Al-Milal (July-December 2024)
Vol. 6, No. 2 ISSN: 2663-4392

Tradition and Innovation

A Study of D. T. Suzuki's Innovations in Zen Buddhism

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Abstract: This research paper explores the significant concept of innovation within the evolving traditions, with a particular focus on the innovative ideas introduced by D. T. Suzuki, the pioneering figure in Zen Buddhism who established or propagated Zen Buddhism in America. D. T. Suzuki's journey to America, guided by the directive of his mentor Soen, aimed to propagate Buddhism to the Western world. This paper aims to analyze comprehensively D. T. Suzuki's role in introducing the novel ideas that expanded beyond the traditional scope of the guidelines preached by Zen's spiritual masters. Central to this exploration is the inquiry into whether those innovative ideas align with the continuum of already established teachings of the tradition or represent a deviation from it. By dissecting these various ideas and beliefs which D. T. Suzuki introduced, this paper seeks to provide insights into their implications for the ongoing trajectory of the tradition.

Furthermore, the paper acknowledges the pivotal role of Suzuki's strategic initiatives and leadership that played a crucial role in propagating Zen Buddhism to the West, emphasizing his advocacy for inner spiritual experience over intellectual comprehension. Suzuki's efforts reshaped Zen as a dynamic, experiential tradition that resonated with Western audiences, aligning with trends towards individualism and personal spirituality. His comparative analyses, notably with Christianity, positioned Zen as offering a more immediate path to spiritual understanding through direct mystical experience. Furthermore, Suzuki's perspectives on science and religion underscore his belief in their complementary roles in human inquiry. He argued for a harmonious coexistence between scientific empirical methods and Zen's introspective spiritual practices, advocating for a holistic approach to existential questions. Suzuki's nuanced views on pantheism expand this framework, proposing a comprehensive worldview that integrates philosophical, religious, and moral dimensions to enrich human understanding of reality and existence.

Overall, Suzuki's contributions to Zen Buddhism and his philosophical explorations continue to influence contemporary interpretations of Eastern spirituality, fostering dialogue across cultural and intellectual boundaries.

Keywords: *Tradition, Innovation, Buddhism, Zen, D. T. Suzuki.*

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Introduction

Tradition and innovation are integral concepts in shaping religious and spiritual practices, each influencing the evolution and interpretation of beliefs over time. Tradition, often seen as the cornerstone of continuity within societies, plays a crucial role in preserving and transmitting cultural values, rituals, and spiritual insights from generation to generation. It provides a framework for understanding the origins and legitimacy of practices, grounding communities in shared histories and foundational principles. The term 'tradition' itself carries diverse meanings and implications. It encompasses the process of passing down customs and beliefs orally or through written records, thereby fostering a sense of continuity and identity among adherents. Importantly, it entails the selective labeling of certain content as 'tradition' or 'traditional'. H. B. Acton elucidates it as, "A tradition is a practice or belief, transferred from one generation to the other and accepted as legislative or authoritative, without argument."[2]

In contrast, innovation introduces novel ideas and methods that challenge established traditions. Particularly in religious contexts, innovation can provoke tension by questioning orthodox beliefs and practices deemed sacred and immutable. Innovation is defined as, "A new idea or method i.e. novelty or simply 'the introduction of something new'.[3] Religious innovations, such as those within Buddhism, often emerge as responses to changing societal needs or philosophical inquiries, offering new pathways to spiritual fulfillment or doctrinal understanding. Zen Buddhism exemplifies this dynamic interplay between tradition and innovation. Originating from Mahayana Buddhism's evolution in China and then in Japan, Zen emphasizes direct, experiential insight over doctrinal adherence or scholarly study. Its teachings, often

[2] H. B. Acton, "Tradition and Some Other Forms of Order: The Presidential Address," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 53 (1952): 1–28, 2.
[3] "Definition of INNOVATION," September 10, 2024, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/innovation.

paradoxical and enigmatic to outsiders, prioritize personal enlightenment (satori) achieved through rigorous meditation practices (zazen). Zen's historical development reflects both adherence to foundational Buddhist principles and adaptation to local cultural contexts and spiritual needs. Its minimalist approach eschews complex doctrines and formal rituals, focusing instead on the direct experience of awakening to one's true nature. This emphasis on personal experience over external authority underscores Zen's pragmatic and anti-dogmatic orientation, distinguishing it from more structured religious traditions. Ultimately, the dynamic tension between tradition and innovation within Zen Buddhism highlights broader philosophical questions related to the nature of spiritual truth and the role of personal experience in religious practice. As Zen continues to influence spiritual seekers worldwide, its emphasis on direct insight and existential discovery underscores its enduring appeal and relevance in contemporary religious discourse.

Zen Buddhism

Buddhism has evolved significantly from its primitive form, leading to its historical bifurcation into two major schools; Hinayana (the Lesser Vehicle) and Mahayana (the Greater Vehicle). Mahayana Buddhism though more developed, traces its ultimate authority back to its founder, Gutama Buddha Sakyamuni. As Mahayana Buddhism spread to China and Japan, it underwent further development, by the efforts of Chinese and Japanese Buddhist leaders who adeptly adapted its principles to the changing conditions of life and the religious needs of the people. Among the various Buddhist sects that emerged in China and then in Japan, who claim to transmit the core spirit of Buddhism directly from its founder, is the 'Doctrine of Buddha,' commonly known as Zen. Though the word Zen derives from the Chinese transliteration of the Sanskrit word '*dhyana*' i.e. meditation, is having unique doctrines, which may be described as speculative mysticism that only initiates with deep insight gained through long training. For those who have not experienced Zen in their

daily lives, its teachings often appear peculiar, enigmatic, or even absurd. Outsiders might view Zen as deliberately unintelligible to guard its profundity from criticism.

However, Zen followers argue that its paradoxical statements are not artificial obfuscations but arise because the human tongue is inadequate to express Zen's deepest truths. These truths can only be understood through direct experience in the inmost soul. Despite its seemingly paradoxical nature, Zen's expressions are some of the plainest and most straightforward among human experiences, though they become intelligible only through personal, experiential insight.[4] To understand the Zen historically, it's essential to grasp the diverse context in which it evolved. It might seem questionable whether the path to enlightenment can be historically understood at all. Two factors make understanding Zen's history particularly challenging. First, Zen emerged after a lengthy period of development within Chinese Buddhism. During its first four or five centuries, Buddhism in China took on various forms and tendencies that influenced its overall evolution and the formation of different schools, including Zen. These early influences persist in Zen, sometimes as subtle undercurrents. Second, the chronicles detailing Zen's beginnings and early development in China, long revered, lack strong historical credibility. The works on it, written more to convey the spirit of Zen than to record accurate history, often glorify the past to reflect the ideals of later authors. Thus, the historical picture painted by these chronicles requires correction and elaboration.[5]

Moreover, personal experience is paramount in Zen. Without the foundation of personal experience, ideas in Zen remain unintelligible. This is a basic truth just as a baby, whose mind has not yet developed to form clear ideas, cannot comprehend complex concepts, the deepest understanding of any subject,

4 D. T. Suzukui, *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism* (New York: Grove Press Inc., 1964), 31-32.

5 Heinrich Dumoulin, *Zen Buddhism: A History, India & China*, trans. James W. Heisig and Paul Knitter, vol. 1 (New York: Prentice Hall Macmillan, 1994), 63.

especially one as intrinsic to life as Zen, requires direct personal experience. Concepts originate from simple, direct experiences and Zen places the utmost emphasis on this fundamental aspect of human understanding. This experiential basis is central to the verbal and conceptual framework found in Zen literature, often referred to as 'Sayings'. The nature of human understanding necessitates a cautious approach to the conceptual superstructure. While Zen is not inherently mystifying, it can appear so to those who have not touched the essence of life through direct experience. Once one penetrates this conceptual superstructure, the perceived mystification vanishes, leading to enlightenment known as 'Satori'.

The concept of Satori, in Zen Buddhism, is the inner, spiritual experience of Enlightenment. It is described as ineffable and beyond the grasp of reason and logic. This experience is akin to the moment when Gautama Buddha attained enlightenment under the Bodhi tree and it stands as the primary goal of Zen practice. Comparable to the transformative experiences found in other religious traditions, satori signifies a profound reorientation of the individual's relationship with the universe. Achieving satori typically requires concentrated preparation, though it can also manifest suddenly through unexpected events such as a loud noise. The importance of prolonged meditation versus spontaneous breakthroughs varies between the two Zen sects: the 'Soto group' that emphasizes silent sitting i.e. *Zazen*, while the 'Rinzai group' focuses on methods aimed at precipitating abrupt awakenings.[6]

Satori is fundamental to Zen; it is the *core* of the tradition, shaping all its disciplines and doctrines toward this ultimate realization. This emphasis is particularly pronounced in the Rinzai school, which prioritizes satori. In contrast, the Soto school emphasizes this pursuit in favor of 'silent illumination' through zazen practice. The term 'satori' derives from the

6 "Satori | Enlightenment, Awakening & Zen Philosophy | Britannica," accessed June 11, 2024, https://www.britannica.com/topic/Satori.

Japanese verb 'satoru', meaning awakening or understanding.[7] In Zen Buddhism, satori denotes to a profound experience of kensho, which involves focusing into one's true nature. 'Ken' means seeing, while 'sho' refers to essence or nature.[8] Although both terms are translated as enlightenment, satori typically denotes a fuller, deeper experience akin to that of the Buddha, while kensho denotes an initial experience that can be further developed. Overall, satori encapsulates the essence of Zen Buddhism—a transformative experience that transcends intellectual understanding and marks a significant awakening to one's true nature.[9]

Furthermore, Zen persistently emphasizes inner spiritual experience over intellectual understanding. It places little importance on sacred sutras or scholarly exegesis. Instead, personal experience takes precedence over external authority and objective revelation. To attain spiritual enlightenment, Zen followers practice 'Dhyana' or 'Zazen' in Japanese.[10] Buddhism, including Zen, does not recognize supernatural agencies in spiritual matters. Consequently, Zen's method of spiritual training is practical and systematic. From its inception in China, Zen has developed a well-marked system for spiritual training, culminating in a thorough method for its followers to achieve their goals. This practical approach is one of Zen's greatest strengths. Despite this, Zen may appear chaotic, as it lacks formal doctrines, sacred books or symbolic formulas that provide direct access to its teachings. When asked what Zen teaches, the answer is simple, Zen teaches none. Any teachings in Zen emerge from one's own mind. Zen merely points the way and if this pointing can be considered teaching, then that is all Zen offers as its

7 D. T. Suzuki, *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism*, 88.

8 Philip Kapleau Roshi, *The Three Pillars of Zen: Teaching, Practice, and Enlightenment*, Updated,Anniversary edition (New York: Anchor, 1989). Ingrid Fischer-Schreiber et al., *The Encyclopedia of Eastern Philosophy and Religion: Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism, Zen* (Boston, Massachusetts: Shambhala, 1989), 180.

9 Ingrid Fischer-Schreiber et al., *The Encyclopedia of Eastern Philosophy and Religion: Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism, Zen*, 180.

10 'Sitting' is the definition of 'Zazen', which can be roughly translated as 'to sit in meditation'.

cardinal doctrine or fundamental philosophy. Zen is not a religion in the conventional sense. It has no concept of God to worship, no rituals or rites to follow, no promised afterlife and no soul whose welfare is a matter of concern. Zen is free from these religious and dogmatic encumbrances. Instead, it focuses on direct, personal experience as the path to enlightenment.[11]

Who is D. T. Suzuki?

D. T. Suzuki or Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, a towering figure in modern Buddhism, transcended his origins as a Japanese scholar to become the preeminent ambassador of Buddhism to the West in the mid-20th century. His path to prominence diverged from conventional routes within Japanese Buddhist academia, yet his self-taught brilliance and exceptional communication skills propelled him onto the global stage during a pivotal era of East-West interaction and Buddhist transformation. Suzuki authored a prolific body of work in both Japanese and English, focusing primarily on Zen Buddhism while also exploring Pure Land Buddhism, Mahayana Buddhism, classical Chinese philosophy and broader religious studies. His writings exemplify Buddhist thought in the modern context, profoundly shaping the Western perception of Buddhism. However, Suzuki's ideas and their origins are multifaceted and intricate. While he became widely perceived as a gentle and wise philosopher sharing profound Buddhist insights, his perspectives were not always mainstream but rather distinctive and subject to scholarly debate.[12]

Suzuki, born in 1870 in Kanazawa City following the Meiji Restoration period of 1868. The era of Emperor Meiji (1867-1912) marked a transformative era in Japanese society, where feudal institutions of the Tokugawa shogunate (1603-1867) gave way to modern practices across social, cultural, economic, and political realms. Despite being from a modest samurai lineage, Suzuki's

11 D. T. Suzukui, *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism*, 34-38.
12 James C. Dobbins, "D. T. Suzuki," *The Eastern Buddhist* 2, no. 2 (2022): 1–84.

father was a physician, passed away during his early years, leaving the family in financial difficulty. Nonetheless, his mother ensured he received a solid education, first in Kanazawa's public schools and later at the University of Tokyo. Financial constraints interrupted Suzuki's formal study of philosophy, but this diversion allowed him to fully immerse himself at Engakuji Temple in Kamakura under the guidance of Roshi Imakita Kosen (1816-1892). Suzuki quickly gained the trust of both Kosen and his successor Soen, who became the temple's abbot after Kosen's passing.

Suzuki's pivotal role in the global spiritual arena was not merely confined to his post-World War II influence in American cultural circles during the 1950s. His involvement began earlier, in the late 19th century, when as a young disciple at Engakuji Temple, he translated addresses of his Abbot Shaku Soen, like 'The Law of Cause and Effect as Taught by Buddha', for the participants of the World Parliament of Religions at the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago. This event marked Suzuki's introduction into the international exchange of intellectual culture, setting the stage for his future impact as a global ambassador of Zen Buddhism.[13] Moreover, English language played a pivotal role in Suzuki's life during this period, proving to be immensely significant. He discovered that proficiency in English opened up numerous opportunities for him, as his skill was remarkably strong. Suzuki exhibited a natural aptitude for the language's grammatical structure and swiftly developed an idiomatic fluency that few of his Japanese peers could rival.[14]

Suzuki's introduction to Western intellectual circles began through his association with Soen and Paul Carus, a German American scholar and editor at Open Court Publishing near Chicago. Carus, who had participated in the World Parliament of Religions, had invited Soen to LaSalle, Illinois, and Suzuki served as their translator during subsequent intellectual exchanges.

[13] "D. T. Suzuki: A Biographical Summary," Association for Asian Studies, accessed June 8, 2024, https://www.asianstudies.org/publications/eaa/archives/d-t-suzuki-a-biographical-summary/.

[14] James C. Dobbins, "D. T. Suzuki," *The Eastern Buddhist* 2, no. 2 (2022): 1–84.

Suzuki read and translated various works sent by Carus to Soen, including Carus's book "The Gospel of Buddha", translated into Japanese by Suzuki and published in 1895.[15] Suzuki acknowledged being influenced by Carus's theories on religion, which shaped his first book, "Shin shukyo ron" i.e. *A New Interpretation of Religion*, which was published in 1896. This early work, less known in the West, showcased Suzuki's scholarly rigor at the age of twenty-six, delving not only into Buddhism but also engaging in the global discourse on religion's significance in modern life.

In addition to that, Suzuki's collaboration with Soen and Carus also afforded him the opportunity to travel to America, assisting Carus with publications and furthering his exposure to Western scholarship. This marked Suzuki's initial immersion into the burgeoning academic study of religion in the West. Before departing for America, Suzuki was resolute in advancing his Zen training, postponing his journey several times in pursuit of achieving satori or enlightenment. Moreover, Suzuki served as an active and fully committed faculty member at Otani University from 1921 until 1939, though he remained officially on staff until 1960. At last, on July 12, 1966, at the age of 95, Suzuki passed away in Kamakura, Kanagawa, Japan. His legacy endures through his extensive writings and the profound influence on the global understanding of Buddhism.[16]

Innovative Contributions of D. T. Suzuki in Zen Buddhism

The evolution of Zen Buddhism in the United States exemplifies how America operates as a cross-cultural meeting point. Until the late 19th century, Japanese Zen Buddhism was a relatively a conservative religious tradition.[17] The revitalization of Zen hinged on its appeal to Western world and its validity to

[15] Judith Snodgrass, "Buddha No Fukuin: The Deployment of Paul Carus's Gospel of Buddha in Meiji Japan," 319–44. Harold Henderson, *Catalyst for Controversy: Paul Carus of Open Court*, 68–69, 95–102.
[16] James C. Dobbins, "D. T. Suzuki," *The Eastern Buddhist* 2, no. 2 (2022): 1–84.
[17] Duncan Ryūken Williams, *The Other Side of Zen: A Social History of Sōtō Zen Buddhism in Tokugawa Japan* (United Kingdom: Princeton University Press, 2005).

modern society. On reflecting the experiences in the United States, Suzuki in the early 1950's communicated to Akizuki Ryomin, an intellectual confidant, about these challenges within the tradition as, "Zen today lacks sufficient compassion, thus limiting its avenues for social engagement. Moreover, it lacks logic (ronri), a point emphasized by Nishida. To gain acceptance among Westerners, incorporating logic is essential, as explained by him, "I urge you to deeply contemplate these issues and make substantial progress". Similarly, Suzuki expressed dissatisfaction to Ruth Fuller Sasaki in a letter, lamenting that the Rinzai group of Zen establishment in Japan had not sufficiently adapted Zen to resonate with the modern man".[18] Suzuki undertook efforts both domestically and internationally to promote the revitalization of Zen Buddhism, aiming for its flourishing in the twentieth century and its accessibility to what he often termed as 'modern men'.

Suzuki engaged on multiple fronts to reform the practices of Zen and more commonly Japanese culture, which Suzuki believed was deeply intertwined with Zen. His goal was to rejuvenate the tradition by modernizing its ideas, to articulate its concepts using contemporary intellectual frameworks. With Japan's opening to the West after the Convention of Kanagawa in 1854, Zen Buddhism began to intersect with global cultural currents that were transforming Buddhism worldwide. This transformation, as identified by David McMahan, "Buddhist Modernism', blended Buddhist doctrines with concepts of democracy, capitalism, individualism, and Protestant notions of internalized religion. This fusion emphasized meditation, personal experience, and Buddhism's compatibility with scientific and humanistic ideals".[19] Numerous interactions between Asian Buddhists and Western audiences facilitated a cross-cultural hybridization, reshaping perceptions of Buddhism for both Westerners and Asian Buddhists. This ongoing exchange fostered a

[18] Suzuki, Zen, ed. Richard M. Jaffe, First Edition, New edition, vol. 1 (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2015), xv.

[19] David L. McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism*, 1st edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

synthesis of ideas and practices across Europe, Asia, and particularly in the United States. The Zen Buddhism that emerged from these interactions became characterized as a deeply experiential and mystical tradition, emphasizing meditation practices.[20]

The advent of Modern Buddhism created a spectrum bridging traditional Zen Buddhism and its modern iterations, marked by diverse meanings, practices and aesthetic expressions throughout the 20th century. Today, this continuum is simply referred to in contemporary discourse as 'Zen'. Commercially successful expressions of 'Zen' have expanded into wellness markets, offering a broad array of products, diets, techniques, and practices aimed at enhancing lifestyle and well-being. D. T. Suzuki, one of the most renowned Buddhist intellectuals of the early twentieth century, arrived in the United States in 1897. He collaborated with the German philosopher and publisher Paul Carus (1852-1919), who was a strong advocate of global religion. Carus first encountered Suzuki's teacher, Soen Shaku (1860-1919), at the World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893 while working on translations of Buddhist texts. Impressed by Shaku, Carus later facilitated Suzuki's journey to the United States, positioning him as the principal interpreter and ambassador of Zen Buddhism in the American West.

Moreover, Scholars have observed that Suzuki's interpretation of Zen Buddhism differed significantly from contemporary Japanese Zen practices. Suzuki's understanding of Zen, expounded in several widely read books and lectures, was shaped by diverse intellectual influences from Western traditions and personal interactions with intellectuals in Illinois, New York and California. Apart from his collaboration with Carus, who championed the idea of the essential unity of all religions, Suzuki also translated the works of the Swedish mystic Emanuel Swedenborg and engaged with American Transcendentalists, literary figures, and members of the Theosophical Society.

[20] Robert H. Sharf, "Buddhist Modernism and the Rhetoric of Meditative Experience," *Numen* 42, no. 3 (1995): 228–83.

These encounters profoundly influenced Suzuki's conceptualization of Zen Buddhism as a direct, non-dualistic, and deeply personal religious experience.[21] Suzuki thereby echoed and creatively integrated a religious perspective that emphasized individual spirituality, a paradigm influential in the American religious landscape. His contributions have been lauded extensively.

Lynn White, for instance, compared the impact of Suzuki's seminal work of "Essays in Zen Buddhism", to the monumental intellectual works such as Latin translation of Aristotle by William Moerbeke, in the thirteenth century and the translation of Plato by Marsilio Ficino, in the fifteenth century.[22] Similarly, Arnold Toynbee predicted that Suzuki's introduction of Zen to the West would eventually be likened to the discovery of nuclear energy.[23] More recently, Gerald Cooke highlighted Suzuki's unparalleled role in making Zen accessible and relevant to the West, likening him to Commodore Perry who opened Japan to extensive Western exposure—a figure bold, affirmative, and persistent in his mission.[24] Moreover, according to Thomas Merton, concludes that "Suzuki's work transcends partisan and academic confines. His contribution is hailed as a singular achievement in bridging Asian spiritual traditions with Western accessibility.[25]

Suzuki and mysticism; Interconnections of Buddha and Christ

Suzuki's work is seen as a spiritual endeavor, akin to Christian parallels like Xavier's interactions with Japanese Buddhists. In this view, Suzuki's understanding of Christianity sometimes appears as oversimplified as the

[21] Inken Prohl, "California 'Zen': Buddhist Spirituality Made in America," *Amerikastudien / American Studies* 59, no. 2 (2014): 193–206.
[22] White Jr. Lynn, *Frontiers of Knowledge; In the Study of Man* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1956), 304-5.
[23] Joan Stambaugh, *The Buddha Eye: An Anthology of the Kyoto School and Its Contemporaries*, ed. Frederick Franck (Bloomington, Indiana: World Wisdom, 2004), 5.
[24] Gerald Cooke, "Traditional Buddhist Sects and Modernization in Japan," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 1, no. 4 (1974): 267–330.
[25] Thomas Merton, "D. T. Suzuki: The Man and His Work," *The Eastern Buddhist* 2, no. 1 (1967): 3–9.

Jesuit missionaries' view of Buddhism, as he profoundly influenced scholars of Christian mysticism like Rudolf Otto and Thomas Merton. For example, Otto in an article for The Eastern Buddhist, contrasted Zen followers with Shinshu adherents, describing Zen practitioners as mystics and interpreting Bodhidharma's paintings as manifestations of the Numinous.[26] Similarly, Merton appreciated Suzuki's method to that of the Church Fathers, viewing the cultural aspects of Zen as peripheral.[27] Suzuki argued that Zen and Christian consciousness are fundamentally alike, despite differing interpretations of mystical experiences.[28] By defining mysticism as a 'common denominator' of religious traditions, Suzuki compared Zen monks to figures like Meister Eckhart and associated Zen's passivity with Christian quietism, grouping Eckhart, Zen, and Shin within the broader school of mysticism.[29]

Moreover, Suzuki attempted to draw connections between Jesus Christ and Buddha, as he states that "Genuine Christians and enlightened Buddhists can recognize a fundamental religious sentiment at the core of our existence, even while maintaining their unique interpretations and expressions of faith. I believe that if circumstances had been different, Gautama Buddha could have been born as Jesus Christ, challenging Jewish traditions and Jesus could have been born as a Buddha, teaching concepts like non-ego, Nirvana, and Dharmakaya." Suzuki emphasized that great individuals, like Buddha and Christ, emerge from their historical contexts, influenced by the ideas and needs of their times, yet also serving as vessels for eternal truths that resonate through significant historical figures and events. No matter how remarkable a person may be, they inevitably reflect the spirit of their times. They do not

[26] Rudolf Otto, "Professor Rudolf Otto on Zen Buddhism," *The Eastern Buddhist* 3, no. 2 (1924): 117–25.
[27] Thomas Merton, *Mystics and Zen Masters* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999), 219.
[28] Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, *Essays in Zen Buddhism (Second Series)*, 1st edition, vol. 2 (London: Rider & Company, 1950), 309.
[29] D. T. Suzuki, *Mysticism: Christian and Buddhist* (New York: Routledge, 2003), xix.

exist in isolation from the ideas and events of their era but are immersed in the currents of thought and necessity. This was true for both Buddha and Christ—they embodied the struggles against declining institutions and represented the emergence of eternal ideals that occasionally announce their will through great historical figures or events.[30]

Additionally, Suzuki explains that the Buddha possesses the ability, (if he chooses) to appear as a Nirmanakaya[31] in response to the earnest wishes of his followers or to fulfill his own purposes. This spiritual body can assume any desired form, whether by oneself or by others. However, Suzuki clarifies that the Tathagata[32] does not actually divide himself; any appearance of division, arises from the perceptions of his devotees. Thus, the Transformation-body is a creation of their perception rather than an emanation of the Tathagata himself. This essence of Buddhahood lies in the Dharmakaya, but for the Buddha to bring salvation to the world of specifics, he must leave his original state and assume forms that are comprehensible and acceptable to the inhabitants of this earth. The Holy Spirit emanates from Absolute Buddhahood and is visible to those whose previous karma prepares them to perceive it.[33]

This comparative approach, however, conceals an underlying agenda—namely, to assert that Zen holds a ‘mystical’ superiority over Christianity. Suzuki argues that Zen, with its greater affirmation and bold paradoxes, represents the pinnacle of mysticism compared to other traditions as he states that “Zen represents the fundamental truth underlying all philosophy and religion. Every intellectual pursuit should lead to Zen, or ideally begin with it,

30 Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, *Outlines of Mahayana Buddhism*, 29.

31 The nirmanakaya is the Buddha’s manifested form in the world, guiding people on the path to liberation.

32 Tathagata, a title frequently used by the historical Buddha Siddhartha Gautama, is uncertain in its exact meaning, with Buddhist interpretations offering up to eight explanations. The most widely accepted interpretation is "one who has thus (tatha) gone (gata)" or "one who has thus (tatha) arrived (agata)," suggesting that the historical Buddha was just one among many who have attained enlightenment in the past and will in the future, teaching others how to achieve it. In later Mahayana Buddhism, Tathagata evolved to symbolize the inherent buddha nature present within all individuals.

33 Edward Conze, *Buddhist Thought in India: Three Phases of Buddhist Philosophy*, 232.

to yield practical results. Any viable religious belief must derive from Zen to be effective and applicable in our daily lives."[34] Moreover, in an essay from 1916, Suzuki categorized Zen separately from devotional, contemplative, intellectual and superstitious forms of mysticism, positioning it uniquely.[35] Throughout his life, despite elevating a culturally specific form of Zen, Suzuki maintained that it stands as the 'ultimate reality of all religions and philosophies', a phenomenon unparalleled in the Eastern or Western' history of mysticism, whether Buddhist or Christian.[36] In contrast to Thomas Merton, who cautiously speculated about Buddhism and acknowledged the limitations of his insights as a Catholic monk and priest, unfamiliar with the tradition, Suzuki confidently asserted his interpretations of Christianity.[37]

However, Suzuki's understanding for Christianity often remained polemical. For instance, he commented that Christian doctrines like the crucifixion are nothing but merely symbolic, contrasting Buddhism's freedom from Christianity's historical symbolism.[38] Even in their visually spiritual 'poverty', Zen masters are described by Suzuki as being 'more poetic and affirming' compared to Christian figures like Meister Eckhart. This distinction arises because, according to Suzuki, 'in Christianity, there is often a heightened awareness of God whereas Zen seeks to erase even this last trace of God-consciousness, if possible'.[39] Suzuki analogizes the relationship between Christianity and Buddhism to that between wine and tea: where tea is stimulating yet bland, wine initially excites and then intoxicates.[40] This reasoning led Suzuki to conclude that Zen transcends labels of philosophy, metaphysics, or religion; instead, it embodies 'the essence of all religious and

34 Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, *Essays in Zen Buddhism (First Series)*, vol. 1, 268.
35 Sakamoto Hiroshi, "D. T. Suzuki and Mysticism," *The Eastern Buddhist* 10, no. 1 (1977): 54–6
36 Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, *Essays in Zen Buddhism (First Series)*, vol. 1, 265-81.
37 Thomas Merton, *Mystics and Zen Masters* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999), 5.
38 Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, *Essays in Zen Buddhism (First Series)*, vol. 1, 154.
39 Ibid., 349-50.
40 Daisetz T. Suzuki and Richard M. Jaffe, *Zen and Japanese Culture* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1970), 273.

philosophical thought'. Suzuki goes so far as to assert that 'if there exists a God, whether personal or impersonal, that entity must be present in and with Zen'.[41]

Implicit in these assertions is an almost Protestant perspective on religion, emphasizing personal inner experience over rituals, doctrines, or collective beliefs. However, Suzuki's claims about 'mystical experiences being rare and having theological implications', derived from thinkers like William James, challenge the notion of a universal theory of religion. Suzuki contends that Zen, being free from specific religious or philosophical ties, can be embraced by both Christians and Buddhists alike, likening it to different sized fish happily coexisting in the same ocean.[42] He reversed the established frameworks to promote Zen as the origin and ultimate aim of all mystical encounters.[43]

Suzuki's Theory of Religion

Suzuki is primarily considered as a conveying of Zen to the West, particularly as an interpreter of Buddhism for contemporary life. In his own time, however, he was also recognized as a perceptive observer and theorist of religion in a broader sense. His interest in theoretical questions emerged early with the publication of 'Shin shukyo ron' in the year 1896, well before his travels abroad. At that time, the term 'religion' (i.e. shukyo) had recently entered into the vocabulary of Japanese while its semantic boundaries were still in evolution.[44] Suzuki, who influenced by 18th and 19th-century Western philosophers during his academic studies, was engaged in correspondence with Paul Carus, an editor of Open Court and a prominent advocate of the 'religion of science'—a rationalized religion compatible with scientific

41 D. T. Suzuki, *Mysticism: Christian and Buddhist* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 374.
42 Erich Fromm, D. T. Suzuki, and Richard De Martino, *Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960), 5.
43 Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, *Essays in Zen Buddhism (First Series)*, vol. 1, 109, 172, 203
44 Jason Ananda Josephson Storm, *The Invention of Religion in Japan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

thought. Suzuki adopted a similar rationalist perspective in his book, critically examining both Eastern and Western religions to discern their empirical plausibility and inherent challenges.

Initially, Suzuki believed Buddhism could harmoniously coexist with reason and science, a viewpoint previously advocated by Carus and other Western scholars.[45] However, Suzuki's interpretation of Buddhism began to evolve after his journey to America and exposure to alternative theories. In America, he became drawn to the concept of religious experience as the foundation of religion, contrasting with the intellectual approach he initially favored. This emphasis on non-rational spirituality which had roots found in American Transcendentalism and European Romanticism, Suzuki was familiar with and resonated with Zen's idealization of sudden enlightenment. Suzuki found work of William James's "The Varieties of Religious Experience", particularly influential. James's focus on an individual's internal psychological state shifted the locus of religion from external elements like texts, doctrines, and rituals to personal experience.[46] This perspective aligned with Suzuki's evolving understanding of Buddhism and marked a significant departure from his earlier rationalist approach.

From this period onward, Suzuki extensively employed the concept of religious experience to explain various forms of Buddhism—Zen, Mahayana, and Hinayana, Pure Land—and to draw comparisons with worldwide religions. Concurrently, Suzuki integrated the widely recognized category of mysticism into his explanations of Buddhism and other faiths. His approach was initially shaped by William James's mystical experience, which he characterized as ineffable, noetic, transient and passive.[47] Throughout his life, Suzuki maintained a persistent interest in mysticism. During his early

[45] Daisetsu Teitaro Suzuki, *Selected Works of D.T. Suzuki, Volume III: Comparative Religion*, ed. Jeff Wilson, Tomoe Moriya, and Richard M. Jaffe, First Edition, vol. 3, xv–xxi, 3–28.
[46] William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature*, 31.
[47] Ibid., 379–82.

residence in America, Suzuki was particularly drawn to Swedenborgianism, a 19th-century mystical and theological movement initiated by Emanuel Swedenborg (1688–1772), fascinated by its mystical visions. Moreover, Suzuki's interpretation of Zen satori or enlightenment experience, echoed William James's analysis of mysticism, highlighting characteristics such as intuitive insight, irrationality, affirmation, authoritativeness, impersonalism, and feelings of exaltation.[48]

His most extensive exploration of mysticism occurred late in life with his book 'Mysticism: Christian and Buddhist', where he combined the work of a Christian theologian and mystic, Meister Eckhart with the myokonin Asahara Saichi, a Shin Buddhist. Thus, themes of religious experience and mysticism, gives Suzuki with a conceptual framework to analyze Buddhism in a modern context, to make it accessible to Western audiences and to engage in discussions about religion with Western scholars.[49] Despite later reservations about describing Buddhism in terms of mysticism which are expressed toward the end of his life, this perspective pervaded Suzuki's entire body of work and remains central to his scholarly legacy.[50] Suzuki's influential presence extended to various scholarly forums throughout his lifetime, beginning with his admiration for the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago, attended by his Zen master Shaku Soen. Suzuki's international acclaim grew following his participation in the World Congress of Faiths in London in 1936. Subsequently, he was a featured speaker at the First East-West Philosophers' Conference in Honolulu (1939) (despite being unable to attend due to personal circumstances), followed by subsequent conferences in 1949, 1959, and 1964.

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48 Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, "The Koan Exercise," in *Essays in Zen Buddhism (Second Series)*, vol. 2, 28-34. "Passivity in the Buddhist Life" in Selected *Works of D.T. Suzuki, Volume IV: Buddhist Studies*, ed. Mark L. Blum and Richard M. Jaffe, 267–76.

49 Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, *Selected Works of D.T. Suzuki; Pure Land*, ed. James C. Dobbins and Richard M. Jaffe, vol. 2, xviii–xix. *Selected Works of D.T. Suzuki, Volume III: Comparative Religion*, ed. Jeff Wilson, Tomoe Moriya, and Richard M. Jaffe, vol. 3, xxi–xxvi.

50 D. T. Suzuki, review of *Review of a History of Zen Buddhism*, by Heinrich Dumoulin and Paul Peachey, *The Eastern Buddhist* 1, no. 1 (1965): 123–26.

He also made notable appearances at the Eranos Conferences of 1953 and 1954 in Switzerland, renowned gatherings of leading humanistic scholars.

Two years prior to his death, D. T. Suzuki engaged in a renowned inter-religious dialogue with Thomas Merton in New York, discussing the continuities and discontinuities between Christianity and Buddhism. By this time, Suzuki had firmly established himself as an internationally recognized authority on Buddhism. Despite his philosophical inclinations, Suzuki's ideas resonated less with American philosophers, who favored analytic philosophy, a style of logical thought that Suzuki often critiqued. Instead, his ideas found a more enthusiastic reception among religionists, psychoanalysts, musicians, poets, writers, theologians, artists and spiritual seekers of diverse backgrounds.[51]

Suzuki's view on science

For Suzuki, what did science mean? Suzuki's understanding of science is encapsulated in his early article '*The Land of Secure Peace of Mind'* (Anshin ritsumei no chi'). He describes science as rooted in the experience of the five senses, emphasizing its study of spatial, temporal, and mental phenomena. Science, according to Suzuki, breaks down complexities into fundamental causes and underlying uniformity, employing meticulous analysis to elucidate the relationship between force and matter through sixty-three elements. This description represents Suzuki's foundational view of science during his youth, reflective of the prevailing authoritative understanding of the time. He frequently used terms such as 'experience' 'five senses', 'sensation', and 'analysis' to characterize science in his writings. For Suzuki, science is distinctly separate from philosophy and religion, constituting one of three independent spheres of knowledge. It is primarily associated with Western

[51] James C. Dobbins, "D. T. Suzuki: Ideas and Influences," *Oxford Research Encyclopedias*, 2022, 1–18, https://doi.org/doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.013.1164.

learning, encompassing natural sciences and psychology, among other disciplines.

In contrast, Suzuki views religion not as a scholarly pursuit but as encompassing doctrines, rituals and institutions, while philosophy pertains to European thinkers' reflections on human nature and existential concerns. Suzuki's discourse on science often juxtaposes it with religion, emphasizing science's emphasis on objective experience and its reliance on observable facts to appeal to human reason. In summarizing these distinctions, Suzuki simplifies the realms of knowledge: science pursues truth within sensory boundaries, philosophy within rational constraints and religion within emotional domains. This tripartite framework underscores Suzuki's approach to categorizing and discussing the various dimensions of human understanding and inquiry.[52]

As a young man, Suzuki held a positive view of science, seeing it not merely as a tool for material progress but to liberate spiritual pursuits. He believed that scientific advancements removed natural barriers, thereby fostering conditions for spiritual freedom. Suzuki emphasized that his endorsement of science stemmed from its potential to enhance spiritual activities, not just its material benefits.[53] During the early decades of the Meiji era, Suzuki observed an opposition to science, comprising nativist scholars, Confucianists, ultra-nationalists and religious figures. Nativist scholars and Confucianists viewed science as a threat to their traditional schools, while ultra-nationalists feared its potential impact on the imperial state. Religious groups, both Christian and Buddhist, were apprehensive about science undermining superstitions, blind faith, and sacred beliefs. According to Christian doctrine, the supposed irreconcilability of science and religion is likened to the impossibility of

[52] Kirita Kiyohide and Andrew Bernstein, "Young D. T. Suzuki's Views on Society," *The Eastern Buddhist* 29, no. 1 (1996): 109–33. Suzuki Daisetsu, *Mikokai Shokan*, ed. Inoue Zenjõ (Kyoto: Zen Bunka Kenkyuojo, 1989), letter 46, 26 November 18, 1897.

[53] Suzuki Daisetsu, *Mikokai Shokan*, ed. Inoue Zenjõ (Kyoto: Zen Bunka Kenkyuojo, 1989), letter 50, 6 Jan. 1901.

reconciling ice and coal. The dominance of scientists often results in atheistic arguments and naturalistic doctrines.

Moreover, Christianity's adherence to deism and the belief in divine revelation remains steadfast, leading to the belief that science and religion cannot peacefully coexist. Science is seen as encroaching upon the sanctity of religion and undermining the authority of religious figures. Therefore, those committed to upholding God's way are urged to exert every effort in opposing the influence of science.[54] In contrast to traditional religious perspectives, Suzuki, identifying as a "New Buddhist", advocated for a harmonious coexistence of science and religion. He argued that "science and religion should operate within their distinct realms, emphasizing the need to establish a scientific foundation for Buddhism i.e. 'Science and Buddhism' pursue different methods and goals. Buddhism aims at attaining Bodhisattva-hood above and enlightening living beings below, whereas science focuses solely on explaining natural phenomena. Religion delves inwardly, while science explores outwardly. Some argue that scientific laws cannot determine Buddhist truths, suggesting an inherent disconnect between the two. However, the 'new Buddhism' school opposes this notion, advocating for the use of scientific findings to underpin Buddhist principles. Furthermore, traditional Christian objections to science have been misguided and dismissive Buddhist attitudes have also been biased. Through the lens of science, we aim to cleanse religious distortions and illuminate the true essence of religion.[55]

Suzuki asserted that religion and science were not adversaries but rather mutually relevant. He contended that any religion unable to withstand scientific scrutiny could not qualify as genuine or contemporary. Suzuki's Zen perspective, which he espoused, harmonized with science without contradiction and he remained steadfast in his belief that Zen teachings would

[54] Suzuki Daisetsu, Shinshukyoron, in Hisamatsu Shin'ichi, Yamaguchi Susumu, and Furuta Shokan, eds., *Suzuki Daisetsu Zenshu*, Second edition, 32 vols. (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1980), 23:105.

[55] Ibid., 106.

remain unshaken in the face of scientific critique. This conviction underscored his identity as a 'new Buddhist'. His stance also served as a critique of established religious institutions, including Buddhism itself. Suzuki argued that for the necessity of religious reform in collaboration with science, Religion must reform itself in conjunction with science. He asserted by adding that "through the lens of science, we will expose and rectify religious corruption, revealing its true essence". He emphasized that religion should align with scientific truths and discard beliefs contrary to factual evidence to achieve greater clarity. Moreover, regarding true religion, Suzuki described it as embodying a reverence that transcends self-centered thoughts, recognizing a universal moral principle connecting all humanity with the universe.[56]

State and Society

The Buddha's teachings did not promote the establishment of a state; rather, they focused on achieving individual liberation from suffering through the the Eight-fold Path and the Four Noble Truths. Buddhism stresses ethical conduct, including non-violence, honesty, compassion, and respect. Furthermore, the principle of non-attachment encourages detachment from worldly power and wealth. However, the Buddha did not offer explicit directives on political governance or the creation of states; his emphasis remained on guiding individuals toward spiritual and ethical development. On the contrary, Suzuki in his first book, named '*A New Theory of Religion'*, was written when he was just twenty-six years old, just before he sets for the United States. In this work, he explored his thoughts on the interplay between religion and the state. He began by presenting a contemporary Enlightenment perspective on religion as, "Religion aims for the realization of a cosmic ideal, while the state prioritizes its own survival. Religion advocates universal brotherhood without distinctions between self and others, whereas the state is founded on loyalty, patriotism and independence among its citizens. Religion questions the

[56] Ibid, 109-20.

existence of the state and challenges historical foundations, whereas the state acts based on its self-interests. This fundamental misalignment makes religion and the state incompatible". Suzuki further argues that "the state should contribute to social progress and help humanity achieve its purpose. He asserts that the state, while important for societal organization, is not the aim of human existence but a temporary necessity in human development. To ensure that the state does not obstruct the realization of religious or human ideals, Suzuki believes it should undergo reform when necessary".

In Suzuki's perspective, "the state is not an end in itself but a tool to advance human interests." This viewpoint is grounded in modern civil society and aligns closely with a libertarian concept akin to a minimalist state.[57] Suzuki delves into the relationship between religion and the state, suggesting that the state is a necessary component of societal advancement. He posits that the state serves as a means for humanity to achieve its existential purpose rather than being an end in itself. Suzuki underscores that humans exist for the collective good of humankind, not solely for the state's benefit. He portrays the state as an expedient or tool rather than a definitive goal. This viewpoint idealizes the state as a night watchman in a modern civic society, although Suzuki acknowledges the reality that actual states often diverge from this ideal. Recognizing that states typically prioritize their own survival based on principles of loyalty and patriotism, Suzuki asserts that religion should align itself with and support the state's traditions and history. His stance evolves into advocating a complementary relationship between religion and the state, where both entities mutually assist each other. Suzuki suggests that if every state action is imbued with religious significance and every religious act is relevant to the state, their pursuits become intertwined and serve each other's

[57] James W. Heisig and John C. Maraldo, eds., *Rude Awakenings: Zen, the Kyoto School, & the Question of Nationalism* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1995), 53.

interests. This cooperative framework, according to Suzuki, enhances both religion and the state.[58]

Regarding Suzuki's early use of terms like 'religion', 'Buddhism' and 'Zen,' prior to his departure to America in 1897, he initially discusses religion broadly, then focuses on Buddhism, and later introduces the term 'Zen'. His concept of religion during this period emphasizes a profound consciousness or faith that forms the core of human existence, guiding actions and energizing civilization. However, Suzuki's conceptualization of religion and the state remains abstract and somewhat removed from practical realities. In summary, while acknowledging the inherent differences between religion and the state, Suzuki advocates for a symbiotic relationship where they collaborate under the leadership of a Zen-like religious ethos, aiming to mutually benefit each other's endeavors. After relocating to the United States in the late 1890s, Suzuki articulated clearer views on the state and society, particularly critiquing Japan's contemporary structure of government, that includes the imperial family role and those who supported it: the Meiji's bureaucratic and political establishment, ultra-nationalists and advocates of Japanism.

Furthermore, the authority of the state and absolutizing its survival, Suzuki argued was analogous to living under the illusion that money retains value beyond its utility in acquiring life's necessities—a futile pursuit akin to sustaining oneself on gold and adorning oneself with silver.[59] Suzuki envisioned an ideal society as one where individuals could freely develop their strengths as they desired. He articulated, "Isn't our primary goal in structuring society to foster the unrestricted growth of innate talents, to be utilized for the collective progress of society? To achieve this, every individual must have equal opportunities and circumstances. Essential to creating these equal

[58] Suzuki Daisetsu, Shinshūkyōron, in Hisamatsu Shin'ichi, Yamaguchi Susumu, and Furuta Shokan, eds., *Suzuki Daisetsu Zenshu*, Second edition, 32 vols. (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1980), 23:137-39.

[59] Kirita Kiyohide and Andrew Bernstein, "Young D. T. Suzuki's Views on Society," *The Eastern Buddhist* 29, no. 1 (1996): 109–33.

opportunities is minimizing the disparity between the affluent and the impoverished. If everyone were liberated from concerns about basic needs like food, clothing, and shelter, it would catalyze the organic development of inherent virtues and talents. Here, Suzuki backs his perspective by aligning with socialist views and criticizing capitalist theories.

Additionally, he argued that when directed toward the advancement of society, this cultural progress would be genuinely trans-formative. Suzuki emphasized that the 'purpose of human existence' lies in fostering the unrestrained development of our innate virtues and talents, directing them toward societal advancement. To enable this, he advocated for a social system that liberated individuals from worries about sustenance and provided further material civilization, equitable wealth distribution and equal opportunities, thus minimizing the constraints imposed by material existence. As a Buddhist reformer taking an independent stance, Suzuki possessed a profound understanding of social sciences. He asserted that, "Today's impoverished and marginalized individuals are not at fault, their plight stems from societal structural flaws, particularly wealth distribution imbalances. Should Buddhists content themselves with spiritual solace while neglecting the material hardships faced by the poor and vulnerable? I sincerely hope Buddhists will actively engage in uplifting society at large, rather than settling for personal peace of mind".[60]

D. T. Suzuki's orientation of Pantheism

The term 'pantheism'[61] is of modern origin, possibly coined by the Irish freethinker John Toland around 1705, comes from the Greek roots, *pan* means 'all' and *theos* means 'God'. Pantheism can be encapsulated in two ways: in a positive way such as in the belief that God is identical with the cosmos,

60 Ibid., 127-28.

61 Pantheism is the belief, both philosophical and religious, that reality, the universe, and nature are equivalent to divinity or a supreme entity. According to this view, the physical universe is seen as a deity present within itself, continuously expanding and generating, and has existed since the dawn of time.

implying that nothing exists outside of God and in a negative way such as the rejection of any perspective that separates God from the universe. However, due to the complexity and contested nature of these concepts, there is little consensus among philosophers on a more precise definition. The term itself is controversial, often leading to debates over its appropriation or rejection, which can obscure the underlying issues. Therefore, pantheism should not be seen as a singular, clearly defined position, rather it encompasses a diverse array of doctrines, many of which would not necessarily identify themselves as part of the same philosophical tradition.[62]

Suzuki's view of Pantheism is based on his worldview, that reflects persistent concerns and apprehensions, encompassing philosophical, religious and moral dimensions.[63] Norman Geisler, in his book 'Worlds Apart: A Handbook on World Views', describes Suzuki's pantheism as, "The essence of the pantheistic view of Suzuki is that the realm of specifics is both real and illusory, relative and absolute, and finite and limitless. To fully perceive Reality, one must liberate oneself from logic, words, concepts and abstractions—anything that obstructs personal experience of that which transcends being and non-being. Through this realization, Nirvana is attained—one merges with the One".[64] In his work 'Shin shukyoron', published in 1896 just before Suzuki's journey to the United States with Carus and shortly after the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions, Suzuki grapples with the diverse currents shaping Buddhist modernism in Japan and Western philosophical thought during the late nineteenth century, exploring the 'true essence' of religion through Zen Buddhist perspectives. Suzuki, following in the footsteps of Nakanishi Ushiro and Shaku Soen, prominently incorporates

62 William Mander, "Pantheism," in The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, ed. Edward N. Zalta and Uri Nodelman, Fall 2023 (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2023), https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2023/entries/pantheism/.

63 Maurice A. Canney, *An Encyclopedia of Religions* (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1921), 277.

64 Norman L. Geisler, *Worlds Apart: A Handbook on World Views* (Michigan: Grand Rapids, Baker Book House, 1989), 93.

the concept of 'pantheism'.[65] His pantheistic ideology asserts that no single truth can fully capture reality. To explore this concept, he examines various aspects in his explanations of truth.

In this aspect, Suzuki employs the term 'God', although his usage clearly diverges from the deity concept in orthodox Abrahamic religions, leaning instead towards something akin to Spinoza's view of God or Nature.[66] However, Suzuki's view incorporates a notion of pantheism by denying God as Creator, Lawgiver, or Savior, but instead making an appeal to a source or focus of transcendence. Furthermore, after critiquing those who dismiss religion too hastily in favor of only secular philosophy and materialistic science, referencing the meaningless rites and absurd myths found in traditional faiths, Suzuki argues that such criticisms overlook the enduring essence of religion, which remains unchanged throughout history. He further contends, along with fellow New Buddhist thinkers, that this essence always encompasses both rational and irrational (or emotional) dimensions, necessitating an approach blending intellectual analysis and religious emotion. For Suzuki, the 'supernatural' aspects of religion must harmonize with our lived experiences, engaging the mind, senses, and emotions.

In addition to that, Suzuki distinguishes religion from science and philosophy by asserting that the former is a direct encounter with reality, while the latter two offer explanatory frameworks for that reality. This perspective leads Suzuki to propose that religion in essence, constitutes a firsthand illumination or realization of nature's dynamic reality—akin, perhaps, to phenomenology. However, Suzuki acknowledges that religion, as a perfected awareness of reality, cannot single-handedly dispel ignorance. He sees a complementary

[65] John Breen, Fumihiko Sueki, and Shōji Yamada, eds., *Beyond Zen: D. T. Suzuki and the Modern Transformation of Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2022), 17.
[66] Ibid., 18.

role for philosophy and science in this regard.[67] In 'Shin shukyoron', Suzuki goes further, affirming his conviction in a universal principle consistent throughout Heaven and Earth. This principle not only governs celestial orbits and natural landscapes but also underpins moral principles governing all life forms. While this principle may initially refer to physical laws of universe like gravity, Suzuki extends its application to encompass broader moral and existential dimensions.[68] Additionally, in developing his pantheistic view, Suzuki asserts that, "I identify as an atheist in the Christian sense, not as a theist, not as a pantheist, but with a definition that is more expansive than that". Although in his view atheism is considered superior to theism, which is viewed as entrenched in primitive delusion and pantheism surpasses atheism due to its lack of negativity, even pantheism has a limitation as it cannot provide an explanation for why evil predominates and disasters happen.[69]

Furthermore, contrary to the classical pantheism which states that 'God is responsible for deciding or determining everything, including what we perceive as our choices',[70] makes everything then sacred. In this Suzuki denies this principle and contends that, "If all were considered sacred, there would be no presence of wickedness or catastrophic occurrences and consequently no distinctions between good, evil, or fortunate events. Both morality and immorality would cease to exist, reducing the world to a state of chaotic mechanical forces. In such a scenario, the universe would lack meaning or discernible differences, appearing vast and indistinct. No, no. There are pairs of things that exist together and have an impact on one another. These pairs

67 Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, "Selections from Shin shūkyō ron," in *Selected Works of D.T. Suzuki, Volume III: Comparative Religion*, ed. Jeff Wilson, Tomoe Moriya, and Richard M. Jaffe, vol. 3, 3-28.

68 John Breen, Fumihiko Sueki, and Shōji Yamada, eds., *Beyond Zen: D. T. Suzuki and the Modern Transformation of Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2022), 19.

69 Daisetsu Teitaro Suzuki, "Selections from Shin shūkyō ron," in *Selected Works of D.T. Suzuki, Volume III: Comparative Religion*, ed. Jeff Wilson, Tomoe Moriya, and Richard M. Jaffe, vol. 3, 3-28.

70 Lindsay Jones, ed., Encyclopedia of Religion (USA: Macmillan Reference, 2005), vol 10, 6961.

include good and evil, right and wrong, health and illness, prosperity and decline, evolution and degeneration, creation and destruction, Heaven and Hell, and Buddhas and devils. Are these not our true experiences?'[71] He asserts the existence of meaning in life. He argues that 'the evolution of the universe and the development of humanity must have a purpose or at least a guiding principle.

This leads to the notion or idea of evolution, that tradition is not a static but a continues process, which has been adopted by other Buddhist scholars. For instance, Sakaino Koyo addressed the central query in a brief piece that was published in 1900 in the first issue of New Buddhism (Shin bukkyo), the official publication of the New Buddhist Fellowship (Shin Bukkyo Doshikai), 'What forms the bedrock of Buddhism, particularly New Buddhism? We New Buddhists aim to establish Buddhism on a foundation of pantheistic philosophy. Pantheism will underpin Buddhism. This groundwork will allow for the continuous refinement and enhancement of Buddhism in the future. This is what we refer to as New Buddhism'.[72]

Moreover, Within Japanese Buddhist modernism, pantheism is also highly relevant, especially for academics and laity Buddhist activists who defined the parameters of New Buddhism between the 1880s and the 1940s. It was seen by these intellectuals as a medium ground between idealism and materialism as well as between theism and atheism. D. T. Suzuki developed a unique interpretation of "pantheism" as the ideal approach to religion in early works like Shin Shukyoron. This interpretation resembles a phenomenological

[71] Daisetsu Teitaro Suzuki, "Selections from Shin shūkyō ron," in *Selected Works of D.T. Suzuki, Volume III: Comparative Religion*, ed. Jeff Wilson, Tomoe Moriya, and Richard M. Jaffe, vol. 3, 3-28.

[72] John Breen, Fumihiko Sueki, and Shōji Yamada, eds., *Beyond Zen: D. T. Suzuki and the Modern Transformation of Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2022), 21.

perspective on religion and avoids the traps of static and possibly nihilistic materialism, ultimately embracing Hegelian notions of change and evolution.[73]

Conclusion

The profound and transformative essence of Zen Buddhism, focusing particularly on the concept of satori. Satori is presented as the ultimate objective of Zen practice, akin to the enlightenment attained by Gautama Buddha himself. It is described as an inner, intuitive experience that surpasses rationality and logic, resulting in a profound shift in one's perception of the universe. The historical and experiential aspects of Zen, noting that its teachings may initially seem cryptic or paradoxical to those unfamiliar with its practices. However, these teachings are grounded in direct personal experience and are intended to lead to deep insight into one's true nature. Ultimately, satori in Zen is depicted as the culmination of disciplined practice, whether through extended meditation or sudden breakthroughs, representing a profound awakening that defines the tradition. Moreover, D. T. Suzuki's pivotal role in introducing Zen Buddhism to the West, emphasizes Suzuki's prioritization of inner spiritual experience over intellectual comprehension within Zen, contrasting this approach with traditional religions that rely heavily on sacred texts and doctrines. Suzuki advocates for practical, systematic spiritual training through practices such as 'Dhyana' or 'Zazen', highlighting Zen's strength in its pragmatic methodology despite its departure from conventional religious practices like worship and formal doctrines.

The evolution of Zen Buddhism in the United States, shaped significantly by D. T. Suzuki's influence, underscores America's role as a vibrant cross-cultural hub. Suzuki's efforts to rejuvenate Zen involved adapting its teachings to resonate with Western audiences and modern sensibilities, emphasizing direct spiritual experience—an approach aligned with American trends towards

[73] Ibid., 28.

individualism and personal spirituality. Through Suzuki's collaborations and writings, Zen Buddhism underwent a profound transformation from a traditional, conservative Japanese practice into a dynamic, experiential tradition that captivated Western intellectuals and seekers. This transformation not only revitalized Zen but also fostered a cultural exchange blending Eastern and Western philosophical ideas. This cross-cultural hybridization of Zen Buddhism in America illustrates how interactions between cultures can reshape and modernize religious traditions, rendering them accessible and meaningful in new cultural contexts.

D. T. Suzuki's work underscores several significant themes, as:

Comparative Mysticism: Suzuki's exploration of Zen Buddhism involves a comparative analysis with Christianity. He argues that Zen, with its bold paradoxes and direct spiritual insights, surpasses Christianity's reliance on historical symbolism and God-consciousness. This juxtaposition suggests Suzuki's perspective on Zen as offering a deeper, more immediate path to spiritual understanding.

Universal Relevance of Zen: Suzuki posits Zen as transcending religious and philosophical boundaries, positioning it as a foundational truth that resonates across diverse cultural and religious contexts. He asserts that Zen's core principles can be embraced by adherents of both Christianity and Buddhism, making it universally applicable and accessible.

Primacy of Personal Experience: Reflecting a Protestant-like emphasis on personal spiritual experience, Suzuki prioritizes inner realization over formal rituals, doctrines, or collective beliefs. He asserts that mystical experiences, as embodied in Zen practice, are transformative and essential regardless of one's religious affiliation.

Historical and Spiritual Contextualization: Suzuki contextualizes his interpretations within broader historical and spiritual frameworks. He draws parallels between the spiritual missions of Buddha and Christ, portraying them

as conduits for enduring spiritual truths that transcend their respective historical eras. This contextual approach underscores Suzuki's belief in the timeless relevance of Zen's teachings.

Intellectual Evolution: Initially shaped by rationalist viewpoints on religion, Suzuki's perspectives underwent a profound transformation following his exposure to American theories of religious experience, notably through William James. This shift prioritized personal spiritual encounters over intellectual analysis, marking a departure from Suzuki's earlier rationalist stance. Suzuki embraced the concept of religious experience as a cornerstone of his interpretations of Buddhism and other religions. Drawing from William James's insights into mysticism, Suzuki explored Buddhism's resonance with mystical dimensions, aiming to make it accessible and meaningful to Western audiences.

Comparative Religious Scholarship: Throughout his career, Suzuki engaged deeply in comparative religious studies, examining Buddhism in dialogue with Christianity and other faith traditions. His exploration of mysticism, exemplified in works like 'Mysticism: Christian and Buddhist', provided a framework for understanding spiritual phenomena across diverse cultural contexts. While Suzuki's philosophical ideas found limited traction among American analytic philosophers, they deeply resonated with a wide spectrum of intellectuals, artists, and spiritual seekers worldwide. His holistic approach to Buddhism and emphasis on mysticism continues to shape contemporary understandings of Eastern philosophy and spirituality.

Views on Science: Initially, Suzuki embraced science not just for its technological advancements but as a potential catalyst for spiritual liberation. He perceived scientific progress as dismantling barriers that hindered spiritual growth, highlighting its role in enhancing rather than diminishing spiritual pursuits. In contrast to traditional religious perspectives that often viewed science with suspicion, Suzuki advocated for a harmonious coexistence

between science and religion. He argued that while science explores the external world through empirical methods, religion delves inwardly into questions of spirituality and moral principles, suggesting they operate in distinct but complementary realms. Suzuki critiqued established religious institutions, including Buddhism itself, urging reforms grounded in scientific scrutiny. He advocated for religion to align with empirical truths, rejecting beliefs inconsistent with factual evidence to reveal its authentic essence and universal moral principles. Grounded in Zen philosophy, Suzuki argued that Zen's emphasis on direct experience and universal ethics could harmonize with scientific inquiry. He contended that Zen teachings not only withstand scientific critique but contribute to a broader understanding of human spirituality, fostering a holistic approach to existential inquiry.

Views on Religion and the State: Suzuki's posited that while religion aims for cosmic ideals and universal brotherhood, the state primarily focuses on its own survival and the organization of society based on principles like loyalty and patriotism. Suzuki suggested that despite these differences, a harmonious coexistence could be achieved if the state supported the ethical and spiritual development of its citizens. Over time, Suzuki's viewpoint evolved from a critical appraisal of the state's role to advocating for a symbiotic relationship between religion and governance. He re-imagined the state not merely as an entity unto itself, but as a facilitator of human progress and the realization of existential purposes. This perspective resonated with a libertarian concept of a minimal state, wherein individuals are free to cultivate their inherent talents and virtues without undue interference.

Pantheistic View: Suzuki's interpretation of pantheism reflects his comprehensive worldview, blending philosophical, religious, and moral dimensions. His pantheism diverges from traditional Abrahamic notions of God as a personal creator, aligning more closely with Spinoza's concept of God or Nature. Suzuki views pantheism as involving a transcendent source while rejecting anthropomorphic depictions of God. Suzuki critiques the

dismissal of religion in favor of purely secular philosophies and materialistic sciences. He argues that religion offers a profound encounter with reality that integrates both rational analysis and emotional experience. Suzuki suggests that while religion illuminates' aspects of reality, philosophy and science provide complementary explanatory frameworks, collectively enriching human understanding. Beyond physical laws, Suzuki extends his pantheistic view to encompass broader moral and existential principles governing life. He posits that these principles imbue the universe with meaning, asserting the existence of moral distinctions such as good and evil, health and illness, prosperity and decline, which profoundly shape human experiences. Moreover, within Buddhist modernism, Suzuki advocates for a dynamic interpretation of pantheism that evolves alongside societal changes. This perspective seeks to establish a foundational understanding of Buddhism rooted in pantheistic philosophy, bridging ideological gaps between materialism and idealism, theism and atheism.

In essence, D. T. Suzuki's works were profoundly shaped by the American context, where he sought to bring Zen teachings into alignment with a broader audience. This environment embraced rationalism and secularism, often excluding religion from personal life, thus limiting its resonance to the individual. Suzuki responded with a nuanced and rational approach that maintained Buddhism's spiritual core while making it more accessible to Westerners. Furthermore, Zen's method of self-realization inspired Suzuki to innovate, solidifying his reputation as a pioneering thinker carrying forward Zen tradition.

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