

Beyond Monism and Pluralism

On Dōgen's *Pan-Self-Ist* Turn of Metaphysics

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***Abstract:** This paper aims to take up the philosophy of Dōgen and delineate it as a contemporary piece of philosophy that merits our serious attention. To be more specific, this paper adopts Jonathan Schaffer's path-breaking work on philosophical monism as a platform to illuminate Dōgen's metaphysical positioning. As we shall see, Dōgen will be depicted as a "pan-self-ist metaphysician" who annihilates the whole debate between monism and pluralism.*

Schaffer proposes that we try a new interpretation of monistic philosophy, which he calls "priority monism". Schaffer insists "priority" rather than "existence" should be the topic of ontological debate between monism and pluralism.

According to Schaffer's argument, existence monism is said to be the "world only view", which claims "exactly one thing exists". However, as Schaffer says, "monism would deserve to be dismissed as obviously false, given this interpretation".

In contrast, priority monism, which Schaffer says is more defensible, claims that "[t]he world has parts, but the parts are dependent fragments of an integrated whole". That is, priority monism admits existence pluralism with a caveat that the whole is prior to its parts. So interpreted, "[t]he historical debate is not a debate over which objects exist, but rather a debate over which objects are fundamental".

It is in view of this proposal that I will depict Dōgen as a metaphysician of a new kind. Schaffer's "priority turn" of ontology leads us to one philosophical possibility that Schaffer dimly mentions but does not delve into any detail. That is, pace Schaffer's strenuous effort to revitalize the monistic tradition, the upshot of his priority turn might be an annihilation of the whole debate between monism and pluralism. Seen from Dōgen's perspective, not only at the level of existence but also at the level of priority, the monism/pluralism debate is to be annihilated.

Introduction

This paper aims to take up the philosophy of Dōgen and delineate it as a contemporary piece of philosophy that merits our serious attention. To be more specific, a recent resurgence of monistic philosophy composes the background for this paper. Above all, this paper adopts Jonathan Schaffer's path-breaking work as a platform to illuminate Dōgen's metaphysical positioning. As we shall see, Dōgen will be depicted as a "*pan-self-ist metaphysician*" who annihilates the whole debate between monism and pluralism.

Schaffer proposes that we try a new interpretation of monistic philosophy, to which he gives a name of "priority monism". Schaffer insists "priority" rather than "existence" should be the topic of ontological debate between monism and pluralism.

According to Schaffer's argument, existence monism is said to be the "world only view", which claims "that exactly one thing exists. . . . On such a view there are no particles, pebbles, planets, or any other parts to the world. There is only the One. Perhaps monism would deserve to be dismissed as obviously false, given this interpretation".¹

In contrast, priority monism, which Schaffer says is more defensible, does not insist that the whole has no parts. Rather, it claims that "[t]he world has parts, but the parts are dependent fragments of an integrated whole". That is, *priority monism admits existence pluralism* with a caveat that the whole is prior to its parts. In this sense, it annihilates the monism/pluralism controversy at the level of existence. So interpreted, "[t]he historical debate is not a debate over which objects exist, but rather a debate over which objects are fundamental".²

It is in view of this proposal offered by Schaffer that I will depict Dōgen as a metaphysician of a new kind. Schaffer's "priority turn" of ontology leads us to one philosophical possibility that Schaffer dimly mentions but does not delve into any detail.³ That is, pace Schaffer's strenuous effort to revitalize the monistic tradition, the upshot of his *priority turn* might be an annihilation of the *whole* debate between monism and pluralism. Seen from Dōgen's perspective, not only at the level of *existence* but also at the level of *priority*, the monism/pluralism debate is to be annihilated.

¹ Schaffer 2010, 32

² Schaffer 2010, 33

³ Schaffer 2010, 35; 45

Dōgen on the Whole and its Parts

As a starter, let us take up the phrase of “*Issai-Shujō Sitsu-U Busshō*” (一切衆生悉有佛性) and explore how this illuminates Dōgen’s take on “the one as the whole” and “the many as its parts”. In the fascicle of *Busshō* (*buddha-nature*), Dōgen says this:

[In Buddhism, traditionally, when] one speaks of “*Shujō* (衆生)”, [the term is used as] “sentient beings (*Ujō* 有情)”. . . . [However, in Dōgen’s view,] saying of “the entirety of being (*Shitsu-U* 悉有)” refers to “*Shujō*”. . . .⁴

In this citation, Dōgen is talking about “*Shujō*” as a component of “*Issai-Shujō*”. “*Shujō*” is an old translation of the original Sanskrit word “*Sattva*”, which was replaced by a new translation of “*Ujō*”, the literal meaning of which is “that which possesses mind”. Following this, in the former part of the citation, Dōgen is talking about “*Shujō*” or “*Sattva*” as “minded/sentient creatures”.

However, the latter half of the citation defies this gloss. As is evident from Dōgen’s equation of “*Shujō*” with “the entirety of being” (*Shitsu-U*), Dōgen suggests that we take the word “*Shujō*” to have a broader meaning than the traditional understanding of it. He replaces the meaning of “*Shujō*” as “sentient beings” with that of “all beings that exist”.

Having offered his interpretation of *Shujō* and *Shitsu-U*, Dōgen proceeds to the next component of “*Issai-Shujō Sitsu-U Busshō*”, i.e., the term of “*Busshō*”. As he says,

In a word, the entirety of being (*Shitsu-U*) is the buddha-nature (*Busshō*); One entirety of the entirety of being (*Shitsu-U no I-Shitsu* 悉有の一悉) is called *Shujō*.⁵

This is a perplexing remark. First, Dōgen (quite abruptly) declares that “the entirety of being is the buddha-nature (*Busshō*)”, but how are we to understand this crucial vocabulary of “*Busshō*”? Dōgen does not give us any clue about this. Second, Dōgen further proclaims that “one entirety of the entirety of being” is called “*Shujō*” but how are we to make of this?

⁴ Dōgen 1990, vol. 1, 73

⁵ Dōgen 1990, vol. 1, 73

According to Dōgen's *untraditional* interpretation, “*Shujō*” was equated with “the entirety of being”. That is, “*Shujō*” à la Dōgen is a notion that refers to the whole as a group of individual beings. To our concern, “*Shujō*” is a word that can be paraphrased as “the one as the whole”.

However, at the same time, Dōgen observes that “one entirety of the entirety of being (*Shitsu-U no I-Shitsu*) is called *Shujō*”. In this case, the word “*I-Shitsu*” can be decomposed into “*Ichi*” and “*Shitsu*”, meaning “one” and “all” respectively. In short, “*Shitsu-U no I-Shitsu*”, the translation of which is “one entirety of the entirety of being”, can be paraphrased as “one of the individual members of the whole taken in its entirety”. That is, “*Shujō*,” when it appears as “*Shitsu-U no I-Shitsu*”, refers to “one of the many that compose the whole”.⁶

Putting these together, the notion of *Shujō* is given a double meaning; “the one as the whole” and “one individual part of the whole”. This might be a welcoming move for those who seek a reconciliatory approach to the monism/pluralism debate. For, this seems to suggest that being the whole and being a part of it might turn out to converge under the umbrella concept of *Shujō*. However, this *surely* is a perplexing remark as well. Our task is to put forward an intelligible exposition of this enigmatic worldview proposed by Dōgen.

***Inmo* (Such)**

At one point in the fascicle of *Busshō*, where Dōgen gives a further comment on “*Issai-Shujō Sitsu-U Busshō*”, he mentions that “the essential point” of this World-Honored One’s saying can be expressed by another Ancestor’s saying of “*Ze Shimo Butsu Inmo Rai* (是什麼物恁麼來; what is it that comes like this?)”.⁷

This phrase, “*Ze Shimo Butsu Inmo Rai*”, is one of Dōgen’s favorite phrases and makes recurring appearances in the entire book of *Shōbōgenzō*. Thus, in the fascicle of *Henzan*, Dōgen tells us one anecdotal dialogue between Nangaku and Enō, in which the essential point of “*Ze Shimo Butsu Inmo Rai* (what is it that comes thus?)” is illuminated.

The story, which is a famous one in itself, is simple. When Nangaku visited Enō, Enō asked him, “What is it that comes thus?”, and to this Nangaku replied, “Were I to try to put [this thing that comes thus] into words, they would miss the

⁶ On this reading of “*Shitsu-U no I-Shitsu*”, See Nishitani 1991, 130f.

⁷ Dōgen 1990, vol. 1, 73

mark (*Setsu Ji Ichi Motsu Soku Hu Chu* 説似一物即不中). To repeat, Dōgen’s suggestion is that this dialogue between Nangaku and Enō leads us to “the essential point” of “*Issai-Shujō Sitsu-U Busshō*”.

Let us proceed by focusing on the notion of *Inmo* as appears in “*Ze Shimo Butsu Inmo Rai*”. As a glossarial note, it can be pointed out that the word “*Inmo*” has a double meaning. On the one hand, it means “this” or “this such”. On the other, it means “what” or “what sort of”. Given this double meaning of *Inmo*, the entire phrase of “*Ze Shimo Butsu Inmo Rai*” implies both “What is it that comes like this?” and “Such a thing comes here in this way” at one time.⁸

Keeping this double meaning of *Inmo* in mind, what needs to be emphasized is that *Inmo* is categorially blank as to what it is. All that can be said about *Inmo* is that “something comes somehow” and it always comes with the query—“what is it that comes like this?” In this sense, the something-ness or somehow-ness of *Inmo* is always elusive or ineffable. In this way, *Inmo* always follows Nangaku’s saying of “Were I to try to put this such into words, they would miss the mark”. For, *Inmo* does not say what the essence of the referent is.

In the fascicle of *Inmo*, Dōgen gives a rather straightforward expression of this elusiveness or the unfathomability of *Inmo*, saying:

Such [*Inmo*] can’t be got; not such can’t be got; both such and not such can’t be got. What will you do? . . . We should study “such” in “can’t be got”; we should question “can’t be got” in “such”.⁹

In addition, also in the fascicle of *Inmo*, Dōgen makes the following comment.

Daikan Enō once addressed Diae of Nangaku, saying, “What sort of thing is it that comes in such a way?” These words mean that “such” is beyond doubt, because it is beyond understanding (恁麼はこれ不疑なり、不會なるがゆゑに). . . . “What sort of thing” is not subject to doubt; it is coming of such a thing (什麼物は疑著にはあらざるなり、恁麼來なり).¹⁰

⁸ The word “*Shimo*” (什麼) that appears in “*Ze Shimo Butsu Inmo Rai*”, though different in notation, has the same meaning and usage as “*Inmo*” (恁麼).

⁹ Dōgen 1990, vol. 1, 416f.

¹⁰ Dōgen 1990, vol. 1, 417f.

Dōgen insists that *Inmo* is not to be doubted because it is unfathomable. This phrase, without doubt, is enigmatic and needs glossing. Dōgen tersely affirms that *Inmo* is undoubtable because it is unfathomable but he says nothing about how this can be the case. We need further clarification as to how the undoubtable because unfathomable character of *Inmo* holds.

Three comments before proceeding:

- 1) It should be emphasized that the unfathomability of *Inmo* does not lead us to skepticism. The unfathomability of *Inmo* does not mean that it is unacceptable or dubious. On the contrary, Dōgen suggests that the unfathomable character of *Inmo* should be considered vis-à-vis the undoubtability of it. That said, one possible approach to the *undoubtable because unfathomable* character of *Inmo* will be to get the undoubtability aspect into sharper focus and explore whether it might shed some light on the unfathomable side of it.
- 2) It is worth restating that *Inmo* is a word that has a “double meaning”. As we saw, *Inmo* means “this” or “this such” and “what” or “what sort of” at one time. Otherwise put, when you raise a query of *Inmo* (asking “what?”) you are, in a sense, already answering it. Take the case of “*Ze Shimo Butsu Inmo Rai*” as an example, the interrogative utterance of “what is it that comes like this?” always comes as a package with an affirmative version of it, “Such a thing comes in such a way”.
- 3) It should be a matter of evidence that “what sort of thing?” cannot be asked unless something is given somehow. *That is, the coming of such a thing must precede the question of “what sort of thing?”* This, I assume, is the sense in which Dōgen says “what sort of thing” is not subject to doubt. When you say “what sort of thing?”, it cannot be an expression of your doubt. For it always comes with an affirming experience of the coming of such a thing. This “something-somehow-ness” of *Inmo*, as we shall see, when coupled with Dōgen’s *ineffabilist understanding of “self”*, leads us to the identification of *Inmo* with the *ultimate truth of Buddha* that is “beyond predication”.¹¹

Inmo as the Ultimate Reality of Buddha

To repeat, Dōgen’s reference to *Inmo* is made in close connection with the ineffabilist understanding of “*Ze Shimo Butsu Inmo Rai*”. That is, if we try to say anything further than “something comes somehow”, it always misses the mark. In a

¹¹ I owe this clarificatory point to a comment by an anonymous referee for the journal.

word, the prominent characteristic of *Inmo* can be found in its ineffability as to what it is.

So, as long as *Inmo* is concerned, any further query beyond “something, somehow” is blocked. *Inmo* refers to that which is just what it is; that which is beyond further predication.¹² In this sense, *Inmo* is not only undoubtable but also infallible. (You can’t err as to what the target of your talk is when you give no predicative specification of your referent.) It should be this “infallible because ineffable” aspect of *Inmo* that Dōgen had in mind when he says the following:

... if you wish to get such a thing, you should be such a person. Since you are such a person, why worry about such a thing? The point here is that, for the time being, he is speaking of “proceeding directly to supreme bodhi” as “such” (この宗旨は、直趣無上菩提、しばらくこれを恁麼といふ).¹³

In the first two sentences, Dōgen repeats essentially the same point about *Inmo* that we reviewed above; the always-and-already-got-ness of *Inmo*. *Inmo* is not to be doubted as *Inmo* is always the coming of such a thing. Slightly adjusted to the case in hand, you do not have to worry about *Inmo* as you are always and already such a person and thus *Inmo* is always manifested in you.

What’s remarkable is the move that Dōgen makes in the third sentence. Dōgen, getting beyond the undoubtability, goes so far as to claim that when you speak of *Inmo*, you are speaking of “proceeding directly to supreme bodhi”. Dōgen is now making a much stronger claim than the assertion of undoubtability, declaring that *Inmo* be regarded as a direct expression of the ultimate truth of Buddha.

***Nyoze* and Existing in Suchness**

Let us proceed by making a further exploration into *Inmo*. Again, as a glossarial note, it can be pointed out that *Inmo* is a word that colloquially/informally represents one traditional term of Buddhism: *Nyoze* (如是). *Nyoze* is a word that is conventionally translated as “such”; “suchness” or “thus”; “thusness”.

¹² On this point, see Bielefeldt 2017, 30

¹³ Dōgen 1990, vol. 1, 402

For example, D. T. Suzuki gives his comment on this “suchness” of *Nyoze* as the following: “*Aru ga mama no aru* means to “exist in suchness.” Plants and trees exist in suchness, as do dogs and cats and mountains and rivers and streams”.¹⁴

According to Suzuki, *Nyoze* (as a formal counterpart of *Inmo*) is a word that might as well be translated as “being (existing) as it is by its own nature”. That is, the suchness of *Nyoze* is a notion that can be paraphrased as “as-it-is-ness” (“*aru ga mama*”).¹⁵

On the part of Dōgen, this suchness of *Nyoze* is discussed in the fascicle of *Shohō-Jissō*, where he says this:

The presencings of all the buddhas and ancestors are [the presencings of] real forms in its ultimacy. The real forms are the myriad of things. The myriad of things is their form just as it is (*Nyoze-Sō*), their true nature just as it is (*Nyoze-Shō*), their body just as it is (*Nyoze-Shin*), their mind just as it is (*Nyoze-Shin*) (佛祖の現成は究盡の實相なり。實相は諸法なり。諸法は如是相なり、如是性なり。如是身なり、如是心なり)¹⁶...

This is a dark passage. But with the help of the glossarial note above, it should be allowed to read this passage as “every *Nyoze* as “existing in suchness” is an expression of Buddha’s truth”. To put it less bluntly, when we speak of the myriad of things in this world just as they are, we are speaking of those things in their real forms or their ultimate reality. That is, everything in the world, when they exist just as they are, i.e., when they exist in suchness, are already manifestations of the ultimate truth of Buddha.

One passage from *Shohō-Jissō*, where Dōgen refers to the idea of “*Honmatsu Kukyō Tō*” (本末究竟等), can be cited as textual support for this reading:

The Tathagata says “all things, from top to bottom, from beginning to end, are ultimate reality themselves, and this applies equally to all things” (*Honmatsu Kukyō Tō*). This saying of the Tathagata is a self-expression of *Shohō-Jissō* in itself.¹⁷

¹⁴ Suzuki 2016, 111

¹⁵ Suzuki 1997, 219

¹⁶ Dōgen 1990, vol. 2, 432

¹⁷ Dōgen 1990, vol. 2, 432f.

What Dōgen aims to convey should be obvious: he is insisting that all things are manifestations of ultimate reality in themselves and are all equal on this count. To quote yet another expression, “when all things are nothing but those things, we call them the buddhas. When all things, just as they are, are manifestations of their real forms, they are what we call the buddhas”.¹⁸

So the core thought found in Dōgen’s view on the undoubtable character of *Inmo* can be expressed as “all things, when they exist in suchness (*Nyoze* or *Inmo*) are equally manifestations of ultimate reality”. It is in this sense that Dōgen equates the Tathagata’s saying of “every entity is equal in their ultimate reality” as a self-expression of *Shohō-Jissō*. *Inmo*, as a colloquial counterpart of *Nyoze*, is a word that verifies the ultimate truth of Buddha: all things, just as they are, are manifestations of ultimate reality themselves.

Being Such and Being a Self

To move on, let us introduce the notion of “self” as a helping guide to approach the undoubtable because unfathomable trait of *Inmo*.

First, it needs to be noticed that “everything exists as itself” is a primitive, self-evident affair. For it is an undeniable truth that “everything is equal to itself”. Otherwise put, it is undoubtable that “nothing can differ from itself”. If something differs from itself, that something should be something other than the original self. Or it will be a new self that is distinct from the original self.

Second, it should be noticed that this primitive, undoubtable character of being a self can be taken as an expression of another aspect of being a self: the ineffability of X’s being a self. The background assumption for this is simple: X’s being a self is a fact or a state that can never be an objective target of theoretical reflection. For example, even as we try to describe the ultimate reality of a flower’s being that flower, we simply have to admit that the ultimate truth of that flower’s being itself is something that cannot be verified from sideways-on.

“X’s being X” is realized only through the existential state of “X’s being itself”. That is, an adequate account of “X’s being itself” can only be given through the primitive fact of “X’s being itself”. To give it a Dōgenian expression, *aru ga mama* is just *aru ga mama* (*Inmo* is *Inmo*), and we can’t say otherwise.

¹⁸ Dōgen 1990, vol. 2, 433

Now, the idea to be joined to this is that *Inmo* is expressive of the truth of something's existing as self. That is, being just as they are is expressive of the fact that X exists as X.

To review the argument offered by Dōgen, it is claimed that *Inmo* is an expression of Buddha's truth in that it is expressive of the state in which the entirety of being exists as what they are. All things, just as they are, are already manifestations of ultimate reality. This, conjoined with the idea that *Inmo* is expressive of the truth of a self's being itself, should imply that the undoubtability of *Inmo* can be illuminated by the undoubtable character of being a self. For it can be argued that X's being such (*Inmo*) is undoubtable because it is expressive of the fact that X exists as itself.

With these considerations in view, we now can see what the undoubtable character of *Inmo* amounts to. As long as the undoubtability of being a self is reflective of the ineffability of being itself, talking of the ineffability of being a self is at one time talking of the ineffability of *Inmo*. What follows from this should be clear. *Inmo*'s undoubtability is explained in terms of the ineffability of being a self *qua* the ineffability of *Inmo*. This should be the sense in which Dōgen says *Inmo* is undoubtable because it is unfathomable.

Dōgen's Pan-Self-Ist Turn of Metaphysics

To wrap up, the central tenet of Dōgen can be condensed to the thesis that all beings, just as they are, are manifestations of ultimate reality. Also, this means that the ultimate reality of things tells us that the entirety of being exists as self. In Dōgen's voice, "[a]rraying the selves in order and we get the whole universe" (われを排列しておきて尽界とせり).¹⁹

Now, from a meta-metaphysical point of view, it should be allowed to characterize the ontological commitment of Dōgen as a move from *existence* to *self*. That is, the teachings of Dōgen can be interpreted as urging us to set the notion of *self*, not *existence*, as the target unit of ontology. Dōgen suggests we transpose the question of ontology from "what is it that exists?" to "how are we to understand the ultimate reality of everything's existing as self?". The following remark of Dōgen can be read along these lines:

¹⁹ Dōgen 1990, vol. 2, 47

We should realize that the “being” that is here made the “entirety of being” by the buddha-nature is not the being of being and non-being. (仏性に悉有せらるる有は有無の有にあらず)²⁰

The phrase “the “being” that is made the entirety of being by the buddha-nature” is a difficult one. However, it should be permissible to read this as “when the entirety of being verifies the ultimate truth of buddha nature”; i.e. “when the entirety of being verifies the ultimate reality”.

Granting this to be the case, the entire sentence should be read as “when talking about the ultimate reality, the being or non-being is not a target question to be asked”. That is, the target of our ontological inquiry should not be the question of *existence* that deals with the being or non-being. Instead, Dōgen asserts that we shift the focus of attention from the concept of existence to that of self.

To our concern, this move of Dōgen will have grave consequences. For as the previous considerations have shown, the essential point about the entirety of being’s existing as self is that the fundamental structure of self forbids us to take them as a target of theoretical reflection. That said, what is important is to get clear about what follows from this: the ineffable character of self deprives our metaphysical inquiry of its qualification to take the *number of the beings* as its target question.

Given that the selfhood of X (X’s being itself) cannot be a target of *numerical* reflection, the question that asks whether that which exists should be counted as *one* or *many* no longer holds. In other words, as long as the ultimate reality of things should neither be regarded as the One nor the many, Dōgen’s take on the ultimate reality of things annihilates the debate between *existence* monism and pluralism. As Dōgen impressively notes:

Hearing the phrase of “the myriad of things”, we should not explore it as being the One, nor should we explore it as being the many²¹.

Two things are worth mentioning. First, as long as the notion of “existence” is concerned, Dōgen will be depicted as a metaphysician of rather a queer kind: 1) He is not an existence monist, for he denies that that which exists is one. 2) He is not an existence pluralist, for he denies that that which exists is many. 3) He is not an

²⁰ Dōgen 1990, vol. 1, 73

²¹ Dōgen 1990, vol. 2, 433

existence nihilist, for he is committed to the existence of self as the ultimate reality of the world.

In a word, none of the traditional categorizations of ontology fits the positioning of Dōgen. Considering his insistence that self is the topic of metaphysics although it is something whose being or non-being is not a matter of philosophical inquiry, he might as well be called a *pan-self-ist* at the level of the existence talk.

Second, Dōgen's annihilation of the monism/pluralism debate might raise the following concern. To review the argument that Dōgen makes about the notion of "*Issai Shujō Shitsu-U Busshō*", he was committed to the view that "*Shujō*" is "the one as the whole" and "one of the individual parts of the whole" at one time.

However, given the annihilation thesis mentioned above, this does make a queer situation. On the one hand, when discussing the phrase of "*Issai Shujō Shitsu-U Busshō*", he says that *Shujō* refers both to "the one as the whole" and "one individual part of the whole". On the other, he also says that "the myriad of things" (those which exist in this world) should not be explored "as being the One" nor "as being the many".

The One and the Many

To proceed, let us introduce two concepts both of which play a central role in the Buddhists' understanding of self; undeterminedness (無自性) and emptiness (空).²² Put in advance, the idea is that the notion of self, when given a deeper examination in terms of undeterminedness and emptiness, will shed new light on the issue of the One and the many.

As a first step, let us consider the teaching of "one water, four views (一水四見)", in which Dōgen talks about an idea that the thing we call water appears in various ways according to the type of being that sees it. As Dōgen says, "[i]n seeing water, there are beings who see it as a jeweled necklace, as miraculous flowers, as raging flames or as pus and blood".²³

By referring to these examples, Dōgen makes us see the process by which entities with determinate character emerge from a world of emptiness where there is no determinate essence that makes each entity the entity that it is. Otherwise put, Dōgen is trying to give his answer to the question: "what makes an object token the

²² For an excellent review of these core Buddhist ideas, see Garfield 2015, chap 2 and 3.

²³ Dōgen 1990, vol. 2, 192f.

object token that it is?” For example, “what is it that makes water what it is (i.e., water)?”

Dōgen’s answer to this question is that it is our practical confrontation with the things that makes each being the particular being that it is. Water’s being water (and not a jeweled necklace) is dependent on human’s seeing it as water. As Dōgen says, water is “given life” when humans see it as water. Conversely, water is “killed” when different types of being see it as something other than water such as a jeweled necklace or miraculous flowers.²⁴

What has to be noticed is that Dōgen’s take on “one water, four views” cannot hold if water has its self-determined essence that makes water what it is. For there’s no denying that what is essentially water cannot be something other than water. To put it in the other way around, what we call water can become water (or anything other than that) just because it carries no determinate essence in itself. That is, the thing that we regard as water can be a necklace just because the thing that we regard as water is empty in itself.

However, at the same time, it has to be noticed that Dōgen’s rejection of the self-determined character of things does not commit him to any sort of metaphysical nihilism. True, “X’s being X” is not sustained or realized by independent, essential selfhood of X, but this does not mean that X is nothing in itself. Dōgen admits that X, though empty in itself, emerges and exists as X that is distinct from other elements of the world, say, Y or Z.

In the fascicle of *Zenki*, Dōgen explains this moment of emergence from the world of emptiness in an illuminating way:

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. Whereas I am pushing the pole, the boat is carrying me, and there is no I beyond the boat. My sailing in a boat is what makes this boat be a boat. . . .²⁵

Obviously, Dogen is talking about the practical dependence of what-it-is-ness of things. Again, it is argued that the determinate characters of things become present from the world of emptiness through our practical confrontations with them. A boat that is not a boat in itself becomes a boat by my confronting it as a boat.

²⁴ Dōgen 1990, vol. 2, 193

²⁵ Dōgen 1990, vol. 2, 83f.

In addition, what has to be remarked is that Dōgen seems to suggest a *reciprocal* portrayal of this practical confrontation. As will become clearer in due course, Dōgen seems to be saying that the boat is made the boat by the person's using it as a boat, and at the same time, it is being carried by the boat that makes this person the person that he is.

Also, importantly, this reciprocal relationship between the self and the boat can be extended to include the relationship between a thing and the entire universe. As Dōgen's wording of "life can be likened to" implies, what is talked about here is our life at large and not the individual contexts where only the local interdependences matter. Thus, says Dōgen;

At this very moment, the entire universe is nothing but the boat itself: the sky, the water, the shore, have all become the moment of the boat. . . . In this way, 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 are all essential parts of the boat; and the whole Earth and the whole of space are all essential parts of the boat. All of this applies to self as life and life as self in general.²⁶

In this passage, Dōgen quite explicitly endorses the idea of universalized reciprocal dependency. It is not the boat that is in operation at a localized time and place, but the boat that contains the entire universe as its moment that is "given life" by my using it as a boat (Life is what I am making it). Conversely, this self that sails in the boat is "given life" by being carried by the boat that contains the whole earth and the whole space as essential parts of it (I am what life is making me).

To recall, Schaffer's argument for *priority* monism was that both the whole and its parts exist but the whole is prior to its parts (The parts are dependent fragments of the whole). In contrast, Dōgen insists that it is reciprocal—"simultaneous", to use Dōgen's original wording—dependency between the whole universe and each of its parts that makes each being the thing that it is. For Dōgen, it is not the *priority* relation but the *reciprocal-cum-simultaneous* dependence that obtains between the whole and its parts.

Beyond Monism and Pluralism

²⁶ Dōgen 1990, vol. 2, 84

At one point, where the annihilation of *existence* monism/pluralism debate was discussed, Dōgen mentioned: “[h]earing the phrase of ‘the myriad of things’, we should not explore it as being the One, nor should we explore it as being the many”. Also, in the context of discussing the phrase of “*Issai Shujō Shitsu-U Busshō*”, Dōgen made a remark to the effect that “*Shujō* as the multitude of beings is the One as the whole and one individual part of the whole at one time”.

Putting these two thoughts together, Dōgen is eventually holding that the entirety of being is “neither the One nor the many” and “both the One and (one of) the many” at one time. Now, having the thesis of universal reciprocity/simultaneity between the whole and its parts in view, how are we to make of this peculiar commitment made by Dōgen?

Getting back to the case of the boat, Dōgen said that the moment at which my sailing in a boat makes the boat be a boat, the sky, the water, the shore—in short, the entire universe—have all become the moment of the boat. It is in this sense that “the whole Earth and the whole of space” are said to be “all essential parts of the boat”.

However, at the same time, what needs to be remembered is that when I am using the boat as a boat, I am using it as a boat and not as anything else. As long as I am confronting it as a boat, the boat exists as a boat; i.e. as an individual part of the whole that retains a character that is distinct from other elements of the universe.

So, in sum, Dōgen’s thought on the One and each part of it can be compressed as the following: a boat is given life and *simultaneously* the whole universe becomes its essential parts when a boat is used as a boat (i.e., as an individual part of the whole). That is, “X’s existing as X (i.e., as an individual part of the whole)” is always concatenated with its *being one with the whole*. That being said, what are the consequences of these considerations for the issue of *priority*?

On the one hand, when asked whether X is a part or the whole, it will not be allowed to claim that “X is a part [full stop]”. As long as “X’s being an individual part of the whole” comes as a package of its “being one with the whole”, the claiming of “X is a part” should always be concatenated with the saying of “*simultaneously* X is nothing but the whole”. Thus, Dōgen’s saying of “X should not be explored as being [one of] the many [full stop]”; the part is always one with the whole.

On the other, the same sort of consideration can be applied to the myriad of things as “the One”. That is, it will not be allowed to claim that “the entirety of being as *totum simul* is the One [full stop]”. For, as long as the One as the whole is

always the one that each of the many is one with, the saying of “the One” should always be concatenated with the saying of “*simultaneously* this One is the One with which each of the many is one with”. Thus, Dōgen’s saying of “the myriad of things should not be explored as being the One [full stop]”; this One’s being the One is made possible by its concatenation with the part.

From above follows the verdict on the *priority* debate by Dōgen. Based on his *pan-self-ist* understanding of the world, he proclaims that the monism/pluralism debate is annihilated even at the level of priority; it is always the *simultaneous-cum-reciprocal* interdependence, not the *priority*, that holds between the whole and each of its parts. For Dōgen, the moment at which something exists as an individual part of the world is, *simultaneously*, the moment at which it is one with the entire universe.

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