

EMPTY WILLING: CONTEMPLATIVE BEING-IN-THE-WORLD
IN ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS AND DŌGEN

by

PHILIP CHARLES NOVAK

B.A., University of Notre Dame 1972
M.A., Syracuse University, Syracuse, New York 1976

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PREFACE

The peace that descends with the completion of a difficult project brings with it a welling up of gratitude. It is, as the Buddha attests, a blissful mental condition, and one to which he often called his monks' attention: "Let us be grateful and bear in mind what has been done to us; let us not forget even a particle of what has been accomplished on our behalf" (Samyutta-nikaya, II, 272). The greater part of my own grateful remembering must, of course, remain a private matter, for the chain of grace is too long and many-linked to be acknowledged fully in writing. But in the spirit of the Buddha's reminder, I would like to express my thanks to the following persons for the roles they played in helping me to complete this leg of the journey.

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...the Sage
puts himself in the background
but is always to the fore
Remains outside but is always there...
Through his actionless activity all things are
duly regulated...
He is, indeed, a teacher.

CONTENTS

PREFACE	
INTRODUCTION	
I. THE LIVES OF JOHN OF THE CROSS AND DŌGEN	1
II. THE CONTEXT OF CONTEMPLATIVE PRACTICE	14
1. Essence and Realization in John and Dōgen	
2. Cosmic Complicity	
3. Moral Purity and Asceticism	
III. CONTEMPLATION AND EMPTINESS: THE ROLE OF ATTENTION	47
1. The Contemplative Aspirant as a Consciousness- of-Objects	
2. The Metaphor of Purification	
3. Non-discursive Attention as Emptying	
IV. CONTEMPLATIVE INTENTION: JOHN, DŌGEN AND THE ACTUALIZATION OF WILL	85
1. John: The Will as Faith, Hope and <u>Caritas</u>	
2. Dōgen and Zen: The Will as Faith, Determination, Doubt and <u>Karuna</u>	
V. EMPTY WILLING: THE PSYCHOTRANSFORMATIVE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CONTEMPLATIVE GESTURE	116
1. Attention and the Transformation of Consciousness	
a. The Question of Depth	
b. The Dual Ontological Motives	
c. Man's Psychological Predicament: A Closer View	
d. The Strategy of Non-discursive Attention	
2. Will and the Transformation of Consciousness	
a. The Crisis of Will in Modern Thought	
b. The Contemplative Will as Faith	
NOTES	180
LIST OF WORKS CONSULTED	183
BIOGRAPHICAL DATA	200

INTRODUCTION

Everything is both like everything else and different from it--like it in that the things being compared both exist; different or there would be no distinguishable things to compare. So, it might be asked of a dissertation that revolves around a comparison: what is its point? To what end is the comparison being made?

If persons on different sides of the globe were independently to discover that bodies fall at the rate of sixteen feet per second squared, this would be taken as evidence that they had learned something about nature--about the world and how it works. We see something like this at work in the sadhanas (spiritual paths) of St. John and Dōgen. Though the Christian saint and the Zen master are leaves on quite different trees, similarities between them, qua contemplatives, exist at a level profound enough to encourage the exploration of common ground. Ultimately this common ground invites us to go beyond San Juan and Dōgen to the contemplative gesture in its universal nature. In other words, though San Juan and Dōgen stand in the foreground of this thesis, they are, in the end, only doorways. We are seeking what their lives and teachings open onto: the essential elements of the human contemplative gesture and its psychotransformative power.

Our argument is a progressive one; it builds. The reader should take note of this. It does not reach its full

stature until Part Five and earlier circumscriptions will only be counterproductive. So that the reader is not in doubt concerning the full sweep of the argument, a concise account of it forms the last part of this introduction. And, so that the reader may not be in the dark regarding the nature of our thesis, we shall state it here: profound similarities in the praxes of John and Dōgen point to an underlying strategy of the human will, the elements of which suggest a transcultural understanding of the nature of contemplative being-in-the-world and its psychotransformative power.

A further introductory word must be said in connection with that cumbersome but indispensable phrase, "psychotransformative power". The abiding spirit of our researches and their present formulation has been the wish to understand the depth-aspect of psychological praxes that took shape long before Freud fashioned the conceptual tools that gave us official and 'unprecedented' access to a depth psychology. How was it possible, we asked ourselves, for premodern contemplatives to achieve psychological transformation and integration without theoretical access to "the unconscious"? In searching for an answer, we have been drawn to the conviction that man's contemplative response to reality contains something for which the interpretive categories of depth psychology are unfit, something which adds to that science's attempts to understand the nature of the psyche a unique and irreducible element.

Over twenty years ago in his overview of the four major theorists of depth psychology (Freud, Jung, Adler and Rank), Ira Progoff called for "a theory and practice that approaches the human personality with an awareness of its magnitude; and especially one that uses psychological concepts as instruments with which to develop man's spiritual and creative capacities" (1956:262-63). None of his subjects, his study concludes, answered that need. Even Jung, this Jungian admits, "could not hide from himself the fact that his earlier theories had built a psychological hedge around the realities of man's creative and spiritual experiences" (Ibid:10). It may seem presumptuous to claim a degree of success where the founding fathers of western psychology have failed, but the claim is finally not for ourselves but for the masters this thesis studies. Unencumbered by the epistemology and world view of contemporary social science and empowered by the powerful traditions in which they were securely rooted, they might well have had access to intents and strategies modern psychology lacks. By placing the contemplative sensibilities of John and Dōgen in conversation we have sought the beginnings of a transcultural answer to the kind of challenge Progoff has proposed.

Part One of the present study is a brief introduction to Juan and Dōgen within the contexts of their traditions.

Part Two is a prolegomenic discussion which draws John and Dōgen, as fellow contemplatives, within speaking distance of each other on issues that are often seen as dividing

Christians and Buddhists. The issues dealt with are (1) the relations between the individual and the absolute, (2) the question of grace or "cosmic complicity" in the contemplative endeavor, and (3) moral purification and asceticism as practical accompaniments of that endeavor. Our purpose in this part is to establish an atmosphere of similitude which invites the more detailed investigations that follow. The reader should note that the material covered here is ancillary to the main thesis.

Parts Three and Four are a presentation of textual evidence for and a discussion of the phenomena of attention and intention as they manifest themselves in John and Dōgen. "Attention" describes the practical core of the inner work; "intention", the general movement of the sensibilities in which that work proceeds. Attention and intention, as complementary movements of the will, are respectively the center and circumference of the contemplative gesture and the building blocks of the psychology of religious contemplation presented in Part Five. There, we bring together the contemplative paradigm of transformation with that of depth psychology and, from this confrontation, (1) draw out the psychotransformative strategy implicit in the gesture of attention and (2) probe, from a contemplative standpoint, the source and effectiveness of human willing.

The tongues of John and Dōgen speak different languages but, we shall argue, the language of their wills, is one. Their minds move in different universes of concept and image

but each, we shall see, puts the greatest stress upon a psychological praxis that is carefully indifferent to the concepts and imagery of the personal mind. And these two interrelated and complementary gestures--the all encompassing singlemindedness of the will and the specific practice of sustained, non-discursive attention--not only provide a way of understanding the generic structure of contemplative activity but suggest a paradigm of psychological transformation which completes psychological science because it asks man, as science cannot, to rely on something that transcends him and eludes him, to complete him.

EMPTY WILLING

Circumspect, like one who in winter
crosses a stream,
Watchful, as one who must meet danger
on every side,
Yet yielding, as ice when it begins
to melt...
Receptive as a hollow in the hills.

Tao Te Ching XV