

2-28-2020

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Recommended Citation

Parmley, Dakota, "Creating an Ethics of Love: Encountering Nonduality through Buddhism and Phenomenology" (2020). *University Honors Theses*. Paper 812.
<https://doi.org/10.15760/honors.831>

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CREATING AN ETHICS OF LOVE:
ENCOUNTERING NONDUALITY THROUGH BUDDHISM AND PHENOMENOLOGY

by
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An undergraduate honors thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Bachelor of Arts

in

University Honors

and

Philosophy

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2020

Introduction

It seems that many people have a hard time not despairing about the direction the world is heading in the current era. All around us, negativity seems to abound and the question of where humanity is heading starts to ring like a bell in the minds of those who question. Certainly, people have valid reasons to despair at the current state of affairs. Climate change is a pressing issue and many people cannot seem to believe that such an issue exists or matters; it seems that divisiveness is increasing; the amount of raw information and data people are inundated with constantly has created an ignorance by which “facts” can no longer be fully discerned. All of these, and more, are reasons why people “despair.”

Yet, there is something about despairing that takes humanity away from the immense potential that lies at its core. While there are vast possibilities contained within science, technology, knowledge, and other avenues of innovation in human spheres, the wisdom that such powers require for loving and kind use has gone to sleep. This wisdom is necessary for the truly ethical use of these vast human capabilities to arise. It is the awakening of this wisdom that is the awakening of peace and the natural mind of compassion in all people; an awakening to true and lasting change in the spheres of ethics as well as the more transcendental spheres of existence.

Ethics is by far one of the most critical areas for this world to turn towards if true and lasting progress towards a happy and wholesome world is to be made. No longer will it suffice to create ethical systems of action that work for a decade or two and then fade away, and increasingly it becomes apparent that those in positions of fame and power lack an ethical mindset. The pendulum of change (in the hearts of people and in external institutions) swings back and forth too wildly, with no clear direction in sight. Ethics is no longer about ethics to a majority of people. Rather, it seems it has become more about being “right” than doing good. It has become more about winning than helping others. It is focused on the argument, and not the substance of change it creates in this world that *all* beings share.

The question then becomes one of how *sustained* ethical action is created. It may be easy to find a new way of relating to the world and other human beings in a theoretical manner. However, the way that people have gone about doing this has clearly not created any lasting change in regard to problems that continue to arise in society and the world, on both a geographic level and a historical level. This may be because ethical systems themselves have not been created from a stable and sustained place.

In response to the need for a stable ethics, a new way of relating to the world and others is needed, but this new frame of reference towards experience is not turned towards very often—indeed it is hardly even known of. This is what may be called one’s *true-nature*, the nature that lies at the heart of the mystery surrounding *being*. Turning towards this is indeed a challenging endeavor, but for sustained action to come into being and lasting change to occur, it is this true-nature which must be reconnected with. I argue that this powerful aspect of existence, which all humans possess, is an invaluable tool in dealing with the issues of today.

In reconnecting with one’s true-nature, which lies at the heart of being I call Reality (but is also called “nonduality” and “Enlightenment”), one gains a perspective that allows for a radical shift in their relationship to experience, as a deep drive towards doing good for all arises in its being known. One is required to investigate experience in such a way that they see that this true-nature could never be *lost*—simply obscured from view—and it is this true-nature of all existence that is the essence of love and life itself.

In order to elucidate these points more clearly, this thesis will explore two specific forms of investigation (also called practices) which help one start to get in touch with this aspect of being: Western Phenomenology and Zen Buddhism. These two practices help one reconnect with their true-nature, and in turn create a natural impulse towards ethical action in the world. In order to do this, one must explore first the goal of practice, which this thesis takes from Zen Buddhism: nonduality which expresses itself in the

dual realm of experience through loving action. This comes through exploring some of Zen Master Eihei Dōgen’s works, and exploring what is called here the “arc of practice.”

What is written on these pages is carefully crafted to inspire one to engage with some form of practice, and in order to do this, two different examples of the results of deep investigation within the above-mentioned practices will be examined: Martin Heidegger and Nishida Kitarō, and their ways of dealing with the “sacred.” By exploring these topics, the issues related to such experiences of “transcendence” can be understood more clearly, and some useful ways of looking at such encounters can be explored. This will reveal some hidden difficulties in terms of rhetoric, which will hopefully inspire in the reader a sense of what is being pointed to.

This is all so that the world may become a more loving, compassionate, and virtuous place. So that the virtues of compassion can roar like thunder in the hearts of all beings. This is about how reconnecting with nonduality in its complete sense is what can allow one to truly become a force for good in the world, however that looks in each moment. While there is much intellectual conversation, the heart of this thesis—loving-kindness and virtue—is what truly matters.

THE ARC OF PRACTICE

How does one go about changing their relationship to the world and creating sustained ethical action which allows for progress to be made in regard to the issues of the world? In one word, the answer would be: practice. That may sound simple on paper and as a word, but as a verb, as an action and a way of relating to the world, it is incredibly vast and can feel at times rather complex. There is so much to investigate and explore in the vast play of experience that it can sometimes seem daunting to take up the challenge of practice within it. After all, where does one even begin?

Right where they are. Right here, right now, in this very moment practice can start. It simply entails what Zen Master Dōgen calls “taking the backward step” that “turns the light and shines it

inward.” (Fukanzazengi). In other words, it asks for one to look *within*, and find answers there. When the manner of orienting to the world is no longer the sensory perceptions that constantly change, something great and unchanging is found to be underlying all of experience.

At first, however, this is likely to be merely sensed in the world of perception. There is some feeling of dissatisfaction with the world and how one operates within it, almost as if something is missing. It can feel as if half of the puzzle (sensory perceptions) is complete, and another half (Nonduality, Enlightenment, Reality) is missing, but the pieces are not to be found. But there’s a hint of them in the part of the puzzle that is visible. One has a few choices at this point. Either give up on the puzzle altogether, find a new one (though the same issue will occur), or start looking for the other pieces.

It is this last option, where one chooses to set out in search of the other pieces, where practice and investigation truly begin. And while the path of practice is different for everyone, the fact of investigation remains consistent no matter how it occurs.

After a period of time (there is no general for this), the practitioner reaches a stage where the puzzle is completed. The initial half of the puzzle was realized to be an incredibly small portion of Reality, and the other pieces of the puzzle, while not necessarily visible, are seen to be incredibly fruitful and useful for the life that one leads as a human being.

One way of imagining how this looks is Dōgen’s image of transcendence. In essence, the practice starts by realizing that there are people who are awakened and people who are not. When one has themselves awakened, there is no distinction between these people. This non-distinction is then transcended so that there are once again people who are awakened and people who are not, which is almost identical to the beginning stage of practice (Tanahashi). However, in this state “you are totally yourself and act without hindrance.” (Tanahashi xxxii). Another way that this arc of practice can be stated is as: “duality, nonduality that is transcendence of duality, transcendence of transcendence, and transcended activities.” (Tanahashi xxxii).

This means that at first, one is unreflecting about the world of sensory perceptions that they live in (duality). Once investigation begins, one can experience transcendence of the realm of duality (nonduality), which is a huge shift for the practitioner's life. However, there is a need for one to transcend their transcended state and see that the nondual realm is present within the dual realm (transcendence of transcendence), which allows for one to take actions that are informed by the nondual in everyday life (transcended activities).

One ends up at the same place that they started at, but something has radically shifted. The practitioner who has reached the stage of completion goes out into the world and begins to help others awaken to the truth of existence by their mere presence. This should not be confused with a sense of heroism or a mission that one must embark upon, but it is rather a stage of action that exemplifies the insights one has attained to on their path.

Someone who has reached the end of the path responds to the world in a vastly different way than someone who is just starting or who has not started at all. In the Zen tradition, this is, ideally, in a loving and compassionate manner in which the proper response arises spontaneously in each given moment. This is possible because there is no separation between the being they are who is experiencing separateness, and the world that appears to be separate from them. In Reality, the practitioner has *experienced* that truth is beyond separateness, but inclusive of separateness. When acting from this place of non-separation, one appears on some level to be separate, but experiences separateness in a way that is unimaginable to one who has not begun an investigation of the nondual aspect of experience.

Part of the difficulty is that this experience of nonduality exists beyond words and concepts, what Dōgen calls the "bamboo node" and the "root of twining vines" (*Shobogenzo*). However, without words and concepts, such an experience could not be pointed to. This is why Zen is famous for its *koans*, or illogical and unsolvable riddles that cannot be thought through. They are meant to induce in the

practitioner an experience of non-duality that totally breaks down previous modes of thinking and conditioned responses.

It is due to this that a lot of Zen phrases (and Buddhist phrases more generally, too) seem rather strange and obfuscatory to many. The only reason for this is to help land the experience of Reality on the person engaging with the practice of investigation. The sentiment of the nondual is expressed by Dōgen in phrases such as:

“When even for a moment you sit upright in samadhi..., the whole world of phenomena becomes the buddha seal and the entire sky turns into enlightenment.” (On the Endeavor of the Way, p. 5)

and

“Enlightenment does not divide you, just as the moon does not break the water. You cannot hinder enlightenment, just as a drop of water does not crush the moon in the sky. The depth of the drop is the height of the moon.” (Actualizing the Fundamental Point, p. 31)

These are rather poetic and the sentiment is nice. The difficulty is that one can gain some sort of feeling from these words and think that the experience of nonduality is actually happening. And, on one level, practice (studying Dōgen’s texts in this case) and enlightenment are not separate things according to Dōgen. However, they are also entirely separate phenomena that must be seen as being together at each moment of the journey, even though they seem so vastly different.

This is why the Buddhist view is employed in this thesis, and it has greatly affected the planning of how to write this. Really, there is something that is so beyond any notion of Buddhism or Phenomenology or Philosophy that is being expressed in each moment of human

existence and it is this sense that I hope to reconnect the reader with, even if it is simply through encouragement to begin investigation.

And have no doubt—investigation is crucial to this, as what one sees with their bodily senses is only part of the panorama of experience. Even the thinking mind, which Buddhism considers another sense faculty, is something which exists in this conditioned, dualistic world of experience. Nothing is wrong with this world or the experience of it, but it is important and crucial to see that it is not the whole picture, or at least open to the idea that it may not be.

There are many ways in which people discuss these manners of experiencing the world which are possible after a certain level of attainment. For example, Vasubandhu, a philosopher of the Mind-Only (*Yogacāra*) school of Buddhism, gives one a picture of this in his verses on consciousness. He discussed the structure of conscious experience as being akin to a roadside magic show in which a magician uses a pile of sticks as a prop and, by the use of a mantra that affects the minds of people in the audience (note: only the magician knows this is a trick and how it works), makes the audience see the sticks as a real elephant (Garfield 187). In terms of how this relates to experience, it seems that Vasubandhu saw the human perception of external objects as similar to the perception of the elephant by the audience. In Vasubandhu's words:

“The foundation consciousness is like the mantra,
 Reality can be compared to the wood.
 Imagination is like the perception of the elephant.
 Duality can be seen as the elephant.” (Garfield 188)

Here is the obfuscation coming up. It seems like this is saying something rather strange, and from a certain vantage point, it is incredibly strange. What this is saying is that consciousness at its most fundamental level is that which allows for one to mistake the pieces of wood for the elephant. The fact

that there is an experience happening means that our minds are already affected because consciousness must necessarily be consciousness *of* something. Reality, here being used to discuss phenomena, are these pieces of wood that one *imagines* to be separate from the experiencing “subject.” It is here that duality is conceived of. There is a “subject” who experiences given “objects” of experience, without the possibility of there being an experience beyond any notion of duality having been explored. How the magician fits into this is anyone’s guess.

There is something ineffable about this way of seeing the world which can only be understood through the same thing Buddhism and Phenomenology employ: investigation. One must diligently work at uncovering the truth in each moment, knowing that something may not be entirely true in experience and courageously moving forwards. Pointing at what is being discussed here is hard to do, and it is the investigation of the possibility of something existing outside of the senses (which must always be sensing something “out there”) which allows one to move towards what has always been present, that which Vasubandhu and many others discussed later in this thesis, are pointing at.

In order to realize what is being discussed, one’s true-nature and the heart of Reality itself, one must dedicate themselves to practice. Both Buddhism and Phenomenology aim to take one out of this more reflexive relationship to the world and enter into the more reflective one, which is generally done through a meditative and/or contemplative practice. All of this is aimed at training what Buddhism calls one’s “dhāmma/dharma-eye,” or the eye of Reality. This term, “dhāmma/dharma,” can have a lot of added religious connotations that need not be there. In Pāli and Sanskrit, it literally just means “that which is,” or “phenomena,” as well as “Reality.” Some people also use this to refer to the historical Buddha’s teachings, but this is not always the case and either meaning can be used in practice. It may seem confusing that phenomena and Reality (here pointing towards the nondual experience) are under the same category. But, in some Buddhist traditions at least, this is true nonduality. It arises from a complete

acceptance of both the ineffable (sometimes called mystical) aspects of existence and the more mundane ones.

Through meditation, contemplation, and inquiry into the nature of reality and experience, one is able to come into contact with Reality in its most unfabricated and pure form—the cessation of suffering Buddhists call *nibbāna/nirvāna*. This is an experience that can happen gradually or suddenly (oftentimes, it is both) and it is the culmination of many years of practice. Dōgen would have it that every moment of practice is the experience of nirvāna, and every experience of nirvāna is the culmination of each moment of practice. Ultimately, this comes as some form of encountering Reality in a way that forever changes the unfolding of one’s life. Much integration will necessarily occur, and while one will still appear to operate on a dualistic plane, their relationship with experience is one of nonseparation. It is this experience that is beyond words, but inclusive of; an awakening to true wisdom. It is when one starts to investigate the internal landscape to its fullest that they find there was never a real difference between inside and outside—this is called emptiness—and the practice is then able to really “begin” (or, end).

INVESTIGATION

In order to thoroughly investigate, one must start to map out the experience of the dual properly. There are a lot of people who have dedicated vast portions of their lives to doing just that, in order for others to attain to a higher experience of life than they might have been able to. Usually, these have become specific kinds of investigative practices.

For example, in Phenomenology, there is an attitude of not being committed to the existence of the objects of the sense realm. An example of this is Edmund Husserl’s *epoche*: a way in which one leaves the “natural attitude” where most people live (Husserl 51-53, 56-57). In this natural state of identification, one is attached to the senses and has no inclination to investigate the nature of experience so that Reality may be perceived. Instead, one unassumingly thinks that there is *really* a chair they are

sitting on, instead of the possibility that it may simply be a convincing presentation to the fundamental entity of consciousness. Granted, this is a strange conclusion to come to right off the top of one's head. Regardless, what the *epoche* asks one to do is to drop the existential commitment to the senses, what Husserl calls hyletic data, and instead change the way in which one relates to the objects of direct experience.

This is incredibly similar to Buddhist thought on the realm of the dual. Generally, the realm in which one is experiencing sense data is considered to not be Reality, but is instead something that is clung to by consciousness (Fink). Consciousness clings to the six senses (five bodily, plus the thinking mind) and the five aggregates (form, sensation/feeling, perceptions, volitional/mental formations, and consciousness), which leads one to crave specific experiences, thereby increasing the attachment to the sense data. The five aggregates are a concise mapping of the dual that has been accumulated throughout over two thousand years of dedicated investigation and it shows that people had to deeply look at this world in order to come to some of the possible experiences that lie along the path. It is the practitioner's job to, through engaging with the same deep investigation, let go of their attachment to the sense data and aggregates in increasingly substantive ways, so as to have that experience of Reality and the cessation of suffering.

For Husserl, this experience comes through bracketing off the external objects of conscious experience and analyzing the intentional, temporal, and transcendental structure of these states of conscious existence, along with their intentional objects. This is a large point which is easy to miss. Husserl is saying that it is only the *direct* experience of any experiencing body that should be analyzed, at the expense of the other more "invisible" aspects of experience, such as societal conditioning.

This is in contrast to someone like Heidegger, who thinks that any sort of bracketing is a gross denial of the nature of experience, and that such bracketing may even be impossible (Garfield 176). Heidegger does have a good point about this being potentially impossible, especially in the modern-day

when societal conditioning abounds in every small aspect of experience that one has. These are important to investigate as well, and whether one investigates them or not will likely make a large impact on how they relate to the world of experience.

Rather than get caught up in these views of bracketing and non-bracketing, however, they can serve as good reminders of the arc of practice discussed earlier. In a sense, bracketing asks one to fully investigate one portion of the dual experience, while the other points towards investigation of how both are active in each moment of experience. This is a good reminder for the practitioner, and for the purposes of this thesis, it also serves to remind that both have an underlying core that is necessary for the practice of phenomenology and meditation: investigation. In other words, throughout the various ways that phenomenology takes shape, it has at its center the “reflective investigation of the nature and of the transcendental conditions of the possibility of subjectivity” (Garfield 176). This indicates that one is always reflecting on how it is possible to be having an experience at all—what does it mean that consciousness is conscious of not only itself but objects?

This is the start of this thesis, and the point could be summed up in this imperative: Investigate! Because what is being done is ultimately a changing of one’s frame of reference to experience. Instead of being embroiled in the experience constantly transforming around oneself, they instead get invested in looking at the different ways in which *things may not be as they seem*. Instead of thinking that things must be as they appear to consciousness, it is turned into various forms of hyletic data that are not necessarily what is Real. Rather, it could be that the hyletic data are merely the means by which experience is shaped. At the very least, it gets one to be less attached to the physical perceptions and aspects of existence which comprise only a portion of the world that humans inhabit. And at deeper levels of practice, there is the possibility of having some sort of transformative experience that allows one to glimpse into the Reality which lies beyond the senses. This is what has been sought by the practitioner—an awakening to Truth.

An experience in this vein can fundamentally shape one's experience of the world in a way that allows for increased encounters as the practitioner develops strength in investigation. It is such an investigation that opens up the door for realizing one's own true-nature and slipping into a transcendental way of relating to life. Experiences such as these open the door to a world of wonder and beauty beyond compare. Yet, as with anything, there is always a need to balance the work of life with the play of investigation. This is a further awakening to true nonduality and the possibility of selfless service to the world.

THE POSSIBILITY OF NONDUALITY

At this point, if investigation has gone well in someone's personal practice (and sometimes it takes a while for things to go well), experiences beyond the duality of existence have occurred. This is the stage of "nonduality that is transcendence of duality." It is helpful, however, to get an idea of what these experiences are really like and how people discuss them in more philosophical language. Heidegger was mentioned earlier, and his ideas are powerful for exploring what it might mean to realize the larger whole of our being.

In the rhetoric of Heidegger, there is a discussion of the "passing of the last god," in which one encounters the sacred. The sacred is such that it "invokes a sense of an open clearing wherein one first encounters with amazement and wonder the fact of being." (Krummel 386). It is this experience that one searches for in investigation. An experience that reconnects one to the ever-present sense of being alive in the world, of an undeniable sense of *being*, the "I am" without any need for "I." This is not to be confused with the Cartesian sense of "I am," as that would be a blatant mistake and misrepresentation of the sense of *I am* which is being talked about here (Sharf).

Rather, it is "an all-pervading not (*Nichthafte*) that refuses any ontologically identifiable presence" (Krummel 387) outside of itself. It comes from the sense of chaos that engulfs one's being,

simply to reveal that one always was and forever *is*. It is an unshakable faith and knowledge of one's own being. As Krummel puts it, the question changes from "What grounds being?" to "How can beings be without ground?" (Krummel 388-389). There is immense respect for the philosophies of Heidegger here, in that he is pointing out how difficult it is to *identify* the presence of this all-pervading not. Yet, he is still trying to point towards it. He has reached a level of insight that has allowed him to experience the ever-present ground of being in a way that requires no extra sense outside of itself to ground it. This being *is* its own ground, and that is the sacred which imbues all of experience.

Heidegger warns people, however, that the modern-day makes everything "unsacred" by trying to reduce it to that which is quantifiable and controllable (Krummel 387). This is important to take note of, as it highlights the importance of investigating truth wholeheartedly. Investigation allows one to reconnect with the fundamental experience of *being*, by which the sacred begins to imbue all things in the natural world, in part because investigation in this phenomenological or meditative manner shows just how unquantifiable and uncontrollable much of experience is. In Buddhist terms, because this newfound sense of being has arisen from a place beyond just the physical senses, it has made one's dharma-eye stronger. Reality is perceived more clearly in each moment, and less and less confusion arises as to the truth of experience. This is a significant moment for any practitioner as confusion is typically the hallmark of investigation for a long time before clarity starts to arise. Now, however, one has reached a level of insight where their understanding of what grounds being is unshakable—it is the very Reality they have glimpsed, this sense of *being* beyond thoughts and concepts.

Nishida Kitarō had many similar sentiments and was well-read on much of Western philosophy, which allows him a unique voice to help convey more Zen sentiments to a Western audience. The way in which Kitarō went about discussing the sacred was as pure experience, which "must be defined as knowing events exactly as they are, without the addition of any thought or reflection. It is experience prior to conceptualization and verbalization." (Dilworth 96). Words and concepts are ways of attempting to

quantify and control experience and, as Heidegger points out, some of the ways in which one is disconnected from being the most are through attempts to quantify and control experience. Words and concepts do this if they are coming from an inauthentic place; if they come from a place not grounded in being.

And, while Kitarō explicitly avoids any mention of Zen Buddhism, there is a Zen phenomenism which “*finds experience richest in its own subjective immediacy*” when there are no more words or ideas left to cloud the perception of the Real which lies in his philosophy (Dilworth 98). This, however, brings us back to the arc of practice. The idea of “subjective immediacy” implies some sort of duality. Indeed, it may be dualistic if one gets hung up on the words, but the question must arise as to how Kitarō himself related to subjectivity. He is doing some strong pointing, and he is pointing towards one’s own investigation by which a completely nondual experience is possible.

To understand this further, in his *Study of Good* Kitaro says that “meaning or judgment are things which indicate the relationship between present consciousness and something else, and therefore do no more than express the position of present consciousness within the system of consciousness.” (Kitarō 8). Put simply, the thoughts and ideas one has about the world simply point towards how one is relating to the larger experience of consciousness itself, and there is something far beyond meaning and judgment which is worth investigating. Even consciousness is a barrier to this, but only insofar as one is thinking of consciousness as the *word*. Part of what this quote can do for the practitioner is help them to see that meaning and judgment are *things*, more objects of experience which cannot be truth itself. The fact that one can see the thoughts they have (and, with enough meditation practice, realize that the thoughts think themselves) shows us that there is something “other” about thoughts. Something that is still engrossed in a concept of someone doing the thinking, without pointing towards the nature of the experience itself. Of course, the absolute aspect of experience can never be pointed to; it can simply be experienced.

Kitarō further tries to help one “attain to the experience of unity,” by pointing out that “this unity and disunity too... are ultimately differences of degree. If there is no wholly united consciousness, there is no wholly disunited consciousness.” (Kitarō 8). Again, the notions of union and disunion are just that: *notions*. What is being pointed to here is beyond the workings of the mind, but it is also *inclusive of those workings*; impossible to grasp, as one quickly realizes. The words “union” and “disunion” are pointers towards different states within the conscious experience one is having, but they are “differences of degree” because they are part of the same experience, the same nondual Oneness that Buddhism talks about.

This leads one to realize, albeit in an intellectual fashion, the non-duality of this world of experience and Reality itself. This is “the true emptiness of Buddhism... which Nishida in turn associates with what Western mystics call *Gottheit* (godhood).” (Krummel 385). One arrives at this place of undeniable *being* through their true-nature, what Mahayana Buddhists call one’s buddha-nature, what I have been calling Reality, what some call Enlightenment (it can be called *so* many things...), dying for the Finite-self, the small person who knows not of the truth. Yet, it is also that the Finite-self dies for the Truth. In both dying for each other, Reality is perceived.

One has no doubt when this has occurred. Doubt could no longer exist, and one truly begins to experience the world in “color.” This is usually some form of experience which thereby transforms the practitioner. Phenomenology and Buddhism both aim at such experiences—the experience of Truth beyond sense and even words/concepts.

It becomes quickly apparent, then, why Vasubandhu’s verses on consciousness can be quite puzzling at first. They are pointing to an experience that is really impossible to describe. In a sense, every experience is impossible to describe, but the worldview that is being pointed to is one that is very hard to connect with if one has not gone through a process of investigation. Perhaps something has changed if one takes another look at it:

“The foundation consciousness is like the mantra,
 Reality can be compared to the wood.
 Imagination is like the perception of the elephant.
 Duality can be seen as the elephant.” (Garfield 188)

If consciousness is a mantra which confuses people, and anything which is *sensed* (this includes thoughts) is the wood, then it is the *conceptualization* of these things which lends itself to a perception of “other”-ness. The things which are sensed are not “I,” but are rather something altogether different. This is only thought of because there is a consciousness that is *impersonal* at play in experience. Through our experiences of phenomena/sensory objects (what Vasubandhu calls reality), one becomes conditioned to think that there is a specific entity having the experience that is vastly different from the rest of the world, without investigation of that idea.

What the investigation allows one to see is that there may be no separate self. “Subject” and “Object” are themselves concepts and ideas which have no true basis in reality, even though they may be useful for dealing with the world. There is a vast realm of experience beyond duality, beyond thought and sensory experience, but it is inclusive of that which is called “the dual.” It is not about just the senses, but it is also not solely about the non-sense. It is about this arc of practice that has allowed one to see through their “roots of twining vines,” as Dōgen would say, and land fully in the experience of Reality in all of its completion.

And, while it may be easy to then say that one need not ever embark upon the journey if they end up where they started, such sentiments miss the point entirely. If one had never started, then so much would not have occurred, and the mind which is all-accepting, wise, loving, and compassionate may not have arisen.

Such aspects of practice, however, are a uniquely Zen flavor of practice. This is the importance of the nondual in Buddhism—it lends itself to a profound transformation of the character of the practitioner in such a way that loving-kindness, wisdom, and compassion become the main tenets of relation to the world.

It is here that the practitioner finds their guiding light in the unshakable ground of their being, and moves outwards to help in whatever way they can.

THE TROUBLES OF TRANSFORMATION

In order to reach such a place of integration, however, one must do the work asked in a consistent and determined manner. This would be where one is attempting to “transcend transcendence,” so that there is no longer a difference between the nondual experiences one has had and the human being that one is in everyday life. Such integration requires much dedication and time in order to fully realize. After years of hard work, one looks back at the road that has been walked and notices that something incredible has shifted—a profound transformation has occurred—but exactly *what* has changed evades precise phrasing into words. It has been the accumulation of many small choices, many small moments of clarity, and much time spent on investigation of experience. In order for the virtuous, loving, and compassionate characteristics within someone to come forward, dedication to *some* form of practice, to some way of delving deeply into some of the most fundamental questions that lie at the heart of the human experience of *being*, is a prerequisite.

What dedication to practice and cultivation of an expansive mindset hopefully engenders in the psyche of a practitioner is a sense of *goodwill* or *loving-kindness* towards all extant things, what is called *mettā* in Buddhist terminology. This is not the passionate sense of romantic love, but more a sense of one wishing others happiness and the causes of happiness, *for their sake*. Such a mindset requires trust, it requires a hopeful heart and a sort of knowing that at the core of each being lies the same capabilities for

loving-kindness and wisdom. This way of relating to others comes into full-bloom when one is focused on cultivating those qualities in each and every moment.

Oftentimes, the experiences one has of transcending the mundane aspects of existence help tremendously in terms of being able to extend one's sense of goodwill to all extant things. And, with dedicated practice, such experiences are really possible. There are, however, dangers that come along with these sorts of experiences of Reality. The part of the path that can help to create a deep transformation within the heart of the practitioner is exactly that which may also end up being the hardest thing with which to deal.

There are three major problems that seem to be the common factors when it comes to difficulty on the path, and they are what Buddhism calls the "three poisons" (Jenkins, et al): attachment, anger, and delusion. These three poisons are considered to be the root of evils in the world, and it is the duty of the practitioner to be ever-vigilant against their influence. All three of these become more apparent to the practitioner when one has experiences of Reality and begins working towards embodying true nonduality.

One of the first emanations of anger, hostility, or a sense of avoiding people one dislikes, is a sense of superiority that can arise when one has such incredible experiences. It can come in the form of thinking that no one else, even in one's own spiritual community, truly understands the teachings. Sometimes it arises as displeasure with the world of "normal" people. There are many ways that it manifests and, if it is doubled with a specific context of dealing with this experience, it can lead to fierce closed-mindedness to other points of view. Clearly the radicalism that can arise from this is dangerous to many people and has already caused significant issues in the modern world.

The emanations of attachment can come in terms of a fixation that can arise on recreating the experience of Reality or on going deeper into the realms provided, at the expense of "worldly" existence. This is specifically a spiritual form of attachment, but the root of attachment is simply a sense of greed or needing more and more of something "out there," which one does not have, in order to truly be happy. It

seems that one would finally be happy if there was “just one more” experience of transcendence, or a bit more money, or whatever it may be. In terms of experiencing Reality, it can potentially lead to an unwillingness to be truly nondual and accept one’s status as operating at both a human level and a nondual level. One can start to wish to leave worldly existence behind when they fail to see that such things only happen through a radical embracing of all conditions and things of the world.

The poison that I want to focus on, however, is that of delusion. Delusion comes in the form of not seeing reality clearly, and in the context of this paper, it can come up as a mistaking of the words for the experience, as thinking that just because one speaks nice words, or understands them intellectually, that they are entitled to the truth. Even if someone does have a true and genuine understanding of nonduality, it is incredibly hard to *speak* about such things without causing others to become deluded.

Indeed, the discussions which take place regarding experiences of transcendence are often confusing for people with little contemplative or meditative experience. As Robert Sharf aptly points out, “many key technical terms relating to Buddhist *praxis*... are interpreted phenomenologically: they are assumed to designate discrete ‘states of consciousness’ experienced by the Buddhist practitioner in their meditative practice.” (Sharf 231). This shows part of the difficulty in understanding intellectually what is in truth a practice; the essential *experience* is something that fails to be seen. That unshakable ground of being, that faith in existence, is lost when one attempts to *interpret* these teachings and it is a delusion to think that simply by understanding or translating a word someone is going to understand what it means. For someone who has not had such experiences, there is little knowledge of what these “key technical terms” are referring to, even if they are definitely pointing towards certain experiences. It would be as if someone who had never seen a plate in real life were to have another language’s term for “plate” translated into their own. There would be a sense of “Oh, okay, it means plate” but that person still has no experience of a plate.

In a further example, the usual translation for *prajña*, “wisdom,” is a pitfall for truly seeing what *prajña* is. From meditating on this with the Abbott at a local Zen Center in Portland, Oregon, I realized that this is not a *term* meant to be *understood*. Rather, it is best known as the “function of nonduality.” It is the applied effort of the “wisdom beyond wisdom,” of the Reality that one glimpses in practice. This is not going to come from a logical form of thinking through the etymology of *prajña*—that will just lead to more delusion. Rather, this is an experience that one accumulates through years of practice.

Sharf once again nicely points out that “...the epistemic commitments attendant upon the rhetoric of experience in the discipline of religious studies are patently Cartesian, and we should exercise caution when imposing a seventeenth-century European metaphysic on medieval Buddhist writings.” (“Buddhist Modernism” 232). Sharf is pointing out that, to a Buddhist practitioner, Descartes’ understanding of Truth was on shaky ground when the terms “I think” got involved. The truly undeniable experience of Reality lies *beyond* thought, in a place that is unable to be assailed by doubts. This is what Buddhist teachings are pointing towards, and it is through the act of investigation that one uncovers the truth or falsity of the teaching. But the delusion is that the terms used in Buddhist communities are a type of Cartesian rationalism, and while there may be similarities in some aspects, they must also be recognized to be completely different kinds of investigatory methods.

In other words, what is being looked at here are *practices* which point to something beyond thought but are inclusive of it, and the delusion comes in thinking that just because one has the words to talk about it, they necessarily get what is being discussed. A common Zen adage describes this as a “finger pointing towards the moon” and, oftentimes, people spend too long staring at the finger trying to understand it and not enough time looking at the moon, that is, the nondual experience (“Experience” 105). It is not, however, that Buddhist practices are solely intent on producing mystical experiences that can never be discussed outside of Buddhist circles (“Buddhist Modernism” 235), though some specific schools might be intent on such things. Rather, the true Buddhist practice is giving up any need to discuss

“mystical experiences,” whatever those may be. Not only because that which is produced (arises), can be destroyed (cease), but also because the focus of the practice lies in something much more “mundane.”

Even the notion of “mystical experience” is difficult, and Sharf points to Robert Gimello’s seminal essay on Buddhism and mystical experiences to make the argument that Buddhism does not grant one a mystical experience, but specifically the *Buddhist* experience (“Buddhist Modernism” 240-243). This is accurate, and it helps one see past further delusion. The truth of Reality (nonduality, Enlightenment) itself is beyond any notion of dogma or a specific lexicon, and the specifically Buddhist part of such experiences are the words used, not the heart of being which is investigated. The true mystical experience comes when one sees past any *notion* of being a “phenomenologist” or “Buddhist” or “meditator,” into the heart of being which is beyond mere identification.

It leads one to realize that the words surrounding these experiences don’t always help others. Rather, they can cause delusion and confusion in people who have not started to practice. It is through truly practicing and embracing the nondual that one realizes how it is through action and *heart* that one leads the way through dark times. By confining these experiences to an intellectual conversation, by being attached to them, it actually can create doubt about these practices in the hearts of practitioners and laypeople alike. Because it is through the lasting transformation that practice makes possible that the incredible benefits of practice are able to truly inspire others to also investigate.

In other words, action taken from a nondual place inspires change. It creates something beautiful and profound. This is not to be taken as being against the power of thought and the word, though. These things are incredibly useful, and they must be used like any other tool should be: with wisdom. When wisdom and goodwill are the main ways of relating to the world, something subtle makes itself manifest and love abounds wherever the practitioner goes.

BEYOND THE BARRIERS: AN ETHICS OF LOVE

Ultimately, the nondual must take form in the dual, so that the one is seen as two, not only one. Not that this is at all easy. In fact, it is one of the hardest endeavors a human being can embark upon. This is, in the arc of practice, the “transcended activities” part, and it marks, to Dōgen, each moment of practice as well as an end goal. It entails letting go of delusion, anger, and attachment, looking to find the highest and most authentic expression of Reality *in each moment*, and it is not an easy task.

It is no less that is asked of the practitioner, however. This necessitates a refusal for one to think that the fruition of the path lies in some experience bound to come in the future, as the truth that exists right before them may fall away into a sort of shunned blindness and a sense of apathy for the world. It is *this moment*, the only thing that is ever-present, which requires one’s full attention. What is the authentic and living expression of truth as it must be seen *here and now*?

One way that Buddhism answers this question is by promoting within the practitioner what is called the perfections (*pāramitās*): generosity, virtue, strength, patience, concentration (self-reflection), and prajña (Garfield 300-3). These could be thought of as being similar to virtues, but it is important to note that they are beyond what is normally considered a virtue. They are primarily practices that one engages in to help develop a virtuous and loving character, but they are not even things that one “perfects” in order to become a more “perfect” being. Rather, the term *pāramitā* has notions of “highest,” “farthest” or “most excellent,” and they are qualities that one aspires to and works to make a more ingrained part of their life. Keep in mind the difficulties of translating and interpreting words that were discussed above; these are actions, experiences, and ways of living in the world, not just terms. These *pāramitās* are antidotes to the three poisons, as well as seeds that are planted within oneself and others. Without them, the goal of practice cannot be reached—the transformation of the practitioner into a more loving and virtuous person. This is because the goal is less about some grand experience of Enlightenment (which many seem to think), but more about how well one lives life in light of these experiences; it is about how ethical of a life one can lead.

And yet, it is the seeing of Reality with a crystal-clear certainty, the development of one's dharma-eye, and the cultivation of the pāramitās, that allows this type of nondual and ethical relationship with existence to develop. It is in seeing Reality clearly, which entails acting ethically, that Zen Buddhism achieves a sort of freedom beyond simply the determination of the past, a creativity by complete presence in the moment (which is always the “first-time”), compassion by having an open heart towards others, and wisdom through equanimity in each moment (Kasulis 141). This seeing of what-is simply as-is is a vital part of Zen practice and it fosters in each person a sense that the highest calling in life is doing good for all beings.

In Zen Buddhism, the nature of Reality is seen through what Dōgen calls “non-thinking” (Fukanzazengi) and “the nothingness out of which it arises,” which leads one to always function *in relation* to others (Kasulis 139). “Non-thinking” should not be confused with the sort of thoughtlessness where one has no intentions when taking action. Each action becomes incredibly intentional, and returning to the present moment time after time opens one's heart to the suffering of others, and what the unique response of each moment must be. This indicates that the entire practice is done with a sense of *ethics* in mind, even if this is achieved through spontaneous action in each moment. Ethics and relations *must* be the focus—it could be no more, no less. When one is aiming to become more loving and compassionate towards all beings at all times, it is necessarily about all beings, not just oneself or one's own specific religious creed.

This is where transformation shines. Through the practice, something profound occurs and the world in which one *thought* they lived is revealed to have never quite been the full truth. Something about it was true and real, but some other piece was missing that now seems to have fallen into place. One has not “transcended” reality, but rather one has accepted all conditions and states of existence with a mindset that can seem “transcendent,” even if it is one of the most “mundane” things possible. Something finally lands in experience, and an ethical and wholesome life comes into fruition

This is, after all, the point of the whole journey. One must have a grounded framework from which to be an ethical actor, in order to be more loving and virtuous. When one has spent years working with these goals in mind, such things become rather natural in a way that is indicative of what is sometimes called “ease in practice.” Ethical action has the opportunity of revealing itself to be the truly natural way of being in the world, because of the true *selflessness* by which one relates to life.

This is because transformation has occurred and actions are truly *of* the nature of radical love and virtue. This sort of radical love does not necessarily mean that one supports or endorses harmful worldviews, or that they would be fine with certain tragedies happening at the hands of others. Rather, such people and moments are seen with a sense of heartbreak, and a truly selfless desire to do good arises from it. This selflessness is love itself, and it is able to be freely given to all beings as they come in and out of the practitioner’s experience.

Love is a powerful means of working through the difficulties that arise in practice. If one can remember to meet the moment with loving awareness, that is the practice itself. It is not that one will always be blissful and loving (being a human is not so easy), but one can remember time and time again that there is an expansive and caring worldview that one can relate to experience with. With time, this does get much easier. One almost becomes an embodiment of love in each moment, and it is because there has been a choice to care more about the wellness of all beings than the status of the faulty mental narrative which is so easy to be trapped in. This is why selflessness is love, and all it took to see it was a wholehearted investigation of one’s life as a human *being*.

Investigation, practice, and seeing Reality are truly such powerful tools. By moving forward into them, one is making a commitment to a sort of *unconditional follow-through*. That no matter the pain, the difficulty, the trials and tribulations, one is committed to the authentic expression of true love, that which lies in one’s true-nature, in each moment. Once the path has begun in earnest, there can be no turning back from this goal (even if one thinks they have). Sometimes, it will seem so laughably simple that one

wonders how it was ever not their natural expression. Other times, it can be so incredibly difficult that one fails to see how such a thing is possible. Practice helps some.

Conclusion

There is a glaring element of contradiction in all of this that has hopefully become apparent. If one cannot point to these truths with words, then why has anything been written at all? This is a question that I asked myself many times while writing this thesis, and the conclusion I came to was fairly simple. Looking at the great people who have engaged with these questions and done much investigation before me, through talking with my advisor and friends, through discussion with my Zen teacher, through my personal practice of investigation, I came to realize that *we are always saying something*. Each action or non-action, each word spoken or not-spoken, is something said in this world.

People who have reached these great heights of investigation certainly dealt with this difficulty as well. It is reminiscent of the line from the Tao Te Ching, where Lao-tzu *says*: “Those who know don’t talk, and those who talk don’t know” (94). Perhaps it is because, as humans, we don’t know, and are constantly coming to new knowledge in each moment, constantly being shaped and reshaped by the world of experience.

If there is anything in here that can at all inspire change in the hearts of people, then it is worth saying. While I may wish to stay silent and continue investigation constantly, this has been a great source of realization that this practice is also about the realm of relationships and duality. As is so often the case, it seems that what is being said is what most needs to be learned by the person saying it, it is what the person saying it is learning.

And, for a thesis that is about creating an ethics of love, it seems that ethics has been discussed very little. It is, however, what this entire thesis is wrapped in. Nothing was written without some thought towards how it could be related to ethics, how it was helping the world (or if it was helping at all). From

discussing Dōgen and the arc of practice, to looking briefly at the philosophies of Heidegger and Kitarō, the point has been to encourage one to practice and investigate the world that humans inhabit. And, that investigation will hopefully have as its goal a loving and virtuous embodiment of nonduality. The nonduality that *is* possible, that is alive in this very moment.

If this author's experience says anything, then there is a rich possibility for transformation in practice. Beautiful things can occur, and the world might become a better place because of it. It is because of where humanity is in relation to its world that it will increasingly be asked to find its True-Nature. It will be asked to see the source of Reality, the ground of all *being* and *non-being*, and whatever lies beyond. Really, there should be no need for the world to become a better place. And, if one were to hang out in transcendence, there would certainly be no need. There is a place where one can live where everything is blissful and easy, which is indeed the nature of Reality, but not the nature of most human existence. When one embodies insight, it is hard to see that, even though the sentiment seems dualistic, the world *can* and *must* become a better place for all beings. How strange would it be to call all duality, "bad"?

Hopefully, to those who see, this thesis is an encouragement to stand up and do the work of living love. Only two practices have mentioned here, but it is the core of both, which is *investigation*, that is the key. There are likely an infinite amount of practices that are each so complete unto themselves that they are all one.

The real practice starts with this author, it starts with the reader, it starts with the next breath taken, with the next letter read. All of these words are pointing, so do not stare at them too long. The point is love and virtue, and it *can* be overstated. It can never be acted on too much, though.

This world is asking each and every one of us to be as we are, to be free. And within that, no one is asked to love unconditionally. That would be a conditional form of love.

Perhaps, though, the Sun might smile a bit brighter if that step was taken. Maybe the Earth would seem so incredibly green, no matter which side of the fence one is on. Maybe, Love is the key.

And it might just be in your hands.

It might even set the world free.

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