” and Kreeft’s “nature” seem to reflect John’s

²⁵⁷Michael Sells, *Mystical Language of Unsaying*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 2-3.

²⁵⁸Peter Kreeft, “Zen Buddhism and Christianity: An Experiment in Comparative Religion,” 527-28.

²⁵⁹Thomas Merton, *Zen and the Birds of Appetite*, 135-6.

apophatic notion of God as ‘unknowing.’ Both Merton and Kreeft find great difficulty in relating the Zen experience of ‘nothingness’ to the Christian mystical experience of God. The difficulty is brought about because there is a monistic as well as a dualistic character in the Christian concept of union with God, especially in John. In union with God, although a mystic experiences God as ‘nothingness’ (**nada**) in the soul, one is still involved in a subject-object duality. Regarding this difficulty in relating Christian mystical experience with the Zen experience of ‘nothingness’ Merton writes:

Zen is not concerned with God in the way Christianity is, though one is entitled to discover sophisticated analogies between the Zen experience of the Void (Sunyata) and the experience of God in the ‘unknowing’ of apophatic Christian mysticism.²⁶⁰

The basic issue in relating the Christian mystical experience of ‘nothingness’ and the Zen experience of ‘nothingness’ is, therefore, the question of interpreting monism and dualism.

3) Nothingness: Experience As Unity and Duality

At this point it is worth mentioning in more detail how the experience of ‘nothingness’ differs in both John and Dogen. As we noticed in both John and Dogen, the experiences of enlightenment are similar insofar as both experience them as ‘nothingness.’ Since John and Dogen experience ultimate Reality as “nothingness” both involve a non-dual awareness. Thereby both Dogen and John promote some kind of psychic wholeness and unification. Johnston characterizes the unitive experience of Zen:

It will be clear, I believe, that Zen meditation is a process of unification in which the whole personality is harmonized in a oneness which reaches its climax with a complete absence of subject-object consciousness in **satori**.²⁶¹

Enomiya-Lassalle also sees Christian mystical experience as an experience of unity without any differentiation:

²⁶⁰Ibid., 27.

²⁶¹William Johnston, The Still Point: Reflections on Zen and Christian Mysticism, 4.

The soul is so deeply united with God that one loses all consciousness of his own existence. . . One has become one with God. There is no subject-object tension and there is no longer any dualism. And only when this state has passed is the soul aware of its difference from God.²⁶²

According to Enomiya-Lassalle, thus, the experience of Zen enlightenment, and the experience of Christian mysticism are equivalent in the sense that they experience Reality in unity. Dogen says,

In this world there are millions of objects and . . . each one of them is, respectively the entire world-this is where the study of Buddhism commences. When one comes to realize this fact, (one perceives that) every object, every living thing is the whole, even though it itself does not realize it.²⁶³

What is being espoused here is the perception of an absolute unity together with a recognition of difference. This unity encompasses individual objects without erasing the differences between them. This unity may be perceived through the mediating concept, the Divine,' as in the example under consideration, or through a culturally relative mediating concept: 'God', or the Buddha-nature. Because both John's mystical experience and Dogen's enlightenment involve an overcoming of dualism and of the subject-object tension, both involve a "seeing" which is said to be "undifferentiated."

Thus, Enomiya-Lassalle equates the experience of 'nothingness' in Zen with an experience of God in Christian experience. The reason is as follows. According to Enomiya-Lassalle, Zen enlightenment is an experience of being which transcends subject-object dualism. Thus it must be an absolute experience because if the enlightenment experience is relative it would not be satori. Hence the experienced being is absolute being which is absolute reality. Thus the experience of Zen enlightenment is equivalent to an experience of God. Here he attributes Zen's 'nothingness' as an ontological absolute by identifying the experience of nothingness with the experience of God.

Further Graham also sees the **Satori** experience as very close to the experience of

²⁶²Enomiya-Lasalle, Zen Meditation for Christian, trans by John C. Maraldo, (Lasalle, Illinois: Open Court, 1974), 189.

²⁶³Phillip Kapleau, Three Pillar of Zen, 310.

God for he believes that Satori and the experience of God are the same in the sense that both experiences reveal our true-selves. Both Satori and God are common in the fact that through them we realize our true-selves in an unselfconscious manner. He writes:

Catholicism expresses this fulfillment in terms of God being glorified. But so far as the individual is concerned, he gives glory to God by removing the impediments to God's self-manifestation within the human spirit; a process which necessarily brings with it the emergence of the true created self.²⁶⁴

Herein concerning the notion of 'nothingness' in John and Dogen, it seems to be wise to consider it in two separate aspects: one in terms of mystical experience and the other in terms of ontological ground. In terms of mystical experience, Enomiya-Lassalle's view of mystical experience seems to be correct. As he mentioned, both John's and Dogen's enlightenment experiences are common in the fact that both experiences have a unitive character. There is agreement that both Dogen and John's mystical experiences are the same in the sense that both experiences transcend subject-object duality. In this regard, the experience of 'nothingness' in Dogen and John is the same.

In his recent book, Jerome Gellman has made a careful for a quite different approach to religious experience and religious pluralism. He notes that most of what is regarded as incompatibility in religious experiences can be dealt with in the same way that we deal with discrepancies in other varied experiences of the same reality. He, in fact, suggests that the divine object is understood to have a complex nature. For instance, if some people experience God as loving and others experience God as just, 'they may both be experiencing the true nature of God, a nature both loving and just.'²⁶⁵

Thus Gellman says, 'The attempt at harmonization should be guided by the desire to accommodate as much of the appearances as is possible as indicative of reality. Any adjudication which in this regard saves more phenomenal content than another is to be preferred, everything else being equal.'²⁶⁶Gellman writes:

. . . . Given all of this, judging from what is revealed of God in experience, we can

²⁶⁴Dom Aelred Grham, Zen Catholicism, 86-7.

²⁶⁵Jerome Gellman, Experience of God and the Rationality of Theistic Belief, (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), 115.

²⁶⁶Ibid., 112.

readily see how it could be possible for God to be experienced in ways other than and contradictory to His being a personal being. For instance, other features of God could emerge into the open out of the plenitude, just as God's person-hood does. God could be experienced wholly as an impersonal being. And we can readily understand how it could be possible that the experience of God as a wholly impersonal being would be pure 'bliss and joy', as are experiences of impersonal Brahman.²⁶⁷

Thus experiences of God as personal and experiences of the divine as impersonal are reconciled, with each retaining cognitive validity.

Carman also supports the multiple character of God's attributes by saying that within most religious traditions the religious ultimate is characterized in some way by having multiple attributes, even 'polar attributes'. Thus he argues that within most religious traditions, a certain spectrum of varying religious experiences is presumed.²⁶⁸

If we grant the reality of God's multiple nature, 'conflicting' religious testimony need not be discounted. Again, it is basic issue in relating the Christian mystical experience of 'nothingness' and the Zen experience of 'nothingness', therefore, in the question of interpreting monism and dualism.

4) Nothingness: As Awareness of God vs Awareness of True-self

However, according to John, awareness of '**nada**' or 'nothingness' is a state of the 'unthinkable' which is characterized as formless 'unknowing.' This is a state in which specific images and intellectual concepts are transcended. In this state mystics rise above surface-consciousness, but this does not mean that one loses all consciousness of whatever type.

Instead, in John's mystical awareness, it is an absorption in God, in which he is known by direct perception, without the necessity of apprehensions being channelled through particular reflections, forms or images. Green refers John's contemplative union as a state of unknowing because in such experience there is a:

....state of understanding all but thinking about no specific item of knowledge; perceiving all but conceiving of nothing particular....The spiritual knowledge now communicated to the mystic is not confined to any particular matter of reason,

²⁶⁷Ibid., 118.

²⁶⁸John Braisted Carman, *Majesty and Meekness: A Comparative Study of Contrast and Harmony in the Concept of God*, (Grand Rapids MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 1994), 28.

imagination or sense-perception...to know nothing, then, as St. John says, is to know all, i.e. to empty oneself of all particular ideas and images is to apprehend all things seen in their true light, through that principle which is their ground or basis.²⁶⁹

John in this state expresses as ‘nothingness’ or **nada**. However, this state is not literally “conscious of nothing” but rather “conscious of nothing but God” according to John. The **nada** or ‘nothingness’ here is an emptying of the self with regard to the this and that of particular things..

On the other hand, Dogen’s Zen which does not involve the concept of God at all in the Christian sense is not an experience of ‘nothing’ but the True-self which is actually ‘All’. Thus for Dogen, unlike John, we see ourselves not as personalities, but the All, which includes our True-self. With the perception of all of reality as an interconnected whole, ordinary distinctions between self and others disappear. Dogen writes:

‘everything has self.’ the entire universe is myself-as-it-is...yourself as myself, myself as yourself. Myself-is-yourself, yourself-is-myself and the entire universe form one unity.²⁷⁰

With the perception of all of reality as an interconnected whole, ordinary distinctions between self and others disappear. Hence, for Dogen, the enlightened mystic’s awareness of consciousness is not sharply divided in terms of ‘mine’ and not-mine.’ In other words, the enlightened mystic’s sense of herself is no longer limited to the confines of her own physical body. Thus for Dogen, they are all mine, in as much as they are all are essentially connected to me through the unity of the Buddha-mind.

Therefore, the attainment of knowledge from mystical experiences is different in Dogen and John. Since John attains mystical knowledge from union with God, John’s mystical knowledge is relational and receptive, or passive. In other words, John’s mystical awareness comes from God. It is not self-awakening knowledge as in Dogen. It is passive and receptive by nature since it depends on God and relationship. On the contrary, Dogen’s mystical awareness is self-awakening in character. It comes from the realization of the Buddha-nature. In this respect, it is non-relational. It is not receptive.

²⁶⁹Deirdre Green, “St. John of the Cross and Mystical ‘Unknowing,” *Religious Studies*, 22 (1986), 32.

²⁷⁰*Dogen Zenji’s Shobogenzo*, Kosen Nishiyama and John Steven trans, v. I, 105.

It comes not from somewhere but from self-within.

5) Summary

However, if we consider the ontological grounds of Dogen and John, we can see why these reviews have emerged. First of all, as we have already observed, the fundamental realization of Zen including Dogen's Zen is the realization of the Buddha-nature, which is precisely Oriental Nothingness, a Nothingness which is beyond the duality of being and nonbeing. However, in John's mystical theology, God is the ground of being and God is subsistent and ontological Being. Although God is experienced **nada** which seems to phenomenologically be the same as 'nothingness' in Dogen, John's mystical experience is hardly the same as Dogen's. The expression of 'nothingness' in John's mystical experience does not indicate the absence of an ontological ground. Rather it is an ineffable expression of God. Since God is beyond our modes of expression, God has to be expressed in a negative sense. According to Certeau, when John writes of a 'dark night' he actually creates a 'strangeness in the order of language' in order to communicate what cannot be said.²⁷¹

Here there seems to be emerging a fundamental difference between Dogen's Zen and John's mystical experience. It is that though John's mystical experience is characterized by unity, it also has a dualistic character in terms which are not present in Dogen's Zen. This is a fundamental difference in terms of mystical awareness between Dogen and John. Johnston has distinguished this dualistic character of Christian mystical experience:

The experience of complete and utter unity beyond subject and object is by no means unknown in the Christian mystics. . . this unitive prayer, when it reaches its peak point, contains an element of diversity or separation within the very unity.²⁷²

In this respect, John's mystical experience could be defined as "unitive and dualistic." Thus it is unity and duality. Johnston in his book, Christian Zen, describes the difference between Christianity and Buddhism:

²⁷¹Michael de Certeau, The Mystic Fable: The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries, trans, Michael B. Smith, (Chicago: The University of Chicago press, 1992), 8.

²⁷²William Johnston, The Still Point, 39-40, 77.

If Christianity and Buddhism cross spiritual swords, the issue at stake is monism versus dualism. . . so it comes down to the basic problem: Are there many things or is there only one thing.²⁷³

However, Kreeft rejects the view that Christian mystical experience is dualistic. He rejects the view that God is an objective “other,” who exists independently. Kreeft argues that God could not be an objective “other.” The reason why most Christians regard God as “Other”, according to Kreeft is because God seems to be objective only to our subjective consciousness. He states:

Though Christianity sees God as ‘objective,’ this means only ‘independent’ . . .He is not an object **in se** but only **quoad nos**, only relative to our subjectivity (or rather, as our subjectivity is relative to him).²⁷⁴

According to Kreeft, since God is not ‘objective’ other, he transcends subject-object reality. Thereby, Kreeft believes that God is non-dual in nature. In this regard he argues that the Christian presence of God corresponds to Zen **satori**. He states:

The permeation of the whole of the Zen man’s life by **satori** corresponds to the Christian ‘practice of the presence of God’. . . . It does not objectify God (Who, being infinite, cannot be limited to one pole of any dualism, including the subject-object dualism). . .²⁷⁵

However, although Kreeft’s view of a non-objectified God or the non-dual nature of God, seems to be correct, it does not necessarily mean that the non-dual nature of God is equivalent to ‘nothingness’ in Zen. For it does not make any ontological proof that the ‘non-dual nature’ of God and Zen’s ‘nothingness’ are identical. In other words, we may presume that the Christian God and Zen’s nothingness are equivalent as a hypothesis, but we cannot make an ontologically identical affirmation between them.

Therefore, the experience of ‘nothingness’ in Dogen and John is similar as long as both are involved in unitive experience of oneness. However, John is different from Dogen in the sense that John’s experience has a dualistic character even in the midst of unitive experience. Johnston says in this regard:

²⁷³William Johnston, *Christian Zen*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 21.

²⁷⁴Peter Kreeft, “Zen Buddhism and Christianity: An Experiment in Comparative Religion,” 525.

²⁷⁵*Ibid.*, 521.

. . . this unitive prayer, when it reaches its peak point, contains an element of diversity or separation within the very unity.²⁷⁶

Dogen's enlightenment via Nothingness is characterized by boundless openness without any center, and "nothingness" in Dogen is free from anthropocentrism and theocentrism. Accordingly, in Emptiness there is no dominant-subordinate relationship, i.e., subject-object relationship. The person is not subordinate to the Buddha, nor is nature subordinate to the person. Thus Zen experiences the Absolute as impersonal, and personality needs to be submerged, left behind, or given up to realize It. Abe describes its character:

Everything, without exception, is dominant over everything else and at the same time subordinate to everything else. This is complete emancipation and freedom from any kind of bondage resulting from discrimination.²⁷⁷

Thus the concept of 'nothingness' used in Dogen's metaphysic cannot be adequately rendered into John's mystical theology. They differ because different religious objects as well as goals are being pursued and achieved in relation with different Reality.

Thus divergent reports from both Dogen's and John's experiences achieved by both of them in connection with the religious ultimate can be credited largely in their own terms.

C) Self Identity in Mystical Experience: Differentiated vs Undifferentiated

On the other hand, in Dogen's enlightenment experience, individuality is seen as one of the essential components of a unified all-encompassing system. Within the perception of all reality as an interconnected whole, ordinary distinctions between self and others disappear. Thus in the enlightenment experience there is no division in terms of mine and not-mine. In other words, there is no sharp distinction between 'I' and 'others.' For enlightened awareness, they are all mine, inasmuch as they are all essentially connected to me through the unity of the Buddha-nature. Dogen writes:

²⁷⁶William Johnston, *Christian Zen*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 39-40.

²⁷⁷Roger Corless and Paul F. Knitter, *Buddhist Emptiness and Christian Trinity*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1990), 21.

The entire universe is myself-as-it-is. . . yourself as myself, myself as yourself, yourself-as-myself and the entire universe form one unity.²⁷⁸

Thus there is no quality of differentiation in Zen enlightenment. What Dogen notes here is that this unity includes and incorporates the subjectivity of others. In other words, the mystic's awareness of self is no longer limited to the confines of self. Through the experience of unity, one's sense of self is extended beyond spatial parameters. Thus from the perspective of enlightened mystics, everything is an interconnected unity.

Therefore, Kasulis describes the Zen enlightenment experience as a "non-discursive awakening to the interdependent non-substantiality of reality, especially the self."²⁷⁹In other words, non-discursive awakening to reality would not seem to be an experience of self as a disjunctive individual. Rather, it breaks the foundation for conjunctive-disjunctive duality within spatial collectivities by an awakening to non-self in which the ordinary self-other dichotomy does not hold. Dogen states:

Acting on and witnessing myriad things with the burden of oneself is 'delusion.'
Acting on and witnessing oneself in the advent of the myriad of things is enlightenment.²⁸⁰

Enomiya-Lassalle, also describes this unitive enlightenment experience as an experience of essence:

It is an experiential realization of the absolute unity of all being in which there is neither 'I' independent in itself nor any kind of individual thing, nor any object."²⁸¹

Thus there is a sense of the Buddha-nature within everything. Dogen spoke repeatedly of the immanence of the Buddha-nature in all things. Hence Nothingness discloses ultimate Reality, the totality of beings, as they really are in themselves. All beings thus are seen truly, "free of discrimination", not as "objectified" by our subject-object consciousness, but as they are in themselves.

²⁷⁸Dogen Zenji's *Shobogenzo*, Kosen Nishiyama and John Steven trans, v I, 105.

²⁷⁹Thomas P. Kasulis, "Nirvana," *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 448.

²⁸⁰Shobogenzo, "Genjokoan," Thomas Cleary trans, 32.

²⁸¹Enomiya-Lassalle, *Zen-Meditation for Christians*, 150.

On the other hand, however, John holds to the theological doctrine that even in the perfect **union mystica** man remains man-i.e., God's creature. The soul in union retains its individuality. The union of the soul with God does not destroy the individuality of the soul. In John's view, union is not an immersion or absorption of the soul into an impersonal deity. Before, in, and after union the distinction of persons is affirmed. John states:

. . . . when the spiritual marriage between God and the soul is consummated, there are two natures in one spirit and love. . . This union resembles the union of the light of a star or candle with the light of the sun, for what then sheds light is not the star or candle, but the sun, which has absorbed the other lights into its own.²⁸²

The dissolution of the self in John seems close to Dogen's view, but John's dissolution of the self is different from that of Dogen because John's dissolution of the self is in transformation, absorption, participation, or inclusion of the self in God. In any event, the intimacy of the mystics's relationship with God, a relationship wherein the soul is "dead to itself" and alive in God, would if taken pan-theistically as opposed to panen-theistically, mean the annihilation of the self, but John is clear that even when absorbed in God one still stands on one's own two feet. Johnston correctly wrote in this regard:

The highest point of mysticism is reached not in the experience that "I" know and love God," not in any I-Thou experience but in the experience that "God lives in me."²⁸³

Thus it is more accurate to call John a panentheist than a pantheist because these terms (transformation, etc.) do not imply complete loss of identity. In panentheism, the creature is in God, in such a way that the creature is at least metaphysically distinct from the creator. Moreover, panentheism is an attempt to do justice to both divine immanence and transcendence. In this regard John's mysticism not only emphasizes the divine transcendence of nature which ends up with a monopolar God, it also emphasizes

²⁸²A.2.4.8.

²⁸³William Johnston, "Buddhist and Christian Meet," The Eastern Buddhist, New Series, 3. 1 (June 1970), 143-4.

the immanence of God in the creature, namely in the human soul. To have union with God means to participate in Him, not to become God. John states:

Yet besides this life of love through which the soul that loves God lives in Him, her life is radically and naturally centered in God, like that of all created things, centered in God, as St. Paul says: In Him we live and move and are (Acts 17:28). This was like saying: In God we have our life and our movement and our being. And St. John says that all that was made was life in God (John 1:3-4). Since the soul knows she has her natural life in God.²⁸⁴

Therefore, one does not become one with God in the same way that one becomes a Buddha. John's experience of oneness is 'in' and 'with' God, while Dogen's experience of oneness comes out of self realization of the Buddha-nature. John's oneness is achieved by the love of God which is characterized as a merging of the two into one unity without collapsing its identity. John states:

All things of both God and the soul become one in participant transformation, and the soul appears to be God more than a soul. Indeed, it is God by participation, Yet truly, its being is naturally as distinct (**distinto**) from God's as it was before just as the window, although illumined by the ray, has an existence distinct (**distinto**) from the ray.²⁸⁵

Although it is unified with God, it is on the basis of distinction. Even in union one does not lose one's relational aspect. John also mentions that since a person in this state become "divinized", the soul experiences both humanity and divinity within itself. In other words, even in spiritual marriage, the soul involves a manifestation of the mystery of the Incarnation at least in part. Nevertheless, although the soul experiences and participates in the inner life of the Trinity in this state of spiritual marriage, it does not yet give an individual the complete possession of the Beloved which he seeks. Dr Bruteau has described such a distinction of the self in unity in Christian mysticism:

This distinction arises from the existential reality of the autonomous acts of knowing and loving which also constitute the unity. So the plurality and the unity are both referred to the same act, and that act is characteristic of the highest conscious selfhood. If Ultimate Reality is of the nature of selfhood, it must be a

²⁸⁴A.8.3.

²⁸⁵A.2.5.7.

complex unity of this sort. . . . this distinction is not due to a distance between Creator and creature, but is the same kind of distinction that prevails inside the Godhead itself.²⁸⁶

Geoffrey Parrinder also argues that Christian mystical experience is an irreducibly plural form of mysticism. He accurately points out that in theistic mysticism, the mystic and God become one, yet remain two. Parrinder writes:

“Theistic mysticism seeks union with God but not identity. Monistic mysticism seeks identity with a universal principle, which may be called divine though that would imply a difference from the human. Non-religious mysticism also seeks union with something, or everything, rather like monism.”²⁸⁷

Thus, ‘differentiated’ unity is the hallmark of theistic mysticism. John’s mystical experience of unity, then, can be called ‘differentiated’ unity, while Dogen’s mysticism is an undifferentiated unity between the mystic and “universal principle.”

D) Significance of Mystical Awareness in Dogen and John

Having seen various philosophers’ interpretation of mystical awareness, particularly the concept of ‘nothingness,’ we can see that interpreting mystical awareness is a difficult task for it lies on the fact that the mystical awareness is qualitatively distinct from other modes of knowing.

Both Dogen and John present that mystical awareness is a matter of direct perception of the Divine or Absolute, not of inference. Mystical knowing, in fact, is not on a straight line with other types of knowledge. John, for instance, the connatural **intellectus**, is an elevated consciousness which is higher than discursive **ratio**. It is not a new species of conceptual knowledge, nor is it knowledge of new or different facts and events in the world; it is rather an intuitive openness to and an awareness participation in, the unity of a whole situation. In fact the knowledge attained from mystical experience is not the same as our ordinary knowledge. One can distinguish between two different types of knowledge, one sort being discursive and the other

²⁸⁶Beatrice Bruteau, “Insight and Manifestation: A Way of Prayer in a Christian Context,” Prabuddha Bharata, 88.

²⁸⁷Geoffrey Parrinder, Mysticism in the World’s Religions, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 15.

consisting in spiritual apprehensions. John states:

Mystical consciousness is a type of apprehension which is different from our usual rational or empirical modes of thought, but which is nevertheless to be regarded as a very real type of "knowledge". . .it is just such a form of knowledge which St. John refers to as "unknowing". . .it does not involve annihilation of the soul's faculties.²⁸⁸

Mystical knowing is, thus, a spiritual awakening, a coming to truth about the nature of reality. Mystical knowing, in this regard, differs from other modes of knowing in that there is a radical transformation within the knower himself. The other modes of knowing are involved in temporal observation of assorted phenomena while mystical knowing is not directed toward anything. Mystical knowing is rather a shift in the whole of existence. Mystical states show our rational consciousness to be only one kind of consciousness. They show us that there are other dimensions to our life, other kinds of truth and knowledge. Mystical knowing, thus, involves not only reason and faith, but also will, and practical action. It is not so much a part of life, as life itself, rather it is the ground of all existence. Mystical awareness show us a form of truth which embraces the whole self, which is not limited to reason or to feeling and which cannot therefore be measured by them.

Thus a point should be emphasized here that mystical awareness is an act of the whole person. It is the reason why enlightenment is characterized by unity for in the act of mystical apprehension, all our faculties are united and integrated into a whole. As John asserts in union there is no longer duality. "It is a total transformation in the Beloved in which each surrenders the entire possession of self to the other. The soul becomes divine, becomes God through participation."²⁸⁹

Mystical awareness also differs from other modes of knowing because it is not based on sensory means of knowledge. In our ordinary way of knowing which is characterized as subject-object way of knowing, the human mind can investigate and acquire knowledge only in terms of "relations."

This is the reason why both Dogen and John assert that any approach to the attainment of knowledge which invokes the feelings of the heart at the expense of

²⁸⁸Cf. Daniel A. Dombrowski, *St John of the Cross*, 175.

²⁸⁹C.22.3.

reason, or, vice versa, the use of reason to the neglect of the yearnings of the heart, may ultimately prove inadequate and unsatisfactory. Accordingly, John suggests that mystical knowledge is not natural knowledge: it has not come through the senses, nor has it come through inferences from sensible objects. He says:

This knowledge is not produced by the intellect which the philosophers call the agent intellect, which works upon the forms, phantasies, and apprehensions of the corporal faculties; rather, it is produced in the possible or passive intellect. This possible intellect, without the reception of these forms, etc., receives passively only substantial knowledge, which is divested of images and given without any work or active function of the intellect.²⁹⁰

Rudolf Otto, also characterizes mystical knowing as a particular sort of knowing which is a unique kind of apprehension, not to be reduced to intellectual knowing.²⁹¹

Therefore, since mystical awareness is a unique kind of apprehension, not to be reduced to intellectual knowing, most mystics teach the contemplative path as a way to achieve mystical awareness. John teaches that we have to see God by the contemplative path.

According to John, mystical awareness is a state of the 'unthinkable' which is characterized as formless 'unknowing.' This is a state in which specific images and intellectual concepts are transcended. In this state mystics rise above surface consciousness, but this does not mean that one loses all consciousness of whatever type. Instead, in John's mystical awareness, it is an absorption in God, in which he is known by direct perception, without the necessity of apprehensions being channelled through particular reflections, forms or images. Green refers to John's contemplative union as a state of unknowing because in such experience there is a:

...state of understanding all but thinking about no specific item of knowledge; perceiving all but conceiving of nothing particular...the spiritual knowledge now communicated to the mystic is not confined to any particular matter of reason, imagination or sense-perception...to know nothing, then, as St. John says, is to know all, i.e. to empty oneself of all particular ideas and images is to apprehend all things seen in their true light, through that principle which is their ground or

²⁹⁰Kieran Kavanaugh & Otilio Rodriguez trans, *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, (Washington D.C.: ICS Publications, 1979), 561.

²⁹¹Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, John W. Harvey trans, (Oxford University Press, 1977), 125.

basis.²⁹²

Mystics express this state as ‘nothingness’ or **nada**. However, this state is not literally “conscious of nothing” but rather “conscious of nothing but God” according to John. the **nada** or ‘nothingness’ here is an emptying of the self with regard to the this and that of particular things.

Likewise, it seems that Dogen’s Zen which does involve the concept of God at all in the Christian sense is not an experience of ‘nothing’ but the True-self which is actually ‘All.’ We can find the characteristic of Zen’s mystical awareness from Dogen’s comments on the cat killing **koan**:

If I had been Nan-chuan, I would have said: “Even if you can speak, I will cut the cat, and even if you cannot speak, I will still cut it. Who is arguing about the cat? Who can save the cat?”

Here, we can find Dogen’s rejections of ordinary mental processes. “Even if you can speak, I will cut the cat” indicates that Dogen will reject any answer evolving from the process of “thinking,” wherein we may, for example, conceptualize the cat as an object that we can take a stand about and either help or not help. “Even if you cannot speak, I will still cut the cat” indicates that he will also not accept an answer form “not-thinking,” that is, a negating attitude toward the process of thinking itself. In other words, the disciples cannot simply ignore-and thus answer.

The mystical perception of “without-thinking” can thus be characterized pre-reflective thinking. That is pre-reflective experience of life. It is before “thinking” and “not-thinking.” In “thinking” and “not-thinking” are the process of our ordinary mental activity. We can certainly think about a cat-analyze it, worry over it, decide whether or not to kill it, and so forth. We can also not think about the cat or, for that matter, anything at all; that is, we can stop the thinking process altogether. However, “without thinking” is beyond the dichotomy of thinking and not-thinking. In ‘without-thinking’, cause and effect arise at the same time.

Dogen, in fact, observes that “cause is not before and effect is not after,” Hee-Jin

²⁹²Deidre Green, “St. John of the Cross and Mystical ‘Unknowing.” *Religious Studies*, 22 (1986), 32.

Kim explains that Dogen saw cause and effect as absolutely discontinuous moments that, in any given action, arise simultaneously from “thusness.” Hee-Jin Kim writes:

No sooner does one choose and act according to a particular course of action than are the results thereof (heavens, hells, or otherwise) realized in it...Man lives in the midst of causation from which he cannot escape even for a moment; nevertheless, he can live from moment to moment in such a way that these moments are the fulfilled moments of moral and spiritual freedom and purity in thusness.²⁹³

Dogen concludes that ordinary thinking is inadequate to the highest form of truth. Nishitani writes in this regard:

The field of emptiness goes beyond both the field of sense intuition and rational thinking. . . it pertains to the realization of the thing itself, which cannot be comprehended by sensation or reason. This is not cognition of an object, but a non-cognitive knowing of the non-objective thing in itself; it is what we might call a knowing of non-knowing, a sort of **docta ignorantia**.²⁹⁴

Consequently, there is a loss of awareness of the empirical self and personality, a loss of the ability of rational analysis and so on in the state of mystical awareness. Therefore, since mystical awareness is a unique kind of apprehension, not to be reduced to intellectual knowing, most mystics teach the contemplative path as a way to achieve mystical awareness.

In this regard, mystical awareness is not an ‘unconscious’ state but a state of pure and unified consciousness, quite different from ordinary forms of awareness, wherein we are not aware of our selfhood as being separate from the Divine, where there is no room for self-reflection, and wherein rational concepts, symbols and so on are excluded from the field of awareness.

Thus both Dogen and John are noting that normal metaphysical categories which are active in sifting the perceptions of ordinary being break down with enlightenment. It seems that while the empirical consciousness is transcended into mystical awareness, truths and realizations are being conveyed to the deeper consciousness, to the true self, and these realizations later come into a mystic’s conscious, rational awareness when we

²⁹³Hee-Jin Kim, *Dogen Kigen: Mystical Realist*, 1975 ed, 285.

²⁹⁴Keiji Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, Jan Van Bragt trans, 139.

descend to “the upper level of the natural order of things.”

Mystical perception, thus, differs from sensual perception in the respect that participants acquire information about physical objects via sensory stimulation but base mystical beliefs on direct, non-sensory awareness of God. Eberle writes in this regard:

An important and legitimate difference between MP and SP is that the conditions in which an agent reliably perceives God differ from the conditions in which an agent reliably perceives physical objects. We are familiar enough with this kind of phenomenon in SP. If we want to put ourselves in a strong position to learn about the fine-grained details of a painting, we have to get right up close to the painting, but if we want to discern its overall pattern, we need to view it from a distance...In each case a perceptual state that aids accurate perception in one set of circumstances hinders veridical perception in another.²⁹⁵

According to mystical perception, the subjective state in which an agent is most receptive to God’s presence include the percipient’s being in a state of child-like trust, whereas no such state is included in sensual perception. Alston writes:

Why suppose that the conditions that make for accurate perception of the physical environment also make for accurate perception of God? On a typical hot sunny day in the Arizona desert a pair of sun glasses is an aid to accurate observation; but they have quite the reverse effect on a cold foggy day in the Aleutians. And surely God is more different from the Aleutians than the Aleutians are from Arizona.²⁹⁶

Thus, according to Alston, various attempts to disqualify mystical perception on the basis of this difference between mystical perception and sensual perception cannot be successful.²⁹⁷ Alston further argues that since God is transcendent and God is manifest at God’s own behest and timing, it is not reasonable to expect that mystical beliefs are amenable of corroboration via accurate prediction. However, it is reasonable to expect that sensual perceptual beliefs are amenable of such corroboration.

In this regard, the testability requirement should be different from ordinary means for the contemplative mode of awareness insofar as its object is supposed to be immaterial, transcendent, and so on, and thus seems to elude the tests we ordinarily use

²⁹⁵Christopher J. Eberle, “Autonomy and Explanation of Mystical Perception,” *Religious Studies*, vol 34, (1998), 307.

²⁹⁶William P. Alston, *Perceiving God*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), 233

²⁹⁷*Ibid.*, 209-222.

in evaluating ostensible perceptions. Since there are different means of verification, e.g., scientific, philosophical, or spiritual, some perceptions cannot be verified by other means of verification.

Mystical experiences, thus, must be seen in relation to the techniques used to induce them, to the mystical goal as it is defined by the tradition in question, to the metaphysical interpretations surrounding them, to the symbols by means of which they are expressed. Judgement, therefore, is not a discursive process for the mystic, as if he or she were evaluating every step of the way in his or her religious life.

In fact, we should recognize that there are considerable differences between the way we form and check mystical perception and the way we form and check sensual perception.²⁹⁸ The difference between mystical perception and the empirical version of sensation is that for mystics the experience deals with something “comprehensive.” It is distinct from observation through mental perception which perceives things from a mental faculty and then determines what they are by objectivizing them. In other words, sensual perceptual checking procedures do not provide us with the reason to discount the epistemic status of mystical perception.

As we have seen, John, for example, denies that the certainty of a mystic’s union can be verified by the result of an empirical search for no search could find the object which would correspond with the word “God.” Rather, John argues that since God is understood as a darkness, it is through faith and love that one can come into union with God and one should not remain agnostic about what lies beyond such darkness. In other words, According to John, one can only truly know something through participation: by entering into a type of union with it. What is more important in assessing the validity of the mystic is an increase in the mystic’s love for God and his or her neighbors. Judgement, therefore, can only be made from within this relationship.

Dogen, on the other hand, urges his disciples to examine their own experiences and to authenticate their understanding of what is. Dogen asserts that there is no extra-experiential touchstone, no thing-in-itself that can serve as the standard for evaluation. Dogen maintains that a special mode of reflexive consciousness is needed for this

²⁹⁸Christopher J. Eberle, “Autonomy and Explanation of Mystical Perception,” 305-306.

authenticating process. In his fascicle, Dogen writes:

The Buddhas and Tathagata have the wondrous art **wu-wei**: they directly transmit to each other the wondrous dharma and authenticate perfect enlightenment. Being passed on directly from Buddha to Buddha, this transmission is without distortion, i.e., **jijuyu sammai** itself is the touchstone.²⁹⁹

For Dogen the term **jijuyu sammai** implies the authentication of enlightenment. **Sammai** is the Japanese equivalent to the sanskrit “**samadhi**,” a high-level meditative state. “**Jijuyu**” means a saintly serenity and joy that one brings to one’s daily life. In other words, if one’s mystical perception has such a characterization, it is the touchstone of its authentication. In this regard, James Price correctly pointed out that one must shift the epistemological attention “principally on the knower, not on what is to be known.”³⁰⁰

Therefore, in order to understand mystical awareness, we require an alternative approach. This must include a broader definition of such terms as knowledge and understanding. For Ultimate Reality does not submit to our analysis and conceptualization. Thus Reality, like all insights and direct experiences is not possible to define through exact literal meaning.

Hence since it can be apprehended by non-dual perception, dualistic and sensual perception cannot experience understand it. Thus Dogen, like John, emphasises an existentialist sense of authenticity rather than truth-telling in the ordinary sense.

Conclusion

In this study I started with an investigation of the experiences and teachings of two mystics, Dogen Kigen and St. John of the Cross conducted at a phenomenological level. I attempted to understand their writings from within the terms of their own philosophy, elucidating the nature of their mystical experiences and their forms of expression.

I classified Dogen and John into two broad types. I have outlined the major characteristics of these two types as follows: In theistic or devotional mysticism (John

²⁹⁹T. P. Kasulis, “Truth and Zen,” *Philosophy East and West*, 30, no 4 (October, 1980), 459.

³⁰⁰James R. Price, “The Objectivity of Mystical Truth Claims,” *The Thomist*, 49 (1985), 94.

of the Cross), the personal deity is the object of the mystic's longings, although very often, as we have seen, John speaks of a formless experience which takes him close phenomenologically to the more strictly monistic experiences of Dogen's Zen. John as a devotional mystic expresses himself in romantic, emotional, and often passionate language. John's mysticism is characterized as a way of 'love' leading to union with God (mystical marriage), rather than an absolute absorption into the formless Reality of all, and correspondingly it does not often insist upon the transcendence of all particular ideas and images.

In John's mysticism, the whole pattern of events and experiences which constitute mystical development seems to involve participation in a developing love-relationship with the divine partner encountered in contemplative states. In fact, the mystical experience of John is generally passive. That is, it seems to the subject that he has not attained the experience solely through his own efforts, but by God's grace. Indeed, he may be surprised by its nature and occurrence.

On the other hand, in monistic mysticism (Dogen), the Buddha-nature or Nothingness is seen as the Ultimate Reality and True-nature of all, and is itself beyond all opposites, non-dual, transcendent, "neither this nor that". Dogen follows the path of 'knowledge' (mystical intuition; non-dual awareness) which passes beyond all symbols, beyond all limited human conceptions, and beyond all dualistic thinking, to become one with the formless Buddha-nature.

Following on from my discussion of their spiritualities, in chapter four, I compared their teachings and experiences. I pointed out a large number of similarities and differences between Dogen and John. What has emerged from comparative study is that there are three basic levels at which the similarities or differences of mystical experience between Dogen and John can be analysed: they are as follows:

- (a) The differences and similarities of phenomenological experience
- (b) The different mystics' ontological reality within the experience
- (c) Experience and interpretation.

Thus in a cross-cultural study of Dogen and John we find that there are differences and

similarities of phenomenological experience (a) that is, a unity of a number of different types of experience, and a diversity of interpretation (c). Two mystics can have a different experience of the same Absolute Reality, or can have what appear to be phenomenologically identical experiences of different Realities.

Concerning the similarities, we found that there are close parallels between the methods and techniques used to induce mystical experience in Dogen and John. Both mystics use similar forms of meditative discipline, which usually comprise purification, the cultivation of detachment and ethical virtues, and contemplation. We find that both traditions teach that certain levels of imagery, certain attachments, and certain limited modes of understanding, have to be transcended. The exact levels of symbolism and types of understanding implied differ from Dogen to John, but the importance of rising above excessive rationalism is always stressed and personal experience is all-important. It is also held to be of great importance to rise above selfish or hedonistic desires, and excessive attachment to the things of the senses; but the world and the lower faculties are nonetheless not to be rejected.

As the mystic progresses, he or she is rewarded by greater self-knowledge, and with this self-knowledge comes knowledge of the divine Reality or the Void. New levels of consciousness or being are encountered. Finally the mystical path culminates in union with, or absorption into, the absolute spiritual principle of which all particular things are manifestations or creations. John, for example, maintained a similar distinction between **ratio**, the knowledge of natural truths, and **intellectus**, the wisdom which gazes upon supernatural truths. John could thus intelligibly speak of the development of a new “organ” of mystical insight. Dogen regards ordinary thinking as deluded and productive only of suffering, and illusion.

As a result mystics see into the heart of things, understand the one source from which reality proceeds, and come to see all things in the Light of the Divine, or Absolute. As we see in Dogen and John, there is a unity of certain basic or general spiritual truths, such as the distinction between the true Self and the empirical self, and belief in our essential oneness with spiritual reality.

What Dogen’s and John’s mystical awareness suggests is that we cannot understand the other realm of being. We cannot understand the mystical realms of being in our

universe unless we step outside the realm of modern logical, dualistic and analytic thought. Dogen's and John's mysticism teaches us that there are different categories of reality, different types of intelligibility, obeying different laws: one such is mystical consciousness. For example, as we have seen in John's mystical experience, when John experienced God as an object in his mystical experience God cannot be regarded as an object in any ordinary sense.

Thus the actual experience of a mystical object is qualitatively different from experiences involving normal states of consciousness. Mystical perception is distinct from knowledge based upon ordinary perception. Once the relationship between contemplative practice and mystical experience has been established, it becomes clear that rational and empirically based methods of investigation are inadequate for understanding mystical perceptions. What we appear to have is a two level hierarchy of consciousness, which levels we can call respectively "ordinary-consciousness" and "mystical-consciousness." Ordinary-consciousness is binary or dual and distinguishes clearly between this and that, more and less, above and below. Mystical-consciousness is non-binary or non-dual and leads to expression like "union with God" (John) and "thusness" (Dogen) rather than this or that. It allows differences not only to co-exist but to co-inhere, non-hierarchically and absolutely, retaining their several integrities.

However, despite the fact that there are many similarities between Dogen and John, I have argued that mysticism in John and Dogen is also different, because differences emerge from their theological or metaphysical foundation, namely, 'Ultimate Reality.' John is really experiencing a personal God, and Dogen is experiencing a consciousness of an impersonal void. Thus they are ostensibly perceiving different "objects." Since both God and the Void are supposed to be "ultimate," and "ultimate" can not be simultaneously personal and impersonal, they are experiencing different reality. Because it is logically impossible to claim a personal experience of God and impersonal experience of Reality or the Void as being the same.

Thus, part of our study concerning 'difference' has been focused on the mystics' "ultimate reality," namely 'God' and the 'Buddha-nature.' Because it is from the origin or source that differences and similarities of mystical experience are emerge; such as the concept of the 'self,' contemplation, mystical goal, and so on. Thus, 'God,' and the

‘Buddha-nature,’ are at the ‘core’ of their mysticism.

In other word, ‘ultimate reality,’ being the core of all mystical experience, is the main factor that leads to distinctions among different mystical traditions. It is the fountain of all spiritual matters. It is the final criterion that can open up distinctions between different mystical traditions. All other phenomenological differences rely on this basis. Depending on which ultimate one experiences or believes in, the characteristics of one’s experience will be determined. In other words, all other differences such as concepts of human nature, contemplative paths, mystical experiences, and so are derived from his or her ultimate reality. Thus in order to find out the difference between two mystics, the primary thing to do is to examine the nature of their ultimate reality.

Although tremendous academic research and discussion has been conducted throughout Christian history, no one would deny the fact that in Christianity ‘God’ is understood as ‘ontological Being.’ “God exists.” God is the “Other Being,” who is ontologically separated from us. He is infinite, and we are finite. There are two separate beings. There is an antithesis between God and human beings. This is the bottom line in Christian theology. Thus there is an ontological gap between God and human beings. Even Christian mysticism, including John, does not avoid this fact. Although John’s mysticism expresses God as **nada** (nothingness) this does not necessarily deny God’s ontological existence. Rather, it is an apophatic understanding of God.

Thus for John, it is clear that union is two things becoming one. In this respect, John’s mysticism is about bringing the two poles of duality together within one immediate experience. This understanding of union assumes that God or the Absolute is fundamentally other and separate from us. Thus the “union” with God is experienced as a coming together of two opposite essences.

On the contrary, this is not the type of Dogen’s Zen. For Dogen, ultimate reality is not separated being from us. For Dogen, as we already have seen, the Absolute and the relative are presently and perpetually “united.” Thus Zen seeks that which lies beyond antithesis. It takes us to an absolute realm wherein there is no antithesis of any sort. Thus the ‘Ultimate’ is associated with the notion of non-being. To objectify Ultimate Reality, in whatever terminology, is but to project what we are in our own deepest

selves. Here the phenomenal and Absolute are mutually inclusive or “transparent” one to the other. Phenomena, thus can be considered as merely delusive illusions that obscure Reality, or they can be considered as formally distinct manifestations of Reality.

Thus in Dogen’s Zen such a notion of a Supreme Being could never occur. There is no such separated ontological Absolute being. There is no such “Supreme-being” distinct from us. There is no God to help, for there is no God “up there” or “out there”; neither is there supernatural intervention or refuge. But rather talk of the “Absolute” or the “One Mind.” The ‘Absolute’ is the Mind, and the Mind is the Buddha. To see directly into one’s original Nature, that is Zen. Therefore, the finite is infinite and vice versa. In Dogen’s Zen the Ultimate Reality, the Transcendent, is in fact the non-theistic, non-personal process mode of thought. It is “Emptiness,” **Sunyata**.

They are not two separate things, though we are compelled to conceive so intellectually. The mistake consists in our splitting into two what is really and absolutely one. The Absolute does not separate from us. So the Absolute is not something to be attained. It can be said that Emptiness is another name for the Buddhist doctrine of **Pratitya Samutpada**, Dependent Co-origination, which, as we observed already, means that nothing exists as a self-subsisting, isolated thing; rather, everything is ultimately a net of relationships, and consequently is always in flux, is “becoming.” Thus **Sunyata** or Emptiness does not mean simply the lack of everything, but rather has the quite positive meaning of being the Ultimate Source of all reality

Thus, in Dogen’s Zen there is no difference between the realizer and what is realized, while in John there is “Divine being” who is regarded as a separate “object” with whom one is united. For Dogen, the ‘Ultimate’ is true-awareness of the ‘thing itself,’ namely, True-self. This ‘True Self’ is undifferentiated and not separated from ourselves. While John’s object is understood as the separate distinctive Absolute Being, Dogen regards it as an Absolute non-separated Self. To be a Buddha means that one has realized one’s identity with **Tathata**, with the one true self which is not conditioned by the distinction between “I” and “you,” “this,” and “that.” It is the seeing into one’s own nature.

Therefore, Dogen’s Zen is a matter of self-awakening, while John’s mysticism is ‘relational’ between two separate beings, God and humans. Thus John is ultimately

dualistic while Dogen is monistic. Since Dogen's Zen denies the infinity and transcendence of a living personal God by identifying the Absolute with nature, it is a very peculiar form of 'non-theism.' It supersedes the doctrine of God. Thus there is a qualitative difference between John's notion and Dogen's notion of ultimate reality.

For Dogen the object of reality is not experienced in a personal relation. Reality is experienced as neither a Lord-self duality, nor a "union" in the strict sense of the word. In the attainment of the Buddha-nature, Reality is always realized from the standpoint of the oneness of practice, every "sentient being is the Buddha-nature," it constitutes a non-objectifiable subjectivity. Therefore, Dogen's mystical experience is self-awakening in character, it comes from realization of the Buddha-nature. It is non-relational. It is not receptive. It comes not from somewhere but from self-within. Thus, unlike John, it is not anthropocentric, which excludes all beings other than human beings. It is based on a cosmological structure.

On the contrary, since John's mystical experience comes from God, it is not self-awakening experience as in Dogen. John's mystical experience is receptive, or passive, because it depends on God. Thus while in John's mysticism there is a personal relation which exists between two separate personal beings who remain two and yet are unified as one, Dogen's Zen, by contrast, asserts that humans are ontologically identical with Reality or the Buddha-nature. It is a non-reflexive awareness or awakening of primary Being, not a consciousness of a distinct self. Moreover, Reality, the Buddha-nature, is devoid of all sense of personal reference. Thus for Dogen the problem lies in the fact that most humans are oblivious to their true oneness with Reality. The problem is not moral, but epistemological. It is not that humans are not unrelated to the Buddha-nature or Reality, but that they fail to realize this inherent relatedness, and this constitutes the basic human dilemma. On the contrary, since John's mysticism is union with an active and compassionate personal God, it involves the moral attributes of goodness and love to a high degree.

In short, we have two major paradigms of the 'Ultimate Reality.' John's paradigm stresses 'Supreme Being' and separateness, whereas Dogen's paradigm stresses transiency and relatedness. Dogen's Zen is a most radical form of auto-soterism. It revolts against any authority and does not affirm the existence of God. Contrary to

John's mysticism, the principle of Dogen's Zen is negatively the denial of Divine intervention, and the gift of Divine grace. In Zen it is one's own spiritual realization that makes the difference and the mind is its own place. In this regard, it is no other than Mind. Thus it engenders a spirit of mysticism by taking refuge in a doctrine of radical intuition by looking into one's own nature. We bear the whole responsibility for our actions and no Sage whatsoever he be has the right to encroach on our free will. We are at the same time responsible for our slavery and our freedom. The chains of enslavement have been forged by ourselves, and only we can break them. Only ignorance can lead us to seek outside aid. One thing seems fundamentally necessary and it is "to know ourselves." If we attain a perfectly clear vision of what we are, we no longer need to go elsewhere. Exterior ways become to us ways of perdition. Just as all men and women on earth have said and will say at the moment of their Awakening, so do we say simply, 'I am the way.' Zen teaches that salvation can be secured by man's own power and wisdom.

On the contrary, in John, since the whole human race has been undone in the person of Adam, and the excellence and dignity of our origin is so far from availing us that it turns to our disgrace, it is vain to look for salvation in our own nature. Therefore, for John, it is necessary to transform our former nature by God's grace, instead of by "seeing" into one's own nature" As St. Paul said, "Your faith should not stand in the wisdom of man, but in the power of God." In consequence of sin, there is really no one in a normal bodily and spiritual condition. The injurious effect worked by sin also had immediate influences upon our nature. The fatal effect of sin also finds its deeper reason in the fact that the life harmony between us and the object has been disturbed. Consequently, our own intellect as well as our body has no capacity for the sublime wisdom to apprehend God.

Thus it is best to acknowledge that Dogen's Zen and John's mysticism rest on different mystical foundations. The Buddha-nature and John's God function in their own universes and it seems clear that these universes are not fully related to each other.

The following diagram will briefly show two distinctive paradigms in John and Dogen:

St. John of The Cross

Dogen's Zen

Human Nature: God's Image
Corrupted by Original sin

No-Self (Buddha-nature)
Co-Dependent Origination

Cause of Human Suffering: Original Sin
Disobedience

Ignorance
Illusion

Human Body: Temple of Holy Sprit
Dualistic: Body vs Soul

Cosmic: Interrelated as a Whole
Monistic: Body-Mind Unity

Ultimate Reality: God
Personal

Void or Emptiness
Impersonal

Meditative Path:1) Meditation: Discursive
Prayer
2)Contemplation

Not-Thinking
Without-Thinking
Zazen Insight Meditation

Outcome: Experiencing God's
presence
Union with God

Living in the Present Moment
Seeing One's True-nature
Self-Awakening

Goal: Union with Christ

Realization of the
Buddha-nature

Means: God's Grace
Personal-Grace
Love

Self Effort
Natural-Intrinsic Grace

Experiential
Uniqueness: Unity and Duality
Differentiated

Non-dual
Undifferentiated

The World View: Dualistic

Non-dualistic

**Metaphysical
Presupposition: Being
God**

**Non-being
Emptiness**

A more formal view of comparative discussion concerning mystical experience in Dogen and John would be as follows:

- 1) The mystical claims of Dogen and John make apparently conflicting assertions on the basis of their contemplative states. In particular, while both of them claim to be aware of “Ultimate Truth” or “Reality” in these states, they describe the object of this awareness in contrasting terms.
- 2) Although both Dogen and John are actually having a similar mystical experiences such as, ‘non-dualism’, it is unreasonable to say that they are actually sharing the same mystical objects.
- 3) Hence any attempt to show that both phenomenologically have the same mystical experience cannot be an apologetic for the existence of a prior Absolute in the essentialist sense
- 4) Since Dogen’s and John’s metaphysical or theological foundations are different, we can conclude that they are describing different types of mystical experience.

However, the issue we are discussing bears upon fundamental questions in the cognitive value of mystical experience. For example, on what criteria can we justify that John’s mystical experience of God or **nada** is not the same as Dogen’s mystical experience of ‘nothingness,’ and vice versa? On what ground does one make a justification for the claim of either identity or difference in mystical experience? The question is, then, whether John’s perception of God or Dogen’s awareness of the Buddha-nature in their mystical experience can be epistemologically justifiable or is just subjective experience.

Such a question is unavoidable for the comparative study of mystical experience. Without bringing and discussing these kinds of questions, phenomenological differences between Dogen’s and John’s mysticism might not be confirmed as essentially and fundamentally different kinds of mystical experiences. In this respect, the foregoing

comparative study of John and Dogen is by no means complete.

However, because of the limits of length in my thesis, and my primary concern in this thesis on phenomenological comparison, it is impossible to cover such philosophical issues of mystical experience in detail. It would be another philosophical thesis on mysticism.

Limitations of this Study and Suggestion for Future Directions of Cross-Cultural Study of Mysticism

The comparison I have done in the previous chapters, in fact, has some limitations. First, an obvious limitation to this particular study is that neither John's mysticism nor Dogen's Zen represent their respective traditions fully. I have argued that John's spirituality, while articulated in a way that is unique to his era, is representative of much broader and deeper Christian notions of the contemplative path. But this is not all of Christian spirituality and it cannot be said to articulate even all of monastic Christian spirituality.

The same such issue can be raised for Dogen's Zen. While I also argue for the centrality of Dogen's presentation, it is only a central articulation which is unique to Dogen, important though he is within Buddhism.

A limitation to such a method is that what is discussed is not a comparison of two religions, but of two spiritual forms of two religions. Moreover, in choosing the spiritualities of John and Dogen's Zen I have chosen themes selectively which seem to be comparable. In other words, there are many other themes which could be discussed. This begs the question, what if one were comparing spiritualities where one or more of these essential ingredients were missing? Given this limitation, one realizes that what one can say generally about a mystic's encounter and how much one can extrapolate from it is not as great as one might be tempted to think.

Further, this comparison did not directly address the crucial question of whether such similarities and differences are justified. In this respect, the foregoing comparative study of John and Dogen is by no means complete. In order to justify the phenomenological comparison of Dogen and John, a number of philosophical points

which arise out of the results of the phenomenological comparison need to be discussed.

Thus it is imperative to examine the distinction between experience itself, and ontological or epistemological claims made as a result of the experience. There arise various questions concerning the nature of mystical awareness and its epistemological value. For example in order to justify the nature of mystical awareness, we need to clarify the nature of mystical modes of apprehension such as 'pure consciousness' as a possible content consciousness. By bringing and discussing these kinds of questions, phenomenological differences between Dogen's and John's mysticism might be clarified as different kinds of mystical experiences.

However, at the same time, we must recognize the fact that although philosophical analysis has an important function, it has a limited role to play in the elucidation and clarification of mystical experience. Philosophical investigation can serve the purpose of clarifying or making explicit the assertions of mystics, helping us to understand their claims after a certain manner, and helping us to see the epistemological and metaphysical implications of their experiences.

However, we have to recognise the fact that the essential key to understand mystical experience is personal experience. As Lott has pointed out concerning the role of philosophy, in mystical experience there is certainly a non-analysable experiential centre of each religious tradition. Thus in the study of religion no purely "objective" analysis is either possible or desirable. As Dom A. Graham says that mental concepts of God which are verbalized in theological propositions are inadequate by the very fact that they are concepts. Conceptual presentations of mystical experience, thus, do not make sense to someone who has not realized the experience. They, however, are not worthless but "help to focus our minds at the level of rational thought."³⁰¹

In this regard, a full and total understanding of mystical experience cannot be achieved by the non-mystic. For this reason it seems imperative that the study of mysticism, if it is to make progress, should be undertaken by scholars who have themselves undergone mystical experience, or who are following some mystical discipline. Certainly the detached, philosophical, phenomenological, and scholarly

³⁰¹Dom Aelred, Graham, Zen Catholicism, 80.

approach has its advantages, but greater advantage still can be found by the scholar who also has personal experience of or personal commitment to mysticism. We have seen that both John and Dogen, great mystics, were themselves highly accomplished metaphysicians or theologians. Yet they never failed to emphasize that metaphysics or theology can never be a substitute for direct experience.

Thus, no matter how much a mystical account is explained or analysed, it is not “understood” unless it is experienced, unless it is really yours, unless it is grasped from within. In other words, life comes first and thought comes after. As Merton says, “In Zen the experience is always prior not in time but in importance. Zen explains nothing. It just sees.”³⁰² Similarly, concerning Christian mysticism, Merton asserts that the heart of Catholicism is a living experience of unity in Christ which far transcends all conceptual formulations.³⁰³ Thus Merton points out that though there are different emphases in Zen and Christian mysticism in reference to doctrine and experience, in both Zen and Christian mysticism experience comes first and doctrines are about the experience. Rahner also asserts that theological propositions, while they allow us clarity, are not merely an end but also a beginning.

Experiential Reality As A Basis For Comparison

Therefore, in comparing mystical experiences in Dogen and John I have examined the basis of mystics’ ‘experiential reality.’ This is one of the advantages of this thesis. I believe that the essential key to mysticism is personal experience rather than philosophical analysis. Philosophical analysis has an important function, but nonetheless it has a limited role to play in the elucidation and clarification of mystical experience. I assumed that mystics’ “experiential reality” on the basis of comparing the mystical experiences of Dogen and John can accurately communicate without thereby begging epistemological questions about whether the identification of an experience as being of God or the Buddha-nature is ever justified. And since mysticism is primarily a matter of practice rather than theory, the difference becomes all-important.

Theoretically all forms of mysticism might be subsumed under some kind of greater whole; but in ‘experiential reality’ a mystic follows one particular path with exercises

³⁰²Thomas Merton, *Zen and the Birds of Appetite*, 38, 55.

tailored towards a certain defined end.

In this regard common characteristics which are drawn out by means of philosophical or theoretical abstraction do not necessarily refer to, it should be noted, the ontological reality as experienced by mystics. Thus I assumed 'experiential reality' as a basis for comparison because the mystic's "personal experience" is the most important and essential aspect of mysticism.

Briefly stated, 'experiential reality' is a mystic's proper and particular experiential reality. It is a mystic's experience of reality which has its own words and validity. It is a mystic's personal and proper experience. It is through personal experience that something becomes truly real for us and is taken up into our life: only then do we truly understand. Using 'experiential reality' as a basis for the discussion of mystical experience also implies that mysticism cannot satisfactorily be explained or discussed within a framework alien to mystical experience. For the philosophical analysis of mysticism cannot explain mysticism by means of a logic which is alien to mystical experiences. Philosophical analysis, by means of its own logic, would see mystical experience as something uncertain from which rational argument is unable to derive any 'proof' of mystical realities.

Moreover, 'experiential reality' is not a matter of religious experience or mystical experience in general. This is a particular realm of mystical experience. For instance, we might simply say that John's experience of 'union with God' is a kind of religious or mystical experience in general. But in describing John's 'union with God' in terms of 'experiential reality,' it is not merely a mystical experience. It is a mystical experience which has emerged out of John's own spiritual system. Thus, 'experiential reality' is a proper experience of a mystic's own spiritual entity in which cultural, social, and doctrinal factors are transmitted as well as transcended. In other words, 'experiential reality' is a mystic's experience in relation to his or her total cultural and doctrinal setting, without reducing mystical experience to social or doctrinal factors. In this way, each mystical tradition reveals its own uniqueness and its own inner dynamic spirit.

In this regard, 'experiential reality' is 'unique' in character. In mystics'

³⁰³Ibid., 39-40.

“experiential reality,” we can find a diversity of precise theological or metaphysical interpretation, of cultural influence, and forms of expression peculiar to the temperament of each mystic.

Further, in “experiential reality” we can find the complexity and richness of each mystic; a complexity and richness which sometimes seems to be denied by those writers who seek to reduce all forms of mysticism to a common factor, or to claim that they are all the same. When mystical experiences are studied within this ‘experiential reality’ we are guarded against the temptation to draw facile, loose and general comparisons between mystical experiences from different traditions which, when taken out of their context, might appear more similar than the full evidence warrants. When approached this way, each mystical tradition reveals its own uniqueness and its own inner dynamic.

Thus without recognizing the characteristic of ‘experiential reality’ in mystics’ experiences, a comparison of mystical traditions would underestimate the difference of mystical experiences. Indeed, it may be that in comparing different mystical traditions, modern philosophers of mysticism have tended to underestimate the role that experience plays in revealing mystical experiences. For instance, Stace’s theory of essentialism which takes the form of extreme syncretism seems to deprive each tradition of its uniqueness and authenticity, of the specific flavour and tone, the specific archetypes and symbols, peculiar to it.

Thus the most important question may be not what philosophers make of mystical experiences, but what mystics tell us about their experiences in terms of ‘experiential reality’. Through “experiential reality” we can see that in mystical experience there are other dimensions which cannot be found by philosophical analysis or cultural and social factors.

In other words, mystical experience involves both theological or metaphysical and individual inner-creative revelation. In this regard, mystical experience must be interpreted by taking account of both the “without” nature of experience (which comes from without, from outside the mystic), and the “within” (those factors internal to the mystic which to a degree perform the interpretation). Mystical experience emerges between pre-conditioned elements and individual creative-inner elements. In this regard, every mystical experience is unique in character even-though it occurs within the same

tradition.

For instance, John's thought also sheds light on this matter. The contextuality of mystical experiences of John is not the source that makes possible mystical experience. But rather than argue for the causal function of these contexts upon the experience of the mystic, these contexts are the place where the mystical experience has its sense. In other words, for John, experiences are not caused by the mystic's religious tradition and culture. Instead, the experiences have their life and meaning in such context. Thus when John discusses the spiritual practices and preparations of the mystical life, he is not suggesting that if one goes through such exercises he or she will receive a vision of Christ.

In this respect, neither contextualist (Katz) nor essentialist theory (Stace) is enough to interpret mystics' experiences though there are some benefits. A contextualist will always be able to see mediation and context, and an essentialist will always be able to see the primitive experience. Simply asserting one or the other will not solve the issue.

All these considerations imply that we cannot expect reason or logic to be in a position to pass judgement on the validity of mystical cognition. Mystical experience includes reason within its scope; it encompasses reason, reason does not encompass it. Thus the most important question may be not what philosophy makes of mystical experience, but what mysticism tells us about the limits of rational understanding. In this regard, one must keep in mind that both reason and experience have their own proper functions as well as limitations. Reason must guide experience, whereas experience gives conviction of truth.

My View: Different and Unique

At this moment, however, I would like to present my position to show that mystical philosophers' view is one sided on the one hand, and to explain in more detail about the characteristics of the mystics' 'experiential reality' on the other hand. I believe that Katz is less sensitive to the discontinuity of a certain experience (transcendent or non-historical) from one's previous religious tradition, while emphasizing the point that mystics can only experience that which they are prepared for even in non-dual awareness. In other words, Katz argues that even non-dual mystical experience, which overcomes the logical and socio-cultural conditions of one's previous tradition, is still

partially conditioned by them.

Hardly any one denies that a religious tradition considerably influences a mystic's experience and report. In fact it is true, at least partially, that the tradition to which the mystic belongs, the doctrine, the concepts, the culture which the mystic brings to experience, shape the experience from the beginning. Katz is correct in his assertion of the contextuality of all experience. Different conceptual and linguistic frameworks are brought to different experiences. As Katz writes, "these constructive conditions of consciousness produce the grounds on which mystical experience is possible at all."³⁰⁴

This is why Katz asserts that "'God' can be 'God', 'Brahman' can be Brahman' and 'Nirvana' can be 'Nirvana' without any reductionist attempt to equate the concept 'God' with that of 'Brahman', or 'Brahman' with 'Nirvana.'"³⁰⁵

However, Katz dismisses the view that there can be such a thing as "pure experience." Concerning the possibility of transcending the limitations of personal and cultural mediation, Dogen's Zen shows that one is even to cease using Buddhist concepts in both one's daily activities and also within zazen. This is an important premise for Dogen: that one is to rid oneself of all remnants of Buddhist notions, including **nirvana** and **samadhi**.

As we have seen in Dogen, in enlightenment experience, there are no time-divisions such as past, present, and future. What really is, is the immediate presencing here and now of being-time. As Dogen's 'without-thinking' indicates, there is such an experience which can occur without any pre-conditional concept.

John also speaks of mystical experience as not caused only by the mystic's religious tradition and culture. There is neither movement nor differentiating of awareness and neither remembering nor building on previous moments in the Pure Consciousness Event.

Thus, Katz dismisses the point that in a mystic's 'experiential reality,' there is a great deal of continuity on the surface as well as a great deal of discontinuity beneath. There can be a discontinuity of experience which is not conditioned by previous tradition. It is an experience unaffected by the mystic's prior beliefs, expectations, or

³⁰⁴Ibid., 63.

³⁰⁵Ibid., 66.

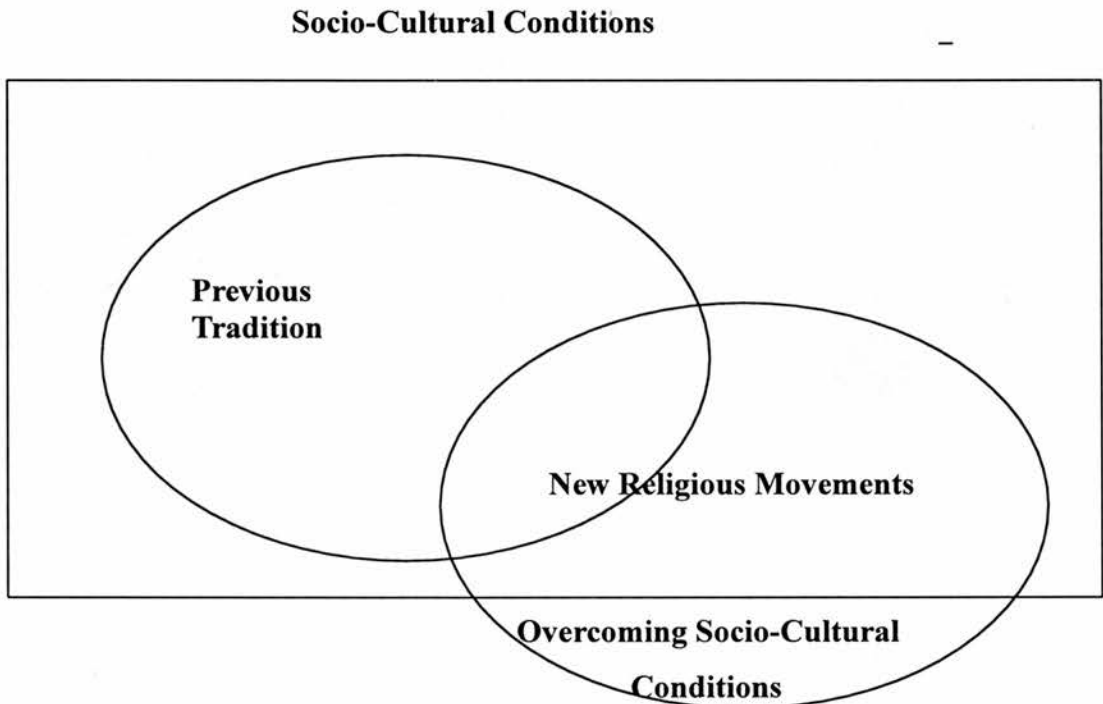
intentions. Otherwise, the subsequent tradition does not have to be called a new religious movement whether it stands inside or outside.

However, in order to present my position in more detail, I would like to illustrate a story of my friend's personal and concrete experience. When my friend was in Korea, his wife frequently complained about his bad habits because he did not close his shampoo cap after taking a shower. For a couple years he had to separate from his family because he went to the U.S.A. to study theology. In the U.S.A., he stayed in a dormitory. In his dormitory in the U.S.A., there was always a bad smell. One day, he experienced a good smell in his dorm; for, he had left his shampoo open. In that moment, he acknowledged that it might be the least expensive substitute for an aromatic.

Later, he received enough scholarship money from the school; nevertheless, his belief did not allow him to buy an aromatic. However, the problem happened when he and his family reunited after two years of separation. His wife complained again of his behavior of leaving his shampoo cap open as an unchanged bad habit. His behavior was interpreted as a continuous experience by his wife. She complained again and again. But he could not say anything, being silent. One day, she made the same mistake as he did. All of sudden, she acknowledged that the opened shampoo gave a good smell and understood why he was reluctant to buy an aromatic. Interestingly, she imitated his bad behavior after taking a shower. She became more reluctant to buy an aromatic, insisting the use of the substitute.

At first, his wife did not know that there was a great deal of continuity on the surface as well as a great deal of discontinuity beneath in terms of her husband's bad habit. His wife was less sensitive to grasp and to hear the discontinuity at first as Katz did in his understanding of the relationship between the previous tradition and subsequent tradition. Between two distinctive traditions, a person or a movement acts like a ring connecting the two; by the same token, the "distinguishable" character of this ring shows that it does not merely connect two identically. Rather, it shows that there is a great deal of discontinuity to which we have to pay attention. Otherwise, the subsequent tradition does not have to be called a new religious movement whether it stands inside or outside. Such discontinuity may sow "a ring's genuine experience" with some distinguishable character. At the same time, some portion of continuity, which was

more or less enhanced, also tells “a ring’s genuine experience” with some distinctive meaning. The following diagram illustrates this point in a simple way.



There are some overlapping portions. Likewise, there are some disconnected portions. However, more importantly, there are also some portions of certain experiences which may represent the overcoming of socio-cultural conditions in time and space. The conventional way of thinking, world view, beliefs, prevailing cultural influence, etc., might be repudiated, more or less, by a new religious founder who still largely belonged to the previous tradition. It may be assumed that he/she had a “pure experience” which was irrelevant to the previous tradition and its socio-contextual consciousness; nonetheless, his/her experience was still partially conditioned by them.

Likewise, he/she has to communicate his/her new experience to other followers by using the conventional scheme of his/her time. Otherwise, there is no communication at

all. It does not show that his/her experience was preconditioned entirely; rather that his /her portion of human experience does not necessarily demand the dimension of consciousness; in contrast, communication largely depends upon concepts, images, etc which are filtered by consciousness. To a great extent, a new religious founder seems to be de-constructive over against his/her conventional preconditioning. Conventional preconditioning had lost its power of formative or regulative function. He/she was free from his/her previous tradition “existentially” and “ideologically.”

In the development of a new religious movement, the totality of the founder’s genuine experience is the seed for a new religious movement. In the later development, similar experiences may happen intentionally or unintentionally to the followers of that tradition. The systematized structure of similar experiences establishes and enhances the formative function of this “new religious movement” to its followers. In a sense, such a genuine experience is partially conditioned by socio-cultural conditions and by previous tradition.

However, it also has some trans-cultural or trans-conditional elements, which appeal to the followers of a new religious movement with great persuasive power. It is radically new although it is not entirely new. Something new appeals to the people who could not get such a transformative power from their old tradition. In my friend’s experience, the experience of “an additional function of shampoo” as a substitute for an aromatic was radically new. It may not be entirely new; someone might have already utilized it as a similar substitute in a different context. However, my friend gets a follower, his wife, who more eagerly utilized her experience than he did, which became her new belief. Therefore, I believe that it is possible both to understand that the experience happens within a tradition and to regard it as unique

Contribution of This Thesis

This thesis, however, in comparative characterization of John and Dogen, provides a paradigm for future research and study in the area of comparison between Christian mysticism and Zen Buddhism. It provides a tool for communicating between Christians and Zen Buddhists. This thesis also offers common ground for dialogue between Christianity and Zen Buddhism. Both traditions will realize that some messages are not entirely foreign to them.

Our researches, thus, also show that Christians and Zen Buddhists can learn many valuable insights from each other, and that they can effectively use these insights in their environment. They should not depend solely on their own traditions. Rather we can most effectively deepen new insight if we constantly rethink our own traditions in the light of themes and doctrines from other traditions. As we know, historically no tradition develops apart from some contrasting tradition. In the Christian sphere, the early faith, initially resisting Greek philosophy, came to adopt the framework of Greek ontology. In China, the models of Indian argumentation were replaced with deeply embedded patterns of Taoist theology.

Moreover, while conventional theologians have a tendency to compare and analyse in terms of doctrine or concept, this thesis suggests that they can learn from mystical accounts that doctrines are inadequate. This thesis shows that there is not a denial of doctrine and concept in mysticism, but a challenge to enter into the very spirit of teachings by experiencing for ourselves what the mystics experienced. In other words, scriptures are not final. They are tentative and provisional. They point the way, as a Zen saying, puts it like “a finger pointing to the moon.” Mystics then warns us not to get so much involved with the pointer that we miss the moon.

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