

# Provocative Ambivalences in Japanese Philosophy of Religion

With a Focus on Nishida and Zen

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For Europeans it is strangely foreign [*befremdlich*] how strongly this far eastern philosophizing [of the Kyoto School] is informed by a religious tradition, namely Zen Buddhism. Yet is the word “religion” appropriate here? Words like “philosophy” and “religion” could mean something related, and yet different, in Japan and in Europe.

—Otto Pöggeler (1995, 95)<sup>1</sup>

In Buddhism religion and philosophy are like a tree that forks into two from its base.... The life of religion includes philosophical thought as its counterpart, a sort of centrifugal force to its own centripetal tendencies, both moved by the same dynamism.

\* I would like to dedicate this essay to Professor Horio Tsutomu, who helped introduce me both to the academic study of Japanese philosophy and to the practice of Zen. I would also like to thank the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science for a fellowship that enabled me to research and write this essay.

1. Pöggeler suggests that what Nishitani sought in “religion” was not a matter of traditional institutionalized doctrines, but rather a “holistic return to the origin of life [*den ganzheitlichen Rückgang zum Ursprung des Lebens*]” (PÖGgeler 1995, 104). Cf. FUJITA 2000.

mism.... But how is one to explain this way of doing philosophy of religion and reconstruct it in terms suitable to the present world when the very idea of philosophy and metaphysics has been usurped by western models?

— Takeuchi Yoshinori (1983, 4)

It must be said that there is a fundamental gap between eastern practice (行), especially the non-thinking (非思量) of Zen, and philosophy as an academic discipline of reflection (反省の学) that arose and developed in the west. Nishida Kitarō cast himself into that gap.... If the meeting of Christianity and Greek philosophy, as the mutual encounter (ぶつかり合い) between the principle of faith and that of reason, was an event that pervaded and drove (and still pervades and drives) the spirit of the European world for centuries, the mutual encounter between Buddhism—especially in the honed and concretized form of Zen—and the western world will undoubtedly continue as a great drama played out in the depths of history for many generations to come.

— Ueda Shizuteru (1998, 167, 226–7)

[The] problem of Zen and philosophy ... remains even now to be settled. It is, after all, the task remaining at the core of the spiritual and cultural encounter between east and west.

— Nishitani Keiji (NKZ XXI, 120)

Questioning the meaning and limits of philosophy is an eminently philosophical gesture. The self-critical tradition of ever again re-defining philosophy has at times contracted and at other times expanded the range of the discipline. In recent years, after the dream of isolating philosophy as a self-grounding science of pure reason has lost credibility, there is a tendency to affirm philosophy's interdependence with other areas of life and discourse. In this postmodern interdisciplinary context, Derrida and others have boldly begun rediscovering and rethinking the ambivalent ties between religious faith and philosophical reason (cf. DERRIDA 1998; DE VRIES 1999; BLOECHL 2003; CAPUTO 2002). And yet, even postmodern western philosophers can at times become surprisingly conservative, ironically even Eurocentric, when faced with a non-western tradition—as if deconstructing the western tradition were one thing, but offering a

concrete alternative to it quite another. The suspicion persists that in the case of Asian thinkers such as Nishida Kitarō and the Kyoto School any overstepping the bounds of (western) philosophy in the direction of religion would be a pre-modern residue rather than a postmodern endeavor. Is this suspicion warranted?

In his recent book *Philosophers of Nothingness: An Essay on the Kyoto School*, James Heisig remarks that underlying the philosophies of Nishida, Tanabe Hajime, and Nishitani Keiji, “there is an important assumption that is not shared with western philosophy as a whole: the clear delineation of philosophy and religion” (Heisig 2001, 13–14).<sup>2</sup> Heisig acknowledges that “the reader accustomed to western philosophy can hardly fail to ask at some point whether these thinkers have not in fact forsaken philosophy for religion.” However, he suggests that this charge is based on a “fundamental confusion of categories.... [For] there is really nothing like a ‘philosophy’ or a ‘religion’ floating free of the language, imagery, and cultural meanings that each uses to express itself.... The philosophizing of religions means one thing in a Judeo-Christian context and quite another in a Buddhist one, and both of them again are different from the ‘scientific’ study of religion” (Heisig 2001, 269–70).<sup>3</sup>

What is the context in which Nishida and the Kyoto School developed their philosophies of religion? The “philosophy” side was clearly primarily influenced by the importation and “translation” of western philosophy into *tetsugaku*. Although the sources of the “religion” side of their thought are more difficult to pin down, I agree with Heisig and others that their primary orientation, even when interpretively adopting and adapting Christian categories, is Mahayana Buddhist, and more specifically Zen and/or Shin Buddhist. The question is: Insofar as Buddhism is at its core an embodied practice of awakening to the non-ego as a “self that is not a self,” rather than a “tying back the bonds” (*re-ligare*) with a transcendent creator God by way of faith in His revelation (cf. YAMA-

2. Heisig has suggested elsewhere that, by “combining the demands of critical thought with the quest for a religious wisdom,” the Kyoto School thinkers have “enriched world intellectual history with a fresh, Japanese perspective and opened anew the question of the spiritual dimension of philosophy” (Heisig 1999, 367).

3. According to Heisig’s interpretation, for “Nishida, Tanabe, and Nishitani, the primary frame of reference for the coincidence of philosophy of religion is always Buddhist, and more specifically a Buddhism focused on the pursuit of self-awareness.” I have commented on this interpretation in DAVIS 2002.

GUCHI 1961, 5, 9), what difference does this Buddhist background and orientation make to the way in which the proper relation between religion and philosophy gets conceived?

It has often been asserted that Buddhism is more compatible with the modern rational worldview than is Christianity (cf. VON BRÜCK and LAI 2000, 124f, 159ff, 376ff, 518). And yet, despite a remarkable degree of compatibility between Buddhism and rational philosophical analysis, there remains a decisive gap between the two at the point where the former ultimately appeals to the necessity of embodied practices of meditation. *It is Buddhism's requirement of extending rational discourse into embodied practice*, and not that of a “leap of faith” into the acceptance of a rationally groundless doctrine of revelation, *that both challenges and is challenged by the presuppositions and limits of modern western philosophy*. An insistence on an embodied practice of awakening is perhaps most pronounced in the “religion” (宗教)<sup>4</sup> of Zen Buddhism, which maintains that the ultimate truth (宗) of its teaching (教) is “not founded on words and letters” (不立文字). Hence, Zen practice and experience can no more be reduced to philosophical discourse than can (Judeo-Christian-Islamic) faith be reduced to (Greek) reason.

On the other hand, philosophy can no more be reduced to Zen experience than can reason be reduced to faith. Nishida, as we shall see, even as he argues for the non-separability of philosophy and religion, was acutely aware of this mutual non-reducibility. What we find in Nishida therefore is not simply a reiteration of the so-called Asian predilection to not sharply distinguish between philosophy and religion. While he does attempt to bring (western) philosophy and (Zen) religion together, the result is not an eclectic mish-mash of categories or a confusion of methods, but a provocatively novel way of conceiving the inherent ambivalence or symbiotic tension—in Nishida’s language the “contradictory identity”—between religion and philosophy.

This essay proceeds in the following order: To begin with the question of how *shūkyōtetsugaku* should be (re)translated is addressed. I then reflect on the modern dichotomy between philosophy and religion, and on how this dichotomy influences the academic approach to the philoso-

4. Nakamura Hajime explicates the original meaning of 宗教 as having two aspects: (1) self-awakening (自覚), enlightening oneself (自らさとること); and (2) discoursing on this [enlightenment] (それお論議すること) (NAKAMURA 1993, 56).

phy of religion, before discussing the way these western assumptions were imported and yet called into question in Japan. In the central three sections of this essay, the relation between philosophy and religion (particularly Zen) in Nishida's thought is closely examined. In the final two sections, I show how Nishitani, taking up where Nishida leaves off, explicitly calls for philosophy to open itself up to an inherently ambivalent relation with the embodied practice of Zen.

(RE)TRANSLATING *SHŪKYŌTETSUGAKU*  
AS PHILOSOPHY-OF-RELIGION

How should we translate the Japanese term *shūkyōtetsugaku* 宗教哲学 into a western language? A strange question, it would seem, since the term itself is—or at least was to begin with—a translation of the western term “Religionsphilosophie” or “philosophy of religion.” And yet, strange things happen during the course of translation; indeed this course leads unavoidably through interpretive reiteration, and often to creative innovation. In any case, such semantic metamorphoses are not simply cause for confusion; for they can also be enlightening, and are at the very least—or rather at their very best—thought-provoking.

It should be emphasized that Japanese scholars and translators are anything but imprecise in their methods. And it should also be pointed out that the “productive ambivalence” that I wish to focus on here cannot be found in each and every contemporary Japanese approach to the philosophy of religion. Academic westernization has cleared up much of the previous “confusion” produced by the mingling of eastern perspectives into (western) philosophy. But perhaps the phrase “academic westernization” is redundant, since universities in Japan are basically institutions of modern-western intellectual learning (学問), as opposed to their counterparts, the temples and monasteries where the traditional “ways” (道) of educating the “whole body and spirit” (全身全霊) are maintained on the sidelines and backwaters of modernizing-westernizing Japanese society. Yet one can still find in some corners of Japan today an intriguing overlap between modern academic study (研究) and the traditional “investigation into the self” (己事究明); and it is precisely the provocative tension between these two endeavors that is at issue in this essay. It is for this reason that, rather than discuss the many more or less faithful echoes of

western academic discourse in Japan, I focus my attention on the tradition of the Kyoto School, particularly on those members who have ventured to bring Zen Buddhism and philosophy together in ways that challenge dominant western conceptions of philosophy, religion, and the philosophy of religion.

The ambivalence at issue in their *shūkyōtetsugaku* involves the very relation between philosophy and religion. If we (re)translate *shūkyōtetsugaku* as “philosophy of religion,” the ambiguity at issue can be expressed as *the question of the “of.”* Should this be understood as a subjective or as an objective genitive, as philosophy-of-religion (subjective genitive, with religion in charge as the subject), or as *philosophy-of-religion* (objective genitive, with philosophy in charge, taking religion as its object)?

Insofar as religious experience is not just treated as an object of disengaged research, but informs their thought at a basic level, we can at least say that the *shūkyōtetsugaku* of the Kyoto School is not limited to the *philosophy-of-religion*. This is reflected in the fact that the term “religious philosophy,” rather than “philosophy of religion,” has often been used to (re)translate *shūkyōtetsugaku* (cf. UNNO 1989; UNNO and HEISIG 1990).

It is also not the case, however, that the thought of the Kyoto School flows unilaterally from religion to philosophy; their philosophy of religion is not merely a systematic articulation of religious experience or doctrine. In order to capture the ambivalence or bi-directionality involved in their thought, therefore, I suggest we translate their *shūkyōtetsugaku* as “philosophy-of-religion,” where the italicized “of” functions as a “double genitive” (both subjective and objective). In the sense that they attempt to bring religious practice and experience into a two-way dialogue with philosophical discourse, their *shūkyōtetsugaku* as philosophy-of-religion is a bilateral dynamic movement between philosophy-of-religion and *philosophy-of-religion*.

## MODERN WESTERN PHILOSOPHY-OF-RELIGION

The relation between philosophy and religion has been envisioned in a variety of manners over the course of western history. If Greek philosophy was inaugurated by giving priority to *logos* over *mythos*, this was not a rejection of religion in the name of philosophy, so much as a philosophizing of religion. In the ancient Greek and Hellenistic world,

the *practice* of philosophy was inherently soteriological; it was not a mere academic exercise, but a “way of life” (cf. HADOT 1995). With the introduction of the Judeo-Christian tradition, however, a great tension arose between the “faith” of religion and the “reason” of philosophy. For centuries Jewish, Islamic and Christian theologians debated the relation between faith and reason. In the main, or at least in the orthodox mainstream, faith in divine revelation was accorded priority over human reason. Philosophy became the handmaid to theology, and orthodox philosophy of religion, as “natural theology,” was decidedly philosophy-of-religion. The Enlightenment was a handmaid rebellion; reason would no longer stay put under the yoke of faith. In the ensuing historical situation of modernity, philosophy of religion appeared and perhaps still appears destined to become exclusively *philosophy*-of-religion.

The general effect of this history is that the specifically western conflict between faith and reason is assumed to *essentially and universally* define the relation between “religion” and “philosophy.” Even modern rebels like Kierkegaard must *react* to this situation by calling for an irrational, expressly absurd “leap of faith” beyond the ken of philosophy into the religious mode of existence. In any case, despite whatever remnants of romantic or existential resistance remain, the modern academic textbook answer to *the question of the “of”* is decidedly in favor of the objective genitive; “philosophy of religion” is philosophical thinking that takes religion as its object. Accordingly, John Hick begins his widely used textbook, *Philosophy of Religion*, by claiming that the term “philosophy of religion” should be reserved for “*philosophical thinking about religion*.” “Philosophy of religion, then, is not an organ of religious teaching.... [It is] a second-order activity, standing apart from its subject matter” (HICK 1990, 1–2).

As a disengaged academic discipline, modern philosophy of religion must maintain an objective neutrality over against its subject matter. Max Weber insisted that all university academics sacrifice subjective belief in religious worldviews for the sake of “intellectual integrity,” just as, on the other hand, “religious devotion” is said to compel non-academics to make a “sacrifice of the intellect” (*Opfer des Intellektes*). According to the “inescapable condition of our historical situation,” writes Weber, “science [*Wissenschaft*] is a ‘vocation’ organized in special disciplines in the service of self-clarification and knowledge of interrelated facts.... [It does not] partake of the contemplation of sages and philosophers about the *mean-*

ing of the world” (WEBER 1991, 268). Weber claims that the “capacity for the accomplishment of religious virtuosos—the ‘sacrifice of the intellect’—is the decisive characteristic of the positively religious man.” And yet the “fate of our times” is said to be “characterized by rationalization and intellectualization and, above all else, by the ‘disenchantment of the world.’” If, therefore, one chooses to sacrifice the intellect for the sake of religious faith, then one should quietly step down from the university platform and humbly return to the “open arms of the old churches” (271–2). “To affirm the value of science,” however, is said to be “a *presupposition* for teaching [in the university].”<sup>5</sup>

But must “philosophers” also play by the methodological rules of disengaged “science”? One might ask whether between or beyond the alternatives of, on the one hand, the “science of religion” (*Religionswissenschaft*) as a “neutral” description and analysis of religious phenomena (which in practice often tends toward reductive explanations), and, on the other hand, “theology” (which would begin by affirming a particular non-verifiable and non-rational source of revelation), a sociologist like Weber failed to recognize the uniqueness of the discipline of the “philosophy of religion” (*Religionsphilosophie*). The difference between *Religionswissenschaft* and *Religionsphilosophie* is translated in Japan as that between *shūkyōgaku* 宗教学 and *shūkyōtetsugaku* 宗教哲学. The latter is defined by Hase Shōtō as “the academic discipline which—while interpreting the results of the scientific and historical research on religion—investigates in one’s own self, and seeks to understand in a manner convincing to reason, the essence or the proper form of religion in general” (HASE 1998, 714). Yet the question remains of how we are to understand the key condition of: “in a manner convincing to reason.”

Kant defined the Enlightenment as “man’s emergence from his self-imposed immaturity,” where “immaturity” is “the inability to use one’s understanding without guidance from another.” The only thing required

5. WEBER 1991, 268. Weber adds here a revealing personal note: “I personally by my very work answer in the affirmative [to the question of the value of science], and I also do so from precisely the standpoint that hates intellectualism as the worst devil. ... [Yet] if one wishes to settle with this devil, one must not take flight before him as so many like to do nowadays. First of all, one has to see the devil’s ways to the end in order to have in view his power and his limitations.” Weber’s question to those who attempt to overstep the boundaries of modern rationality, then, would presumably be whether they do so prematurely or only after following the path of science to the end.



for maturity is “the freedom to use reason *publicly* in all matters,” in the matter of religion as well in politics (KANT 1996, 53–7). Kant called for the autonomy of reason to be asserted over the dogmatic “historical faith” in revelation, and in this spirit he wrote his classic modern text in the philosophy of religion: *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft* (*Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*). On the one hand, Kant famously remarked in his *Critique of Pure Reason* that the effect of disqualifying all “*practical extension* of pure reason” was “to suspend knowledge in order to make room for faith” (KANT 1956, 33). On the other hand, he makes abundantly clear in his *Religion* treatise that he is not opening the backdoor for a retreat from modern human autonomy to “historical faith” in supernatural revelation, but rather making room for what he calls a “*pure rational* faith [ein reiner Vernunftglaube]” (KANT 1977, 764).

Not surprisingly, however, many have questioned whether the religious term “faith” should be used at all to refer to the conviction in ideas that are argued to be necessary postulates of practical reason.<sup>6</sup> As we shall see, not only for a conception of religion centered on a non- or supra-rational faith in a transcendent God, but also for a conception of religion according to which an immanently-transcendent God/Buddha-mind is corresponded to through a practice of self-negating self-awareness, Kant’s attempt to reduce religion to the realm of rational morality remains a one-sided *philosophy-of-religion*.

#### IMPORTING AND QUESTIONING THE *PHILOSOPHY-OF-RELIGION*

It is certainly not the case that Nishida and his generation of Japanese thinkers were as yet unaware of the strict modern divide between “faith” and “reason,” or “belief” and “knowledge.” Although one of the conceptual distinctions Nishi Amane had to initially struggle to understand was, in fact, that between “religion” and “philosophy,” in the end he managed to clearly introduce this dichotomy into Japan as that

6. Cf. however Hase Shōtō’s provocative reinterpretation of Kant’s notion of “faith,” in connection with Tanabe and Pure Land Buddhism, in HASE 1990, 91ff.

between the former as a matter of “believing without discussing the reason of things” and the latter as a matter of “providing a theory that can explicitly in language clarify what the reasons for arriving at [one’s] belief are.”<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, while Nishida and other post-Meiji Japanese thinkers never simply equated or confused philosophy with religion, it is with good reason that Kosaka Kunitsugu has recently listed, as the first distinguishing characteristic of “Japanese philosophy,” its “extremely strong tendency toward the philosophy of religion” (KOSAKA 1997, 100). This tendency is not a unilateral philosophizing about religion, but involves a bilateral search for the proper relation between philosophy and religion.

In the Preface to his first book, *An Inquiry into the Good*, Nishida clearly states that from his perspective religion is not simply one object among others for philosophy; it is rather “the consummation of philosophy” (NKZ I, 3). In his early lectures on the topic of “philosophy and religion,” Nishida goes so far as to claim that *all* great philosophies are at bottom philosophies of religion: “great philosophies always arise out of a profound religious heart. Philosophies that forget religion are shallow.... I think that all great philosophies are religious.” “It cannot at all be said,” he adds, “that the purely intellectual philosophies of the eighteenth century Enlightenment period were profound philosophies” (NKZ XV, 176).

Moreover, Nishida is among those who consider there to be little room for any genuinely religious experience in Kant’s rationalized religion. In his “The Logic of Place and the Religious Worldview,” Nishida writes: “I cannot find in Kant any recognition of the distinctive nature of religious consciousness as such.... Religion cannot be made to fit within mere reason, *blosse Vernunft*. If one is to discourse on religion, one must at least possess a religious consciousness as a fact of one’s soul” (NKZ XI, 373). A mere *philosophy-of-religion* will end up reducing religion to a lesser realm of experience. “Religion is a fact of the soul (心霊上の事実). A philosopher should not attempt to fabricate [a theory of] religion on the basis of their own system. A philosopher must explain this fact” (NKZ XI, 371). In other words, “philosophers of religion” must begin by bracketing their theories and opening themselves to the fact of religious experience.

Nishida admits that one cannot speak about religion with someone who closes his eyes and ears to this fact; for “one cannot discuss colors with a blind man or discuss sounds with a deaf man.” Yet, to some extent

7. Quoted from Nishi Amane’s *Hyakugakurenkan* in KITANO 1997, 20.

at least, this religious consciousness is available to everyone, just as everyone, to some extent, can appreciate art without being themselves an artist. Moreover, according to Nishida, opening one's eyes and ears to the fact of religion does not entail taking a leap of faith away from logic as such. He "cannot follow those who [dismiss religion] by saying that it is unscientific or illogical" (NKZ XI, 372). What Nishida attempts to do is to clarify the logic peculiar to the religious worldview—a "logic of place" (場所の論理) as a logic of "absolutely contradictory self-identity" (絶対矛盾的自己同一) that breaks beneath and encompasses the "objective logic" (対象の論理) of the modern scientific worldview.

### NISHIDA'S AMBIVALENT UNIFICATION OF PHILOSOPHY AND ZEN: THE FECUNDITY OF AN IMPOSSIBLE DESIRE

The relation between philosophy and Zen in Nishida's thought has proven to be one of its most fascinating, if also provocatively enigmatic, aspects. After all, is it possible to unite philosophy with Zen, and to do so without betraying the essence of either or both?

One day after class in 1912 or 1913 Morimoto Seinen—a young college student later to become a famous Zen master—asked Nishida the following question: "Did *An Inquiry into the Good* originate only on the basis of studying the texts of western philosophy, or was Zen practice or the experience of *kenshō* involved in its origination?" Nishida is said to have clearly answered that his book originated "*from both*" (BANTŌ 1984, 65).

Decades later, in response to a letter from Nishitani, Nishida wrote:

It is indeed true, as you say, that there is in the background [of my philosophy] something of Zen.... *Although something like this is indeed impossible, I wish nevertheless to somehow unite Zen and philosophy.* This has been my heart's desire (念願) since my thirties. (NKZ XIX, 224–5, emphasis added)

In what sense did Nishida's years of intense Zen practice lie in the background of his thought? In what sense did he wish to "unite Zen and philosophy," while at the same time recognizing their essential differences?

In order to understand Nishida's conception of the relation between Zen and philosophy, we must begin with his fear of being misunder-

stood. This concern was so strong that Nishida for the most part chose not to speak at all of his Zen practice; and indeed, as the above letter goes on to say, he would “strongly object” to connecting his thought with Zen, inasmuch as this would be done by those who understand neither. Nishida’s concerns were surely not unwarranted, for there existed in his time as there exists today the temptations to either reduce Zen to, or think it a substitute for, philosophy. Suzuki Daisetsu and Miki Kiyoshi critically responded, in opposite directions, to these temptations. In his “How to Read Nishida” Suzuki, who strongly resisted the reduction of Zen to the level of philosophical discourse, suggested that “Nishida’s philosophy...is difficult to understand...unless one is passably acquainted with Zen experience (SUZUKI 1988, III). On the other hand Miki, although himself concerned to somehow unify *logos* and *pathos* in philosophy, called for a more strictly theoretical approach to Nishida’s philosophy. Miki writes: “First of all I think that, obviously, Nishida’s philosophy should be understood throughout as philosophy. Departing from this standpoint of philosophy, and considering Nishida’s philosophy straightaway in connection with religion or religious philosophy (宗教哲学), can in fact easily lead to misunderstanding” (MIKI 1998, 144).

Suzuki’s and Miki’s views each has its point and its limitation. Miki is certainly justified in cautioning against simply bringing in religious experience as an arbiter in matters of philosophical discussion. He does not doubt the profundity of Nishida’s religious experience, and yet he makes the pointed remark that “a philosopher with profound experience, be it artistic or religious, need not talk about it; it will show up of its own accord.” However, when Miki unambiguously concludes that “philosophy should be viewed theoretically as philosophy” (MIKI 1998, 145), did his own enthusiasm for the academic rigor of western philosophy lead him to ignore the manner in which Nishida was attempting, not just to diligently work *within* the parameters of the western theoretical standpoint, but *also* to probe and ultimately call into question the limits of these parameters?

Precisely because of the radicality of Nishida’s attempt to bring philosophy into contact with Zen, we must be careful to explicate what this does and does not mean. Nishida’s desire was to bring Zen and philosophy together, without collapsing them into one another. In reducing Zen to philosophy, or philosophy to Zen, something essential to both would

be lost, and the dynamically ambivalent space, in which Nishida lived and thought, would collapse shut.

Ueda Shizuteru depicts the gap between Zen and philosophy, the gap into which Nishida cast himself, as a “magnetic field” in which opposites both repel and attract one another, both supplement and call one another into question (cf. UEDA 1998, 168). Nishida did not seek to turn philosophy into Zen or Zen into philosophy, but rather, in Ueda’s expression, to place himself at the position of the “and” in the *question* of “Zen *and* philosophy.” This conjunction “and” marks the (dis)conjunctive hinge in what Nishida would call a relation of continuity-of-discontinuity (非連続の連続); the “and” holds the two sides both together and apart.

Ueda has interpreted the relation of Nishida’s philosophy to Zen experience according to the “discontinuous continuity” between three levels, namely: (A) the pre- or proto-linguistic (言葉以前 or 事-言) level of pure experience; (B) the *Ur-satz* (根本句) level of poetical-religious expression; and (C) the level of philosophical discourse (cf. UEDA 1998, 183ff; 1992, 234ff; 1981, 71ff). It was Nishida’s great accomplishment to have brought all three of these into a dynamic and bi-directional relation. While the tradition of Zen had moved freely between (A) and (B), it had not yet undertaken the “metamorphic transplantation” (換骨奪胎) out of its original element into the realm of philosophical discourse. On the other hand, while other philosophical interpreters of Zen had been able to step back from (C) to (B), without actual Zen training they had not been able to make the “leaping step back” (飛躍的退歩) to level (A) (UEDA 1981, 76–7; 1992, 242). Moving in both these directions—from (A) all the way to (C) and from (C) all the way to (A)—Nishida opened up and maintained a magnetic field for “Zen and philosophy” as a “relation of bi-directional motility” (UEDA 1998, 230).

The fact that Nishida’s Zen experience lay in the background of his thought does not mean, therefore, that his philosophy unilaterally becomes a handmaid for the articulation of Zen doctrine. In Nishida’s philosophy-*of*-Zen, philosophy does not simply abnegate its autonomy and straightaway become a philosophy-*of*-Zen. As Ueda points out, Nishida explicitly refused to reduce his philosophy to a unilateral explication of Mahayana Buddhism or Zen experience. Nishida writes: “I am not reasoning from the standpoint of religious experience. I am giving a radical analysis of historical reality” (NKZ IX, 57). Nevertheless, at the end of its path a philosophy is prone to discover its origins. “It is not that I

conceived of my way of thinking in dependence on Mahayana Buddhism; and yet it has come into accord with it” (NKZ XIV, 408; cf. UEDA 1998, 170). Perhaps this is why we find so many of Nishida’s references to Mahayana Buddhism and Zen at the end of his essays, after he had exhausted his dialogical appropriation of the methods and insights of western philosophers. It is also here, at the end of his essays, that we find numerous elaborations on the relation between philosophy and religion.

### NISHIDA ON THE CONTRADICTORY IDENTITY OF PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGION

For example, in the 1928 essay “The Intelligible World,” Nishida develops his topology of self-awareness, with its system of enveloping universals, in dialogue with Kant, the German Idealists, and Husserl. If Nishida questions the limits of “objective logic,” he does not simply forsake logic as such; indeed he affirms that “philosophy must thoroughly take the standpoint of logic” (NKZ V, 139). Even when, in the end, he questions the limits of dialectical reason and phenomenology, this is not a rejection of logic as such, but an attempt to rethink it as embedded in a more fundamental awareness of life and reality. Life is not to be squeezed into the parameters of heretofore logic; logic is rather to be rethought according to a more profound experience of life. In a later text he writes:

We do not come to know our being alive by means of thought; but rather we think on the basis of this being alive.... What is called rational mediation (or thought) must be [understood as] included within our life. (NKZ VIII, 269)

Nishida’s logical reflections are meant to take us back to the point of becoming self-aware of a dimension of concrete life that exceeds and yet encompasses the mediations of rationality.

In “The Intelligible World,” in the course of his topological return to this more profound level of experiencing reality, there ultimately comes a point where logic (as the articulation of form) gives way, letting itself be enveloped by a translogical topos of the Formless. Logic, as the self-reflective articulation of phenomenal form, is located within the “form of the Formless,” the place wherein forms take shape without their being a shaper. “That which envelops even the universal of intellectual intuition,

and which serves as ‘place’ for our true self, may be called the ‘place of Absolute Nothingness.’ It can thus be thought of as religious consciousness” (NKZ V, 180). Philosophical knowledge takes place in this place of Absolute Nothingness, but its concepts can say nothing of this place itself. “Of the content of religious consciousness itself, one can only refer to religious experience,” for it “essentially and completely transcends our conceptual knowledge” (NKZ V, 181–2).

There is nevertheless here a “point where religion and philosophy touch each other.” The religious standpoint on its own is mute; it is philosophy’s role to “reflect” on the structure of reality enveloped in the self-determination of Absolute Nothingness. “From this standpoint of knowledge which has transcended all knowledge, it is pure philosophy that clarifies the different standpoints of knowledge and their specific structures.... The standpoint of philosophy is that of the inward self-reflection of the religious self” (NKZ V, 183).

While “The Intelligible World” belongs to Nishida’s middle period of writings, before he had completed his turn from an orientation from the standpoint of the self to an orientation from the standpoint of the dialectical historical world (cf. NKZ VII, 203), his understanding of the relation between religion and philosophy remains in many respects consistent throughout his writings. In 1940 he writes that philosophy and religion converge with respect to the “basic fact” of the origination of historical reality as absolutely contradictory identity. And yet, he continues,

this does not mean that philosophy and religion are immediately one. Religion begins with the self-awareness of this basic fact and is the standpoint wherein this fact thoroughly becomes the fact itself. Philosophy too begins from here, and yet is the standpoint wherein the fact reflects on the fact itself. We can say that these are the two opposing directions of the fact which determines itself in absolute contradiction. (NKZ X, 121)

Religion stays with the fact itself, intensifying the direct experience of life and reality. Philosophy too must stay in touch with this basic fact of existence; and yet it must at the same time step back far enough to reflect on the structure of this basic fact’s occurrence. Philosophy draws on the intuitive grasp of reality found most intensely in religious experience. On the other hand, religion, at least a religion that entails the self-awareness of concrete reality, calls on philosophy to articulate the logic of its structure.

Nishida's lectures on the relation between philosophy and religion also end with the claim that religion and philosophy should mutually augment one another. He writes:

Philosophy is intellectual knowledge (知識); it is academic learning (学). But in contrast to regular sciences, which are based on certain hypotheses or presuppositions (假定), philosophy seeks to dig down further beneath these presuppositions and, unifying them according to what is immediately given, return to their origin. However, that which is immediate, truly concrete, and originary, is in fact the content of religion. At this point, philosophy and religion converge. But philosophy seeks to illuminate this conceptually, while religion experiences it, and seeks to live it directly. It is therefore the case that great philosophy contains religious content, and great religion contains philosophical reflection. (NKZ XV, 147)

Nishida's conception of philosophy, in short, is neither identical with nor separable from his conception of religion. Philosophy involves a double movement: a discursive advance (or rather "radical decent") towards, and a reflective step back from religious experience. On the one hand, philosophy, by digging beneath the presuppositions of science and everyday cognition, leads back towards religious experience; on the other, philosophy steps back from this most intimate experience of life and reality and reflects upon it, attempting to articulate its logical structure.

Nishida calls the most fundamental logical structure of the world an "absolutely contradictory self-identity" (絶対矛盾的自己同一) between the One and the many, or, in religious terms, the "inverse correspondence" (逆対応) between the self-negating infinite Absolute and the self-negating finite individual. Nishida draws not only on Zen, but also on Shin Buddhist as well as Christian sources to articulate this notion of "inverse correspondence." However, lest we remain tempted to assimilate Nishida's "philosophy-of-religion" into ready made western models for reconciling faith and reason, let us highlight here and in the following section two central characteristics of Nishida's thought that clearly reflect his orientation to and from Zen Buddhism: (1) a return, by way of "immanent transcendence," to "radical everydayness"; and (2) an appeal to the self-negating "practice" of self-awareness.

Nishida writes: "When we truly enter thoroughly into the consciousness of Absolute Nothingness, there is neither 'I' nor God. And because



this is Absolute Nothingness, the mountain is mountain, the river is river, and all beings are just as they are” (NKZ v, 182). For Nishida, true religious experience involves neither an extra-ordinary mystical intuition (which he calls “a worthless piece of excess” [NKZ x, 120]) nor a devotional worship of a transcendent personal being. As he states in “Prolegomenon to a Philosophy of Praxis,” religion must be thought of as “the factual basis of our everyday life” (NKZ x, 120).

In his final essay on religion, Nishida stresses that this most fundamental standpoint of “the self-determination of the absolute present” lies on the extreme opposite pole to the otherworldliness of a Neoplatonic mystical union with the One; it refers rather to a standpoint of “radical everydayness” (平常底) (NKZ xi, 446). “Religion,” in Nishida’s understanding, does not depart from what Zen calls “the ordinary mind” (平常心); it is a matter of trans-descendence to the root of everyday life (NKZ xi, 454). Hence, the sense in which Nishida’s thought leads to or draws on “religious experience” must be understood as fundamentally different not only from a theology that appeals to the authority of scriptural revelation, but also from a religious philosophy that purports to speak from the standpoint of a privileged intuition of a supra-mundane realm.

#### NISHIDA ON THE EGO-NEGATING PRACTICE OF SELF-AWARENESS

Nevertheless, there is a sense in which the provocative ambivalence of Nishida’s philosophy-of-religion challenges the limits of modern academic discourse—namely, in its call for a *practice* of self-awareness by way of “self-negation” (自己否定). An engaged practice of self-effacement is necessary in order to break through the walls of egocentric subjectivity. While Nishida’s philosophy consistently eschews otherworldly transcendence, it does entail a radical path of what he calls “immanent transcendence” (内在的超越), where in the absolute freedom of its unfathomable depths the self transcends the determinate forms of its being and inversely corresponds to the Nothingness of the Absolute (cf. NKZ xi, 448–9; cf. 434, 463). This path of internal transcendence involves radically stepping back beneath the ego-subject to what Bankei calls “the unborn Buddha-mind” (不生の仏心). According to Nishida, “while religion is a matter of penetrating to this unborn Buddha-mind, philosophy must

take its starting point from the fundamental self-awareness of this standpoint.” Reorienting philosophy from this starting point demands nothing less than “a conversion of standpoint” which overturns the “subjectivism from which modern philosophy is unable to free itself” (NKZ X, 123).

“Only by negating the self completely does one come to know the bottom of the self” (NKZ V, 172). In the end, this entails a religious demand: “In negating the self absolutely, there is seeing without a seer, and hearing without a hearer. Reaching this point is the religious ideal; this is what is called liberation (解脱)” (NKZ V, 179). Only a seeing and a hearing that has freed itself of the distorting filters of egocentric subjectivity can clearly perceive the mountain as mountain, and the other as other. This trajectory of thought, we may surmise, inevitably led Nishida to turn from whatever remnants of subjective idealism may have remained in the middle period of his thought to his later attempt to think from the self-determination of the dialectical world itself. “It is not that we merely see the world from the self. Rather, the self is thought of within the historical world.... Every standpoint of subjectivism, by taking its point of departure from the self of abstract consciousness, beclouds our vision” (NKZ XI, 447).

It is not the case, however, that Nishida proposes trading in the particular standpoint of the existing individual for an abstract vision of the world *sub specie aeternitatis*; seeing without a seer does not entail a view from nowhere. According to Nishida, the more we open ourselves, by way of immanent transcendence, to Absolute Nothingness, the more we become truly unique individuals, acting on and intuiting the world from a particular point; we become self-aware and creative focal points of the self-determination/limitation (自己限定) of Absolute Nothingness. Absolute Nothingness is nowhere outside the interaction of singular events and individuals. The world, in other words, is itself essentially an “absolutely contradictory self-identity of the encompassing One and the individual many” (NKZ IX, 332). As individuals of this world, we too are thoroughly self-contradictory beings, finite self-determinations of the Infinite. And it is precisely when we become self-aware of this self-contradiction that we become truly creative and responsible individuals.

In the concluding chapter of his 1939 *Philosophical Essays III*, Nishida stresses the “religious practice” needed to fully realize this standpoint.

By delving into the origin of this self-contradiction of the self, we obtain true life from the standpoint of the absolutely contradictory

self-identity. This is religion. There must be an absolute negation here, what is called the religious practice of forfeiting one's body and spirit. This is not a matter of thinking logically or acting morally. For this reason Dōgen speaks of sitting in *zazen* as the casting off of body and mind; in other words, it must be a matter of religious practice (宗教的行) (i.e., what Dōgen means when he says: "One should learn the step back which turns the light around"). (NKZ IX, 332)

Religious practice, in the end, reaches beyond both pure and practical reason. Nevertheless, this religious standpoint does not simply discard thought and morality; it is their radicalization and their wellspring. "Academic learning and morality too must be a matter of religious practice" (NKZ IX, 333).

Yet what would it mean to philosophize as a matter of "religious practice"? Elsewhere Nishida gives us some indications in this regard, namely, in his call for a return to and a radicalization of Descartes' method of doubt. Descartes is said to have "denied (否定した) everything from a standpoint of self-awareness" (NKZ XI, 161-2). In this sense, Nishida affirms:

The method of philosophy must be thoroughly Cartesian. It must be thoroughly a matter of becoming self-aware through negation (否定的自覚), and analysis of self-awareness (自覚的分析).... Philosophy is a matter of learning how to deny the self, that is to say [in Dōgen's terms], a learning how to forget the self (哲学は自己を否定すること、自己を忘れることを学ぶのである). (NKZ XI, 173-4).

Nishida returns to his eastern roots in an attempt to articulate a philosophical practice of realizing a more profound, and profoundly open, dimension of the self by way of self-negation. Indeed, he goes on to say that "in this great turning point in world history, we need to thoroughly dig down to the base of Japanese culture and build up our thought on a great and profound basis" (NKZ XI, 174), a basis that would bring together east and west, embodied experience and logical reasoning.

Nishida's references to Dōgen in the context of discussing Descartes' method of doubt remind us of the "Great Doubt" (大疑) in Zen, a connection that Nishitani will later make explicit. Yet from the perspective of Zen's practice of Great Doubt—which aims to break through the bottom of the self-conscious "ego" to an embodied *ek-stasis* into the "ten directions" of the extended world—Nishitani sharply criticizes the limits of

Descartes' method of doubt. "This methodical doubt," he writes, "was not doubt in its authentic sense, a doubt which grips one's whole body-mind, in which the self and all other things in their entirety become one big question-mark, as is the case with the 'Great Doubt' in Zen" (NKC XI, 15). Elsewhere Nishitani writes that the self-conscious ego on which Descartes grounded his philosophy marks not only the limits of his thought, but the essential problem of modern humanity as such. "If we grant that Cartesian philosophy is the prime illustration of the mode of being of modern human being, we may also say that it includes the fundamental problem lurking within this mode of being of the modern ego-self" (NKC X, 25).

According to Nishida as well, Descartes did not pursue far enough the radical trajectory of the method of doubt. "He did not reach the true standpoint of self-awareness through negation" (NKZ XI, 161; cf. 158). He remained within the presuppositions of subjective logic and modern metaphysics. In contrast to Descartes' self-grounding cogito, for Nishida, "the self-evident fact which we in the end, try as we might, cannot doubt, is the fact of the contradictory self-identity of the self and things, outside and inside" (NKZ XI, 162). It is this originary fact of the dynamic intertwinement of self and world that Nishida attempts to articulate with such notions as "acting-intuition" (行為的直観) and "from the created to the creating" (作られたものから作るものへ). Knowledge of things takes place not by standing aloof and representing them as objects for a disembodied consciousness, but by engaging with them in praxis, by acting on them and letting them act on us. This demands a standpoint of "knowledge-sive-practice, practice-sive-knowledge" (知即行、行即知) (NKZ X, 439). The dynamic non-dualism of this dialectical intertwinement of self and world essentially involves seeing and acting through the mediation of the body,<sup>8</sup> for, standing in the midst of the world, "our self exists in the manner of the 'oneness of body and mind' (身心一如) and acting-intuition" (NKZ X, 438; cf. 158–9).

One may note the significant similarities here with Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological return to what he calls the "primacy of perception," the embodied intertwinement of self and world that preexists Descartes' dualism of *res cogitans* and *res extensa* (cf. MERLEAU-PONTY 1981, 89). And

8. Cf. NKZ X, 442. On the central role of the body in Nishida's thought, cf. NKZ VIII, 271, 307ff.

yet, as Yuasa Yasuo has pointed out, the eastern notion of “oneness of body and mind” is not merely a phenomenological description of an always already given state of existence, but is more specifically a normative ideal that must be achieved by means of “practices of self-cultivation” (修行) (cf. YUASA 1989, 194–5). According to Yuasa, Nishida himself did not sufficiently clarify the role such practices play in the transformation from inauthentic everyday dualism to the authentic non-dualism of radical everydayness (cf. YUASA 1990, 89ff). Perhaps Nishida was wary of calling into question the limits of modern-western academia before it was firmly established in Japan. In any case, despite the many significant textual passages we have examined above, Nishida did not thoroughly elucidate the provocatively ambivalent relation between a philosophy of self-awareness and embodied practices of awakening. This task was left to his successors such as Nishitani Keiji.

#### NISHITANI ON THE NEED FOR AN EMBODIED PRACTICE OF KNOWING

Nishitani wrote that, while “Nishida’s philosophy takes for its standpoint a radical realism where the standpoint of what we normally think of as the ‘self,’ namely the self of consciousness (or reflection), has been broken through,” he did not sufficiently explain how this breakthrough takes place (NKC IX, 247–8). For Nishitani, both the problem of the willful everyday ego, and the practice necessary for breaking through this inauthentic everyday standpoint, needed to be more explicitly thematized. And while it is surely an exaggeration to say that Nishida “made no mention of the momentous question of the relation between religion and philosophy” (NKC IX, 249) (as we have seen, Nishida did thematize this relation in both his early and later writings), Nishitani can indeed be credited with explicitly addressing this relation, and with unambiguously embracing its ambivalence.

Nishitani’s attempt to philosophically reflect on/from “the standpoint of Zen” enacts a step back to some of the fundamental ambivalences in the encounter between western philosophy and eastern practice. The dualism of the modern worldview, Nishitani points out, along with the reduction of knowledge to a purely cerebral affair, has effected a “personality split” in the west, a split that the Japanese have inadvertently

imported underneath the shining surfaces of western modernity (cf. NKC XX, 57–8). Nishitani traces this split to a falling into oblivion of the connection between knowledge and “practice” (行).

In a seminal essay entitled “What is Called Practice,” Nishitani writes:

A state of affairs that fundamentally characterizes the so-called early modern and modern historical times periods is found in the fact that the element of “practice” has been dropped from the formative path of human beings. In particular with regard to the intellect, a knowing of “objective matters,” an objective knowing represented by science has become dominant, and the dimension of knowing where the investigation of objects and the self-investigation of the subject are inseparably bound together has been closed off. (NKC XX, 54)

In the more originary dimension of knowing of which Nishitani speaks, “the direction inward” and the “direction outward” are tied together without being simply identical; they are “two and yet one” (二つで一つである). “The apprehension of a state of affairs at the same time implies self-knowledge; indeed from the start this knowledge operates at the dimension of a ‘unity of subject and object’ (主客合一)” (NKC XX, 54). The “unity” spoken of here does not entail a simple identity, but it does imply that the dualistic separation of subject and object is an *a posteriori* alienation from their *a priori* mutual implication; the standpoint of dualism is a *post factum* alienation from the standpoint of an originary intertwinement of self and world.

At the level of this originary non-dualism, “knowledge can only come about in unison with embodied practice, in the manner of ‘the oneness of body and mind’ (身心一如的に).” In actively engaging with a matter at hand, “one understands it with one’s whole body and mind, and this knowledge at the same time entails a self-knowledge of the whole body and mind.” It is for this reason, Nishitani writes, that in the east one spoke of “the unity of knowledge and practice” (知行合一) (NKC XX, 55). Nishitani finds this conjunction of knowledge with embodied practice in various aspects of Japanese culture, aspects which are all too quickly disappearing with the progress of modernization/westernization. At the profoundest level, he finds this originary dimension of practice-*sive*-knowledge in the practices (修行) of the Buddhist Way (仏道). He writes that “practice (行) is a matter of going along the Way (道を行くこと); and at the same time, the practice of going along the Way is itself the Way” (NKC

xx, 61). The Way leads to the non-duality of sincerity-*si*-truth (まこと), that is, to a dimension where things show themselves in their truth only to one who has undergone an existential practice of sincerity, a practice that can only be done with the whole body and spirit.

### NISHITANI'S UNAMBIGUOUSLY AMBIVALENT PHILOSOPHY-OF-ZEN

Nishitani was led (back) to this standpoint by way of both philosophy and Zen. Indeed, Nishitani's personal and philosophical path can be understood as an attempt to recover, in the contemporary historical situation, this mutuality of knowledge and practice. The problem of nihilism became the focus of his attention,<sup>9</sup> to begin with as a problem that he painfully felt as a personal existential crisis. He later became convinced that the problem of nihilism lies "at the root of the mutual aversion of religion and science," and "contains something difficult to solve solely from the standpoint of religion, or solely from the standpoint of philosophy," at least insofar as these remain disconnected from one another (NKC xx, 193–4). Having chosen a career as a professional philosopher, Nishitani recalls that, no matter how much philosophy he studied, he could not rid himself of a certain anxious feeling of disconnectedness from reality; it was as if his feet were not touching the ground, or as if he were a fly bumping up against the glass of a window pane, unable to actually go outside and directly encounter the world. It was the impotence of theoretical philosophy alone to solve this crisis of disconnectedness that led him to take up the practice of Zen. And sure enough, after some time of *sanzen* practice, the feeling went away (NISHITANI and YAGI 1989, 57–60). In this manner, Nishitani writes, "in my case western philosophy became connected with the 'practice' (行) of Zen" (NISHITANI 1988, 29).

Nishitani did not understand this journey through western philosophy to Zen only as the direction of his personal solution, for he took his own existential plight to be a sign of the nihilistic times. In such times, Nishi-

9. For a fuller account of the path of Nishitani's philosophy-of-Zen as a topological trans-descendence through the field of nihilism to the field of *śūnyatā*, cf. DAVIS 2000 and 2004.

tani contends, it is necessary for philosophy itself to undergo a transformation. In an essay entitled “Christianity, Philosophy and Zen,” Nishitani explicitly calls on philosophy to open itself, beyond the limits of “theory,” to the embodied experience of Zen. There he writes:

Philosophy has in general remained stuck at the level of “theory,” and has not been a [genuine] inquiry into the self. The “theoretical” standpoint of “seeing” (見) or “viewing” (觀) could be said to lie at a halfway point on the way to what in Zen is called: “Pointing directly at the human heart/mind; seeing into one’s nature and becoming a Buddha” (直指人心、見性成佛)... [Here we find] both the nearness and the difference between the fundamental character of Zen and that of philosophy.... In Zen, the essential limitations of the standpoint of “theory” are raised into sharp awareness, and the standpoint of “theory” is sublated into the “seeing” and “viewing” of one who is awakened. The content of “theory” is transformed into the content of “awakening” (覺). (NKC XI, 222–3)

Theory remains at the level of “a painting of a rice cake” or a “finger pointing at the moon,” while Zen brings us into direct contact with their reality. Hence, Nishitani urges, “must not philosophy too take a step forward from its heretofore basic standpoint, and proceed a step in the direction of its connection with Zen?” (NKC XI, 223). Theoretical reason must lead beyond itself to experience; for, as Nishitani writes elsewhere with regard to “the limits of reason”: “Direct embodied experience can encompass the intellectual understanding of reason, but the intellectual understanding of reason cannot substitute for embodied experience” (NKC XX, 13).

In such contexts, Nishitani clearly asserts a certain ultimate priority of Zen experience over philosophical theory. However, this should not be taken to mean that he wishes to unilaterally assimilate philosophy to the tradition and institutions of Zen Buddhism. As Nishitani made very clear in a remark to Jan van Bragt, he wished to be considered a philosopher, and not religious thinker who “provided Zen with a natural theology” (VAN BRAGT 1989, 9). Buddhism in general, he wrote, is faced with a “double task,” that of “modernizing and at the same time postmodernizing” (NKC XVII, 140). For these tasks it needs philosophy as critic, and not just as messenger.<sup>10</sup>

Horio Tsutomu has expressed this bi-directionality of Nishitani’s



thought as follows: “On the one hand, Nishitani thoroughly applies philosophical reflection over against the traditional standpoint of traditional ‘Zen.’ On the other hand, in letting the standpoint of ‘Zen’ reflect itself within philosophy, he carries out a thorough self-criticism of philosophy itself” (HORIO 1997A, 306). Maintaining the bi-directionality of this philosophy-*of-Zen* meant holding the two sides apart even as he brought them together. Insofar as it is the same person who undertakes the two disciplines, Nishitani acknowledges, they will inevitably affect one another (Nishitani 1988, 29); but they should not be prematurely conjoined, and should never be simply conflated.<sup>11</sup>

In the Preface to his *The Standpoint of Zen*, Nishitani explains the role of philosophy as that of a two-way mediator between Zen and the everyday world. He writes of

proceeding on a path from the pre-philosophical to philosophy, and then further from philosophy to the post-philosophical. Yet at the same time this implies the reverse direction, in other words, a return path from the standpoint of the “practice” of Zen, through the standpoint of philosophy, and back to the place of the pre-philosophical. (NKC XI, 8)

Nishitani not only urges western philosophers to take a step forward towards Zen; he also claims that today Zen needs to “reflect itself” through philosophy in order to speak to the contemporary world (NKC XI, 6). Nishitani is said to have described his life as a circling practice of “thinking, then sitting; sitting, then thinking” (HORIO 1997B, 22)—an image that poignantly expresses the dynamic bi-directionality of the path of his unambiguously ambivalent philosophy-*of-Zen*.

Having focused on the specific cases of Nishida and Nishitani, this exploration of the provocative ambivalences in Japanese philosophy of religion reaches the following conclusion. These philosophies-*of-religion* cannot be dismissed as residues of a premodern failure to emancipate

10. In particular Nishitani criticizes Buddhism for its lack of historical consciousness, and for lack of attention to other basic aspects of the modern world, including social ethics, natural science, and the problem of technology. Cf., for example, NKC XVII, 142, 149.

11. Nishitani reportedly gave his student Horio Tsutomu, who was beginning the practice of Zen, the same advice that he himself had received from Nishida: “Pursue philosophy as philosophy and Zen as Zen” (HORIO 1992, 95).

philosophy from religion. Rather, their ultimate aim should be understood as nothing short of articulating a dynamic thinking-*of*-practice as a possible postmodern way of life. At the very least, they certainly succeed in provoking us to rethink the meaning—and the ambivalent relation between the terms—of the philosophy of religion.

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