

THE RELIGIOUS PHILOSOPHY OF TANABE HAJIME

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The Religious Philosophy of Tanabe Hajime

The Metanoetic Imperative

Edited by

TAITETSU UNNO
&
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CHISOKUDŌ

Cover art: Claudio Bado

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Facsimile reprint. Originally published by Asian Humanities Press,
Berkeley, CA. © 1990 Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture

ISBN: 979-8648502840

Nagoya, Japan

<http://ChisokudoPublications.com>

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Editors' Introduction

The essays brought together in this volume are offered as an interdisciplinary, intercultural response to *Philosophy as Metanoetics*, a pivotal work in the religious philosophy of Tanabe Hajime (1885-1962). Most of the contributions were first presented at an "International Symposium on Metanoetics" held at Smith College in the fall of 1989.

As the successor of Nishida Kitarō, who is generally credited with being the first modern philosopher of Japan, Tanabe shared the vision of applying the rigors of the Western philosophical tradition to the intellectual tradition of Japan and at the same time cultivating a more Oriental expression to philosophical questions. As with Nishida, this led Tanabe away from the separation of philosophy and religion that has characterized philosophy in the West and towards a standpoint in which the two work symbiotically, distinguishable but inseparable.

It is hardly surprising that a thinker as saturated with the philosophical spirit as Tanabe would eventually apply his critical mind to the work of his teacher and set off in a new direction of his own. Whereas Nishida had laid the greatest accent on the "Zen experience" and only later in life made an effort to incorporate the insights of Pure Land Buddhism, *Philosophy as Metanoetics* sets itself squarely in the Pure Land tradition of Shinran, relegating Zen to a secondary position. Behind this difference in religious perspective lay a decade and more of a growing impatience on Tanabe's part with some of the key concepts of Nishida. More immediately, the work stands against the backdrop of Japan's aggressive failure in the Pacific War. All of this is woven, subtly but unmistakably, into Tanabe's argument for a philosophy of metanoia, a "philosophy that is not a philosophy."

As the essays in this volume should make plain, the particular history surrounding the composition of Tanabe's work is far from rendering it an esoteric text of interest only to Japanologists. Experience in adopting *Philosophy as Metanoetics* for seminars on Buddhism has demonstrated the appeal of its rigorous intellectual

analysis, radical self-criticism, powerful integrity of feeling, and confessional tone bordering on religious faith. More importantly, it has spawned questions about the relationship between philosophy and religion, Shin Buddhism and Christianity, and personal and social transformation, as well as about the impact of historical events on philosophical thought.

If the English translation—painstakingly prepared under the direction of Tanabe's most illustrious living disciple and a ranking philosopher in his own right, Takeuchi Yoshinori—has made Tanabe's thought accessible to a wider Western readership, it must be seen as no more than a *partial* translation. Only the ongoing translation of its content into modes of thinking and questioning different from Tanabe's own can truly "carry it over" from Tanabe's world to our own. It was with this in mind that fifteen scholars from the United States, Japan, Germany, and Canada gathered at Smith College in the first week of October of 1989 for three intense days of discussion.

The contents of the present volume reflect the design of the symposium itself. Opening recollections of Professor Tanabe by Takeuchi Yoshinori, public lectures by James Heisig on the Kyoto School in general and by Langdon Gilkey on Tanabe's philosophy of religion in particular, and a detailed analysis of *Philosophy as Metanoetics* by James Fredericks set the stage for the four panels on the meaning of metanoetics for Shin Buddhism, Christianity, Philosophy, and Society. Among the many questions that came up for discussion in the course of the four panels, the matter of the role of Tanabe and the Kyoto school in fostering Japanese nationalism and the spirit of military expansionism during World War II found the least agreement among participants. The variety of information and perspectives brought to bear on this difficult question, now a half century later, only served to highlight the need for more careful attention to the use and abuse of intellectual conscience under imperialist, colonialist, or militaristic regimes.

The success of the Symposium and the publication of this volume was the result of much hard work by more persons than space allows us to acknowledge. We are especially grateful to Mary Maples Dunn, President of Smith College, and Robert Merrit, Dean of the Faculty, for their support and participation in the project; to all the colleagues in religious studies who played an active role in the proceedings, whether by chairing the panels

(Elizabeth Carr, Karl Donfried, Dennis Hudson, and Janet Gyatso) or preparing responses for discussion (Jean Higgins, Quentin Quesnell, Carol Zaleski, and Jamie Hubbard); to research assistants Caroline Butterworth and Susan Olson, who worked selflessly behind the scenes; to the administrative assistant of the religion department, Donna Gunn, whose organizational talents behind the scenes made everything immeasurably easier for all; and to the generous financial support provided by the Japan Foundation, the Ada Howe Kent Fund, and the Jacob Ziskind Fund of Smith College.

The editors join together with the contributors in hoping that this small volume may serve as one more stepping stone on the path that leads religious and philosophical traditions of the world into dialogue with each other.