

A MOUNTAIN BY ANY OTHER NAME: A RESPONSE TO KOJI TANAKA

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Chinese (Sino-Japanese) Buddhism in general and Chan (Zen) in particular are very different kettles of fish from Indo-Tibetan Buddhism. The Daoist influence gives it a whole new flavor. Chan certainly inherits a story about emptiness from Indian Buddhism, though. And though it may put a whole new spin on it, we take it that it preserves the structural features about emptiness that generate dialetheias—though substantiating this thought in detail is far too big an undertaking for this occasion.

In his article in this issue, Tanaka takes issue with our view that Dōgen's Buddhism is dialethic. In a paper rich in textual exegesis and in philosophical insight, he comments on four *prima facie* dialethic passages in Dōgen. The first two we ourselves cited in connection with the claim that Dōgen is dialethic.¹ Tanaka argues that the translations of the passages are not correct and that, appropriately translated, the passages are not contradictory. Tanaka argues that the other two passages are not dialethic either. In particular, the word 'not' does not function in its usual way, but is doing something else. The discussion of the fourth passage is combined with a discussion of a fifth apparently dialethic passage, which is used by Garfield and Priest (2009) in connection with Dōgen's account of the stages of enlightenment—though it is not attributed to Dōgen. Again, he argues that the negation should not be understood in its usual familiar way.

In what follows, we will defend our translation of the two passages from Dōgen. We will then discuss what Tanaka has to say about the third and fourth passages. Here, we will largely be in agreement with him. Finally, we will discuss Dōgen's account of enlightenment. This exposes a third important disagreement with Tanaka. While we will agree with Tanaka that the passage cited is not dialethic, we will argue that he has misconstrued Dōgen's account of the stages of enlightenment—our account of this—and is simply looking for dialetheism in the wrong place.

Dōgen, Passage 1

The first passage we cite is from the *Shōji*, which we took from a standard translation,² and it goes as follows:

Just understand that birth-and-death is itself nirvana. There is nothing such as birth and death to be avoided. There is nothing such as nirvana to be sought. Only when you realize this are you free from birth and death.

The *prima facie* dialetheia is obvious. The passage implies that there is such a thing as birth and death, and denies it. Tanaka's translation of the passage is:

Only when you regard [literally, have in mind] birth-and-death just as nirvāṇa and you do not avoid it as birth-and-death and you don't seek it as nirvāṇa, are you free from birth-and-death.

This does not appear dialethic. In particular, the passage mentions neither the existence nor the non-existence of birth-and-death, and therefore does not assert the contradiction that birth-and-death exists and doesn't exist. Rather, Tanaka argues, Dōgen merely urges us to refrain from such cognitive (or intentional) states as avoidance and seeking of birth-and-death.

Tanaka's claim is untenable for two reasons. The first is rather straightforward: his translation of the passage is incorrect, both on lexical and grammatical grounds. The second is philosophical: Dōgen had a good reason to talk not merely about cognitive attitudes toward birth-and-death but also about its existence and non-existence. We first consider the interpretation of the *Shōji* on purely philological terms, and then turn to philosophical issues.

First of all, Tanaka's translation is lexically incorrect. He does not translate the Japanese auxiliary verb *beki* べき that appears in the passage and which means 'have to' in that context. So his translation must be modified to read 'you don't have to avoid it as birth-and-death and you don't have to seek it as birth-and-death.' But the negative form of the auxiliary verb is *bekarazu* べからず or *bekaraji* べからじ, neither of which actually occurs in the text, rather than *bekimonaku* べきもなく or *bekimonashi* べきもなし, which are to be found in the text.

But things get worse. Even if we follow Tanaka in being so unfaithful to the text as to omit the auxiliary verb, his reading cannot be sustained. The negative forms of *itou* いたう, to avoid, and *negau* ねがう, to seek, are *itowazu* いとわず and *negawazu* ねがわず, respectively. Again we cannot find these expressions in the phrase at issue, and without them, Tanaka's reading cannot be sustained.

Indeed there are words for negation in the passage: *naku* なく and *nashi* なし. But what is negated is neither 'have to avoid' (seek) nor 'to avoid' (seek). What is negated? The answer becomes obvious when we attend to the grammatical fact that *mo* も is commonly used as an abbreviation of *monowa* ものは or the phrase best translated as 'thing which is.' The unabbreviated version of this key phrase would then be *itou-beki-monowa-naku*, and this can be straightforwardly translated as 'a thing to be avoided is not,' 'a thing to be avoided doesn't exist,' or 'there is nothing

to be avoided.’ It is then absolutely clear that what is negated is the existence of the object of these cognitive states, that is, birth-and-death, and not the advisability of entering these cognitive states.

We grant that translation is always underdetermined. And of course we grant that it is often not an easy task to translate Dōgen’s language into English. But the passage at issue is rather straightforward. Tanaka’s translation is not a possible reading, but rather an obvious mistranslation. Dōgen literally asserts the existence and non-existence of life-and-death in the passage, and what he asserts is literally contradictory.³

So much for philology. We now turn to the second reason for rejecting Tanaka’s effort to make this text consistent, a philosophical reason. The *Shōji* (Birth-and-death) chapter opens with two quotations of ancient Zen/Chan masters, Kassan and Jōzan. Both of these sentences, or K-J sentences as we call them, refer to birth-and-death:

(1)

生死の中に佛あれば、生死なし

If there is Buddha in birth-and-death, there is no birth-and-death.

(2)

またいはく、生死の中に佛なければ、生死にまどわず

It is also said that if there is no Buddha in birth-and-death, one is not perplexed by birth-and-death.

Dōgen comments on the K-J sentences as follows:

As being words of persons who obtained nirvana, these must not be put aside in vain. So anyone who wants to be free from birth-and-death should make clear the meaning of these sentences.

The whole *Shōji* chapter constitutes Dōgen’s interpretation of, or response to, the K-J sentences. The passage we quoted is thus naturally read as Dōgen’s interpretation of the K-J sentences. Dōgen’s second sentence, “there is nothing such as birth and death to be avoided,” reflects the non-existence of birth-and-death implied by the consequent of (1), while his third sentence, “there is nothing such as nirvana to be sought,” reaffirms the non-existence of Buddha mentioned in the antecedent of (2).

There is no other passage in the *Shōji* that explicitly refers to the existence and/or non-existence of birth-and-death. So, in addition to being philologically unsound, Tanaka’s translation of the passage at issue has an unhappy interpretative consequence: On his reading, Dōgen does not take into account Kassan’s and Jōzan’s remarks about the existence or non-existence of birth-and-death, despite the fact that this chapter is structured as a commentary on them.

Of course, Dōgen is well known for taking Chinese passages and bending them. But there is absolutely nothing in the *Shōji* that suggests that Dōgen is doing this here. Quite the contrary. In the context of the short fascicle, the point of the passage in question is clear, familiar, and is as follows. As Nāgārjuna says,⁴ samsāra (birth and death) is nirvāṇa. Both, then, have no ultimate existence; both are empty, that is, have only conventional existence. Only by realizing this may one form the appropriate

(liberating) attitude toward samsāra (birth and death) and nirvāṇa. We are, then, talking about the existence and non-existence of birth-and-death.

Given this interpretation, it might be thought that Dōgen's contradiction, that birth-and-death both exists and does not, can be interpreted consistently by parameterization: birth-and-death exists conventionally, and does not exist ultimately. But even if one interprets the claim that birth-and-death does not exist as a claim about ultimate reality, this does not remove contradiction. For Zen clearly inherits the idea that ultimate reality, *tathāta*, Buddha nature, is ineffable. To say that nirvāṇa does not exist ultimately is to say that nirvāṇa is not part of it, and so is to talk about the ineffable. So this attempt to avoid contradiction simply jumps out of the frying pan and into the fire.⁵

Dōgen, Passage 2

Let us turn now to the second passage at issue. This is from the *Genjōkōan*,⁶ and we gave it as follows (translation from the same source as the previous quotation):

As (*jisetsu*) all things are Buddha-dharma, there is delusion and realization, practice, birth and death, and there are Buddhas and sentient beings. As (*jisetsu*) the myriad things are without an abiding self, there is no delusion, no realization, no Buddha, no sentient beings, no birth and death.

Dōgen clearly seems to be saying that delusion, realization, et cetera both exist and do not exist. Tanaka contests the translation. The Japanese is:

諸法の仏法なる時節、すなはち迷悟あり、修行あり、生あり死あり、諸仏あり衆生あり。万法ともにわれにあらざる時節、まどひなくさとりなく、諸仏なく衆生なく、生なく滅なし。

The key word in the dispute is *jisetsu* 時節. The word can indeed mean *when*.⁷ Tanaka suggests that this defuses the contradiction, since we then have:

at a time when *A*, *B*; at a time when *C*, $\neg B$.

But this defuses the contradiction only if the times are different. And this is certainly not the case. The contents of both of the *jisetsu* clauses are truths that are accepted, and not in a temporally restricted form, by Madhayama Buddhists in general and Dōgen in particular: all things are Buddha-dharma and the myriad things are without an abiding self. (And, in this case, we cannot even hope to resolve the contradiction by saying that one is a conventional truth and the other is an ultimate truth. Both have the same status.)

We note that unlike *when* in English, the Japanese word *jisetsu* can connote a categorical, rather than a temporally restricted, assertion of the main clause. Dōgen often uses it in this way, for example in such chapters of his *Shōbōgenzo* as *Ikkamyōju*,⁸ and *Uji*.⁹ In other words, the contradictories are not conditioned to any particular occasion or time. There is still, then, a contradiction.

Tanaka notes this possibility. In reply, he contests the translation of the passage “as (*jisetsu*) the myriad things are without an abiding self.”¹⁰ According to Tanaka, this should be “[w]hen I am present together with myriad things.” Several points are relevant here. The first is that the translation is just wrong. Tanaka has mysteriously dropped the word for negation in the original text, *zaru*.¹¹

Next, the context of the passage makes it clear that the point being made is the familiar one that if everything is empty (has no selfhood), then delusion, realization, et cetera, have no ultimate existence—as the standard translation indicates. Finally, and conclusively, this does not escape contradiction. Even if Tanaka’s translation were right, as Dōgen goes on to explain in the *Genjōkōan*, there are times when I am together with the myriad things: in the enlightenment experience. Since the other contradictory holds at all times, there are times when the contradiction is realized.

Tanaka says that the two sentences we have just discussed are part of a triplet in their *Genjōkōan* context, and suggests a connection between the triplet and the three stages of awakening. For the record, there are *two* further sentences, which are:

Because the Buddha Way originally sprang forth from abundance and paucity, there is birth and death, delusion and enlightenment, sentient beings and Buddhas. Moreover, though this is so, flowers fall when we cling to them, and weeds only grow when we dislike them.¹²

Whatever, exactly, these mean, the whole passage appears to us to have nothing to do with the stages of awakening.

The Enlightenment Experience

We turn now briefly to the other two passages from Dōgen that Tanaka discusses. The first of these concerns the enlightenment experience. He cites the following passage from the *Zazengi*:

Sit diligently and then thinking (*shiryō*) becomes not-thinking (*fushiryō*). What is thinking that becomes not-thinking, this is non-thinking (*hishiryō*). That is the art of zazen.

We do not see this as a dialectic passage, so we do not need to contest what Tanaka says here. But for the record, our understanding of the passage is as follows.

First, note that Japanese has three words that are used as negations: *fu* 不, *hi* 非, and *mu* 無. In the vernacular, these are virtually interchangeable. If they are used differently, as writers in the Zen tradition sometimes do, they must indicate terms of art. That is how Dōgen is using the first two here.

We take thinking in the passage in question to refer to deliberate rationalization of some kind. In zazen, one gives this up. There is then not-thinking (*fushiryō*) going on. But thoughts may still be occurring. The aim is to go beyond the experiencing of any (subject/object) thoughts, non-thinking (*hishiryō*). It is the absence of any intentional thought. In the end, this interpretation is not so different from what Tanaka says about the matter: the transcending of self is just a special case of the transcendence of the subject/object distinction.

We do have one significant disagreement with Tanaka here, though. He takes the three *shiryō* to correspond to the three stages of Zen enlightenment. This seems to us to be incorrect. The *hishiryō* state appears to correspond to the second stage of enlightenment. There is nothing here that corresponds to the third stage, as will become clear in due course when we discuss the three stages of enlightenment.

We turn now to the fourth passage from Dōgen that Tanaka discusses. This is from the *Sansuikyo*. Thomas Cleary's translation of the first two sentences is as follows:

An ancient Buddha said, Mountains are mountains, waters are water. This saying does not say that "mountains" are mountains; it says that mountains are mountains.¹³

The second sentence of this would appear to be dialethic. Tanaka defuses the contradiction by enforcing a distinction, as follows:

An ancient Buddha said, "Mountains mountain, waters water." These words don't say that "mountains" are mountains, they say that mountains mountain.

This is a somewhat free interpretation of the text. In the original text (which, of course, contains no quotation marks), the three phrases that repeat the word *mountain* are *exactly* the same, except that the first uses the Chinese character for *mountain* twice, the second uses the Japanese phrase for *mountain* twice, and the third uses one of each. Normally, this would make no difference, and we would indeed have a contradiction on our hands.¹⁴ But in this context, it is natural to suppose that Dōgen intends *some* kind of disambiguation, so we do not. But what this is, to put it mildly, is opaque. Tanaka's gloss is not a standard one; but as to the correct gloss, we offer no opinion. Neither, for our purposes, do we need to do so.

Post Enlightenment

This brings us, finally, to Tanaka's discussion of the three stages of enlightenment in the context of the Ox-Herding Pictures and Garfield and Priest (2009). This discussion starts with another quotation about mountains (not one from Dōgen):

Before I studied Zen, mountains were mountains, and water was water. After studying Zen for some time, mountains were no longer mountains, and water was no longer water. But now, after studying Zen longer, mountains are just mountains, and water is just water.

One might well think that we are in dialethic territory with the second stage: mountains are no longer mountains; but we do not think so. The first sentence refers to the pre-enlightenment stage. In this, one takes statements at their face value, having their conventional truth-values. The second refers to the enlightenment stage, when all claims are rejected. The third refers to the post-enlightenment stage, when we return to where we started, but now things are seen in a different way.

The second phase of the process is modeled on what Garfield and Priest call muification. This is where the standard truth values are mapped to *e*, by an operator they call μ (*mu*). This signals a rejection of conventional truth values, and corresponds to something like *hishiryō* in the zazen experience. In the Sino-Japanese

context, *e* (emptiness, *śūnyatā*) is nothingness (無). And as Garfield and Priest say, being mapped to *e* is a sort of external negation of the sentence involved (unlike the internal negation of the object language). Taking that value is not to be thought of as any kind of endorsement, though. It is a formal way of marking the fact that the claim is to be rejected, just as Tanaka says should be the case in this stage of the enlightenment journey.¹⁵ In particular, it is not an endorsement of a contradiction of any kind. “Mountains are not mountains” signals a rejection of all claims. In particular, *mu* (μ) has *nothing* to do with *mu* (無) as a negative particle in Japanese, and *a fortiori* the contradictions involved in dialetheism. It is not even an object-language connective. It is simply a map from truth values to *e*. Nor, contra Tanaka, do we take the couple ‘Mountains are mountains and mountains are not mountains’ to be true at any stage of the process. *A fortiori*, it is not a dialetheia.

At the end of his article, summarizing his main anti-dialetheic point, Tanaka says:

The [story of the Ox-Herding Pictures] may well imply a contradiction. Yet, I have demonstrated that Dōgen would not be so committed. For Dōgen, contradictions are to be cast off altogether with the very mechanism that allows such contradictions to arise. Dōgen was no dialetheist.

We agree that contradictions, and all other conceptual/linguistic constructions, are to be cast off, as Tanaka says. But this is in the second stage of the enlightenment journey: “muification” occurs, and all statements are rejected. But for us, this is not where the dialetheias are to be found. They are to be found in the first and third stages, where sentences take their standard truth values. And some of them take the dialetheic value *b*, both true and false.

The *satori/kenshō* experience may well be ineffable. But Dōgen, like all other Zen writers, uses language. And he does this because the language tells us something both true and important about reality. Dōgen is no Hamlet, for whom the rest is silence. As the goddess in the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa Sūtra* says, when she reproaches Śāriputra for his silence:

All the syllables pronounced by the elders have the nature of liberation. Why? Liberation is neither internal nor external, nor can it be apprehended apart from them. Likewise, syllables are neither internal nor external, nor can they be apprehended anywhere else. Therefore, reverend Sariputra, do not point to liberation by abandoning speech! Why? The holy liberation is the equality of all things!¹⁶

And some of the things that Dōgen has to tell us about liberation are dialetheic. As to what some of these things are, we stand by what we said in our original article.

Notes

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- 1 – Deguchi, Garfield, and Priest 2008.
- 2 – Tanahashi 1985.
- 3 – We also note that Nishijima and Cross 1994–1999, vol. 4, p. 197, and Cleary 1986, p. 122, translate the passage much the same way as we do.
- 4 – *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* XXV:19.
- 5 – See our discussion of Argument 3 in our reply to Tillemans in this issue of *Philosophy East and West*.
- 6 – Our original article gives the source as the *Shōji*. This is a mistake, as Tanaka observes.
- 7 – We note that Nishijima and Cross (1994–1999) and Cleary (1986) both use this translation.
- 8 – 酔酒の時節 (*jisetsu*) にたまをあたふる親友あり ... たまをかけらるる時節 (*jisetsu*)、かならず酔酒するなり。Whenever you get drunk [= are unenlightened], a close friend [= the Buddha] [secretly] gives you a gem [= Buddhahood]. Whenever you are [secretly] given a gem, you should always get drunk. (Dōgen 1993, p. 203)
- 9 – 仏法をならわざる凡夫の時節 (*jisetsu*) に、あらゆる見解は、有時のことばをきくにおもはく、あるときは三頭八臂となれりき、あるときは丈六八尺となれりき...。In the case of an unenlightened person who doesn't learn Buddhism, all opinions, on the hearing of the word 'Uji (being-time),' sometimes become [acala with] three heads and eight arms, and sometimes become [Buddha who is] sixteen or eighteen feet [in] height. (ibid. p. 238)
- 10 – He connects this with a question of the meaning of negation. However, this is irrelevant. The issue is what the *jisetsu* clauses mean, not their negations. Tanaka gets to negation by introducing an irrelevant contraposition into the argument. Moreover, it is not even clear that *when* does contrapose. (When you took the car it did not break down *en route*. So when the car broke down *en route*, you didn't take it.)
- 11 – We note that Cleary (1986, p. 32), translates this passage as “When myriad things are all not self”; and Nishijima and Cross (1994–1999, vol. 1, p. 33), translate it as “When the myriad dharmas are each not of the self.”
- 12 – Cleary 1986, p. 32.

- 13 – Ibid., p. 99.
- 14 – We presume that Dōgen is referring to a Chinese text, where no such distinction is possible, and the contradiction is bald. What this was, however, we do not know. Nor, therefore, can we discuss whether the original Chinese was intended as dialethic.
- 15 – In the same way, in a contemporary formal logic of truth-value gaps, the mathematics sometimes assigns gappy sentences a third value, *n*. But philosophically this may be interpreted as an *absence* of all truth values.
- 16 – Translation from Thurman 1976, p. 67.

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