

## REVIEWS

HIMI Kiyoshi 氷見 潔, *Tanabe tetsugaku kenkyū: Shūkyōtetsugaku no kanten kara* 田辺哲学研究—宗教哲学の観点から [Studies in the thought of Tanabe: A perspective from the philosophy of religion]. Tokyo: Hokuju Shuppan, 1990. 350 pp. Hardcover ¥4,500, ISBN 4-89384-185-8.

Compared to the philosophy of Nishida Kitarō, Tanabe Hajime's thought remains largely unexplored territory in Japan. Immediately after the war his philosophy came under suspicion from a number of quarters—and for a brief period after his death in 1962, some efforts were made to recapitulate his life achievement. Other than that, Japanese academia has by and large turned a deaf ear to Tanabe's ideas. If there is any interest at all, it seems to be concentrated in the circles of those who studied directly under him.

In recent years, however, Tanabe has attracted the attention of scholars from the West—principally Japanologists and philosophers of religion—as a representative of Japan's modern intellectual tradition ranking with the thought of Nishida and Nishitani Keiji. In 1984 the German theologian Johannes Laube published the results of research conducted in Japan on Tanabe; 1986 saw the English translation of one of Tanabe's major works, *Philosophy as Metanoetics*, under the direction of Takeuchi Yoshinori; and in 1989 an international symposium was organized in the United States to discuss that book, the results of which were published the following year (UNNO and HEISIG 1990). Though the future is hard to predict, there is good reason to suppose that the interest will be sustained in the years to come as part of the broader interest in modern Japan.

The waves of enthusiasm shown abroad have yet to wash back to the shores of Japan. To the best of my knowledge, until the appearance of Himi Kiyoshi's *Studies in the Thought of Tanabe* in 1990, only one book-length work on Tanabe had been published in Japanese since his death, and that was written by IENAGA Saburō nearly twenty years ago (1974). As late as 1991 the editors of a special volume to commemorate the hundredth anniversary of Tanabe's birth expressed the hope in their preface that the book "may in some small measure attract attention among Japan's younger generation of philosophers to the imposing system of thought that Tanabe has left us" (TAKEUCHI, MUTO, and TSUJIMURA 1991).

Such has been the fate of Tanabe's philosophy in Japan, which only makes Himi's work all the more welcome. Although written by one of the "younger generation" mentioned above, the book is the fruit of over twenty years of research. Long before interest in Tanabe had begun to stir in the West, Himi was hard at work on the texts, rowing against the currents of his age in determined pursuit of what he saw as something of unique value. The results are a model of clarity, not only as a reply to the challenge from

abroad but as a stimulus to revitalize interest in Tanabe at home.

Just where Himi locates the uniqueness of Tanabe's thought is hinted at in the subtitle of the book, "A Perspective from the Philosophy of Religion." Himi's own perspective is that the philosophy of religion cannot be "like theology or apologetics, which begin from a given corpus of doctrines in order to establish a direct line to transcendent truth," or "like certain brands of systematic philosophy that seek to reduce without remainder the truth of which religions speak to the realms of human reason" (pp. 12–13). It is rather an epiphany of philosophical reason that takes place "not by relying on any form of established religion, but by always preserving the autonomy of its inquiry, by showing itself ever prepared to submit to radical self-reflection and self-criticism, by pressing relentlessly ahead to the limits of its own capacities in order to break through to the point that it can negotiate the transcendent truth that religions have to offer" (p. 13). For Himi, this kind of undistracted commitment to the demands of reason, of which Kant is the archetypal example in Western philosophy, is nowhere more evident in Japan than in Tanabe.

Given Tanabe's commitment to reason, the fact that he never affiliated himself with a particular religious tradition during his lifetime is far from a discrediting weakness. Indeed, Himi sees it as the source of his strength as a philosopher of religion. In contrast to the view that his shifting interests—proceeding in stages from Pure Land Buddhism to Christianity and finally, in his waning years, to Zen and the bodhisattva ideal—make him no more than a religious vagabond unable to find himself at home in any one religion, Himi argues that these transformations point to "a logic unfolding spontaneously out of Tanabe himself." It is the location and elucidation of this logic that Himi sets as his primary task in this book (p. 20).

In order to allow Tanabe's philosophy to emerge naturally from Tanabe's own philosophical questions, Himi argues vigorously against the attempt to interpret Tanabe from a preestablished framework. For example, he sharply rejects Ienaga's attempt to identify the high point of Tanabe's thought with what he himself sees as a turning point in Japan's history and to dismiss later developments as retrogressive; or Tsujimura's tendency to idealize Nishida's philosophy of religion and measure the progress of Tanabe's thought according to his degree of proximity, conscious or otherwise, to it. "When all is said and done," Himi insists, "Tanabe's philosophy must be judged on its own merits" (p. 24).

Himi does, however, follow the lead of KOSAKA Masaaki (1949) and Takeuchi Yoshinori in dividing Tanabe's development into four periods: epistemological critique (1910–1922), dialectical method (1922–1934), "logic of species" (1934–1943), and a religious philosophy of reliance on Other-power (1944–1962). This fourth period he makes the primary focus of his attention, and omits discussion of the first period on the grounds that it is not necessary for an understanding of the philosophy of religion of Tanabe's final years. He finds the two middle periods important for the for-

mation and solidification of Tanabe's own philosophical position, but never loses sight of his focus on what he calls Tanabe's "later philosophy." Thus, after a lengthy presentation of dialectics and the logic of species, he deals respectively with the *nenbutsu*, Christian, and bodhisattva stages in Tanabe's philosophy of religion.

Himi vigorously attempts to show why it was *necessary* for Tanabe to pass through these stages in order to complete the development of his thought. He argues that the attempt to fuse metanoetics and the logic of species required the transition from Pure Land to Christianity in which he worked out his "trinity of love"; and that the transition from Christianity to the bodhisattva ideal was worked out as a dialectical synthesis of opposites: the love that preserves and yet sublates the difference between self and other, and the "absolute reality" that breaks through the realm of praxis. This synthesis is witnessed in his interpretation of the way of the Mahāyāna bodhisattva as a symbol of the selfless action idealized in the *kōan*. For Himi, Tanabe's turn to Zen in his final years did not represent a shift of loyalties from an Other-power religion to a self-power religion, but was rather an internal necessity consequent on the deepening of his "philosophy of submission to Other-power" (pp. 322–35).

In laying out the internal logic of Tanabe's development, Himi does not fail to note points of inconsistency in the process and to call for fundamental restructuring where necessary. The classical example of this appears in his analysis of part 3 of *The Dialectics of Christianity*. In the preface to the book, which is an attempt to unite metanoetics with the logic of species, Tanabe stresses that the repentance for sin does not directly involve a "generic" sin but a "specific" sin belonging to a particular people. The suggestion is that he will take the matter up in the body of the book. What happens is that this initial resolve weakens as the book progresses, and instead it is the sin of humanity in general or a kind of universal "original sin" that becomes the focus of his language of repentance. Himi sees Tanabe's failure here as a departure from the direction that his thought should naturally have taken, and then proceeds to reconstruct this next stage in Tanabe's stead (pp. 258–77).

It seems to me that the reasons for this departure of the text of *The Dialectics of Christianity* from its stated aims may need further thinking. Himi sees Tanabe as having had a kind of "complex" towards organized Christianity that made him eventually buckle under the influence of the Christian theory of "expiation." Although this is not the place to go into detail, the explanation seems rather too circumstantial. A more convincing argument might look to problems inherent in the logic of species itself that made it difficult to reconcile with the idea of metanoetics.

Himi's uncompromising demand for logical consistency is a function of his overall aim of making clear the distinctive contribution that Tanabe's philosophy of religion has to offer. In drawing a clear thread through the major transitions of Tanabe's thought, Himi's book marks a turning point in

the study of this important philosophical figure. The critical study of Tanabe's work can no longer be the same after Himi's work, of which we may hope this is only the beginning.

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