

BODY-MIND-SELF-WORLD: ECOLOGY AND BUDDHIST PHILOSOPHY

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Within yourself, no fixed positions: Things as they
take shape disclose
themselves. Moving, be like water, Still, be like a
mirror, Respond like an echo. – Zhuangzi

By the training of our nature we recover the Power. When
Power is at its utmost, we accord with the Beginning. In
according we attenuate, in attenuating we become Great,
and blend together the twitters of the beaks. When the
twitters of the beaks blend, we are blended with Heaven
and Earth. – Zhuangzi

The mind-body problem, in its most radical formulation, occurs only in Western philosophy and thinking. In many ways, this formulated problematic is the impetus for and foundation of psychology. The mind-body problem has its philosophical roots in Greek philosophy, especially in the thinking of Socrates and Plato, and finds its apotheosis in Descartes' *cogito*. Descartes' "Methodological Doubt" was a conceptual game—a doubting of all that could be doubted except the doubting activity itself, and the subject performing the doubting. Mind, and its mental events, rose to a rarefied and privileged status over the body and the body's relation to the material world; the "real" self became disengaged and disentangled from the web of life; self lost its thread in the ecumenical weave of life. Mind too would play an important role in Buddhism, but mind and its conceptual products would need to be repatriated to the world from which they emerged.

Descartes' conceptual game and the consequences of his conceptual play completed Plato's project. Plato extolled the virtues of the immortal soul and the metaphysical Being of a higher realm over the human body and its world of stones, plants, insects, animals, and the resplendent unity of landscapes that emerged from the interbeing of integrally related elements, which in themselves were interbeings emerging from other types of elemental

beings in a field of intersubjectivity. With Presocratic wisdom sealed forever by Plato's comprehensive vision of a transcendent pattern world, Buddhist philosophy would be one of the first fully developed projects that would address the dynamic interconnections of all things, living and nonsentient. Following Descartes' play, the hand is dealt subsequently in Western philosophy in very different ways that stack the deck in terms of a world not of intersubjectivity and interdependence, but as an objective world where reality is an *a priori* given beyond experience. This reality is attainable only through the conceptual or some experimental means, or what John Dewey called "a spectator theory of knowledge."¹

Plato, and later Descartes, relegated the body's perception, its *aisthēsis* in Greek, to a lower order that gave the lowest soul its greatest measure, that of appetite, of wanting more, that of the fundamental *eros*, or life-force. The senses were not to be the organs of truth, knowledge, virtue, or even beauty. They were rendered inferior, and unlikely candidates for anything worthwhile and virtuous in the human realm. That which the body perceived through its organs of eyes, ears, nose, taste buds, and the feeling of its tactile whole from foot soles to head top were rendered as shadows of some greater universal good of Platonic Form, or Christian God, or the Mind now being debunked by Daniel Dennett. In the west, Nietzsche's clear vision saw this as all the same play of the conceptual the game. In India, the 6th century Sâkyamuni Buddha was preaching and practicing about the seductions of the human mind in realizing the fundamental truths about the self and its relation to all of other beings of the world, and all of this without an appeal to any kind of god except the human.

Descartes' analysis even concluded that even animals, our closest relatives who display tendencies of also having soul, were cleverly constructed machines designed by a creator being, none of which greater than He could be conceived. This creator being gave humans animals so they may service our needs. Descartes' version of our nearest relatives is a familiar tale that follows the archetypal pattern of the great Yahweh giving Noah what he needs after the earth's cleansing of its original sinful ways.

Although most of us no longer agree with Plato's vision or Descartes' ideas about animals, their influences gush through our veins still. Plato, and his most distant protégé Descartes, separated by almost two thousand years—and there are many others in between and since—extol Being over value,

concept over sensory perception, philosophy and science over poetry and art, and mind over body.

Our word aesthetics comes to us directly from the Greek *aisthēsis*, but it has been delivered without an address with just a scribbled, nearly unintelligible trace of a return address and canceled stamp. Plato wished to ban poets and artists from his perfect society, itself a concept of a Being that does not "be." To his credit, Descartes was enamored with understanding matter and the body, but this focus on the material came only through the separation of two distinct realities that the privileged human being straddled. The human body and its world was viewed as something foreign and alien to Descartes; it was something exotic that demanded attention; the body was of the animal and became for us a cleverly constructed machine similar to the machine-like universe of Newton. The seeds of an alien natural world were planted psychically in ancient Greek mythology that mismatched the human and non-human animal in the forms of centaurs (man-horses), silenī (man-horses), minotaurs (man-bulls), satyrs (man-goats), sirens (women-birds), sphinxes (woman-lion-birds), tritons (man-fish), and gorgons (snaky haired winged women). Although these forms were dualistically split between the human and non-human, the ancient Greeks tried to connect them into one. Even Pan, the greatest of all the animal-human human-animals, whose name means "all" or "everything" was a whole that was divided into two.

Descartes' enthrallment with matter and the body, however, was not for aesthetic reasons because science had already lost its lust for beauty, which it is now just beginning to recapture. The aesthetic belonged, and perhaps always belonged, to the body; belonged to the body's capacity to perceive directly; belonged to the body's capacity to perceive without the conceptual overlay that Descartes inherited from Plato, and that we have inherited from Descartes. This conceptual overlay, which even the great Kant could not break through, was given its most singularly and developed expression in Buddhist philosophy, which focused first and foremost on human liberation from the attachment to desires, but provided the first fully developed ecological philosophy through its interbeing self in an intersubjective world of stones, plants, insects, and animals.

Cutting Through to Liberation

Western philosophers such as Nietzsche and Levinas have enjoined us in their own ways to come face to face with the Other. The being of the Other is the byproduct of the dualistic tendencies of Western philosophy, science, and cultural meta-narrative. Levinas views the encounter with the Other in ethical terms and Nietzsche with more of an aesthetic turn. All of these turns are responses to the dualist tendencies of Western thinking that keep the self away from its world and in distant pursuit of realities beyond. Buddhism, especially the Mahayana trend of Zen, prefigures Deep Ecological responses to the problematic worldview we have come to inherit through the mind games of our philosophical predecessors. The Buddha sat in *zazen* and came face to face with the Otherness of his concepts and their play in creation of reality. His enlightenment, his awakening, is the unveiling and disclosure of the darkness of the all too human conceptual slumber.

Just as Nietzsche's "Death of God," which is his prerequisite and necessary condition for the realization of becoming over-and-over-again the *Übermensch*, or Overhuman, the Buddha realized that even his yogic spiritual training was a last-holding-on-to a concept—the concept of enlightenment itself, of finding God, realizing one's Brahman nature, becoming God oneself instead of being an inter-being with all the other gods and goddesses found in this world of stones, plants, insects, animals, and their earthly celestial landscapes. As the *Diamond Sutra* reminds us time again, the Buddha taught nothing and taught us the emptiness of concepts and the emptiness of their referents.

The Buddha's sitting meditation brought the many manifestations of his demons in the various forms of Mâra's voluptuous daughters, an army of deformed pot-bellied thousand mouthed devils, and then Mâra himself, but Buddha Sâkyamuni remained motionless and unattached to the events that swarmed around him. How could the Buddha remain untouched by the demonic forces around him, and then continue his meditation for yet another seven days? He realized the specific conditions of all living beings, the causes of their rebirths, and throughout all time and within the world he beheld beings living, dying, and transmigrating to the new receptacles of future lives. In other words, Buddha Sâkyamuni attained enlightenment because he had a direct experience of reality, a reality that was beyond the reality delivered by the deceptive overlay of concepts. He entered a direct communion

with reality, which was even beyond the concept of "unity" itself. He entered reality in itself, or *tathata*.

The Buddhist analysis of phenomena continued long after the Buddha's death. What would remain constant throughout Buddhism's analysis of reality, and find its greatest expression in Zen, would be the emphasis on the world of pure experience. This world of pure experience can be achieved only by going beyond concepts and the dualistic reality promulgated by conceptualization. The Zen practitioner enters into direct communication with reality and the objects of reality. Our senses present us with a direct experience of the world. For example, when we have a cup of tea, we have a direct experience of tea if we are mindful of drinking tea. This experience of tea is not a conceptual experience of tea. Later, when we reflect on the experience of tea and define the experience of drinking the tea as being distinct from our other experiences such as driving a car, that original direct experience, which includes an appreciation of the warmth and other qualities of the tea's blend and preparation, is rendered conceptually. At the moment of tasting the tea, there is no distinction between the taste of the tea and the drinker of the tea. Only when a distinction is made between subject and object does the experience disappear (Hanh 1994, 88). This experience, however, is presupposed by a more fundamental truth of Buddhism—the Buddha's awakening to interdependent arising.

In Buddhism, *paticca sumuppada*, or interdependent arising, means that everything is constantly changing, impermanent, self-less; nothing exists separately by and of itself and every thing is conditioned by other things (Koller, 151). This is the idea of *sunyata*, or emptiness. As the Madhyamaka philosopher Nagarjuna says: "Emptiness is interdependent arising" (24.18 *Mulamadhymakakarika*). From the Buddhist perspective, the affirmation of a separate reality of identity—the byproduct of conceptualizing after experience—that is not subject to these conditioning forces is the greatest illusion and cause of *dukkha*, or trouble, and by extension, suffering; the affirmation of the not-self (*anatman*), that is, the self as an interbeing that emerges from the dynamic play of the conditioning forces of an unfolding world is to eliminate *dukkha* and affirm life. This affirmation of life is to reintegrate continually and immerse the self into the dynamic structure and flow of the spontaneous, self-generating, organismic process continuum we call world. To borrow a term from Merleau-Ponty, this world is really an *interworld* (*intermonde*) (*Phenomenology of Perception*, 404). The interworld is continuous and dynamic. In its wholeness, the interworld is the only reality

where everything "from to rock to heaven . . . is holistically integrated at each level of complexity"² (Tu 1989, 70).

Buddhism's Aesthetic Turn to an Interworld

Sutras such as the *Diamond* and *Heart* are designed to bring practitioners into direct contact with reality and entail defeating the seductive power of allowing concepts to separate them from reality. Madhyamaka philosophy, especially Nagarjuna's, is particularly important in the rejection of the conceptual. As David Kalupahana writes:

For [Nagarjuna], as for all the later Buddhist schools, a 'concept' was something that conceals or covers the real nature of the object. Hence, the earlier term *sammuti* [literally "to think together," "agreement," or "convention;" this is the word that is used in earlier texts for "concept"] appears as *samvrti*, which has a completely different connotation in the developed metaphysic. The new term is derived from *sam* and *vr*, 'to cover', 'to obstruct'. The term *samvrti*, unlike *sammuti*, would therefore mean 'something that covers'. A concept in this sense, would be like an outer shell that covers the kernel, the real nature. The so-called Ultimate Reality (*paramârtha*) comes to be concealed by the 'concept' (*samvrti*). It is revealed to the individual only on the development of the highest intuition. Thus, reality cannot be resolved into concepts; it is indescribable or indefinable (*anirvacaniya*, a new term coined by later Buddhists). The noumenal or the 'thing-in-itself' (*tattva*) cannot be grasped by concepts. (135)

The term *sammuti*, the earlier term employed for concepts by Buddhists, also points to the interference of concepts in our encounter with reality. Our conventional ways, themselves products of conceptual rarefactions of our experiences, motor "the manner in which each individual, driven by his inclinations, attempts to see or grasp *what he wants to see or grasp* with the concepts" (Kalupahana, 134). The "agreement" of what constitutes reality at this conventional level ultimately inhibits our ability to encounter directly its real nature.

Although theoretically dependent on Nagarjuna's philosophy, many Buddhist practitioners do not employ his dialectical analysis. As Thich Nhat Hanh says about Zen Masters: "their words, acts, and looks also have the

function of combating concepts, of producing crises, and of creating conditions that arrive at releasing the vision of reality" (Hanh, 125). It is well known that Zen masters have developed numerous strategies to assist practitioners to have direct perceptions of reality unhindered by our conceptual overlay. The Zen experience of directly perceiving abolishes our dualistic tendencies. Unlike the process of conceptualizing, the act of perceiving contains both the subject and object simultaneously. As Thich Nhat Hanh says:

When the eye is opposite a flower, one can say that the eye and the flower are dharmas that can exist separately; *but when "seeing" occurs, the subject and object of the seeing exist at the same time in sensation.* The flower is not the object seen. The object of seeing is found in the seeing itself, and cannot exist independently of the subject of the sensation . . . when sensation occurs, the first phase, which is contact between the physiological phenomenon (eye) and the physical phenomenon (flower), has already passed in order to arrive at the second phase, which is the sensation (seeing). (Hanh, 129)

When this experience is experienced without the discrimination of subject/object, the reality of *tathata* is revealed. This experience is essentially an aesthetic one.

The development of the dualistic relation between self/world, or between subject/object, is at the root of problems in environmental ethics and the ecological crisis. Although apparently distinct in nature, what I am suggesting is that Buddhism's posture of non-duality is an aesthetic turn toward the inter-being of all things in an intersubjective world. This posture in many ways prefigures current thinking in developing an ecological philosophy. The doctrine of *paticca sumuppada*, usually translated as dependent origination, is really a doctrine of interdependence, that is, a doctrine of the interbeing of all things. *Paticca sumuppada*, which is found at the core of all schools of Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism, denies the ontological status of any separate, distinct being defined in separate, independent, essential, or substantial terms. All Being is inter-being. Even the human self is not really a self from this perspective. The self is really a not-self, that is, a being that emerges from and is conditioned constantly by other beings in an intersubjective field, an interworld, of all inter-being.

In his *Learning from Asian Philosophy*, Joel Kupperman argues persuasively for the ethical importance of the value of including self-formation,

and Buddhist thinking on this matter plays some role in his argument. Kupperman argues that the central topic of ethical philosophy should be the development of a self that leads to a life of value. He offers three reasons for this position. His first reason is that the inclusion of discussions on self-formation directly relates to the ways we make our ethical decisions, which are likely related to our previous patterns of making choices. Second, issues of style and nuance are made more visible, and they especially matter in positive acts such as friendship or compassion vis-à-vis negative acts such as murder. Third, issues of value come to the foreground when we move from what has been done to how it is done. This last point, which seems to extend from the second, emphasizes the resulting harmony from ethical choices if they are products of our "second natures" as opposed to the calculative choices based on applications of some utilitarian and deontological approaches that present choices "wrenched out of the context of the agent's character and history" (Kupperman, 6). Although the "contemporary western philosophical common sense" view—as Kupperman calls it—often appeals to ecologists and scientists because it resonates with the way they make decisions, it still suffers from the age-old problems associated with utilitarianism and deontology. More likely than not, ecologists opt for some version of a utilitarian, or cost-benefit analysis, approach that minimizes human impact on the natural environment. This type of analysis yields beneficial results if the right persons are honestly applying the criteria by which results are being measured. Although my intention here is not one of ecological ethical decision making, I follow Kupperman's lead by focusing on the central importance of the self in Buddhism, especially as expressed in the *Diamond Sutra*. I also attempt to follow the Buddha's lead in the *Diamond Sutra* that to use a linear mathematical and calculative model to reach the shore of liberation for all species is akin to arriving precisely at "the number of grains of sand in the Ganges."

In the history of life on our planet, it is now clear to biologists that the early Buddhist insight of interdependent arising has a biological analog in the role of symbiosis. Symbiosis has played a powerful role in triggering emergence in biological systems. Among the millions of specific instances of symbiosis that have affected the evolutionary drama, there are occasional standouts that dwarf the rest in terms of subsequent change unleashed in the world. From the long-ago coalition of bacteria-like cells that crossed the threshold of development leading to all higher life forms to only yesterday when humans tamed horses, these major symbiotic events have transformed the world in ways Darwin never considered. Ecologists have long known that mutualism is more significant in ecological relationships than competition. As the ecologist Frank Golley has noted: "It seems easier to tease apart

interactions into competitive pairs than to synthesize cooperation among pairs" (Golley, 182). For example, to enter the nature of the wolf is to realize the "mind" of a prudent predator that "feeds only on animals that would die under other circumstances and that contribute little to the productivity of the prey population" (Golley, 201). The prudent predator shares his prey with those who are more adapted at handling the next stage of the carcass such as vultures and scavenging eagles. These predator-prey relationships have evolved together—from the arising of this, that arises—in mutual interdependence that gives rise to each other's presence in the world. Their relationship is prudent, appropriate, and is the wisdom of the world's unfolding—the necessary condition of their being.

The self of Buddhism orients itself beyond itself to the world of other selves as is evidenced by its emphasis on *karuna*, or compassion. This sense of compassion is especially extended to the world of nature and does not allow the human perspective any privileged position, as it is usually given in the Western intellectual tradition. Hence, perspective and the overcoming of the human-centered view are crucial for understanding the place and role of the human individual and the human species in the greater universe.

Relinquishing the human perspective for a larger, greater, and more holistic viewpoint, that is, the perspective of the "world system of one thousand million worlds . . . that is taught as a no-system" (*Diamond Sutra* Chapter 30b, Conze, 65) has a validity and importance that science clearly recognizes in the contemporary era. Darwinian biology, quantum physics, chaos theory, and the science of complexity represent some of the best examples of this forfeiture of the anthropocentric, deity-directed view of the universe and the subsequent byproducts of this view such as intelligent design. This view is primarily a Western one that sanctions a higher reality, a transcendent god, and an immortal soul. Ironically, chaos theory is a recent western idea that moves away from this Western tradition. Chaos theory and its recent outgrowth, the science of complexity, focus on the self-organization, or self-creation of systems (of systems within systems), and their evolution. The subsequent, and logical, step to take from these approaches is one of inclusiveness and value, the participation of all elements and units in the structure and function of a system and the environmental value of the system's well being, including potential for evolution. Buddhism (and Daoism) focused on these aspects of natural systems long before chaos theory. Chaos theory and the science of complexity, however, open a new window on the holistic,

participatory universe, and we discover a greater, even central, role of the self's participation in and the shaping of the natural and social world.

Analyses of chaos and complexity provide us with a new language for interpreting and giving meaning to the worldview of Buddhism. What I am suggesting here is similar to what John Culliney and I have suggested about the self in Daoism where we argue that the self is potentially a *fractal self*, one that potentially can seamlessly interweave its being with affinitive systems, or attractors in the world, whose organization is now recognized to transcend classic dimensionality (*Zygon* 34,4). The so-called fractal organization of nature refers to an apparent universal geometry of form and process elucidated primarily by the mathematician Benoit Mandelbrot in the 1960s and 70s (Mandelbrot 1977). Although others had earlier glimpsed the fractal principle and discovered discrete examples of its application, Mandelbrot proved that intricate, repetitive patterns appeared in the universe over a vast range of scale and that nature created structure in a continuum of seamless dimensionality. No longer could the world be accurately simplified by reference to linear coordinates and whole-number dimensions. For example, between a two-dimensional surface and three-dimensional space was an infinity of intermediate form—"world system of one thousand million worlds"—as evidenced in the structure of a sponge or a cloud.³³ Much of this language is taken from our article in *Zygon*

Buddhism too realized the seamless dimensionality in nature, which we suggested was *dao*, and sees the self, the person, a living-being, and a life-span reality as a river forever flowing. Subhuti is asked in Chapter 30 "if a daughter or son of a good family were to grind the 3,000 chiliocosms to particles of dust, do you think there would be many particles?" And he gives the Buddha the following correct answer: "If chiliocosms are real, they are a compound of particles under the conditions of being assembled into an object. That which the Tathagata calls a compound is not essentially a compound . . . Subhuti, what is called a compound is just a conventional way of speaking. It has no real basis" (Hanh 1992, 24). The *anatman* has an inherent affinity and fractal congruence with nature, which means it has a natural fit or perfected flair or fluency within an affinitive system, or the particular portion of nature to which it emerges, because it has no basis except its systemic basis of the flow of ever interacting particles. Hence:

All composed things are like a dream,
 A phantom, a drop of dew, a flash of lightning.
 That is how we meditate on them,
 That is how to observe them. (Hanh, 25).

In Buddhist thought the self is fully immersed in the structure and flow of nature. This accords with the principle of self-organization in the science of complexity, because the process has its own sense, its own intelligence, in which the self does not stand outside the system and participates within the system. A process that generates pattern (order from chaos) within a system, or part of the world, proceeds as if there were a ghost in the machine, a spirit emerging from the interactions of the system's (or world's) integrated parts. This emerging spirit, or the tendency of nature to develop an integrating structure that directs its entire system, is not recognized as much of a focus for discussion in Buddhist philosophy as it is in Daoism.⁴ From the Buddhist perspective, the realization of the process as reality and its corresponding compassion vis-à-vis essentialist conceptions of reality is enough for liberation. And this vision is wholly antithetical to the concept of mastery over a system or of conquering nature.

To understand the (not) self as an interbeing emerging from the dynamic play of the conditioning forces of the unfolding world is to eliminate *dukkha*, and affirm life and death, not just one's own life and death, but all death and life as being identical in their difference. This affirmation of life and death is achieved by extending ourselves through compassion. This compassion is not the same as pity—the feeling of being superior through our pious egos, and by placing the human in the role of steward over the inferior, over the animal, the plant, the insect, and the rock. As Dogen says, "to cultivate-authenticate all things by conveying yourself [to them] is delusion" (Kasulis, 90). To extend ourselves through compassion, however, is to suffer the *pathos* of life and death with all of the world's beings; it is to become an interbeing where we are held together by our subjectivity in the ecumenical web among other subjectivities such as animals, insects, plants, and stones. There is no one, and there is nothing except interdependent arising, constantly changing, impermanent, self-less, with nothing existing separately by itself without being conditioned by other things. This is the idea of *sunyata*, or emptiness, a lesson learned from animals, insects, plants, and stones. Although we are beginning to visit these perspectives scientifically and sociobiologically, our visits are without spirit, without the spirit of Buddha Sâkyamuni who attained enlightenment because he had a direct experience

of reality. Through this direct communion he became an inter-being with all the other beings found in the earthly celestial landscapes of stones, plants, insects, animals.

The *Diamond Sutra* (*Vajracchedika*) is perhaps the best Buddhist text to “cut through the illusion” of essentialism. Just as a diamond, the text is characterized by its hardness, by its difficulty to be penetrated by conventional and analytic ways of knowing. This sutra is in reality a *koan*, a meditative exchange of questions and answers that are used to break down the duality of our more discursive and conceptual way of thinking and knowing the self and the reality of its world. The *Diamond Sutra* gives us the answer why the Buddha remained “sitting” for seven days even after his enlightenment. This text reminds us in just about every verse to abandon our attachment to concepts as we attempt to cut through illusion and arrive on “the shore of liberation” (Chapter 21). A type of wisdom different from the *philosophia* of Socrates and Plato, a type of wisdom that is not a wisdom of the rational soul, is needed to penetrate the truth of the reality of the human being and the ecology of its home. This wisdom is the wisdom of the no-self, the *anatman*; this wisdom is *prajñā-parimīta*, a surpassing and perfect wisdom where the self is realized as an *interexisting* being with other beings through the great expanse of earthly time.

Prajñāparimīta is considered in the *Diamond Sutra* as being beyond both the knowledge of our ordinary experience, where we remain less than fully present in the experience, as well as being beyond the constructions of our conceptual and theoretical understanding of the world and our place in it. Both conventional truth and constructed knowledge are impediments in reaching “the shore of liberation” for oneself and all beings, sentient or otherwise. The wisdom of *prajñāparimīta* is a surpassing way of knowing that is related to the fundamental truth of Buddhism—*paticca sumuppada*. The koan-like exchanges in the *Diamond Sutra* are all underwritten by the truth of interdependent arising. Subhuti asks, “If sons or daughters of good families want to give rise to the highest, most fulfilled, awakened mind, what should they rely on and what should they do to master their thinking?” (Hanh, 3). The Buddha’s immediate reply postpones his answer that occurs a bit later in Chapter 3: “this is how the bodhisattva mahasattvas master their thinking. However many species of living beings there are—whether born from eggs, from the womb, from moisture, or spontaneously; whether they have form or do not have form; whether they have perceptions or do not have perceptions; or whether it cannot be said of them that they have perceptions or that they do not have perceptions, we must lead all these

beings to the ultimate nirvana so that they can be liberated. And when this innumerable, immeasurable, infinite number of beings has become liberated, we do not, in truth, think that a single being has been liberated" (Hanh, 4). This last statement appears nonsensical because it violates Aristotle's law of contradiction, but this is precisely its intent—to shake the mind to look deeper, to force the mind to gain insight, to affect a seeing into.

In other words, we need to look to the contradiction to find truth. The lesson is not given straightforwardly as conclusions are given in well-reasoned arguments, but the lesson is the moment at which the lesson is actually taught. Subhuti asks, "Why is this so? If, Subhuti, a bodhisattva holds on to the idea that a self, a person, a living being, or a life span exists, that person is not an authentic bodhisattva" (Hanh, 4). The entire idea of a self—that concept that abstracts the bundle of *khandhas* into a being—is dismissed here, and long with it the tendency that gives rise to such a notion is shown to Subhuti as being illusory. This tendency is checked further in the next chapter when it is announced that the Buddha bodhisattvas "do not rely on any concept when [even] practicing generosity" because attachment to the idea of generosity presupposes and implies the presence of the idea of a self. Even the body, which is addressed in Chapter 5, is dismissed as nothing more than a momentary configuration in the expanse of time: "When the Tathagata speaks of bodily signs, there are no signs being talked about" (Hanh, 5).

The Buddha's injunction against "being" is an affirmation of a fluid field of interrelated, interdependent, and continually changing relations strung together only by their orderly presencing; this presencing is a "snapshot" of the flow of reality, a memento of the experience in reality that is held out over the coursing of reality's time. Practical knowledge, or everyday ordinary commonsensical knowledge, of the concrete particulars of this fluid order is possible, and even desirable when arranging human affairs, but has deleterious effects when we confront our ecological concerns. To borrow a Daoist phrase, "in grasping, one loses it." In other words, we can easily believe our mental constructions of separate, independent, and ontological entities and be enticed by the convenience of our human hubris because most of us just need, or are willing, to get through our daily lives in the most convenient ways possible. However, the Buddha's injunction against being is the first level of liberation not only for the particular individual, but also for all "beings who need to be led to the ultimate nirvana so that they can be liberated" (Hanh, 4). The Bodhisattva is enjoined to liberate them as well. To liberate others is to

begin defining oneself relationally and weaving oneself back into the ecumenical web of life. Being separate from the web of life is the source of *dukkha*, suffering for humans, and a lot of trouble for all other species.

To understand the reality of things in terms of separateness and disparity is not to see things as they truly are (*yathabhutam*); we are held captive by self-inflicted and socially perpetuated ignorance (*avijja*) that amplifies and results in greater and greater levels of attachment to the reality of Being. This ignorance ultimately creates besotted individuals, separates us from others, causes alienation of the human species from the forces to which we too are subject, and prevents us from liberating the intimacy we could, and should, share with all "beings." From the Buddhist perspective, and this perspective is not different from the ecological one, this misguided conception of things is the first level of personal liberation and responsibility; it is a necessary step in affecting a change in our relationship with the natural world. To see the self as empty, that is, as lacking in substantiality as a separate self-existing entity, is the first move to removing attachment and moving toward a more enlightened posture in the world. The Buddha's insight of *anatman* is a first phase of realizing the essential and central insight of interdependent arising. Unlike the more implicit overtures to interdependence and interrelated arising and the *inter-existing* of all things found in East Asian philosophies, the Buddha's central insight of enlightenment is made explicit in *paticca-samuppada*. This doctrine introduces the pronouncement of the interrelatedness and interdependence of all things that will be later phrased in the *Heart Sutra* as the emptiness of all things. In the *Heart Sutra*, the claim is not that things do not really exist; the claim is a stronger proscription against the idealization of reality. The point of the *Heart Sutra* is to make clear once and for all that the primary reality is one of interdependent arising and this is how things actually are. That is, all things exist only in relation to each other in a complex arrangement that has an internal impetus to order itself in a variety of ways. To miss the cloud in the piece of paper is to lack the eye of wisdom that has "gone beyond" (*prajñāparamita*) or as John Koller has so nicely put it: "If we see the kernel of wheat in terms of interdependent arising, then we see that it is not just wheat, existing by itself. We see that it is arising, it absorbed the warmth and light of the sun, the nutrients of the earth, the moisture of water, and so forth. And the soil, energy from the sun, and water that make up this kernel have been recycling through existence for billions of years" (Koller 198). All things then are microcosmic individuated orders of a greater systemic proclivity that gives rise to the larger reality we call nature. This emergence of individuated orders—animals, plants, insects,

stones, and persons—is the definitive outcome of complexity. From this perspective, the natural world is not a creation made *ex nihilo*, but is an emergent possibility that evolves from the interaction of a variety of interactive components. And the Buddha is clear in the *Heart Sutra* when he stresses that these components do not at first exist as separate entities or particles (as was held in the Sarvastivada view) and then engage in some dynamic play of reality as permanent separate entities in search of relationships. Perhaps this was the last temptation of Siddhartha Gautama before becoming a Buddha. This is to live in Buddhist bad faith, and to succumb finally to attachment. *Paticca-samuppada*, the primary and singularly most important insight of Buddhism, becomes secondary in this misguided outlook. There is no self-existence at any level. This radical claim is presented in the radical language of emptiness. Cutting into this emptiness is the task of the *Diamond Sutra*.

In the *Diamond Sutra* Subhuti is put to the test. His test takes the form of *dokusan* found in *Zen* practice when a monk meets privately with the master and engages in questions and answers, but Subhuti's meeting is in front of 1,250 *bhiksus*, or ordained monks. Subhuti's enlightenment is a public matter, because as the *sutra* states the Buddha "always support[ed] and show[ed] special confidence in the *bodhisattvas*" (2). Sometime Subhuti's answers take an odd and illogical form. He has been asked a series of questions throughout the first six chapters where he consistently gives correct answers. But in Chapter 6, he asks, "In times to come, will there be people who, when they hear these teachings, have faith and confidence in them?" (Hanh, 5). This question seems logical enough, especially since he has been all along doing so admirably. The Buddha's reply, however, almost takes the form of a reprimand: "Do not speak that way, Subhuti. Five hundred years after the Tathagata has passed away, there will still be people who enjoy the happiness that comes from observing the precepts." In other words, the legacy of the enlightened dharma shines into the future. The self, consistently dismissed as just an idea, is here defined as extending beyond itself into future time because everything, including the self, is interrelated within the momentary matrix of interdependent relations as well within the expansive reaches of time. Dogen seems to have the *Diamond Sutra* in mind when he later writes "rocks and stones, large and small, are the Buddha's own possessions" ("Bussho" and "Sangai-yuishin" Chapters, *Shobogenzo*) and that "while . . . seeking a teacher, one may "spring out from the earth" and "make nonsentient beings speak the truth" ("*Sansuikyō*" Chapter). Dogen maintains that even those eternally motionless stones are *bussho*; even those beings

without sentience are Buddha nature. Rocks and Stones are, of course, the hardest of earth's beings for us to develop and exercise compassion toward.

The reason even rocks and stones are Buddha-nature is because they too are part of the fluid field of changing relations, albeit their rate of impermanence is clearly slower. For Dogen, Buddha-nature is the experiential presence of impermanence itself. All things are impermanent, and to profoundly experience this reintegration of the self into its eternal fluid field is to find a teacher in what we would call nature, the ultimate reality that includes even nonsentient beings such as stones and rocks. Again when Dogen entitles a chapter of the *Shobogenzo* "Mountains and Waters as Sutras" and writes in another "The sutras are the entire universe, mountains and rivers and the great earth, plants and trees" (*Jisho zammai*), he makes more explicit the Buddha's pronouncements on the nature of the self and the dharma found in the *Diamond Sutra*.

In Chapter 12 of the *Diamond Sutra*, the earth relatedness of the dharma is proclaimed: "Subhuti, any plot of land on which this sutra is proclaimed . . . will be a land where gods, men, and asuras will come to make offerings just as they make offerings to a stupa of the Buddha" (Hanh, 10). And this "sutra should be called *The Diamond that Cuts through Illusion* because it has the capacity to cut through all illusions and afflictions and bring us to the shore of liberation" (Hanh, 13). To cut through the multi-layered illusions perpetuated by the human importance of the mind in treating the human self and its species as special, simply because we are the rational animal, is to make a serious mistake. By defining the human animal out of the fluid field of the Buddha world is to ultimately commit the greatest sin of being "all too human." Even the teachings or the enlightenment of the Buddha cannot be conceived as being separate independent things existing apart because they in themselves cannot capture the fullness of the reality contained within the enlightenment experience or the truths of the *sutras*, which the Zen tradition appropriately understands when it proclaims the *sutras* are best used as toilet paper. Even the attainment of the Arhat is not exempt because "if an Arhat gives rise to the thought that he has attained the fruit of Arhatship, then he is still caught up in the idea of a self, a person, a living being, and a life-span."

Understanding the *Diamond Sutra* in terms of interdependent arising gives presence to the Buddha's enlightenment that we—humans, animals, insects, plants, and rocks—are nothing but a momentary consolidation of the

endless fluid field of reorganizing entities that are subject to nature's tendencies to organize in any number of various ways. All beings in nature express a self-similarity across scale as interactions or interconnections among other beings that may be as variable as atoms forming protein molecules or as people forming institutions and societies. Buddha's realization of this ever changing, impermanent process is the subject of his enlightenment. To willingly find ourselves in such a way is the subject of our challenge to respond more authentically to our natures, to our Buddha-natures, and to the Buddha-natures of those other species whom we share our mutual home. To do so, is to be responsive to the world in which we find ourselves, and to the world from which we emerge.

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NOTES

¹For Dewey, empiricists and rationalists alike believe they are exploring the nature of reality. This belief ultimately issues forth from a psychological need to control nature either through scientific means or an appeal to some transcendent search for absolute and eternal truths. In *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, Dewey states "[t]here was bequeathed to generations of thinkers as an unquestioned axiom the idea that knowledge is intrinsically a mere beholding or viewing of reality—the spectator conception of knowledge" (112). Empiricists, from Dewey's perspective, assumed that for each idea in the mind there is a corresponding object in reality. Rationalists, on the other hand, held that the object of thought itself exists in reality. Both views conceive of the real as being fixed, certain, and static in nature and assume a disparity of mind and nature. These conclusions lead Dewey to his concept of "experience," which connects the human being as an organism to a dynamic environment.

² Tu is thinking here of Daoism, but what he says is applicable to the Buddhist project as well.

³ Much of this language is taken from our article in Zygon.

⁴ *Dao*, or the way of the world: "The Tao constitutes the regulating structure of nature" (Ch'en 1977, 14).