

Postmodernity and the Buddhist Studies of Ecology

- Joanna Macy's Ecological Self and Buddhist Self-Denial -

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I. Introduction

Modern spirituality, alas, modernity is a characteristic that appeared in overall cultural attitude focusing on reason which began with illuminism. Modern spirituality emphasized faith on man's reason rather than religion or feelings and it contributed highly to the development of history of mankind based on rational thinking, however, it started to be challenged as it entered the 20th century.

Jacques Derrida (1930~2004) is in the lead of that postmodernistic challenge and his central ideology is called deconstruction philosophy. The subjects that he attempted to deconstruct had an absolute something from the so-called center such as word-centered, noise-centered, species-centered, male-centered, and paternal-centered. Such centeredness can not avoid narcissistic pathological phenomenon, and underneath such phenomenon breathes a tightly closed, exclusion of self love. It is thought that the greatest ill of modernity lies in this self-centered self-confidence¹⁾. Derrida's deconstruction

1) Kim Hyung-hyo, *Deconstruction Philosophy of Derrida* (Seoul: Min-eum-sa, 1993), p.

is the deconstruction of the absolute of the centeredness and in that central absolute which has to be deconstructed lies the modernistic self-concept with its uniformity and standard trait.

In her thesis, "The Ecological Self: Postmodern Ground for Right Action,"²⁾ Joanna Macy criticizes this modernistic self-understanding and advocates the ecological self as the postmodernistic vision. Her ecological self-understanding is in the same orbit as Buddhist non-self, doctrines of dependent origination, and bodhisattva theory.

This thesis will analyze the problems of modernistic self-concept as the roots of ecological crisis, look into Buddhist self-denial as the textbook for complete deconstruction of self and furthermore verify that the ecological self-concept which Macy proposed as the basis for postmodernistic action was based on Buddhist doctrine of dependent origination. In conclusion, this will clearly show that eco-Buddhism uses the same grammar as postmodernistic ecology.

II. The Roots of the Ecological Crisis

1. Jewish-Christian View of Nature

Roderick Frazier Nash's contrasting testimony³⁾ of eastern and western

2) Joanna Macy. "The Ecological Self: Postmodern Ground for Right Action," in David Ray Griffin, ed., *Sacred Interconnections: Postmodern Spirituality, Political Economy, and Art* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1990), pp. 35-48.

3) Roderick Frazier Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (New Haven: Yale

views on nature has become a classic on this subject. Afterwards Lynn White, Jr. (1907-1987)⁴⁾ proposed a sharp reproach and self-reflection stating that the Christian values regarding its views on nature, the man-nature relationship, hence, the human-centeredness, were the original roots that brought about today's ecological problems.⁵⁾

The criticism that the roots of the ecological crisis is found in the teachings of Judaism and Christianity was not solely suggested by the outsiders. Should we make a truthful explanation about the Christian world view, we can not but acknowledge the incapability of Christianity with its tendency to rule the world and its classical Christian doctrine, for not having taught appropriate respect for nature. In this matter Christianity needs help from other traditions such as Buddhism, Confucianism or Japan's Shintoism, which appears to care for nature more creatively'⁶⁾ This is a reflective

University Press, 1967), pp. 20-21, 192-93. 'Ancient Eastern cultures are the source of respect for and religious veneration of the natural world'; and 'In the Far East the man-nature relationship was marked by respect, bordering on love, absent in the West.' Malcolm David Eckel, "Is there a Buddhist Philosophy of Nature?," in Mary Evelyn Tucker & Duncan Ryuken Williams, eds., *Buddhism and Ecology: The Interconnection of Dharma and Deeds* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), recited from p. 327.

- 4) Lynn White, Jr., "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," *Science* 155 (1967), pp. 1203-07. This is a widely referred thesis on environmental ethics. White provided the theological bases on mankind's power over nature and it became the beginning of ecological awakening criticizing today's environmental problems on such bases.
- 5) A. W. Watts, A. J. Toynbee, C. Amery, N. Berdiaeff, etc. are the main scholars arguing that Christianity is the principal offender of environmental destruction. Berdiaeff stated in his book, *Meaning of History* (1925): 'Christianity killed nature. This is the other aspect of the big purpose while Christianity strived for freedom of the human spirit.' Cho Yong-hoon, *Views on Nature of East and West and Christianity's Environmental Ethics* (Seoul: The Christian Literature Society of Korea, 2002), p. 167.

confession from the insider that Christianity has an essential guilt or at least a weakness when it comes to the ecological crisis of the modern world.⁷⁾

In precedent of the self-reflections from the insider of Christian theology mentioned before, the first person who proposed to reproach with the guilty verdict on this matter and left commemorative writings on environmental ethics was historian Lynn White, Jr.

God blessed them (Adam and Eve), and said, "Have many children, so that your descendants will live all over the earth and bring it under their control. I am putting you in charge of the fish, the birds, and all the wild animals."⁸⁾

God blessed Noah and his sons and said, "Have many children, so that your descendants will live all over the earth. All the animals, birds, and fish will live in fear of you. They are all placed under your power."⁹⁾

Lynn White sharply points out that this teaching of man being the lord of all creation, of which in man-nature relationship, Judaism and Christianity puts man in the center and gives the right to dominate, own and be in charge of nature, is the original base for human-centeredness. Lynn argues that

6) Langdon Gilkey, "*Keiji Nsiritani's Religion and Nothingness*" (unpublished paper), p. 27. Jan Van Bragt, "Man and Natural Environment," *Modern Times and Religion* 10, (Modern Religion Research Center, 1987), recited from p. 28.

7) German theologian E. Drewermann pointed out that Judaism-Christianity regarded nature as man's enemy, hence, viewed as a subject to subordinate, and stated that there is no reference anywhere in the Bible that denies man-centered understanding of nature. Cho Yong-Hoon, *Views on Nature of East and West and Christianity's Environmental Ethics* (Seoul: The Christian Literature Society of Korea, 2002), p. 170.

8) Genesis 1:28.

9) Genesis 9:1-2.

human centeredness regarding nature is the culprit that brought today's ecological crisis.¹⁰⁾ Such is the standing that views nature as a possession and man as its master, in other words, a master-servant relation in the man-nature relationship. Man was given the special privilege to replete the earth and dominate it. Hence, the relationship of man and nature is to order and to serve. The God in Genesis gives man the right to own not only all the animals in sea, land and sky but also all the non-living matter when God said 'all placed under your power'.

According to White, while the creation faith of Christianity sees man as a priceless existence participating in heavenly transcendency, pinpoints that the other 'physical creations are there for no other reason than to serve the purpose of mankind'.¹¹⁾ For this reason Christianity is the most man-centered religion in the man-nature relationship among all the religions that appeared on earth. Such man-centered views of nature became the spiritual basis for the development of natural science and improvement of the industrial society in the contemporary west and from this, one eventually derives the fact that Christianity is the principal offender in producing ecological problems.

Then God said, "And now we will make human beings; they will be like us and resemble us. They will have power over the fish, the birds, and all animals, domestic and wild, large and small." So God created human beings, making them to be like himself. He created them male and female...¹²⁾

10) Lynn White, Jr., op. cit., pp. 1203-7.

11) Lynn White, Jr., "*Historical Origin of Ecological Crisis*," *Science World* 1 (Spring 1992), trans. into Korean by Lee Yoo-sun, p. 283.

12) Genesis 1:26-27.

God made man in the same image (*imago dei*) and gave special status. Therefore, being the lord of all creation, man is the ultimate purpose (*telos*) of creation. It is clear in Genesis that man and nature can only exist as possessor and subordinate, the ruler and subject.

The scholars who speak for the traditional Judaism and Christianity has put a lot of effort in order to explain that Genesis does not only mean domination, possession and control of nature by mankind. Nevertheless, should a person be neutral in values—without any purposeful prejudice whether it is negative or positive—about Jewish and Christian traditions, will not be able to easily agree on the argument that this passage does not mean man's possession and domination of nature.

Genesis suggests not only the right of power to rule over animals but also plants and minerals, in other words, total conquest and control of all nature.

I have provided all kinds of grain and all kinds of fruit for you to eat.¹³⁾

Now you can eat them, as well as green plants; I give them all to you for food. The one thing you must not eat is meat with blood still in it; I forbid this because the life is in the blood. If anyone takes human life, he will be punished. I will punish with death any animal that takes a human life. Human beings were made like God, so whoever murders one of them will be killed by someone else. You must have many children, so that your descendants will live all over the earth.¹⁴⁾

13) Genesis 1:29.

14) Genesis 9:3-7. Similar passages can be found beside Genesis in the Old Testament. '...what are human beings, that you think of them; mere mortals, that you care for them? Yet you made them inferior only to yourself; you crowned them with glory and honor, You appointed them rulers over everything you made; you placed them over all creation: sheep and cattle, and the wild animals too; the birds and the fish and the creatures in the seas. O Lord, our Lord, your greatness is seen in all the

It is not easy to read this part as another meaning other than possession and domination of nature by mankind. In Genesis 1:26-7, it gives the right to dominate and possess animals, and in 1:29, it gives the right to dominate plants. In Genesis chapter 9, mankind is given the right to possess and dominate all beings in the world including non-living matters. Hence, all matters that is above the earth exist for mankind. The God in Genesis gives as a present to mankind the right to possess and dominate all creations on this earth.

Not only that, going a step further, although man commits sin and goes astray, God promises to give salvation.¹⁵⁾ Man are the purpose while nature are nothing but tools for mankind. In this way, Christianity's man-centered views of nature, hence, nature valued as the means eventually puts man and nature in master and servant relationship and this viewpoint makes it harder to deny that it is one of the ideological roots in today's ecological crisis.

2. The Self-concept of Modernism

One of the other ideological roots that brought ecological crisis other than Christianity's view on nature is the self-concept of modernism. Among the many characteristics of modernity the one most noticed related to ecology is the change of perspective on matter and nature. The view toward matters and nature before and after modernity are totally different. Modern man unlike those before viewed the matter as material objects.

The traditional attitude on matters before modernity was hylozoism. This

world!' Psalms 8:4-9.

15) Genesis, Chapters 8 & 9.

word is a combination of the Greek word 'hýlē', meaning material(matter) and 'zōē', meaning 'life', therefore meaning 'material with life'. This word was first used by 17th century English philosopher Ralph Cudworth (1617~1688), and it was used to mean all active principles like spirit and soul in matters are dissolved into a complete whole with passive principles like matter.¹⁶⁾

However, modernism made man view matters with a hylozoist perspective and look at spirit and nature completely separate from each other.

The new modernist turns the eye away from nature, and the movement of all matters in the universe points to the heavenly territory which can only be viewed by the human intellect. The intelligent mind separate from the physical being somewhere in the heavens eventually comes to perceive systematically the laws of science, which rules over nature.¹⁷⁾

As Al Gore (1948~) pointed out, our view of nature simply as a matter is based on Descartes' dualistic thinking. According to him, there exists a wide gap that can not be narrowed between mind and the physical body. This is because matters according to its natural traits are always rightfully

16) Hylozoism was explained by nature scholars of the school of Ionia, who established Greek philosophy, such as Thales, Anaximenes, and Heracleitos and then it was succeeded by the Stoic school. In the contemporary period, G. Bruno, Italian nature scholar during the Renaissance era was a hylozoist, while in the early 20th century, E.H. Hegel was a hylozoist. One of the examples of Hylozoism is; Thales said that the magnet pulled the metal because it had a soul and that 'all creation were filled with god'.

17) A. Gore, *Earth in the Balance* (NY: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1992), Trans. into Korean by Lee Chang-joo, *Earth in Crisis* (Seoul: Life and Dream, 1995), recited from p. 258.

distinguished while the mind can not be distinguished.

Hylozoism is also linked with animism. This word, also expressed as a theory in which there are many spirits, comes from the Latin word 'anima'.¹⁸⁾ English anthropologist Edward Burnet Tylor (1832~1917) first suggested this and it views all matters and nature as spiritual beings just like human beings and as they possess the anima, they are living beings much like human beings. Nature schools Thales and Anaximandros, as well as Miletos of Anaximenes saw nature not as matters that we think today but as monism nature that contains soul and life. Their purpose was to make known the essential reality of matters, which they called 'physis'. The word physics comes from this Greek word and originally it meant the effort to view the essential trait of all matters. They viewed living and non-living things as well as mind and matter as one, and the Greeks who came afterwards called the school of Miletos hylozoist, those who thought matters were alive. Thales declared that all matter had God-like nature and Anaximandros argued that just as the body is maintained by air, the universe is maintained by pneuma,

18) English anthropologist Edward Burnet Tylor (1832~1917), in his *Primaeval Culture* (1871), first used this term when he stated that looking at matter and nature from the animism perspective was a 'barbarian's philosophy' and while explaining the origin of religion it became the origin and basic principle of religion. According to Tylor, animism-like method of thinking was probably established from dream and death experiences. For example, while sleeping, although the body is resting, one dreamt of far away places, or else, just after death, although there are no external injuries, one felt that the body looked different than when alive. Therefore, one came to assume that there was a soul. Sleep and near deaths are temporary absences of the soul, and death is its permanent absence. But the soul is active even after death, hence it is presumed that religion arose from idolatry of such occurrences and it is said that by acknowledging souls in animals and nature, the concept of god was first created.

breath of the universe, a sort of an organic body, therefore, man and nature are united into monism.

But from the perspective of hylozoism, the omitted nature became a machine without any life. While hylozoism and animism put man and all matters on the same level, modernistic viewpoint viewed man and matters as two totally different existences, being in a completely different dimension. Nature which presides outside hylozoism exists only as a subordinate of mankind.

The value assessment on nature as a perceived object and its corresponding standing of nature guided nature to be used skillfully and economically. Nature as the actual thing in order for man to operate the plan can be made possible according to man's wishes. Using nature and changing it to suit man depends on man's free will. As the thinking subject, human beings is the composer managing freely the materials in his own will.¹⁹⁾

Out of hylozoism, the modern man begins to own nature, which had given birth to man, and takes control of it. As the subject of cause, man is a being with ego. Hence man's status in comparison with nature, which does not have the ego, is a being with incomparable worth. Thus, nature is only a subordinate 'subject', in which man can deal with as he pleases according to his own will.

Modern self-concept alienates nature completely from man. The self-concept that represents modern science mentality, is created from the division between man and nature.²⁰⁾ Nature in the modern world is

19) G. Friedrich, "Ecology and the Bible," in Jung-bae Lee, ed., *Ecology and Theology* (Seoul: Jongro Book, 1989), p. 55.

completely excluded from the range of ego. Man is the only one who can take control as the ruler, owner and manager while it looks down upon nature from the above.

The modern self-concept is independent from all objects and nature, and is differentiated from all objects and nature, thus a conserved ego independent from the endlessly glimmering nature.²¹⁾ The self-concept recognized as an ideology of modern world away from hylozoism is actually derived from Plato's dualism, where lies the origin of the western modern mind. According to Plato, the material world that can be seen by the eye is not the ultimate world. There lies an ideal world which is distinguished from the material world and this is the ultimate, everlasting world that is the real existence. The material world is just a second dimension existence, a copy of the idea world. Therefore, God or idea or soul are in the higher level than the substance or matter. Eventually nature is just a sensual world that can be created and changed and it is just a reproduction of the ideal world, which is the subject of rationality.

The modern self-concept which was derived from Plato's dualism inevitably undermines nature. Nature has deteriorated into the background with modern self-concept in its center and it has become a subject and an instrument to be used as a subject and to be conquered.

The ideological root of such consequence is as mentioned in Descartes' theory and it is also the same with Bacon. When Frances Bacon said, "knowledge is power", the power here means the ability of man, who has the

20) Joanna Macy, "The Ecological Self: Postmodern Ground for Right Action," in David Ray Griffin, ed., *Sacred Interconnections: Postmodern Spirituality, Political Economy, and Art* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1990), p. 39.

21) Ibid., pp. 38-39 참조.

ego as rationality, to dominate the world and nature. Whether it is called rationality or mentality or else the soul, the modernistic self-concept which shows its roots from Bacon also inevitably puts nature as an existence without an ego.

Whether it is the Christianity's view of nature or modern mentality's self-concept, both of it has alienated nature from mankind. Christianity's view of nature and the modern mentality's view of nature are clearly differentiated from each other but nevertheless both of it are seen as the roots of which brought about the same result of ecological crisis.

III. Buddhist Self-Denial

In order to correct the mistake, it is only rational to find the reason and extinguish it. Should one of the reasons for today's ecological crisis be the wrongful establishment of self-concept, it is a necessary essential process to find it and correct it.

In conquering self-concept, it is hard to find another thorough tradition as Buddhism. As a prescription in correcting self-concept to overcome ecological crisis, there is a necessary and sufficient value in excavating seriously the attempt at a thorough self-denial. Suzuki Daisetsu (1870~1966), who opened a new epoch in introducing Buddhism by translating it into a western concept, began with denying the self when introducing the core ideology of Buddhism.

Whatever name we give to the mystical thing—God, or the ultimate being, or the

absolute, or the atman, or the ego, or Brahman, or Tao, or Rationalism, or the Infinite Being, or the Zero, or the non-existence—it is something that can never be understood and it exists in front of us, or else behind dualism of you and me, or the ego and the non-ego, or the subjective and the objective, or God and the creation as a mystical thing that can never be understood.²²⁾

Confucianism calls it heaven or reason, Taoism calls it tao or reason, Veda calls it Brahman, Upanishad calls it atman, the Semitic people call it Yahweh or Allah, as they believed that there exists an everlasting absolute and complete real being on the other side of the phenomenal beings. In fact, should there be such absolute real being, it can not be denied or overcome. But in Buddhism, it does not hand down such being. Alas, it definitely denies such existence.

The body is like a pile of foam, the feeling is like a floating bubble, the thought is like shimmering air, the will is like a plantain and the conscious is like a phantom's law.²³⁾

To use the plantain as timber, its roots are cut, its leaves taken off, its skin teared out and skinning it off to find the hard seed, it seems like nothing is hard.²⁴⁾

There is no transcendental ego or substance in the eye (as one of the senses that can see). After the seeing process is finished, there is no need to distinguish whether there is or there isn't..²⁵⁾

22) D. T. Suzuki, "Basic Thoughts Underlying Eastern Ethical and Social Practice," *The Eastern Buddhist* 31/2 (1998), p. 156.

23) 『增一阿含』 Vol. 27, 35, 9 (*Taisho*, Vol. 2, p. 701c).

24) 『雜阿含』 Vol. 9, 248 (*Taisho*, Vol. 2, p. 59c).

25) 『中論』 Ch. 2, No. 20 (*Taisho*, Vol. 30), "眼等無本住 今後亦復無 以三世無故 無

During the period when Buddha appeared, people believed in the existence of Brahman, which is the ultimate being and united principle of the universe in Brahminism, which was the most powerful existing ideology. As the ultimate being, Brahman²⁶⁾ is the origin of all phenomenal world and as the united being of all creation, it is the 'self-existence' and 'conserving' existence.

The Indian people during that period, analyzed mankind linked with this Brahman. According to them, human beings are composed of three factors; two phenomenal egos that which creates and destroys both the materialistic physic and the spiritual mind, and the pure ego, atman which is immortal trespassing such the first two phenomenal egos. However, atman is said to be the internalized Brahman. In other words, the Brahman of which is the general being in each creation is the atman. Hence, just like the Brahman, the ultimate being of atman is the 'self-existing' and 'conserving' existence. Unlike the two phenomenal egos which is created and destroyed, atman is a being which can truly be said to be the true ego as the practical being. Each individual atman, which has the general Brahman, takes the unique characteristic of which does not mix with others or does not change.

People are tied down because of their obsession of 'this is my atman'. But if they are not obsessed with 'this is my atman', ...even with such thought a correct opinion is created.²⁷⁾

有無分別。”

26) By knowing Brahman, this is the one original entity, in which one becomes knowledgeable of all other things in the phenomenal world. Also, it is the core of all phenomenal world, hence it is the united entity of all creation behind the variety. Hence, it is the origin of creation and the end of it.

However, Buddha firmly denied the existence of this atman. This is denying the existence of self as the practical being. The non-self of Buddhism closely linked with postmodernistic self-understanding, is derived from the following doctrines of dependent origination of which is about Buddha's awareness.

Because this exists, that doesn't exist, and because this appears, that also appears. Because this doesn't exist, that doesn't exist, and because this disappears, that also disappears.²⁸⁾

The readers are probably holding a book right this moment. But Buddhism does not believe that this book will always be a book whenever and wherever. It means that Buddhism does not acknowledge the book as the essential existence. The existence of the book exists as a book only in relation to the person who uses it. That is, only when a person (the reader) who is willing to read the contents contained inside the object made of paper and writings will the book exist. If that object is put under one's head, it is no longer a book but a pillow. If a dish is laid on top of the object, it is no longer a book but a tray. If the paper is torn and used to wipe out dirt, it is a tissue. If it is gripped and used to hit, then it will be a weapon. If it is

27) *Saṃutta Nikaya* ii, p. 17; iii, p. 135.

Upāyupādānābhinivesavinibandho khvāyaṃ Kaccāyana loko yebhuyyena. tañcāyaṃ upāyupādānaṃ cetaso adhihānam abhinivesānusayaṃ na upādiyati nādhiṭṭhānam abhinivesānusayaṃ na upeṭi na upādiyatinaḍhiṭṭhāti attā na me ti...Kaccāna sammādiṭṭhi hoti

28) *Saṃutta Nikaya*, ii, pp. 28, 65.

Iti imasmiṃ sati idaṃ hoti imassuppādā idaṃ uppajjati imasmiṃ asati idaṃ na imassa nirodhā idaṃ nirujjhati

given to the goat then it will become food. This object composed of paper and writings is not a book whenever or wherever but only when there is someone who will read it. It becomes a tray according to the dish, or tissue according to the waste, or a weapon according to the person who hits and the person who is hit. The object is not food by itself but it becomes food according to the goat which eats it. The book exists because there is a reader and when the reader is gone, the book will also be gone. The thing that we call tissue is not a tissue until dirt is smeared to it or when the dirt disappears.

Buddhism analyzes all existence including oneself inside a relationship. Such truth is understood as self denial. Dependent origination means that all existence is dependent, temporary and relative existence and denies the definite, conserving and the self-existing real essential self. In this sense this doctrine is also another form of self-denial.

One of the central ideology in understanding Buddhism, the concept of *śūnyatā* is also basically no different from the meaning of non-self. For example, raise a hand and make a fist. There definitely is a fist in front of us. But when the fingers are opened, the fist disappears. This is because there is no *dravya*, *svabhāv* or *ātman* in the existence of this thing called the fist. It is also the same thing with the desk that we are sitting in front of. If the assembled small parts -nothing is added or taken away - are taken apart, the desk is no longer in existence. This is because it is not the essential existence. There is no essence. The 'emptiness' means there is no essence in all existences. Hence this is also understood as self-denial.

Except such explanation of 'emptiness' as the keyword is difficult to find in any

Buddhist textbooks. Therefore it is not easy to find a text that clearly defines the definition of emptiness in one simply direct sentence.²⁹⁾

We call this emptiness. It is an expediences based on something, it is also another form of *madhyamā-pratipad*. Whatever it is, if it is not a dependent origination, then it does not exist, hence if it is not empty, then it does not exist.³⁰⁾

Madhyamā-pratipad is also the core of Buddhist ideology. *Madhyamā-pratipad* was first used to mean training of middle path, which says not to be crave pleasure or be obsessed with asceticism, but when it came to Mahayana Buddhism period, it was used to mean the ideological meaning. *Madhyamā-pratipad* means ‘exist as empty’, ‘exist as if there is nothing’, ‘exist although there is nothing’, and ‘though there is nothing there exists’. *Madhyamā-pratipad* is used simultaneously when empty and existing. The real nothingness is dependently existing, while the dependent existence is the real nothingness. The *madhyamā-pratipad* means ‘the real nothingness is the dependent existence’[空即是色], as well as ‘the dependent existence is the real nothingness’[色即是空].

The Buddha says to Katyayana that the world usually bases its views on two things, existence and non-existence. ‘It is,’ is one extreme; ‘it is not’ is another. Between those two limits the world is imprisoned. The holy men transcend this

29) Garma C. C. Chang, *The Buddhist Teaching of Totality: The Philosophy of Hwa Yen Buddhism* (Univ. Park and London: Pennsylvania State University, 1971). Chang elaborately explains about ‘emptiness’ throughout roughly 90 pages, but does not provide any text that explains it is one sentence.

30) 『中論頌』第24品 第18偈.

yaḥ pratīyasamutpādaḥ śūnyatām tām pracakṣmahe sā prajñāptirupādāya
pratīpatasaiva madhyamā

limitation. Avoiding both extremes, the Tathagata teaches a Dharma in the middle between them, where alone the truth can be found.··they are no longer different but the same.³¹⁾

Therefore madhyamā-pratipad is also already understood as self-denial as mentioned in noon-self, dependent origination, and emptiness. All things in Buddhism is realized through self-denial.

Mahayana Buddhism, especially Zen Buddhism says that fundamentally there is no birth and death.³²⁾ This means that the entity through self-denial becomes aware that there is no I to be born and die. Transcending death in Buddhism does not mean not dying but becoming aware of the fact that there is no I to die, that is, through self denial one becomes free from death. Only through self denial is there a way to overcome all the pain including death which Buddhism refers to.

According to Macy, such self denial of Buddhism mostly coincides grammatically with postmodernistic self understanding.

IV. Macy's Postmodernistic Self-Understanding

Macy clearly denies the self separated from all matters and nature, the self differentiated from all matters and nature and the conservative self independent from the endlessly flickering nature.

31) Edward Conze, *Buddhism: Its Essence and Development*, Korean trans., *Buddhism for the Hangul Generation* (Seoul: Se-Gye-Sa, 1990), pp. 182-183.

32) 柳田聖山, 『臨濟錄』(東京: 大藏出版株式會社, 1977), p. 102; 塚本善隆 編, 『肇論研究』(東京: 法藏館, 1955), pp. 14-22.

But that does not mean that Macy insists on the return of hylozoism or animism which sees each matters having life forms. The fact that she sees each individual matters as one material or physical existence makes it different from hylozoism and animism, and from this point-of-view, her views on matters and nature are not different from modern views on nature. However her self-understanding, for the following reasons makes it definitely a different postmodernistic self-understanding from that of the modern one.

First, Macy's postmodernistic view of self is not that of narrowing into the inside of the skin and shell of the individual matter but a concept that extends it to the whole nature and universe.³³⁾ She does not find such self-concept extended into nature and universe from metaphysical reasons but from ordinary experiences of daily life. From the confessions of people who identify themselves with the forest and whales as they open their arms to hug the trees or jumps into the sea in order to stop and protect them from reckless deforestation of tropical forest and excessive fishing of whales, Macy experiences postmodernistic self-understanding changed from the modernistic self-concept.³⁴⁾ These people identify the forest and sea and their own self. According to Macy, such conversion of perception in which during modern times it was depreciated solely as mystical or a sort of poetical emotion, should be highly credited as an alternative solution to overcoming ecological crisis and as the highest practical value.

Macy argues that the conversion of self perception extended into the universe is a change from modern empirical ego to that of postmodernistic

33) Joanna Macy, "The Ecological Self: Postmodern Ground for Right Action," in David Ray Griffin, ed., *Sacred Interconnections: Postmodern Spirituality, Political Economy, and Art* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1990), p. 37.

34) *Ibid.*, p. 36.

absolute ego/higher ego and this is the core of ecological view of self that can overcome the earth's ecological crisis.³⁵⁾ Inside the concept of the absolute ego understood as the ecological self, the tree is perceived as our lungs. Also just as we do not advice someone to be patient while their legs are being cut off, the trees of Amazon will not be cut either. Hence, in Macy's ecological self understanding the world is our body and perceived as being one with the ego.³⁶⁾

The ecological self-understanding as such absolute self is clearly defined also by Arne Naess, who was the pioneer of deep ecology. Naess' 'realize self' statement contains the meaning that one should attempt to understand the fact that man is thoroughly interconnected with nature and to realize the self in this nature. This is requesting the realization of the higher self that includes all of the other people as well as the whole world of nature ridding of the empirical self in the modernistic meaning, that is, the isolated self-concept.³⁷⁾

Secondly, while the modernistic self-concept views each individual matters totally separate, independent and distinct being, Macy's ecological self understanding says that it can not clearly divide each matters from one another making it completely different from modern views of nature. As the typical systems thinking, a special characteristic of the so-called postmodernism, all matters in nature in fact can not eventually exist as a completely separated individual and since they have a common destiny, they

35) Ibid., p. 37.

36) Ibid., p. 45.

37) Arne Naess & David Rothenberg, eds., *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle: Outline of an Ecosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 8-9.

exist deeply related to each other.³⁸⁾ From Macy's self-understanding, one can read the ideology of the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa-sūtra* of which refers to the notion that if I am sick, you are sick and if you are happy then I am happy.³⁹⁾

Also like Einstein has shown, Macy clarifies that all beings are interrelated and dependent.⁴⁰⁾ Her definition of the ecological self is the overall substance and energy and information flowing inside us which is not a permanent self but the self that endlessly changes through interactions. Inside the concept of such ecological self that flows according to the present moment there is no self that can be put into the range of I and you.

Such understanding can be easily understood in relation to the process philosophy of Whitehead. Whitehead states that all realistic things are processes. This means that all beings have definite significance only in correlation terms of the realistic being. Therefore, all forms of beings have statuses as beings only in relation to the real being. The being considered to be separate from the actions of the real being is nothing but an empty imagination.⁴¹⁾

Thirdly, in Macy's ecological self understanding the distinction and confrontation of the principal and auxiliary becomes extinct. The modernistic self-concept, which separates each entity into principal and auxiliary, is nothing but a 'fabricated matter inappropriately undermining the ecological

38) Macy, op. cit., p. 38.

39) Robert A. F. Thurman, trans., *The Holy Teaching of Vimalakīrti* (University Park and London: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1981), p. 43.

40) Macy, op. cit., p. 39.

41) Moon Chang-ok, *Understanding Whitehead's Process Philosophy* (Seoul: Tong-Na-Moo, 1999), p. 48.

self as an interlocked process'⁴²⁾. The ecological self understood according to Macy can not be separated as principal and auxiliary and is only a 'system as a link to the continuing events.'⁴³⁾

All ethical duty can not help but to be premised on the separation of self and other. Even if that is based on altruism, altruism of separation of self and other can not help but have limitations.⁴⁴⁾ Hence, Macy only acknowledges one big unified self rather than the separation of small selves. Eventually to Macy, environmental conservation ultimately can only be conservation of oneself. However, real ecology can not make it possible to protect 'oneself' and strictly speaking, the only thing possible is the preserved existence of the world.

Such changes of self-concept, that is, change from the concept of modernistic empirical self to the concept of ecological higher self, change from separated self-concept to ecological self-concept as systems or else a flow and change into ecological self-concept in which the self and others are not separated are the bases which makes it possible for the real ecological self to be put into action rather than viewed only as an ethical duty.⁴⁵⁾

42) Bateson, G., *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (New York: Billantine Books, 1972), p. 319; Macy, op. cit., p. 40.

43) Ervin Laszlo, *Introduction to Systems Philosophy* (New York: Harper & Row Torchbook, 1973) p. 21; Macy, op. cit., p. 40.

44) Macy, op. cit., p. 45.

45) Ibid.

V. Ecological Self-Realization

Macy believes that only when transcending of altruism, absolute self which transcended separation of self and others, self integrated as a whole being, and ecological self are left, restoration of true ecological world and realization to preserve it are possible. This is only possible when conversion from modernistic self-concept perceived as a permanent unchanging being in the center of the matter and nature into the ecological self-concept is realized. This is the ultimate purpose of the 'deep ecology or the essential ecology' in which Naess had mentioned.⁴⁶⁾

Therefore, in order for the realization of the ecological self, the foremost task is to deny and thus conquer modernistic self-concept.

People are usually tied down because of the obsession that 'this is my atman'. However if they are not obsessed with 'this is my atman', ...even with such attitude can a right opinion be made.⁴⁷⁾

Macy's ecological self-understanding shares the same grammar with Buddhist absolute self-denial and doctrine of dependent origination. Buddhism begins with denying the fixed unchanging absolute self and thoroughly rejects the process of idolization or materialization of whatever existence. And so according to Linji (Korean: Inje) teachings which was at the peak of China's zen Buddhism tradition, pronounced 'Those who are on the road to seeking the truth! Should you wish to achieve a proper opinion of the truth, there

46) Ibid.

47) *Saṃutta Nikaya* ii, p. 17; iii, p. 135.

should be no misgivings by others and whether it is toward the internal or the external, it should be killed immediately. If you meet Buddha, you should kill the Buddha; if you meet the master, you should kill the master; if you meet an arahant, you should kill the arahant; if you meet your parents, kill the parents; and if you meet your relatives, then kill the relatives. Only then can you achieve nirvana. Do not be bound to the outside matter, get rid of it and become free.’⁴⁸⁾ This signifies a thorough destruction of the materialized thing. He is emphasizing that even Buddha or the preceding master are just an instrument in order for self awareness. He is scolding the fact that by making Buddha or the master an absolute being will only make one be obsessed about it and become a slave to it.

Buddhism stresses that one should also be free from the thing which they consider to be the truth.⁴⁹⁾ In the Judaism-Christianity tradition which make God an absolute being, there can not be self-denial or transcendence such as ‘when you meet God, kill God, and when you meet Jesus, kill Jesus’. Jesus Christ who is God, is in itself the absolute truth, hence it can not be denied or transcended. The heavenly rules of Confucianism can never be denied, and neither can the tao of Taoism be transcended.

However, in Buddhism, there is no absolute which must be maintained until the end. Buddhism does not make Buddhism itself absolute. The truth believed in Buddhism is itself an instrument (pāya). Should someone try to make the truth absolute, then that is an obsession toward the truth and it is

48) 『臨濟錄』「示衆」, 道流 爾欲得如法見解 但莫受人惑 向裏向外 逢著便殺 逢佛殺佛 逢祖殺祖 逢羅漢殺羅漢 逢父母殺父母 逢親眷殺親眷 始得解脫 不與物拘 透脫自在.

49) Buddhist Textbook Committee, *Understanding Buddhism* (Seoul: Bul-kyoSi-dae-sa, 2003), pp. 404-409.

an incorrect attitude.

Any religion that does not know that the self is an instrument and considers oneself to be the purpose and becomes obsessed or makes it absolute, it can only be said that that is a reification attitude. For example, should the audiences meet the actor who played the hero in a movie or television drama, they will confuse him as being the actual hero and thus moon over him. On the other hand, should the audiences meet an actor who played the role of a villain, there are cases where they have actually considered the actor a bad person in real life and thus reproach him and even try to hurt him. The actor is only an instrument and tool in expressing the personality of the character in which the writer wanted to portray. But the viewers or the audiences confuse the actor who is just an instrument or tool as the real character. Such behaviors are referred to as the process of reification or idolization.

Religion can also become like this. Buddhism considers all religion an instrument in teaching the truth. However, if a religion, which is just an instrument in acquiring the truth, is considered to be the truth itself, it is a reification of the religion. If religion is reificated, it is possible to become obsessed about it and become a slave to it. Idolization is thinking that the temporary and relative thing is permanent or else absolute. Buddhism and postmodernism tries to do away with such process without any exception.

Buddha understood pain as the true nature of life. Hence, the purpose of the religious life which he began was to overcome such pain and thus achieve everlasting freedom and peace. According to Buddha, human lives are painful because of greed, anger and foolishness. If so, where do greed, anger and foolishness come from? It comes from the self, that is, the

selfishness of thinking only about the 'I'. Such egotism divides the you and the I and discriminates us from them. It also divides my thing and your thing, the our thing and the your thing, my thing and his/her thing and the our thing and their thing. The moment selfishness arises in a human being, he or she acquires an obsession toward the self which can not be thrown out. The self becomes the absolute being prior to everything else. Greed, anger and foolishness are derived from all this and they bring about pain.

However, all existence and phenomenon in this world can not exist in itself, neither can it exist by itself and it can only exist dependent on others, and once one learns that one is a temporary and relative as well as limited being, one will become aware that such existence and phenomenon are not worth being obsessed about. Therefore, such enlightenment will enable everyone to rid of the selfishness and obsession of the 'self' or the 'possessions' which one is so obsessed about. Once selfishness and obsession of the self disappears, so will the desire, and when the desire disappear, so will anxiety and pain, and when anxiety and pain disappear, this is the so-called existential freedom, hence it is nirvana, the supreme enlightenment.

The doctrine of dependent origination gives the practical bases which makes it possible to reach world nirvana, that is, peace of the society, not only nirvana as an individual freedom. According to the doctrine, 'because there is a worker, there is a user, and because a worker is created so is the user. If there is no worker, there is no user, and if the worker disappears, so does the user'. The worker and the user are the reason to exist for each other. The doctrine states that I am not my reason to exist but that you are my reason to exist. All existence in the world disappear when one disappears, hence lies the joint destiny of which I can be whole only when you are

whole.

In other words, all beings exist by ‘living together’, meaning that one should live in harmony with one another. In order for a bowl of cooked rice to exist, first there has to be uncooked rice and for this to exist, a farmer needs to exist as well as land, workers, rice-planting by those workers, weeding, crop-dusting, harvesting, trucks, mills and vendors. Moreover, there needs to have sunlight, water, wind and fire. In other words, in order for the “I” as in the bowl of cooked rice to exist, there needs to exist many “you”. In that bowl of cooked rice lies the breath of universe of which we don’t know everything about. In looking at all connections related to that bowl of rice, there is not one existence that exists without being related to the universe. Therefore, according to the Avatamska Sutra’s theory of dependent origination, it refutes that inside a grain lies the whole universe.

According to the doctrine, one stump of tree, a root of grass, a rolling stone are all linked in a closely tied knot of connectedness with all existences in the whole universe. In order for that one thing to exist, all beings of the universe not only can be left out and all are valuable. It’s because if you disappear, then I disappear. Hence you are the foundation of my existence, therefore you are me.

All existences of the universe are closely connected with each other and so you and I are not separate. Everything is bound together in one big whole, one life form. Hence the Avatamska Sutra said that the world is a flower. A flower is consisted of a combination of several petals. Therefore the world is one body.

The meaning of the doctrine of dependent origination is to live together without any discrimination as the world is one body. Buddha taught this as

'great charity viewing the whole world as one body'. Such enlightenment of the doctrine and action derived from such enlightenment is the life of great charity living by viewing the world as one body.

The meaning of the word charity can be understood as 'taking action in giving all benefits and pleasure'(maitri) for you, and 'taking action in taking away the disadvantages and pain' (karuṇā). However, the real meaning in taking action of charity is to take action in denying the self in terms of modernistic concept and understanding the ecological self. Taking real action of charity is not just 'I' giving pleasure 'towards you' or else 'I' taking away 'your pain'. Charity is taking action in leaving the world behind while you and I disappear. In other words, charity is taking action to become one with the world as the self is denied. A passage in *Vimalakīrti-sūtra* clearly explains this.

Mañjuśrī goes to visit Vimalakīrti, who is sick. Vimalakīrti has already achieved enlightenment and considered to be a Buddha or Bodhisattva transcending all kinds of sickness. Hence nobody could understand why Vimalakīrti was sick. Mañjuśrī asked why Vimalakīrti was taken ill.

Mañjuśrī, my sickness comes from ignorance and the thirst for existence and it will last as do the sicknesses of all living beings..... For example, Mañjuśrī, when the only son of a merchant is sick, both his parents become sick on account of the sickness of their son. And the parents will suffer as long as that only son does not recover from his sickness. Just so, Mañjuśrī, the bodhisattva loves all living beings as if each were his only child. He becomes sick when they are sick and is cured when they are cured. You ask me, Mañjuśrī, whence comes my sickness; the sicknesses of the bodhisattvas arise from great compassion.⁵⁰⁾

50) Robert A. F. Thurman, trans., *The Holy Teaching of Vimalakīrti* (University Park and

Because I exist through you, I can not live without you, and when you disappear, I will also disappear, hence, you are me. Since you and I are one, if you are sick then so am I and knowing that your pain is my pain, I must take care which is true charity, that is, the great charity.⁵¹⁾ In a place where great charity is put into action, the selves who give and receive all disappear and thus, everyone becomes dependent on one another, eventually making only one world remain.

In other words, through denial of self, one realizes that the world is one and through this notion life is taking action in charity. Realization of charity is nothing other than social salvation. When personal salvation that is the enlightenment of self-denial appears as freedom, charity which is taking action of self-denial is the social salvation and comes forth as peace. Should I perceive myself in terms of self-centeredness and hence put myself forth and then perceive you and everything in front of me, ultimate peace can not exist, and only unlimited competition derived from selfishness and so as a result of that, only opposition and conflict are left behind. But in a place where great charity is realized, all opposition and conflicts as well as antagonism and struggle disappear leaving behind only peace making everyone be as one. Therefore, the doctrine of dependent origination not only brings about nirvana as an individual freedom but also nirvana of the world, that is, it makes possible social peace. This is the enlightened truth of which Buddha realized and it is also the significance of the doctrine of dependent origination, and realization of such doctrine is the meaning of the actions of the Bodhisattva, which is the essence of the Mahayana spirit.

London: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1981), p. 43.

51) 「大智度論」(『大正藏』Vol. 25), p. 209.

VI. Conclusion

At the roots of the contemporary ecological crisis, lie man-centered views on nature according to Judaism and Christianity and also the modernistic self-concept that views the self as an absolute, uniform and standard existence. These are the worldly viewpoint that undermine nature and the ecological system compared to all human beings. Today's ecological crisis is derived from such self-concept and world views.

Derrida, who stands in the forefront of postmodernism, deconstructs modernistic self-concept, which is the absolute being, putting it in the same orbit as self-denial of Buddhism. Joanna Macy abandons modernistic self-concept, which uses the same grammar as Buddhist self denial, moreover, advocates ecological self-concept based on Buddhist non-self and the doctrine of dependent origination. Macy makes it clear that her ecological self-concept was rooted and developed from Buddhist doctrine of dependent origination. She also makes it clear that her ecological self-concept and its practical model is based on postmodernistic understanding. Thus it can be verified that eco-Buddhism uses the same grammar as postmodernistic ecology.

Macy's ecological self stands in the same line as the Bodhisattva of Buddhism. Her theory ends with the conclusion to take action while self-denial of Buddhism also ends with Bodhisattva's action of charity which is the realization of self-denial.

The ecological realization as an ethical duty based on modernistic self-concept can not avoid separation of the self and others, and this eventually can not function as a complete ecological ideal. Therefore, Macy emphasizes that the best alternative solution to the present day ecological crisis is taking

action based on the ecological self-understanding which pulses along the same vein as Buddhist self-denial, dependent origination and bodhisattva.

Keywords

ecology (생태학), self-concept (자아개념), modernism/modernity (모더니즘/근대성), postmodernism/postmodernity (포스트모더니즘/탈근대성), self-denial of Buddhism (불교의 자아부정), doctrine of dependent origination (연기법), views on nature of Christianity (기독교의 자연관), ecological self theory (생태학적 자아론), ecological realization (생태학적 실천), Joanna Macy (조안나 메이시)

Postmodernity and the Buddhist Studies of Ecology

- Joanna Macy's Ecological Self and Buddhist Self-Denial -

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Jacques Derrida (1930~2004) is in the front line of post-modernistic challenges and deconstruction philosophy which is his main ideology. Derrida's deconstructionism is the deconstruction of the absolute from the center and in the center of the subject of which must be deconstructed is the absolute, modern self-definition which has the aspects of uniformity and standardization.

Joanna Macy criticized modern self-definition in her thesis "The Ecological Self: Postmodern Ground for Right Action" and advocates ecological self with a postmodernistic vision.

She uses the modernistic self-concept in the same context with Buddhist self denial and moreover, she advocates ecological self-understanding based on Buddhist non-self and dependent origination. She also makes it clear that the ecological self-understanding and its practical model that she has suggested are based on postmodernism. Hence, it has been verified that eco-Buddhism uses the same grammar with postmodernistic ecology.

Macy's ecological self-theory can only be in the same context

with Buddhist bodhisattva. Her theory concludes with an action plan while in Buddhism the Buddhist self-denial can only be concluded with its practical usage of the bodhi's charity performance.

The ecological practices as an ethical duty based on modern self-concept can only draw a line of demarcation between oneself and others and eventually can not function as a complete ecological idealism. Therefore, Macy emphasizes the best alternative solution for the current ecological crisis, which is to take action based on the ecological self-understanding that takes the same stance as Buddhist self-denial, dependent origination and bodhisattva.

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포스트모던적 도전의 선봉에 데리다(Derrida, Jacques, 1930~2004)가 있으며 그의 중심사상을 해체철학이라 부른다. 데리다의 해체주의는 중심으로서의 절대 해체이며 그 해체되어야 할 대상의 중심에 절대와 획일과 보편적 성격을 갖는 근대적 자아개념이 자리 잡고 있다.

조안나 메이시(Joanna Macy)는 자신의 논문 “생태학적 자아: 올바른 실천을 위한 포스트모던적 기반”에서 이 근대적 자아개념을 비판하고 포스트모던적 비전으로서 생태학적 자아를 주창한다.

메이시는 불교의 자아부정과 동일한 논리체계로써 근대적 자아의 개념을 용도폐기하고, 나아가 불교의 무아설과 연기법에 근거한 생태학적 자아이해를 주창한다. 또한 자신이 제시한 생태학적 자아이해와 그 실천적 모형이 포스트모더니즘에 근거하고 있음도 명백히 한다. 이로써 생태불교학은 포스트모던적 생태학과 그 논리체계를 같이 하고 있음이 확인된다.

메이시의 생태학적 자아이론은 불교의 보살론과 맥을 같이 할 수밖에 없다. 조안나 메이시의 이론은 실천으로 결론을 삼고 있으며 불교의 자아부정은 그것의 실천인 보살의 자비행으로 결론지을 수밖에 없기 때문이다.

근대적 자아개념에 근거한 윤리적 의무로서의 생태적 실천은 자타의 분립을 피할 수 없으며, 이는 결코 온전한 생태적 이상으로 기능할 수 없다. 따라서 메이시는 불교의 자아부정, 연기법 및 보살론과 맥을 같이하는 생태학적 자아이해와 이에 근거한 실천만이 오늘의 생태위

기에 대한 최선의 대안임을 역설한다.