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Simon P. James, Zen Buddhism & Environmental Ethics
Ashgate, 2004. ISBN: 0-7546-1368-2

Chapter Three

Environmental Ethics

In the previous chapter, I argued that Zen is neither amoral nor immoral but can be fruitfully conceived in terms of virtue ethics. I identified two key virtues at the heart of Zen, *prajñā* (insight) and *karuṇā* (compassion), and I showed how these virtues develop in practices such as meditation. In this chapter, I address the charge that Zen is inherently anthropocentric by examining the implications of Zen teachings for our moral relations with the natural environment. However, since, up to now, we have been considering Zen in terms of virtue ethics, before turning to the environmental implications of Zen it will be helpful to consider the general matter of the application of virtue ethics to environmental issues.

Environmental virtue ethics and the charge of anthropocentrism

In Chapter Two, I mentioned that virtue ethics has undergone a revival in recent years. This renewed interest was largely inspired by G. E. M. Anscombe's 1958 paper, 'Modern Moral Philosophy'.[1] In that paper, Anscombe argued that the prevailing vocabulary of 'duties' and 'moral obligations' in which discussions of ethics are conventionally framed depends on a religious context within which we are considered to be subject to the law of God. But in modern secular society, she maintained, appeals to duties, moral obligations and the like, seeming, as they do, to imply such a context, cannot be upheld. In response to this situation, Anscombe recommended that we relinquish the now hopelessly confused project of modern moral philosophy and direct our attention to the philosophy of psychology, and an analysis of the ideas of action, intention, pleasure and wanting. Should our inquiry eventually bring us to an analysis of the idea of virtue, then we will have got to the point where we can begin, as it were, to have another shot at ethics, starting, once again, with its oldest and most venerable tradition, virtue ethics.[2]

Anscombe's paper struck a chord with those philosophers who had become dissatisfied with modern ethics, preoccupied, as it is, by discussions of 'rights', 'duties' and 'obligations' and dominated by the perennial standoff between consequentialism (especially utilitarianism) and deontology. Indeed, since its

[1] G. E. M. Anscombe, 'Modern Moral Philosophy', *Philosophy* 33 (1958), pp.1-19.
[2] Ibid. p.15.

publication, Anscombe's general discontentment with modern ethics and her call for a return to virtue ethics has resurfaced in the work of a number of authors. Her influence is evident, for instance, in the work of Alasdair MacIntyre, who in *After Virtue* argues that modern ethics consists of a mixed bag of ideas drawn indiscriminately from a variety of incommensurable ethical traditions – talk of rights, duties and obligations mixing with appeals to empathy, compassion and moral sensitivity. Like Anscombe, MacIntyre does not recommend that we throw up our hands in a Nietzschean rejection of morality, but that we return to Aristotle and virtue ethics.[3]

One might expect the message of Anscombe et al to be welcomed by those working in environmental ethics, a field of study bedevilled by an array of intransigent problems regarding the 'rights' of natural objects and our moral 'obligations' to the natural world. Yet regardless of its popularity in other fields, the tradition of virtue ethics has been sorely overlooked by environmental ethicists.[4] There are doubtless several reasons for this. Louke van Wensveen, one of the small but growing set of writers who have treated the subject, notes that talk of virtues and vices has a rather antiquated air about it (think of references to a 'lady's virtue'), and consequently less rhetorical bite than the prevailing discourse of rights and obligations. Moreover, in a subject that often considers itself a branch of applied ethics, virtue ethicists have noticeably less practical guidance to offer on specific moral dilemmas than consequentialists or deontologists. Utilitarian calls for us to curb global warming in order to reduce the net suffering of sentient beings or deontological calls for us to respect the natural rights of higher mammals would seem to have clearer implications for how we ought to act than calls for us to cultivate certain character traits. What use are appeals to the virtues of humility or simplicity in deciding whether or not to build a bypass or whether to extend legal protection to a particular species of organism? (I will address these and other practical questions in Chapter Five.)

One reason for this lack of interest in virtue ethics could be environmental philosophy's fixation with avoiding the charge of anthropocentrism. I suspect that many radical environmental thinkers – deep ecologists, for example – would see virtue ethics and its concern with the good life as perniciously human-centred, one more manifestation of the human hubris that has spawned our modern environmental crisis. To be sure, these thinkers might acknowledge that forms of environmental concern could be conceived as virtues – they might admit that an appreciation of wild nature could be a component of the good life, for instance. But for many non-anthropocentric thinkers, to think of an appreciation of nature as a component of human well-being is to value nature not for its own sake, not for its intrinsic value, say, but only in so far as it furthers human interests, i.e., the human

[3] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: a study in moral theory* (London: Duckworth, 1987).
[4] Robert Elliot continues this trend when he concludes his chapter on normative ethics in a recent companion to environmental philosophy with the statement that 'The prospect of a virtue-based environmental ethic seem dim'. (In Dale Jamieson, *A Companion to Environmental Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), p.190.) On the neglect of virtue ethics by environmental thinkers, see Louke van Wensveen, *Dirty Virtues: The Emergence of Ecological Virtue Ethics* (New York: Humanity Books, 2000), p.19, n.7.

interest in living well. Robert Elliot is expressing this sort of scepticism regarding the application of virtue ethics to environmental issues when he writes that: 'There is a distinction to be drawn between, on the one hand, ways of treating the natural environment which we regard as admirable, desirable, constitutive of ideals of human excellence, and on the other hand, valuing the natural environment for its own sake in a completely non-instrumental way.'[5] To emphasize the attainment of ideal or virtuous character is, he claims, to be 'overly concerned with the human world'.[6]

I disagree. It seems to me perfectly reasonable to hold that valuing nature non-instrumentally – that is, valuing it for its own sake rather than for its usefulness – is constitutive of human excellence. Consider the example of a man who loves wild nature, someone like William Wordsworth or John Muir. Suppose, for the sake of argument, that that man's capacity to appreciate wild nature is a virtue, that it is constitutive of his well-being. Now to say that the nature-lover's capacity to appreciate wild nature is good for him in this sense is not to say that he values wild nature *because* it is good for him. Indeed, there is a case for saying that to value wild nature in this anthropocentric and instrumental way would not be to *appreciate* it at all. John O'Neill has illustrated this point by referring to Aristotle's treatment of friendship. For Aristotle, friendship is constitutive of human well-being, which means, very roughly, that it is good for us to have friends. However, Aristotle points out that the best sort of friendship involves caring for our friends for their own sake, not for some benefit they might bring us, and not because we think our friendship with them might contribute to our personal well-being. Similarly, there is no contradiction in conceiving of the non-instrumental appreciation of nature as a virtue, in holding, that is, that valuing nature for its own sake is good for us.[7]

So a Zen Buddhist ethic need not be thought anthropocentric simply on account of its being a virtue ethic. For it could hold that valuing nature non-instrumentally is constitutive of human well-being. We will see whether it does in fact do this in the following pages. However, it might be thought that any ethic based on Zen must be guilty of a certain degree of anthropocentrism. After all, Zen would seem to be primarily concerned with *human* awakening. Toshihiko Izutsu, for instance, writes that 'the anthropo-centric tendency of Buddhism was greatly fortified by the rise and development of the Zen sect',[8] especially after Lin-chi, a thinker who set out 'to put Man at the very centre of Zen thought'.[9] These statements would no doubt give pause to those thinkers towards the deep green pole of the environmental spectrum, for whom an adequate environmental ethic must be free of any trace of human-centredness.

[5] Robert Elliot, *Faking Nature: the ethics of environmental restoration* (London: Routledge, 1997), p.57.
[6] Ibid. p.57.
[7] John O'Neill, *Ecology, Policy and Politics: human well-being and the natural world* (London: Routledge, 1993), p.24.
[8] Toshihiko Izutsu, *Toward a Philosophy of Zen Buddhism* (Boulder: Prajñā Press, 1982), p.3.
[9] Ibid. p.6.

So, is Zen primarily concerned with human awakening, and is it to that degree anthropocentric? In relation to this question, it is worth considering the following passage from Malcolm David Eckel in which he refers to what he calls 'the paradox of Buddhist "anthropocentrism"':

> The tradition is genuinely concerned with the human achievement of human goals... But the achievement of self-interest is tied in an equally fundamental way to the decentering of the self.

Indeed, he continues, 'in Buddhist culture at large the cultivation of self takes the form of a decentering of the self and a concern for a wider network of life'.[10] This concern for a wider network of life clearly involves concern for other humans – otherwise it would be hard to make sense of the centrality of other-regarding virtues such as compassion in Zen practice (it is for this reason that Buddhism is not egoistic). But does this concern extend to non-human beings, and – more interestingly – if it does, to which sorts of being can it be thought of as extending to? Moreover, if environmental concern is indeed central to Zen, can the tradition be framed in terms of any pre-existing environmental ethic? These are questions this chapter will try to answer.

Sentient life

At first sight, it might seem that on account of it being a tradition of Mahāyāna Buddhism, Zen must conceive the moral community as incorporating all sentient beings. After all, we have been using the term *karuṇā* to denote, not some mundane sense of fellow-feeling, but the 'great compassion', the 'supramundane' virtue that aims at the liberation of all sentient beings. To have *karuṇā* in this sense is to seek to alleviate the suffering of all sentient beings by leading them to Buddhahood. Admittedly, on the basis of orthodox Mahāyāna cosmology, animals cannot be awakened in this lifetime (they must await a human rebirth); however, the wish to completely extinguish the suffering of others extends to all sentient beings, not just to those capable of awakening in this lifetime. That is to say that the 'moral circle' – to adopt a common image from the literature – here includes not just all humans, but all sentient beings. All sentient beings are taken to have moral standing, to be morally considerable.

It might seem that the Mahāyāna – and by implication, Zen – has something in common here with utilitarian ethics of the sort proposed by Jeremy Bentham in the eighteenth century and developed in recent years by Peter Singer. For his part, Singer, like other utilitarians, bases his ethics on a principle of equality, according to which one should give equal weight in one's moral deliberations to the like interests of all those beings affected by one's actions.[11] The moral circle is

[10] 'Is there a Buddhist Philosophy of Nature?' in Mary Evelyn Tucker and Duncan Ryūken Williams (eds), *Buddhism and Ecology: the interconnection of dharma and deeds* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1997), pp.341-2.
[11] See, for example, *Practical Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p.21.

therefore held to include all and only those beings that can be said to have interests. But which beings are these? Singer points out that in order to have interests a being must be able to suffer and enjoy things. So I am acting immorally if I decide on a whim to kick a dog because the dog is a sentient being, a being capable of suffering, and it therefore has an interest in not being kicked. On the other hand, I am not acting immorally if I decide on a whim to kick a stone (unless, perhaps, I boot it at the dog), since the stone cannot suffer and so has no interest in not being kicked. Singer concludes that the criterion for inclusion in the moral circle is sentience, so that only beings that can suffer are worthy of our moral regard. Moreover, Singer argues that suffering is suffering, whatever being might be experiencing it, and so if a being suffers one is morally bound to take that suffering into account. Humans can suffer, so they are in the moral circle. But so can nonhuman animals – chimpanzees, dogs, chickens, lizards, frogs, etc. – so they are also in the moral circle. In deciding on the right course of action, then, Singer proposes that one should take into account the interests of all those beings that would be affected by it, notably the interests those beings have in not being caused to suffer. The right action will be the one that, all things being equal, leads to the greatest reduction (or the smallest increase) in the total suffering of those beings affected.[12]

Zen and Singer are certainly of a piece in rejecting the anthropocentric idea that our moral obligations extend only to humans. For Singer, there can be no moral justification for considering the suffering of a non-human animal such as a laboratory rat to be less significant than the suffering of a human.[13] Likewise, Zen inherits the general Buddhist idea that our actions towards those beings able to suffer ought to be guided by the First Precept, non-violence (*ahiṃsā*). The tradition also incorporates the distinctively Mahāyānist idea, articulated in the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra*, that all sentient beings possess the Buddha-nature and are therefore ultimately destined for Buddhahood. Although it is not obvious that someone who claims that nonhuman animals are imbued with Buddha-nature is directly attributing moral standing to those beings (and that is an issue we shall address presently), such claims certainly elevate the status of nonhuman animals, and are to that degree opposed to anthropocentrism. Furthermore, as a tradition of Eastern Mahāyāna, Zen incorporates the special regard for nonhuman animals associated with Eastern schools of Buddhism. The *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*, which as we saw in Chapter One was an important influence in the East, and especially on Zen, argues forcefully that ethical concern be extended to nonhuman animals.[14] Indeed, under the influence of texts such as the *Laṅkā* and the *Brahmajāla Sūtra*, many

[12] See Ibid. Chapter Three.

[13] Singer is, however, aware that morally-relevant differences between beings that are considered in a technical sense to be *persons* (that is, self-conscious beings, aware of themselves as distinct beings with a past and a future) and beings that are not persons emerge in conjunction with the issue of taking life (see Chapter Five of his *Practical Ethics*).

[14] See D. T. Suzuki (translator), *The Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), (Chapter Eight).

schools of Eastern Buddhism came to promote vegetarianism, Zen monks and nuns, in particular, tending to avoid eating meat.[15]

So, both Zen and Singer maintain that all animals have moral standing on account of their capacity to suffer, but Zen augments this by maintaining that all animals are also equal in their potential for Buddhahood. Both positions are to this extent non-anthropocentric. This rejection of anthropocentrism is nicely demonstrated by the following story.[16] Two Zen priests, Shen-shan and Tung-shan, were taking a relaxing stroll through the mountains, admiring the plum blossom filling the valley below them, when suddenly a rabbit darted across the path in front of them. The two men stopped in surprise. 'How agile it was!' exclaimed Shen-shan. 'Even such a beast as a rabbit can have agility like that. How marvellous!' Tung-shan, however, though similarly impressed by the agility of the animal, reproached his friend for having used the phrase 'Even such a beast as a rabbit.' 'Think of the rabbit as a great man in disguise,' he suggested. One interpretation of this story could be that Tung-shan was drawing his colleague's attention to the teaching of rebirth, the possibility that the rabbit might have been a 'great man' in a previous life. To be sure, the idea that nonhuman beings might have been one's friend or relative in a former life often acts as a motivation for environmental concern in Buddhism.[17] However, regarding the story at hand, if the being had really been a *great* man he would not have been reborn in the form of a rabbit. For in the context of Buddhist cosmology, the rebirth of a human in the form of an animal represents a step down the spiritual ladder, as it were, because as well as leading unhappier lives, animals are seen as having less potential for spiritual development than humans (in this respect Buddhism *is* anthropocentric). Hence, rebirth of a human as an animal must be the result of the *karma* generated by evil deeds in one's human life. If a truly great man were to be reborn, he would be reborn as a human or a god rather than a rabbit. I do not think this is the point being made in the story of Tung-shan, however. It seems to me that the Zen master was rather speaking from a Mahāyāna standpoint, making the point that a rabbit possesses (or perhaps, is a manifestation of) a flawless Buddha-nature just as much as a human being.

In some very general respects, then, Zen seems in accord with the recent writings of ethicists such as Peter Singer. But before one jumps at the chance of seeing Singer's writings as a theoretical articulation of the central intuitions of Zen, it must be noted that there are some important differences between the two positions. For one thing, Singer allows the possibility that someone could do the

[15] See Peter Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp.164-5.

[16] From Rev. Reirin Yamada, 'The Way to Understand Zen' in William Briggs (ed.), *Anthology of Zen* (New York: Grove Press, 1961), pp.188-9.

[17] The *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*, for example, cites this as a reason for being a vegetarian: '…in this long course of transmigration here, there is not one living being that… has not been your mother, or father, or brother, or sister, or son, or daughter… [this being so] how can the Bodhisattva-Mahāsattva who desires to approach all beings as if they were himself and to practise the Buddha-truths, eat the flesh of any living being…?' (p.212 (Chapter Eight), Suzuki's annotation).

right thing – that is, act in such a way as to alleviate the suffering of sentient beings – without *feeling* that that is a good thing to do. In saying this, however, Singer is very far from the Mahāyāna tradition. As we saw in Chapter Two, for the Mahāyāna the virtue of compassion is central, and compassion, of course, is a feeling. A man who did not feel for his fellow beings could not be a *Bodhisattva*.

Another, related, difference between Singer's position and that of Zen could be articulated in terms of meta-ethics. Singer's position is consequentialist in the sense that it deems an action right if it yields a good outcome – in his view, a good outcome in terms of the alleviation of suffering. But we have been interpreting Zen as a form of virtue ethic rather than a form of consequentialism. And according to the virtue ethic developed in the previous chapter, actions can be considered to be right if they are expressions of virtue, regardless of their consequences. So one could say that an action would be considered right according to Zen (and indeed Mahāyāna teachings generally) if it were motivated by a concern to liberate all beings from the round of *saṃsāra*, regardless of whether it did in fact have the best possible consequences in this respect.[18] (In fact, since his compassion should have been developed in tandem with his insight, a *Bodhisattva*'s good intentions could not misfire in this way.) Conversely, an action would be considered wrong if it were motivated by malevolence, for instance, even if, through some quirk of fate it in fact resulted in the alleviation of a great deal of suffering.[19]

The Buddha-nature of mountains, trees and rivers

We in the West are the inheritors of a philosophical tradition that has tended to deny nonhuman animals moral standing. Animals, various moral philosophers have told us, are without souls or without minds or in any case without that distinctive property which confers moral standing upon humans. In the light of such anthropocentric views, Singer's position is rightly portrayed in a positive light. He is *extending* the moral circle to include nonhuman animals, showing that they are not machines or 'brutes' or 'beasts' but have moral standing in their own right.

We have already compared and contrasted Singer's views with those of the Mahāyāna generally. But what of specifically Eastern Mahāyāna traditions such as Zen? How would they view this extension of the moral circle? Well, like other schools of the Mahāyāna they would applaud Singer's attempt to bring nonhuman animals within the fold of morality, for they would see it as being in line with their

[18] Admittedly, a utilitarian could reply that some form of rule-utilitarianism could accommodate the importance of motivation, arguing that actions motivated by compassion are right, not because they always maximize utility, but because the rule that actions be so motivated maximizes utility. But with this argument we are, I think, very far from anything resembling the Mahāyāna. Mahāyāna traditions do not laud the virtue of compassion simply because exercising it just so happens to decrease suffering; actions motivated by compassion have non-instrumental value..

[19] Note that these conclusions are in accord with the Buddhist idea that the moral worth of an action, that is the specific nature – good or bad – of the *karma* it generates, is a function of the choice or intention (*cetanā*) behind it.

aim to secure the liberation of all beings. Indeed, as we saw above, Eastern traditions of Mahāyāna were especially concerned to extend moral concern to nonhuman animals. But in some schools this approval would, I think, be qualified. For it seems likely that some Eastern traditions would view the idea of including all and only nonhuman animals in the moral circle in a negative light as a *limitation* of the aspirations of the Mahāyāna rather than as a praiseworthy extension of the moral circle. After all, as William LaFleur has shown, while in India the idea that all sentient beings were destined for Buddhahood was seen in a positive light as an expansion of the Great Vehicle, in China it was – ironically – perceived as a restriction. Why *deny* the promise of Buddhahood to plants and other seemingly nonsentient beings? asked the Chinese.[20] Perhaps they would have had similar qualms about Singer's position. But whether they would have or not, it can be noted that Eastern Mahāyānists did indeed tend to work with a very broad conception of the Great Vehicle, the set of beings destined for (or instantiating) Buddhahood being sometimes taken to include not only (all) animals, but also plants and even apparently non-living 'beings' such as mountains and rivers.

The extension of the Great Vehicle beyond the limits of the animal kingdom is particularly associated with the Shingon (Ch. Chen-yen) and Tendai schools of Eastern Buddhism, both of which proved important formative influences on Zen. For Chan-jan (711-782) of the latter school, Mahāyāna philosophy impelled one to consider plants and even soil as destined for Buddhahood:

> In the great assembly of the Lotus all are present – without divisions. Grass, trees, the soil on which these grow... Some are barely in motion while others make haste along the Path, but they will all in time reach the precious land of Nirvana... Who can really maintain that things inanimate lack buddhahood?[21]

In Japan, these sorts of claims chimed with traditional conceptions of the religious significance of the natural world – Shintō ideas that natural beings were inhabited by divine spirits (*kami*), for instance – and the idea of the spiritual significance of nature accordingly took root and flourished on Japanese soil.[22] It is evident, for instance, in the idea, pervasive in Japanese thought, of the inherent enlightenment (*hongaku-shisō*) of grasses and trees, rocks and mountains.[23] On this very broad conception of the Great Vehicle, all these beings were to be thought of as having Buddha-nature. Or rather, following Dōgen, these beings were to be

[20] William R. LaFleur, 'Saigyō and the Buddhist Value of Nature' in John Baird Callicott and Roger T. Ames (eds), *Nature in Asian Traditions of Thought* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2001), p.184.

[21] Quoted in William LaFleur, 'Enlightenment for Plants and Trees' in Stephanie Kaza and Kenneth Kraft, *Dharma Rain: Sources of Buddhist Environmentalism* (Boston: Shambhala, 2000), p.110.

[22] See LaFleur, 'Saigyō and the Buddhist Value of Nature', pp.195-6; Graham Parkes, 'Voices of Mountains, Trees, and Rivers: Kūkai, Dōgen, and a Deeper Ecology' in Tucker and Williams (eds), *Buddhism and Ecology*, p.113.

[23] See Paul L. Swanson, 'Why They Say Zen Is Not Buddhism: recent Japanese critiques of Buddha-nature' in Jamie Hubbard and Paul L. Swanson (eds), *Pruning the Bodhi Tree: The Storm over Critical Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997), p.6.

thought of as *being* Buddha-nature. As we saw in Chapter One, Dōgen, inspired no doubt by his early training in Tendai, maintained that the line in the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra*, 'All sentient beings without exception have the Buddha-nature', should be reread as, 'All is sentient being, all beings are (all being is) the Buddha-nature'. For Dōgen, mountains 'are the actualisation of the ancient buddha way',[24] and to drive this obscure point home he speaks – in terms reminiscent of the twentieth century environmental ethicist, Aldo Leopold – of considering the world from the perspective of a mountain, or of the long, slow movement of mountains through many eons of time.[25] He would, I think, have been intrigued by the speeded-up film in natural history television programmes of plants moving so quickly that they seem sentient, like animals. He might also have been impressed by the science of geology, and its discovery that the earth's surface is more fluid than it appears, that even mountains are born and die.

LaFleur has shown that in Japan natural entities such as plants, rocks and rivers were sometimes even conceived as being spiritually superior to humans. For while humans had to appropriate their enlightenment experientially – that is, realize their inherently awakened natures – trees and other natural entities were thought of as instantiating the way of the Buddha just as they were. In this sense, nature was considered to be 'in full possession of what man only still partially possesses'.[26] As such, the natural world was considered to have a religious significance, or, more precisely, a 'saving power and function'. To contemplate the natural world was to follow the way of the Buddha.[27]

This conception of the salvific power of nature is also found in Zen. For Zen poets such as Bashō, there is no separation between the way of nature and the religious path. That is why a poem ostensibly about natural phenomena could be viewed as a religious verse. Consider, for example, the following poem from Daitō (1282-1338), one of the founders of the Ōtōkan school of Rinzai:

> Rain clears from distant peaks, dew glistens frostily.
> Moonlight glazes the front of my ivied hut among the pines.
> How can I tell you how I am, right now?
> A swollen brook gushes in the valley darkened by clouds.[28]

[24] From the first line of his 'Mountains and Waters Sūtra', quoted in Kaza and Kraft, *Dharma Rain*, p.65.
[25] See LaFleur, 'Enlightenment for Plants and Trees', p.110.
[26] LaFleur, 'Saigyō and the Buddhist Value of Nature', p.197.
[27] Ibid. p.208.
[28] Quoted in Kaza and Kraft, *Dharma Rain*, p.77. For criticisms of the idea that the attention to natural phenomena expressed in Japanese poetry is evidence of a genuine appreciation of nature, see Arne Kalland 'Culture in Japanese Nature' in Ole Bruun and Arne Kalland, *Asian Perceptions of Nature: A Critical Approach* (Richmond: Curzon, 1996). Kalland argues that the natural phenomena referred to in *haiku* – cherry blossoms, the morning-glory, pines, the moon, etc. – 'all appear in a predictable, or conventional, way and even authors who have hardly been outside the main cities have become renowned for their sensitive praise of nature' (p.251). This is no doubt a criticism that could have been levelled at some poets, but it does not apply to men such as Bashō and Ryōkwan whose love of

To consider nature as having a salvific power is, however, not only to imbue it with a religious meaning, but also to say that the spiritual practitioner can learn from it. So to say that trees, mountains and waters exemplify Buddhahood is to say that these beings have something to teach us. And one way of expressing this is to say that these beings exemplify virtues, and that we can, in turn, learn virtue by contemplating them. To be sure, this way of putting matters is at odds with the mainstream Western traditions of virtue ethics, for which only humans can exemplify such qualities.[29] But Buddhist traditions, for their part, have not drawn such a sharp distinction. For example, in the *Jātaka* tales, the stories of the Buddha's former lives, the Buddha-to-be is often portrayed as a virtuous animal. In one tale he is said to have lived as a crane who, out of compassion, only ate fish that were already dead; in another, he is portrayed as a noble stag who sacrificed his own life in order to save one of his herd.[30] These cases are, however, rather special – after all, the individual animals depicted in these stories are not ordinary animals, but previous incarnations of the Buddha. Indeed, the positive images of nonhuman animals conveyed in these tales must, I think, be weighed against the more negative portrayals evident in other parts of the Buddhist tradition where animals are portrayed as leading lives ruled by sex, aggression and other vices.[31]

Inanimate – or perhaps I ought to say apparently inanimate – beings such as trees and mountains would not seem to be guilty of such vices, however. In fact, traditions of Eastern Mahāyāna have sometimes regarded these beings as paragons of virtue. By way of example, consider the various ways in which Zen Buddhists refer to the virtues exemplified by plants.[32] At times, the emphasis is on the 'thoughtlessness' of the plant and the spontaneity of its 'behaviour'. Thus Robert Aitken is continuing an old Buddhist tradition when he draws an analogy between the clover's spontaneous and thoughtless production of pollen and the Buddha's

nature is well-documented, nor does it apply to modern Zen Buddhists like Thich Nhat Hanh and John Daido Loori, whose environmental work is an expression of their practice of Zen.
[29] Although Philip Cafaro notes that the references to the virtues of animals found in the writings of modern environmental thinkers such as Aldo Leopold and Henry David Thoreau take us back to Homer, 'who could speak of the *arete* of a horse and have all Greece understand him'. ('Thoreau, Leopold, and Carson: Toward an Environmental Virtue Ethics', *Environmental Ethics* 22 (Spring 2001), p.9.) (*Areté* is the Greek term conventionally rendered as 'virtue' or 'excellence' in English.)
[30] See Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics*, pp.158, 162.
[31] Lambert Schmithausen, *Buddhism and Nature: the Lecture delivered on the Occasion of the EXPO 1990, An Enlarged Version with Notes* (Tokyo: The International Institute for Buddhist Studies, 1991), p.20.
[32] Or, one might say, the teachings symbolized by plants. The idea that beings such as plants exemplify the virtues of Buddhahood is in practice often inseparable from the idea that these beings symbolize teachings that can be read by someone who is suitably attentive. Thus, the hollow stem of bamboo is said to symbolize the empty core at the heart of phenomena, or a modest flower display in a room set aside for the tea ceremony is meant to symbolize the pure, unassuming attitude of mind that the ceremony requires. See Herrigel, *Zen in the Art of Flower Arangement*, p.106.

twirling of the flower before the smiling Mahākāśyapa.[33] At other times, the focus is on the patience or steadfastness exemplified by plants. In this respect, trees, and, it seems, especially pine trees, are seen as exemplifying 'imperturbability, strength and firmness of character'.[34] For the Sōtō poet-monk Ryōkwan (1758-1831) they exemplified a divine dignity.[35] In other contexts, the emphasis is on the way plants are able to adapt themselves to their environments – in a Taoist idiom, one would say to the *Tao* – in a way in which humans often cannot. Consider, for example, the following passage from Gustie Herrigel:

> The master has seen, from the example of himself and others, how fuss, haste and impatience only bring discord into his life and his surroundings. He has listened to the plants in the wind and the storm, seen how they yield, bending and swaying, how they calmly let everything pass over their heads and so remain uninjured.[36]

Compare Katsuki Sekida's beautiful story of his encounter with an old Zen priest:

> [The priest] had been ill, and when I visited him he was sitting quietly at the window basking in the sun. A few books of haiku and a notebook were beside him. He had been composing haiku. It was a calm winter day. In the course of our conversation, he pointed to a pine grove in front of the temple and said, 'You know the Zen question, 'The Bodhisattva of Great Mercy [Avalokitesvara, or Kannon] has a thousand hands and a thousand eyes; which is the true eye?' I could not understand this for a long time. But the other day, when I looked at the pine trees bending before the cold blasts from the mountain, I suddenly realized the meaning. You see, all the boughs, branches, twigs, and leaves simultaneously bend to the wind with tremendous vigor.' He said this with a quiet but earnest gesture. I could feel his close intimacy with the pine trees. He had to convey his experience to somebody else. It was the evening glow of his life. He died a few weeks after our meeting.[37]

Some schools of the Mahāyāna spoke of a heavenly 'Pure Land' which would provide a kind of springboard to *Nirvāṇa* for those beings who were virtuous enough to be reborn there. For to be reborn in a Pure Land would be to find oneself in a spiritual paradise in which even the rustling of the leaves in the trees proclaimed the *Dharma*. Who could fail to attain awakening in such a place? For Zen, however, the Pure Land is not some far-off destination, which can only be reached by securing an auspicious rebirth, it is the very world in which we live.[38] So the truth is there in *zazen*, but it is also there in the tall beech trees outside the

[33] Robert Aitken, *The Mind of Clover: Essays in Zen Buddhist Ethics* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1984), p.137.
[34] See Herrigel, *Zen in the Art of Flower Arangement*, p.84.
[35] Suzuki, *Zen and Japanese Culture*, pp.370-1.
[36] Herrigel, *Zen in the Art of Flower Arangement*, pp.22-3.
[37] Katsuki Sekida (translator), A. V. Grimstone (ed.), *Two Zen Classics: Mumonkan and Hekiganroku* (Tokyo: Weatherhill, 1977), pp.110-11. Annotations in original.
[38] See Paul Williams, *Mahāyāna Buddhism: the doctrinal foundations* (London: Routledge 1989), pp.227, 263-4.

meditation hall, reaching up into the evening sky; and it is there in the cawing of the crows as they return to roost.

Non-violence

On the face of it, it would seem that this very broad conception of the Mahāyāna as encompassing even trees, mountains and rivers would prove especially amenable to modern environmentalist concerns. And indeed, as we saw in Chapter One, Zen has proven an important source of inspiration for environmental thinkers, particularly for those towards the dark green pole of the environmental spectrum. However, it remains to be seen what implications these ideas have for environmental *ethics*.

In his book *Nonviolence to Animals, Earth, and Self in Asian Traditions*, Christopher Key Chapple suggests that the East Asian idea that plants and other natural beings are enlightened is 'uniquely ecological', implying that these beings 'are to be valued as intrinsically worthy of veneration and protection'.[39] Taking our lead from Chapple's suggestion we can ask whether the claims of Zen Buddhists that trees, mountains, rivers, and so on instantiate Buddhahood are meant to bring these beings within the purview of the First Precept, non-violence (*ahiṃsā*).[40] The first thing to note about this suggestion is that it would mark a break with traditional Buddhist understandings of non-violence. For the First Precept is traditionally considered to apply only to sentient beings, so that it serves as an injunction against intentionally killing – or more broadly, harming or injuring – humans, animals, birds, fish and insects,[41] but not plants, and certainly not mountains, rivers and other apparently insentient beings. In any case, regardless of its relation to orthodox teachings, the idea that our behaviour towards trees, mountains, and so on should be governed by non-violence would seem to over-extend the First Precept – to over-expand the moral circle, if you like – and to therefore imply an impracticable ideal. For if *all* beings are to be thought of as instantiating Buddhahood, then one would expect Zen Buddhists to see the injury of a clod of soil (whatever that means) as being on a par with the injury of an animal. Perhaps one would expect to read of Zen masters making efforts not to impinge upon anything, concerned lest they harm a morally-considerable being. One would imagine the Zen master tip-toeing around, taking care not to step on

[39] (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993), p.65.
[40] Even if one claims only that these beings are 'on the way' to Buddhahood, rather than actual Buddhas, one could suppose that they ought still to be viewed as sentient beings, and hence as falling within the domain of non-violence. See Steve Odin's discussion of the views of Omine Akira in his essay 'The Japanese Concept of Nature in Relation to the Environmental Ethics and Conservation Aesthetics of Aldo Leopold' in Tucker and Williams (eds), *Buddhism and Ecology*, pp.101-2.
[41] Peter Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhism: teachings, history and practices* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p.202. See also Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics*, p.69.

blades of grass (for they manifest Buddha-nature), carefully avoiding crushing lumps of soil beneath his feet (for they too manifest Buddha-nature).

This ideal bears some resemblance to the exacting interpretation of *ahiṃsā* propounded in Jainism, but it does not accord with the practice of Zen.[42] Zen masters, although, as we shall see, respectful of nature, do not take such extreme measures to avoid impinging on the world, so it is unlikely that in claiming that beings have Buddha-nature they mean to accord them moral standing in a way that brings them within the purview of the First Precept.[43] (In fact, Chūjin (1065-1138), a Tendai scholar, explicitly addresses this matter, maintaining that the claim that plants are endowed with Buddha-nature is made from the standpoint of ultimate truth, but that from this standpoint moral distinctions are not relevant either. It would seem to follow that the ascription of Buddha-nature to plants (and other beings) should not affect our moral obligations towards them.[44])

But if this is granted, then what should one make of the following reformulation of the First Precept presented by Thich Nhat Hanh: 'Aware of the suffering caused by the destruction of life, I vow to cultivate compassion and learn ways to protect the lives of people, animals, plants, and minerals'?[45] Is Nhat Hanh advocating that crushing clods of earth be compared to killing animals? Is he calling for the sort of extension of the First Precept I have dismissed as being out of keeping with Zen practice? I do not think he is. As we saw in Chapter Two, non-violence, like the other precepts, is not merely an injunction against performing a certain kind of action. It also has a positive aspect, so that someone whose actions were in accord with the First Precept could be said to have developed the virtue of *ahiṃsā*. All Buddhists agree that someone who had developed this virtue would radiate kindness and compassion towards sentient beings. I would hold that such a caring, gentle attitude would also be extended to plants. This is not to say that the harming of plants should be considered to be a violation of the First Precept on a par with, say, injuring an animal. It is only to say that the gratuitous harming of plants, for instance, would be considered to be against the spirit of *ahiṃsā*. Indeed, it seems implausible to suggest that a man who had cultivated non-violence in his dealings with animals would not also be gentle in his relations with other beings.[46] This gentleness is illustrated by a story, related by D. T. Suzuki, of the Sōtō monk, Ryōkwan.[47] Suzuki tells how one day the monk noticed a bamboo shoot poking its way through the floor of his closet. Each day, Ryōkwan noted the plant's progress. However, since bamboo grows quickly, it wasn't long before the plant had grown so tall that its tip was brushing the ceiling. Ryōkwan, anxious not to impede the flourishing of the plant, tried to make a hole in the ceiling to allow the bamboo to grow through. (More precisely, Ryōkwan, ever the 'holy fool', tried to *burn* a hole in the ceiling. The roof caught fire and the entire structure burnt down!) Whether or not it would have been an 'official' violation of the First Precept to have thwarted the bamboo's growth, Ryōkwan's action was in the spirit of the First Precept, and could, I suggest, be seen as an expression of the positive virtue of non-violence.

So in reformulating the First Precept to incorporate the protection of plants and minerals, it would seem that Nhat Hanh is simply making the point that the man who has developed the virtue of non-violence would be gentle, not only in his relations with sentient beings, but with all things. And whether or not his claim can be justified in terms of the classical Buddhist teachings, he is, I think, making a point, entirely in keeping with the nature-regarding spirit of Zen, namely, that morality extends towards the natural environment as a whole, not just to humans, nor even just to those beings we deem sentient.[48]

A similar moral concern for the natural environment is expressed by John Daido Loori, at the time of writing, the abbot of Zen Mountain Monastery in New York State. Loori enjoins his students to consider the various ways in which observing the precepts affects the environment.[49] Thus he teaches that the precept of *ahiṃsā* ought to be thought of as bearing upon, not only our treatment of individual organisms, but also our relations with species, for to decimate species is 'the worst kind of killing'. 'Do not steal', on the other hand, 'means not to rape the earth', while the Third Grave Precept, 'Honour the body – do not misuse sexuality', Loori reads as an injunction against interfering in the natural order of things through genetic engineering. The Fourth Grave Precept, 'Manifest truth – do

[42] Jainism is an Indian religion, older than Buddhism, which promotes as the highest spiritual goal the practice of *ahiṃsā* as a way of cleansing one's life-force or soul (*jīva*) of karmic accretions. It is held, moreover, that *ahiṃsā* ought to be extended to all sentient beings, which, on the Jaina conception, means not only (all) animals but also (all) plants and even elemental forces such as fire and water. Hence Jaina monks and nuns not only avoid killing insects, by covering their mouths and sweeping their path, but also avoid disturbing the elements by, say, lighting or extinguishing flames or wading into water. (See Christopher Key Chapple, 'Jainism and Buddhism' in Dale Jamieson, *A Companion to Environmental Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), p.53.) To be sure, these extreme measures are partly a result of the fact that, unlike Buddhism, Jainism sees even unintentional actions as generating *karma*, so that even accidentally swallowing a fly or stepping on a daisy is thought to produce bad *karma*.

[43] Cf. Arne Kalland, 'Culture in Japanese Nature' in Ole Bruun and Arne Kalland, *Asian Perceptions of Nature: A Critical Approach* (Richmond: Curzon, 1996), p.247. Cf. also Deane Curtin, 'A State of Mind Like Water: Ecosophy T and the Buddhist Traditions', *Inquiry* 39, (1996), pp.247ff.

[44] Schmithausen, *Buddhism and Nature*, p.24.

[45] Quoted in Sallie B. King, 'Contemporary Buddhist Spirituality and Social Activism' in Takeuchi Yoshinori (ed.), *Buddhist Spirituality: Later China, Korea, Japan, and the Modern World* (London: SCM Press, 1999), p.471.

[46] In this connection it can be noted that the *Vinaya* rules for monastic life prohibit monks and nuns from intentionally injuring plants, even though plants are not 'officially' protected under the First Precept. On the treatment of plants in the context of early Buddhist ethics, see Schmithausen, *Buddhism and Nature*, pp.6-8.

[47] D. T. Suzuki, *Zen and Japanese Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1973), p.369.

[48] Holmes Rolston III also explores the possibility of basing a Zen Buddhist respect for non-sentient beings on the idea of *ahiṃsā*, although he views non-violence as a 'commandment' rather than a virtue. See his essay 'Respect for Life: Can Zen Buddhism Help in Forming an Environmental Ethic?' *Zen Buddhism Today* 7 (September 1989), p.15.

[49] John Daido Loori, 'The Precepts and the Environment' in Tucker and Williams (eds), *Buddhism and Ecology*, pp.177-84.

not lie', serves as a condemnation of the efforts of multinationals to pass themselves off as ecologically-concerned when they are in fact nothing of the sort ('greenwashing'). 'Proceed clearly – do not cloud the mind', the Fifth Grave Precept, Loori interprets as a warning not to allow our judgement to be clouded by greed, while he sees the Sixth Grave Precept, 'See the perfection – do not speak of others' errors and faults', as enjoining us to think of natural processes as inherently perfect, in need of no 'management' on our part. And so on for the other precepts. I do not think that Loori would want his teachings on this matter to be subjected to an exhaustive philosophical analysis. He would, I imagine, maintain that he is not interested in offering a defensible philosophical theory, but only in making the general point, nonetheless entirely in keeping with Zen, that our ethical concern should extend beyond the sphere of animal life to the natural environment as a whole.

Ethical holism

In bringing apparently non-sentient beings such as plants, mountains and rivers within the purview of ethics, the Zen comportment towards nature is at odds with utilitarianism, and I have rejected the idea that it can be understood on the model of Singer's position. To find an appropriate theoretical model for the Zen Buddhist attitude towards nature we will have to look elsewhere.

For one candidate, we can turn to the position of environmental ethicist J. Baird Callicott, as developed in his article 'Animal Liberation: A Triangular Affair'.[50] In that essay, Callicott coins the phrase 'humane moralism' to denote those positions, like Singer's, which accord nonhuman beings moral standing if, and only if, they are sentient. To be sure, he admits that such views represent an advance on those positions that categorically deny that any nonhuman animals have moral standing, and, in this respect, Bentham and Singer are considered to be a step up the moral ladder from inveterate anthropocentrists like Aquinas and Descartes. Yet for Callicott humane moralism is ultimately an inadequate basis for an environmental ethic. The problem here, he suggests, is that whereas humane moralism is inherently individualistic, a properly environmental ethic must be holistic. Let us try to clarify what this means. To say that humane moralist positions such as Singer's are individualistic is to say that they hold that the moral standing of beings can be determined by looking to the characteristics of those beings in themselves, irrespective of their contexts. So, on Singer's account, a rabbit has the same moral standing, whether it is languishing in the laboratory of some pharmaceutical company or hopping about in the wild. In both cases it has the same capacity to suffer, so in both cases it has the same moral standing. According to Callicott, however, such an individualistic approach cannot do justice to the moral significance of environmental concerns, and so could not form the basis for a properly environmental ethic. An environmental ethic, he maintains,

[50] In Louis P. Pojman (ed.), *Environmental Ethics: Readings in Theory and Application* (Belmont, California: Wadsworth, 2001), pp.52-63.

would have to take a more holistic approach in recognizing that the value of any particular being is not something that that being possesses in itself, but is instead a function of the part it plays in an environment whole, or, more precisely, a reflection of the *contribution* it makes to that whole. So according to an 'ethical holism' of this sort, a field mouse would have value, not on account of its possessing a special value-conferring property (sentience, for example), but because it plays a role in an environmental whole, as food for a kestrel, for instance, or as a fertilizer of the soil. Similarly, actions would be deemed right to the extent that they further the good of the environmental whole. As Aldo Leopold, the founding father of such holistic approaches, famously put it:

> A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise.[51]

The reference to beauty indicates that, unlike Singer, ethical holists such as Leopold preserve a place for feeling in their accounts of our moral relations with nature. Leopold's *Sand County Almanac* is filled with heartfelt, evocative descriptions of natural phenomena, many of which are entirely in the spirit of Zen. Moreover, just as for Leopold ethics is tied to aesthetics, so for Zen there is no clear line between a moral concern for nature and an aesthetic appreciation of it. We saw in Chapter Two that art forms such as the tea ceremony, archery and flower arranging are partly ethical practices because the virtues inherent in them are, in part, moral virtues. And many of them – perhaps all of them – bear upon one's moral relations with the natural world. Hence the aesthetic sensitivity to the world engendered by the practice of, say, flower arranging translates into a particular ethical appreciation of the world. Seeing the delicate beauty of flower arrangements, the artist comes to see the beauty inherent in all things – like a *haiku* poet, perhaps. And just as a sense of this beauty causes him to treat the flowers, twigs and pebbles with which he works with respect, so he gradually becomes gentler in his dealings with all things. His aesthetic appreciation has naturally engendered a particular ethical comportment. Furthermore, it could be that the specific kind of aesthetic sensibility fostered by Zen is especially appropriate for environmental ethics. As we saw in Chapter One, much Zen-inspired art aims at conveying the aesthetic sensibility the Japanese call *aware*, 'the sorrow-tinged appreciation of transient beauty', in Steve Odin's nice phrase.[52] This sense of impermanence is, moreover, inextricably tied to an awareness of natural cycles (think, for example, of the seasonal references (*kigo*) in *haiku*: frogs, snails or plum blossom for spring, butterflies for summer, the flowering bush clover for autumn, and so on). For Zen, the best depictions of the natural world convey the truth that phenomena are not hard-edged, substantial entities – natural kinds, for instance – but events, confluences of forces, eddies in the stream of life, if you will. This dynamic picture of the natural world strikes a chord with the writings of modern environmental thinkers such as Leopold, for whom a sense of the beauty of nature

[51] Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), pp.224-5.

[52] 'The Japanese Concept of Nature' p.99.

is informed and invigorated by an understanding of the dynamism inherent in ecological relationships. For these thinkers, seeing nature as beautiful is largely a matter of appreciating the way in which natural phenomena play their part in various processes – food webs, nutrient cycles, energy flows, and the like – and of seeing how these processes fit together in a great sacramental economy of life.[53] For the Zen poet and the sensitive ecologist alike, there is a stark beauty in the decomposition of the dead mouse and in the new growth of fungi about the spot where it fell.

There are, therefore, some similarities between the aesthetic-cum-ethical concern for the biotic community advocated by ethical holists such as Leopold and the concern for the environment espoused by Zen Buddhists such as Thich Nhat Hanh and John Daido Loori. Moreover, it would seem that Zen and ethical holism show a similar awareness of the natural world as a whole. In this connection, Gary Snyder has suggested that the Chinese phrase *shan-shui* ('Mountains and waters'), so common in Buddhist accounts of the religious significance of nature, refers, not to two particular sorts of natural entity, but to 'the totality of the process of nature'.[54] So maybe in saying that mountains and waters instantiate Buddhahood Zen Buddhists are not saying that individual mountains and stretches of water ought to be accorded moral standing, but are thinking more holistically.

Would it be right, then, to say that a Zen environmental ethic would be a form of ethical holism? In support of the idea that it would, one could argue that our actions towards environmental wholes ought to be governed by the positive virtue of non-violence. For, after all, whether or not environmental wholes such as ecosystems are strictly speaking alive, they can certainly be harmed, and one might think that we ought therefore to treat them carefully, gently, non-violently. Steven C. Rockefeller is perhaps thinking along these lines when he maintains that 'the most fundamental principle of environmental protection is widely recognized today to be a variation on the theme of *ahiṃsā*, or no harming', where this concerns the prevention of environmental harms such as the elimination of endangered species.[55]

In an interesting study of the views of Kūkai (a Shingon master) and Dōgen, Graham Parkes explores the possibilities of basing a holistic environmental ethic upon Buddhist ideas. In his view, Dōgen's conception of nature can be framed as an extreme form of holism in which securing the good of the whole is deemed an overriding consideration.[56] Thus when Dōgen maintains that all beings are Buddha-nature, Parkes suggests that he is not making the implausible suggestion that all beings should be treated equally. On the contrary, 'a view of the world as… Buddha-nature would naturally lead to reverence for and respectful treatment of the totality – but would not rule out destroying certain parts of it under certain

[53] See Gary Snyder's essay, 'Grace' in Kaza and Kraft (eds), *Dharma Rain*, pp.450-3.
[54] 'Blue Mountains Constantly Walking' in Kaza and Kraft (eds), *Dharma Rain*, p.129.
[55] 'Buddhism, Global Ethics, and the Earth Charter' in Tucker and Williams (eds), *Buddhism and Ecology*, pp.317-8.
[56] See 'Voices of Mountains, Trees, and Rivers' in Tucker and Williams (eds), *Buddhism and Ecology*, pp.122-3.

circumstances'.[57] So respect for the 'organized totality' of Buddha-nature would in fact justify eradicating destructive beings such as the tubercle bacillus.[58] Just as one might contribute to the well-being of one's body by removing an abscess, so reverence for the Buddha-nature might lead one to remove these harmful beings.

I am not sure whether Parkes' conception of holism accords with Leopold's. Leopold has often been interpreted as presenting a version of ethical holism wherein securing the well-being of the land is held to be an overriding consideration. According to such an extreme ethical holism a thing would be right if, *and only if*, it tended to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. Defenders of Leopold have suggested alternative readings of the man's work, however.[59] In any case, whether or not Leopold is propounding such a position, it would seem that Parkes is presenting an extreme version of ethical holism of this sort as a reading of Dōgen. On this view, the prime virtue, one might suppose, is 'respect' or 'reverence' for the organized totality of the Buddha-nature, where such respect might occasionally sanction efforts to eradicate harmful beings such as tubercle bacteria.

Is such an attitude in accord with a Zen Buddhist understanding of nature? To be sure, Zen, like Buddhism generally, is holistic. The teaching of universal emptiness means that to know the nature of any element of reality one must look to its context, its environment. Nevertheless, Zen seems to embody a concern for individual phenomena at odds with extreme holism. Let us follow Parkes in considering this matter with respect to the views of Dōgen. The holistic outlook of Dōgen must, I think, be understood in terms of the Hua-yen and Tendai philosophies with which Dōgen would have been familiar and of which his own views are partly an expression. The worldview set out by those schools is certainly holistic in that it sees reality as a coherent whole formed of mutually-dependent elements, and in this sense it bears a superficial resemblance to the holism developed in the writings of Leopold. But the holism espoused in Hua-yen is subtler, and I would hold more profound, than that evident in the writings of holistic environmental thinkers. Neither Hua-yen nor Dōgen is supposing that each being forms a part of a totality which can be understood on analogy with an organic body. Matters are not so simple. Dōgen inherits the view, propounded in both Hua-yen and Tendai philosophy, that the whole is contained within each part. That is why he can claim that an awakened man can see 'the entire world in one tiny speck of dust' or 'the entire universe… in… a tall bamboo'.[60] So while for an extreme holist a being has value only to the extent that it contributes to the well-being of the whole, for Dōgen each being has a supreme worth as an embodiment of the whole. Similarly, whatever precise form it took, a Zen Buddhist environmental ethic would have to do justice to the value inherent in the details of the natural world – in the little epiphanies expressed in *haiku*, for example.

[57] Ibid. p.122.
[58] Ibid. pp.122-3.
[59] For example, see J. Baird Callicott, 'The Conceptual Foundations of the Land Ethic' in Pojman (ed.), *Environmental Ethics*, p.134.
[60] Dōgen, *Shōbōgenzō: The Eye and Treasury of the True Law, Vol. 1*, translated by K. Nishiyama and J. Stevens (Tokyo: Nakayama Shobō, 1976), pp.15, 89.

We will explore the metaphysics behind this idea in the next chapter. For the moment, it will suffice to note that this commitment to the worth of individual beings means that Dōgen's conception of the Buddha-nature cannot be understood along the lines of extreme holism. While an extreme holist would be willing to sacrifice individual deer in order to preserve the well-being of a particular environment, Zen thinkers would be less inclined to sanction such holistic efforts at wildlife management. Loori's criticisms of holistic approaches to wildlife management, whether they can be justified in their own terms or not, are, I think, more in keeping with Zen thought.[61]

This is not to say that Zen Buddhists would never consider such holistic approaches justified, however. Consider a situation in which one is forced to choose between culling a population of deer that has grown too large or harming the biotic community of a Scottish island which is being devastated by the presence of too many deer. The Zen Buddhist *could* be justified in choosing to cull the deer if she did so out of compassion for the deer or out of a concern not to harm the island's ecosystem. But unlike the extreme holist she would not suppose that the concern to preserve the well-being of the ecosystem must *necessarily* trump the concern not to harm the deer. The Zen approach is, as ever, more flexible than that.

Deep ecology

In the literature on environmental ethics, sympathetic mentions of Zen Buddhism are most commonly found neither in the writings of 'humane moralists' like Peter Singer nor in the work of 'ethical holists' like Aldo Leopold, but in the writings of deep ecologists. Having so far failed to find an adequate model for Zen Buddhist environmental concerns in either humane moralism or (extreme) ethical holism I would now like to consider the possibility that it is in the writings of deep ecologists such as Arne Naess and Warwick Fox that we will find an account of environmental concern more in tune with Zen.

As we saw in Chapter One, Zen has proved popular with deep ecological thinkers. Arne Naess has acknowledged Dōgen as a major inspiration,[62] while Bill Devall and George Sessions refer approvingly to Zen in articulating their conception of deep ecology.[63] Warwick Fox concludes his influential *Toward a Transpersonal Ecology* with a quotation from Dōgen, arguing that Zen is based on what he calls an 'ontologically based identification', a profound awareness of 'the fact *that* things are', which, he maintains, has important implications for

[61] Loori refers to the culling of deer as 'controlled genocide'. 'The Precepts and the Environment', pp.180-1. Note that Buddhism in general has trouble accounting for the ethical worth of species and environmental wholes. See Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics*, pp.183-4.

[62] Deane Curtin, 'A State of Mind Like Water', p.241.

[63] 'Deep Ecology' in Pojman (ed.), *Environmental Ethics*, p.158.

environmental philosophy.[64] Both Joan Halifax and Jeremy Hayward refer to Zen teachings in articulating their respective conceptions of deep ecology.[65]

So what are deep ecology and Zen supposed to have in common? First, they are thought to share a commitment to the general idea that right (that is, 'eco-friendly') action will not be generated through the 'external' pressure of moral exhortations to behave in environmentally-appropriate ways, but will arise naturally from an 'internal' transformation in how one sees the world. Thus Arne Naess admits to being 'not much interested in ethics or morals... [since] Ethics follows from how we experience the world'.[66] Zen seems to chime with this stance, for, as we saw in Chapter Two, Zen also *seems* to downplay the importance of ethics, assuming that appropriately caring behaviour must emerge naturally as a result of an enlightened way of seeing the world. (In a forthcoming study[67] I argue that to claim this is to overlook the possibility of framing both deep ecology and Zen in terms of virtue ethics. Nonetheless, it is clear that both deep ecology and Zen are generally hostile towards a particular conception of ethical life – the idea that doing right is merely a matter of conforming to ethical rules.)

Moreover, a case can be made for saying that both deep ecology and Zen advocate learning to see the world in a similar way. Although the phrase 'deep ecology' was originally conceived as an 'umbrella term' to encompass a variety of thoughtful responses to environmental issues, over the years it has become associated with a particular position on environmental matters and a specific conception of what it means to see the world aright. On this conception, the goal of deep ecology is to foster 'Self-Realization'. The first thing to note about this idea is that it is based on a singularly holistic conception of the self. According to deep ecologists such as Naess, that entity we conventionally refer to as the self does not stop at the limits of our skin. For we find that if we want to specify who or what we are we have to refer to conditions seemingly outside us. So on this account I am not a hard-edged atomic entity 'Simon James'; on the contrary, my identity depends on my being a member of a particular family, a resident of a particular town, a citizen of a particular nation, and so on. Ultimately, it could be said that I depend on the whole of nature. Deep ecologists maintain that we become aware of the extent of this more expansive self in so far as we *identify* with the interests of other beings. So I see someone slip and fall on the ice outside a High Street store and I automatically rush to help. I identify with their pain, spontaneously, naturally. In this sense, one might say that my self has expanded to include them. Finding the life of her village threatened by plans to develop a Go-Karting track on

[64] Warwick Fox, *Toward a Transpersonal Ecology: Developing New Foundations for Environmentalism* (Boston: Shambhala, 1990), pp.250-1, 268.

[65] See Halifax's essay 'The Third Body: Buddhism, Shamanism, and Deep Ecology' and Hayward's essay 'Ecology and the Experience of Sacredness', both in Allan Hunt Badiner (ed.), *Dharma Gaia: A Harvest of Essays in Buddhism and Ecology* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1990), pp.20-38 and 64-74, respectively.

[66] Quoted in Fox, *Toward a Transpersonal Ecology*, p.219. Fox provides a wealth of examples of other antinomian statements from deep ecologists in pp.217-29 of that book.

[67] David E. Cooper and Simon P. James, *Buddhism, Virtue and Environment* (Ashgate, 2004).

its outskirts, a local woman feels that she herself is threatened and she lends her voice to a campaign to protect the town with the same vigour that she would try to protect herself from harm. Deep ecologists maintain that just as we ultimately depend on the whole of nature, so there exists a particular mode of consciousness in which one identifies with nature as a whole. This is said to be the consciousness of one who has realized his or her 'great Self', and the process by which this is achieved is said to be one of 'Self-Realization'. Thus environmental activist John Seed once said that in working to protect the rainforest he does not think of himself as an individual, 'John Seed', working to protect some other entity, 'the rainforest'. He sees himself as part of the rainforest protecting itself.[68] Joanna Macy makes a similar point:

> it would not occur to me to plead with you, 'Oh, don't saw off your leg. That would be an act of violence.' It wouldn't occur to me because your leg is part of your body. Well, so are the trees in the Amazon rain basin. They are our external lungs. And we are beginning to realize that the world is our body.[69]

On the face of it, there would seem to be some striking similarities between the deep ecologists' conception of Self-Realization and the conception of Zen awakening. In the following passage, Thich Nhat Hanh would seem to be agreeing with Naess, Macy, et al when he maintains that enlightened self-interest can motivate us to care for nature:

> We classify other animals and living beings as nature, acting as if we ourselves are not part of it. Then we pose the question 'How should we deal with Nature?' We should deal with nature the way we should deal with ourselves! We should not harm ourselves; we should not harm nature... Human beings and nature are inseparable.[70]

Compare Ruben L. F. Habito, another Zen teacher:

> In rediscovering that one's true self is not separate from 'the mountains and rivers and the great earth' and all sentient beings, there is no longer anything in the universe that is outside of one's concerns... To see one's true self *as* the mountains, rivers and forests, and as the birds, dolphins and all the inhabitants of the great wide earth, constitutes a sound basis for living an ecologically sound way of life.[71]

Moreover, Philip Kapleau writes of a state in which

[68] Quoted in Joanna Macy, 'The Greening of the Self' in Badiner (ed.), *Dharma Gaia*, p.55.
[69] Ibid. p.62.
[70] Quoted in Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics*, p.151.
[71] Ruben L. F. Habito, 'Mountains and Rivers and the Great Earth: Zen and Ecology', in Tucker and Williams, *Buddhism and Ecology*, pp.170, 172; emphasis in original. Note that Habito is quoting Dōgen. Cf. James H. Austin, *Zen and the Brain* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2000), p.652.

> all of nature, mountains and rivers, are seen as oneself. In this deeper realization of oneness you will feel the preciousness of each object in the universe, rejecting nothing, since things as well as people will be seen as essential aspects of yourself.[72]

So there would seem, on the face of it, to be striking parallels between deep ecologists and Zen Buddhists on these issues. To recap: it would seem that, for both deep ecology and for Zen, people cannot be enjoined to act in environmentally-friendly ways by the imposition of moral rules, but must first learn to see the world aright. More precisely, the idea would seem to be that one must come to identify with the world, to see oneself as the world, and to cherish and protect the world as one cherishes and protects oneself. One could say that for both deep ecology and for Zen the key virtues bearing upon our relations with the natural environment are therefore the selflessness and empathy which allow one to identify with other beings and so achieve Self-Realization.

But before we down tools, satisfied that deep ecology provides an adequate model for a Zen Buddhist environmental philosophy, there are some questions that need answering. In particular, it has not yet been made clear what Self-Realization actually involves. What does it mean to identify with nature? Here, I suggest, deep ecologists often equivocate. They sometimes speak as if Self-Realization involved somehow 'taking the perspective' of nature conceived as a whole. Naess, for example, refers sympathetically to Advaita Vedānta in articulating his position, and so encourages the idea that realizing one's Self is to realize one's identity with some metaphysical Absolute – *Brahman*, perhaps.[73]

With this idea, however, we would seem to be far from Zen. For these reflections suggest that the deep ecologist's account of Self-Realization presupposes a substantial self (*ātman*), the existence of which Zen, as a form of Buddhism, cannot countenance. An argument for this conclusion could run as follows: Given that (1) Zen is a form of Buddhism, and that (2) all forms of Buddhism deny the existence of an *ātman*, and that (3) the deep ecological idea of Self-Realization presupposes the existence of such a self, one can conclude that the idea of Self-Realization is at odds with Zen.

This argument is more difficult to appraise than its simple form might suggest. Though seemingly incontrovertible, the first premise has recently been challenged by Noriaki Hakamaya and Shirō Matsumoto. In short, their reasoning is that the idea of the Buddha-nature, so important in Zen, represents a concept of an *ātman* (in fact, the Mahāyānist *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra* expressly refers to it as such).[74] Therefore, by the second premise of my argument, Zen is not a form of Buddhism. I do not believe this argument is sound since I do not agree that the Buddha-nature represents an *ātman*. But I will not give my reasons for holding this view here –

[72] Philip Kapleau, *The Three Pillars of Zen: Teaching, Practice, and Enlightenment* (London: Rider, 1985), p.62.
[73] See Arne Naess, 'Ecosophy T: Deep Versus Shallow Ecology' in Pojman (ed.), *Environmental Ethics*, pp.151-3.
[74] See Williams, *Mahāyāna Buddhism*, pp.98ff.

venturing into this stormy debate would take us too far off course.[75] I would like to note, however, that Naess has more recently qualified his references to Advaita Vedānta, and argued that his conception of Self-Realization should *not* be thought of as presupposing the existence of an *ātman*.[76] The third premise is therefore not obviously true. Indeed, as the following passage from Jeremy Hayward indicates, perhaps the deep ecologist's idea of Self-Realization can be squared with the Buddhist teaching of not-self (*anātman*):

> Buddhists emphasize the obstacle that arises at each step on the way of this gradually widening circle of identification, namely the belief that there is a separate self at all. This obstacle is only overcome at the last stage, when the self is seen to be not separate from the space in which all that exists arises, has its being, and decays.[77]

Nevertheless, whether or not either Zen or deep ecology subscribes to a notion of an *ātman*, if Self-Realization involves one's identifying with nature conceived as a *whole*, then the deep ecologist's position reduces to an extreme form of ethical holism. For if one identifies with the whole of nature, if, say, one follows Macy in thinking (and feeling) that the whole of nature is one's body, then any individual beings that have value would have value, not in themselves, but only to the extent that they contribute to the good of that whole. In that case, culling a particular species of pest to preserve the good of 'nature' (however that is specified) could be seen as analogous to cutting one's hair or one's toenails in order to preserve the good of one's body. Now, to be sure, Zen is holistic, but we have already seen that this kind of extreme holistic perspective on environmental issues is out of keeping with the Zen Buddhist sense of the worth of individual beings.

But deep ecologists sometimes speak about Self-Realization in a way that implies that to realize one's Self is to identify with individual natural beings rather than to identify with nature as a whole. Thus Robert Aitken talks about becoming truly 'intimate' with a black bear (on the face of it, a perilous undertaking),[78] while Kapleau writes, in the passage quoted above, of feeling the preciousness of *each* object.

This commitment to the worth of individual beings is especially evident in another central tenet of deep ecology, the idea that to the extent that we identify with it nature is perceived to have intrinsic value, a value 'in itself' which ought to

[75] For a selection of essays by Hakamaya, Matsumoto and others, both for and against the idea that the teaching of the Buddha-nature contravenes the *anātman* teaching, see Hubbard and Swanson (eds), *Pruning the Bodhi Tree.*

[76] Curtin notes that in an unpublished paper 'the Hindu *ātman*... is explicitly rejected by Naess in favor of a Buddhist conception of no-self'. ('A State of Mind like Water', p.240.)

[77] Hayward, 'Ecology and the Experience of Sacredness', p.66. Compare the story of Shih-t'ou related in Heinrich Dumoulin, *Zen Buddhism: A History. Vol.1: India and China* (New York: Macmillan, 1988), p.73.

[78] Robert Aitken, 'Gandhi, Dogen and Deep Ecology' in George Sessions, *Deep Ecology: Living as if Nature Mattered* (Salt Lake City: Peregrine Smith Books, 1985), p.234.

be respected.[79] To be sure, deep ecologists sometimes mean by this that environmental wholes such as the biosphere have intrinsic value.[80] But at other times they seem to be saying that individual beings have this kind of value – for instance, when they express their commitment to the intrinsic value of nature in terms of the 'equal right' of all things in the biosphere to 'live and blossom'.[81]

With the idea that individual beings have intrinsic value we are, I feel, moving closer to a Zen Buddhist view of things. Nevertheless, differences between deep ecology and Zen would seem to remain. Although Naess tends to operate with a broad, non-biological conception of life, so that even 'natural wholes' such as rivers and mountains can be considered to be alive, he appears to hold that Self-Realization incorporates only one's relations with living beings.[82] But in maintaining this he seems to be introducing a distinction quite out of keeping with some important strands of Zen thought.[83] When Dōgen, for instance, maintains that we are enlightened by things, he is not only referring to living things. When he claims that all beings are Buddha-nature, he is not only referring to animals and plants, but also to walls, tiles and stones.[84]

With Dōgen's ideas we find ourselves on the edge of some very difficult conceptual terrain, and I do not intend to set out over it just yet. However, I would like to suggest, tentatively and provisionally, that it is in the deep ecologist's idea of the intrinsic value of beings that we find the closest match for a Zen Buddhist view of nature. When deep ecologists maintain that all living beings have intrinsic value, they would seem to be expressing an intuition that chimes with the positive regard for nature one finds in Zen.

It will be the purpose of the next chapter to flesh out and appraise this suggestion. For the moment, I would like to conclude this chapter by noting that however this conception of intrinsic value is spelt out, it cannot mean that all things have the sort of moral standing that Jainism attributes to sentient beings, and which leads some Jaina practitioners to take extreme practical measures to avoid impinging upon the world. If indeed Zen attributes intrinsic value to beings, then this cannot entail that any harm caused them is morally wrong, a violation of the First Precept, say. To say that a tomato has intrinsic value cannot be to say that one ought not to slice it up for a salad, although it might be to say that one ought not to gratuitously crush it underfoot or wastefully toss it in the bin. In this connection, it is interesting to note that whatever deep ecologists mean by saying that all living things have intrinsic value (and that is a question for the next chapter), they do not

[79] On the connection between identification and intrinsic value, see Naess, 'Ecosophy T', p.154. Naess and Sessions maintain that a commitment to the intrinsic value of 'Life on Earth' is a 'Basic Principle' of deep ecology. (Devall and Sessions, 'Deep Ecology' p.159.)

[80] See, for instance, Ibid. p.160.

[81] Ibid. p.158.

[82] See, for example, Naess, 'Ecosophy T', p.153; Devall and Sessions, 'Deep Ecology', p.160. See also Curtin, 'A State of Mind Like Water', p.245, 250. Curtin notes that in other places Naess seems to be edging towards the possibility of identifying with non-living things.

[83] As Deane Curtin argues in his very interesting article 'A State of Mind Like Water'.

[84] See Parkes, 'Voices of Mountains, Trees, and Rivers', pp.122-3.

believe that this commitment entails a 'hands-off' policy of non-interaction with the world.[85] The deep ecologist's awareness of the intrinsic value of the pine outside his door does not prevent him from felling it for timber if need be. Nor does his sense of the intrinsic value of plants stop him from eating. But it does entail that these actions are performed with a due sense of respect for the beings involved.[86] Similarly, as I argued above, a Zen Buddhist environmental ethic would not consider as exemplary a life of passive withdrawal from the world. The fact that it would not provides a reason for thinking that whatever deep ecologists mean by saying that all living beings have intrinsic value, the central intuition to which they are giving voice would be one endorsed by Zen.

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[85] See Devall and Sessions, 'Deep Ecology', pp.158-9. Cf. Curtin, 'A State of Mind Like Water', pp.247ff.
[86] See Snyder, 'Grace'.