Dōgen:

Theories and Doctrines
Dōgen’s Theory of Practice (gyōji)

- Practice ultimately equivalent to zazen
- Practice also interpreted to include every action
- Related to the Zen saying, “Ordinary mind is the Way.”
- Dōgen’s concept of practice as everyday action related to doctrine of “Original Enlightenment” (hongaku)
Theory of Practice (gyōjī) cont.

• In *Hongaku* theory all human actions are viewed as actions of the Buddha
• In Dōgen’s view, such actions must comprise *perpetual* endeavor
• Why continue to practice after attaining enlightenment?
• Because, for Dōgen, practice and attainment are identical
Theory of Practice (gyōjī) cont.

- Enlightenment is not an abstract entity to be sought and acquired
- Enlightenment is an intrinsic part of the means to its attainment (“practice”)
- Continued practice after attainment viewed as an act of gratitude to the manifestation of Reality, in which we all participate
Manifestation and Attainment Kōan (genjō kōan)

• Dōgen views kōan practice as inferior to zazen
• Instead, he advocates his genjō kōan in the Shōbōgenzō
• This kōan denotes the “manifestation and attainment” of truth or reality
• Reality cannot be separated from one’s actions and experience
Genjō Kōan cont.

- If one refuses to act before understanding the nature of life, one will not achieve anything
- The only reality for an individual is her present action, nothing more, nothing less
- There is no transcendent goal or enlightenment to seek
- Enlightenment consists in merely living, acting, and being in the present moment
Genjō Kōan cont.

• Dōgen explains the *genjō kōan*:
  – To master the Buddha way is to master oneself
  – To master oneself is to forget oneself
  – To forget oneself is to realize the myriads of phenomena
  – To realize the myriads of phenomena is to “cast off” one’s mind and body, and the mind and body of others
Genjō Kōan cont.

- A bird cannot find a path in the sky other than by soaring in it and uniting with it.
- Similarly, human beings must drop all dualistic differentiation and clinging to self.
- Thus, the practice of zen and the attainment of zen become identical.
- It is upon this idea that Dōgen formulated his theories of Buddha Nature and time.
Buddha Nature

• Although Buddhism teaches “selflessness” (*anātman*), humans long for a lasting, permanent self (*ātman*)

• People are tempted to interpret “Buddha Nature” as a soul or eternal “self”

• For some, the notion of impermanence is deeply disturbing and even repugnant

• Their aim is to find something stable and reliable in the face of chaos and change
Buddha Nature cont.

• Dōgen rejects this interpretation
• He emphasizes Hui-neng’s quote, “Buddha Nature is impermanence”
• In fact, Dōgen views all manifestations of reality (mountains, trees, water, humans) as Buddha Nature
• There is nothing solid to grasp to
Mind is The Buddha (sokushinzebutsu)

- This expression does not mean that all the base functions of an ignorant mind are somehow equated with Buddhahood
- “Mind” is a mind that is engaged with Buddhahood in an authentic manner
- In Dōgen’s view, all existences (i.e., manifestations of reality) are Buddha Nature
Sokushinzebutsu cont.

- All sentient beings are part of this reality as well
- The Buddha Nature cannot be sought, since there is nothing substantial to seek
- The functions of a mind of one who lives in an authentic manner become the Buddha Mind
- The experience of that person becomes identical to the enlightenment of the historical Buddha
The Absolute Now

• Dōgen’s theory of time can be classified into six categories:
  – Self-identity of Existence and Time
  – Specific Time
  – Basic Time
  – Principle of Continuity in Time
  – Absolute Present
  – Applied Time/Time in Practice
Identity of Existence and Time

- Time has no significance without existence
- Time must always be considered in relation to something
- Even hours of the day only derive meaning in relation in terms of existence
- Must be thought of in reference to specific conditions and events
Specific Time

• Each moment is captured and isolated among an infinite continuity of time
• The common view of time isolates moments, names them, and builds upon them
• Dōgen sees the position of each existent during the isolated moment
Basic Time

- Beneath the separate moments we ordinarily perceive is an endless form of time
- This time is not substantial
- It is interdependent
- Yet it transcends the phenomenal world
Continuity in Time

- There is a continuity of moments in an endless succession
- This becomes equivalent to the process of human experience
- Flowing from the past to the future and vice versa
Absolute Present

- Total reality is the existential here and now
- The practice of the moment is *itself* enlightenment
- The Absolute eternal now is timeless, without beginning or end
- It is self-contained, yet perpetually dynamic
Applied Time/Time in Practice

• This refers to the soteriological role of time
• In Dōgen’s view, time cannot exist without practice
• Each moment of practice forms a totality within itself
• Since each moment is a totality within itself, the ultimate time becomes “sitting meditation” (shikan taza)