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FRONTIERS OF JAPANESE PHILOSOPHY 6

Confluences and
Cross-Currents

edited by

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and

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NANZAN

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Editors' Introduction

The papers collected in this, the sixth volume of *Frontiers of Japanese Philosophy*, represent the proceedings of an international conference held at Universitat Pompeu Fabra in Barcelona from 3 to 6 June 2009. As its title, “Confluences and Cross-Currents” reflects, the event was a philosophical encounter in more than one sense. On the one hand, it brought together scholars of Japanese philosophy from various parts of Europe, Asia, and the Americas. Like the Kyoto School tradition itself, which has come to enjoy ever greater respect in the academic world and was very much in evidence throughout the proceedings, the conference was one more attempt to being the dialogue among philosophies to bear on a variety of issues and from a variety of perspectives. On the other hand, although it was initially conceived as a closed workshop on the latest developments in the field of Japanese philosophy, the decision was taken to open it to the general public. As a result, students specializing in Asian studies, a relatively recent initiative in Spain, were able to mix with specialists in the field, which proved to be a stimulus to both sides.

Clearly a conference such as this would not have been possible without the happy coincidence of initiatives during the past decades among scholars, publishing houses, and committed institutions and individuals to promote a deeper appreciation of the wealth of intellectual and spiritual traditions in the Asiatic world. By the same token, the hope that the process will continue rests on the pursuit of new lines of investigation and new philosophical horizons to embrace them. The high quality of the presentations, nearly all of which have found their way into these pages, is a shining testimony to the fact that Japanese philosophy has come of age and is no longer restricted to a small coterie of experts.

It is worth noting here that the list of publications having to do with Japanese intellectual history in general and Kyoto School philosophy in particular has grown steadily over the past years, both inside and outside of Japan. This is due in no small part to the important contributions made by persons present at the conference. The same holds true for Spain. Not so many years ago it would have been hard to image a university sponsoring an event such as this. Even so, much remains to be done if Japanese philosophy is to shed its esoteric and exotic image in order to take its rightful place in the curriculum as one of the many valuable sources of philosophical reflection. In this regard, one can only hope that future gatherings and future publications such as this continue to sow their modest seeds with confidence. As the poet Antonio Machado has said, “se hace camino al andar”—the walking makes the road.

The nineteen essays in this volume have been arranged into three groups. The first of these, “Confluences East and West,” opens with a short piece by Alejandro Bárcenas on modern Japanese aesthetics and its relationship to neo-Kantian thought. Bárcenas outlines the important role of nineteenth-century German philosophy in Japan, in particular Hegelian idealism and neo-Kantian currents of thought, among those who laid the foundations for aesthetic theory in Japan and promoted what amounted to a “humanism” not unlike that found in the European renaissance. Despite the general tendency among Japan’s first modern philosophers to accept foreign ideas uncritically and thus hold them at arm’s length from their own very different philosophical past, many important pioneers of modern aesthetics in Japan had the good fortune to be exposed to teachers such as the American Ernest Fenollosa and the German Raphael von Koeber who encouraged them to pursue confluences of their new inheritance with the old.

Giancarlo Vianello’s treatment of nihilism and emptiness brings together a wide range of thinkers and different traditions to help better understand the achievements of the Kyoto School and their ideas of “nothingness” vis-à-vis the questions raised by Western nihilism. Tracing a path that reaches back to Parmenides, Plato, and Plotinus, and passing through Dionysius the Areopagite, Scotus Eriugena, and Meister Eckhart before coming to Jacobi, Nietzsche, and twentieth-century thinkers like Jaspers, Adorno, and Heidegger, Vianello draws out a number

of meanings of “nothingness” in ancient philosophy, gnosticism, and mysticism Christian and Jewish. At the same time as he seeks to locate the roots of historical nihilism in romanticism (as opposed to “religious nihilism”), he shows how nihilism began to overcome its purely negative connotations to take on, with Nietzsche, a more positive face in the repudiation of values that had lost their power and significance. In similar fashion he holds up the critical role that Mādhyamika thought has had to play in the Buddhist context with its central focus on *śūnyatā* and the uprooting of habits of thought that keep us caught in illusion.

Maja Milčinski takes a broad look at attitudes to death in Daoism and Japanese tradition. In so doing, she contrasts the connections between the notion of impermanence and the apophatic tradition found in Asia with European approaches to death. Despite the medieval attention to the *ars moriendi* and the varieties of *danse macabre*, she argues that Europe failed in the end to establish a discipline aimed at learning to die well. Despite later ideas like Freud’s “death instinct,” European thought has tended to view mortality and impermanence as a source of personal frustration or as mere dramatic devices. In contrast, a well-established tradition in Japan has consistently drawn attention to the beauty in the ephemeral nature of things. Milčinski suggests that behind this sensitivity lie Buddhist and Daoist notions of the illusory nature of reality and the ego, and a preference for mystical and meditative experience over logical and discursive thinking.

Bernard Stevens sets out to shed light on the Asian sources in the philosophy of Nishida Kitarō by focusing on the indirect but indisputable similarities of his key ideas to the Abhidharma philosophy of Indian Buddhism. The Yogācāra idea of mind is presented as a way to understand the “transcendental” role of consciousness in Nishida’s thought, culminating in his logic of “place” or *basho*. Stevens proposes to read Nishida’s philosophy as constituting a post-Kantian or neo-Kantian system following in the line of transcendental thought that runs from Descartes through Kant and Husserl, and in this way to locate Nishida’s originality in a move towards a paradigmatic structure that goes beyond the purely theoretical—this, too, under the inspiration of Yogācāra Buddhism. He argues that just as the Yogācāra ideas of mind

cannot be reduced to mere psychology but entail a spiritual dimension as well, Nishida gives priority of place to the will and to ethics in a dynamic deepening of intentionality itself, and in this way provides a bodily and moral ground to conscious acts.

Agustín Jacinto Zavala approaches the question of influences on Nishida's thought from another direction by drawing out from his works a range of ideas and citations related to Aristotle's epistemology. Nishida's ongoing dialogue with Aristotle is shown to have stimulated his idea of consciousness as a *basho*, his idea of the *basho* of nothingness, and his stress on overcoming the subject-object dichotomy. Jacinto focuses in particular on a critical period in the development of Nishida's epistemology revolving around the publication of his essay "Place" in June of 1926, which was to set the course for his later thought.

Finally, Ralf Müller reflects on Watsuji Tetsurō's interpretation of the Sōto Zen master Dōgen. He sees the value of Watsuji's book *Shamon Dōgen* to lie not only in it being one of the first attempts to come to grips with Dōgen's thought and present it as an important resource of values to Japanese and Western philosophy, but also because of the particular attention he pays to the meaning of language in Dōgen's master work, *Shōbōgenzō*. Müller shows how Watsuji realized the critical appropriation that Dōgen had effected in overcoming the simple categorical rejection of language in Zen, thus opening the way to a more rational approach.

A second group of essays gathered together under the title "Cross-Currents," show a marked commitment to apply Japanese philosophy to concrete challenges that face our planet and contemporary society. It opens with an impassioned argument by Kazashi Nobuo to adjust Nishida's philosophy to the realities of nuclear arms in a post-Hiroshima age. He reviews Nishida's idea of the historical world with a critical eye to exposing its limitations and relocating its potential in the service of a "philosophy of peace." He explains how Hiroshima has drawn a line in the sand of intellectual history that Nishida could not have foreseen. His suggestion of shifting the source of philosophy from Plato's wonder to the *tristesse* of human life, Kazashi suggests, has to be shifted again to include the fear of global nuclear warfare and the potential for the "end of human history." Accordingly, a new philosophy of history must take a step beyond speculation and theory to enter into daily life; it can

no longer remain content with a positive image of the human but must take into account the destructive capacities reflected in the production of arms and the overproduction of goods for consumption. It has to appreciate the plurality of historical reality without neglecting its disjunctions and shadows. The new paradigm that Kazashi proposes is one that transforms Nishida's "active self" into an idea of "multiple selves" active in the manifold dimensions of history, and from there works towards a harmonious synthesis of values in a civil and global society

Kitagawa Sakiko brings into relief various aspects of Japanese feminist thought that can contribute to a "supra-moral" place attentive to the voices of women that were stifled by the masculine intoxication with modernity. Rather than create a space for women to think, modernization in Japan used a biologically biased view of woman to keep the fuller, more traditional role of the feminine from playing a critical role in the process. She traces the difficult road to the recovery of the reversibility of the sexes and the displacement of attention from the individual to the polyphonic that marked the symbolic importance of woman in literature through thinkers like Hiratsuka Raichō and Yosano Akiko. Kitagawa argues that the "liberation" of women is not to be sought in the concession of personal freedoms handed down by a male society committed to modern sexual dualism, but entails a more fundamental "self-awareness," a negation of self that opens to the other, symbolized in a "philosophy of motherhood."

Similar questions are taken up in Michiko Yusa's attempt to draw on Nishida's philosophy of self-identity to recover a fuller sense of women as a "sexed body." She sets out to clarify certain themes central to Japanese philosophical feminism, in particular, the need for women to assert themselves not only as persons of the feminine sex but also as human beings. Yusa draws on the ideas of Yosano Akiko and Hiratsuka Raichō, alludes to Dōgen as representative of the egalitarian strain in Zen that rejects the exclusion of women from enlightenment, and wraps it all together in Nishida's notion of the "concrete universal" where the feminine and the human combine to form a full sense of identity. D. T. Suzuki's positive approach to women and Sakaguchi Fumi's critique of the "structure of discrimination" are also drawn on for support.

Gereon Kopf presents a sustained and well-documented argument for

a “cosmopolitanism” that can overcome the deficiencies of nationalism and localism as answers to the increasingly globalized world. This view, based on Mutai Risaku and his critical development of Nishida’s notion of the “self-identity of absolute contradictories,” expressly rejects tilting the balance either towards the unity of the world or towards the plurality of cultures that make it up. He presents cosmopolitanism as an ideology that give equal value to the autonomy and specificity of particular cultures and subcultures without forfeiting universal principles or blurring the larger vision of a common world. Only such a model can truly overcome the vestiges of colonialism that survive in many models of universalism devised by those in political or economic power.

John C. Maraldo draws us into a carefully worded discussion of ethical normativity focusing on the alternative model found in Zen texts. He argues against the ordinary views of Zen as lacking a sense of the ethically normative, as simply taking over an uncritical mix of Mahayana monastic precepts and Confucian social ethics, or as advocating a situational ethic in which behavioral norms are adjusted to changing situations not because of any commitment to philosophical relativism but because of the appeal to a higher ideal or norm, namely, the discovery of the true mind. After examining these positions one by one, with examples from Zen literature, Maraldo proposes that normativity is not a preliminary state that can later be set aside in the light of something ultimate or absolute. Nor is the imperative form of the precepts replaced in the end by a purely descriptive, trans-normative formulation. He rather suggests repairing the disjunction between the description and the normative—what *is* and what *ought to be*—by appealing to the “declarative” as an intervening space in which the ideal is replaced by the “realizational” in the full sense of the term.

The section ends with Thomas P. Kasulis offering a series of hermeneutical keys for opening Japanese philosophy to Western readers oblivious of the original language and the cultural baggage that it carries. He recommends paying attention to the questions, often tacitly assumed and in the background, that particular authors were trying to answer, and loosening the controls of historical context and intellectual biography in favor of more heuristic and pragmatic goals. Far from trying to simply universalize, essentialize, or totally decontextualize Japanese

thought, Kasulis proposes a series of generalized principles to keep in mind: its tendency to seek out internal relationships (a principle of intimacy), especially between the knower and the known but also between the mind and body which are viewed as inseparable; the importance given to apprenticeship as practice under a master; the preference for the *how* over the *what* (for functions rather than substances); the appeal to *holographic* models (even at the ontological level) in which the parts are in the whole and the whole in each of the parts; the habitual use of “argument by relegation” that includes opposing views without any attempt to refute them from within a broader perspective; and the tendency to track down the origin of contradictions rather than explain them teleologically.

A final group of “Critical Studies” on particular authors and themes opens with Uehara Mayuko taking up a little-known essay of Kuki Shuzō in which he engaged in a kind of self-analysis on the multiple meanings of his family name. Her aim is to show how this lighthearted piece on the play of sounds gives us a clue for inquiring into his interest in the problem of nominalism and naming in philosophy. After reviewing Kuki’s theory of contingency as a framework for interpretation, Uehara discusses three realms of word-associations he uses to characterize the meaning of his family name: prehistory, myth, and destiny. Between the lines of the text she reads an attempt by Kuki to apply his idea of contingency to the development of a literary theory, in particular to Japanese poetry traditional and modern with regard to its use of rhyme.

Jacynthe Tremblay presents a detailed analysis of the linguistic style Nishida employed to present his “logic of *basho*.” Often overlooked, or at least lightly passed over, Nishida’s choice of words and grammatical usage shows a careful deliberation crucial to the development of his ideas. In particular, Tremblay demonstrates how his use of case and proposition discloses a new syntax created in response to the question of where the self comes from and where it is situated. Analogously, the encompassing quality of modern Japanese (which Nishida helped to secure) was put to the service of a relational logic aimed at including all the elements of reality, attending to all the dimensions of human existence, and locating the individual within society and the historical world vis-à-vis a multiplicity of “others.”

In reply to critics who summarily dismiss Nishida's philosophy as weakened on the historical front by excessive attention to the mind and interiority, Matteo Cestari provides careful textual proof of a major shift in Nishida's late work based on the attempt to overcome the dichotomy between the "within" and the "without." He accomplished this by applying a "dialectic of the historical world" to the mutual self-expression of the world and the things that make it up, including but not restricted to conscious subjects. Cestari sees here the core of Nishida's complementary ideas of *praxis* and *poesis*, and from there discusses the revised notions of politics, technology, morality and history. He concludes by displacing the blanket rejection of Nishida's view of history with a particular critique aimed at an overly abstract and optimistic tendency that kept Nishida from recognizing the darker side of technology and the relationships of humans to their natural and social world.

James W. Heisig takes up the entire corpus of Nishitani Keiji's wartime writings from 1940 to 1945 in order to assess the generalized dismissal of his "overcoming modernity" as nationalistic, fascist, or imperialistic. In particular, Heisig focuses on the three interlocking questions of relocating Japan's place in the world order, the de-Westernizing of Japanese identity, and the de-absolutizing of the scientific worldview. Meticulous attention to detail not only helps isolate the most morally questionable aspects of Nishitani's idea, but also exposes much of the broadside criticism as unfounded, based on a selective reading of the actual texts, or a conflation of Nishitani's views with those of others in his circle. He concludes by arguing that we have to allow for the development that took place in Nishitani's ideas during the last half of his life and not allow the chiarascuro of his wartime writings taint the whole of his achievement as a philosopher.

Britta Boutry-Stadelmann presents an overview of Karatani Kōjin's idea of a "world republic" within the context of the cultural, environmental, and economic stress of a global community in search of a viable future. Beginning with Karatani's attempt to identify the core problem of the modern world in the closely interwoven ideas of capital, nation, and state, she follows him in his search for an alternative model. Ideas that we once considered only in the abstract and quickly forgot, such as "the limits to growth," the "pollution of the natural world," and the call

for “sustainable development” have become too real in our time to allow for anything but a radical overhaul in our way of thinking. Karatani’s move beyond Marxist socialism, state capitalism, and democratic liberalism towards communities based on “associationism,” as Boutry-Stadelmann is at pains to show, belongs to a long line of thinking and practical experimentation with alternative lifestyles, which she traces from the Enlightenment down to the present day.

The volume closes with Graham Parkes taking on a certain class of influential but academically unconscionable attempts to link the Kyoto school with the military fascism of the war years by innuendo, slipshod scholarship, and biased reading of the evidence. The claim that some of these Japanese thinkers were responsible for having defined the philosophical outlines of Japanese fascism, in part because of their connections to Martin Heidegger and imperialist ideology, is unraveled thread by thread to disclose a surprisingly amateurish, and at times even unintelligible, string of arguments employed by a small number of scholars in the United States and Great Britain. He concludes by showing how even the attempt at a rational dialogue has been hijacked by a brand of academic politics suspiciously similar to the very things it is aimed at decrying.

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