



***The Gift of Death* as the Grand Narrative of Humanism: Towards an Inclusive Ethos for Co-realization**

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Abstract

The celebrated western humanist tradition has its source in its early philosophical texts. In *The Gift of Death*, Derrida analyses the history of the emergence of ethical responsibility in the so-called Religions of the Book such as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. While the humanist project helped itself through its conquest of the human sphere, it has served to upset the ecological balance and jeopardize sustainability. While searching for an inclusive vision for a sustainable, ethical perspective, Dōgen's philosophy gains relevance in the contemporary context.

Keywords: Humanism, religion, ecology, Christianity, Eastern thought, Poststructuralism, Western thought

1. Introduction

Poststructuralism and deconstruction, whether viewed as demolishing all ethical bases or as giving rise to ethical demand, have almost accomplished a revolution by a declaration of liberation for many a marginalized section – women, the colonized, the coloured, the working classes, the special interest groups and so on. Yet it remained humanist and hence partial still in its reach. Peculiar ethics, or rather an ethos that was, more or less, deliberately fashioned during the high theory era and the period

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immediately after it, is part of the focus of this paper. Additionally, Derrida's interest in Levinas' thought almost from the beginning of his major writings played a crucial role in restoring the humanist stress threatened by the lurking subversive indeterminacy associated with poststructuralism as much as in according greater visibility to Levinas.

Derrida's *The Gift of Death* is the focus of the study not only because of the choice it makes in the contemporary ethical discourse, which is in no small way reinforced by the colossal that its author has been and whose thought bears so heavily on contemporary theory but also due to the fact that the book sets the tone of the ethics of an era and beyond, by tracing the entire Greco-European ethico-historical conditions that shaped the European present. There seems to be an undercurrent of satisfaction, if not with the final result, about the conditions that have led up to the contemporary frame of reference for ethics. Indeed, the sentiment the book exudes is of a Europe that is at the cusp of snatching an imminent ethical victory that, thanks to the historical contingencies, other civilizations cannot achieve. This study also harks back to the Eastern thought as a sounding board and as a parallel to locate it ecologically. And these arguments would be leveraged to hazard the current commonplace view that the Western thought cannot deviate, as Derrida's book yet again demonstrates, from its homocentric stance, as much as the Indian thought is in need of a substantial revision.

2. *The Gift of Death* as Postmodern Ethics

Evidently, *The Gift of Death*, coming as it does towards the later phase of Derrida's career, and presumably, a more considered one at that, supports an ethos apropos in the long line of western ethical thinkers. Indeed, the little book is proffered as the high point and the culmination in identifying the predicates of what is described as postmodern ethics in the long run-up to the late 20th century. It may be noted that the text lists a long tradition of thinkers who tried the route of what it describes as a "religion without religion", such as Levinas, Marion, Ricoeur, Kant, Hegel, Kierkegaard and Patocka himself, whose text Derrida dwells on extensively. And one, it seems, would not be wide of the mark to consider Derrida

himself to “belong to this tradition that consists of proposing a non-dogmatic doublet of dogma, a philosophical and metaphysical doublet, in any case a thinking that ‘repeats’ the possibility of a religion without religion” (Derrida, 1995, 49). This is a crucial point, for the book is meant to draw the blueprint of a postmodern rulebook for a religion without religion.

The text is a reminder to the Christian world of Europe of its responsibility, with a special emphasis on what it means to be a Christian and a religious individual, even as Derrida adds that it applies not only to what he calls the three religions of the Book (Judaism, Christianity and Islam), but even to those outside its purview. And this implies an attempt to fashion an ethical framework with general acceptability, for which he plans to take from the Bible and Christianity, which are used only for illustration. As the arguments for the humanist project in the text draw on a variety of traditions and are predicated on assumptions that need debate, a summary of its main arguments is in order.

3. The Gift of Death: An Overview

The title of the text, *The Gift of Death*, refers obviously to the biblical story of Abraham, the patriarch’s absolute obedience to God in submission to sacrifice his only son Isaac (Gen: 22). The exegesis of this incident is invested with such amplitude that it is introduced as the hinge for building an entire and viable contemporary postmodern ethics. Apart from the play on the rich ambiguity of the title that can take on meanings such as sacrificing one’s life for another, suicide, murder etc., the meaning of the concept of gift, analyzed extensively by anthropologists like Marcel Mauss and debated at length by contemporary theorists, also gets considerable attention in the text.

Derrida’s book sets off with a reference, more or less approvingly, to the Czech philosopher Jan Patocka’s *Heretical Essays on the Philosophy of History* (1975) that views Christianity, especially of the European persuasion, as unique as well as superior, by virtue of the concept of *mysterium tremendum* (tremendous mystery) inherent in it. Patocka presents the history of Europe as the development of this sense of mystery from the pre-Platonic orgiastic religion

through Platonism to Christianity. The historical lineage that engenders a world that is out-and-out humanist, traced by Patocka and which evidently finds Derrida's approval, is assumed to have been a spin-off from Christianity.

Patocka views Western history as a series of oppositions. The pre-Platonic orgiastic mysteries were characterized by an absence of responsibility, which is termed as the 'demonic' and hence the opposition is between the 'demonic' and 'responsibility' that is reckoned as a hallmark of Christianity. Through a critique of the orgiastic religion, the text, by contradistinction, tries to demonstrate "the origin and essence of the religious". Orgiastic religion is hardly a religion worth the name, for "Religion is responsibility or it is nothing at all". Indeed, according to Patocka, one can speak of religion only in the post-orgiastic phase when the orgiastic or demonic mystery has either been destroyed or integrated into a "sphere of responsibility." And such a subject of responsibility will have to both put down orgiastic or demonic mystery as well as subject itself to the wholly and infinite other. Derrida would say that it applies to not only all the three "religions of the Book", but also takes on a pan-European significance, so much so that such a history is vital not just for European Christianity, as it is for "an irreducible condition for a joint history of the subject, responsibility and Europe" (Derrida, 1995, 2).

The opposition referred to above between the demonic and responsibility is the ground on which the entire European history is constructed, for "the demonic is originally defined as irresponsibility or . . . as non-responsibility" (Derrida, 1995, 3). According to Patocka, the emergence of responsibility that marks both the history of religion as well as that of the subject is rather surprisingly forgotten by Europe, or Europe suffers "from ignorance of its history, from a failure to assume its responsibility, that is, the memory of its history as history of responsibility" (Derrida, 1995, 4). However, crucially, when Patocka refers to responsibility, he means responsibility to human beings, and hence the humanist agenda would be assumed as a given and as the natural scheme of life. Evidently, Patocka's book may then be alternatively called a discourse on the growth of humanism, which remains incomplete and hence needs a more radical engagement.

As Derrida seems to share the sentiment, the text by Patocka, as much as by Derrida, in a way, is a call for the completion of the humanist project. Whether it can be called a part of the incomplete project of modernity requires a separate analysis.

As noted above, Derrida is also of the view that “this becoming responsible” is intimately a result, especially of Christianity and its mystery, the *mysterium tremendum* (Derrida, 1995, 6). He says that Christianity has endowed Europe with a new self, that is, the present self that is not aware of the legacy and its own character. Christianity being the zenith of the growth of responsibility and at once a critique and the incorporation of Platonism and neo-Platonism, with both of them carrying elements of orgiastic mysteries, this study becomes as much a critique of Christianity as it is of Patocka and Derrida.

Significantly, because Patocka says that with the emergence of Christianity, the orgiastic and Platonic mysteries are not eliminated but only subordinated, there is the indication of a story of domination and control: “One secret is at the same time enclosed and dominated by the other. Platonic mystery thus incorporates orgiastic mystery, and Christian mystery represses Platonic mystery” (Derrida, 1995, 9).

4. The Humanist Project Embedded

One might say that the grandiose scheme of humanism finds its appeal in the popular imagination in the wake of the endowment of an immortal soul exclusively to humans, which gathers form at this point in history. From then on, the politics of the soul, which is yet young becomes most glaring in ethical thought. As its corollary, the soul’s exclusive character got entrenched and it ensured the apotheosis of the human. And Patocka has it all there: “It is, for the first time in history, an immortality of the individual, since it is interior, since it is inseparable from its own fulfillment. The Platonic doctrine of the immortality of the soul is the result of a confrontation between the orgiastic and responsibility” (Patocka, 114, qtd. in Derrida, 1995, 12). The soul is a spin-off from the philosopher’s meditation on death and mutation. In fact, a philosophy that has simultaneity with soul has had a long vigil

over death. When Derrida says that “the philosopher is also a great thaumaturge”, he refers to an entire world that is conjured up, with its centrality primarily on soul and humanism (Derrida, 1995, 15). The humanist project, then, is an offshoot of the philosopher’s obsession with soul and death, because philosophy on the soul is essentially a concern with death, in an act that is designed as a triumph over death. Such a notion of death is at once a relation to the Good as well as responsibility which is the history of the Western subject according to Patocka.

The new religion, that is, Christianity, says Patocka, hides under it the orgiastic irresponsibility which surfaces often. There is and has always been the possibility of a recrudescence of the orgiastic. Evidently, for Patocka, Christianity has not realized its full potential for responsibility. As he puts it: “Christianity has not yet come to Christianity” (Derrida, 1995, 28). Therefore, there is a call for severing of ties with its Greco-Roman heritage: “Christian politics must break more definitively and more radically with Greco-Roman Platonic politics in order to finally fulfill the *mysterium tremendum*” (Derrida, 1995, 28). Indeed, this study, in a way, not only impugns Patocka’s stress on the Greco-Roman tradition as the sole determining factor of European culture but also argues precisely for a severing of its ties with the Greco-Roman tradition, if from a different perspective.

When Patocka emphatically concludes “that Christianity alone has made possible access to an authentic responsibility throughout history, responsibility as history and as history of Europe”, one needs to interrogate how the celebrated responsibility has come about and at what price (Derrida, 1995, 50). Besides, the call for a departure from one’s legacy is also a matter of strategy as well as the economy, that is, whether such a departure is possible and whether it would bring in dividends. For one, in terms of strategy, the severing of the old ties mentioned above is easier said than done. Secondly, the European past definitely has a longer period of antiquity than the Greco-Roman, which Patocka chooses to ignore. These issues are vital and need to be looked into.

5. The Humanist Project Seeping through the Narrative

The central metaphor of Derrida's text is the biblical incident of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac. It is elaborated as exemplifying the ethical framework for a believing or even an unbelieving world and as its rule and guidance. The Biblical incident is God's 'test' of Abraham. Significantly, the incident raises a series of issues. Firstly, Derrida's own definition of the *mysterium tremendum* would hardly escape the charge of being rooted in the metaphysics of presence, a fundamental critique by Derrida himself against the conventional ontotheology based philosophies. For instance, in addition to the liberal use of the religious jargon, a large number of statements in the text indicate that Derrida's own ethics has to be predicated on some extra systemic validating central presence: e.g. "God is himself absent, hidden and silent, separate, secret, at the moment he has to be obeyed. God doesn't give his reasons . . . or share anything with us; neither his motivations, if he has any, nor his deliberations, nor his decisions. Otherwise, he wouldn't be God. . ." (Derrida, 1995, 57). It apparently is a language not too far away from an ontotheologist and even a liberal humanist.

Secondly, one notes that God's command to Abraham is kept hidden from Sarah, Eliezer and Isaac. Had it been revealed to his wife or son, it would probably have spoiled the scheme. Evidently, familial communion, when it involves God, is at a premium. The family as a democratic platform, as it were, is alien to the divine world. Sarah probably, if at all, comes to know about it only after the event, which indicates to us that Sarah's place, as much as that of Isaac's, is on the margins. The child belongs equally to her as well. By arrogating the power of destiny of the child to himself, everyone else is reduced to a nonentity in the matter. On the other hand, had all these that happened to Abraham happened to Sarah, and if Abraham is the last one to come to know about it, would Abraham have taken kindly to such a prospect? Surprisingly, Sarah's and Isaac's person and views do not figure in the scheme. How the contemporary society would take to such an incident if it were to occur today may be just another part of the story. But the point is when one justifies or condones all such inequities in the name of the patriarchal biblical world, the same logic should apply

to wherever it is used as an exemplum. Yet, this does not seem to happen with Derrida's analysis.

Besides, according to Derrida, the incident that stresses the incompatibility between general ethics and absolute ethics (murdering someone in obedience to divine command) advocates irresponsibility rather than responsibility. Derrida, if smugly, calls it, "ethics as 'irresponsibilization' (Derrida, 1995, 61), because the incident is viewed as a moment of triumph as absolute ethics take precedence over general ethics. However, at the end of it all, as always, it is a mountain in labour. The whole debate about absolute ethics and general ethics is erased as god's angel intervenes to forbid Abraham from murdering Isaac. Then Abraham, unbidden and matter-of-factly, so it seems, grabs an unfortunate "ram, entangled in a thicket by his horns", and sacrifices it, instead of his son, to (blood thirsty?) God. Significantly, no angel is in sight to interfere in the killing of the ram. Even as no god is known to have ever consumed such burnt offerings, the devotees, here Abraham and Isaac and possibly the servants instructed to wait at a distance, must have feasted on the lamb under the auspices of divinity. Here is collusion, instead of a contradiction, between the general and absolute ethics to secure the stamp of approval on killing the lamb. Notably, is not the lamb trapped in the bushes a trope for the predicament of the nonhuman animal kingdom that demands a sympathetic approach?

Instead, in a single stroke, the redactor of the text accomplishes many things. And one recalls that even in societies like classical Greece, which "celebrated animal sacrifices and occasionally immolated human victims, life in itself was not considered sacred" (Agamben, 1998, 66). Hence the angelic intervention designed to stop the killing of Isaac at once forbids human sacrifice as well as sanctions animal killing. Evidently, the humanist agenda of the enterprise is unmistakable. It declares that homicide, not to mention filicide, is forbidden. Hence cannibalism too is disallowed. The divine realm is brought to sanction the eating of the animal meat as much as it sanctifies the human realm. The metaphor has accomplished the job of assigning places to all the stakeholders. In this humanist moment of structuring, the politics of the narrative is evident.

The Abrahamic story, it may be noted, has become a common heritage for the Judeo-Christian-Islamic thought, as a “common treasure” and as “a property of all the three so called religions of the Book” (Derrida, 1995, 64). And it is here, the liminal space between the inclusive orgiastic mysteries and the later ‘responsible’ religions, where one locates the book (the Bible). As a result, a possibly inclusionary vision of the ethics of the past, which Patocka characterizes as irresponsibility, subsequently gives way to an exclusionary human perspective. Besides, as Derrida views Abrahamic narrative as an ethical story relevant even to nonbelievers, the universal character ascribed to it too becomes clear. He calls it a “fable” and hence a philosophy of “generality”. For, as he puts it, “whether one believes the biblical story or not, whether one gives it credence, doubts it, or transposes it, it could still be said that there is a moral to this story, even if taken it to be a fable (but taking it to be a fable still amounts to losing it to philosophical or poetic generality)” (Derrida, 1995, 66).

6. The Human-Divine Convergency

However, the significant aspect of the ambitious humanist project is the sudden leap, almost like a sleight-of-hand in Derrida’s argument that introduces an apotheosis which practically identifies God with the human other. The sudden passage is from viewing God as absolute other to one where “everyone else is completely or wholly other”, as “Every other (one) is every (bit) other” (Derrida, 1995, 68). Yet the attempt to equate every other (human) with God is far from seamless as Derrida would have it. An extended citation is in order:

“If God is completely other, the figure or name of the wholly other, the every other (one) is every (bit) other. *Tout autrest tout autre*. It implies that God as the wholly other, is to be found everywhere there is something of the wholly other. And since each of us, everyone else, each other is infinitely other in its absolute singularity, inaccessible, solitary, transcendent, non manifest, organarily non present to my ego . . . then what can be said about Abraham’s relation to God can be said about my relation without relation to every other (one) as every (bit) other . . . in

particular my relation to my neighbor or my loved ones who are as inaccessible to me, as secret and transcendent as Jähweh” (Derrida, 1995, 77-78).

Derrida’s empathy with the suffering humanity does not render the text less exclusionary with regard to its nonhuman other: “Every other (one) is God’ or God is every (bit) other”, which implies “that every other one, each of the others is God in as much as he or she is, like God, wholly other” (Derrida, 1995, 87). It is out and out human, too exclusively so.

The more interesting part is how Derrida goes on to try yet another definition of God to suit the humanist creed. There is a departure from the traditional Judeo-Christian idolatrous image of God. Instead of the Judeo-Christian-Islamic view of God as transcendent one way up there, Derrida defines God as a “name of the possibility I have of keeping a secret that is visible from the interior but not from the exterior” (Derrida, 1995, 108). The next step is to identify God with one’s conscience, which is located at the threshold between oneself and the other. Conspicuously, the definition as well as many features introduced as Western specific forms the core of the Eastern tradition too:

Once such a structure of conscience exists, of being-with oneself . . . thanks to the invisible word as such, a witness that others cannot see, and who is therefore at the same time other than me and more intimate with me than myself . . . once there is secrecy and secret witnessing within me, then what I call God exists, (there is) what I call God in me, (it happens that) *I call myself God . . . God is in me, he is the absolute ‘me’ or ‘self’, he is the structure of invisible interiority that is called, in Kierkegaard’s sense, subjectivity*” (Derrida, 1995, 108-09)(italics added).

Derrida’s text stresses how the Father in heaven would reward the doer but seems immediately attracted by the Indian virtue of disinterestedness by referring to Baudelaire’s remark about the “suppression of the object”, which becomes a precept for ethics. Yet it is a far cry from the verse of the Bhagavat Gīta that runs: “*Karmanyē Vādhikaraste Ma Bhaleshu Kadāchana*” (Gita 2.47) (you are entitled to the deed only, not to its fruits), which is a total focus on

one's duty without any desire for its fruits either in this world or the next.

Again, Derrida concludes the text by quoting an extract from Patōcka's book that refers to the singularity of Christianity built on a god who immolated himself for others (for the human other undoubtedly). Nietzsche famously described that stroke of genius called Christianity. However, similar sentiment informs the Indian thought as well. For instance, in the Vedic thought, the universe had its origin in the sacrifice of God, Prajāpati, Brahma, regarded as the primeval man (*puruṣa*). "The man was sacrificed, presumably to himself by the gods, who apparently were his children. From the body of the divine victim, the universe was produced" (Basham, 1981, 242). The following extract from the "Hymn of Primeval Man" celebrates it:

When the gods made a sacrifice
with the Man as their victim,
spring was the melted butter, Summer the fuel,
and Autumn the oblation.
From that all-embracing sacrifice
the clotted butter was collected
from it he made the animals
of air and wood and village (Rg.Veda 10.90).

These parallels and resonances between the West and the East in terms of the divine sacrifice call for an analysis of an era prior to the Greco-Roman tradition. Hence rather than celebrating a humanism that is assumed to have been set in motion with the Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian traditions, which later only get accentuated with the Cartesian cogito, one should take a deeper retrospective view. Ironically, the poststructuralist and postmodernist theories are often viewed as concerted attempts to deliver Western philosophy from the serious damage it suffered primarily due to cogito.

7. A View from the Paleolithic Age

One wonders as to why Patōcka chose to identify the beginning of the Western tradition with the Greco-Roman and the Judeo-

Christian era at all. For one, even as a regress ad infinitum is impossible, here is an equally relevant and powerful past that bears on the period chosen by Patocka for analysis. For another, the Judeo-Christian tradition may be viewed as a defining moment of departure from what was a holistic, inclusive and more sustainable worldview. While a nostalgia concerning the failure to realize the potential humanist focus is palpable in Patocka as it is with Derrida, one is inclined to interrogate the assumptions on which the Western thought came to be built. As a matter of fact, the Judeo-Christian tradition had already come a long way from the Paleolithic life that can be described as anything but humanist. Beyond the Greco-Roman thought, where both God and later man move to the centre stage, one needs to look back to a temporal scheme that both Greco-Roman as well as the East must have shared at one point in time. A quick synoptic glance over this long history is a fruitful exercise.

The Paleolithic world from which the Greco-Roman world has come away is believed to be characterized by a fundamental unity, where everyone felt in the blood a state of continuity with interchangeable external forms. The natural world of land, plants and animals to which people were closely interlinked made everyone feel at home. Instead of perceiving nature as hostile and inert, the Paleolithic mind viewed nature as dynamic, responsive and nurturing to everyone. Not that the world presented no terrors for the people. On the contrary, beyond the sentimental effusions, what is of significance is the way the Paleolithic mind could integrate the natural phenomena to take them in their stride.

The Paleolithic culture must have existed more or less in the static form for at least 200,000 years. And even if longevity is an indication of sustainability and something really to write home about, a return to a Paleolithic mode of life at this point in time looks a near impossibility. Though it lacked the rigour of philosophy in the modern sense, the Paleolithic mind had an intuitive belief that the Magna Mater would provide for her children. The Magna Mater must have emerged as a life principle, and an immanent one at that, animating everything in an equitable and assuring cycle of birth and death.

In the then existing cosmology and cosmogony in the form of myths, “the Paleolithic mind did not posit human beings as special children of creation separate from the rest of nature” (Oelschlaeger, 1991, 20). The Paleolithic mindset or mode is believed to have been shared universally, which gradually gave way to agriculture with its related encroachments in the form of domestication of animals, deforestation and so on, which dealt a death blow to the inclusive vision. More importantly, the rise of agriculture was accompanied by religions of transcendence with its anthropocentrism and attempted to placate the deity in addition to their focus on private property and social segregation. While agriculture itself may have emerged thanks to a variety of factors, including climate change, increase in population, serendipity and so on, “once the humans became agriculturists, the almost paradisiacal character of prehistory was irretrievably lost” (Oelschlaeger, 1991, 28).

Indeed, if this transition from hunting foraging way of life to agriculture is “the so called Fall,” “then the ancient Mediterranean theatre is where the ‘fall from Paradise’ was staged” (Oelschlaeger, 1991, 31). With agriculture came the scourge of philosophy and theology, which together made all the difference, as nature now became an object of study and evaluation. Then it was just a matter of course: “from the agricultural revolution to the first great Near Eastern theological and philosophical outpourings is but a millennia” (Oelschlaeger, 1991, 30), though the real break for Europe occurred after “the Hebrews and the birth of historical consciousness” (Oelschlaeger, 1991, 28). Evidently, the later modern and postmodern western idea of nature has been initiated or rather mediated by the ancient Sumerians and Egyptians. The Paleolithic mind, instead of worshipping a transcendent god, given to celebrate the magic of the quotidian and the miracle of life itself with a shared sense of life with the least minimum sense of fatality, may have had ethics that precedes philosophy, in a sense, close to Emmanuel Levinas’ ethics.

8. Indian Thought

These similarities in prehistory may be accounted for in terms either of the archetypal images of the human psyche realized in history generally or by inter-influences. Modern research has

produced enough literature regarding prehistoric migrations and the consequent inter-influences as the constitutive factors underpinning the thought systems. The Eastern tradition also shares a parallel trajectory. The Hindu cultural orientation, like most others, experienced a slow and grinding change from the Paleolithic nomadic community of hunters and fruit-gatherers to agriculture and domestication of animals, a trajectory that is generally applicable to many communities globally. The Vedic age in India and the emergence of agriculture must have been the Eastern 'Fall' that was followed up by a 'redemption' in the form of an *Upaniṣadic* phase that stressed the *Brahman-Atman* (the Absolute and the individual soul) identification that was designed to restore the old view of immanence. The inclusive character reflected in the script of the age is far too pronounced to be overlooked: it expresses itself in what has come to be known as the *mahāvākyās* (great statements concerning core truths), such as *Aham Brahma Asmi* (I am the Absolute), *Tat Tvam Asi* (You are the innermost principle) and so on. The defining moment for India, philosophically, maybe the *Upaniṣadic* period and the emergence of Jainism and Buddhism, all of which contributed to setting the tone for a more inclusive vision.

Among a large number of verses celebrating the vision, the following verse from *Chāndōgya Upaniṣad*, now a commonplace as well as typical, concerns a father concluding the instruction, telling his son who is unable to locate the salt that got dissolved in water: "Then the father said: 'You don't perceive that the one reality (sat) exists in your own body, my son, but it is truly there. Everything which is, has its being in that subtle essence. That is Reality! That is the Soul! And you are that, Svētakētu!'" (*Tat Tvam Asi*), (*Chāndōgya Upaniṣad* 6.13).

In fact, the identity of the individual souls and the universe is reiterated forcefully in the *Upaniṣadic* literature. It views all forms of life as interconnected as a system. The democratic sentiment is unmistakable in that even the gods will have to die and be replaced by other gods. "Animals, insects, and according to some sects plants all lived under the same law. With remarkable imaginative insight, some sages taught that even water, dust and air were filled with minute animalculae, and that these too had souls which were

the same, in essence, as those of men” (Basham, 1981, 245). Interestingly, the human interest was not flagging either. “To us the most striking feature of Indian civilization is its humanity”, and in India down the centuries of its past, “slaves were so few in number,” and its “human rights so well protected” (Basham, 1981, 9).

However, behind the veneer of the clichéd eastern spirituality is the *Mokṣa* that emerged as the ultimate aim of life and the world as bondage in some form. For, *Mokṣa* can come to pass only through liberation from the phenomenal world. Any worldview that considers the world as bondage is something other than conducive to a sustainable life. The inclusive character of the *Upaniṣadic* philosophy takes a severe beating due to its view of the world as a bondage from which everyone rather laboriously has to ultimately break free. And such a *Mokṣa*, the *summum bonum* of life for the human soul, becomes more convoluted as it turns out to be a Brahmin preserve instead of a state accessible democratically for the rest of the biotic sphere. Evidently, such a dispensation can be very oppressive.

9. Dōgen’s Inclusive Vision

In this context, the most noteworthy perspective in terms of sustainability of the universe emerges from Eihei Dōgen, a Buddhist monk of the 13th century. Perhaps, there is hardly a more egalitarian as well as ecocentric vision than the philosophy of Dōgen, as is propounded in his *Shōbōgenzō* (Treasury of the True Dharma Eye). As the title suggests, it concerns the Right View of the Buddhist eight-fold path, which is a de-anthropocentric vision in which the human and the nonhuman share the same platform. Dōgen emphasizes the simultaneous attainment of Buddha nature for everyone. Far from an individual working for personal enlightenment, Dōgen’s vision is distinguished by its mutuality of relatedness reminiscent of a Paleolithic vision:

trees and grasses, wall and fence expound and exalt the dharma for the sake of ordinary people, sages and all living beings. Ordinary people, sages, and all living beings in turn preach and exalt the dharma for the sake of trees, grasses,

wall and fence. The dimension of self-enlightenment-qua-enlightening-others basically is fully replete with the characteristics of realization, and causes the principle of realization to function unceasingly (Dōgen, 2002, 13).

The common core issue shared with other religions is generation extinction, birth and death, and Dōgen is concerned about liberation. Being a transanthropocentric issue itself, it gets addressed appropriately from such a perspective. Hence, the personalist enlightenment that usually implies some form of othering with regard to the nonhuman sphere in many religions gives way to a veritable co-realization or a collective *nirvana*. As Dōgen puts it: “Practice that confirms things by taking the self to them is illusion: for things to come forward and practice and confirm the self is enlightenment” (Dōgen, 2002, 40).

Human beings in Dōgen’s scheme are significant to the extent that de-anthropocentrism, arising from self-consciousness, can happen only to humans. Besides, Dōgen’s variant reading of a significant verse from the *Nirvana Sutra* is notable. It runs: “*Shakyamuni Buddha said, ‘All sentient beings without exception have the Buddha-nature. Tathāgata abides forever without change’*” (Abe, 1992, 60). However, Dōgen, for whom everything is alive, says:

...as for all ‘sentient beings’, in the Buddha Way all things possessed of mind are called sentient beings, because mind is, as such, sentient being. Things not possessed of mind are also sentient beings, because sentient beings are, as such, mind. Hence, all mind is sentient being, and sentient beings all are being Buddha-nature. Grass and tree, nation and state are mind. Because they are mind, they are sentient being. Because they are sentient being, they are being Buddha-nature. Sun, moon, stars, and planets are mind. Because they are mind, they are sentient being. Because they are sentient being, they are being Buddha-nature (Dōgen, 2002, 85).

Obviously, Dōgen endows everything with life, mind and Buddha nature. When he says that “whole-being is Buddha-nature,” one encounters ultimate socialism, so to speak, with sentient being (*shujō*) and whole being (*shitsūū*) together and where mind and

Buddha-nature are all locked in an ecologic embrace. Dōgen's stress on social praxis is also pronounced: "True compassion can be realized only by transcending *nirvana* to return to and work in the midst of the sufferings of the ever-changing world" (Abe, 1992, 58).

10. Conclusion

Unlike the *Upaniṣādic* or the Dōgen tradition, both of which have not happened in the West where instead "a peculiar combination of Attica and Jerusalem that has fatefully influenced the history" (Oelschlaeger, 1991, 322), which steadily but surely drew a wedge between the human and the nonhuman sphere. As a corollary, "Hellenism and Judeo-Christianity in combination introduced an unprecedented direction to human intercourse with the earth, for nature was conceived as valueless until humanized" (Oelschlaeger, 1991, 33). The initiatives especially since the closing decades of the twentieth century under the banner of the ecological campaign, have nudged people into an awareness "that we are not the end or *raison d'être* of the evolutionary process but merely a coordinate interface" (Oelschlaeger, 1991, 350), which perforce would see us humbler, and with Lyotard one might exclaim, "I am interested in remaining a child" (Lyotard, 1993, 107).

Finally, ethics have become a pressing issue due to the exigencies of our time. As Giorgio Agamben puts it: "there is no essence, no historical or spiritual vocation, no biological destiny that humans must enact or realize. This is the only reason why something like ethics can exist because it is clear that if humans were or had to be this or that substance, this or that destiny, no ethical experience would be possible—there would be only tasks to be done" (Agamben, 1993, 43). Humanism hence while continuing its work for humanity, should give shape to ethics for ecologism where everyone gets their due, for which we need a more inclusive narrative, a *upaniṣad* (lore sitting close), and a new bible (the book). For only a thought system that upholds the co-realization of all its stakeholders would be the first step toward ethics based on equity.

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