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Zen and Anarchy in Reiner Schürmann

Being, Nothing, and Anontology

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nominalized, hypostatized) notion of anarchy, we may take the anarchy that precedes *on* and *mēon* as *neither* ontological nor meontological but as *an-ontological*. If being becomes intelligible vis-à-vis its opposite, non-being, then the nothingness of being—irreducible to that opposition or any metaphysical reduction in terms of such opposites—may be regarded as *anontological*. *An-on* here would designate *an-archē* as what is prior to, and irreducible to, principles (*archai*), including those that rule the very logic of opposition, e.g., between being (*on*) and non-being (*mēon*), affirmation and negation, etc. As *nothing* it clears the space for the unfolding of being vis-à-vis non-being, presencing/absencing, *genesis/phthora*, *Angang/Abgang*, *alētheia/lēthē*, *on/mēon*. While immanent to, or making possible, that very distinction, being qua nothing as *an-on* would be abyssally removed from the being/non-being distinction. The anarchy is thus anontological and anarchic praxis would be a convergence or correspondence with that anontological anarchy, “being without being.”

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As such, it surpasses even the being/non-being distinction that pertains properly to entities (beings). For Heidegger, being is no mere being vis-à-vis non-being, and its nothingness is not the opposite of being. Thus, Heidegger often was unsure about the very term “being” (*Sein*). But in speaking of anarchy as *that to which* anarchic praxis on man’s part corresponds, are we not likewise nominalizing it, hypostatizing it into something ontological? Schürmann himself warns against simply stopping at an *ontological* notion of anarchy that would represent it as an *archē*, an ontological First (Schürmann 1978b: 367). Nishida, on the one hand, clarifies the (in)distinction of nothingness by drawing it out in terms of an undelimited place wherein the very opposition between being and non-being can be made, the very space that makes contradictory and oppositional relations possible in the first place. Schürmann, however, takes-off from Heidegger to focus on being’s event-character as *Ereignis*. But we might say that the anarchy that precedes principles, in addition to its event-like nature, is also a gaping abyss that engulfs, enfolds and unfolds, the dualities of presencing and absencing, coming and going, generation and extinction, birth and death, being and non-being, *on* and *mēon*.

In Schürmann’s scheme, every metaphysic involves the positing of a rule in its search for a First whereby the world becomes intelligible and masterable. It seeks to establish “‘principles’ for thinking and doing.” “Anarchy” designates “the withering away of such a rule, the relaxing of its hold” (Schürmann 1990: 6) and what that reveals. The *an-archē* that precedes principles is also what cannot be hypostatized or reified, *nothing*. At one point Schürmann characterizes this very originary nothingness as *ontological* (Schürmann 1990: 141). But taking a clue from Heidegger’s reluctance concerning the word “being” (*Sein*) and from Nishida who would prefer to reserve “being” (*yū*) to the semblance of substance belonging to entities (beings), as well as from Schürmann’s own warnings about stopping at a *merely ontological* (i.e.,

Abstract

This article discusses Reiner Schürmann’s notions of ontological anarchy and anarchic praxis in his readings of Heidegger and Eckhart, while bringing his philosophy of anarchy into dialogue with Zen-inspired Japanese thought. I thereby hope to shed light on his thought of anarchy in terms of what I call “*an-ontology*.” The inspiration for this project is the fact that Schürmann himself had practiced Zen as a young adult in France and had engaged in comparative analyses of Zen and Eckhart in his earlier works. I take what Schürmann meant by the principle of anarchy as a form of *praxis* that *precedes* the theoretical bifurcation between being and non-being. A similar sort of “anarchic praxis” is recognizable in Zen and we can find comparable (an)ontological implications of such praxis in the Zen-inspired writings of the Japanese medieval thinker Dōgen and of the contemporary philosopher Nishida Kitarō.

Introduction

In his book, *Heidegger on Being and Acting*, Reiner Schürmann states that “Heidegger” therein is no proper name but rather “a certain discursive regularity” (Schürmann 1990: 3). In the following I shall treat Schürmann in the same way. By bringing “Schürmann,” with his appropriations of Heidegger and Eckhart, into dialogue with certain figures of Japanese thought, inspired by Zen which Schürmann himself had practiced and written on, I hope to shed some light upon the matter of his thought, in particular his thought of anarchy. If being is at bottom *anarchic*, being is *nothing*. In the following I wish to unpack what I call an *anontology of anarchy*—the anon of *anontology* here denoting a double negation inclusive of *on* and *mēon* but reducible to neither—in reading Schürmann.

A fundamental aspect of Schürmann's philosophical project was his doctrine of the principle of anarchy.¹ This was primarily a *praxis*, a doing. The doctrine calls for a recognition of the loosening of the grip of principles, metaphysical posits, that have exercised their dominion over phenomena. The point is to leave behind attachment to such principles and to embark on a path of detachment that Schürmann, using Heideggerian-Eckhartian terminology, designates "release-ment." The loosening of principles, *archai* (ἄρχαι)—through releasement—reveals what Schürmann calls *an-archē*, anarchy. And the corresponding praxis that comports to this revelation is thus an "anarchic praxis."

In particular, and especially in his readings of Heidegger, Schürmann designates the anarchy to be "ontological." As "ontological anarchy," it refers to an indeterminate factor that simultaneously both establishes and destabilizes any determination of being (Schürmann 1984: 386; 1990: 10)—that which permits the "surfacing" of, but also discredits claims to absolute-ness, eternity, or universality. The *theoria* and the *praxis* of anarchy are thus inextricably linked in Schürmann's thinking. He intends their non-duality to simultaneously reveal and respond to the principle of anarchy.

In the first three sections I shall explicate the concept of anarchy in its intimacy with releasement in Schürmann's readings of Meister Eckhart and Martin Heidegger, and in his remarks on Japanese Zen Buddhism. In the sections following, I shall extend his dialogue with Zen by introducing two Japanese thinkers representing medieval and modern interpretations of Zen thought, Dōgen and Nishida Kitarō² I want to unpack the

¹ I am restricting my discussion of Schürmann here to works published during his life. I will not discuss his posthumous *Broken Hegemonies*.

² When discussing modern Japanese thinkers, such as Nishida, I will generally follow the traditional Japanese ordering of names with family name first, followed by the personal name. In the case of Nishida, *Nishida* is his family name and *Kitarō* is his personal name. An exception would be

anarchy. In practical terms, to be in accord with that anarchy is to "live without why": "Man, in the most hidden ground of his being, truly is only when in his own way he is like the rose—without why." In response to the purposeless flow of presencing—ontological releasement—man is called-forth to comport to phenomena in that mode of releasement, to let be, "live without why" (Schürmann 1978b: 362). In his reading of Michel Foucault from the mid-1980s, Schürmann accordingly develops the idea of a practical "anarchistic subject" who responds to that phenomenal flux that constitutes and destroys temporal networks of order, fluidly shifting into and out of their shifting fields (Schürmann 1986: 302). In response to the anarchy, "living without why" would entail "being without being": *being* without fettering oneself to a fixed or static way of being. Despite man's will to impose permanence on everything, everything, including himself, is undergoing constant change. This point is underscored by Dōgen: Like the world, at every moment our bodies and minds make-passage, rising-and-falling, undergoing births-and-deaths of cells and experiences. In Schürmann's terms, to live in existential comportment to such anarchy would be to engage in anarchic praxis, "living without why."

And to *be without being* is also a response to anarchy qua nothing. As we have noted anarchy in Schürmann's sense is inseparable from a certain understanding of nothingness. In Zen that nothingness is the emptiness of beings in regard to their substantiality, whereby they are impermanent, dependent, and contingent. In Eckhart, it is the abyssal desert of the godhead beyond a determinate God. In Heidegger the being of beings is *no-thing*; it anonymously gives their beingness while serving as the very *clearing* for their presencing/absencing. In Nishida that clearing is the *place* of nothing *wherein* beings come and go. In all of these cases nothingness is *not* the opposite of being. Heidegger struggles throughout his career to make this point: *being is no thing*, it has no opposite that can stand-opposed to it.

kenotic grace, only through self-negation or ego-death, does man encounter God (Nishida: 2003: 10:315, 325; 13:235).¹⁸ As in Schürmann's anarchic praxis, it is being qua substance that is being negated.

The very place that permits that mutual self-negation as an abyss, irreducible to any principle of objectification, in Schürmann's terms would be *anarchic*.

It points to an un/grounding abyss behind grounds, an *an-archē* that releases, without securing, *archai*. Undermining while erecting, it clears the space wherein beings come and go and wherein we are born and die. As what Nishida calls "contradictory self-identity" (*mujunteki jikodōitsu*; 相対的自己同一), it would have to include the opposites of being and non-being¹⁹ or in Greek, *on* and *mēon*. The absolute nothingness here encompasses the ontological and the meontological.

To denote that structure of double negation inclusive of both *on* and *mēon* but reducible to neither (i.e., beings or their negation), I thus propose the neologism of the *anontological*. The event of double negation or double releasement, is then not only anarchic, it is an-ontological: The anarchy is anontological.

Conclusion

In his readings of Eckhart and Zen, Schürmann discerns an anarchic element—irreducible to principles, *archai* and *teloi*—that he calls the principle of anarchy, and in his analysis of Heidegger, this becomes more specifically an *ontological*

¹⁸ To depict this idea Nishida quotes the lines by Dōgen we discussed above: "To study the Buddha-way is to study one's self. To study one's self is to forget one's self" (Nishida 2003: 8:512, 514; and 10:336).

¹⁹ While "being" here is *yū* (有), Nishida uses the term *sōtai mu* (相対無) or "relative nothing" to name "non-being" as the opposite of "being." On the other hand "absolute nothing" (*zettai mu*; 絶対無) is what encompasses that opposition.

implications Zen thought may have for Schürmann's thought on anarchy and vice versa. Would the "anarchic praxis" that Schürmann also recognizes in Zen have a comparable ontological meaning, especially in light of Zen's emphasis on emptiness (*kū*) or nothingness (*mu*)? And how might this relate to the nothingness noticeable in Eckhart as well as in Heidegger? And what does this tell us about the meaning of releasement and the relationship between anarchy and being? My suggestion is that we may further explicate Schürmann's sense of anarchy in terms of what I shall call the "*an-ontological*." I will thus argue for an "anontology of anarchy" that would be prior, and irreducible to, the archic constructions of the *on/mēon* (ὄν/μὴν; being/non-being) distinction.

Meister Eckhart

Two central figures in his project, to whom Schürmann repeatedly turns to articulate what he means by "anarchy," are Meister Eckhart (c. 1260–c. 1328) and Martin Heidegger (1889–1976). In Eckhart's case, it is his method of theological negation in the quest for God that unfolds that anarchy. In the search for the true origin of the divine, the intellect must aspire not to God qua Holy Spirit nor Son nor even the Creator. All creatures are mere nothings, receiving their being from their divine source. But detachment from beings on the way to divinity must advance to detachment from *all* images (Schürmann 1978a: 287, 298). That includes even the names given to God. Through this path of negations (of creatures, images, names), the intellect is led to the "region of the unspeakable," where God can no longer be "objectified" in its opposition to the human knower (Schürmann 2001: 69–70). The Eckhartian God here in its unnameable purity, as neither this nor that, is none of the Persons

someone like D. T. Suzuki who is widely known in the West with numerous publications in Western languages.

of the Trinity, nor the Creator opposed to creation. God thus bereft of His personality, the ground as *no-thing*, is what Eckhart means by *gottheit* (“godhood” or “godhead”) (Schürmann 2001: 44, 112).

The path to that godhead entails a forgetting of distinctions that differentiate *this*, *that*, and I. Only one who is un-attached to any *thing* discovers the godhead as *no-thing* (Schürmann 2001: 66, 71, 114–15). Such a one is detached, no longer imposing his conceptions or volitions upon the world, no longer willing but letting, to mirror the nothingness (*unwesene*) of the godhead that releases, and is released from, all beings. In that breakthrough of the soul, what remains, as Schürmann understands Eckhart, is nothing other than an “unknowable desert” (Schürmann 2001: 69, 111). For Schürmann, Eckhart’s way of thinking reveals an abyss preceding any of our conventional notions of who or what God is, an annihilation of the very grounding function of God (Schürmann 2001: 110).

When one is released into that desert of the godhead, intentionality and purpose, i.e., “why,” loses any sense (Schürmann 2001: 108). As the *archē* (ἀρχή), the wherefrom, is without why, so, too, the *telos* (τέλος), the whereto, is without why (Schürmann 1978a: 310). Thus “God is, man lives, things subsist and perish—all without a why” (Schürmann 1978a: 307; 2001: 109). But this why-lessness of all is the primordial why: “What is, is—without a why” (Schürmann 2001: 62). God thus “deprived of a ‘why’ is pure *nothingness*” (Schürmann 1978a: 305, my italics).

This pre-originary “origin” (*ursprunc*, *archē*) in the bosom of the godhead that, properly speaking, is *not*—no being opposable to any other—is thus *not* God in the theological or metaphysical sense. Instead, Schürmann declares, “it is *nothingness* and *anarchy*” (Schürmann 2001: 116, my italics). The *archē* that is the originary why-lessness of all, is *anarchic*. And that anarchy from which being erupts is the nothingness wherein God, world, and man, Creator and created, all disappear in non-differentiation—a nothing prior to all oppositions, including

Accordingly, we may interpret this in Schürmannian terms as anarchic.

Nishida goes-on to conceive that abyss dynamically as involving perpetual self-negation countering any nominalizing or hypostatizing tendency by combining the Mahāyāna notion of the emptiness of emptiness with the Christian concept of God’s *kenosis*.¹⁷ The place of absolute nothingness, as a self-negating nothing, envelops the world through its *kenotic* clearing of space. Schürmann in his Eckhart reading takes Christ as the model of self-renunciation and total abandonment that parallels the Eckhartian praxis of detachment and releasement. But he radically reads Eckhart’s prescription to mean that one follows Jesus only by renouncing God Himself. God vanishes both as teleological goal and as epistemological object and any onto-theological foundation is deprived (Schürmann 2001: 162). While in Eckhart, releasement unveils the abyssal godhead behind God, in Nishida’s case, God in self-negation proves to be a place that is absolutely nothing, clearing space for the world. The dynamic in each case is predicated upon the denial of being qua substance. In Schürmann’s Eckhart reading God’s abandonment of divine properties is mirrored in human practice via the “double annihilation of human and divine properties” (Schürmann 2001: 219). In Nishida as well the implacement involves self-negation *both* on the part of the absolute qua place *and* on the part of the finite self qua implaced. It involves their mutual self-negation in the inverse correspondence (*gyakutaiō*; 対立) between God and humanity, absolute and relative, infinite and finite, or place and implaced. Just as God meets man in

¹⁷ While connecting the following idea with what he called “the true emptiness of Buddhism” (*bukkyō no shinkū*; 仏教の真の空), Nishida in turn associates this with what the Western mystics called *Gottheit* (godhead, godhood). Presumably he has Eckhart in mind (Nishida 2003: 10:104, 157, 317). The term *kenosis*, meaning to empty oneself, appears in Paul’s Letter to the Philippians 2:6–8: “God ... emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.”

At the 1926 inception of Nishida's theory of place, place proves to be the dimension one touches in the depths of one's being, where one encounters the existential nullity finitizing one's self, where one's being is environed by nothing. He characterizes it as a place wherein life meets death, "the place of generationand-extinction" (*shōmetsu no basho*; 相滅の場) (Nishida 2003: 3:423). Therein one intuits one's non-substantiality, the abyss out of which one's self is constituted to face the world. It is a primal nothingness that precedes any dichotomization between ideal and real, experience and reality, subjective and objective; and from out of which the world and our experiencing of the world unfold through the play of opposites and dualities.

In his works of the 1940s,¹⁵ Nishida connects place that had been expanded in the 1930s as the dialectical matrix of the world to the notions of "God" and "the absolute" (*zettaisha*; 絶対). God as transcendent other is at the same time immanent to one's self in the depths of one's being. While immanent to our being, it transcends our attempts to grasp it, conceptually or instrumentally. It is really nothing objectifiable as standing-opposed to oneself. The *absolute* (*zettai*) by definition—both in its Latin and its Japanese etymologies—cannot stand opposed to anything that would relativize it.¹⁶ Nishida thus conceives God/absolute as "immanently transcendent" (*naizaiteki chōetsu*; 内在超越) in line with his notion of the place of absolute nothing. Its abyssal nature is such that it would engulf the God of metaphysics or any grounding principle for that matter.

¹⁵ E.g., *Yoteichōwa o tebiki to shite shūkyōtetsugaku e* ("Towards a Philosophy of Religion with Pre-established Harmony as Guide") of 1944 and *Bashoteki ronri to shūkyūoteki sekaikan* ("The Logic of Place and the Religious Worldview") of 1945.

¹⁶ While in Latin *absolvere* means to be "set free," "make separate," in Japanese *zettai* also has the sense of being cut-off (*zetsu*; 断) from opposition (*tai*; 対).

the subject/ object, I/you, Creator/creature, actor/action, etc., antinomies (Schürmann 2001: 110–11, 188). We can also add to this list, the very primal opposition of being and non-being, affirmation and negation.³ The primordial why-lessness, the anarchy of being, is *no thing*, and hence its process of be-ing "accomplishes itself as nothingness" (Schürmann 2001: 161). In that *ontology* of process, "we are ... on the way to *annihilation*" (Schürmann 2001: 166, my italics).

To grasp that "nothingness and anarchy" requires a mode of acting that mirrors what it grasps. Practice as a certain way of being cannot issue from theory the intellectual grasping of being. Rather, what Schürmann calls "releasement," from Eckhart's Middle High German *gelāzenheit* (and Heidegger's modern German *Gelassenheit*) (Schürmann 1978a: 285)⁴—i.e., the abandoning of human and divine *eigenschaft* (property, selfhood)—"remains the existential condition for the understanding of Eckhart's ontology" (Schürmann 1978a: 303). It entails a praxis that nihilates and relinquishes the willful quest for an ultimate to found the way things are. This way of releasement is an "anarchic doing," for to penetrate into the why-lessness of all, one must live without why. In living without why, one thus is released into that absence of an ultimate why, the desert wherein foundations give way, a state of ontological indistinction, wherein the soul's ground, God's ground, and the ground of things are the same, an abyss. Schürmann declares releasement as such to be the existential ground for thinking that unveils being (Schürmann 2001: 187, 189).

In his Eckhart reading, Schürmann notices a certain proximity to Buddhistic modes of thinking, in particular Zen, with which Schürmann himself had some familiarity. However, he

³ How nothingness as such is distinct from mere non-being opposed to being should become clearer in the course of this essay.

⁴ "Releasement" may also be rendered as "letting-be."

also cautions us against over-simplifying strategies of comparison.⁵ Schürmann reminds us that while Zen takes the nothingness of things as properly the *isness* or *suchness* (*tathatā*) of things, Eckhart is still theocentric. Eckhart's path of release-ment negates attachment to *things for the sake of God*. The creature is nothing (*niht*) in that it does not possess its own thing-ness (*iht*). It is not a true substance for "its iht resides in God" (Schürmann 1978a: 288). In Mahāyāna Buddhism in general, including Zen, the dis-owning of being happens amidst beings in their interdependence and not in relation to a transcendent ultimate, such as God. God's nothingness (*unwesene*) in Eckhart, Schürmann tell us, is to be distinguished from the nothingness of creatures in that it is the *hyper-on* of Neo-Platonism, *beyond* beings (Schürmann 1978a: 288; 2001: 218).

And yet, having pointed out this theocentrism, Schürmann goes on to suggest that it *collapses* under the very logic of releasement (Schürmann 1978a: 290). If *God* designates the highest being, releasement renders any such ultimate or absolute meaningless (Schürmann 1978a: 301). Schürmann's reading of Eckhart is here ambivalent: on the one hand the Neo-Platonic *hyper-on*, the nothingness of God is still theocentric. On the other hand, in that very nothingness of the godhead, wherein God loses His distinct being, the theocentrism collapses. Concerning this point in comparison with Zen, Schürmann states that Buddhist "emptiness" seems to concern man's relation to things, which he notes to be *only one side* of releasement, its voluntary or "ascetic" side that he calls "detachment," which does what the godhead does, i.e., lets all things be. To this Schürmann adds that like man, God must *also* abandon all His own—"a step beyond the recognition of the emptiness of all composite things." In

⁵ If there is a polemic in Schürmann's comments on Zen in his book on Eckhart (Schürmann 2001: 217ff.), it is not directed towards Zen per se but rather against D. T. Suzuki's overly simplifying comparative strategy as exemplified in his *Mysticism: Christian and Buddhist* (Suzuki 1957).

releasement of God and man would collapse that theocratic hierarchy. In Dōgen's case—and Zen in general—by contrast, Buddha-nature from the very beginning directly refers to the impermanence or emptiness, and thus interdependent arising, of phenomena. Zen refuses to assign any transcendental status to either Buddha-nature or emptiness. But this also means that emptiness cannot be equated with the non-being that bifurcating thought, in its affirming and negating, grasps in opposition to being. Instead it is what the anarchic praxis of "non-thinking" understands as immanent to beings.

Kitarō Nishida

Nishida Kitarō (西田 幾多郎; 1870–1945)—the founder of the Japanese Kyoto School of philosophy—inherits that anti-transcendentalism of Zen but develops it in terms of place (*basho*; 場所). If in Eckhart, God, man, and world are one in the ground of the soul as the *locus* of their energetic identity; and in Dōgen, all beings are one in *emptiness*; in Nishida, all are one in *absolute nothingness* (*zettai mu*; 絶対無) as their *place*. Nishida initiated his theory of place during the mid-1920s with the idea that *to be* is *to be implaced* (Nishida 2003: 3:415). Things are predicated upon the place of their being. The contextualizing conditions of their place, however, continually recede the further one inquires after them without ever reaching a final answer as to the ultimate *why* of their being. As reasons recede into the darkness of in-definition, the "absolute" for Nishida proves to be a place de-limited by nothing, a "place of absolute nothing" (*zettai mu no basho*; 絶対無の場所). "Place" thus eludes positive description at its most concrete level, and yet in its very *no-thingness*, opens up space for things in their mutual differentiations and oppositions and envelops them altogether.

gen likewise understands the passage involved through various stages of Buddhist practice from initial resolution to attainment in terms of being-times mutually-giving way (Dōgen 1990: 1:51, 297; 2002: 52). This brings us back to my first point concerning Dōgen: practice is a-causal and a-teleocratic, *without why*, an-archic. There is no underlying *telos* that guides practice from its inception. It is not due to one's volitional efforts, but is an expression of being-time. Taking *being-time* as a verb, Dōgen thus tells his followers "to being-time thus" (*ujisubeshi*; 眞実なる) (Dōgen 1990: 2:57; 2002: 58), i.e., to live the dynamism of being-time, to let being-time be.

While in Eckhart the nothingness of creatures is ontologically dependent upon the *hyper-on* of God, Buddhist emptiness refers to the absence of "own-being" (*sva-bhāva*) or ontological independence, due to the interdependent arising of all phenomena. That emptiness, however, as the very nature of things, is often spoken of in terms of "Buddha-nature" (*busshō*; 佛性).¹³ Dōgen equates being-times, in their vast network that constitutes the whole of being, as Buddha-nature qua impermanence. He tells us that the Dharma (Skt.; Jp. *hō*; 法; "truth") of "whole-being Buddha-nature" (*shitsuu busshō*; 法界) qua "impermanence Buddha-nature" (*mujō busshō*; 無常法界) is manifest at each moment or being-time, whereby there is arising/desistence, birth/death, coming/going, presencing/absencing (*kimetsu*; 刹那) (Dōgen 1990: 1:91; 2002: 76).¹⁴ While noticing the distinctness of God's nothingness qua *hyper-on* from creaturely nothingness, Schürmann also noted how the dual

¹³ There is a long history of the variety of interpretations concerning the meaning of "Buddha-nature." In general it points to the potentiality in all beings to realize enlightenment. But that potentiality of becoming enlightened in regard to the emptiness of all things seems to have something to do with the very emptiness of the self.

¹⁴ Notice that *Dharma* in this context, and here capitalized, has a different significance than *dharma*s in lower case letters and often in the plural. The former means the truth of reality as taught in Buddhist teachings and the latter means the momentary and atomic constituents of reality.

releasement, man's way and God's way together prove to be "a double annihilation of human and divine properties" (Schürmann 2001: 219). Yet Schürmann ignores here one of the fundamental characteristics of Mahāyāna thought that negates not only the substantiality of composite things but of all absolutes, including the very principle of emptiness itself in a double negation, i.e., the emptiness of emptiness (*śūnyatāyāh śūnyatā*). The undermining of a theocentrism that would collapse a vertical hierarchy (the hierarchy of transcendence), e.g., of the Creator-created relationship, then is not utterly unknown or foreign to Mahāyāna thought, which for two millennia debated over the implications of the meaning of emptiness as applied in a variety of contexts, including the emptiness of emptiness, especially when the Buddhist tradition itself had occasionally led to the reification of certain concepts or the positing of absolute principles.⁶ In such occasions, emptiness has proved to be a useful deconstructive tool, not only in regard to composite things but also in regard to transcendentalized absolutes. In modern Mahāyāna-inspired thought, the Japanese philosopher Nishida Kitarō develops this in terms of the mutual self-negation (or inverse correspondence) between man and God or between finite being and the absolute. (But more on Zen and Nishida in the sections below.)

Martin Heidegger

Eckhart's thinking belongs to the epoch of medieval thought while challenging the perimeters of its scholastic boundary. Heidegger's thinking, for Schürmann, is more explicitly historical in that it comes in the declining stages of modernity, looking back upon the history of philosophy.

⁶ E.g., the notions of the *tathāgatagarbha* or Buddha-nature, and the *dharmakāya* or the embodiment of truth, etc.

But in Heidegger as well, there is the central significance of releasement. What the collapsing of metaphysical posits at the end of an epoch makes clear is being qua releasement that neither founds, nor explains, nor justifies anything, but grants beings without a “why” (Schürmann 2001: 200). The ontological difference originally thought metaphysically in the relationship between beings (*Seiende*) and their beingness (*Seiendheit*) now shifts to designate the difference between beingness and being (*Sein*) itself as the granting or releasing, or giving to presence, of beings and their beingness (Schürmann 2001: 206–08). If Heidegger understands being (*Sein*) in terms of the on-going un-concealment (*a-lētheia*; ἀλήθεια) to human thinking, beingness (*Seiendheit*) names the foundational origin of an order that articulates a particular aletheiological (or aletheic) constellation for thought. It provides the epochal principle for the way being appears—an “economy of presence” that reigns for a period of history (an “epoch”) (Schürmann 1990: 45). Every beingness as such must tacitly refer to its event of coming-about. But while accounting for the possibility of those concrete constellations and their principles, being as the event of presencing (*Anwesen*) escapes reduction to those principles. Before that mystery of the *giving* of being, the *es* (“it”) of *es gibt* ... (“there is ... X”), we can only be silent. Schürmann explains this unknowability to be not simply absence per se but an absencing, in its *temporal* “direction and sense,” (Schürmann 1990: 147) accompanying the presencing of being. The *es* of *es gibt* belongs to this anonymity of presencing/absencing (Schürmann 1990: 142; 2001: 208). In his *Le Thor* seminars of the late 1960s, Heidegger discusses this in terms of an “excess of presence” (Schürmann 2001: 207). If the principles governing an epoch are the *archai* for the mode of presence of beings, that excess, we might add, would be *an-archic*.

What Schürmann discovers in Heidegger is this anarchy of being. Behind the variety of metaphysical posits that sound

as time in its moment-to-moment presencing-and-absencing, rising-and-falling, with each moment giving-way to the next. Dōgen here appropriates the Huayan Buddhist notion of the non-obstruction between *dharma*s or “thing-events” (*jiji muge*; 事事無礙) and extends it to also involve the diachrony of time in the non-obstruction between moments (*jiji muge*; 念念無礙).¹² For Dōgen they are the same non-obstruction amongst *dharma*s. Time as such is ontological, yet also meontological. That is to say, each moment of being gives-way to, lets-be, the rising of others. Thereby each being-time, each momentary *dharma*, has its appropriate concrete position *vis-à-vis* the whole matrix of space-time, “abiding in its *dharma*-position” (*jū-hōi*; 住持). The entire world is continuously “worlding” anew in its risings-and-fallings, making-passage (*kyōryaku*; 往 or 來) throughout its allotted *dharma*-positions (Dōgen 1990: 2:51; 2002: 53).

Taking being in Heidegger as an event that *lets* “the coming-about of any constellation of thing and world,” Schürmann notices that in Heidegger time does not necessarily entail the predictable movement or mechanistic progression from point A to point B: “Summer does not ‘become’ autumn. Suddenly it is autumn” (Schürmann 1990: 273). Compare this with Dōgen’s statement about seasonal change or any sort of change. For Dōgen, spring is spring and summer is summer, without necessitating any substratum underlying the transition from one to the other. Each takes-place, makes-passage (*kyōryaku*), by abiding in its allotted *dharma*-position, without obstruction, to let the other be. Likewise with firewood and ashes. The former does not become the latter. There is no continuity underlying the change for each abides in its own *dharma*-position, whereby it comes and goes (Dōgen 1990: 1:55; 2002: 42). Dō-

¹² Both “mutual non-obstruction of thing-events” and “mutual non-obstruction of times” are pronounced in Japanese as *jiji muge* but written with different ideographs for “thing-event” (事事) and “time” (念念).

stance vis-à-vis the rising-and-falling of phenomena (*dharmas* in Buddhist parlance). The “thinking” here is really an experiencing of the ontological absence of substantiality in both self and other beings. Emptiness (Skt. *śūnyatā*; Jp. *kū*; 空) in Mahāyāna Buddhism refers to the lack of ontological independence and hence is synonymous with the very interdependent origination (*pratiītya-samutpāda*) of phenomena. The thinking and acting Dōgen calls for then is one that resonates with the interdependent rising-and-falling of phenomena. We may recall Schürmann’s own declaration of the inseparability of “essential thinking” and “unattached acting” that together allow for things, in their “contingent pliancy in presencing,” to enter into “interdependence unattached to principles” (Schürmann 1990: 269).

The anarchic acting and thinking in Schürmann’s Heidegger reading entails “the will to non-willing,” a relinquishing of the willful quest for constant presence (Schürmann 1990: 250). In a parallel spirit Dōgen warns against the willful imposition of one’s self upon *dharmas*.¹¹ Instead one is to let them come forth: “To practice and confirm all *dharmas* by conveying one’s self to them is illusion. For all *dharmas* to advance forward ... and confirm the self is enlightenment” (Dōgen 1990: 1: 54; 2002: 40). And: “To study the Buddha-way is to study one’s self. To study one’s self is to forget one’s self. To forget one’s self is to be confirmed by all *dharmas* in the universe” (Dōgen 1990: 1:54; 2002: 41). Dōgen’s point: enlightenment cannot be willed but happens through the configuration of *dharmas* in the midst of which one finds oneself configured accordingly.

If Dōgen’s *practical* philosophy is thus anarchic in Schürmann’s sense, what about his “ontology”? Dōgen understands being in terms of what he calls “being-time” (*uji*; 時): being

¹¹ As alluded to above, *dharmas* in this context can mean phenomena or thing-events in general. This sense can be traced to the ancient Abhidharma discourse of India, where *dharmas* meant the irreducible or unanalyzable momentary constituents of reality.

their voice from one epoch to another, the presencing (*Anwesen*) that brings entities into presence (*Anwesenheit*), even as it does so according to specific principles (*archai*) governing the epoch, is itself without principle, without *archē* (or *telos*), hence *an-archic*. The economy of presence or aletheic configuration then is under the double bind of its anarchic (indeterminable) event of presencing and its determining mode of presence (the *archē*). That determining mode appears from within the economy as eternal and universal in contrast to the entities falling under its domain when in fact it is contingent to its event of presencing.

In reading Heidegger, Schürmann initially explicates anarchy in historical terms as the point where the foundational bedrock of action for an epoch loses its hold. The hegemony of a principle, having lost its legislative or normative power, crumbles to reveal an open clearing: “figures of *archē* ... give way to mobile determinations” and “stable norms give way ... , [and] the threshold of post-modernity introduces anarchy into action” (Schürmann 1990: 233). With the loosening of the hold of absolutes, the ground of our being and doing is shown to be anarchic—an economy of inter-relations fluctuating without reasons or principles. As such, “anarchy expresses a destiny of decline, the decay” (Schürmann 1990: 6). Yet it is also the case that Schürmann views anarchy in Heidegger as operative behind presencing/absencing as such *throughout* history, whereby finite constellations assemble and disassemble in ever-changing arrangements, establishing and destabilizing epochs. Presencing then is itself a-historical. It is the a priori event that makes possible an historical order of presence (Schürmann 1990: 145). While explaining Heidegger’s “unconcealment” as a duality of emergence from concealedness, “permeated with time, with movement,” Schürmann adds that it, however, does not point to some ultimate reason for being (Schürmann 1990: 170–71). The temporality of presencing/absencing is “without why,” and “only play” (Schürmann 1990: 179). What is perma-

nent throughout history is this shifting motility or line of difference between presencing and absencing, unconcealment and concealment, having no *archē*, but from which grounds and archai spring forth. It is anarchic. In that respect, “anarchy” in Schürmann’s Heidegger names not only what appears at the end of modernity but that which has been implicit throughout history.

Schürmann paradoxically calls the “principle” of this Heideggerian enterprise, the “anarchy principle,” or “the principle without principles” (Schürmann 1990: 6). The enterprise entails an anarchic praxis, expressing what Eckhart himself implied in “life without why” (Schürmann 1990: 10). Schürmann quotes Heidegger’s appropriation of Eckhart (via Angelus Silesius) in *Der Satz vom Grund*: “In the most hidden ground of his essence, man truly is only when in his way he is like the rose—without why.” Tying this in with Heidegger’s historical concerns, Schürmann asks: When is it that man can be like the rose? It is when the “why” withers. He is referring to the withering of metaphysics at the end of modernity (Schürmann 1990: 38, also 10). Schürmann’s analysis of Heidegger here, as in his Eckhart reading, raises the issue of theory and practice. What happens to their opposition once “thinking” means no longer the securing of some rational foundation for knowing and once “acting” no longer means conforming one’s daily enterprises to the foundation so secured (Schürmann 1990: 1)? His answer is that in Heidegger’s raising of the question of being, action can no longer be a separate issue (Schürmann 1990: 4). With the Heideggerian deconstruction of metaphysics, action itself loses its foundation (*archē*) and end (*telos*): “in its essence, action proves to be an-archic” (Schürmann 1990: 4, also 1, 5). Thinking, no longer opposable to action as mere theory, instead, is *other*, receptive to the anarchy of presencing/absencing. Refraining from imposing conceptual schemes upon phenomena, such non-representational thinking—what Schürmann here calls “essential thinking”—complies with the

privation of forms as well as fullness of forms at the same time, i.e., all things are one in nothingness” (Schürmann 1978a: 306). Schürmann finds that in Zen the anarchic pre-originary origin *is not*: “If the anarchic origin were to *be*, its being would make it opposable to other beings” (Schürmann 1978a: 311). Hence it *is not*. And yet this not would have to be *other* than what can be reduced to the opposites of being and non-being, fullness and privation.

Dōgen

Although mentioning Dōgen (道元; 1200–1253) a couple of times, Schürmann was not too interested in—nor did he possess the tools—to bring this founder of Sōtō Zen and preeminent Zen philosopher into dialogue with Eckhart or Heidegger. But there is much in Dōgen’s thinking that resonate with what Schürmann was looking for in his readings of Heidegger and Eckhart.

The first point I want to raise is Dōgen’s prescription for a-teleocratic practice and non-intentional thinking, i.e., acting without a goal and thinking without an object. In Schürmann’s terms, we might say that Dōgen calls for anarchic praxis. He designates his non-theoretical or non-representational way of thinking that refuses to posit conceptual categories or think in terms of dichotomies, “nonthinking” (*hi-shiryō*; 無思) (Dōgen 1990: 1:224; 2002: 4, 110). While “thinking” (*shiryō*; 思) involves the affirmation of ideas; and “not-thinking” (or rather: “negating thinking,” “thinking of not”; *fu-shiryō*; 無思) is the negation or denial of what was thus affirmed, “non-thinking” (*hi-shiryō*) goes beyond that positional opposition of yes and no, being and non-being, in the sheer acceptance of what presences in virtue of their emptiness, i.e., non-substantiality and interdependence (Kasulis: 1981: 72–75). Instead of a willing that affirms or negates, it involves a letting that takes no positional

perience the “loss of origin.” For this the Sōtō (曹洞) lineage of Zen is famous for prescribing its method of “just sitting” (*shikantaza*; 只管打坐) (Schürmann 1978a: 282). Schürmann notes that the same goes for any sort of teleological preoccupation that may explain why one would engage in *zazen* (坐禅; sitting meditation), whether for the sake of health or tranquility or even *nirvāṇa*. Rather Zen admonishes the practitioner to rid oneself of any such preoccupation. In a violent negation of any object of conception or volition, the will is to not will (Schürmann 1978a: 286). In its refusal to postulate a first cause or a goal and in its meditational practice that proposes to acquaint the practitioner on an experiential level with that absence of beginning or end (*archē* or *telos*), Schürmann finds Zen to be anarchic.

To seize upon its matter of experience, Schürmann proposes to interpret Zen’s anarchic praxis by way of releasement (Schürmann 1978a: 281). For it involves a *letting-go* of the hold of principles in both how we understand the world and our comportment to that world. Thereby Zen practice approaches Eckhart’s mysticism. Both Eckhart and Zen, Schürmann argues, involve releasement as an “unlearning of possession and attachment” (Schürmann 1978a: 299). And both follow the principle of anarchy in its destruction of causality as an appropriate category (Schürmann 1978a: 300–01).¹⁰

Parallel to that anarchy, Zen entails a certain understanding of nothingness. Schürmann quotes the founder of Sōtō Zen, Dōgen, that the Zen student “attains and abides in the stage of nothingness.” In his *mondō* (question-and-answer) sessions with his Zen master Deshimaru, Schürmann learns that nothingness in Zen refers to the forgetfulness of both things and of oneself. And “things” here includes opposites, e.g., the “total

¹⁰ Schürmann even adds that “the hidden anarchy may be the reason for the unforeseeable and provocative behavior of some Zen masters” (1978a: 304–05).

flux of presencing/absencing (Schürmann 1990: 269, 289).⁷ Thinking as such is releasement, it lets beings be: “to think being as letting-phenomena-be, one must oneself ‘let all things be.’” (Schürmann 1990: 287). To think being is to follow the event (*Ereignis*) of being (Schürmann 1990: 289). Thinking, under the practical a priori of anarchic acting thus arrives at the presencing event that is *being*. Anarchic praxis then is the concrete condition for thinking “being itself”: “to follow the play without why of presencing, it is necessary to ‘live without why’” (Schürmann 1990: 287). In reply to the withering of principles, the Heideggerian enterprise qua anarchic praxis and “living without why” thus entails the non-duality of “essential thinking” and “unattached acting”—a “thanking” that complies with the event of presencing (Schürmann 1990: 269, 296). And that accomplishment, where thinking, acting, and being, loosened from the fetters of principles, work together in mutual appropriation (or: “enownment,” *Ereignis*), Schürmann calls “anarchic economy” (Schürmann 1990: 273): On the basis of “actions—assimilating to that economy, *turning* into a groundless play without why,” essential thinking “receives, hears, reads, gathers, unfolds ... the anarchic economy” (Schürmann 1990: 242–43).

That enowning event (*Ereignis*), the unconcealing that brings beings into the open (*Offen*) (Heidegger 1972: 5; 1988: 5) is the “it” that tolerates no name. Schürmann declares: “it” is not (Schürmann 2001: 208). Being in Heidegger first of all is no *thing* corresponding to a *noun*. Schürmann takes it rather as a *verb*, designating “the self-manifestation of beings out of and against absence” (Schürmann 1990: 297). The presencing itself is *nothing* present. That which can only be thought of as an-archic, “the coming about of presencing, is nothing... At the same time, that coming-about is everything” (Schürmann 1990:

⁷ Below we shall notice an analogous prescription in Dōgen’s call to forget the self and *let* the phenomena come forth to validate our experience.

150). Schürmann notes that nothingness is thus understood in the service of an understanding of being as event beyond all representation (Schürmann 2001: 255n104). And understood from out of beings, being can never be encountered among them for it is no-thing, nothing (Schürmann 1990: 197). A point to notice here is that for Heidegger, being qua nothing (*Nichts*) is not simply negative as non-being (*Nichtseiende*) but *more-being* (*seiender*) than any being and is beyond all “positivity” and “negativity” (Heidegger 1989: 266; 1999: 187–88).

Nothing in Heidegger, we may add, *also* points to the very absencing-*spacing* of the field that permits the presencing of beings. The temporal character of the binomial presencing/absencing is also a clearing of contours, whereby *alētheia* “appears as the ‘free space of the open’” (Schürmann 1990: 173) or what Heidegger calls “the open” (*Offen*) or “clearing” (*Lichtung*) (Schürmann 2001: 196). Beyond the horizon of our willing projections, things appear under the mode of letting, as released in the open expanse, restored to their radical contingency. Therein they show themselves to be “emerging mutably into their ... mutable ‘world’” (Schürmann 1990: 280).

In the last stages of Heidegger’s thinking (e.g., in his 1969 *Le Thor Seminar*), this aspect of being develops into what Schürmann calls its “locus-character” in the “*topology* of being.” Schürmann understands this to refer to the historical economy that constitutes a field of presencing, the *topos* that “renders the spatial, temporal, linguistic, and cultural ‘loci’ possible.” As such it is “not reducible to one *archē*” (Schürmann 1990: 13). For the origin is irreducibly manifold (Schürmann 1990: 144). Schürmann suggests that it involves a “play of difference” that unfolds through “manifold, finite, arrangements of phenomena ... , in ever new topological multiplicities” (Schürmann 1978b: 365). The open encompasses that topological multiplicity as “the event of mutual appropriation between world and thing, which always already lets

phenomena be encountered” (Schürmann 1990: 278–79). Associated with that “open expanse” is also Heidegger’s concept of “that-which-regions” (or “the regioning”) (*die Gegnet*)⁸—a region, emancipated from principles, while gathering together all that there is (Schürmann 2001: 203).

Schürmann depicts this open clearing or region that is *nothing* as a “field of phenomenal interdependence” (Schürmann 1990: 278).⁹ It is to this field of “polymorphous presencing” that anarchic praxis co-responds in a “polymorphous doing” (Schürmann 1990: 279). The ontological anarchy in which anarchic praxis partakes, we might then add, is a clearing or space of *nothingness* wherein being/s unfold/s. Later we shall see how the Zen-inspired Nishida developed a comparable notion of a *place of nothing* wherein beings come and go. But we first need to take a look at Schürmann’s own remarks about Zen and his attempts to apply to it the anarchy principle.

Zen

On several occasions—in conference presentations and published works—Schürmann brought Eckhart and Heidegger into dialogue with Japanese Zen Buddhism. His familiarity with Zen (☒) stems from the time when, as a student living in France, he studied Sōtō Zen under Deshimaru Taisen (☒☒☒☒; 1914–1982). In his 1978 article, “The Loss of the Origin in Soto Zen and Meister Eckhart,” Schürmann concedes that experientially there are deep resonances between Zen and Eckhart’s mysticism. Instead of engaging in any speculative search for a metaphysical first (or *archē*) Zen seeks to ex-

⁸ *Gegnet* is the verbalized noun form derived from *Gegend*, “region.” On this idea, see Heidegger, *Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens 1910–1976* (Heidegger 1966: 65ff; 1983: 45ff).

⁹ This again calls to mind the Mahāyāna sense of emptiness qua interdependence as well as Nishida’s concept of absolute nothingness as the place of beings as we shall see below