Where is our disagreement?

A Zen-inspired method to understand deep disagreements

By
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Abstract
In this thesis, I develop a method that will help you understand and solve deep disagreements. In forming my method I draw on Zen Buddhist philosophy. In chapter one my understanding of deep disagreement is presented. Deep disagreements is seen as being caused by underlying metaphysical fundamental beliefs and/or worldviews. My method hinges on three concepts, interconnected, conventional centric, and ultimate reality. In the process of explaining these concepts important Zen Buddhist ideas are explored. By exploring which of these three categories a view or argument engages with you will be able to avoid deep disagreements because the types of beliefs that cause deep disagreements are made transparent. In the second chapter, I first analyze an argument against theism and for naturalism and show that there is a deep disagreement at play in that argument. In using my method you can see that the conflict is not a conflict. I then analyze animism and show that animism does not need to be in opposition to naturalism and that both can coexist. In the third chapter, a meta-analysis is made. The main advantage of my method is that it tries to understand and place all types of views into a bigger picture. This makes my method unifying. I also show that there is a wide range of areas in which this method could be used. It could be used in many situation of disagreement.

Keywords: Deep disagreement, Centrism, Interconnectedness, Ultimate reality, Zen Buddhism, worldviews, methodology.
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1. Introduction

Often we find ourselves in disagreements. To an extent, one of the primary functions of philosophy is just that, resolving these disagreements. Yet, radically different ideas and positions are always in conflict with each other and seem to have a hard time, or even be willing, to resolve their disagreements.

There are many types of disagreements. Some are just a result of one party making some rational mistake. Other disagreements result from two people not thinking that the meaning of a fact is the same. Sometimes you just stick by your position because you are stubborn and don’t want the other person to be right. These disagreements are normal and we come across them regularly. However, there is another form of disagreement that is more problematic. These arise from the parties in disagreement having different worldviews and/or different fundamental beliefs. The problem with these types of disagreements is that they might not be obvious in a debate or dialogue because the persons engaging in it can use the same language and talk about the same topics while still having radically different views of the meanings of these words and topics. As a result, it might seem as if they are discussing the same thing when in fact they might not be. Think for example of two persons discussing Jesus. One of them is a catholic, the other is a Muslim and neither of the parties is aware of this. The potential disagreement that will arise between them might not be fair because the catholic person believes in the Trinity and thus sees Jesus as God while the person who believes in Islam views Jesus as just another prophet in a long line of prophets. The two very different beliefs about Jesus will inform what they talk about and pose a problem in their dialogue. Whatever disagreement they might come across will be informed by this deeper disagreement concerning who Jesus was. I will call this type of disagreement Deep disagreement and it is this type of disagreement that this thesis is concerned with.

How should one deal with deep disagreements and make sure they don’t happen, or at least make it transparent that a deep disagreement is occurring? A philosophy that, I think, has the potential to easily help in finding, understanding, helping to solve, and ultimately avoiding deep disagreements is Zen Philosophy. Zen philosophy, contrary to many other worldviews, seems to be able to hold that two positions are true and false simultaneously and thus accept the truth and
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soundness of two contradictory judgments of the same thing. Zen philosophy accepts three types of views on existence. In this thesis, the three views will be called conventional centric, interconnected, and ultimate reality. With the help of these concepts, I hope to show a way to understand and solve deep disagreements.

Aim and research question

In this thesis, I will develop a method based on Zen Buddhist philosophy. After I have developed a Zen-inspired method I want to test it on two examples of deep disagreements in contemporary philosophy. By applying my theory to two examples I hope to discern more clearly how my method handles deep disagreements and see what advantages and disadvantages my method can provide.

My thesis aims to see what Zen philosophy in general and my Zen-inspired method, in particular, can contribute to understanding, solve and ultimately avoiding getting into deep disagreements.

My research question is thus; How can my Zen-inspired methodology help us understand deep disagreements?

In understanding deep disagreements we should be able to find and avoid getting into deep disagreements. In a way, we should also be able to solve deep disagreements because they are made transparent and therefore you will be able to engage appropriately with the disagreement. The problematic aspects of the deep disagreement are removed.

To answer my research question I will structure the thesis in three main parts. The first will focus on presenting a Zen-inspired methodology that can help in understanding and solve deep disagreements. The second part will be an application of my methodology on two examples of deep disagreements that result from different worldviews. The last part will be a meta-reflection and focus on evaluating my methodology to discern its strengths and weaknesses.

Structure and method

In building my Zen theory I will primarily focus on Zen philosophy. However, because Zen is part of the larger tradition of Mahayana Buddhism and because key philosophers like Dogen have influences from other Buddhist traditions I will not purely restrict myself to Zen Buddhist literature.
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Instead, I will develop a reconstruction of Zen Philosophy and take the fitting ideas wherever I find them. This means that my account of Zen philosophy will not perfectly represent any specific Zen traditions, but be a reconstruction that is possible and reasonable given my aim and research question. Even so, my emphasis will be put on Dogens Sōtō Zen philosophy. As a consequence, the use of Zen philosophy in this thesis should be seen as my application and interpretation of Zen philosophy.

The primary function of the first part of the thesis is to introduce some theoretical concepts and then develop my method. I will start by introducing my understanding of deep disagreements. After that, I will delve into Zen philosophy. The main focus will be to present and explain three views of existence. This is necessary because Zen philosophy can be seen as built up by three main views on existence.

The three views are conventional centric, interconnected, and Ultimate reality. I have developed the technical terms interconnected and conventional centric reality and decided to use Ultimate reality. This is because I find these terms to be more descriptive for a Western audience than traditional terms like Buddha-nature, no-Buddha-nature, and conventional reality in describing what is happening in these views. I hope that my terminology will make it easier for the reader that is not well-versed in Buddhist philosophy to follow my argument.

To present these concepts I will explore some important Zen ideas. First I will explore some core assumptions made by the Mahayana tradition which Zen Buddhism is part of. Notably here is the theory of dependent origination. The Zen Philosopher Dogen's interpretation of Buddhism will be central to my understanding of the Zen ideas I will use for my method. Notably here are Dogen's ideas of Buddha-nature (enlightened reality, or ultimate reality), mind, impermanence, the practical dimension of Zen, and how different views of existence work together with each other. The ideas of interconnectedness and Ultimate reality should be almost fully presented by this point. Ultimate reality and interconnectedness will first be presented as synonymous and later on, utilizing Dogen's understanding of Zen, I will separate these concepts from each other.

I will move on to introduce the idea of a conventional centric view and its relation to ultimate reality and interconnectedness. In this section, we will start to move from a purely metaphysical discussion to one that encompasses a practical dimension. Therefore I will end by discussing the concept of enlightenment and the practical enlightened state of no-mind (Mushin). When we have explored the conventional centric view of reality we should also start to fully
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Understand the view of ultimate and interconnected reality. At this stage I will form my method and how it should be used. I will also shortly discuss my method's potential.

In part two I will present two examples from contemporary philosophy where philosophers are in deep disagreements and apply my Zen method to them. The deep disagreements I will apply my method to are between naturalism and theism as well as naturalism and animism. My choice to focus my analysis on these topics is because questions relating worldviews are particularly susceptible to deep disagreements. Further, I believe a focus on worldviews will succeed in successfully illuminating the strength of my method. My analysis of the deep disagreement between naturalism and theism will be based on an article where Gregory Dawes defends a naturalist approach against theism. The analysis of the deep disagreement between animism and naturalism will primarily be based on anthropological works on the two worldviews.

In the third part, I will have a meta-discussion where I evaluate the results from the second part of the thesis and see what my Zen-inspired method can provide to situations where philosophers are in deep disagreement with each other. This is an important section because I will try to do a meta-analysis of my approach so that I can discern the advantages and problems with it. The thesis will end with a short conclusion.

Research overview

In the literature on deep disagreements, we find articles like Ranalli's “What is Deep Disagreement?” (2018), Pritchard's “Wittgensteinian Hinge Epistemology and Deep Disagreement (2018)”, Fogelins's “The Logic of Deep disagreements” (2005) to Lynchs “After the Spade Turns: Disagreement, First Principles and Epistemic Contractarianism” (2016). Where the main focus in these works are on either epistemology or Wittgensteinian hinge epistemology my contribution will be in providing a different way to understand deep disagreements with a higher focus on metaphysics.

The application of Zen philosophical ideas to modern Western philosophy is not new. Notably, we have the Kyoto School of Philosophy with philosophers like Nishitani Keiji (1982), Nishida Kitaro (1990), Abe Masao (1992), and Tanabe Hajime (1986). These thinkers have used their inspiration from Buddhist philosophy to engage with Western philosophy. Mainly, this dialogue has been with philosophers that are part of the continental philosophical tradition. From
the Western side, we have philosophers like Jay L. Garfield who has engaged in Buddhist philosophy and written works to try to introduce some Buddhist ideas into the Western philosophical discourse. See, for example, “Engaging Buddhism: why it Matters to Philosophy” (Garfield 2015).

A few aestheticians have engaged in Zen philosophy, among them we have Robert E Carter (2017), David Cooper (2017), and Yuriko Saito (2017).


There is also a large amount of literature that explores Dogen's philosophy. Among them, we have Steven Heine who has written and edited multiple works on Dogen (Heine 2020, 2015, 2012, 1985). Similar types of books that explore Zen philosophers and other Buddhist thinkers exist. We also have translations of old Buddhist and Zen Buddhist works. This ranges from sutras to poetry made by monks and philosophers.

On the topic of animism, we have the recent anthology “Animism and Philosophy of Religion” edited by Tiddy Smith (2023). We also have extensive anthropological literature like the works of Viveriros De Castro (1998, 2019) Philipe Descolas's “Beyond Nature and Culture” (Descola 2013), the works of Tim Ingold, See, for example, his compilation of essays “The perception of the environment” (Ingold 2000). We also have Rane Willerslev's work “Soul Hunters” (Willerslev 2007) and Eduardo Khons Monograph “How Forests Think” (Kohn 2013). These are just a few examples of some important anthropologists who have engaged in the topic.

When it comes to the study of Theism and Naturalism and the relation between them we have for example the works of Plantinga (1986,1996,2000,2001), Gregory (2008), Johnson (1997), and Rae (2005) among others. We also have Gregory Dawes whose article “in defense of Naturalism (2011)” I will analyze further down.

2. Theoretical presuppositions and forming a Zen inspired method
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Before I can delve into Zen philosophy my understanding of deep disagreements needs to be presented. Therefore I will start by exploring my understanding of deep disagreements. Then I will move on to present the ideas of interconnected, conventional centric, and ultimate reality. At first interconnectedness and ultimate reality will be addressed as synonymous. Then I will make a distinction between ultimate reality and interconnectedness. When this is done I will address conventional centric reality and the relation between the three concepts. I will end this chapter by developing my Zen-inspired methodology.

Deep disagreements

What do I mean by deep disagreements? This is an important question. Broadly speaking I see deep disagreements as disagreements that arise from clashes of perspectives, disagreements about our most fundamental commitments, and disagreements arising from different worldviews (Ranalli&Lagewaard 2022:1). This definition should be enough for my purpose. The key function of relevance for this thesis is that some underlying fundamental beliefs cause disagreements. Often, I believe, they arise from different worldviews, however, they could also arise from one specific fundamental belief which is relevant to a specific discussion.

One thing we can see in this formulation of deep disagreements is a focus on worldviews and fundamental beliefs. It is these that cause a problem. More generally, I think, it is fitting to label these fundamental beliefs as core metaphysical understandings. As Van Inwagen thinks, even if it is a problematic definition of metaphysics, still the most accurate definition is that metaphysics concerns ultimate reality (Van Inwagen 2015:1-2). We can see that the fundamental beliefs of relevance do not primarily focus on testable facts. If that were the case deep disagreements should pose a fairly small problem and you could easily discern who is right and wrong in the disagreement. Rather, I see these fundamental beliefs to be more tightly connected to the idea of worldviews and how reality functions. That is, how we fundamentally approach existence and interpret the unknown or that which is not, as of yet, testable. In this understanding, we can have naturalism, theism, and animism as examples of broad categories of different fundamental approaches to existence. As my understanding of deep disagreements shows, questions concerning worldviews are susceptible to deep disagreements. Therefore it will also be these three worldviews that will be analyzed further down. Within naturalism, animism, and theism we can have, for example, Christianity and Hinduism as more specific theist worldviews and scientism as a more narrow naturalist worldview or a specific indigenous animist group's animist worldview.
specific worldviews can be provided, however, at this point it's not necessary. What is of interest is which type of fundamental beliefs in these worldviews it is that pose a problem. I think, the problems are metaphysical and concern how we understand the unknown and that which is not testable.

A disagreement concerning whether there is water in a tree should not hinge on metaphysics because it is testable. However, a disagreement about whether a tree should be seen as a person or not concerns more fundamental metaphysical understandings of existence. An animist could say that a tree is a person and a naturalist would say that a tree most certainly is not a person. However, if we start understanding the more fundamental and metaphysical understanding of what a person is there is the potential of agreement. Maybe the animist, when talking about persons means an entity that acts and reacts to its surroundings. If that is how personhood is understood then the naturalist and animist are not in conflict because both can agree on that assumption. It is these types of underlying assumptions that I call metaphysical and I believe concern the unknown. It is also these types of beliefs that cause deep disagreements.

Let us focus on another example. What happens after we die? Is dying a bad or a good thing? This is a question where a final answer can not be found. Even if you don’t believe in an afterlife, it is hard to prove that there is no afterlife or what, if an afterlife existed, it would be like. If a Christian theist and a naturalist enter into a discussion about death the fact that the Christian theist believes in an afterlife while the naturalist, in this case, just thinks that we are eaten by worms, will affect anything that is said about death and thus risk creating a deep disagreement. Again the issue lies in the metaphysical understanding of the unknown. The naturalist might see dying as bad because life ends and the body is eaten by worms and the Christian theist can see death as a good thing because you will enter paradise. The disagreement here is not about death. Both parties can and probably will agree on the practical aspect of death and how it practically works, however, the meanings differ because of their metaphysical understanding of existence and how they interpret the unknown.

I want to highlight that epistemology is also relevant here. Indeed many see deep disagreements as also concerning epistemology (Ranalli&Lagewaard 2022). However, even if epistemological questions will be relevant and touched upon many times I have decided to mainly focus on metaphysics. My understanding of metaphysics is thus broad and includes epistemological questions. An exploration of the specific epistemological dimensions that will arise in this thesis is something I leave for another occasion.
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If metaphysics and the unknown are what causes deep disagreements then to avoid them a first step should be to disregard metaphysics and the unknown and just focus on the known. I think a lot of scientists would be happy about this, however, many religious people would not and neither am I. There is something unknown and it is at least possible that, for example, a God exists. So even if we focus on the practical nature of existence there needs to be a space for the unknown and the metaphysical. Because of this, I believe that a good method for dealing with deep disagreements should be practically focused while still enabling metaphysical understandings of existence and the unknown. Further, it would be advantageous if it does not demand a specific metaphysical, cultural, or religious understanding so that people with different worldviews can use it. Otherwise, the method would lose traction. Why would a Christian adopt a method that demands a Buddhist worldview? Thus my method must have a space for metaphysical understandings of existence that, at least sometimes, deals with questions about which a definitive answer is unknown and not demand of you to adopt a specific worldview. My method will fulfill the criteria I presented above. Let me now start to construct my method.

**Initial remarks on my interpretation of Zen philosophy**

To sketch a method from Zen philosophy we need to understand Zen metaphysics, especially the relation between what I call conventional centric, interconnected, and ultimate reality. The conventional centric view of reality represents the way we perceive the world in day-to-day life and is a centric and dualistic view. Dualism here should be understood as describing a view where we have a subject-object, subject-subject, and object-object distinction. Non-dualism is the opposite where everything is interconnected and none of the aforementioned distinctions are made. What is meant by dualism contra interconnectedness will become clearer in the next section. Dualism further implies that things in existence have inherent essences which are distinct from other things in existence. This makes the dualistic distinction between subjects and objects possible.

The conventional centric view is also centric because it emphasizes how things are viewed from a perspective. For example how a stone appears to a human that is holding it in their hand. For a human, a stone will seem to be distinct from them. This results in the human falling into dualistic thinking emphasizing that the stone seems to be distinct from them even if the distinction might not be as clear. For example, elementary particles are constantly in movement, and when the stone is in the hand of the human they are intertwining. Even so, it is true that from the human perspective, the
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stone is distinct from the human. Centrism should be understood as how things appear from a standpoint.

I will call the opposite of a conventional centric view of reality an interconnected view of reality. The interconnected view emphasizes the opposite of the conventional centric view. It focuses on how things are interconnected and are thus non-dual. This view is non-dual because nothing is seen as being distinct from each other. Because this view aims for holism it also moves away from centrism because it wants to include all perspectives. However, as will be shown later, this does not mean that interconnectedness is not centric, just that it moves away from centrism. Interconnectedness does not see things in existence to have inherent essences. Things in existence do not have anything by themselves which makes a clear distinction between different entities in existence to be separated from each other. Everything is interdependent.

Ultimate reality is a view where things are revealed as they truly are. This position is beyond centrism, dualism, and interconnectedness while also encompassing them. Ultimate reality thus represents how things truly are. This is a metaphysical perspective and is what is used by different worldviews to explain the true nature of existence and explain the unknown in an attempt to make it known in some sense.

Going forward these three terms will be essential. But what do they mean? These complicated concepts need more clarification and Zen Philosopher Dogen can help us here. However, to understand his view some core Buddhist assumptions need to be presented. Most significant is the theory of dependent origination, (also called, dependent arising) which will be important for our understanding of the ultimate and interconnected view of reality.

Moving into my explanation of the Zen conception of reality, I will use a human looking at a stone as an example. Depending on the topic I will purely focus on the nature of the stone in relation to the rest of existence but when it is important to deal with the human elements I will explain what happens when the human is in contact with the stone.

The theory of dependent origination

When explaining the theory of dependent origination a distinction between the Zen view of ultimate and interconnected reality is not yet made. Both positions are very similar but there are core differentiating characteristics that separate them from each other. The distinction between
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Ultimate and interconnected reality will be made in the section “Interconnectedness and ultimate reality are separate.” For now, both terms can be seen as synonymous.

The theory of dependent origination holds that everything in existence is interdependent. Understanding the theory of dependent origination is important to grasp interconnected and ultimate reality. In explaining the theory of dependent origination I will draw on Garfield's understanding of it.

The theory of dependent origination presents three types of dependence; causal dependence, part-whole dependence, and dependence on conceptual imputation (Garfield 2015:25). Causal dependence claims that no event can exist independent of any other events (Garfield 2015:30). Basically, nothing can exist outside of cause and effect relations. Part-whole dependence holds that everything is part of a whole and is dependent on it and every whole is dependent on its parts (Garfield 2015:33). Dependence on conceptual imputation holds that “[…] the entities and properties we experience in the world depend for their reality and identity on our minds, including our perceptual and conceptual apparatus, for their existence as the entities we encounter (Garfield 2015:33).” It should be noted here that how you perceive dependence on conceptual imputation will vary depending on your conception of mind. The Zen conception of mind is that mind and matter are not separate but dependent on each other to be what they are.

The theory of dependent origination provides the building blocks for a holistic interconnected theory of existence. Indeed, Zen philosophy is a holistic philosophy that holds existence to be non-dually interconnected. When you realize this you are realizing interconnected and ultimate reality.

Let us see what the theory of dependent origination does to the stone example. First, the stone cannot exist without its surroundings. This includes the causal relations it is part of; the things that have affected the stone and the things the stone has affected. The stone is also part of something bigger; existence. Without existence, we have no stone but without the stone, we have no existence. At the same time without every part that makes the stone, we don’t have a stone, and without the stone, we don’t have the parts that make the stone i.e. the minerals, atoms, and so on. This covers the two first dependences; casual dependence and part-whole dependence.

It should be noted here that I use both interconnected and ultimate reality instead of terms like realizing Buddha-nature or enlightenment. This is because these two terms, at this stage the distinction between ultimate and interconnected reality is not yet made, making them synonymous with each other.
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Taking humans and conscious beings into account we can also say that the stone would not be a stone if we humans did not have some kind of conceptual perception of it. The English word stone is an example of this. Without the way the stone is perceived and the way it is intellectually processed and explained in a brain, the stone would not be a stone. The stone is dependent on how beings conceive it. This covers the third type of dependence; Dependence on conceptual imputation.

Another implication of the theory of dependent origination is that it seems to follow that nothing in existence can have an inherent essence that is separate from the rest of existence. That is, there is nothing particular or inherent in an object that makes it what it is. The self-identity of an object is fully dependent on the surrounding world. Here the term dependent arising might be more helpful than dependent origination because it points towards the idea that everything in existence arises together. The effect of dependent origination is that your identity is shared with everything’s identity and everything’s identity is shared with yours. As Nishitani Keiji puts it, you are in the home-ground of yourself and everything else simultaneously (Nishitani 1982: 64). In a sense, we can see an inverse of a normal essentialist approach where you look for a property that an object must have to be what it is to a view where an object's identity is defined by everything it is and has been in contact with. Neither inherent nor intrinsic essences can exist because there is no property that anything in existence has in virtue of the way it is by itself. Thus their position is closer to claiming that there are only extrinsic properties. However, I am skeptical that Zen would subscribe to extrinsic properties either. Unfortunately, the question of extrinsic properties will have to be left to another occasion.

The rejection of any inherent essence has made the use of the term emptiness common in Buddhist philosophy. By claiming the emptiness of an object you reject ideas of inherent essences in them and thus point to their interconnected nature.

The theory of dependent origination provides the building blocks for both interconnectedness and Ultimate reality. Realizing the interconnected nature is seen by many as realizing Ultimate reality, that is, reaching enlightenment. One might rightly ask whether Zen is an idealistic philosophy. This is especially relevant because some Buddhist traditions can accurately be described as idealistic. The short answer is no. Zen philosophy tries to walk the line between materialism and idealism. Both are seen as necessary conditions for making each other what they are. Zen philosophy can thus be seen as an idealism that includes materialism and a materialistic philosophy that encompasses idealism (Kim 2004: 122). The importance of this point is that Zen
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Philosophy is not strictly idealistic nor materialistic but tries to walk the line between the two and neither completely affirm nor reject either position. It is now time to make the distinction between interconnectedness and ultimate reality.

Interconnectedness and ultimate reality are separate

Thus far I have been addressing interconnectedness and Ultimate reality as being synonymous. I will now start showing the difference between the two views. The separation of these two views hinges on Dogen’s understanding of Buddha-nature (Ultimate reality) and his critique of other Buddhist conceptions of Buddha-nature. Dogen thinks that traditional Mahayana Buddhists still are dualistic (Abe 1992:41-42). It is because of this view we can make the distinction between an interconnected and ultimate reality.

Buddha-nature signifies the true nature of existence and Buddhism claims that this is not easily accessible to humans. This relation is described in the theory of primal confusion which claims that existence is constructed in a way that it would seem, from a human perspective, that existence is dualistic, that phenomenons are permanent with inherent essences. In actuality existence is non-dualistic\(^2\) and phenomenons are impermanent, interdependent without inherent essences (Garfield 2015: 8). Buddha-nature thus aims to explain the true nature of things. The true nature of existence is seen as non-dualistic, interdependent, and impermanent without independent properties. In this sense, Buddha-nature is the same as an interconnected view of reality. But as we will see, this is not full enlightenment, just part of it. An interconnected view of reality makes slightly less explanatory claims than ultimate reality. To make this point Dogen introduces his idea of no-buddha-nature. This leads us to the Buddhist sunyata philosophy. Let me quickly explain sunyata or emptiness philosophy.

The Sanskrit word sunyata is often translated to emptiness. However, the word emptiness does not fully capture the idea of sunyata. Even so, there is a dialectical advantage to using the word emptiness. This is in line with the Zen usages of negations when using words like no-tree. Because of that, I have decided to stick with the word emptiness instead of the Sanskrit sunyata. In the Mahayana tradition, you often use the term emptiness. However, this word has more than one

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\(^2\) I could have used monism here instead of non-dualism. However, because there are so many different types of monisms, whether religious or materialistic I have decided to opt for non-dualism instead. With that said, it is a type of monism.
meaning and is often used as an interrogative. Let us quickly present the idea of emptiness so we can understand what Dogen means with no-buddha-nature.

The concept of emptiness is tightly tied to the idea of interdependence and primal confusion and is used to show that even if one thing seems to have an inherent essence it does not. Thus, if you say that the stone is empty, or that a stone is no-stone you do it to guard yourself against dualism and point out that the stone does not have an inherent essence while at the same time pointing toward the phenomenon in front of you that is the stone. This is supposed to be a more accurate description of what the stone truly is. However, it is not enough to just negate the conventional way of existence because that would mean that Buddha-nature and the non-dual, interconnected, and interdependent way of existence is the essential way of existence. The idea of inherent essences would not be rejected. Therefore the point is made that even emptiness is empty (Garfield 2015: 65). The implication of this is that the word emptiness can both be used as a tool to reject the apparent inherent essence a thing has but also as an interrogative to point towards Ultimate reality which is beyond the duality between inherent essences and interdependence. It is this function of emptiness philosophy that Dogen uses when saying that Buddha-nature is no-buddha-nature (Abe 1992:57).

In describing Buddha-nature the focus tends to be put on rejecting the way existence appears to us as a cause of primal confusion. That is, rejecting conventional centric reality. This would not be enough because Buddha-nature is also empty of its inherent essence or self-nature. In this sense, ultimate reality or true Buddha-nature, which Dogen calls no-buddha-nature is beyond independence and interdependence. This conclusion is drawn because Dogen sees neither independence nor interdependence to be satisfactory. After all, even when you talk about interdependence you ascribe to it an idea that existence is inherently interdependent. However, if existence is inherently interdependent then it can not truly be interdependence because interdependence should mean the complete rejection of inherent essences. Thus Dogen concludes that ultimate reality must be beyond these two positions (Abe 1992: 49-57). This is why he uses no-buddha-nature, to negate any inherent quality Buddha nature might seem to have. It is in this sense he is a mystic because when confronted with this dilemma of not being able to avoid ideas of inherent essences he judges the ultimate to be beyond the human intellectual understanding. We can now see that the important point that separates interconnected and Ultimate reality from each other is that even an interconnected view is not able to fully reject ideas of inherent essences and dualism.
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If we say that interconnectedness is the true nature of existence then this quality is something inherent in the nature of existence. However, true enlightenment or ultimate reality should not accept this. Also, as we will see, an interconnected view rejects what I call a conventional centric view. In rejecting conventional centricism it comes into a dualistic relation between the two positions. This would be a dualism between a right and wrong view which Zen also rejects (Abe 1985:137). Therefore an interconnected view cannot be the same as Ultimate reality. Also, I think one should understand interconnectedness as being practically bound. You can, as I have, describe it as a view that is adopted and argued for in many worldviews. However, by having this quality it does not reach Ultimate reality. Interconnectedness has not truly become metaphysical because it can still be practically argued for. For example, utilizing science, you can argue that things are casually interconnected, also you could argue for ideas of sameness because things in existence are built up by elementary particles. This view then is not strictly metaphysical, even though it tries to be. It also carries with it some dualisms and centrism. The true metaphysical position in Zen is how ultimate reality is characterized. We will return to this topic further down.

In presenting no-buddha-nature, it is therefore acknowledged that as long as we engage in language and describing enlightenment we are still engaging with dualism because language is dualistic. Interconnected reality is just this, the move away from conventional centricism to the interconnected way of existence. There is still a lack of realization that both interconnected reality and conventional centric reality are necessary parts of existence (This point should become clearer in the next section). Interconnectedness is also bound by the dualism of language. It should be noted here that if two enlightened people would talk about a stone their understandings would not be dualistic because they have realized ultimate reality. The stone then is the stone in its true form, a form that language cannot capture and experience does not tend to capture either.

We can see that for Dogen realizing Buddha-nature is the same as understanding and seeing things as they truly are (Kim 2004:128). By doing so, you penetrate the veil of Maya, that is, you overcome primal confusion. It is here that we come to an important point of Dogen's view of Buddha-nature. It might seem like Buddha-nature implies a reality devoid of dualism, permanence, and independence but this is not strictly speaking true. If it were the case, Dogen would claim that we had a dualism between permanence and impermanence, independence and interdependence, and dualism and non-dualism. As long as you claim that either of the claims in these oppositions are true you have not truly arrived at a non-dualistic worldview. You are still adopting a centric view from a perspective. In the case of conventional centrism, you view things as if they have inherent essences.
and focus on what separates things from each other. In interconnectedness, which some Buddhists would call enlightenment (remember, Dogen claims this view of enlightenment to be misguided) you have a focus on how things are interconnected, impermanent, interdependent non-dualistic. In a sense, it is a focus on sameness, the unifying aspect of existence contra to the conventional centric view which focuses on differentiation. Also by disregarding, or moving away from conventional centrism, you are taking a perspective in virtue of avoiding the conventional centric perspective of existence. Nevertheless, because even a focus on interconnectedness still adopts a perspective it cannot truly be enlightenment and reveal ultimate reality. It cannot reveal how things truly are. Therefore Dogen claims that enlightenment is not a state beyond the dualistic conventional centric way our primal confusion makes us perceive the world. Rather, it is just an expansion of the way we see the world. As Abe Masao states, when explaining Dogen’s view of Buddha-nature; in enlightenment, the way we saw the world before does not disappear, our understanding and view of existence is expanded so that we see and understand that which is beyond our dualistic way of perceiving the world (Abe 1992:58).

The core of this idea is that if you want to understand how things truly are, that is, ultimate reality, you have to understand all perspectives on the phenomenon in question. Interconnectedness and conventional centrism are both perspectives and are to a large extent in opposition to each other. Nevertheless, the fact that they reject each other means that they cannot fully include all perspectives.

Now we can see that there is a difference between interconnected reality and Buddha-nature or, to use the term I introduced earlier; Ultimate reality. While Interconnected reality, reveals the interconnected way of existence, Buddha-nature, or Ultimate reality encompasses both conventional centric reality and interconnected reality. Ultimate reality reveals the true full nature of things beyond any perspective. It is a truly metaphysical position that tries to explain the unknown.

If we add conventional centrism to the pot we see that the conventional centric view is represented by how the world normally appears to us. The interconnected way to view reality represents a moving away or opposition to conventional centric reality. This position seems to be close to Ultimate reality, however, because it is still engaging in dualistic and centric thinking it is not. Then we have Ultimate reality where there are no dualisms and where things appear such as they are. Ultimate reality is a truly metaphysical position and tries to explain the unknown because in it everything has to become known. Otherwise, it can not be beyond the other views.
Where is our disagreement?

An important implication of Dogen’s view of ultimate reality is that it rejects metaphysical perspectivism. Things are a certain way. However, we can see an ontological perspectivism which claims that as a human we tend to see things from a perspective even if we try not to. Before we make this point clearer and examine how Dogen arrives at this conclusion, let us illustrate the points made thus far in my stone example.

If we return to the example of the stone we see that in this view the meaning of things is changed. We can accept that the stone seems to have an inherent essence. However, in Enlightenment, you understand that this is just part of the nature of how the stone presents itself to us. However, as stated above, moving away from the idea of inherent essence is also dualistic in a way. That is why true enlightenment is not only a move from a state of independence to interdependence but rather a move beyond both.

We can now say that we have conventional centric reality, interconnected reality, and ultimate reality. These are then the three ways to view existence. Stambaugh claims that Dogen’s dialectics can be summarized as follows; A is -A, therefore A is (thoroughly and really) A*. (Stambaugh 1991:86). If we transfer this dialectics to these three ways of reality we can say that conventional centric reality is A and interconnected reality -A in the A is -A relation. Ultimate reality is then the final A*.

Before we move on to explore conventional centric reality let me do a short detour into the idea of impermanence. Dogen thought that nothing could exist without a temporal aspect and thus he states that Impermanence-is-Buddha-nature (Kim 2004:139p). Without going too much into this problem, which is complicated, we can say that he claims that nothing can stay the same because of the impermanent nature of existence. This can be seen as another reason for the rejection of inherent essences because it implies that something is permanent. But if nothing is permanent then how can anything stay the same? That everything is always changing and in constant movement is supported by science and thus I think it is important to highlight it as a support for the rejection of inherent essences that Buddhism makes.

3 Zen Buddhism believes that we can transcend perspectivism. However, for my method, it is not important whether this is practically possible. What is important is that there is a way things truly are and that you at least theoretically can imagine a view of things beyond centrism where you are not bound by a perspective.
Where is our disagreement?

Conventional centric reality and its relation to interconnectedness and Ultimate reality

The focus thus far has been on ultimate reality and interconnected reality and conventional centrism has only been addressed in passing. Let us thus explore this further.

Conventional centric reality represents how we normally view reality. It is the way reality is viewed when we are affected by primal confusion. Thus it represents a view where things seem to be independent, permanent with inherent essences. Nishitani uses the term standpoint to explain this way of viewing existence (Nishitani 1982:118). In this view, you only see things from a certain standpoint and thus a perspective is always used. This is why I have added the word centric to conventional reality making it into conventional centric reality. By doing so I give the term a more descriptive character because centrism implies a view from a specific standpoint.

Abe Masao clarifies that in enlightenment the pre-enlightened state remains, your view is just expanded (Abe 1992:58). This is an important point because it makes the conventional centric way to view reality true. In this sense, both interconnected reality and conventional centric reality are true. Both a reality where things appear independent, dualistic and phenomenons are permanent with inherent essences and its opposite is true. One can ask how this can be? The answer lies in what we claim that conventional centric reality is. The claim is that it is a perspective on the world. Things indeed appear in the way Conventional centric reality claims and this is a part of how reality appears to us. However, this is just a perspective, these truths are only valid from a certain standpoint. Thus it is a centric view.

We need to be careful here because it might seem that conventional centrism is only a perspective that ultimately is false. That assumption would not be true. If we take an example where it looks like a pen in a glass is bending when it is not actually bending one could say that the perspective where the pen bends is a perspective where reality is distorted and appears in a way that is not true. This conclusion would not be the Zen one, instead, they would say that the bent pen is part of how the pen presents itself to the world, just like it being straight is part of how it presents itself in the world. Thus conventional centrism is not only a perspective, that is flawed, it is a perspective that picks out some real features of existence, namely those that make things appear to be permanent, dualistic, and independent with inherent essences. The true nature of existence is
Where is our disagreement?

dependent on conventional centrism. Removing or claiming conventional centrism to be wrong would be like removing the H from H2O.

The same can be said about the interconnected view of reality. It will seem that it is closer to ultimate reality and it is true but only because the human predisposition is affected by primal confusion which favors a conventional centric view. Interconnected reality also carries with it centric features mainly because it rejects the perspective of conventional centric reality. It is thus also a perspective and therefore centric. It is only in ultimate reality we move past the problem of centrism. Saying that interconnected reality is false would be like removing the O from H2O, or separating the H and O from each other in H2O.

If we look at a quote from Zen master Ch'ingyuan Wei-hsin we can get a better picture of the relation between the three positions. “Thirty years ago, before I began the study of Zen, I said, "Mountains are mountains, waters are waters." After I got an insight into the truth of Zen through the instruction of a good master, I said, "Mountains are not mountains, waters are not waters.” But now, having attained the abode of final rest (that is, Awakening), I say, "Mountains are really mountains, waters are really waters (Abe 1985:4)“

The progression illustrated here is one from conventional centrism, to interconnectedness and finally to ultimate reality. When Wei-hsin first states that mountains are mountains he sees them as being permanent, independent with inherent essences. When he realizes that this is false he adopts the view that mountains are not mountains and thus adopts the interconnected view that rejects ideas of independence, permanence, and inherent essences. But when he finally realizes that this too is a flawed view he realizes that mountains are really mountains, thus seeing reality for what it really is beyond the previous two centric views. This means that mountains are neither independent nor dependent, neither permanent nor impermanent without intrinsic or extrinsic properties or inherent essences. Or, to make this messier, a mountain is independent because it is dependent and dependent because it seems independent, it is permanently impermanent, and the impermanence is permanent, it is intrinsically a mountain because it is not intrinsically a mountain. Notice a shift in the meaning of the words. The dialectic is trying to sidestep any view of inherent essences and permanence and independence while still accepting that a mountain is in fact a mountain. Again, a lot of this is due to the skeptical stance on language that makes the existence seem a way that it is not.
Where is our disagreement?

The point that is of importance is that both the interconnected and conventional centric views are true but only from a specific standpoint, from a perspective and these perspectives are necessary parts of the true nature of existence. The meaning of perspective is then that any perspective reveals something true and necessary about how something presents itself in existence. The question of whether this perspective is right or wrong is changed to what it is about existence this perspective reveals. It is only when a perspective is lost that you can see the full scope of reality, which will include all perspectives.

This move from a conventional centric view, an interconnected view, and finally an Ultimate view is a matter of grades. It is not part of a have it or not have it relation and it always needs to be maintained through practice (Abe 1992:65). This is important because practically speaking a person can and will always be on the spectra of Conventional centrism, interconnected and ultimate reality and no one of these views of existence will fully be adopted by anyone. Indeed, enlightened experiences are seen as being part of everyone's life.

Practically enlightenment can be captured by the theory of no-mind. Essentially no-mind describes enlightenment in practice. No-mind is a state where there is not yet a separation between mind and body. You are connected with the world and experience it in a non-dual way (Suzuki 1996: 262). Practically, this state can best be explained by referring to the state of flow. As Suzuki points out no-mind and the flow state are different ways of describing the same thing (Suzuki 2019:117ff). In the state of flow, you just act and don’t have time for intellectual reflection. On top of that, you perform to the best of your ability. We all have been in these states where things just happen and afterward, you realize that you, somehow, for reasons that you can’t explain, have performed to your full potential.\footnote{For readers that have some familiarity with Daoism it can be added that Daoism has influenced Zen greatly (Suzuki 2019:21). The Zen theory of no-mind is one of those areas and it is hard to find a distinction between no-mind in Zen and \textit{Wu wei} in Daoism.}

Whether the state of no-mind is closer to an interconnected view or that of ultimate reality is a matter of grades and not a situation where of having and not having (Abe 1992:65). Thus, because interconnectedness is closer to ultimate reality, for humans, it might seem like the same thing sometimes. However, interconnectedness is also more of a theoretical idea and no-mind captures a spiritual idea that is in line with the spiritual feeling you have in enlightenment.
Where is our disagreement?

Forming a theory

We now need to form a theory out of the ideas presented above. We can see that Zen has three ways to view existence. These views are conventional centric, the interconnected and ultimate reality. Two of these views reveal truths about existence and cannot be said to be false. They are to different extents and ways dependent on centrism. Thus they are perspectives on existence. It is only in Ultimate reality you fully realize the complete scope of things. Ultimate reality does not even represent a view, just how things are. What you can do, however, is to argue that the claims made by someone making a statement based on, for example, a conventional centric or an interconnected view of the world are wrong if the right evidence is provided. For example, if someone claims that water is not H2O then you can, no matter if they view things from an interconnected or conventional centric view show that they are wrong.

If we return to my stone example things should become clearer. If you say that the stone is a stone with an inherent essence then you can accept that this is so from conventional centrism without accepting that it is ultimately the case. You can even accept that it is true that the stone has inherent essences from a certain perspective and that this is a necessary condition for the stone and still maintain that this does not capture the ultimate nature of the stone.

This type of analysis is made possible by the three-way relation between ultimate, interconnected, and conventional centric reality because ultimate reality encompasses both views and transcends them to true non-dualism. Further and more importantly, it is Ultimate reality that is truly metaphysical, where the other positions are made practical because they do not represent how things ultimately are. This is important because it enables us to make a separation between the ways existence is approached and perceived and how things actually are. If we just focus on interconnectedness and conventional centrism we are, at least to an extent, avoiding engaging with metaphysics. In practice and analysis, as I will show, you will be able to deal very little with metaphysics. By doing so, I hope that we can work around the problem of deep disagreements. The position of ultimate reality has received the role of taking on the truly metaphysical assumptions, like those dealing with the unknown. By moving metaphysics to ultimate reality you make it easier to focus on the practical elements of conventional centrism and interconnectedness. That is, to focus on how these approaches work, the assumptions made in them, and the approach to understanding existence they have. Both interconnectedness and conventional centrism become perspectives on existence that are grounded in a practical dimension. They are types of ways to view and approach the nature of existence.
Where is our disagreement?

What can be done when analyzing a deep disagreement using these three ways of existence is to examine which perspectives they are taking and by doing so place them on the spectra of conventional centrism and interconnectedness and discern when someone is engaging with ultimate reality. When that is done you will see which types of truth the argument reveals and the argument’s limitations. At the same time, you also are trying to limit yourself to practical ways to view existence and avoid metaphysical claims of the nature of the unknown and how things truly are. For example, if you say that dog shit is disgusting, you can conclude that it is disgusting from, at least, the standpoint of a human. You can also conclude that it does not seem to be disgusting from the standpoint of a fly that sits on it. Thus the statement that dog shit is disgusting only reveals a centric perspective where it is disgusting from, at least, the perspective of humans. However, it does not say that dog shit is objectively disgusting and any such claims would be false. You also don’t make a metaphysical claim that dog shit is universally disgusting and that this feature is part of dog shit's ultimate nature.

We can now see that the methodological advantage here is that this method can help you to explain why a certain conclusion is drawn without claiming it to be absurd. You can say that it is true from a specific standpoint, with all the baggage that standpoint carries with it, and that the conclusion is sound and true (if it is sound and true, faulty arguments still exist). However, this is enabled because you do not engage in metaphysics, what you think the true nature of things is. You are not yet trying to fill the gaps of the unknown with your metaphysical assumptions. When focusing on interconnectedness and conventional centrism you are, at least to a higher degree, avoiding the metaphysical assumptions that can cause deep disagreements.

Ultimate reality is not excluded in this analysis. By focusing on interconnectedness and Conventional centrism you will more easily spot the metaphysical assumptions that some arguments are making. Indeed, spotting the metaphysical assumptions is very important because many times these assumptions cause deep disagreements. For example, if someone uses the existence of God as a premiss in an argument you will be able to move this premiss to the field of Ultimate reality and explain that the argument engages in the unknown and metaphysical as a premiss in their argument. Also by doing so, you will be able to spot this metaphysical assumption and thus actively relate to it and thus avoid that it causes a deep disagreement.
Where is our disagreement?

Here is the main contribution Zen can make. It can help us analyze exactly what someone is arguing and navigate between views in disagreements without risking deep disagreements. You can evaluate their standpoints and criticize them without claiming that their position is wrong. All you do is say; “Yes, this argument works from this standpoint, however, are you sure that your argument actually fully explains what you intended to explain? You might need to readjust the aims and truth claims you think your argument has”.

Importantly, this is a constructive way to criticize someone because it demands you to try to read it from the perspective of the author and be very charitable to them. It also wants you to make sense of any argument or philosophical problem it analyses and can allow for differing positions to be true. This can help to have more constructive dialogues between people. The main thing this method does is to try to navigate between arguments and arrange them into a bigger picture and explain what ideas and truths they capture. In this sense Zen methodology is unifying. It wants to unify all ideas into cohesion. It is a mediating method and a unifying method.

If we look at the history of the tradition we can see that Zen has successfully achieved this goal multiple, times. Zen Buddhism has incorporated ideas from Confucianism, Shintoism, Daoism, and, of course, other Buddhist traditions (Suzuki 2019). This list is not exhaustive. The fact remains that, contrary to many other religions, Zen has shown a capacity for inclusion and a tendency to communicate between different ideas and make them fit into their theoretical framework.

Practical notes on an analysis using my method

How you sort a view into these three categories will rely on spotting characteristic traits of the different views. For interconnectedness, these traits are a focus on interconnectedness, interdependence, sameness, impermanence, non-dualism, idealism, and the rejection of inherent essences. A conventional centric view will have a focus on permanence, independence, differentiation, dualism, inherent essences, materialism, and realism. The traits a view will have when engaging in ultimate reality is if it engages in some transcendent power for its arguments. This is important for religions and practically means that in the argument someone is using metaphysical beliefs specific to their religion which cannot be proven right or wrong. For example, the existence of God is not proven, thus if you utilize ideas that depend on the existence of God you are engaging in an argument that utilizes Ultimate reality.
Where is our disagreement?

If you utilize metaphysical assumptions concerning things that cannot be empirically proven you are also engaging in ultimate reality. For example, rejecting the existence of God, even if it is not proven that God does not exist would be an engagement in ultimate reality.

In all the cases one also needs to evaluate the importance of ultimate reality. For someone who believes that the empirical world is all that exists, their metaphysical assumptions will not have the same impact as if someone believes in a God. Even if you need to be aware of this fact you can still take their ideas for what they are because all they believe in is the empirical and that which you can prove. Most worldviews will not disagree with these facts but instead claim that there is more than the empirical. Thus separating practical ideas from metaphysical ones will not be hard. Even so, one needs to be aware of their metaphysical assumptions because it will affect how they interpret things in existence and how other worldviews are understood. After all, the person who thinks that the empirical world is all that exists will be prone to exclude anything that does not fit into their worldview.

The list of traits presented above is not exhaustive but represents some key traits. It should also be noted that a view need not be strictly placed in either of the three positions that I have developed which means that, for example, a conventional centric view does not need to fulfill all the criteria I have listed for conventional centrism to be categorised as such.

When the sorting of ideas into my three categories is done you will be able to see how the people in disagreement are approaching existence from different perspectives and thus be able to spot if there is a deep disagreement at play and understand how it works.

Additional comments about my method

In a way, what I have done is to separate interconnected and conventional centric views and made them practical, and removed them from metaphysical claims about the true nature of existence. This true nature of existence is moved into the category of ultimate reality.

An important question remains. Do you need to accept the Buddhist conception of ultimate reality to use this method? I don’t believe so. What you need to accept is that you can view existence as interconnected and as conventional centric and that there are some things we cannot fully grasp. That is, there is a way existence could be viewed that is either beyond the human capacity to realize or is hard for them to realize. If this position is taken you could replace the term
Where is our disagreement?

ultimate reality with God, transcendence, or any term that conceptually tries to capture the full and true nature of existence. It is not the Buddhist concept of enlightenment in itself that makes this method possible but rather the structure of how the ways to view existence are constructed. Thus, you don’t have to accept Zen philosophy as a whole to utilize my method. You only need to accept that there are some limits in the human perspectives on existence. This idea, I hope, most people will agree upon. Humans are limited beings and there are at least some limits to what we can do and perceive. We, humans, are also bound by anthropocentrism, practically making us bound by some kind of perspectivism. As a result of this relation and the fact that the third position represented by ultimate reality can be changed to, for example, God, makes it possible for people of any religion and worldview to use this method. Here we see great potential for inter religious dialogues that, especially but not exclusively, pluralists can enjoy.

However, and I will discuss this towards the end of the thesis, problems might arise if you replace the ultimate real with, for example, God, because it will affect the analysis and postulate that the unknown is known. In a sense ultimate reality just postulates a position where everything is revealed and understood. Whether you believe that to be practically possible is not of relevance. What is important is that you acknowledge your limitations and that you don’t know everything and that theoretically an all-knowing perspective where everything is seen for what it truly is could be possible. When that is done you open up to the possibility of having my interconnected and conventional centric views. However, there is a possibility that if you navigate between these views you could at least come close to realizing ultimate reality.

3. Analysis using my Zen inspired method

When moving into my analysis it will be helpful to keep in mind that even if interconnected and conventional centric reality at their extreme seems to be in opposition to each other, I believe, it is important to view them as being part of a spectrum. It is important because when I then place the views presented within this triad of views all characteristics of a view do not need to be fulfilled. To an extent, the same point applies to ultimate reality. Some metaphysical commitments that engage with ultimate reality will have greater or lesser importance in an analysis. However, in these situations, it will be important to highlight that characteristic, which I will.

One important part of the analysis will be to illuminate that there is a deep disagreement at play. With this, I hope to show my method's strengths in finding deep disagreements. I also hope
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that the analysis will provide a deeper understanding of deep disagreements and provide a way to solve and them. The question of whether my method can help in avoiding deep disagreements altogether will be addressed in the next chapter. Less important aspects of my theory will arise. Some will be discussed throughout the analysis and others will be addressed in the next chapter of the thesis.

Dawes defense of a naturalistic approach

I am going to start by analyzing Gregory W. Dawes's argument for a naturalist approach that he presents in his article “In Defense of Naturalism” (2011). I will pick out what I see as his main arguments and analyze them with my method. Though some reflections will be made here, most of it will be saved to the last chapter of my thesis which is entirely focused on reflections on my method and the analyses made. I will also refrain from actively arguing against or for his position because this is not the primary objective of my method. Further, at this stage, the soundness or validity of the arguments is not of great value. What is important is to observe how my Zen inspired method changes the meaning of the argument. Because of this, I will, to the extent possible, assume that Dawes's arguments are sound.

It should be noted that the argument and subject of the argument are not of primary relevance. What is important is what my method does when analyzing a disagreement. My choice to focus on naturalism is mainly because disagreements concerning worldviews are particularly susceptible to deep disagreements.

Dawes argument

The key view Dawes seems to have is that naturalism implies that it is right to give explanations that are natural rather than supernatural (Dawes 2011:6). Thus Dawes thinks that all you can do is explain what is actually in front of you and in this way it is a materialistic approach. He does not reject the possibility of the supernatural, nevertheless, he sees that a focus on the material and the testable should be adopted first and only be changed if they are proven wrong (Dawes 2011:12).

In his article Dawes responds to a critique of naturalism that claims that the exclusion of divine agency in the study of history is "based on an a priori and non-negotiable commitment to a
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godless metaphysics (Dawes 2011:4)”. By metaphysically committing to naturalism you exclude the possibility of divine agency. The same charges can be made to the natural sciences because they presuppose simple materialism (Dawes 2011:4-5). In a nutshell, the conflict seems to be that if you already suppose the world to be without divine agency you can never find any divine agency in existence. History will only find the empirical and the natural sciences will only find the material. It is this critique Dawes tries to argue against. He does not want naturalism to a priori exclude the possibility of a divine agency and thus says that there is no conflict (Dawes 2011:6). To an extent, then, the fact that there is a deep disagreement at play is almost explicit.

Dawes's defense is that even though the charge on naturalism is true it should only be seen as a provisional commitment. This commitment is justified by the history of the disciplines but could in principle be overturned if theologians could present successful explanations of the facts that scientists and historians are interested in (Dawes 2011:7). Because of this, he claims, the possibility of a divine agent is not excluded. But why should we accept naturalism as a provisional commitment? Dawes's argument rests on two core assumptions.

Dawes thinks we should commit ourselves to a procedural requirement where we need to focus on empirical inquiry first before any philosophical assumptions are made (Dawes 2011:8). Dawes writes; “All this procedural requirement demands is that any proposed explanation should be testable against a body of evidence that is accessible to any capable observer (Dawes 2011:8)”. Because the naturalist engages with the empirical and material, where testable evidence can be provided, he sees naturalism as the best position to start from in our exploration of existence. It makes it a good provisional commitment to take.

The implication for theologians is that Dawes demands them to challenge the naturalist position by providing observable facts about existence which need God for their explanation (Dawes 2011:9). He thinks that to include a God in an argument you have to see a benefit for doing so (Dawes 2011:9).

His second core assumption is that metaphysical naturalism is based on the belief that our best explanations to date include natural explanations rather than the supernatural (Dawes 2011:12). Dawes writes “The fact that history and the sciences seek only natural explanations requires no defense beyond that provided by the history of these disciplines. The very arguments that support our best historical and scientific theories also support naturalism. If the modern disciplines of history and the sciences fail to include proposed theistic explanations, it is not (at least in the first
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instance) because they are theistic. It is because they have not been shown to be the best available explanations of the kinds of facts in which historians and scientists are interested (Dawes 2011:14).

Dawes also states: “It is, therefore, a mistake to say that “for science to be science, by definition it can pursue, identify, and entertain only natural causes. What we should say is that for science to be science, by definition it can “pursue, identify, and entertain” only those causes whose existence can be argued for on the basis of publicly-accessible evidence. This procedural requirement is the only non-negotiable commitment of history and the sciences (Dawes 2011:14)”.

To clarify, you have to argue for a position by using publicly available evidence. By stating this you cannot use your personal experience of something divine as an argument because this experience is not publicly available.

He goes on to defend his argument by claiming that even if God existed we should be able to have evidence of him through his effects (Dawes 2011:19). He thinks that explaining the world can be done by other principles than God and therefore there is no need to suppose his existence (Dawes 2011:20)

Dawes admits that the naturalist disregards proposed theistic explanations. However, he does not see this as a problem because this is the case for any revolutionary idea. They all need to fight the uphill battle and prove themselves (Dawes 2011:21-22). In the end, naturalism is only a provisional position that can be proven wrong.

In a nutshell, Dawes claims that the procedural demand is non-negotiable. That is, you have to be able to provide and test your evidence. Naturalism does not exclude the possibility of a divine agency, it only demands of the theologian to show good reasons for the naturalist to accept the possibility of the existence of a transcendental power.

Applying my method on Dawes argument

What will my Zen-inspired methodological framework make of Dawes's argument? I will now use my three concepts; interconnected, conventional centric and ultimate reality to understand the deep disagreement. The deep disagreement will be solved in the sense that if you understand the disagreement then you will be able to engage appropriately with it. In effect you render the deep disagreement less problematic.
Where is our disagreement?

**Naturalism**

We can start by saying that the naturalist position is conventional centric just because it focuses on the material and that which can be measured. All these aspects of existence can only be seen as measured from a standpoint. For the scientist and the historian, this data is made from their standpoint. The assumption that things are measurable and testable requires a focus on permanence and inherent essences. Any empirical evidence must also be taken from a standpoint and presented utilizing a standpoint and thus it is also engaging in conventional centrism. There is also a lot of differentiation going on, and a focus on what is more significant than the other. History, for example, is inherently so because you have to differentiate the “significant” events from the less significant ones to build your historical narrative. Of course, the result can be more or less centric depending on the specific standpoint taken and than move toward the interconnected position, nevertheless, it is centric. Dawes does not see this as a problem.

The arguments Dawes makes in support of naturalism are also conventional centric because they focus on the material, the measurable, and the testable. These are all things that require a person's active engagement which makes it by necessity centric. In any test, a perspective is always taken. Further, the idea of being able to reconstruct a test hinges on ideas of permanence, that things stay the same. As was presented in the previous chapter, permanence is affiliated with conventional centrism. Centrism, then is unavoidable. However, this is not seen as a problem for Dawes.

An implication of his demand of theology to provide testable proof of a divine agency before a naturalist position can be altered is that Dawes is demanding the theologian to engage in a conventional centric discourse. However, is this what the theist does? Let us return to this point further down.

By stating that one should accept the naturalist position because theistic explanations “have not been shown to be the best available explanations of the kinds of facts in which historians and scientists are interested (Dawes 2011:14)” Dawes again demands theism to work on a conventional centric view. This is a trend throughout the entire paper. You need to provide evidence, good arguments, reservable experiments, and so forth for theistic ideas to be considered but all of the strategies presented above are conventional centric. Indeed his procedural requirement which he sees as non-negotiable is to focus on publicly accessible evidence which demands a conventional centric stance (Dawes 2011:14). We could reformulate his provisional commitment to be a commitment to conventional centrism.
Where is our disagreement?

An important point needs to be addressed. Dawes does not claim that naturalism is proven only that it provides the best explanations thus far (Dawes 2011:12). This is important because his entire argument hinges on the idea that naturalism is not proven right and can, in principle, be disproven, providing good enough reasons are provided. This, however, also means that he accepts a knowledge gap, that even if the naturalist can explain much it has not, thus far, done it fully and completely. There is more to be wanted from the naturalist. This is important because this knowledge gap is precisely what makes my analysis possible and enables me to utilize the concept of the ultimate real. In effect, we can postulate a position where everything is revealed in its true full, and ultimate nature. I will return to this point shortly but first, we need to see what the theistic strategy is. Where can we place the types of arguments made by the theis among my three possible types of views? At this stage, it is just important that the naturalism Dawes presents exhibits the traits of a conventional centric view of existence. We now need to ask ourselves what the theist position is.

Theism

What types of views does theism engage in? As we will see, even though they engage in conventional centrism they also engage in a perspective from ultimate reality. By doing so, we see that the theist and naturalist are engaging in different types of arguments and thus are not easily compared to each other, changing the relevance and meaning of the conflict and discussion between the two positions. This point is what reveals that there is a deep disagreement at play. The two positions have fundamentally different approaches which makes any discussion between the two harder to evaluate. The disagreement starts deeper, in their metaphysics.

Why is theism not only conventional centric? The answer lies in God. Because theism includes and accepts both the existence of an ultimate perspective, that is God’s perspective in the case of Christianity, and, by doing so, tries to utilize God to fill the gaps of the unknowable. The engagement with God implies an engagement in what I call a perspective from ultimate reality. By postulating a higher power like a God that is all-knowing, you are admitting the existence of an ultimate perspective, like what I call the view of ultimate reality. If you then use a God, or a divine agency as part of your arguments you try to use a perspective from ultimate reality in your argument.

Even if a theologian does use arguments and proofs, just like the naturalist, he does not do it exclusively. Their argument hinges on a different perspective than that of the naturalist. This postulated perspective is also clearly not centric and not taken from a standpoint because how can
Where is our disagreement?

something all-knowing be centric? It is part of the definition of all knowing that it is not centric. From the all-knowing perspective, you see both the interconnected, the conventional centric view, and the ultimate view at the same time. How everything fits together is revealed. However, if we then accept that theism engages in argumentation from a different standpoint which does not only engage in centric arguments then you cannot expect them to do just that; only engage in a conventional centric discourse to legitimize themselves. Dawes's demand then is unfounded in the sense that he should not demand of the theist to argue for the inclusion of a divine agency only by using the naturalist's centric methodology because, by its nature, theistic arguments hinge on a perspective that is not centric and not compatible with naturalism.

Resolving the deep disagreement between naturalism and theism

One could say that even the naturalist is engaging with an ultimate perspective because, at least some naturalists, would say that all that exists are physical particles in motion. This is a metaphysical statement. However, there is a significant difference in the nature of this type of metaphysical belief. Because they believe that the physical, that which can be measured is all there is, there is an exclusion of a transcendent perspective. Also, apart from the metaphysical belief, the practical aspects of naturalism are not something that the theist needs to disagree with. Practice and metaphysics in this type of naturalist position are then not separated but the same. Because of this, their metaphysical assumptions are not analytically as problematic to handle. I want to highlight here that even this type of naturalist also has to accept that there are unknown things. Again this unknown is what makes a theist explanation possible and what makes my method possible. Nevertheless, it is here that the naturalist, who in the case of this example only believes that there only exists physical particles in motion, has one of its pitfalls. Because other worldviews will accept their project it might seem like their metaphysical claim is also accepted. However, the theist does not share their metaphysical assumption. So even if the practical and metaphysical dimensions of the theist and naturalist are the same, it is their metaphysical commitment that is causing deep disagreements.

For Dawes to demand a naturalist approach until it is proven wrong is then to demand someone to accept their metaphysics until it is proven wrong. However, the metaphysics for the naturalist or theist is not proven to be right or wrong. This demand is unfounded. Still, it is this metaphysical assumption that causes deep disagreement.
Where is our disagreement?

We can now see that the main problem with Dawes's argument is his procedural requirement. The way he demands the theist to follow the naturalist methodological approach is not founded. However, the point here is not that Dawes's naturalist position is wrong but rather that the perspectives taken are different. We can still accept naturalism, and the naturalist could even be allowed the provisional commitment that Dawes believes can be challenged.

We can now say that if you take conventional centrism to be true then Dawes is right and from their perspective, he certainly has a point. And by raising this point he does reveal something about existence. However, as soon as he accepts that there are limits to a centric perspective, which I think he should and probably also would, you need to accept the possibility of the addition of a different perspective. Note that I do not say a replacement, his position does not necessarily need to be abandoned but supplemented. This different perspective could be a theistic one, or some other that approaches reality from a less centric position. That theists engage in exploring existence from another perspective should not be criticized. There is probably a lot for a naturalist to gain from engaging and understanding this different approach to understanding existence.

Let me clarify this last point. If you accept that humans and their research and activities are conventional centric, which you should and I believe Dawes would do just that, then you should also be able to at least theoretically be able to accept the existence of an ultimate perspective of things where you are not bound by centrism. What you have to accept, which you should, is that arguments and evidence are centric. That is, any argument is just a representation of something and cannot fully capture what it represents and thus can only capture parts of the truth from a standpoint, in this case, the standpoint of the language used. Evidence is also affected by centrism because you can only view the evidence from a perspective due to the human condition. You can not, for example, view evidence from the perspective of the evidence itself. That is, you cannot view the stone as if you were a stone. So centrism is present. These points should be uncontroversial.

However, considering the centric nature you should in principle be able to, at least, postulate an ultimate perspective where everything is fully revealed in a way that centrism is not affecting the view. Again this should not be controversial. However, if you do so then you should allow for arguments and argumentative strategies that try to move away from strong centrism into your arguments. You should then be open to supplementing your view with views that try to utilize and relate to that ultimate perspective. Because theism does relate to an ultimate perspective you should
Where is our disagreement?

consider their perspectives and not demand of them to completely engage in your own centric discourse. Theism can thus supplement your naturalist position.

Now, the same point goes the other way around. The theist should not reject naturalism and argue against it but also try to use them as a supplement to their theistic arguments. Because, as I stated in the previous section where I presented my theory, conventional centric reality, as well as interconnected reality are true ways to view the world and capture truths, the only thing these views are not capable of is capturing a complete ultimate truth beyond centrism. Therefore, the theist can and should accept naturalist points of view but try to supplement them with their views which engage, or at least try to engage in a different perspective.

Animist worldview

In the previous analysis, there has been a notable absence of engagement with interconnectedness. The same type of analysis could almost have been done without using any idea of interconnectedness. One can ask oneself if there are worldviews that engage primarily in interconnectedness. Surely that should be the case if we are to give my approach any credence. The obvious answer to this is of course Buddhism itself. However, to rely on one’s own framework to validate itself is precarious, and preferably another example should be used. And indeed we have a good one: animism.

Animism or New animists as some call it after what is called the ontological turn in anthropology, argues that we should be prepared to “take animism seriously” even if it seems incompatible with the naturalism associated with modern science (Dawes 2023:154). I am going to try to do just that: take animism seriously. While I hope that a similar strength as was seen in the previous analysis will arise I think choosing to focus on animism will specifically highlight the inclusive character of my methodology.

In presenting animism, I will focus on some articles from the recently published book “Animism and Philosophy of Religion” (Smith 2023) and the works of anthropologists Tim Ingold, Phillip Descola, and Viveiros De Castro. In the analysis of animism, I hope to show that animism is not in fundamental conflict with either theism or naturalism but provides yet another perspective on existence. In this case from a more interconnected point of view.

The idea that animals, plants, and objects are like humans is treacherous and is both anthropocentric and anthropomorphic. However, we shall see that humans, as well as animals,
Where is our disagreement?

stones, and plants, are equally moving toward each other. Therefore, it is better to see the relation as making humans and non-human things more alike than to claim that, for example, a stone is more human. Some anthropologists have used the word beings to describe all things in existence that are seen as persons in animism. This can be seen as a strategy to defend ourselves from our centric concepts of the world. Things in existence are placed on a common ground and the sameness we share is highlighted.

In the literature I am referencing there are also multiple words used for describing the non-material in beings. These range from soul, spirit, and mind to life force. I will take them to broadly mean the same thing and when not, I will comment on it in the text.

What is animism?

The definition of animism is varied and researchers present multiple understandings of animism. This makes it hard to work with just one understanding of the idea. This complication should not be surprising because what we call animism is more of an attitude or way to engage with and understand the environment that different indigenous people have adopted all over the globe. Animists in Siberia are different from animists in South America. Due to the complication with defining animism, I opt for picking out some essential traits that animists seem to share. This approach should not be a problem. One reason is that I do not try to represent any indigenous worldview in particular but rather comment on the common traits in these worldviews that have resulted in the term animism. The second reason is that the same problem is present when we consider both naturalism and theism; no one definition is true for every theist and naturalist. Therefore, what I call a complication in defining animism is not that different from problems arising for theists and naturalists and we should be able to proceed in the same manner as with the two presiding topics. Let us move on to define some important traits of animism.

Burley claims that animism tends to emphasize the idea “ [...] that the world is inhabited by innumerable living beings, which may be animal, vegetable or indeed mineral in nature, but also the extent to which these beings constitute mutually supportive communities (Burley 2023:124)” . He further states; “[...] new animism is associated both with a blurring of the boundary between humans and other beings and with an extension of the status of personhood to beings other than humans (Burley 2023: 124)”.

Steinhart presents some understandings of animism which can be summarized as follows. Animism can be seen as an ontology in which non-human beings such as animals and objects can
possess a soul, life force, and qualities of personhood. Animals and objects can have an individual spirit. The boundary between spirit and matter is not seen as clear and all beings in nature can have a spirit or soul (Steinhart 2023: 227-228).

At the core of animism is then the idea that other beings, both animate and inanimate can have a soul, spirit, life force, and qualities of personhood. That is, other things in existence possess qualities we normally ascribe to human beings. Note that this does not mean that the animist always thinks that all beings have qualities of personhood. What and how many beings can and have the quality of personhood also differs between different animist societies. This makes animism distinct from panpsychist ideas of the nature of existence.

In animism the boundaries between beings are weekend. Descola points out that in animism there is a common substance in all beings that weakens the boundary between material things and spirit (Descola 2013: 130). The blurring of boundaries between material things and spirit indicates a focus on sameness and interconnectedness.

It should be noted here that you have at least two options, to say that the stone with personhood is like a human and thus gives it an anthropomorphic character. However, you can go the other way and claim that the human is more similar to the stone and thus you are not giving the stone anthropomorphic characteristics but you are rather making the human person less special in relation to other things in existence.

De Castro thinks that the animist view of existence is enabled because of an inverted focus on reality from that of a naturalist. There is a different understanding of what the fundamental character of existence is in animism. Sociality and behavior are seen as more fundamental than matter. De Castro argues that animism takes sociality as the foundation to existence while naturalism takes the material to be the foundation. The space between humans and non-humans is social for animism while for naturalism its natural and material. The significance of this difference is that if you see the natural as the foundational and unifying principle of understanding existence then sociality becomes something that arises out of it. But if sociality arises out of nature then we can argue, which we can see in naturalism, that the social aspect and behavior of humans are special and significantly different from the rest of beings in existence (De Castro 1998:473). If we take sociality to be the foundational principle of existence then it becomes hard to argue that human social behavior is significantly different from the behavior of the rest of beings in existence.
Where is our disagreement?

Everything is social, therefore it is at least not obvious that human sociality is special in any other way than potentially differing a little from other beings' social behavior (De Castro 1998:473).

Sociality and behavior have a clear temporal focus. It is focusing on the changing nature of existence and how it behaves in different situations and conditions. I think this is an interesting point and hard to argue against. It is a little of a chicken and egg situation; does the material come first or the behavior of things in existence? Surely everything constantly changes and acts in certain ways depending on what it comes in contact with. This temporal focus on how existence behaves over how matter is in a more static sense seems very plausible. The temporal focus also points toward a focus on impermanence, an aspect that is important for my interconnected position. That animism focuses on interconnectedness becomes clearer and more nuanced if we look at the work of Ingold and Hallowell.

Ingold notes that for the Objiwa (an animist society), movement is central to something being alive. Being alive is part of what he calls a constant process of generation. Living beings are not moving upon the world but rather move along with it in a continuous process of becoming (Ingold 2011:98). This aspect is interesting because a focus on becoming implies a simultaneous process of ceasing and thus we have a focus on impermanence. But his focus on movement and change also mirrors the focus on sociality in the other authors understanding of animism because sociality is a temporal behavior. This sociality and focus on becoming thus puts the focus on impermanence.

Ingold, by referencing Hallowell’s research, points out that in animism everything has an inner vital part that stays the same and is responsible for sentience. It is the material world that changes (Ingold 2011:92). Further, in death it is only the body that perishes, while the vital essence or life force continues to live on in another form (Ingold 2011:93). This is reminiscent of the Buddhist idea of transmigration but also seems to give a privileged position to the life-force and thus results in a dualism. Dualism, as we have discussed previously is associated with conventional centric reality and not interconnected reality and thus this could point toward animism not being as much of an interconnected worldview as I try to claim. However, this would be false because the conception and relation between life force and materiality are hard to separate. This point becomes clear when we examine how Ingold presents how the Objiwa views the relationship between mind and nature.
Where is our disagreement?

Ingold points out that the animist does not view mind and nature as separate from each other (Ingold 2011:99). What is called an inner essence is not found in the mind but rather when the boundary between mind and the world is dissolved and you realize that they are one and the same (Ingold 2011:100). So the potential of dualism between mind and matter is not part of the animist world-view.

This interconnectedness between things goes deeper. According to Ingold, and contrary to Western thought, an action is never seen as separate from that which it produces. For example, a clap and the sound of the clap are part of the same. In Western thought, we tend to view the clap and the sound separately (Ingold 2011:103). The same thing can be seen concerning the self. The self and the world are not separate but rather the self is seen as a center of agency. An action cannot be separated by intentionality and then action; the mind posits something and then does it. The boundary between the self, mind, and existence is absolved. The self is not in you but seen in tandem with the world, as a result of the interconnected relations the self is in contact with. It is a cause of your relations with your surroundings (Ingold 2011:103). In a way then, the self is what it is because of your surroundings, the things you engage with, and what you are in your surroundings. If we return to the example from above. If you see the sound and the action as not being separate some part of you is as far away as the sound of the clap moves. This line of thinking results in an intertwining of things and thus in interconnectedness.

Your so-called self-identity is then created together with the outside world, by the things that are not you. This last part is very reminiscent of the Buddhist ideas idea of interconnectedness where the surrounding and everything that makes you what you are is created togeather with your surroundings, that which is not you.

We can see that animism focuses on impermanence, interconnectedness, and non-dualism while also having ideas of non-essential thinking and can thus be categorized as a type of worldview that approaches existence from an interconnected standpoint.

Applying my method on animism

It might already be apparent what my analytical framework will make of animism but let us make some points explicit. We can see that animism places itself on the interconnected side of how they perceive reality. Why is that so? It seems clear that there is a focus on sameness, how things are unified, interconnected, impermanent, and have non-dual and non-essentialist
Where is our disagreement?

characteristics, just like in my account of Zen interconnectedness. This can most clearly be seen in
the account of the self as presented above. This account of what makes a self also mirrors the Zen
idea of non-essentialist thinking where what makes you what you are is created together with the
things that are not you and thus your self-identity is shared with everything in existence. All authors
seem to pick out this aspect, that the boundary between spirit, mind, life force, or whatever you call
it, is blurred. That means that the inner life and outer life, the spiritual and material are not clearly
distinct from each other. This shows a higher focus on non-duality while simultaneously mirroring
Nishitani’s idea that a thing's self-identity is simultaneously in the home-ground of itself and
everything in existence.

There also seems to be a higher focus on impermanence as the focus on generation in
Ingold’s account and the focus on society in De Castro’s account of animism shows. This mirrors
the focus on impermanence in my interconnected account.

Might it not be this focus on interconnectedness and sameness that enables animists to see
multiple beings and objects as being persons? If we adopt Nishitani’s idea of a shared home-ground
it certainly seems that entities can be seen as persons because our identity is shared with them. You
could argue that you might as well say that this points towards that nothing is a person. This would
be a correct conclusion. However, recall that we could as well interpret the animist idea that some
things are persons as a move where we make human persons less special and more like everything
else in existence. The conception of personhood is then different than a ‘normal’ Western view of
persons.

All authors identify a tension between naturalism and animism (See for example; Decastro
1998; Descola 2013; Dawes 2023, Ingold 2011) and this tension is not wrong. It is because both
worldviews approach reality from different perspectives: naturalism from a more conventional
centric and animism from an interconnected perspective. Ingold and Descola seem to think that this
is the case, that is, that naturalism and animism approach the world from different standpoints
(Ingold 2011:107).

Does animism engage with the ultimately real? Surely it is possible. The possibility to
ascribe personhood to an object can be seen as derived from the fact that we cannot provide any
definitive proof that the stone doesn’t have a type of personhood. Some might disagree here but
even if you do, the animists themselves can’t get that proof. Therefore, they are engaging with the
unknown to make their view possible and fill the gaps in knowledge that the unknown provides.
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What can be concluded is that animism is engaging with interconnectedness rather than conventional centrism which naturalism engages with. This fundamental difference in approach will cause deep disagreements if you don’t relate to them appropriately. Thus, when examining disagreements between naturalism and animism you have to take into account this difference in perspectives if you want to avoid getting into deep disagreements.

Now, if we view the naturalist, animist, and theist approach to the world as adopting different perspectives that try to explain the same reality but utilize different strategies we don’t have a clear conflict between them. A door to accepting all three positions seems to open up. My approach thus moves towards a unification of these views where they can help each other to fill the gaps of knowledge that each worldview has. Ultimately, they are not fundamentally at odds with each other because the starting points from which existence is examined and understood are just different. This, however, does not mean that in specific questions they might be in conflict because surely they can and are. The point is that fundamentally they are not excluding the other worldview. Because of this, there is the possibility for all three to work together and inform each other. My framework seems to provide a first step towards unification and opens up a door to an inter-worldview discussion where different worldviews can start benefiting from each other. My method seems to be helpful in avoiding that you get stuck on minor details that seem significant because of your worldview when in actuality these conflicts are hard, or even impossible to solve because the starting point of the discussions are different. Surely, if you view the same thing from an interconnected and a conventional centric standpoint the result will be different and need not necessarily be false.

We now start to move into the last part of this thesis where I start evaluating my project.

4. Problems and strengths of my Zen inspired methodology

Can everyone use this method?

One important question is whether you need to be committed to Buddhism to use my method. Earlier I have made it clear that I don’t think so, however, some commitments need to be
Where is our disagreement?

made and problems will arise depending on your specific worldviews. Now that I have applied the method in practice these questions should be easier to address.

We can firstly say that you need to be committed to the idea that certain methods and worldviews are more centric and focus on that existence, at least, have some inherent essences and that there, at least, are some things that are permanent and independent. You also need to commit yourself to the opposite idea; that you can view the world as being interconnected, interdependent, and impermanent without inherent essences. Even if you don’t agree with one or the other position you have to, at least, accept that both types of view are practically adopted by different people and that both types of view at least have some validity. That is, you need to, at least, accept the possibility of your opposite position being right to some extent.

It will be important what you aim to do with your analysis when adopting this method. If you just want to engage in a dialogue with someone that has a completely different worldview it should be enough to just understand their perspective to make sure that you don’t argue past each other. As an example, if a naturalist wants to engage in an argument with an animist both parties need to understand that, as I have shown earlier, naturalism is more of a conventional centric view and animism is more of an interconnected view and that these differing worldviews change both parties view of what makes an object and object and a subject a subject and what the boundaries between subject and object, subject and subject, and object and object are. If this is not done then their potential disagreement risks becoming a deep disagreement. Indeed, even agreements might be false because the fundamental perception of existence and how it functions are different.

You also need to be committed to an idea of an ultimate view where, at least theoretically, you can view the full nature of a thing in existence. This could be in enlightenment in Buddhism, or God’s perspective for religions that believe in an all-knowing God. For a naturalist, it could be what Thomas Nagel calls a view from nowhere or just that there theoretically is a way to view existence in its true nature. I do not think you need to decide whether it is practically possible to obtain these perspectives just that there is a true nature that humans, as of now, have not grasped. Whether it is possible to grasp or not or whether people have or have not grasped this is not important. We do not want to engage in this because then we will start getting deep disagreements between, for example, a Buddhist who believes in enlightenment and a naturalist who believes that there are limits to what the human can learn.
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The importance is then that you, at least practically accept that what I have called a conventional centric view, and an interconnected view can be and are adopted by people and that an ultimate view, at least theoretically can exist.

Another important point has to do with the metaphysical claims you are committed to. These need to be practically suspended to the extent that it is possible. This, of course, need not be done in general but in the analysis. The results of the analysis can then be used in favor or against metaphysical ideas. Let us make this point clearer because it is very important.

If we turn to the two analyses I have made we can make this point clear. If I, in the naturalism and theism analysis, took God to be real and incorporated Christian metaphysics, my analysis would not have worked. Firstly, I would have postulated that ultimate reality is, at least to an extent known. In this case, it would have been filled with my Christian ideas of the nature of existence. These ideas would then undermine the entire analysis and risk creating a deep disagreement. Deep disagreements are disagreements caused by differing fundamental believes and if you then temporarily drop these beliefs and only focus on the practical and publicly known, that is, what is known and what perspectives that are taken then you will sidestep any deep disagreements. The same goes for a naturalist. If you take it to be true that there is nothing transcendent then you also start to fill ultimate reality with ideas and are also postulating the unknown to be known and thus risk deep disagreements. Thus, in analysis, your metaphysical beliefs need to be suspended.

Let us turn to the naturalism animism discussion to make this clearer. If you as an animist do not, in your analysis, suspend your metaphysical belief that an animal can be a person and the naturalist does not suspend their metaphysical belief that animals can not be a person then any discussion about animals risks becoming the victim of deep disagreements because they fundamentally view animals differently. However, if both suspend their belief about the nature of animals then they can focus on the things and ideas that they share and on the facts about the nature of animals that they can find. The result of this type of analysis can then afterward be used to argue for your metaphysical beliefs. However, the discussion between these two people will not become victims of deep disagreements and the dialogue will be more transparent because an understanding of the differences in how the two parties are approaching existence is reached.
Where is our disagreement?

What is the primary advantages of my method?

It might seem that all my method asks of you is to adopt an agnostic stance and focus on sameness. If that is so then one might rightly ask oneself why this specific method should be used. What is so special about it? The main advantage is that this method doesn’t regard an agnostic stance or a focus on sameness to be enough, they are at most minimal criteria. Instead, my method actively tries to understand all beliefs and organize them into a bigger picture. This implies an active attitude where you want to understand other views and make them fit together with your views, even if it means adjusting your own view.

Let me make this point clearer. Zen Buddhism does not reject any perspective to be false and insignificant. All perspectives are equally important. Recall that even if Zen metaphysics believes in interconnectedness, their conception of ultimate reality encompases both conventional centric and interconnected views and sees them as necessary parts of existence. This implies that any view you run across is seen as a necessary part of existence. What needs to be done in an analysis and what my method does, is to understand and sort this view into a bigger picture. In the process, of course, the meaning of a view might be slightly changed. For example, it is a change of meaning of both naturalism and animism to claim that one is conventional centric and the other interconnected because none of the positions would make this claim themselves (At least not most of the people holding these views). However, the facts in the views are still the same. In this way, my method is engaged in the process of understanding and sorting views into a bigger picture. This makes it so that the method focuses on unification. Thus a focus on sameness is also at best a minimal requirement, my method goes further to a focus on unification. I believe this to be a very significant aspect of it because it completely goes against an approach that focuses on differentiation and categorization while simultaneously doing almost the same. The difference is that my method does not stop with differentiation and categorization but takes the next step to try to unify that which are differentiated and categorized into a bigger picture.

Now, this means that any analysis made with this method will partly fail if you don’t reach a point where you 1) have understood the view you are analyzing and 2) have made it work together with your existing views. Of course, getting to this point will be very hard, but the advantages are also great. If you always try to understand and fit someone else's view into a bigger picture then you are always actively trying to avoid disagreements altogether. The aim becomes to solve and make sense of disagreements rather than engage in them. This attitude is different from an attitude where you try to show that you are right and someone else is wrong and makes communication and
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navigation between conflicting ideas way easier. You are not in the business of arguing for and against things but rather in understanding and explaining the meaning of things.

I think that the focus on understanding should help in building a bigger picture. My method's advantage might not lie in it providing good new arguments but rather in how it uses other arguments and ideas and re-frame them into a bigger picture.

My analysis of animism should work as an example of this unifying aspect of my method. In that analysis, I engage with mainly anthropological literature and connect it to the philosophy of religion. I have moved towards an interdisciplinary discourse between anthropologists and philosophers of religion.

Different levels of advantages

I think my method can be used by most people no matter what their worldviews or fundamental commitments are. It should not matter if you are a naturalist, Hindu, Muslim, Daoist, Animist, Christian, Buddhist, or adopt any other worldview in existence. Some reasons for this are firstly that even if my method is based on Zen Buddhism I have reconstructed it into a more religiously neutral language which should be easy for everyone to use. Further and more importantly, you can maintain your beliefs while still using this method. All you need to do is that you in practice put them aside and focus on the interconnected and conventional centric aspects and how and when someone is engaging in arguments that draw on ideas that have to do with ultimate reality. In that process, you should gain a better understanding and avoid deep disagreements. However and importantly, it does not matter what your worldview is.

Nevertheless, I think some might be able to get more or less advantage from my method. Let me explain further. I think the type of person that can benefit the most from this methodology is both someone that believes in Buddhism or some interconnection worldview and people without strong metaphysical commitments. Let us discuss this further.

I have claimed that my methodology is very inclusive and can allow for many seemingly contradictory views on existence to, at least, be partly true. I have also discussed that my method aims toward unification and to place different views and arguments into a bigger picture. As the two analyses that I have made show you can to an extent accept theism, naturalism, and animism. However, this is only possible if your metaphysical commitments don’t undermine them. That is, after your analysis, when you address the result in relation to your own view of existence your
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worldview can post-analysis undermine this possibility. Think for example of someone who is a naturalist and realist and has a very strong idea that things in existence have independent properties. If this person analyzes an interconnected worldview adopting my method they can gain a greater understanding of this way of viewing existence, also maybe grant it to be a fairly valid way to view existence. The person will also have an easier time engaging in dialogues with this type of worldview. However, she might not accept it to be true, or equally true to their own view because they don’t find enough reasons to drop their belief in independent properties to a belief of interdependence nor will they be willing to accept that both views can coexist. With that said, the reverse is also true, in suspending your belief in independent properties, you will stay more open for evidence against this belief. So even if your commitments might undermine some ideas post analysis you still maintain an attitude that makes you more susceptible to change your opinion.

For the person without strong metaphysical commitments, my method will be more useful because you have fewer fundamental ideas that risk undermining your results. You are generally more susceptible to new ideas. However, this person will probably be less inclined to end up in a deep disagreement just because they have less strong fundamental beliefs. You also have the issue that if you are an agnostic, even if you don’t have very strong specific metaphysical ideas concerning different worldviews, you might not be as open to the unifying dimension of my method as someone who believes in an interconnected worldview. Agnosticism does not necessarily mean an openness to understand and include many different perspectives and views into a bigger picture.

Most likely will people that already believe in some interconnected worldview be able to gain more advantages from my method. The Buddhist, and probably some other worldviews that believe in strong interconnectedness will, as the analyses show, be able to accept many different views to be valid on more than a practical level. This is so because of the belief that the way existence is perceived from different perspectives is part of the true nature of existence. In interconnectedness, you are already engaged in a line of thinking that focuses on how things work together. The leap to a more unifying way of thinking that I believe my method provides is then not as big because these views are already engaged in a line of thinking that focuses on how things are connected and work together with each other. Nevertheless, an interconnected position will undermine any claim that, for example, the naturalist position is ultimately true, in favor of a view that naturalism captures one way in which existence presents itself to us humans. In a sense, we can see a division where a Zen Buddhist will be able to accept some metaphysical claims by other worldviews whereas some other worldviews that are more focused on conventional centrahism might
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have to be happy with just accepting that certain views are practically adopted and that there is a theoretical possibility to accept some of their metaphysical ideas. The difference is in the attitude. One needs to strive towards inclusion due to its metaphysical emphasis on differentiation whereas the other is fundamentally more inclusive due to its metaphysical emphasis on interconnectedness.

Interdisciplinary advantages

We can now see that because of the more inclusive attitude in the framework that I have built my methodology, my method might be very fitting for interdisciplinary and interreligious dialogues. It is in interdisciplinary dialogues where, I believe, we see an area where my method could be of great use. For example, if you are analyzing two arguments made by two analytical philosophers concerning, say, epistemology, I do not think my method would be able to provide anything special that other methods would not already provide. My method’s specific contribution is found when we might get into deep disagreements. That is, in situations where the parties in dialogue with each other have different fundamental beliefs about existence.

I think that believers in pluralism would find this method helpful because it, broadly speaking can be in line with the pluralist objective due to its inclusive nature. However, one should be careful to let this fact become a problem for non-pluralists to use because fundamentally the method is focused on debates where different worldviews and fundamental beliefs tend to become a problem for a proper transparent dialogue between the different parties in the dialogue. This situation is relevant for everyone. It just happens that the pluralist already has a focus on these types of situations.

I stated earlier that this method might not be very useful if two persons from the same discipline with broadly speaking the same fundamental beliefs and worldviews are in dialogue with each other. Though this is true I also think that in practice this is very rare. In my experience, I feel like many people have many different fundamental beliefs even if they are working at the same institution and with similar philosophical questions. For example, I think it is quite obvious that I have a quite different worldview than many of my coursemates and professors and it strikes me as fairly obvious that they think the same. Someone that mainly focuses on the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas and someone that mainly focuses on the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche will develop differing worldviews and fundamental beliefs. In these situations, you will also risk getting into deep disagreements. Because of this, my method is probably relevant in more situations than one might think at the outset. However, sometimes it might just be useful as a compliment to another
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method where its main function is to make sure that you are actually on the same page as the parties you are in dialogue with. In this sense, it will only function as a compliment to your normal method.

The method I have developed should also be very important for political debates and people engaging in political science. Politics are always engaging in debates and disagreements. My method should help in analyzing and understanding these disagreements and to discern which disagreements are deep. Further in understanding what disagreements are deep, you will also understand what it is that the parties that disagree actually are in disagreement about.

Animism has been used in criticizing a Western view of nature. Though this is a fair approach it is very susceptible to deep disagreements. Because of this, it will be much easier to disregard their critique. However, if you use my method you should be able to avoid deep disagreements and thus the critiques that are made might gain more traction. In this case, my method should be useful for both the one criticizing a Western view of nature, the one receiving the critique, and a third party that tries to understand the dialogue between the animist criticizing and the, let’s say naturalist, who is defending herself against the animist critique.

The examples where one could use my method are limited. However, one needs to remember that wherever you turn, you will come across disagreements and they could always become deep. Anywhere where this is happening, no matter the discipline, you should be able to use my method and gain the benefits it provides. The potential areas where my method could be used are very wide.

5. Conclusion

In my thesis, I have developed a method to help you to understand deep disagreements. In understanding deep disagreement you would be able to solve them in the sense that if an appropriate understanding is reached then you will be able to relate to the disagreement appropriately. My method has drawn on Zen philosophy. The central concepts of use have been interconnectedness, conventional centrism, and ultimate reality. Interconnectedness is a view that focuses on how things are interdependent, impermanent that are non-dualistic, and reject ideas of inherent essences. Conventional centrism is in opposition to interconnectedness and believes in dualism, that things are independent, permanent, and have inherent essences. Ultimate reality has represented the way things truly are. Ultimate reality is usually filled by worldview-specific assumptions like the
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Christian God and is engaging in metaphysics. By examining disagreements and spotting in which of these categories perspectives and assumptions that are made belong, I have shown that you can both understand, and solve deep disagreements.

I have used two examples where I apply my method on. The first concerned theism and naturalism where I showed that naturalism mainly engages in a conventional centric view and that theism in both conventional centrism and ultimate reality. Because of this difference in their approach I found a deep disagreement and showed that, in my example, there need not be a disagreement. The disagreement was deep and caused by the fact that fundamentally the theist, apart from engaging in conventional centrism also engages in ultimate reality while the naturalist mainly engages in conventional centrism.

In the second example, I analyzed animism. There I showed that, contrary to some ideas, it need not conflict with either naturalism or theism. This is because animism engages in an interconnected view. The discussions between these worldviews would easily come into deep disagreements if they do not recognize and understand this fundamental difference in the approach to understanding existence.

In the last chapter, I engaged in a meta-discussion where I evaluated my method to discern what advantages and disadvantages it provides. I concluded that no matter your worldview you should be able to adopt my method. Even so, someone who already believes in interconnectedness, like a Zen Buddhist, might reap more advantages from the method.

I also concluded that the main advantage of my method is its unifying nature. My method does not want to be in a disagreement, rather it actively tries to understand every perspective taken on reality and to place it into a bigger picture. It does not only require an agnostic stance and a focus on sameness, two ideas that can be seen as minimal criteria one needs to fill when using the method, rather it wants you to embrace and understand other perspectives and unify them into a bigger picture.

Lastly, I made the point that there are innumerable occasions where my method could be used. I highlighted interdisciplinary dialogues to be one specific area where my method could be very useful. However, I went further and claimed that wherever disagreements arise my method could be of great use. These situations could be political, or philosophical but range to any situation where disagreements arise and where there is a potential for deep disagreement.
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