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DŌGEN'S "LEAVING HOME LIFE" (*SHUKKE* 出家): A STUDY OF AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE AND GROWTH IN JOHN DEWEY AND DŌGEN

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Introduction

This study argues that Dōgen's "Leaving Home Life" (*Shukke* 出家) fascicle is not simply about leaving home/lay life to become a practicing monk. At first glance, the fascicle might not appear philosophically significant. To help bring the themes of that work into greater focus, I juxtapose Dōgen's *Shōbōgenzō* and John Dewey's later works on aesthetic experience and education. Both the teachings of Dōgen and the later Deweyan works on aesthetic experience are similar in the sense that both describe nature as a radically plural and interdependent world without recourse to an underlying substance ontology or reality antecedent to and outside of experience. Both Dōgen and Dewey also claim that the experience of nature as a precarious, interdependent flux is continually ignored because we neglect the cultivation of certain habits and human potentials. The cultivation practices of Dōgen's Zen Buddhism are also comparable to Dewey's experiential melioration or, as Scott Stroud describes it, an *orientational meliorism*: "the way one approaches and experiences the world can be usefully modified to yield better experience . . . [through] cultivating habits of attention to or absorption in the present situation."¹ Dōgen's "Leaving Home Life" fascicle *could* be interpreted in a literal sense: only by literally "leaving home life" and becoming a monk can someone become enlightened.² However, both the view that a person *does not need* to practice meditation and the view that a person *needs* to become a Buddhist monk are mistaken because both are guilty of maintaining the same dualistic understanding of practice and enlightenment.

After comparing the Deweyan understanding of experience and temporality with Dōgen's understanding of the experience of time, I clarify how Dōgen's "Leaving Home Life" fascicle uses the phrase "leaving home life" to signify two important features of Dōgen's work: "leaving home life" expresses (1) the overcoming of the meditation practice/enlightenment dualism, and (2) the interrelatedness of all things. More specifically, it expresses the dynamic interrelatedness of the face-to-face transmission of the Buddhist teachings. Dōgen's central teaching of *the oneness of practice and*

enlightenment involves “the realization of the oneness of means and end, [whereby] each and every step of the present is fully realized as the end itself, not as a means to reach the end. And yet, at the same time, each and every step of the present is totally realized as a means toward a future goal.”³ Similar to Dewey’s understanding of aesthetic experience, I hope to show that “leaving home life” for Dōgen also needs to be understood as the cultivation of greater intercommunication with the environment by the overcoming of means/ends dualism. Dōgen uses “leaving home life” to express the realization of the oneness of practice and enlightenment, the overcoming of the means/ends dualism, and the radical particularity and uniqueness of each convergence of being-time. Contrary to Dewey, “leaving home life” can then be considered a form of aesthetic experience in the sense that persons achieve a greater degree of interaction with the natural world and overcome the means/ends dualism, yet in a way that is not structured teleologically.

Dewey on Nature and Experience

Contrary to the traditional assumptions about the relationship between the experiencing subject and the world, Dewey claims in *Experience and Nature* that “experience is *of* as well as *in* nature.”⁴ What follows in the rest of that work is then an attempt to describe how the two, experience and nature, have become *provisionally* disjoined in everyday life, that is, that only due to cultural and historical factors are dispositions cultivated such that the unity of experience and nature is not recognized. Nature is a field or web of interrelations. Experience can be disclosed such that it is immediately recognized as irreducibly relational because experience is *of* nature. The “*of*” denotes that experience is a web of relationships continuous with the rest of nature—that experience is not “about” or “regarding” that web of relationships but is instead an *aspect* or *coalescence* of the same web. Consciousness does not stand separate from and outside nature. The *provisional* divide between experience and nature only arises when sentient beings fail to be conscious of the many psycho-physical habits from which all cognitive habits emerge. For Dewey,

As long as our own fundamental psycho-physical attitudes in dealing with external things are subconscious, our conscious attention only going to the relations of external things, so long will our perceptions of the external situations be subject at its root to perversion and vitiation.⁵

We lack the ability to engage more fully with the world because we are inattentive to the psycho-physical⁶ way we are related to it. Additionally, we usually maintain excessive attention to mental abstraction (the meanings or significance *attributed* to experience by cognitive habits). Conduct that emerges from this mistaken view can be understood as coercive insofar as

persons develop a narrow and limited understanding of nature and thus fail to recognize its other qualities and potentials. Although possessing these habits could never cut human consciousness off from nature in an absolute sense, it still constitutes a failure to recognize that human consciousness is always *in* and *of* nature. Ameliorating this involves cultivating a greater awareness of our psycho-physical relations with the world. For Dewey, when greater degrees of interaction and intercourse lead to the dissolution of the subject/object and means/ends dualisms within experience, experience is then finally *undergone as aesthetic*. Overcoming these provisional dualisms is how one undergoes experience aesthetically.

Dewey's later works on aesthetic experience are easily some of the most profound attempts to replace the representational understanding of experience and mind that has dominated Western philosophy. In *Experience and Nature* a key feature of Dewey's reconstruction of experience is described as the overcoming of the means-ends dualism:

[T]he theme has insensibly passed over into that of the relation of means and consequence, process and product, the instrumental and consummatory. Any activity that is simultaneously both, rather than in alternation and displacement, is art.

Experience can be undergone such that the immediate present is recognized as simultaneously means and end, instrumental and consummatory. Persons are more fully integrated and embedded in the organism/environment situation when experience is undergone as such. Dewey reconstructs the means/ends dualism with what he calls a means-ends continuum,

whereby the ends are at all times present in the means as an end-in-view. . . . Through "valuation" . . . one determines the values one wishes to obtain and the conditions necessary to acquire them. One then imaginatively frames an end-in-view that functions as a value possibility or norm to guide one's experience until the value is realized in a consummation.⁸

For Dewey, "valuation" is a term that signifies the abstract, *post facto*, account of the *actual valuing* of immediately felt experience; that is, *valuing*, as distinct from "valuation," involves the felt quality of the interaction of organism and environment. In other words, aesthetic experience is the harmonious integration of the organism with the felt quality of existence. It is the *actual valuing* of the immediate quality of existence in the context of intentional and purposive activity.

For Dewey, human organisms are fundamentally temporal beings. Without "temporality there is no participation, no precariousness, no possibility for growth, and consequently no meaning or value."⁹ This means that aesthetic experience and its felt significance are always temporally situated because the very possibility of the organism interacting with the environment presupposes the continuous flow of time. Furthermore, aesthetic experience involves "a

build up of successive stages of experience toward consummation.”¹⁰ Aesthetic consummation requires “an intensity of focus in the immediacy of experience. The focus on the immediacy of experience against the background of the continuity of experience is characteristic of the aesthetic.”¹¹ This is the consummation of immediately felt values in experience. Any single consummation is just one phase of completion in the ongoing interactions of the organism with the environment. In aesthetic experience, “each step forward, each ‘means’ used, is a partial attainment of an ‘end.’ . . . The ‘end’ is not, in other words, an end or finality in the literal sense, but is in turn the starting point of new desire, aims and plans.”¹² For Dewey, aesthetic consummation or “an experience” is the realization of a higher degree of interaction and absorption with the environment. These moments arise and cease in oscillating phases. Aesthetic experience as the overcoming of the means/ends dualism is, then, to interact skillfully with nature’s various potentials through ongoing attentive readjustment to the quality of situations.

Dōgen on the Bodymind and Experience

Dōgen’s work describes a cosmos that is radically pluralistic. Although *generally* there is scholarly agreement about this, some of the debates and disagreements about the content of Dōgen’s Soto Zen need to be mentioned. In particular, there has been scholarly disagreement around the ontological dimensions of Dōgen’s understanding of the bodymind and the nature of dualism before and after enlightenment. In Dōgen studies there have been many different attempts to juxtapose Dōgen with Western Phenomenology.¹³ What many of these accounts of Dōgen commonly argue is that the body and the mind are not two ontologically distinct realities. Drawing primarily on Husserl, David Shaner’s phenomenological account of Dōgen (1985) argues the following:

The body, therefore, as “an aspect of one unity” [bodymind], is presented within the horizon as a whole. Bodymind appears as sharing the non-privileged horizon wherein “all dharmas” are presented equally. [Furthermore], Dōgen is not speaking of any metaphysical separation of body and mind.¹⁴

The unity of the bodymind, for Shaner, is disclosed as a part or aspect of the total horizon of experience as soon as “thetic consciousness”—conscious acts that constitute a corresponding content of experience as meaningful, that is, intentional or “positional” acts of consciousness—is neutralized in experience. For Shaner, what this means is that “The mind-aspect and body-aspect . . . are merely abstractions of primordial bodymind awareness.”¹⁵ The dualistic belief in the separation of body and mind is, then, only due to culturally sedimented habits and beliefs:

This “inward” examination of experience awakens one to the bodymind ground of all experience. Once this is recognized, the propensity to posit a separate

body and mind is seen as an inauthentic representation of bodymind awareness. Hence, body and mind seem to “drop away of themselves.” Thus the “original face” in which the self shares an equal, non-privileged, position amidst [the] experiential horizon is presented.¹⁶

The ontological divisions that consciousness projects onto experience are simply provisional modes of disclosing the total field of experience. For Shaner, as soon as “thetic consciousness” is neutralized, experience is disclosed in a way that reveals the unity of bodymind.

Nagatomo’s work (1992) juxtaposing Dōgen and Merleau-Ponty describes Dōgen’s understanding of practice as a somatic transformation that “may be conceived of as a special kind of habit-formation: the formation of a habit that destroys the provisional dualism operative in our everyday mode of existence.”¹⁷ It is a “provisional dualism” in the sense that, for Nagatomo, our unenlightened habits function such that experience is undergone *as if* there was a dualism between body and mind. There is not an ontological difference between the two sets of habits. The unenlightened disposition is then merely a contingent set of habits and beliefs where experience is disclosed *as if* the mind were distinct from the body. Nagatomo further argues that “this somatic transformation [for Dōgen] may be conceived of as achieving a *higher degree* of psycho-physical integration than the one available in our everyday mode of existence.”¹⁸ The habits that constitute persons, both cognitive and psycho-physical/somatic, are not inherently contrary to each other. It is only due to the lack of a certain form of cultivation (habit formation) that these two domains become disjoined and seem to be divided from each other. For Nagatomo, what the practices of Dōgen’s Zen Buddhism hope to achieve is the melioration of experience such that all the habits that constitute experience, *both* somatic and cognitive, are increasingly brought to the foreground of consciousness.

More recently, both Hee Jin Kim (2007) and Steven Heine (2012) have argued positions contrary to the phenomenological views just mentioned. Building from his earlier work,¹⁹ Kim suggests in *Dōgen on Meditation and Thinking* that the “non-dualism” or “unity” attributed to Dōgen’s work needs to be understood differently:

This unity does not mean that practice and enlightenment, though originally two different realities or ontological antitheses, are merged into one, or are reduced to one or the other in a mystical union of numerical oneness or an uneasy alliance. Practice and enlightenment are . . . [not] the two complementary (and opposite) sides of the same reality. . . . To put it another way, the unity is not the nullification of differences between the two, nor is it a transformation of one into the other, or a fusion of one with the other.²⁰

What Kim is attempting to argue is that both before and after enlightenment, “dualisms” or “difference” constitute the experiences. For Kim, “dualisms” are just as much a part of enlightenment as nondualism is. Likewise, Heine

has also argued that the realm of dualism persists throughout all experience, enlightened and unenlightened:

[T]he polarities, for better or worse, are alive and well, and do exist before, during, and after the experience of enlightenment, but these are not to be understood in the ordinary sense of constituting mutually opposed and everlastingly separable distinctions. Furthermore, it must be acknowledged that even one who has gained genuine spiritual insight cannot escape from and is compelled to continually grapple with the realm of duality.²¹

Exhaustively going over all of the arguments about Dōgen's work would go far beyond the scope of this study. When considering these opposing views, there is one crucial point that needs to be clarified. In both Kim's and Heine's accounts of Dōgen, most of their arguments do not clarify their own positions but instead insist that their accounts of Dōgen are simply different from previous works. Heine, for example, claims his "view puts more emphasis on differences or gives a preference to contrast, conflict, and contradiction instead of the one-sided focus on identity that is found in the conventional interpretation."²² Both Kim and Heine take issue with the "philosophical interpretations" of Dōgen.²³ They generalize many "comparative philosophy" accounts of Dōgen as guilty of the same errors that they attribute to the work of Masao Abe. This is unfortunately a misunderstanding of the works they criticize, and it also reduces many different interpretations of Dōgen into a single overgeneralization. Crucially, what they both get wrong about the earlier accounts of Dōgen is their mischaracterization of them as "monistic" or "privileging unity or oneness." In fact, some of these earlier accounts that they are critical of, if understood properly, better achieve what both Kim and Heine had hoped for.

Revisiting Abe's work is a useful way to see how the claims by Kim and Heine are fundamentally mistaken. In "Dōgen on Buddha-nature," Abe explicitly distances his interpretation of Dōgen from Spinoza's monism, claiming that "the Buddha-nature is not One Substance."²⁴ What Abe argues for is more appropriately named a "radical pluralism." Abe further elaborates, claiming "Dōgen stresses that 'throughout the universe nothing has ever been concealed,' every particular thing in the universe manifests itself in its individuality simply because the Buddha-nature is not a substance, but a 'what'."²⁵ The individuality and particularity of each thing emerges because nature is nothing but inexhaustible interrelatedness without any substances underlying it. For Abe, this pluralism undercuts any monism or dualism one might try to project onto experience: "[E]very kind of duality and every sort of priority of one against the other is completely overcome. There is no irreversible relation. Everything is dynamically interrelated yet distinct."²⁶ Everything is distinct because every unique focal point or *coalescence of relations* is internal to everything else, and everything else is internal to it.²⁷ Abe is certainly not over-emphasizing unity and monism.

Because the cosmos is irreducibly relational and interdependent, each *dharma* or “thing” emerges as a radically particular and novel manifestation of reality. Each *coalescence* is unique in the way that it is interrelated to and dependent on the rest of the cosmos. Abe’s account of Dōgen is radically pluralistic.

Another phenomenological account of Dōgen’s Zen, by Gereon Kopf (2001), also provides a great example of Dōgen as radically pluralistic.²⁸ As Abe has stressed, and building on Nagatomo’s research, Kopf emphasizes that Dōgen’s work is not monistic but instead describes a radically pluralistic cosmos. Commenting on Dōgen passages, Kopf claims,

The dissolution of the binary structure of everyday experience “inside the mountains,” on the other hand, signifies the simultaneous loss of subject and object on the plane of non-positional awareness where *life lives itself*; . . . In the individual event, be it “exhaling or inhaling” or “flowers blossoming,” the interconnectedness of life finds its expression. In this sense, the *bodymind* of the individual practitioner *expresses* the air, the mountains, the rivers, the fences, the cosmos in the activity of sitting meditation. . . . Individual events thus comprise the microcosm, which reflects and actualizes (Jap.: *shōsuru*) the macrocosm of life.²⁹

For Dōgen, each unique and individual experience is *primordially expressed* as interrelated to the rest of the cosmos. Experience, for Dōgen, is *primordially disclosed* as expressing the “interconnectedness of life.” An account of Dōgen’s work that insists there are still “dualisms” would still end up oversimplifying the vast particularity and novelty of existence to abstract generalizations of “sameness” or “unity.” Radical pluralism involves far more difference and contrast than any form of dualism ever could. It is with this thoroughly pluralistic account of nature and the bodymind that the works of Dōgen and, in particular, his use of the phrase “leaving home life” need to be understood.

Dewey’s Art as Experience from Dōgen’s Perspective

John Dewey’s project of realizing the latent aesthetic potential of experience involves cultivating a greater attention to our psycho-physical relations with the world. Likewise, zazen can also be understood as involving a renewed attention to our bodily constitution. Scholars of Dōgen are generally in agreement about the importance for Dōgen of cultivating the human body. Kim, for example, claims that “The human body, in Dōgen’s view, was not a hindrance to the realization of enlightenment, but the very vehicle through which enlightenment was realized.”³⁰ Although there are disagreements as to what the implications of such somatic practices amount to, that such practices are an important part of Dōgen’s Zen is beyond doubt. As I hope to clarify further with Dōgen’s “leaving home life,” Dōgen’s zazen is an

attempt to adjust the way experience is undergone such that the “goal” is to undermine, as opposed to completely extinguish, the habits that merely seek goals or ends. When these habits of seeking and planning dominate the foreground of consciousness, this amounts to ignorance and desire, which is really the *desire for control* (i.e., the mere privileging of purposiveness).

Attempting to completely extinguish “purposive” habits would end up being a form of “retreatism” or nihilism and hence not the Buddhist middle way between eternalism (substance ontology) and nihilism. Instead, habits are cultivated such that the potency of certain cognitive habits are undermined insofar as these habits no longer obstruct the ways persons interact with the world. As Taigen Dan Leighton describes it, Dōgen’s *zazen* can be understood as “just settling, not getting rid of thoughts and feelings, but finding some space of steadiness in oneself. Intimacy develops with the whole field of awareness, which includes everything, including all sense objects, even as new thoughts arise.”³¹ Practices like *zazen* can best be understood as achieving an awareness of the immediate environment through the renewed attention to the somatic habits that constitute experience, yet in such a way that persons are also capable of maintaining a non-rejecting attitude toward the products of cognition.

Another major insight that the works of Dewey and Dōgen have in common is the shared recognition that the non-cognitive or aesthetic dimensions of experience are primordially meaningful and in a way that is not reducible to propositional statement. Although both take the non-cognitive³² dimensions of experience as sense giving and meaningful, they both end up recognizing this significance differently. For Dewey,

Situations or “*res*” are primarily organized, active, lived experiences unified by a prelogical or pre-analytical qualitative unity which gives them their continuity and sense. . . . Art and aesthetic experience capture this sense of the lived qualitative unity of continuously developing experience and make us aware of its sense-giving character far better than cognition alone does.³³

Meaning is not merely attributed *post facto* to experience. For Dewey as well as Dōgen, the aesthetic dimensions of experience are primordially expressive of significance. There are qualities of experience that are immediately felt *as that*. In his *Ikka myōju* or “One Bright Pearl” fascicle Dōgen states that “*One bright pearl* is able to express Reality without naming it, and we can recognize this pearl as its name. One bright pearl communicates directly through all time; being unexhausted through all the past, it arrives through all the present. While there is a body now and a mind now—they are the bright pearl.”³⁴ Emptiness and the co-dependent arising of all things is omnipresent and omnitemporal—that is, it is the one bright pearl. A *dharmā* or “thing” is primordially expressed in experience as meaningfully interrelated to all other things. This is simply the experience of emptiness or the unique way each *dharmā* emerges as interrelated to all

others. Likewise, for Dewey, "If all meanings could be adequately expressed in words, the arts of painting and music would not exist. There are values and meanings that can be expressed only by immediately visible and audible qualities, and to ask what they mean in the sense of something that can be put into words is to deny their distinctive existence."³⁵ The aesthetic dimensions of experience express meaning because the quality of interaction and interrelationship of the organism with the environment is always present. Meaning is how things relate to each other, and the felt quality of a situation is always expressive of the meaningful way the organism is related to the environment at any given time.

From Dōgen's perspective and based on his understanding of time or "being-time" (*uji*), there is still a major obstruction lingering in Dewey's account of experience. Contrary to Dewey's insights, the meditation practices of Dōgen's Zen demonstrate that experience is not fundamentally structured teleologically. The linear, temporal form of experience is merely one of many ways that experience is organized. If Dōgen is right about the nature of time, then Dewey still ends up subordinating and devaluing the experienced present to what is absent because, for Dewey, "the qualitative character of the situation, moreover, is fundamentally temporal and teleological."³⁶ In a voice similar to Dōgen's sensibilities, Dewey, in *Art as Experience*, introduces his understanding of the experience of the immediate present as such:

To the being that is fully alive, the future is not ominous but a promise; it surrounds the present as a halo. It consists of possibilities that are felt as a possession of what is now and here. In life that is truly life, everything overlaps and merges. But all too often we exist in apprehension of what the future may bring, and are divided within ourselves. Even when not overanxious, we do not enjoy the present because we subordinate it to that which is absent. . . . Only when the past ceases to trouble and anticipations of the future are not perturbing is a being wholly united with his environment and therefore fully alive.³⁷

We are cut off from recognizing existence as pervaded with qualitative significance when certain cognitive habits dwell merely in reflection about future ends or past experiences. We fail to recognize the immediate value and quality of "here and now" because we fix value merely in relation to potentially obtainable yet absent "ends" to be achieved. Being "divided within ourselves" is that form of existence that is provisional whereby experience and nature are not recognized as one and the same. Dewey's hope, not his achievement (*at least from Dōgen's perspective*), was to outline a theory of experience that no longer subordinated the value and quality of the immediate present to certain cognitive habits. The point where Dewey and Dōgen diverge is the question of whether perceptual and somatic experience are primordially structured in a linear or teleological way.

For Dōgen, the linear progression of time is not the fundamental structure of experience. Dōgen and Dewey agree that cognitive habits filter and can potentially obstruct experience of the immediate present, yet for Dōgen (unlike for Dewey), perceptual and somatic experience is not structured in a pre-existing, linear flow of time. Dōgen's understanding of time is one of the areas of his work that has been given the most attention by scholars, and there is still much disagreement. What is perhaps uncontroversial, even among the disagreements, is that Dōgen rejects the idea that time simply flows in a single, linear structure. In the *Uji* or *Being-Time* fascicle Dōgen states:

You should not come to understand that time is only flying past. You should not only learn that flying past is the virtue inherent in time. . . .

The essential point is: every entire being in the entire world is each time an [independent] time, even while it makes a continuous series. Inasmuch as they are being-time, they are my being-time.³⁸

The linear progression of time is simply one way that time can unfold. It is not the essential or primordial way time transpires. This, then, leads to Dōgen's insight into the relationship between *Being* and *Time*. As Rika Dunlap claims, "Dōgen dismisses the conventional view of time that separates being from a temporal flow, contesting instead that time and being are in fact identical,"³⁹ that is, that any *dharma* or "thing" is a *particular time* in the sense that its unfolding is both spatially and temporally unique.

For Dōgen, a being-time uniquely arises *as* interrelated to each other being-time. Being-time forms both a continuous series yet is also radically and primarily discontinuous. Each independent time is unique in the way it arises, yet *as that time* it co-arises with all other times. As Masato Ishida's very precise account describes it:

In his [i.e., Dōgen's] view, various temporal modes are folded into the absolute present here and now, and conversely, various temporal modes unfold within the absolute present for the experiencer. . . . Apart from the emergent perspective, the world does not have an independent temporal structure, but once the self is formed in a certain way, the world is realized in a corresponding manner, a unique temporal structure permeating all its details from within.⁴⁰

The dispositions cultivated in practices like zazen are such that persons no longer *merely* bring certain cognitive habits to the foreground of consciousness. When certain unenlightened habits dominate the foreground of consciousness, a teleological temporal unfolding is projected onto our existence and limits the depth and scope of experience. Our unenlightened habits give us a false sense that "time is merely passing by" in a single linear flow. What is important for this study is to look at how Dōgen's understanding of time is related to his teaching of the *oneness of practice and enlightenment*. Just as the world is realized in a particular temporal structure "once the self is formed in a certain way," the formation of the self

is an ongoing process. With the *oneness of practice and enlightenment*, “above all, Dōgen emphasizes that enlightenment, like the Buddha, is not an event that happens only at one particular time, once and for all. Rather, it is an ongoing, vigorous activity that awakens time itself, just as with the zazen practitioner’s upright presence.”⁴¹

The *oneness of practice and enlightenment* is the realization that all experience is, at some level, constituted by practice. Different forms of practice thus constitute the quality and depth of interaction between organism and environment. For Dōgen, with each moment of experience the degree of practice forms both a corresponding depth to the field of experience and a corresponding temporal structure. If experience is structured merely teleologically, the qualitatively saturated presence of nature is still subsumed under the aim-seeking, goal-oriented “end-in-view” of some fixed valuation and determination. Dōgen’s teachings, contrary to Dewey’s, recognize that *any* “end-in-view” is an imposed value upon a world inexhaustibly unfolding and already complete—already an “end-in-itself.” What this means is that for Dōgen “aesthetic consummation” is not merely an issue about “making” or “building up” focus. The difference between Dewey and Dōgen is that of privileging “purposiveness” on the one hand and the realization that the cosmos is “primordially purposive-less” on the other. Dewey’s project privileges purposiveness because continuity and stability are given precedent.⁴² Dōgen, on the other hand, recognizes that any “end-in-view” would just narrow the depth of the present, momentary unfolding of the cosmos. As Ishida claims, for Dōgen “each moment is self-complete and absolute, for which reason the discontinuity of time is stressed more than continuity.”⁴³ The teleological unfolding of time dominates the foreground of consciousness as long as we fail to recognize the discontinuous qualitative dimensions of present experience.

In his later work *Experience and Education* Dewey claims that “observation alone is not enough. We have to understand the *significance* of what we see, hear, and touch. This significance consists of the consequences that will result when what is seen is acted upon.”⁴⁴ For Dewey, the significance of an event is understood in merely purposive and teleological terms; that is to say, it is always occurring *from* the present and *toward* the future for Dewey. The felt significance of the interaction between organism and environment involves a potential in the immediate environment being realized in relation to some future end. Purposiveness structures experience as long as “*all* human experience is guided by a temporally dynamic end-in-view and is creatively transformative of its environment.”⁴⁵ Dōgen, on the other hand, encourages us to cultivate habits that involve maintaining an awareness of the “inexhaustibility” of experience as the “one bright pearl.” In her study of Zen and Huayan Buddhism, Jin Y. Park states:

to be aware of the inexhaustibility of the context, the non-saturability of a context is possible only when human beings give up their desire to domesticate

the world by imposing a value created by the human mind. . . . To understand emptiness as the insaturability of the context of our existence, and thus the inevitable openness of one's perspective, leads us to the ethical implication of the act of forgiveness.⁴⁶

Although Park's focus is on the ethical implications of Zen practices and she primarily draws on the Korean Son master Chinul, a similar insight also applies to Dōgen. To "impose a value" is tantamount to imposing a single, fixed valuation as an "end-in-view." The hope for Dōgen is to recognize that no single determination can exhaustibly capture the experience of emptiness or the "one bright pearl." In *Art as Experience*, Dewey argues that the "moments when the creature is both most alive and most composed and concentrated are those of fullest intercourse with the environment, in which sensuous material and relations are most completely merged."⁴⁷ What Dōgen's Zen teaches us is that in order to merge most fully with impermanence and the co-dependent arising of all things, sentient beings need to forget about imposing a single valuation and hence a single temporal structure onto experience. Setting up an abstract "end-in-view" always fails to capture the inexhaustibility of the present, thereby further obstructing our ability to interact with the natural world of impermanence. For Dōgen, the sentient beings "most alive and most composed and concentrated" are those that have finally given up the desire to control and the desire to impose a single order of valuation on the world.

Cultivation, Growth and "Leaving Home Life" (出家)

Perhaps the most important difference between Dōgen and Dewey involves their respective understandings of growth and cultivation. Just as Dewey's aesthetics privileges the anticipatory structure of experience, the same can be said about his understanding of growth. In *Experience and Education* Dewey claims that "we always live at the time we live and not at some other time, and only by extracting at each present time the full meaning of each present experience are we prepared for doing the same thing in the future. . . . Education as growth or maturity should be an ever-present process."⁴⁸ The aim of Dewey's understanding of education is that growth should become omnipresent in experience. Growth means cultivating a perceptual sensitivity such that persons realize new potentials that make their interactions with others and the environment more meaningful. This can only be brought about through intelligent activity, that is, efficaciously relating means and ends by setting up an appropriate "end-in-view" as a guide to conduct.

At first glance, this is not too far off from Dōgen's understanding of practice. Practice, for Dōgen, is an aspect pervading all existence. The problem is that sentient beings do not realize this yet because they mistakenly take practice to be a mere means leading to something desired

beyond practice, namely enlightenment. With Dōgen's Zen Buddhism, there is something radically different about education and growth. Cultivation for Dōgen might at first *seem* to be purposive. There is the monastic institution with its rules and daily practices, and it might *seem* like these are set up with a greater purpose in mind. This is true *but only in an ironic sense*. In studies on Dōgen, it has been highlighted that Dōgen's attitude and his teachings have changed over time. As Leighton states,

in Dōgen's early work he emphasizes that full personal realization is available to any practitioner with sincere aspirations, lay or monk; whereas in some of Dōgen's final writings after *Eihei Shingi*—for example “The Merit of Home-Leaving” [*Shukke Kudoku*]⁴⁹—Dōgen states that full Buddhahood, including transmission of the teaching to others, requires ordination as a monk.

Leighton describes this difference as primarily a difference in audience. The “point of the later teachings, addressed to his monk disciples, is that historically the teaching of awakening has been transmitted and maintained only by a lineage of ordained monks.”⁵⁰ In fascicles like “Leaving Home Life” and “The Merit of Leaving Home Life,” there is certainly a sense that Dōgen is sometimes literally talking about leaving home life to become a Buddhist monk. If “leaving home life” is interpreted considering Dōgen's understanding of being-time and *the oneness of practice and enlightenment*, these chapters become far more significant. The issue of whether lay persons or only practicing monks can become enlightened is completely beside the point.

Indeed, the teachings of the earlier and later Dōgen should not be understood as divergent in their aim. This is because the structure or “goal” of the teachings are what can be called an *ironic form of growth and cultivation*. The Buddhist teachings are *upaya* or “skillful means” and therefore involve a paradoxical structure. The direction and quality of growth ends up undermining its own aim-seeking or “purposiveness.” This is also how Dōgen's use of “leaving home life” needs to be understood. As the fascicle states,

In sum, the supreme state of bodhi is perfectly satisfied at the time of leaving [home] life and receiving the precepts. It never becomes perfect on a day other than the day of leaving [home] life. That being so, by bringing in the day of leaving [home] life, we actualize a day of realizing the supreme state of bodhi. . . .

Remember, in truth, that the day of leaving [home] life is beyond unity and difference. On the day we leave [home] life, we practice and experience three *asaṃkhyā kalpas* [i.e., innumerable eons]. On the day we leave [home] life, we abide in the ocean of infinite kalpas and turn the splendid wheel of Dharma. [. . .] The day of leaving [home] life has transcended already the day of leaving [home] life.⁵¹

“Leaving home life” is the overcoming of the means/ends dualism and, furthermore, the very “overcoming” of “teachings” in the mundane sense that teachings are like “rafts that take you from one place to another,” that

is, a linear progression that takes you some place or state “other.” For Dōgen, any means toward enlightenment is internally related to enlightenment itself. Enlightenment is not an end to be reached that excludes the means to get there. Means and ends must be understood in a way “beyond unity and difference.”

Attempts at “seeking” the *dharma* or “teachings” (i.e., privileging purposiveness) takes a person further away from the experience of the oneness of practice and enlightenment. As Dōgen states, “The moment you begin seeking the Dharma, you move far from its environs. The moment the Dharma has been rightly transmitted to you, you become the Person of your original part.”⁵² Seeking or “mere purposiveness” is ultimately an obstruction to realizing enlightenment. Dōgen’s teachings recognize that it is through non-purposiveness that sentient beings achieve the “fullest intercourse with the environment.”

This does not mean that zazen practice was pointless or unnecessary. With the oneness of practice and enlightenment, practice and enlightenment are realized as omnipresent and omnitemporal insofar as practice and enlightenment are dynamically related to each other. With whatever degree of practice one is engaged in there is a corresponding depth of the field of experience disclosed; that is, enlightenment is expressed corresponding to the degree of practice. Deliberating about whether you *need* or *do not need* to practice is simply to cling to a false dualism because it maintains the dualism between affirmation and negation that privileges some future possibility as what is “valuable,” all the while devaluing “here and now.” In other words, enlightenment is misunderstood as something beyond the present as an “end-in-view.” What Dōgen’s teachings achieve is the overcoming of the very “seeking” that maintains the means/ends dualism. With this third, nondual perspective, the qualitatively inexhaustible field of experience is always in the foreground of consciousness. This qualitative inexhaustibility would then always co-inhabit the foreground of consciousness even when the fleeting occurrences of cognition and reflection arise. Dōgen’s teachings distance practitioners from mere “purposiveness” and not from thoughts and emotional dispositions *per se*. Attempting to completely extinguish cognitive habits is just another manifestation of “seeking” such that you become aloft and “move far from the *Dharma*.”

Although Dōgen stresses the discontinuity of time, it is possible to recognize a sense of continuity in enlightenment. The beautiful ways that continuity is realized in Dōgen’s Zen are due to the paradoxical nature of the teachings—“leaving home life” as already transcending “leaving home life.” The practices described by Dōgen culminate in realizing the historical continuity of the Buddhist tradition. Each radically discontinuous experience of “leaving home life” reflects the continuity of the monastic tradition just as the particulars of Indra’s net reflect one another. The radical discontinuities of the being-time of former monks are reflected in each other. The “just

sitting” of “here and now” equally expresses not just the “flowers blossoming” but especially the myriad monks practicing meditation. This includes the original Buddha. The Buddhist community itself forms continuity in the sense that “leaving home life” maintains the continuity of the face-to-face transmission of the teachings. A historical continuity emerges from primordial discontinuity. These teachings connect us to the experience of the historical Buddha as well as the entirety of the cosmos:

Clearly know, the buddhas’ and the patriarchs’ realization of the truth is nothing other than their leaving family [home] and receiving the precepts. The lifeblood of the buddhas and the patriarchs is nothing other than their leaving [home] life and receiving the precepts. . . . To see the buddhas and to see the patriarchs is to leave [home] life and to receive the precepts.⁵³

The Buddha, the emptiness of all things, emerges as the field of experience not simply because a person literally “leaves home life” to become a monk. For Dōgen, “leaving home life” is simultaneously to sit face-to-face with the Buddha (i.e., achieve enlightenment). Although each being-time is dynamically interrelated with the cosmos, the being-time of “leaving home life” is a particular expression of the oneness of practice and enlightenment. Furthermore, “leaving home life” is to engage with the primordial discontinuity of experience, the absorption in the non-teleologically structured, felt quality of existence, the “one bright pearl,” and to sit face-to-face with the Buddha.

Conclusion

The desire to be somewhere else—the “idea” of enlightenment—was the reason to leave home life to begin with. For Dōgen, the desire to be somewhere else or be “someplace more valuable” that initiates the monastic lifestyle is worked out until eventually the practitioner overcomes the very idea that one needed to “leave home life” to begin with. The desire to “leave home life” (i.e., the purposiveness and the “seeking” beyond the present experience) is just another aspect of the unenlightened disposition. It is the desire to escape from the present because one fails to recognize its significance and value. *Needing* to “leave home life” and *not needing* to “leave home life” are, then, two possibilities structured by the dualism between affirmation and negation. Structurally, this would mean that “leaving home life,” in the nondual, enlightened sense, is the recognition of the discontinuity of being-time. It is the recognition that each particular being-time is an aesthetic consummation in itself. Recall the story of the Buddha’s enlightenment. Under the Bodhi tree the Buddha realizes the mistake of leaving his family, his wife and child, to seek enlightenment. The very seeking that was the desire behind the Buddha’s “leaving home life” is eventually realized as fundamentally mistaken. The monastic lifestyle, considering Dōgen’s “leaving home life,” follows this same progression of the Buddha’s story rather eloquently. If the goal is as I

have described, then the whole institution of Zen Monasticism is an attempt to overcome itself. It is an “ironic monasticism” in that Zen monastic life takes in those persons “seeking enlightenment” who have “left home life” only to lead them to the overcoming of such practices. It is the “leaving of home life” such that eventually *all experience is realized as* “leaving home life,” that is, the oneness of practice and enlightenment. Sentient beings seeking like the Buddha, searching for something beyond the present, all eventually overcome the habits of seeking and desiring that encouraged their “leaving home life” in the beginning.

Dewey’s understanding of aesthetic experience and growth privilege purposiveness because continuity and stability take precedence over discontinuity and precariousness. Aesthetic “consummation” for Dewey thus gives precedence to temporal progress and instrumentalism. In a sense, Dōgen is completely antithetical to Dewey with regard to how best to overcome the means/ends dualism, although they both share a similar desire to do so. Overcoming the dualism for Dōgen involves non-purposiveness because discontinuity and precariousness are more primordial. Dōgen’s teachings also involve an understanding of growth that overcomes itself. Continuity, such as realizing the continuity between Buddha and Buddha, is an emergent or secondary aspect of existence. Furthermore, Dōgen’s teachings highlight how becoming “most alive and most composed and concentrated” is achieved by giving up that desire to impose a single valuation on inexhaustible existence. In recognizing the radical discontinuity of being-time, the continuity of the historical face-to-face transmission of the teachings is realized. As such, “leaving home life” is dynamically interrelated to all things but is especially expressive of the dynamic interrelatedness, continuity, and development of the Buddhist teachings. Considering Dōgen’s teachings, Dewey could perhaps expand his understanding of aesthetic experience in the sense that, as Dōgen stresses, non-purposiveness and giving up the desire to impose value on experience still culminates in a kind of aesthetic experience and the dissolution of the means/ends dualism. Perhaps it is best to say that *other potentials* in experience, those that are nonetheless aesthetically meaningful (at least based on the Deweyan understanding of aesthetic), are still realized even though we do not structure experience with an “end-in-view.” In this sense, the expression “leaving home life” fulfills the Deweyan demands of aesthetic experience and the oneness of practice and enlightenment for Dōgen.

Notes

1 – [Stroud 2007](#), p. 186.

2 – For example, Shaner suggests that Dōgen is “*extremely* supportive of the need for a serious student to enter a monastery. In his opinion,

there is no other way to sediment such awareness," that is, the awareness of the bodymind unity (Shaner 1985, p. 181).

- 3 – Abe 1992, p. 31.
- 4 – Dewey 1958, p. 4a.
- 5 – Ibid., p. 317.
- 6 – For Dewey, although all of our human habits are rooted in the body and all habits are bodily habits, the “mind” is considered emergent due to the complexity of the relationships and interactions that take place in the organism. See Dewey 1958. Although the whole of *Experience and Nature* is arguably about his understanding of mind, pages 271–273 are the beginnings of his explicit account of an “emergent” understanding of mind.
- 7 – Dewey 1958, p. 361.
- 8 – Odin 2001, pp. 82–83.
- 9 – Stoller 2016, p. 52.
- 10 – Tan 1999, p. 110.
- 11 – Ibid., p. 111.
- 12 – Dewey 1984, p. 60.
- 13 – See Kasulis 1981, pp. 65–86, for one of the first phenomenological accounts. Many of the later phenomenological accounts of Dōgen build on Kasulis’ phenomenological account of Dōgen’s zazen and “without thinking” (*hishiryō*).
- 14 – Shaner 1985, p. 154.
- 15 – Ibid., p. 173.
- 16 – Ibid., p. 158.
- 17 – Nagatomo 1992, p. 182.
- 18 – Ibid.
- 19 – See Kim 2004, for his earlier attempt at arguing this position. For example, he claims that “nonduality did not primarily signify the transcendence of duality so much as it signified the realization of duality. . . . Dōgen’s thought was entirely committed to the realm of duality—including its empirical and rational aspects” (Kim 2004, p. 105).
- 20 – Kim 2007, p. 24.
- 21 – Heine 2012, p. 49.
- 22 – Ibid., p. 50.

- 23 – For example, Kim, after misrepresenting Abe’s views, claims this about other interpreters of Dōgen: “By and large, these interpreters are comparative philosophers whose analyses tend to be formalistic, formulaic, and static, resulting largely in metaphysicized readings of Dōgen’s texts” (Kim 2007, p. 81). Both Kasulis (1981) and Shaner (1985) explicitly argue that Dōgen’s Buddhism is not at all metaphysical but instead merely provides a descriptive account of experience.
- 24 – Abe 1992, p. 48.
- 25 – Ibid., p. 49.
- 26 – Ibid., p. 62.
- 27 – For another account of Dōgen as “radically pluralistic,” see Abe’s “Dōgen’s View of Time and Space,” in Abe 1992, pp. 77–105.
- 28 – It should be stressed that although at times the accounts of Dōgen by Kasulis, Shaner, Nagatomo, Kopf, and others, do share some common ground, each subsequent phenomenological account of Dōgen has been critical of and further developed the previous ones.
- 29 – Kopf 2001, p. 39.
- 30 – Kim 2004, p. 101.
- 31 – Leighton 2012, pp. 7–8.
- 32 – See Dewey 1958, p. 23. I use the term “non-cognitive” in the way that Dewey means it, which is basically synonymous with “aesthetic.” Any “cognitive” aspect of experience is dependent on and constituted by the non-cognitive context. The meaning of anything knowable in experience is always constituted by its “non-cognitive” context.
- 33 – Alexander 1987, p. 105.
- 34 – Dōgen 2002, p. 34.
- 35 – Dewey 1980, p. 77.
- 36 – Alexander 1987, p. 112.
- 37 – Dewey 1980, p. 17.
- 38 – Dōgen 2002, p. 51.
- 39 – Dunlap 2016, p. 116.
- 40 – Ishida 2014, p. 19.
- 41 – Leighton 2007, p. 116.
- 42 – This point is also made by McClelland in a study (2008) that juxtaposes Rorty’s and Dewey’s aesthetics. McClelland argues that Rorty focuses more on the precarious dimensions of experience while

Dewey focuses more on the stable dimension of experience. This is perhaps even more true when juxtaposing Dōgen and Dewey.

- 43 – [Ishida 2014](#), p. 18.
- 44 – [Dewey 1988](#), p. 44.
- 45 – [Stoller 2016](#), p. 52.
- 46 – [Park 2010](#), p. 216.
- 47 – [Dewey 1980](#), p. 107.
- 48 – [Dewey 1988](#), pp. 23–30.
- 49 – [Leighton and Okumura 1996](#), p. 18.
- 50 – Ibid.
- 51 – [Dōgen 1999](#), 4:149.
- 52 – [Dōgen 2002](#), p. 41.
- 53 – [Dōgen 1999](#), 4:148.

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