

Helping Western Readers Understand Japanese Philosophy

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I am currently writing a history of Japanese philosophy as well as co-editing with James Heisig and John Maraldo a sourcebook of readings. There are two challenges in writing for a Western audience about the history of Japanese philosophy. One challenge is figuring out what the major Japanese thinkers throughout history were up to, what they were intending to accomplish. This presupposes an *Einfühlung* or empathy for Japanese thinking. That does not come easily to a person weaned on the forms of thought dominant in the modern Western intellectual tradition. To be a scholar of the history of Japanese philosophy is to immerse oneself for years in Japanese culture and its texts. The challenge is especially difficult if one hopes to treat Japanese philosophy from different historical periods and traditions. Once you have achieved this empathic understanding, you can write about Japanese philosophy for other Japanologists, adapting your explanation only slightly whether those Japanologists are from the West or from Japan.

For my purposes, however, that is not enough. I would like Western readers, even those with no Japanological background, to be able to access the Japanese texts in which I am interested. Translations are, of course, necessary. There are some who claim that you can never under-

stand philosophers unless you read their works in the original language. Although there is some truth to this position, in the end, I disagree. Translations can indeed create an interest in a philosopher and even lead to critical readings of that philosopher. What would have been the impact of Kierkegaard if only those philosophers who could read Danish were allowed to read him or use his ideas critically? Yet, reading a translation of Kūkai or Dōgen is not like reading a translation of Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard was part of the European philosophical tradition and he had read many of the same philosophical works as his audience in English, German, French, Spanish, or Italian translation would likely have read. Kierkegaard shared with his most of his readers in European languages some background in the Judeo-Christian, Greco-Roman worldview. Kūkai or Dōgen, by contrast, shared in a worldview with roots in China, Korea, and India, not Jerusalem, Rome, or Athens. So, the cases are not exactly similar. With modern Japanese philosophers, the difference is not quite as daunting because most major modern Japanese philosophers knew the Western philosophical tradition and many studied at some point in Western universities. This is one reason so much attention in the West has focused on modern rather than premodern Japanese philosophy: the gap between the Japanese and Western context is not as great. A problem here, however, is that most modern Japanese philosophers were still Japanese and they grew up in an intellectual context that had more in common with Kūkai, Dōgen, Shinran, Razan, Sorai, and Norinaga than Plato, Thomas Aquinas, Descartes, Hume, Kant, or Hegel. Therefore, we should take care not to treat modern Japanese philosophy as an Asian outpost, an academic *betsuin* 別院 of the Western intellectual tradition. Even in studying modern Japanese philosophers, we would always do well to keep earlier Japanese philosophical thinking in the backdrop. Therefore, even if we focus on modern Japanese philosophy, we must not lose sight of its premodern Japanese heritage.

If we are to engage Japanese philosophy from *any* period, therefore, we must address the problem directly: how should we supplement translation in order to bridge the gap between the Western philosophical reader and the original Japanese thought? There are two things we can do. First, whenever we try to understand philosophers from any tradition, we need to pay close attention to the questions they are trying to answer. It is easy

to make the error of asking *our* questions of a philosopher from another tradition or time. For example, in his doctrine of *shinjin ichinyo* 心身一如, the oneness of mind/body, Dōgen was not addressing Cartesian dualism anymore than Aristotle was in his theory of the inseparability of formal and material cause. To understand Dōgen's philosophy, we must at least start with the issues that his philosophy was addressing such as whether praxis is the cause of enlightenment and whether one becomes a buddha through mind or body or both. As philosophers, we learn best from our predecessors, regardless of their time and place, if we begin by seeing what their questions were and how well their philosophies answered those questions. Only then should we ask whether that study helps us with our questions in our time and place. In presenting Japanese philosophy to Western readers, therefore, we should embed our discussion—at least minimally—in Japanese intellectual history and perhaps also in the intellectual biography of the thinker we are studying. I suspect this claim is uncontroversial, at least for the readers of a volume like this, but again, I do not think that approach goes far enough. We need to do still more to bridge that gap between Japanese and Western philosophy.

For the past thirty-five years, I have been trying to persuade a Western audience to take Japanese philosophical thinking seriously as philosophy, not just as area studies. In those encounters, I have found that the more the audience has professional training in Western philosophy, the more difficult it is for it to bridge the cultural and intellectual gap to which I am referring. In other words, Western philosophers have unusual difficulty in engaging Japanese thought philosophically. At one time, the philosopher in the West displayed a certain temperament, a critical bent of mind, that inquired into the rational basis of thought and value in whatever form it might arise. Plato and Aristotle, Athenians to the core, would not consider ignoring the thought of the Milesians in Asia Minor, any more than Thomas Aquinas would ignore the Arab and Jewish theology of his time. Leibniz studied Chinese Neo-Confucianism to help clarify his own ideas of pre-established harmony whereas Hegel, Schopenhauer, and Emerson would not think of excluding the ideas from India brought to Europe through the translations by missionaries and scholars. In the past century or two, however, to secure its place in the university, philosophy has become an academic *Wissenschaft*. As such, it

has developed its own “scientific” principles for both its starting point and methodology. Like every other *Wissenschaft*, it maintains that its principles are the right ones for getting at the truth it seeks. When the basic principles in Japanese philosophy—both foundational and methodological—do not mesh well with those of the Western philosophical reader, that reader becomes increasingly frustrated that the Japanese philosopher will not answer, indeed will not even see, the question most obvious to the reader, the question that reader will consider to be the *real* philosophical issue.

Therefore, I propose we need at least a basic articulation of common assumptions and motifs that run throughout the Japanese tradition as general tendencies in its philosophical thinking. This project delights the snipers who are on a search-and-destroy mission targeting any theory of *nihonjinron* or *nihonshugi* or “Japanese national character.” They now have me squarely in the crosshairs of their rifle’s scopes. I am seeking to articulate, they say, an “essence” to Japanese thinking, something that accounts for Japanese “uniqueness.” I am aiding and abetting, they would claim, the Japanese ethnocentrists and militarists. The rifles of their criticism may seem well aimed, but they are loaded with blanks. They make a lot of noise, but do not hit their intended target. The reason their criticisms are ineffectual is because they make two errors in thinking. First, they confuse a generalization with a universalization. I am not making a universal claim: I am not saying *all* Japanese thinkers share the same assumptions, nor that they all share the same methods in their philosophy. I am only generalizing: most Japanese thinkers most of the time show evidence that they share these principles. A counterexample does not refute a generalization; only a better generalization can do that. Further, I am not making any claim to Japanese uniqueness. We can find many principles and paradigms I outline for Japanese philosophy to be in various Western philosophers as well. I am not asserting there is something singular in Japanese thought. Yet, it is generally true that most Western philosophers, especially those of the last two or three centuries, do not share many of these Japanese assumptions, methods of analysis, and forms of argument.

The other error the snipers on the attack against *nihonjinron* make is to confuse a functional pattern with an essence. If you typically use a PC

computer and suddenly you have to use a Mac computer for a word-processing task, you need to adjust your typing to fit the new keyboard. For example, you may need to use the “Apple” key where you had been using a “Ctrl” or “Alt” key on your PC. It is inappropriate to keep looking for the “Alt” key on the Mac or to rail against the inferiority of the Mac because it is “so primitive it does not have an Alt key.” The Mac can be as at least as effective in word processing as the PC, but you have to understand how the function keys work a little differently. Analogously, to engage Japanese philosophy as philosophy, the Western philosopher needs to orient oneself to a different keyboard and different operating system. Although the systems are different, if you know how they work, you can do most of the same tasks on either. In other words, my explanation of general principles in Japanese philosophy has a heuristic and pragmatic purpose rather than putting forward any essentialist claim about Japanese uniqueness. I am merely explaining how some function keys work in Japanese philosophy, especially those not used in most modern Western philosophies.

With those prefatory remarks behind us, let us now consider some of the different functions that are what we will call the “default settings” in Japanese philosophy.

RELATIONS AS INTERNAL RATHER THAN EXTERNAL

If I say “*a* and *b* are related,” the paradigm of external relations assumes that *a* and *b* can exist independently (each with its own integrity), but since there is a relation between them, some third factor *R* bridges or connects the two. By contrast, the paradigm of internal relations assumes that if I say “*a* and *b* are related,” I mean that *a* and *b* are intrinsically interlinked or overlapping, and that the *R* is the shared part of *a* and *b*. This subtle difference profoundly influences how philosophy in each orientation proceeds. In both Western and Japanese philosophies, we can find thinkers and texts who use both paradigms of relationality, but there is what we can call the “default setting” in each tradition. A philosophical tradition’s default setting is, like the default settings in a computer program, not something absolute or unchange-

able. It is simply what is assumed unless one makes special efforts to override the defaults. Defaults are normally very helpful; they let us get on with the task at hand with a minimum of preliminary preparation. We have all probably had the experience of using a computer not our own to run a program we know well. If we encounter different default settings on the unfamiliar computer, we are puzzled and perhaps even annoyed. In the same way, if our modern Western philosophical tradition tends to make external relations the default, whereas most Japanese philosophers throughout history have tended to make internal relations the default, we can experience frustrating difficulties in our attempt to think through Japanese philosophical positions.

Consider, for example, the relation between knower and known. If that relation is one of integrity, the philosopher will assume that the subject (the knower) and the object (the known) exist independently and that they become connected through the creation of a third item, the relation called “knowledge.” Various theories will arise to explain what makes the knowledge “true.” For example, some philosophers claim that knowledge occurs when the representations or concepts in the mind of the knower correspond with the state of affairs in the known. That is the basic “correspondence theory of knowledge” and its history in the West goes all the way back at least to Aristotle.

Now consider what happens when we make internal, rather than external, relations the default model for the relation between knower and known. In that case, knowledge represents not what connects the *independently* existing knower and known, but instead, knowledge is found in the overlap, the *interdependence* between knower and known. The more expansive the knowledge, the greater the overlap and the more inseparable knower and known become. The ideal would be the point in which there is complete interpenetration between knower and reality such that there is “no obstruction” (*muge* 無礙) to separate the mindful heart (*kokoro* 心、意) and the reality that is known. It would be, indeed, reality knowing itself, the basic principle of what is sometimes called the “mindful heart of oneness” (*isshin* 一心). The knowledge lies, then, not in reference or correspondence, but rather in *conference* or mutual interpenetration. It is a model of knowledge that stresses not observation and analysis, but instead engagement and praxis. Whereas

a model of knowledge emphasizing external relations involves *making a connection between knower and known*, a model emphasizing internal relations involves *ceasing the false separation of knower from known*. There are three corollaries to this emphasis on internal relations.

Inseparability of Body and Mind

A most relevant corollary to the stress on knowledge as an internal relation is that the knower is the whole person, not just the mind. After all, the default position would assume that mind and body themselves would be internally, not externally, related. Consequently, knowledge is intrinsically a somatic as well as intellectual event. It involves not merely thinking, but also bodymind praxis. If knowledge engages rather than maps reality, it must involve the engagement of the whole person. As the inclusion of the somatic suggests, the affective also plays a role in engaged knowing. As I will explain later, Japanese terms like *kokoro* emphasize precisely the inseparability in the shared interdependence of knower and known.

Learning as Modeling Oneself after the Praxis of a Master

A second corollary to the default position of knowing as an inherent interdependence of knower and known relates to how knowledge can be taught, that is, what is often called in Japanese philosophy, the issue of transmission. One cannot explain reality in an ordinary discursive manner: that would assume knowledge has its own integrity as the *R* that externally links knower and known. In the default Japanese positions, however, one does not isolate knowledge as some discrete *R* that exists independently of the knower and known or teacher and student. In the Japanese default positions, one does not delineate or outline knowledge for the sake of the student. In that sort of external relational model, it would make sense to think of knowledge as a “lesson plan” that contains the “information” communicated in words and symbols by the teacher for the student. Such a pedagogical model would assume not only an external relation between knower and known, but also an external relation between teacher and student. In the Japanese context, by contrast, because internal relations are strongly stressed, the transmission of the

truth is a process whereby the student assimilates the insight of the master. This pedagogical model assumes that in some respect the teacher and student undertake a praxis together and the student learns by emulating the way the master engages reality. As Dōgen put it in his *Shōbōgenzō*, *Kattō*: “student and master practice together.”

We find this pedagogical model of transmission as a motif that runs through aspects of many traditions in Japan. Kūkai might have been the first philosopher to articulate and expand on this issue through his distinction between the exoteric (*kengyō* 顯教) and esoteric (*mikkyō* 密教). The exoteric assumes a model of teaching and knowledge based in external relations. It assumes a separation between the teacher and the audience, between the intellectual and the somatic, and between the teaching and reality. In contrast, the esoteric emphasizes the mutual immersion of self and reality: one engages reality by modeling oneself after the cosmos-as-buddha in its thought, word, and deed. Through the praxis enacted by the master and emulated by the apprentice, this buddha as reality (*hosshin* 法身) is engaged intimately as one’s own thought, word, and deed. As praxis, it is assimilated in, through, and with this very body (*sokushin jōbutsu* 即身成仏) and its realized as the three intimate functions (*sanmitsu* 三密) of mind, body, and voiced word—the mandala, the mudra, and the mantra. Through the emphasis on *mikkyō* in both Shingon and Tendai, this view of knowledge and pedagogy is an underlying assumption in much of the development of Japanese Buddhist philosophy. For Shinran, enlightenment must be totally separate from figuring things out (*hakarai*) and occurs by entrusting (*shinjin* 信心 through *tariki* 他力) in the working (*gi* 義) of Amida’s Vow so that the distinction between Amida’s function and the self’s function disappears into the auto-agency of the naturalness (*jinen hōni* 自然法爾). In Confucianism, the idea of learning as modeling is expressed in the term *xue* (*gaku* 学—*manabu* as *manebu*) and Sorai emphasized that ethics is no more than modeling oneself after the way of the ancient Chinese sages. The *Shushigaku* emphasis on *ri* as a correlation between the pattern in the mind and the pattern in reality seemed to some Japanese philosophers too intellectual and detached from the somatic. As a result, we find a counter emphasis on either the emotive aspect (as in Jinsai) or on vitalism—expressed as *ki*—in Kaibara Ekken.

Before considering further examples, let us examine a second corollary of making internal relations the default model for connectedness.

The emphasis on how instead of what

The model of a philosophical tradition that places more value on internal than external relations forces us to recast certain philosophical questions and, consequently, the form of their answers as well. The epistemological question becomes not “*what* is knowledge?” but “*how* does knowing occur?” Thus, when thinking about judgment, Nishida focuses not so much in the propositional statements of judgment, but in the *act* of judging itself, how the “acting-intuition” (*kōiteki chokkan* 行為的直義) can in the appropriate “place” (*basho* 場所) become the act of judging either idealistically or empirically. Similarly, the ethical question for many Japanese philosophers becomes not “how does one distinguish the moral from the immoral?” but instead “what kind of distinguishing is moral and what kind is immoral?” Dōgen’s analysis of the maxim “do no evil” (*shoakumakusa* 諸惡莫作) is a good example of this. In his *Shōbōgenzō Shoakumakusa*, his stress falls not on *what* is evil (the *shoaku*) but instead on *how* one can act “without producing” (*makusa*). Likewise, in Japanese poetics the question is more often “how does a good poem come about?” rather than “what are the characteristics of a good poem?”

For example, Fujiwara Teika’s poetics in *Maigetsushō* emphasizes posture and breathing as well as the selection of words and *Shasekishū* speaks of the quieting of the mind as the source of *waka*. And so forth. The common theme here is that philosophy’s task is to investigate the how rather the what. This is the famous Japanese stress on *michi* 道 and its attempts to discuss functions instead of substances. So, for Kūkai, the universe is not ultimately composed of things, but instead is the activities of Dainichi Nyorai. For Dōgen, buddha-nature is not a thing but impermanence, the how-it-is (*immo* 怎麼 or *nyoze* 如是) of the case of presencing (*genjōkōan* 現成公案).

Incidentally, this emphasis on how instead of what calls to mind a commonly misunderstood aspect of an important concept in Japanese Buddhist thought, namely, *hōben* 方便, often translated as “skill-in-means.” There are two common truncated misunderstandings of this term in

Japanese thought, both deriving from using external rather than internal relations as the default starting point. The first is to think of *hōben* as a kind of white lie, a misrepresentation of fact for the sake of some expedient purpose. This assumes that language refers to reality and in this case, misrefers to it by, for example, simplifying it for the sake an audience unable to fathom its subtlety. The assumption in this interpretation is that enlightenment occurs when one understands reality as what is the case about the world external to me. When we switch to the language of enlightenment as engaging rather than knowing about reality, however, the emphasis is on *how* engagement occurs. The primary purpose of *hōben* is not referential but heuristic; it tells you *how* to engage things. It arises from the interplay of audience and reality. The second misunderstanding of *hōben* is to take it as temporary because it gets superseded once one sees reality for how it truly is. When we emphasize its heuristic aspect in describing *how* rather than *what*, however, we can see that it is not a conceptual understanding that gets superseded, but instead a corrective to a habitualized, unskillful way of engaging reality. Thus, rather than being superseded, it gets so integrated into the person, it becomes so second-nature, that it is no longer conscious. In this regard, *hōben* is like the instruction of a sports or music coach. Once one incorporates the corrective into one's performance, one no longer needs to think about it.

Before leaving this discussion of internal relations, we should note that our discussion has focused primarily on issues of knowledge, but epistemology is only one of the subfields of philosophy. The stress on internal instead of external relations runs throughout the other philosophical areas as well. We can represent this contrast diagrammatically as shown in the figures on the facing page.

The contrast is clear when, for instance, a modern Western analytic philosopher and a typical Japanese philosopher try to develop an epistemological, ethical, or aesthetic theory to address some philosophical issue. When they do so, they tend to look for their answer in a different way, following a different paradigm, or perhaps even operating in a different “place” or “field” (*basho* 場所, as Nishida Kitarō called it). Because of that difference, what counts as a suitable answer in each tradition is different in the other. These diagrams will be helpful in exploring our second major recurring motif in Japanese philosophy.

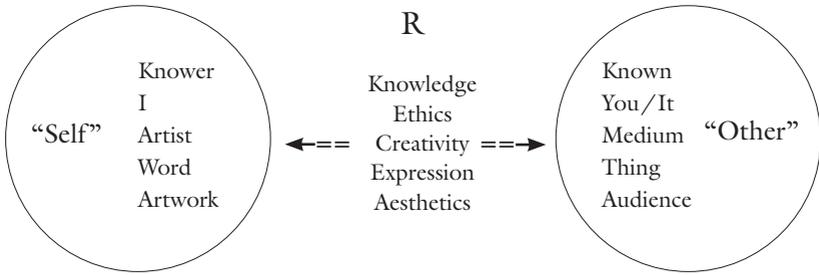


FIGURE 1. Philosophy in the Orientation of Integrity

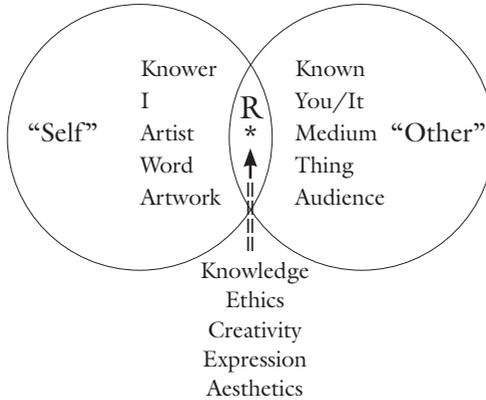


FIGURE 2. Philosophy in the Orientation of Intimacy

THE RELATION OF WHOLE AND PART AS HOLOGRAPHIC

This paradigm contrasts with the principle or assumption that “the parts constitute the whole.” If we are using a model of external relations, we would express this as the “whole consists of its parts and the relations connecting them to each other.” Atomism, for example, makes this assumption and its view of analysis proceeds on its basis. In this paradigm, to understand something, we break it down into its smallest parts, analyze the nature of those parts, and then explain how those discrete parts are linked in external relationships with each other. Thus, a physical

item can be broken down into its atomic components, each analyzed in terms of its composition and the additional chemical bonds linking them together. The holographic model of part and whole is quite different, however.

In the holographic model the whole (holo-) is inscribed (-graph) in each of its parts. So, it is not only the case that the parts are in the whole, but also that the whole is in each of its parts. First of all, we can note that this is only possible if the parts are internally rather than externally related. To see the difference between these two part-whole paradigms, we can consider the difference between a mosaic and a jigsaw puzzle. Suppose a mosaic is completely destroyed and all we have are its pieces, the individual ceramic tiles. Because the individual tiles are, except for color, identical, we can only know how they fit together into the whole mosaic if we have something in addition—a blueprint of where each colored piece goes. Now suppose we have a jigsaw puzzle that has also been reduced to its individual pieces. Even if we have no picture or blueprint, each piece contains, by its unique shape and color, the information about how it fits into the whole. The pieces of the jigsaw each contain the interlap with its appropriate other piece. This is not yet a true holographic relation, however, since each part does not contain the connection with the whole but only to its adjoining pieces. For the fully holographic understanding, we need another analogy, one drawn from biology.

Consider this time a hair from my head. It is certainly only a part of my whole body. If I lost a hair, the rest of my whole body is still intact. Yet, suppose that hair is a piece of evidence from a crime scene. As part of a forensic investigation, that hair is not just a part of me. Because it contains my DNA, it also contains a blueprint for my entire body. In that respect, the whole of my body is inscribed in that one part. The same would be true for a drop of blood. The blood is not the same as the hair, but yet both contain the same blueprint for the whole. Indeed, from the hair you could know my blood type and from the blood the natural color of my hair. This is an example of a holographic relation. The whole not only consists of its parts, each part being in internal relation with others, but also, the whole is in *each* of its parts.

The holographic thinking of whole-in-every-of-its-parts is not a com-

mon model in most Western philosophy, but it has the status of being the default way of thinking in much of Japanese philosophy, especially Buddhist philosophy. Again, we can go back to Kūkai and to esoteric Buddhist thought, in general. The mandala is constructed so that every buddha—by extension every individual thing—is a manifestation of Dainichi Buddha such that every buddha in the mandala or every mantra in the mandala is also really Dainichi. Similarly, in his description of the ten mind-sets (*jūjūshin* 十住心論), Kūkai sets a hierarchy among the ten, but also clearly states that one need not progress through that hierarchy as if they were steps in a ladder. One can go from any mind-set directly into the esoteric, the tenth mind-set, just as the praxis related to any single buddha in the mandala can take you directly into Dainichi. Kakuban made explicit use of this holographic thinking in explaining how Amidist praxis can take one to the most profound depths of insight since Amida is esoterically really Dainichi. The Tendai tradition could find all the three thousands worlds in one thought moment (*sanze ichinen* 三世一念).

Kegon philosophy was probably the most explicit characteristic of the holographic relation of the whole-in-every-of-its-part as well as the interpenetration of all things in internal relation. This is why Kūkai considered the Kegon mind-set to be the most profound of the exoteric schools of thought in his hierarchy of the ten mind-sets. According to him, Kegon falls short only because it lacks esoteric praxis, the means by which one merges with all interpenetrating dharmas as Dainichi Nyorai's functions.

In the Kamakura period, the underlying premise of many Buddhist philosophers was the principle of selection (*senchaku* 選択). If one selected just one practice or just one text and approached it properly, one would achieve the whole of perfect enlightenment. Ironically, the Tendai holographic model found in both its esoteric and exoteric teachings served as a theoretical justification for the Kamakura philosophers to abandon the philosophy of the all-inclusive whole (the Tendai perfect circle or *en* 円) to emphasize the particular. The Kamakura reformers realized that if the whole of Tendai teaching and praxis is contained in each instance, one need only select one teaching, one practice, or one text to get the whole.

Perhaps we can even see the holographic in the background of Nishida's thought. Of course, his emphasis on the concrete universal is clearly indebted to Hegel, but perhaps part of his logic of the relation between the universal and particular also resonated with traditional Japanese Buddhist holographic thinking. For Nishida the universal is not separate from the concrete particular, nor is simply made up of particulars. Rather, the universal is in every of its concrete particulars. We know, furthermore, that Nishida was explicitly fond of Kegon philosophy and the connection, if any, might be found there.

There are two incidental comments that might be helpful to mention here. First, although the holographic model of the whole in every part is strongest among Buddhist thinkers, we should note that there is a kind of holographic thinking in Japanese folk and Shintō practices where a part ritualistically functions for the whole. This is by no means unique to Japan but is found in animistic practices everywhere. In a Voodun doll, for example, one of my hairs can function for me as a whole. What is called "sympathetic magic" sometimes operates along the principle of the holographic relation of whole and part.

This brings us to a second comment about the holographic. With the advent of modern-day discourse theory, there is a tendency to see these relations in Japanese culture as examples of synecdoche or metonyms. This is particularly popular in some discussions of Japanese politics concerning the *kokutai* ideology, for example. The approach of some intellectual historians is to interpret the relation between the emperor and the state to be a one of synecdoche. The problem here is that a metonym or synecdoche is a *figure of speech*, but the holographic relation is *ontological*. I am not speaking metaphorically when I say every cell in my body contains the blueprint for my whole body. Coming from a tradition of theorizing that emphasizes one kind of relation and one kind of whole-part model, Western theorists run the risk of completely misconstruing the function of certain relations as they are understood and used in Japanese philosophical discourse.

Let us turn now to our next principle or paradigm that often serves as a default in Japanese philosophizing, namely, what I call "argument by relegation."

ARGUMENT BY RELEGATION

A popular form of rationally persuasive argument in East Asian thought generally and Japan specifically is what can be called “argument by relegation.” This form of argument deals with opposing positions not by refuting them, but by accepting them as true, but only true of a part of the full picture. That is, rather than denying the opposing position, one compartmentalizes or marginalizes it as part of a more complete point of view; the argument *relegates* rather than rejects.

This is different from argument by refutation, a form of disputation very common in the West and, interestingly, also in India. In this latter form of argument, the purpose is to annihilate the opposing position by showing it to be faulty in either premises or logic. The argument by refutation implicitly accepts the Laws of Excluded Middle and of Noncontradiction. That is, assuming there is no category mistake in the formulation of the position, either p or $\sim p$ must be true and they both cannot be true in the same way at the same time. Therefore, in the refutation form of argumentation, if I can show the opposing position to be false, my position is affirmed. To those deeply steeped in the Western philosophical tradition, arguing in this fashion is so second-nature that it may not seem there is a need for any other way.

Yet, argument by relegation is not without its own advantages. First, there is a logical point behind it. Suppose you and I have philosophic positions that are in fundamental disagreement. If my view of reality is comprehensive, I should be able to account not only for how my position is correct, but also how it is possible for someone to hold your view. Your view, even if it is false in some respect, is nevertheless a *real* point of view and my theory of reality must be able to account for its existence. Whereas an argument by refutation sets out to show an opposing view is ignorant or wrong-headed, an argument by relegation tries instead to show how, given the way reality is, such a partial or wrong-headed view is even possible.

Second, in line with East Asian cultural values about the importance of saving face, an argument by relegation has the appearance of being irenic or conciliatory rather than agonistic or adversarial. If we disagree, in the relegation form of argument, I am not saying you are wrong. Quite the

opposite, I am agreeing that your position is correct but limited. I assert that my position includes yours in some way. Of course, the conciliatory tone is more rhetorical than substantive because if we share the model of argument by relegation, we will indeed be competing over which position can relegate which. Argument by relegation is very common in the Japanese tradition. Kūkai's ten mind-sets includes all other known philosophical positions, non-Buddhist as well as Buddhist. It even includes, and I think this is revealing for this discussion, the lowest level of a mind ruled by "goatish desires," the total lack of spiritual sensitivity. His has a clear rationale for including even this level, namely, if all phenomena are manifestations of Dainichi Nyorai's activity, then even ignorant profligates must be included somewhere in the system. That is, if Dainichi is all of reality, then even goatish desire as a real phenomenon must be explained in Kūkai's philosophical system. In its attempt at comprehensiveness, the Tendai system characterized itself as perfectly embracing or circumscribing (the metaphor of the circle *en* 円) other teachings and practices, even esoteric as well as exoteric. The philosophy of Zhu Xi, developed in Japan as *Shushigaku* 朱子学, relegated the insights of Buddhism, Daoism, and early Confucianism into its more comprehensive system. Nishida and his followers developed the logic of place (*basho noronri* 場所の論理) in a way that the place of absolute nothingness relegated both idealism (to the place of relative nothingness) and empiricism (to the place of being). In other words, Nishida argued the superiority of his philosophy by finding within it places for the other major philosophical systems, but doing so in a way that relegated them to be only partial insights into the whole. In a similar vein, Watsuji's ethics emphasized the emptiness (*kū* 空) of the betweenness (*aidagara* 間柄) that oscillates through negation between the poles of existentialist individualism and Confucian collectivism. His ethical philosophy accepts both individualism and collectivism, but only insofar he relegates them to the margins in his system.

To those familiar with Western philosophy, the building of an ever more inclusive system that relegates—dare we say “sublates” (*aufheben*)—all other philosophical systems smacks of Hegelianism. It seemed that way to many Japanese philosophers as well, especially in the Meiji and Taishō periods. This led to their fascination with Hegelian terminology, includ-

ing the term “dialectics” (*benshōhō* 弁証法). Yet, as the term developed within Japanese philosophy, dialectics came to mean something quite different from Hegel’s notion. This brings us to the final characteristic we will discuss in this essay.

PHILOSOPHY’S GROUND AS THE *IN MEDIAS RES*

The Hegelian dialectic is a progressive movement from one position to its antithesis on to ever more inclusive positions. The ultimate goal is to evolve into a philosophical system that includes all other positions by subsuming them. In a broad sense, and again this helps account for the attractiveness of Hegel to the early generations of modern Japanese philosophy, Hegel’s dialectic transforms opposing positions from being externally related as exclusive opposites into a more integrated, internally related, synthesis of some form. The end result of that Hegelian process seemed familiar to many Japanese thinkers for its internal relations and the relegation of opposing parts into an integrated whole. Yet, the Kyōto School philosophers (and on this point, we can include Watsuji) took the idea of the Hegelian dialectic and reversed its directionality. For many of the Japanese philosophers, the dialectic did not explain where the opposites were going, that toward which they were teleologically evolving. Instead, for them, the dialectic explained from where the opposing positions originated: from what kind of experience, from what kind of logical place, from what ontological ground. Hegel’s was a dialectic of whither; the Kyoto School’s dialectic was one of whence. It is as if for Hegel the problem was how to bring the oppositional concepts into unity, whereas the Japanese philosophers were more often interested in how the original unity became disunited into discrete, mutually exclusive polarities. Put more radically and more provocatively, Hegel uses increasing levels of abstraction to bring the parts into a whole, whereas many Japanese philosophers see abstraction as part of the problem instead of the solution. The process of abstraction makes the interdependent, ontologically inseparable concepts into ontologically discrete polarities. The goal then would be to identify that out of which the abstractions arose and thereby to relegate those abstractions to their appropriate places.

If there were a maxim for this Japanese approach it would be something like: “Do not mistake what is conceptually distinguishable for implying ontological discreteness; do not overlook the concrete or experiential ground out of which the distinguishable concepts were abstracted in the first place.” This maxim, of course, is not at all unique to Japan. Aristotle basically applied it when he criticized Plato for taking reality—informed matter—and then abstracting out the formal from the material, ending up with a two-tiered reality which he struggled to explain how to integrate. Kant saw that pure reason would generate opposing, irreconcilable antinomies that could only be breached when put into the context of praxis and its reasoning.

In any case, in the default Japanese way of thinking we are discussing, the mind-body problem becomes not a problem of explaining how to connect the independently existing mind and body, but rather, of explaining how bodymind comes to be abstracted into body and mind as two opposing substances. (Notice, again, that this shifts the question from a “what” connects to a “how” of interconnection.) This example of the bodymind shows that the tendency of the *in medias res* philosophies is to begin with something between the subsequent poles created by abstraction. We can think of this as a kind of field of experience that is the ground out of which philosophizing with its abstractions emerges. This Japanese interest also accounts for some of modern Japanese philosophers’ fascination with Kant, particular in the move from pure to practical reason.

Quite often, Japanese philosophers think of this field—what precedes the abstraction into opposites—as intrinsically meaningless, but the ground out of which meaning emerges. To characterize that intrinsic meaninglessness, Japanese philosophers emphasize terms like “emptiness” (*kū* 空) or “nothingness” (*mu* 無) or vacuous locutions like “suchness” (*nyoze* 如是 or *immo* 恁麼). This ground is the root enlightenment (*hongaku* 本覺) that must be initialized as praxis (*shikaku* 始覺) or Dōgen’s “presencing *kōan*” (*genjōkōan* 現成公案) that is itself meaningless but out of which expression (*dōtoku* 道得) arises. Or, it is Shinran’s naturalness or “of its so-ness” (*jinen* 自然) that is the ground of *shinjin* and the inseparability of delusional beings and Amida Buddha. These terms are not far from William James’ “blooming, buzzing confusion” out of which all thought and reflection emerges.

Of course, Nishida called this field exactly that, a “field”—*basho* 場所. In his *shu no ronri* 種の論理 Tanabe associated this middle ground as the “specific” between the individual and universal. Motoori Norinaga’s middle was *kokoro*, the point where affect is not separate from thinking, words (*koto*) not separate from events (*koto*), the poet-world-poem being an inseparable single moment of expression. Kaibara Ekken criticized *shushigaku* for its giving primacy to principle or pattern (*ri* 理). For him, *ri* is no more than an abstraction that characterizes the vitality of *ki* 気. Sorai was equally critical of the Neo-Confucian abstractions and argued that one needed to return to the historical ground out of which the virtues arose, the great sages of ancient China. For Sorai, the basic words for the virtues were not principles to be studied abstractly, but merely names for the behaviors of the ancient sages, names the sages themselves invented. The sages acted at first without names for their actions, but for the sake of tradition, invented words for the virtues involved.

Therefore, Japanese philosophy often proceeds by starting with the overlap of internal relations and then analyzes how the opposing positions can be seen as abstractions in one direction or the other of that overlapping relation.

To conclude, it is worth reiterating a few points made at the outset. I would like to remind us that, first of all, my project is not to essentialize Japaneseness. Many Western philosophers have put some stress on internal relations: William James, Henri Bergson, Alfred North Whitehead, and even sometimes Hegel, for example. In fact, one could do a study of the paradigmatic positions in Western philosophers that made some, rather than others, particularly interesting to modern Japanese philosophers. I suspect we would often find in those Western philosophers some emphasis on internal relations, holographic models of whole-part, or a philosophical starting point within the *in medias res*. Second, I am not claiming that all Japanese philosophers, or even that individual Japanese philosophers at all times, use these default positions in their philosophizing. Yet, I do believe identifying such general characteristics are a good way to start explaining Japanese philosophy. Unless we somehow reset the defaults of their thinking, many readers steeped in the modern Western tradition of thought might mistakenly assume Japanese philosophy is somehow exotic or unworthy of their philosophical appreciation.