

Death and Resurrection as the Eternal Return of the Pure Land: Tanabe's Metanoetic Reading of Nietzsche and the Question of History

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In the concluding chapter of his 1949 study of Nietzsche,¹ Nishitani Keiji paused to reflect on the historical situation of his own analysis and in so doing thematized the problem of history at the ground of the meeting of Asia and Europe. He did so by explicitly considering the “meaning of nihilism for Japan.” This might seem at first curious because the entire text had been devoted to coming to an understanding of nihilism per se, although Nishitani immediately argued that if one wants merely to know *about* nihilism, as if this were a conversation topic, then the question was being asked from a standpoint in which nihilism itself ceased to be a question (N, 1). Nihilism is not a general object of knowledge and hence is not transmittable within the terms of the information age, where nihilism is reduced to epistemic posturing and a general idea about the nature of things. Nihilism only comes into question when the singular self, beyond its codification into various strategies of information and other means of defusing an intimate and critical question by making nihilism abstract and general, takes it up as question. Nihilism only becomes a question for a singular individual, yet it does so not when that individual asks *about* nihilism but only when they first find themselves having become a question to them-

¹ The text was originally just called *Nihirizumu* [*Nihilism*], but Graham Parkes and Setsuko Aihara expansively, and with a good deal of clarification, titled their fine translation, *The Self-Overcoming of Nihilism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990). Hence cited as a parenthetical note in the text as N. Please note also that I here follow the Japanese custom of citing the family name followed by the given name.

selves. “By being thrown into nihility, the self is revealed to itself. Only in such encounters does nihilism (like death) become a real question” (N, 2).

One might recognize an explicitly Heideggerian resonance in such an articulation, and that should come as no surprise. Nishitani was a student of Nishida Kitar,² the patriarch of the Kyoto School, and had, at his insistence, studied with Heidegger during the first two years of Heidegger’s Nietzsche lectures. Furthermore, Nishida, Nishitani, and Tanabe Hajime, along with thinkers like Abe Masao and Hisamatsu Shin’ichi, comprise a tradition of thinking that retained both its distinctively Japanese “personality” and “location,” yet engaged in a mode of thinking that was irreducible to either the Asian or the Western philosophical traditions. Yet in taking up the question of nihilism per se, which is to experience intimately oneself coming to be a question for oneself, Nishitani once again returned not only to the collective, but to the specific historical collectivity of Japan. What could nihilism mean for Japan when its very meaning opens up in a singular suspension of meaning per se, what kind of paradoxical yet distinctively Japanese historical meaning could such a question have?

Nishitani, knowing full well that professional philosophy was itself a by-product of the Meiji Restoration and therefore born of Japan’s rapid Westernization, argued that Karl Löwith was on to something

² Nishida is the undoubted progenitor of the Kyoto School, so much so that it is sometimes referred to as *Nishida tetsugaku*, or Nishida philosophy. This is not to say that everyone else in the Kyoto School was an epigone. Tanabe, who shall form the locus of the essay, had a famous series of arguments with Nishida and, whether or not they were justified, was not even on speaking terms with Nishida when the latter died in 1945 in the months before the war’s end. Nonetheless, the Kyoto School marks a singular event in the history of thinking: a manner of thinking, deeply attuned to the pulse of its times, that operates in and between Western and Asian modes of thinking, preserving both its Japanese personality and the expansivity and border-interrogating movements of philosophy itself. It is so far without clear parallel in the West. In this respect, I concur with James Heisig when he contends that the Kyoto School “is not an eastern thought diluted for foreign consumption, nor is it a simple transference that assumes a background in the history of oriental ideas. It makes an unsolicited contribution to world philosophy that both respects the traditions of philosophy and expands them. In this respect, the development of the school from Nishida to Tanabe to Nishitani is a rising crescendo. Never has the west produced an intellectual movement whose contribution to the east can compare with what these three thinkers offer the west.” *Philosophers of Nothingness: An Essay on the Kyoto School* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2001), 272. Hence cited as a parenthetical note in the text as PN.

when he claimed that Japan had uncritically accepted an historical tradition that had confessed that it was in a crisis regarding its own foundations. Japan had imported a dead god without importing the critical awareness of its demise. “We went through this crisis without a clear realization that it *was* a crisis; and even now the crisis is being compounded by our continuing lack of awareness of our spiritual void” (N, 175). Not only had Japan severed its roots, producing both ultranationalism and reactionary nihilism (two sides of the same coin), it had inherited a location and tradition of thinking that was announcing its own fundamental decadence. In this way, Nishitani turned to a thinker like Nietzsche, who, curiously, made it possible for Nishitani to retrieve Japan’s beleaguered Zen tradition. The Mahayana Buddhist tradition in Japan, and elsewhere, already had an ancient – but now opaque and sedimented – tradition of meditation on nihilism, and a series of techniques for activating nihilism, in its robust, affirmative, Nietzschean sense.

Yet if one allows this circle (the circularity of history itself) to continue turning, how does Nietzsche, returning with his activated Mahayana resources, then re-activate his original European setting? After all, as Nishitani argued, Nietzsche’s nihilism “was backed up by responsibility towards the ancestors to redeem what is noble in the tradition. His standpoint calls for a returning to the ancestors in order to face the future, or to put it the other way around, a prophesying toward the tradition” (N, 177). So how does Nietzsche prophesy toward the tradition when read prophetically from another tradition, especially given that said other tradition opens up again under the lens of Nietzsche’s creative and active nihilism? What is the Kyoto Nietzsche to us? What is it to us that Nietzsche is no longer simply a “good European” but a good, albeit inadvertent, Buddhist? This forms the central question of this essay, an essay devoted to the question of history in the plurality of its trajectories. How did Nietzsche intrude upon the historical situation of the Kyoto School and how does this intrusion, in its turn, intrude again upon our own historical situation, especially given the fact that Nietzsche, right from the beginning, was *unzeitgemäß*, an intruder into history *par excellence*?

I will take this question up not with a further examination of Nishitani’s reading of Nietzsche, but by turning to another, in some ways even more remarkable reading, namely that of Tanabe Hajime. In so doing, thinking itself finds itself amidst a great self-aware circle of

historical complications. Nietzsche was a thinker deeply articulate about the self-overcoming movement of the valences of thinking, including his own.³ In this reading of Tanabe's reading of Nietzsche, we will locate three intertwined and elliptically progressive strands. (1) The valences of Nietzsche's thinking undergo a performance of their own operations and re-merge, for the moment, in dialog with the pure land or ground of thinking via Tanabe's retrieval of Shinran and the True Pure Land sect (*Jōdo Shin-shū*) of Buddhism. (2) In so doing, Tanabe not only locates the circle of self-overcoming in Nietzsche's thought, but in thinking itself, albeit with a critical awareness that this can only be done within thinking's present historical location. (3) Finally, this movement, twice thought and twice played, re-merges a third time as we reflect on Tanabe's reflection on Nietzsche's reflection on the movement of thinking. All three circles come to tell us variously of the adventure of difference in its ceaseless, circular becomings, amidst its diversely determined locations.

I

At one point in Tanabe Hajime's (1885-1962) stunning *Philosophy as Metanoetics* (1946),⁴ his magnum opus and one of the seminal texts of the Kyoto School of Philosophy, he locates the central problematic of metanoetic philosophy and philosophical metanoetics (circularly mediating movements) in response to a problem that Shinran (1173-1262), the founder of the Pure Land Shin sect (*Jōdo Shin-shū*) of Buddhism, called *honganbokori*. Roughly, the later is the aporia that arises when I realize that if I seek nirvana, then I inadvertently reinforce the very

³ For example, at the end of the first book of *Zarathustra*, he claims, "Verily I advise you: go forth from me and defend yourselves against Zarathustra! And better yet: be ashamed of him! Perhaps he deceived you." *Also Sprach Zarathustra* (1883-1885), *Kritische Studienausgabe* vol. 5, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag and Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1988), 101. (Translations are my own.) Later in the "Tomb Song" in Book Two, Zarathustra proclaims, "And only where there are graves are there resurrections" (145).

⁴ Tanabe Hajime, *Philosophy as Metanoetics*, trans. Takeuchi Yoshinori, with Valdo Viglielmo and James W. Heisig (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986). Hence cited as a parenthetical note in the text as PM. Although it has almost become fashionable to castigate the work of translators, I would like to this opportunity to praise the extraordinary work that Takeuchi, a fine thinker in his own right, has shared with us.

thing (namely the ego) that nirvana seeks to eradicate. If I do not want to be enlightened, if I do not dare think that I can be enlightened, if I do not somehow venture the arrogance that I may deserve to be enlightened, if I do not vow to seek *satori*, then I will not inaugurate the practices that direct me towards *satori*.

However, the very ego that desires to acquire *satori* is the very ego that blocks access to *satori*. Does not the second of the four noble truths locate the source of human turmoil and suffering in the unquenchable thirst of desire? Is not desire for the Pure Land an especially grand version of desire's impossible quest for satiation? Is it not the ceaseless cravings of the ego that demand a final transport from its own sufferings? Is not the very desire for heaven paradoxically the symptom of the disease of desire itself? Our desire for heaven is the hell of desire itself.

Hoganbokori is pride in one's trust of the Amida Buddha and is thereby the hope or even the assurance that one can inaugurate one's own liberation (entry into the Pure Land) (PM, 12). The ineluctable aporia or antinomy of *honganbokori* derives from the very desire that initiates the path to *satori*. Desire wants *satori* because it somehow wants to unify itself with the enlightened state, wanting a "unity founded on the principle of identity" (PM, 15). But "since the Buddha is the one who seeks nothing, one falls into self-contradiction if one *desires* directly to become the Buddha. But if one does not seek at all to become the Buddha, one will never be able to awaken one's Buddhahood" (PM, 8).

This antinomy also emerges in the very desire to read well, to initiate a line of understanding between the desiring subject and the text itself. Yet the desire that draws the reader to the text is the desire that obfuscates the reader's access to the text. An enlightened practice of reading in the desire to read well requires that the desire that inaugurates the way of *satori* does not survive as the desire that initiated it. One dies to the text just as much as one dies to oneself, allowing the text, or the pure land, to question one and to transform one into a question. Hence desire somehow has to perish, to die to itself, in order to be reborn as no longer the desire that initiates but as the resurrected and enlightened desire that is wholly otherwise than what it once was.

To consider the Buddha as the one who seeks 'no-thing' means that Buddhahood is inaccessible to those who make it the object of their search, since their efforts drive them in exactly the opposite direction.

Only those who can resign themselves to accepting the total annihilation of all objects of desire as well as all desiring subjectivity – only those whose desire is free of all desire – can face their own death with “naturalness” and be restored to life as one who has died to the world and to self. (PM, 119-120)

In the case of an enlightened practice of reading, then, the desire to embrace the text that initiates the act of reading must die to itself in the very act of reading. The one who has come under the enlightening force of the text is not the one who wanted to or even could understand the text. The two selves, the latter born out of the ashes of the former, stand in discontinuous and, as we shall see, circular relationship to each other. An enlightened reading is a resurrection.

Nowhere is this more evident than in Tanabe’s metanoetic reading of Nietzsche, a thinker whose *Also Sprach Zarathustra* “had been a closed book to me. No matter how many times I tried to read it, I could not understand it. But now it has become one of my favorite books, and this is due, strangely enough, to metanoetics. In the doctrine of the superman, which at first seemed so contrary to my own way of thinking, I found proof of metanoetics and could hardly contain myself for joy” (PM, 115). Tanabe, the Hegel scholar and partisan of Shinran, the lover of Kierkegaard and defender of the interconnectedness of all human beings, indeed, of all sentient beings, the religious thinker who uses words like *metanoesis*, resurrection, and grace, could not, *prima facie*, seem farther away from Nietzsche. “Not without reason, his thought had long been a locked treasure house as far as I was concerned. Now that metanoetics has given me a key, it seems worthwhile to try and open it up and have a look inside” (PM, 102). In fact, Nietzsche would also remain impenetrably obscure to “ordinary, ignorant people like me” (PM, 102) because Tanabe, no matter how much he tried, would never be able, so to speak, to read Nietzsche on his own steam (*jiriki*). He required power from somewhere radically other (*tariki*), wholly otherwise than himself, as if alterity were required for the epiphany of Nietzsche’s legibility. The circular overcoming of *honganbokori* that occluded Nietzsche for Tanabe is the very self-overcoming that Tanabe, resurrected as the one who can read Nietzsche, finds dramatized by the (near) sage or *shengren*⁵ Nietzsche.

⁵ This is a Daoist term, also taken up in the Mahāyāna tradition, to name one whose consciousness transcends the range of even the best lived quotidian life. The *shengren* does not abandon the quotidian, but she or he experiences it in a non-quotidian way.

The godless and heartless, hammer-wielding iconoclast reappears, “beneath the exterior garments,” as having “the heart of a sage overflowing with infinite love” (PM, 113).

In what follows, I would like to “read” Tanabe’s “reading” of Nietzsche, knowing that “reading” itself, certainly at least *my* “reading” of Tanabe’s “reading” of Nietzsche, emerges from the ashes of my own *honganbokori*. In these three circles (my reading, Tanabe, and Nietzsche), or, as we shall see, in these three discontinuous ellipses, Nietzsche emerges as proclaiming the very same circle, what he called the “eternal return of the same” and “self-overcoming” and what Tanabe links to the circular structure of metanoetics, which had already to be in play for it to appear either in a reading of Nietzsche or Tanabe on Nietzsche. The eternal return of the death and resurrection of reading had to be in play for the eternal return to be “read” in Nietzsche as well as Tanabe.

II

The above discussion of enlightened practices of reading requires the reciprocal play of death and resurrection. “It would not be going too far to say that the only way for old fools like me to become disciples of Nietzsche is to walk the way of metanoetics” (PM, 115). To read Nietzsche, indeed to read at all, even to think at all, one must first die to oneself. It is this mood of death and collapse, of the shipwreck of a life built exclusively upon the delusion that one lives by one’s own means, of the moon becoming visible only after the house has burnt down, that opens Tanabe’s own text written in the final months of the Second World War. “In my case, metanoesis was aroused because I had been driven to the limits of my philosophical position as I confronted the desperate straits into which my country had fallen” (PM, liv). Writing in a Japan on the brink of ruin brought the failure of Tanabe’s own thinking into dramatic relief. What could one say? What words were adequate? In a way, Hegel was not just to die at the gates of Auschwitz, but amidst the unfathomable heat and black rain of Hiroshima and Nagasaki as well as the dark specter of Imperial Japan’s quest for domination of Asia.

Yet Tanabe does not mourn his own lamentable fate, as if the erstwhile honor of philosophy were being sullied by its internecine con-

text. Surely, Tanabe was not working in the war factories, or championing the cause of Japanese imperialism. Yet he proclaims first and foremost his own guilt, his own failings, and announces with great repentance the scales which ineluctably obscured his own philosophical vision as if he were Oedipus, who, in an act of auto-enucleation, repented for an act for which he could not be reasonably held responsible. Like Oedipus, who did not denounce the Gods or life itself, who *prima facie* seem like worthier and more reasonable culprits, Tanabe, an exhausted Kyoto professor of philosophy recovering in the mountains and retreating from the quite reasonable fear that Kyoto would be destroyed (and, as one might remember, Kyoto was one of the early candidates for the atom bomb), holds himself first and foremost responsible. Tanabe was not an architect of a New World Order. He had, as his tombstone proclaimed, searched for “truth, and it alone” (PM, vii). Yet Tanabe hastened not to disguise his own guilt – and thereby preserve his own ego – in the more deplorable actions of others.

Such repentance reminds me here of Levinas’ partiality to Dostoyevsky’s insistence (in the voice of Alyosha Karamazov in *The Brothers Karamazov*) that “we are all responsible for everyone else – but I am more responsible than all the others.” I do not hide my ego behind the failings of others. “Of course, I despise the shamelessness of the leaders primarily responsible for the defeat who are now urging the entire nation to repentance only in order to conceal their own complicity. Metanoesis is not something to be urged on others before one has performed it on oneself” (PM, lx). Metanoesis, the circle of repentance that leads, in the loss of the self, to conversion, to the rebirth of a new self, is the way or *Dao*⁶ of *zange*, that is, *zangedō*. (Metanoesis, derived from the Pauline writings, names both repentance and conversion. I repent because I converted but I could not have converted had I not repented.) It is a circular way of death that gives rise to new birth, which gives rise to death, which gives rise to new birth.

⁶ *Dao* is the groundless ground of beings, the hidden mother of all things. It is not a tacit substratum of things, a secret ground. The *way* of things is not the *method* of things. *Dō* is the Japanese reading of the Chinese character *Dao* and is also used in compounds that name many of the arts whose circular and ungrounded development cannot be reduced into the linearity of a method or a task. *Shodō*, the way of writing (calligraphy), *chadō* (the way of tea), *kendō* (the way of the double-edged sword), *bushidō* (the way of the samurai), etc., are not crafts in the sense of a *technē*, where one methodically moves towards a goal held in advance.

Tanabe repents that *his*, or any philosophy, could ever hope to have done enough, even though, as the *honganbokori* of philosophy announces itself, this failure can only be born of the necessity for philosophy to want always to do its utmost and act as if it could finally say enough. Furthermore, this is identical to the problematic of the way of *metanoesis* or *zangedō*. If I succeed in repenting for the very finitude that has already betrayed the absolute nothingness of the Pure Land, then I affirm the very thing that continues to block utter difference (pure nothingness), namely the ego that has succeeded in repenting. *Honganbokori* is the ineluctable conceit of the ego that expects to be rewarded in the Pure Land, or simply to have articulated the Good and remunerated the debt incurred by the demand that we act always as if we could have acted on behalf of the Good without being able to know altogether what this would have looked like. It is somehow to act as if one should have succeeded, knowing also that of necessity one has already failed. “I feel especially obliged to share in the corporate responsibility for irrationalities like the injustice and prejudice evident in our country. I feel responsible for all of the evils and errors committed by others, and in so doing find that the actual inability of my philosophy to cope with them compels me to a confession of despair over my philosophical incompetence” (PM, 26).

Tanabe’s solution to the problem of *honganbokori* is the circular structure of *upāya* (“skillful means”). This is a classic term in the Buddhist tradition that names the capacity to speak in the language of prevailing discourses. That is to say, in speaking not in my terms, but in terms that are not my own, I attempt to say what is true in a language that is, in itself, not true. I try to tell true lies. I attempt to speak the truth in the language of the false. I do not lose the true in the false nor do I assume that the false is the true per se. *Upāya* is the true *as* the false and the false *as* the true. This *as* or *qua* is a critical term for the whole Kyoto School and is carefully and critically deployed by Tanabe. *As* or *qua* or *sive* translates the Sino-Japanese copula *soku*, which, for Tanabe, as we shall see, names a pivot around which opposites progressively turn without a Hegelian resolution or mediation (*Aufhebung*).⁷ Discussing this term in relationship to Nishida’s famous

⁷ Takeuchi notes that *soku* “functions as a sort of pivot around which two terms revolve and interchange with each other as mutually defining elements in a single dynamic” (PM, 297). Jan van Bragt, in his introduction to Nishitani’s *Religion and Nothingness*, explains that he translates *soku* as *sive*, evoking Spinoza (e.g., *Deus sive natura*). Put between two contradictory concepts (for instance in the formula, ‘empti-

articulation of the absolutely contradictory identity of being, James Heisig notes that Nishida, in refusing “self-identity” as “A is A,” was not therefore affirming the inverse, namely “A is not A.” (The denial of the principle of identity, in relying upon negation, paradoxically affirms what it seeks to deny.) Nishida, as well as Tanabe, was rather saying “A *soku* not A,” which is something more like “A-*in*-not-A is A.” What is otherwise than A within A is also A, but in a way opposite to the way that A is A. “The copulative – in – translates a Chinese character of notorious ambiguity (usually pronounced *soku* in Japanese). Its meanings include ‘i.e.,’ ‘at the same time,’ ‘and also,’ ‘or,’ ‘forthwith,’ and ‘as such.’ The common ingredient is the connecting of two items or attributes, the second of which is attached to the first as a matter of course” (PN, 65). For Nishida and Tanabe, one could say then “that ‘A transforms B and B transforms A’ in virtue of ‘something common to both’” (PN, 66).

Hence, the “not A” or “B” that volatilizes every A is, to use Schelling’s term, a “barbarian principle” and an “irreducible remainder [*nie aufgehender Rest*]” that operates more like Plato and Schelling’s $\mu\eta\ \acute{o}\nu$, which is not to be confused with $\text{o}\upsilon\kappa\ \text{o}\nu$, the mere negation of being. The $\text{o}\upsilon\kappa$ merely marks the dismissal of A as not being the case. The $\mu\eta\ \acute{o}\nu$, however, does not negate A and, in fact, Schelling endeavored to do something that for the Kyoto School goes back at least as far as Nāgārjuna, namely to think without negation and thereby without discrete identities.⁸ The $\mu\eta\ \acute{o}\nu$ names that which opposes A within A and hence cannot

ness-*sive*-form, form-*sive*-emptiness’), it is meant to draw off the total reality of the two poles into itself as their constitutive and ontologically prior unity.” *Religion and Nothingness* (University of California Press: Berkeley, 1982), xxx.

⁸ Nishida also deployed this term in his final and breathtaking essay, “Nothingness and the Religious Worldview” (1945). “Buddhism expresses this paradox through the dialectic of ‘is’ and ‘is not’ (*soku hi*). I am indebted to Suzuki Daisetsu for showing me the following passage in the *Diamond Sutra*: Because all dharmas are not all dharmas. Therefore they are called all dharmas. Because there is no Buddha, there is Buddha; because there are no sentient beings, there are sentient beings.” *Last Writings: Nothingness and the Religious Worldview*, trans. David A. Dilworth (University of Hawaii Press: Honolulu, 1987), 70. Nishida also traces this to Nāgārjuna, whose “eightfold negation denies every possibility of objective predication,” but which does not result “in a dialectic of substance that becomes subject in the Hegelian sense” (71). In this last essay, Nishida also embraces Shinran and *zangedō*. “There can be no religion of self-power [*jiriki*]” (80). Religious repentance “must be an abandoning of the self in its existential depths—a feeling of shame concerning the very existence of the self” (77). Towards the end, Nishida and Tanabe seem very close, although some critical nuances separate the two projects. For an account of this, see Nishitani Keiji, *Nishida Kitarō* (University of California Press: Berkeley, 1991), esp. 161-191

in any way be assimilated by A but which nonetheless belongs to A. “A” and “not A” are more like contraries that belong to the deeper life of a unity. In the Kyoto School, as well as with Schelling, we find then something like what William Blake in *Jerusalem* attempted to activate in his own thinking, namely, thinking without negation but rather with the progression of contraries. “Negations are not Contraries! Contraries mutually Exist: But Negations Exist Not: Exceptions & Objections & Beliefs Exist not: nor shall they ever be organized for ever & ever: If thou separate from me, thou art a Negation.”⁹ In this way Tanabe and Schelling – and even Nietzsche – endeavored to think the progression without the resolution of contraries, for self-identity does not mark a discrete identity derived through negation. In this way, Deleuze was right to defend Schelling as a thinker of non-negating difference.

How unjust, in this respect, is Hegel’s critical remark about the black cows! Of these two philosophers, it is Schelling who brings difference out of the night of the Identical, and with finer, more varied and more terrifying flashes than those of contradiction: with *progressivity*. Anger and love are powers of the Idea which develop on the basis of a μη ὄν - in other words, not from a negative or a non-being [οὐκ οὐν] but from a problematic being or non-existent, a being implicit in those existences beyond the ground.¹⁰

Tanabe was much closer to the Schelling that emerged after the appearance of Hegel’s *Phenomenology* (1807). For Schelling, the progression of opposites does not admit of any kind of closure or mediation and continuously demands that the terms perish absolutely to each other and not forgo their opposition. Only in the love that is the affirmation of the *soku* (without having first demanded the resolution of opposites) is there the discontinuous progression of thinking. “It is therefore through the Other-power [*tarikiki*] of love, not through the self-power [*jiriki*] of reason, that ethics achieves fulfillment as an ethics of *gensō*. In this sense, Schelling’s logic of conversion and transformation

⁹ William Blake, *Jerusalem*, ed. Morton D. Paley (The Tate Gallery: London, 1991), 156 (plate 17).

¹⁰ Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* (1968), trans. Paul Patton (Columbia University Press: New York, 1994), 190-191. Hence cited as a parenthetical note in the text as DR.

accords with what I have described above as metanoetics, and I can agree with it completely” (PM, 139).¹¹

Upāya in this respect is the movement of contraries by which one says the true by way of the false and simultaneously repents for having ineluctably betrayed the true in the false. This is not an avoidable mistake. It is the condition for the possibility of speaking at all and hence conversion’s constant circulation with repentance. In *upāya* one gains oneself by constantly dying to oneself – becoming utterly a question to oneself - in the *soku* circulation of metanoesis. One sacrifices one’s own power (or *jiriki*) and is resurrected as Other-power, as the gift or grace of *tariki*.¹² “It is no longer I who pursue philosophy, but rather *zange* that thinks through me” (PM, 1). But since *upāya*, the becoming the proxy of Other-power (*tariki*) or absolute difference, is still *jiriki soku tariki*, the self is both grateful to have become the gift of *tariki*, yet repentant that every reception of the radical Other’s gift is also a betrayal of its absolute alterity. Hence, every grateful reception of the gift is also an acknowledgement of the radical finitude of the recipient and thereby a new occasion for *zange* or repentance. In every minute, the way of *zange* is both repentance for the betrayal of the Pure Land and grateful acknowledgement of the ongoing gift of the Pure Land, its (to use Tanabe’s adaptation of Daoist language) “action of non-action,” or “effortless naturalness,” or “action without an acting subject.” Thus, in every minute, seen from *zangedō*, there is a circle of repentance and conversion, of death and resurrection. The death in every minute is what Shinran called *ōsō*, the expulsion, the way to the Pure Land (absolute alterity, the nothing, the Great Death), living *sub specie mortis* (PM, 127). Resurrection is the gift of *tariki* or Other-power and hence is *gensō*, the return from the Pure Land in order to aid others and to

¹¹ This is not to say that Tanabe is completely in accord with Schelling. Tanabe found Schelling’s account of love (as the pivot of the circular progression of thinking) to be too abstract. “In this sense, we may say that Schelling’s thought stops at a *metaphysics* of love without arriving at a *religious witness* to love” (PM, 142).

¹² Tanabe alludes, as did Nishida in his final essay (“Nothingness and the Religious Worldview”), to a conflict between the common perception of the Zen tradition, which seemed to praise one’s capacity to achieve one’s power on one’s own (*jiriki*) and the True Pure Land sect, which seemed to praise the need for the grace of Other-power (*tariki*). Yet as both Nishida and Tanabe saw very clearly, there is no *jiriki* without *tariki* and no *tariki* without *jiriki*. Both express contrary aspects of a prior ontological unity. I have no power all by myself for my very self is the Other as myself. Yet if the Other is simply the Other, then the Other is not a matter of *my* responsibility, *my* witness, the locality that is the *my* of affirmation itself.

engage the new moment compassionately. *Zangedō* is the eternal revolving circle of *ōsō* and *gensō*, of departure and return, of eviction and reunion, of death and rebirth, as the autoproductive circle of difference.

Upāya is the capacity to use the opposite of oneself to express oneself. It was typically used to describe the capacity of Buddhist monks to find ways or “skillful means” to express difficult thoughts in ways that the unenlightened could hear. That is, they had to speak the truth in the language of their acolyte’s wrong views and deluded ideas. For Tanabe, the Pure Land always speaks in the language of the impure land, silence always speaks in language, the infinite always expresses itself as the creaturely, the Dao births itself as the ten thousand, and the absolute future always ironically displaces itself as the present. The absolute uses the “skillful means” of the finite to express itself and enlightenment, responding to the ineluctable *upāya* of absolute nothingness, accepts both the gift and repents for its betrayal of absolute nothingness. It “is the world of mediation through which such a reciprocal transformation enables relative beings to move toward nothingness and to return to the world to serve as a means of enlightenment and salvation for others” (PM, 22).

The self, then, is a kind of pivot, the *soku*, around which opposing forces turn. The *soku* is the copula around which opposites circulate elliptically, much in the same way that the *Zuangzi* (*Chuang Tzu*) speaks of the Pivot of the Dao.¹³ The self is *upāya*, the skillful means of nothingness to express itself as something and for the ongoing satoric realization that something is fundamentally an expression of nothing. “The relative self, then, as being that serves as the medium – or means (*upāya*) – of absolute nothingness and yet remains opposed to nothingness, contains within itself the relative independence of being independent of the absolute” (PM, 22). But for the pivot really to turn, its center really must die to itself, as the Great Doubt expresses itself as the Great Death. “No one can live a genuine life except through death. Living in death, acting as one who has died, becomes the way to true life” (PM, 163). As Zen Master Bu-nan advocated, “while alive be a dead man.”

¹³ In the second of the Inner Chapters (“All Things Being Equal”), the *Chuang Tzu* (*Zuangzi*) argues that “When even This and That have lost all sense of themselves, we call it the Pivot of the Tao, and when the pivot is born into the middle of the great circle, it serves without end.” *The Essential Chuang Tzu*, trans. Sam Hamill and J. P. Seaton (Shambhala Publications: Boston, 1998), 11.

In a remarkable reading, a reading that demanded the Great Death inherent within the enlightened or metanoetic practice of reading, Tanabe links the circle of *zangedō* (*jiriki soku tariki* and *tariki soku jiriki*) to Nietzsche's self-turning circle of the eternal return of the same. Despite being unable to understand *Zarathustra* for years and having written him off as a fad of the Japanese youth, Tanabe returned during the height of the war to read Nietzsche and found him to be the exact opposite of what he had thought earlier. Nietzsche's circle of absolute affirmation in a crucial respect expresses Tanabe's circle of absolute renunciation. Even though Nietzsche seems to enter the circle from the opposite side than does Tanabe (affirmation rather than renunciation), he too affirms the circle (albeit as a near "sage"¹⁴ and hence in a way not accessible to "old fools" like Tanabe). Both circles overcome the ego that would produce its own difference (*honganbokori* solved by Nietzschean self-overcoming). "In this sense the structure of metanoesis is one of infinite spiral process. It is, so to speak, an 'eternal returning' (Nietzsche's *ewige Wiederkunft*) in the true sense of the term, namely a genuine 'repetition' through the power of the transcendent, and is therefore the fulfillment of the movement by eternity" (PM, 5-6).

If one translates the eternal return into the language of *karma*, in which the past exacts a vice grip on the present, relegating the present moment reactive, to the gnashing teeth of the "it was" in the *ressentiment* to a present it cannot affirm, the circular *satori* of the eternal return can be heard in another register. According to the Buddhist notion of *karma*, which sees karmic links of the past as reaching back to an infinite past, there is no escape from *karma*: each present moment is ordained by the *karma* of the past" (PM, 111). In response, the eternal

¹⁴ "Although fundamentally a sage, Nietzsche was not without his imperfections, a finite historical individual forever denied the fullness of his sagehood. We would do better to say that he was not an actual sage but only a potential one. The way of Zen, which seeks to awaken people to the Buddha nature latent within them, is close to the thought of Zarathustra here in its teaching of the will to power" (PM, 113). Nietzsche, who reminds Tanabe of the "Buddhist bodhisattva-ideal" (PM, 113), speaks to the circular structure of this ideal. The sage is not an identitarian state that, once achieved, endeavors, like the *conatus*, to preserve itself. The sage is always born anew, always dies anew, is always on the way to a boundless love for all sentient beings, but, as something finite, always a living, metanoetic contradiction: a finite being loving infinitely. The very force of infinity (= the force of death) demands that the finitude of mortal love always die anew. The boundless love for all sentient beings is always *soku* the fallenness and location and karmic, historical constraint of one's location.

return does not ask the present moment to be otherwise than it is, that is, it does not react against the karmic necessity of time. *Amor fati* loves the moment – each discontinuous moment – without asking that it be like the moment before. It loves the moment καθ' αυτο, in itself, without asking that it be for me. As Nietzsche proclaims of the eternal return in Zarathustra, “So das ist das Leben? Wohlan! Noch einmal!” So that is life? Well then! Once more! This affirmation of each moment as the proxy of life is also therefore the renunciation of any moment as adequate to life in itself. The affirmation of eternity in each moment is done anew in every moment as the present moment dies to the past moment. *Karma* is not a continuous hold of the past on the present. It is the karmic spell of the past as the residue that threatens to take away the novelty of each new moment. Affirmation *soku* renunciation, to coin a phrase, renounces the now to preserve in affirmation the discontinuity of all nows.

In slave morality, as karmic pressure “reaches its peak, the wheels of time grind to a halt and finally cease to turn. Life passes into a state of stagnation and suffocation” (PM, 111). *Karma* asphyxiates the self-turning wheel of the child. “But if life, faced with this outermost limit, can move beyond itself, abandon itself, and accept death, the time of the present, which has stopped, will be transfigured into the fullness of a moment possessed of the weight of infinity. Here is the manifestation of infinity transcending life and death” (PM, 111). It is the manifestation, following Dōgen (1200-1253) of the moon in the dewdrop, of the metanoetic circulation of an absolute future in the dewdrop of karmic constriction. The eternal return is thinking, dying to itself, in order to be itself, such that the very copula (the *be*), expresses the eternal circulation of *honganbokori* and redemption, of gift and betrayal, of karma and the *amor fati* that preserves the alterity and discontinuity of each moment. The eternal return is itself, like time, by continuously overcoming itself. What then is the *Übermensch* but a sage (PM, 101), a site of the pure love of the time of the other, an egoless affirmation of the eternal return as the love of the Pure Land of absolute difference (the *ōsō* of the way of death in every moment) in intimate circulation with the *gensō* or return to the world? This circulation has no ego, no center around which the circulation extends itself with variable circumferences.

To adopt the precision of a geometrical metaphor, the circularity we are speaking of here may be likened to a series of ellipses, each of

which enjoys its own variable eccentricity, unlike the repetition of concentric circles drawn one on top of another. Just as it is impossible to determine the enveloping curve that embraces the whole series of ellipses like a universal concept, so, too, the ‘universal now’ is not an integral locus to be grasped by intuition but something infinite to be realized only through one’s action. That is, the unity of time in the present is not a static, self-enclosed unity, but a dynamic, open unity that holds within itself a contradiction of opposites: a return *soku* departure. (PM, 132)

The metanoetic pivot, the eternal return of the same (thought variously as either renunciation *soku* affirmation or affirmation *soku* renunciation or, to use Nietzschean terminology transfigured into the life of ellipses, hammer *soku* philosophizing with a tuning fork) is not a repetition of a self-same operation. This was the failure of the Hegelian dialectic, namely, that it refused to die of its own antinomies.¹⁵ Rather it is repetition, to borrow a phrase from Deleuze, as “the differentiator of difference,”¹⁶ of difference repeating itself as difference, as the repetition of itself as the self-displacement of itself, of a discontinuous flow of circular movements (the spinning pivot of the *soku* of death and resurrection) that do not emanate from a shared center. The spinning pivot of *soku* does not retain its center in time. Rather, time is the resurrection of new centers out of the Great Death of former centers. There is no integral locus by which to center thinking in order to pre-

¹⁵ “In spite of that, Hegel holds firm to the self-identity of reason, confuses it with the unity of the transcendent action-faith of religion through the transformation of nothingness in absolute critique, and clings throughout to a logic based on self-power in line with his efforts to establish a system similar to Greek ontology” (PM, 55). It is in this sense that Adorno, in his *Negative Dialectics*, once described the Hegelian dialectic as the “belly gone mad.” Tanabe here also locates the elliptical progression of thinking in the philosophy of Schelling and his critique of Hegel. “The synthesis of the present in history cannot take the form of concentric circles drawn about a single focus because the congruence between the past and the future is one of analogical similarity and can only yield a whole of partially similar circularities: the two centers, or twofold essence, are unified without weakening the opposition between them. This is also the internal, dual structure of freedom, whose unity is a personal unity of love, not a synthesis of identity based on reason. This sets Schelling’s thought apart from rational philosophies built on the principle of identity” (PM, 135).

¹⁶ Vide Deleuze, DR. “Given two heterogeneous series, two series of differences, the precursor plays the part of the differentiator of these differences” (DR, 119) “It is the in-itself of difference or the ‘differently different’ - in other words, difference in the second degree, the self-different which relates different to different by itself” (DR, 119). It “perpetually displaces itself within itself and perpetually disguises itself in the series” (DR, 120).

vent it from dying of its own antinomies. Thinking cannot orient itself to its own activity, but rather is itself discontinuously amidst the self-displacing pivot, giving birth to itself anew, and in its gratitude for the gift of each new moment, for the gift even of reading, knows nothing of hoarding, only the Great Compassion (*Mahākuranā*) born in each moment of the Great Death.

In this sense, the Kyoto Nietzsche, the Nietzsche re-engendered in accordance with the allowed by the generosity of his experience of thinking, returns as the Zarathustra written “for everybody and for nobody.” In this era in which we constantly seek the *new* Nietzsche, the Kyoto Nietzsche teaches us that Nietzsche can only be Nietzsche in ever being Nietzsche *anew*. As Nietzsche already knew about himself, there is no *pure* Nietzsche. Yet the impurity of thought *soku* the eternal regeneration of thought is a Nietzsche who returns to us with a new opening. New places and new voices allow Nietzsche to rescue the Buddhist tradition from the narcissism of the New Age Movement (which ironically operates in perpetual flight from the *renewal* of thinking) and bring it to bear on the generosity and generativity of thinking and on the very real problems that Nietzsche rightly insisted belonged to our time.