Plato and Dōgen on Literature and Enlightenment

CAROL S. GOULD

To compare Dôgen and Plato might seem quixotic, given the vast conceptual and cultural gulf between them. Plato, a fourth century B.C.E. Athenian, has come to exemplify rationalist Western philosophy, whereas Dôgen, a thirteenth century Japanese Buddhist monk, is a key figure in the development of Japanese (Sôtô Zen) Buddhism. Moreover, Plato, a well-known target of Derrida, is an opponent of postmodernism, which he confronts in thinkers such as Protagoras. Thus, Plato accepts the principle of identity as axiomatic and, as an epistemological rationalist, he affirms an isomorphism between human thought and reality. In contrast, Dôgen foreshadows post-modernism by denying the correspondence between language and the world and while also rejecting the logical principle of identity. Dôgen, in a sense, deconstructs the Platonic self and a Platonically meaningful language.[2] Both, within their philosophical worlds, are iconoclasts.

This article shows that despite their different philosophical commitments, Plato and Dôgen are strangely alike. First of all, both are virtuoso litterateurs, known for innovative advances in their respective genres of expression. Each appreciates poetic expression aesthetically and sees it as vital for the path towards enlightenment. At the same time, both deny the value of literature and have predominantly non-literary aims. Paradoxically, each cautions us that literature is dangerous.

The similarities of Plato and Dôgen go beyond their apparent ambivalence about literature. In particular, they reflect on the same foundational philosophical questions, in some cases, resolving them similarly. They disagree, however, about the nature of enlightenment and how to achieve it. For Dôgen, enlightenment requires meditation and attentive sensitivity to the details of daily life, whereas for Plato, enlightenment requires intellectual dialogue, contemplation of abstract concepts, and ignoring quotidian tasks and details. Both thinkers begin from the same point, namely, skepticism about the phenomenal world and the precision of natural language. Where do they veer off in such radically different directions? My focus here is on their views of language and its role in finding enlightenment. By exploring their common terrain, we shall see where they part ways and how each expresses his ideals. Given their shared fascination for poetic language, it is crucial to look first at their identities as authors.

Plato and Dôgen as Writers

Plato's *oeuvre* spans fifty years of creative activity, which many scholars divide in terms of early, middle, and late periods. The early works center on the character of Socrates and, arguably, reveal a philosophical alliance with the historical Socrates. The middle works express the views generally associated with Platonism – the theory of Ideal Forms, confidence in philosophical enlightenment, and a focus on the inseparability of philosophical life and method. The late works express Plato's critique of his Platonism while anticipating Aristotle's philosophy. In representative dialogues of each period – assuming one accepts this taxonomy – one finds abundant use of irony on the part of both Plato as author and Socrates as character. In all of his works, Plato displays a dazzling virtuosity with language, evincing an appreciation for structural clarity and semantic richness.

Much of his work is experimental, as for example, his understated modes of characterization, his layering of narrative voices, and his allusions to earlier and contemporaneous Greek authors. Occasionally, he exhibits a sense of comedy as well as tragedy. In fact, at the end of the night depicted in the *Symposium*, the character of Socrates defends the maverick view that the good tragic playwright must also be able to write comedy, and the good comic playwright must also be able to write tragedy. Plato's *oeuvre* suggests that Plato holds himself to this ideal.

One of the most puzzling aspects of Plato's work arises from its poetic brilliance. Plato argues throughout his creative life that poetry is evil or, at best, a type of sophistry. Aesthetically *good* poetry is especially bad, for it fractures the psyches of the audience members by fostering in them emotionality, aestheticism, and, most dangerously, false beliefs. Plato sees poetry as falsehood, illusion, barely the palest reflection of reality.

Interestingly, however, Plato's dialogues were seminal for the development of philosophical writing in Greek antiquity. Drama, being a form of popular culture, was then a powerful form of political rhetoric. Plato may have been experimenting with the use of drama as philosophical rhetoric, as well as an artistic means of defending his views of metaphysics, logic, epistemology, politics and ethics. The dramatic form allows him to probe modes of reasoning and to show, not simply to describe, the process of acquiring philosophical understanding or, failing that, falling into an abyss of ignorance. Aristotle's extant philosophical writings, while not dialogues, reflect Plato's dialogical practice and dialectical commitments. Plato's influence pervades the Western literary traditions from Aristotle through St. Augustine to the Renaissance and romanticism to the present.

Dôgen's works extend from approximately 1231 to 1253. Many scholars classify his works as falling into early and late periods, which they describe variously in terms of extreme or cataclysmic shifts. Recently, however, Steven Heine has argued cogently – and, apparently leaving no stone unturned – that this taxonomy is flawed.[3] Dôgen, as Heine argues, has a multifaceted *oeuvre*, which reflects a multiplicity of viewpoints, purposes, and literary projects. Heine proposes that, for the sake of understanding Dôgen's thought and writings, it should instead be analyzed in terms of early, middle, and late periods, of around ten years each. The transitions one detects are correlated with events that made different demands on Dôgen as an author, teacher, administrator, and human being. For example, in Dôgen's late period, he produced the *Chiji shingi*, which indicates, Professor Heine explains, "his [Dôgen's] plans for integrating the lay community into the structures of monastic life."[4] Therefore, while some view this work as uninspired, Heine is suggesting that we examine the purpose for which it was written, which is to emphasize to the monks the importance of donors and the best way to interact with them. With this in mind, the *Chiji shingi* becomes a remarkable administrative guide or set of memos.

Dôgen's influence on Japanese letters is as seminal as Plato's is on Western philosophical writing. First of all, Dôgen boldly incorporated the Japanese vernacular (*kana*) into Buddhist writings where one would have expected to see *kanbun*.[5] Moreover, as Heine puts it, Dôgen "was the first disseminator of kôans in the history of Japanese Zen."[6] In disseminating, however, he was not uncritical. Like Plato, Dôgen has a subversive streak so that he unceasingly challenges accepted views and interpretations of his predecessors.[7] His output includes poetry (both *waka* and *kanshi*), meditation manuals, sermons, collections of kôans, and commentaries on kôans. Heine emphasizes that Dôgen, in each of his creative periods, experiments with literary forms and language, and that many of his works show meticulous care is taken in writing and revising.[8]

Dôgen's writings obviously reveal a resourceful, creative mind, ever alert to new demands made on his discourse by the flux of his life. Despite new purposes and circumstances surrounding his work, his output is consistently literary. As Heine remarks about Dôgen's late period:

> It is also important to understand the complexity of the late period in that Dôgen never abandoned his interest in poetic creativity and lyricism, as is reflected in a profuse use of [among other things] the symbolism of plum blossom imagery in various kinds of prose and poetic writings.[9]

Despite Dôgen's care with language, his evident aesthetic sensitivity, and his commitment to poetry, he disparages poetry. As Heine discusses elsewhere,[10] Dôgen describes poetry as "worthless," a waste of precious time, which will impede our progress towards enlightenment. Dôgen thus presents us with a paradox about poetry much like Plato's.

Both writers, however, use paradox in their work, and it is the confrontation with paradox that both poets find necessary for enlightenment. So, one must use poetry in order to abandon it. For both, then, the poet's aesthetic ability is key to engaging the audience members and then to persuading them to reject the aesthetic in order to gain enlightenment. For Plato and Dôgen alike, the poet can guide the audience away from the aesthetic by using paradox.

Poetic Language

Dôgen and Plato both express nihilism about natural language in the literary form (as well as content) they develop. Each shows that enlightenment or philosophical understanding begins in confusion, a confusion which involves knowing that one is confused. Their discourses are designed to bring the reader, student, or dramatized interlocutor to that state of feeling lost. As if to bring the reader to a new level of bewilderment, both use their chosen poetic forms to condemn all poetic expression, occasionally using metaphors of toxicity to describe its effects.

Plato's use of the dialogue form, which he did not invent but certainly brought to a new level of sophistication, reflects his view of perceptual knowledge and the misleading nature of language. Socrates, the usual protagonist, exploits a stunning array of rhetorical tricks, irony, and logical fallacies to reduce his interlocutors' claims to contradiction. The character of Socrates (as opposed to the historical Socrates) embodies one of Plato's chief objections to poetic narratives, namely that they exploit the power of language in order to seduce, betray, and deceive. In Plato's *Symposium*, the character of Alcibiades, describes Socrates as "outrageous as a satyr…more amazing than Marsyas, who bewitched with his flute… [except that Socrates] can do the same thing…with mere words." Alcibiades goes on to confess, "Whenever I hear him, my heart throbs and I weep, more than if I were in a religious frenzy" (215e).[11] In the *Laches*, Nicias, a great general, describes Socrates as "entangling" his interlocutors and hanging them out to dry (188a). Socrates' stinging technique becomes somewhat less combative and polemical as Plato's views evolve, but Plato never really abandons it, except perhaps very late in his creative life.

In the *Theaetetus*, he distinguishes between a debate or virtuosic display and a conversation or serious joint pursuit of knowledge (167e-168c). The former exploits the ambiguity in natural language, while the latter involves an effort to uncover the philosophical language that mirrors reality. Plato views poetry as a type of rhetoric, referring often to the battle between philosophy and rhetoric, or between philosophy and poetry. This battle between poetry and philosophy is one battle in the war between the (anti-) metaphysics of particulars and one of universals, or between nominalism and realism. The dialogues present both literary and logical arguments against the fundamental reality of perceptual particulars.

Turning to Dôgen, he did not invent the kôan, but brought it from China in order to adapt it to Japanese Zen Buddhism.[12] Dôgen comments on and refines the kôan, which is an apparently illogical but tautly constructed form of discourse. He offers novel interpretations of traditional Chinese kôans, bringing to mind the Platonic Socrates' deft, irreverent interpretations of traditional philosophical arguments and literary passages. The kôans deal with simple, concrete cases, and lead one to a point of utter confusion, which is not resolved explicitly in the discourse.

Plato rhetorically leads us beyond the words and texts to increasingly abstract levels of understanding until we reach the limits of language, and, all being well, have a rationally intuitive grasp of the Forms. Plato takes it as axiomatic that the knowing self is distinct from what is known. Numerical plurality is therefore real for Plato. Dôgen rhetorically makes us look closely at the world of particularity so as to intuit the oneness and fluidity of reality and the illusion of the separateness of our egos. He therefore denies the duality between consciousness and the object.

The Phenomenal World

Dôgen and Plato both caution that we are easily seduced by appearances, of which natural language is a part. They offer similar arguments for their mistrust of the senses. In *Genjôkôan*, Dôgen refers to the perspectival basis of perceptual unreliability, such that a shift in perspective changes the content of appearances:

> When you ride in a boat and watch the shore, you might assume that the shore is moving. But when you keep your eyes closely on the boat, you can see that the boat moves.[13]

And, Dôgen states again :

> When you sail out in a boat to the middle of an ocean where no land is in sight, and view the four directions, the ocean looks circular, and does not look any other way. But the ocean is neither round nor square; its features are infinite in variety.[14]

In many of his dialogues, Plato articulates similar concerns about the perspectival nature of sense data. In Plato's attack on poetry in Book Ten of his *Republic*, he refers to the well-worn example of the straight stick, which appears bent when immersed in water. It is only by measurement that we can judge whether the stick is bent. Therefore, because we have no *perceptual* criterion for privileging one perspective over another and sense perception tethers us to *some* perspective, perception cannot be a reliable source of knowledge.

Plato argues expansively against the thesis that perception is knowledge in his *Theaetetus* (153a-164b), offering among other objections, versions of the dream and madman arguments that we find in Descartes. Plato points out that we often experience perceptual error, as for instance, when we perceive a person in a dream, only to awaken and realize that the person does not exist.

Plato reasons that objects of knowledge must be permanent, for knowledge itself is certain and non-changing. But, he argues, objects perceived by the senses are constantly changing. Therefore, if we assume that perception is knowledge, the things we perceive as real are constantly becoming something else. Thus, the endurance of perceptible things is an illusion. Permanence exists only in the transcendent realm of the Platonic Forms, which we grasp through rational apprehension. Plato concludes that enlightenment requires one to transcend the realm of sense perception and to rely on reason, eventually to grasp Being by means of rational intuition.

After expressing their shared distrust in sense perception, Plato and Dôgen part ways. Plato argues that rational apprehension is non-perspectival, whereas Dôgen rejects that. As we shall see, Dôgen does not allow for this because he is less optimistic than Plato that language has a logical foundation. Given his belief that rational insight is non-perspectival, Plato aspires to what Thomas Nagel calls a "view from nowhere," a god-like, purely rational standpoint, which constitutes enlightenment.

Dôgen accepts that nothing is permanent, except the principle that everything is in constant flux. All mental activity, for Dôgen, is perspectival. His refusal to go beyond the senses shows his kinship with the empirical and pragmatic traditions. Dôgen denies it is possible for anyone to have a "view from nowhere."[15]

Natural Language as Illusory

How does perceptual illusion undermine natural language, which both philosophers believe misleads the un-evolved or "un-awakened" to take words at their face value? On first consideration, words refer to things in the world. Moreover, in order for us to use language to communicate, the meanings of terms must be relatively stable (allowing that meaning transforms non-arbitrarily as social linguistic conventions change). Because things in the phenomenal world do not remain the same over time, the referents of words cannot be stable.

That is, both Plato and Dôgen deny that the principle of identity holds for the perceptual world. Both see perceptual things as, by nature, in constant flux and having no fixed properties at any one time. A thing's phenomenal properties are dependent on the mind perceiving them. In the *Genjokôan*, Dôgen expresses this:

> When you sail out in a boat to the middle of an ocean where no land is in sight, and view the four directions, the ocean looks circular, and does not look any other way. But the ocean is neither round nor square; its features are infinite in variety. It is like a palace. It is like a jewel. It only looks circular as far as you can see at that time. All things are like this.[16]

Plato articulates the same point in his *Symposium*, among other places:

> Although…we assume a man is the same person in his dotage as in his infancy, and we call him the same, every bit of him is different, and he is constantly becoming a new man, while the former man is ceasing to exist, as you can see from his hair, his flesh, his bones, his blood, and all the rest of his body (207d).

Dôgen and Plato, then, agree that the principle of identity does not describe the phenomenal world.

They part ways, however, as to whether we should reject this principle *tout court* and adopt instead a principle of universal flux. For Dôgen, one is enlightened when one realizes that flux is the only permanent, universal principle, whereas for Plato, one is enlightened when one sees that this principle does not apply to the truly real. That is, for Plato, the enlightened one, or philosopher, grasps the permanent, transcendent Forms. Because, Plato contends, a person can awaken to the Forms, the human soul must be as real and enduring as the Forms themselves.[17] Plato thus maintains that both the human self and the world of the Forms conform to the law of identity – that is, Forms and souls remain the same over time.

Regarding the question of personal identity over time, Dôgen disagrees with Plato. What the enlightened grasp, for Dôgen, is that the self is in flux, just as Plato maintains that the human body is. In *Genjôkôan*, Dôgen says:

Just as firewood does not become firewood again after it is ash, you do not return to birth after death. This being so, it is an established way in Buddha-dharma to deny that birth turns into death. Accordingly, birth is understood as no-birth. It is an unshakable teaching in Buddha's discourse that death does not turn into birth. Accordingly, death is understood as no-death. Birth is an expression complete this moment. Death is an expression complete this moment. They are like winter and spring. You do not call winter the beginning of spring, nor summer the end of spring.[18]

David Loy has interpreted this passage as shedding light on Dôgen's view of the self:

Because life and death, like spring and summer, are not *in* time, they are timeless. And if there is no one non-temporal who is born and dies, then there are only the events of birth and death....then there is no real birth and death. Such is the consequence of the nonduality between me and that most uncomfortable attribute of all, "my" birth/ death.[19]

Dan Lusthaus, addressing this same image, remarks:

No thing (i.e., permanent essence/self) passes from tree to firewood to ash. Each moment is a unique, impermanent configuration….No self "transforms" from one thing to another, no permanent substratum violates impermanence. Each thing sheds its "self" each moment, its "self" being its momentary configuration as what it is and its relation with everything else. substratum violates impermanence.[20]

For Dôgen, if the permanent self is an illusion, then indexical terms like "I" or "you" become illusory, for they suggest that when we use them, they refer to specific enduring individuals with attributes. There is neither a referent that persists through time, nor a subject with real, distinguishable properties.

Dôgen detects another problem in natural language. He says in *Genjokôan*, "To carry yourself forward and experience myriad things is delusion."[21] This suggests that plurality or duality is illusory; and so reality is monistic. Therefore, linguistic terms, of which there are many, fail to refer to real things.

Plato himself faces a similar problem. He inherited a metaphysical monism from Parmenides, who argues that plurality is impossible because to say "x is not y" implies that x includes non-being (in its not being y). Plato tackles the argument and solves the problem differently: he offers a theory of reality consisting of unchanging, eternal elements of reality, each of which is self-sufficient. This is his well-known theory of Forms. For Plato, there is an ideal, conceptual language, with one – and only one – term for every Form. The natural language used in common parlance is messy, ambiguous, and misleading. Plato alludes to this philosophical language in his *Republic* and *Cratylus*. One of the philosopher's goals is to uncover this language through rigorous conceptual analysis.

Both Plato and Dôgen, then, disparage natural language because of its relation to the sensory world. The starting point for enlightenment, for both, is seeing how imprecise and deceptive ordinary language can be. Both believe further that the initial step requires a willingness to confront paradox, and this is found, as we see above, most clearly in their respective poetic forms.

The crucial difference is that Plato, starting from his rationalist foundation, infers that natural language must be concealing the elegant ideal language. Dôgen, on the other hand, sees natural language as a dynamic system with no reference to permanent meanings. More precisely, Dôgen sees language as a cultural artifact that gives shape to meaning through its usage. As Thomas Kasulis tells us:[22]

Zen suggests that meaning is a construction out of emptiness (*mu*). Yet…meaning is not an arbitrary construction. It arises out of the contextualizing of the rawly given….[it] takes form in the interplay between the possibilities within the experiencer and within the givenness.[23]

Dale Wright fleshes out this hermeneutical idea of language in Zen thought:

Language is far more than a tool for…expression and communication. The language that the Zen master "uses" to teach his students would also be what he is teaching. Learning "Zen" would depend upon learning Zen language and the appropriate distinctions built into it…Language is not a "veil" preventing vision; it is a "window" which opens vision.[24]

The ambiguity and indirection of poetic language make literature well suited for contemplative thought. Dôgen wants us to grasp the contradictions within the practice of natural language without trying to fit them into a logically consistent system.

Enlightenment and Desire

Not surprisingly**,** Plato and Dôgen disagree over the goal of knowledge, though interestingly, not its nature. Both believe the path to knowledge or enlightenment is an arduous process which requires transcending one's own limited perspective and desires. Plato describes this by means of a vertical metaphor of ascent, which Dôgen would reject. Both view enlightenment as an immediate, non-discursive grasping of the nature of things. It is something that one must be led to, for the real cannot be described in language. For Plato, apprehending a Form is an immediate, un-analyzable epistemic act, an experience of rational intuition. It cannot be expressed in language, but is achieved by the arduous discursive endeavor of dialectic (which Plato depicts variously at different stages in his development). To appeal to the metaphor of the veil, philosophical dialectic is a process of uncovering. In Socrates' speech in Plato's *Symposium*, he explains that when one has grasped the Forms (with the "faculty capable of seeing it"), one is in contact "with truth, not a reflection of truth." Plato classifies people in terms of how they direct erotic energy. In the *Republic*, he draws an invidious contrast between people who love wisdom with those who love the arts, sensuality, or victory. For Plato, enlightenment involves grasping axiomatic truths, whereas for Dôgen, all insight is on a par.

Dôgen also indicates that attaining enlightenment or Buddha nature is a complex enterprise. It involves seeing the insignificance of transitory things of the material world and the emptiness of objects of desire. In *Genjôkôan*, he contrasts the Buddha with a merely sentient being: "Those who have great realization of delusion are Buddhas; those who are greatly deluded about realization are sentient beings."[25] A Buddha is without self-consciousness; he transcends his illusory self so that, "when Buddhas are truly Buddhas they do not necessarily notice that they are Buddhas. However, they are actualized Buddhas, who go on actualizing Buddhas."[26]

A Buddha, realizing that all things are Buddha nature, annihilates the ego. But this is not an achievement that lasts, because there is no stable self. The idea of personal continuity is an illusion. Professor Lusthaus analyzes Dôgen's remark in *Genjôkôan* about "the logic of nothing at all has an unchanging self."

Realization is not something gained and clung to, but something perpetually relinquished,[27] [and] enlightenment itself is neither permanent nor final, nor full disclosure beyond its horizon. Insight and blindness inhabit the same gaze, though the truly blind can't see that.[28]

A Buddha, like Plato's Socrates, knows that he does not know and that he thus must continue his quest. However, *unlike* Plato's Socrates, the Buddha feels compassion for the majority who live with the illusion of understanding. Life for both involves the practice of their chosen methods. For Plato, it is in principle possible for intellectual – and only intellectual – desires to be truly satisfied (*Republic* 9).

Dôgen denies that any satisfaction endures through time, because the self (like everything else) is constantly renewed. The principle of identity, for Dôgen, is false. Thus, as Lusthaus emphasizes, the Buddhist monk must maintain constant vigilance so that at every moment brings a *renewed* awareness.

Surprisingly, the practical implications for daily life are quite similar for both Plato and Dôgen: both paths to enlightenment require a life of simplicity and minimal worldly pleasures. For neither one would this be onerous. In Dôgen's case, however, enlightenment includes experiencing beauty and importance in the simplest aspects of life. With regard to the beauty of the ordinary, Yuriko Saito observes:

> [Dôgen] identifies Buddha nature with grasses, trees, bushes, mountains, rivers….By far the most vivid examples he cites…are a donkey's jaw, a horse's mouth…in short, those objects and phenomena, which are commonly shunned…for being… unpleasant. One of the bounds to be overcome in Zen enlightenment is our "natural" tendency to appreciate the perfect, the opulent, and the gorgeous, while being dissatisfied with the opposite qualities.[29]

For Plato, enlightenment excludes enjoying such experiences. In the *Republic*, for example, Plato speaks with contempt for the "lovers of sights and sounds." If one has cultivated intellectual desires, she will have neither the energy nor interest in the things that satisfy the others. In both cases, however, the enlightened one must re-enter the vortex of material and social affairs. Plato's philosopher must descend to take part in the state, a small sacrifice for the privilege of contemplation. She is motivated to participate not by compassion, but by prudence "in order to avoid being governed by someone worse." Similarly, there are times when a Buddha must enter the fray out of compassion for sentient beings. Plato's ethic, however, is not one of compassion, but rather of self-interest.

Both are sensitive to the realities of embodied human existence. Dôgen's Buddha, however, delights in it by living fully in the moment. As he says, again in *Genjôkôan*, "When you see forms or hear sounds fully engaging body-and-mind, you grasp things directly."[30] Thomas Cleary, in commenting on *Genjôkôan*, remarks that zazen practice is crucial, precisely because of the inadequacy of intellectual knowledge. To attain enlightenment, one must be mindful in the practice of daily life – for instance, cooking, washing, and gardening.

For Plato, such practices are distractions that slow down our ascent. In the *Theaetetus*, Socrates speaks of the focus on daily life as enslavement. In his *Republic*, the members of the enlightened class have no need to deal with quotidian tasks, because the other citizens take care of all worldly concerns, whether they involve cooking, building, gardening or finances. While the philosophers, like the Zen master, must descend to the social realm in order to promote their enlightened self-interest, the philosopher ignores material existence to the extent that embodiment and social reality allows. Concrete reality, in all its fascinating particularity, holds no allure for Plato, who instead finds it a distraction that appeals to the unenlightened. The Platonic philosopher transcends society, even when she is in its midst. Dôgen sees it differently.

To see what underlies their differences, we must look to their notions of desire. For Dôgen, it is never fulfilled, because it is only momentarily satisfied, to arise again. Given the flux of existence, no desire can ever be gratified and put to rest. As Lusthaus emphasizes, for Dôgen, the self is constantly changing. Thus, the idea of fulfilling a desire becomes absurd.

For Plato, however, only *some* kinds of desires are incapable of being gratified. The psyche, Plato maintains, has three parts: appetite, emotion, and reason, with desire (*eros*) residing in all. The desires of appetite and emotion need constant replenishment, because the pleasure we have in satisfying one of these desires (for wine, for sex, for aesthetic pleasure, the company of a friend, etc.) is temporary. Gratifying these desires is like scratching an itch, which brings only momentary relief. The desires of intellect, in contrast, do not need replenishment. Once one reaches a new level of understanding, one remains there until propelled upward by continued desire for more knowledge. Once one reaches the supra-phenomenal realm, there are no perspectival limits. In Book Nine of his *Republic*, Plato argues variously (one might say this is the real subject of his *Republic*) that satisfying intellectual desires is exquisitely pleasurable, far more so than satisfying other desires. Thus, the desires of the intellect are beneficial in driving us to pursue knowledge. Plato does not see us slipping, like Sisyphus, back to where we started, as Dôgen does. In principle, it may be possible to reach an enlightened state of non-desire, for Plato, but only when one has become disembodied. Then the entire realm of Forms becomes transparent.

Plato's theory of desire rests on his dualist metaphysical realism and correlative notion of the self. Ultimately, however, Plato grounds his theory of desire and enlightenment in his acceptance of the principle of identity, which is arguably the groundwork for his entire metaphysical theory. Plato accepts the principle of identity, because he can fathom neither contradiction nor, therefore, a reality that cannot be discovered through rigorous logical analysis. Dôgen's theory rests on what we might call his "anti-metaphysical phenomenalism" whereby everything, including the self, consists of shifting phenomena. His rejection of permanent identity makes it impossible to accept logical necessity. Our concepts thus become based on a pragmatic contingency.

Conclusion

In comparing Dôgen and Plato, we can see their respective commitments more distinctly. This raises new philosophical questions however. For Plato, one wants to know whether reason admits of rational validation, as implied by his commitment to the Principle of Identity. For Dôgen, one wants to know whether one can use rational methods to undermine a rational system. Or, as Thomas Kasulis poses it, "How does the quest for emptiness not degenerate into…nihilism?"[31] Interestingly, for all of their differences, the problems facing both philosopher-poets are problems of self-reference. One might fruitfully speculate that the differences between the two iconoclasts, Plato and Dôgen, reflect the differences in the underlying values of their respective cultures, which each strives to refashion. Their success at doing so has made them representatives of their traditions and evermore fascinating thinkers.[32]

Notes and References

[1] Earlier versions of this article were presented at The Eastern Division Meeting of the American Philosophical Association (December 2005), at the FAU Conference on Asian Philosophy and Ideas (March 2006), and at the Annual meeting of the Rocky Mountain Division of the American society for Aesthetics (July 2006). I thank the members of the audiences for their questions and comments.

[2] For a study that implies a dissenting view, see Kiyotaka Kimura, "The Self in Medieval Japan: Focusing on Dôgen," *Philosophy East and West* 41/3 (1991): 327-340.

[3] See Steven Heine, "The Dôgen Canon: Dôgen's Pre-*Shôbôgenzô* Writings and the Question of Change in His Later Works," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 24:1-2 (1997): 39-85; and his more recent *Did Dôgen Go to China? What He Wrote and When He Wrote It* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

[4] Steven Heine, *Did Dôgen Go to China?*, p. 193.

[5] I am grateful to Professor Heine for discussing this point with me.

[6] Steven Heine, "The Dôgen Canon," p. 55; see also Steven Heine, "Kôans in the Dôgen Tradition: How and Why Dôgen Does What He Does With Kôans," *Philosophy East and West* 54/1 (2004): 1-19.

[7] Steven Heine, *Did Dôgen Go to China ?*, p. 195.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid., p. 224.

[10] Steven Heine, "The Zen Poetry of Dôgen," notes accompanying public lecture, Florida Atlantic University, Boca Raton, April 2004.

[11] Translation from Greek is mine.

[12] Heinrich Dumoulin, James W. Heisig, and Paul F. Knitter, *Zen Buddhism: A History, Japan* (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2005).

[13] Kazuaki Tanahashi, ed., *Moon in a Dewdrop: Writings of Zen Master Dôgen*, trans. Robert Aitken, etc. (New York: North Point Press, 1985), p. 70.

[14] Kazuaki Tanahashi, ed., *Moon in a Dewdrop*, p. 71.

[15] For insight into how this bears on Dôgen's phenomenology of time, see Robert Wicks**,** "The Idealization of Contingency in Traditional Japanese Aesthetics," *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 39/3 (2005): 90-92.

[16] Kazuaki Tanahashi, ed., *Moon in a Dewdrop*, p. 71.

[17] For just how different this is from Plato, see Yuasa Yasuo, *The Body: Toward an Eastern Mind-body Theory*, ed. Thomas P. Kasulis; trans. Nagatomo Shigenori and Thomas P. Kasulis (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), p. 117.

[18] Kazuaki Tanahashi, ed., *Moon in a Dewdrop*, p. 70.

[19] David Loy, "Language Against its own Mystifications: Deconstruction in Nâgârjuna and Dôgen," *Philosophy East and West* 49/3 (1999): 245-260.

[20] Dan Lusthaus, "Dôgen on Water and Firewood: His 'Logic of Nothing at All has an Unchanging Self' in *Genjôkôan*," American Philosophical Association Eastern Division Meeting, New York, December 2005. Quoted with author's permission, p. 8.

[21] Kazuaki Tanahashi, ed., *Moon in a Dewdrop*, p. 69.

[22] Thomas P. Kasulis, "Zen and Artistry," *Self as Image in Asian Theory and Practice*, ed. Roger T. Ames, Thomas Kasulis, and Wimal Dissanayake (Albany: SUNY Press,1998), pp. 357-371.

[23] Ibid., p. 371.

[24] Dale S. Wright, "Rethinking Transcendence: The Role of Language in Zen Experience" *Philosophy East and West* 42/1 (1992), p. 125.

[25] Kazuaki Tanahashi, ed., *Moon in a Dewdrop*, p. 69.

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Department of Philosophy
Florida Atlantic University
Boca Raton, USA