

ANTIPHONY

A Model of Dialogue

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On 8 November 2014, the Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture celebrated its fortieth anniversary and the seventieth birthday of James W. Heisig. The celebration provided an appropriate context for reflection on forty years of pioneer work in the field of Japanese religions, Japanese philosophy, and interreligious dialogue. Home to two leading scholarly journals, probably the best English-language library in the field of Japanese philosophy, the headquarters of the Japan Society for Christian-Buddhist Studies (東西宗教交流学会), and a research community that seeks its equal, the Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture has been at the forefront of academic and cultural exchange between the Japanese and Anglophone worlds of literature and scholarship as well as of the theory and praxis of interreligious dialogue.

On 24 April 2015, the Dialogue Institute affiliated with Temple University celebrates its fiftieth anniversary and the life work of Leonard Swidler. Together with Hans Küng and Paul Knitter, who will attend the anniversary celebrations in Philadelphia, Leonard Swidler contributed to the popularization of interreligious dialogue. Given the long history of religious conflicts, the ongoing experience of discrimination on religious grounds, and the fact of religious diversity, it does not require a stretch of the imagination to say that such a dialogue is necessary. “Religion”—however it is defined—seems to have an ongoing importance for a large number of people around the world and cannot be ignored.

* This essay is an expanded version of my blog published on the “Ideas and Creations” blog site of Luther College (http://www.luther.edu/ideas-creations-blog/?story_id=585962).

Therefore, at many academic institutions like Luther College (where I teach), at least some professors, classes, and students engage in interreligious dialogue.

The topic of interreligious dialogue is usually addressed from one of two angles: There is the more practically oriented approach of interfaith cooperation envisioned by Eboo PATEL's (2010) *The Story of an American Muslim, in the Struggle for the Soul of a Generation*, and enacted in projects such as Patel's Interfaith Youth Core, which sponsors and implements outreach programs designed to raise awareness of religious diversity and foster interreligious understanding. The second approach is grounded in the philosophical discussion of religious truth claims and deals mostly with metaphysical and epistemological questions. The by now famous *Christianity and Other Religions* (HICK and HEBBLETHWAITE 2001) popularized the notions of religious exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism. John HICK himself articulated the latter position in his 1980 *God had Many Names*. These theological responses to religious diversity — all of which are rooted in the Christian tradition—have been complemented by modern Hindu (RADHAKRISHNAN 1957), postmodern Hindu (KAPLAN 2001), and Zen Buddhist (ABE 1995) approaches to religious pluralism.

However, there is not much evidence of improvements as a result of this dialogue in the past fifty years. No doubt the theories about religious diversity and interreligious dialogue are more sophisticated and the occasions of inter-religious dialogue and collaboration more intentional, but religious violence, intolerance, and discrimination still abound. As with the times before interreligious dialogue, there are those open to accepting people of other faiths or willing to participate in the religious practice developed in other religious traditions, and those who are and do not. Even if the percentage of religious practitioners open to beliefs and practices other than their own is higher than before (I have to admit I am not aware of any statistics to this effect), this might be due as much to the higher degree of mobility and exchange of knowledge as to the proliferation of inter-religious dialogue.

The ideas and practices of interreligious dialogue are very appealing. They are built on the ideals of tolerance, respect, and mutual understanding—all ideals I subscribe to and value. One of the curious and frustrating aspects of inter-religious dialogue is that while most participants enter it with the high ideal of harmony and consent as their goal, more often than not the dialogue sounds more like a cacophony in which everyone seems to say “if everyone would just agree with me, everything would be fine.” Most participants in such dialogues seem to be convinced that their position is the right one, whether it is on the level of religious belief and practice or on the meta-level of theories about the interactions of religious beliefs and practices. It does not matter whether a participant believes that one's own religious belief and practice is the right one, or whether one assumes pluralism (that is, the belief that all religions have a

certain legitimacy) is the right attitude. As a matter of fact, many exclusivists feel that pluralists are not tolerant of their exclusivist attitude. Of course, these two forms of “intolerance,” if we use the *ad hominem* argument that is frequently tossed around, are not identical. Exclusivism evaluates religious beliefs and privileges one over the others while pluralism constitutes a meta-theory that discusses theories about religious beliefs and not religious beliefs themselves. Either way, however, the problem does not seem to be people’s convictions or the predicament that we are caught in the subjectivity of our experience, but rather the reluctance, if not inability, to realize that our conversation partner is as convinced of his or her beliefs and as mired in subjectivity as we are.

To be fair, today there exist more sophisticated versions of the extreme positions, exclusivism (“my belief is the right one”) and pluralism (“my belief in the legitimacy of all religions is the right one”), such as Mark Heim’s exclusivist position (HEIM 1995) and David Ray Griffin’s “differential pluralism” (GRIFFIN 2005). These forms of exclusivism and pluralism equally emphasize the subjectivity of each position, recognize a plurality of subjectivities, and thus allow for a plurality of beliefs. Of course, these two positions disagree on the issue of whether pluralism (the affirmation of diversity) is an acceptable position, even though they recognize the subjectivity of their individual approach. The problem with these revised positions is that they simply seem to justify and accept the cacophony of many subjectivities and thus reduce the dialogue to a series of monologues that may or may not address the same topic. The problem seems to be that everyone is talking but no one is listening.

At this point, I want to inject for those who are not familiar with my work that I have been engaged in crossing the perceived boundaries between religious traditions, be it in form of comparative religious studies, inter-religious dialogue or shared religious practice, for over twenty years. Whether I teach religions of East Asia in Iowa or Christianity at the Center of Buddhist Studies in Hong Kong, whether I guide Luther College students to various Buddhist and Daoist temples and Shinto shrines in Japan, Hong Kong and the P.R.C., or whether I organize conversations between Christians and Buddhists, it goes without saying that I believe in the importance and necessity of interreligious dialogue and collaboration. But I also am aware that these activities sometimes, like so many projects, fall short of their ideals.

While I have been puzzling about the phenomenon that dialogue (personal, religious, cultural, and otherwise) often end in a cacophony—be it at academic conferences, at dialogue sessions, or simply in meetings for a long time—it has only been last fall that I have began to understand the reason why. It occurred to me when I prepared my paper for the conference to celebrate the fortieth anniversary of the Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture, which has been involved in intellectual exchanges across the divides of various religious and

philosophical traditions for four decades. During the preparation of my talk, I read James HEISIG's *Nothingness and Desire* (2013). Heisig has been in the business of comparative philosophy and theology for at least four decades, and has gained some insight into the mechanics of intellectual exchanges across the traditions. In this book, Heisig suggests that we think of dialogue and intellectual exchanges as “antiphony.”

Heisig coined the term “antiphony” when he translated a piece by Iwao Kōyama 高山岩男 (1905–1993) for *Japanese Philosophy: A Sourcebook* (HEISIG 2011). In his contribution to this impressive anthology, Heisig used this phrase to translate the Japanese *koō* 呼応, literally, “call-and-response.” But what does this term suggest? How does it help us understand dialogue situations and the problems that arise therein? How can it help us understand the conditions of a successful dialogue? The best key to these questions can be found in the work of Kōyama itself. In his *Bashoteiki ronri to kōō no genri* [The logic of *basho* and the principle of antiphony], Kōyama suggests that

[w]hat I call “antiphony” has the meaning of invitation and reply, call and response. I imply the broadest meaning of the original concept “call-and-response,” namely asking, answering, calling, being called, and use “antiphony” to identify the most fundamental existential modality of personal behavior and action. “Calling” is a call that can respond to a call, it is not a call that cannot imagine responding; “responding” is a reply to call, it is not a response devoid of a call. If there is a call, there certainly is a response, where there is a response, there is certainly a call.
(KŌYAMA 1976, 69)

In short, “antiphony” is the “fundamental existential modality” of human activity. It is not something individuals do and engage in, but rather constitutes the existential predicament of human existence itself. What is interesting about Kōyama's notion of “antiphony” is that, to him, dialogue is not a secondary modality, a relationship into which two individuals enter, but the condition from which individuals emerge. Not only that, “antiphony” occurs “in between person and person” and indicates “a relationship among two subjects” (KŌYAMA 1976, 69). Then, Kōyama goes even one step further and proclaims that “personhood does not emerge as one individual person, but in the space among many persons” (KŌYAMA 1976, 70).

The terminology of Kōyama here obviously evokes the “dialogical principle” proposed by Martin Buber's “I-and-You” as developed in his *Ich und Du* (BUBER 1923) as well as NISHIDA Kitarō's “I-and-You” (*watakushi to nanji* 私と汝) introduced in his equally named book *Watakushi to nanji* (NKZ 6). In his later work, Nishida describes this relationship between the I-and-You with what he refers to as the “mutual determination among individuals” (*kobutsu to kobustu to no*

sōgo gentei 個物と個物との相互限定) (NKZ 8:17). While never explicitly acknowledged by Nishida himself and probably structurally quite different, this terminology cannot but echo the fourth of the famous “four dharma worlds” (*sifajie* 四法界) of Fazang 法藏 (643–712): “the unobstructed interpenetration among phenomena” (Ch. *shishiwuaifajie*, Jpn. *jijimuge-hokkai* 事事無礙法界) (T no. 1883, 45.672c). While Fazang coined this term in the context of soteriological discourses in Tang China and with the goal to exemplify the world according to Buddha’s view, Jin Y. Park has made the convincing plea that, in some sense, this phrase can be understood to prefigure postmodern realities and conceptions when she suggests that “[b]oth Hua-yen and Lyotard’s postmodern philosophy identify themselves with the vision of the world in which scattering force finds its *raison d’être* without being subjugated to the centralising power. The ultimate stage of Hua-yen emphasizes harmonious coexistence of particularities without necessarily foregrounding their noumenal aspect” (PARK 2003, 171).

Kōyama’s notion of “antiphony” adds to these expressions of the insight that human personality and individuality imply an intersubjectivity, a relationship to an other, or a mutuality among selves, a true “dialogical” character as he roots this mutual relationship of the I to a You in the activity of calling and responding. I and You are not statically opposed to each other but we interact in a dynamic relationship that challenges I and You on an existential level. Our personalities and identities as well as our beliefs and positions are shaped in-relationship to an other and vis-à-vis a You. These identities and personalities are given expressions in articulations, verbal or non-verbal, that address and, to some degree, challenge the other. It is in such a call-and-response and give-and-take or any kind of concrete interactions among persons that identities are shaped and mature. For this reason, the contemporary psychoanalyst and philosopher Jessica Benjamin identifies what she calls the “mutual recognition” (BENJAMIN 1988, 23) as the condition of identity formation.

However, all these conceptions of mutuality are optimistic and seemingly egalitarian. Even in her discussions of sadism and masochism, Benjamin stresses the need for mutuality. So why are discussions pervaded by hegemonic discourses and power struggles? Why do dialogues fail? If the condition of individuality is mutuality, where does this mutuality get lost? Why is it possible to detect a power differential in even the friendliest dialogue situations with seemingly little at stake?

This is where Kōyama’s observation comes in. Despite his own emphasis on the mutuality of every call-and-response, he does recognize the fundamental problem with every dialogue situation. Kōyama chooses the term “antiphony” since, to him, this concept reveals the dynamics and the shortcomings of any dialogue situation. He explains that:

[w]hen we speak of antiphony as a dialogical relationship between two subjects (I and Thou), we ought not think in terms of two persons muttering and gesturing like two physical objects existing in space. This is no way to explain antiphony because the two individual persons present here are two “I’s” and not an “I” and a “You.” Whenever two “I’s” speak out, there is no call and hence no response. It is not dialogue but two monologues that happen to coincide.

(KŌYAMA 2011, 742–43)

The problem is not the focus on mutuality and interaction, the problem is the focus on the “I.” The partners in a dialogue are not an I and a You, but two “I’s,” who equally attempt to assert themselves. This is the situation described in Jean Paul Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness* (SARTRE 1956) as the “gaze.” Two self-consciousness individuals are struggling for supremacy over the discourse, for the right to define, for the correctness of their position. In the process of this struggle they objectify, depersonalize, and dehumanize the other. The motivation for this could be Friedrich Nietzsche’s “will to power,” it could be one’s own insecurity and the fear that one’s identity construction is at stake, or, as it is to Sartre, it could be simply the predicament of self-conscious existence itself.

To resolve this cacophony of mutually self-absorbed voices, Kōyama suggests that we adopt an attitude of responsiveness, the attitude of solving a problem and responding to someone else’s call. One key of how to understand this responsiveness is provided by the Buddhist scholar Stephen Batchelor. In his work *Living with the Devil*, he uses the language of Emmanuel Levinas to suggest that evil and salvation from it equally arises in the interpersonal encounter. Facing another “I,” *my existence* and *my identity* are challenged to their core by the other and I fear annihilation. At the same time, it is in this encounter that liberation from this fear of annihilation as well as from the pending annihilation itself is possible. Batchelor proposes that “[a]nother’s face shocks us into a helpless silence in which we are called to respond from the same depth within ourselves that we witness in his plea.... The root of empathy, compassion, and love lie in that intimate encounter where we hear the other wordlessly say ‘do not harm me’” (BATCHELOR 2004, 131–32). It is in the face of another “I,” who is in the same predicament as I am, it is when we hear the call of another self-conscious person who is subjected to the same condition as I am, that the possibility of liberation from the limitation my own identity is possible.

Traditionally, Buddhist thinkers have thought of this liberation in religious if not soteriological terms. I believe that Fazang’s fourfold dharma world encompassing the “dharma worlds of the individual phenomena” (*shifajie* 事法界), the universal “noumenon” (*lifajie* 理法界), the “non-obstruction of individuals and universal” (*lishiwuaifajie* 理事無礙法界), and, as I have mentioned above, the

“non-obstruction among individuals” provides a key to such a liberation from ourselves. In everyday life, the self-conscious self sees itself as a particular and independent “self” at odds with the others and the world. Deep self-awareness, according to many Buddhist thinkers, brings about the awareness that the construction of an independent self is delusory and that what we call the self is nothing but a particular expression¹ of what the Japanese Zen master Dōgen 道元禪師 (1200–1254) calls the “ten thousand dharmas”² or what we would call the totality of the world past, present, and future. This awareness of the horizon of totality emerges in two steps. First, the self realizes the emptiness of itself and all its identity constructions as well as its dependence on an underlying totality. In a second step, self-consciousness awakens to the fact that the totality, the transcendent if you will, does not exist by itself but is *expressed* in individual embodied moments of self-awareness. However, if one realizes that what we call the self is but an *expression* of the totality, one realizes the similarity with the other underlying any perceived difference. In other words, I recognize that the emphasis of difference is constructed and that the other is a particular expression of the totality in the same way I am. If this is the case, Fazang claims, one can realize the “non-obstruction among phenomena.” Translated into the context of intercultural and interreligious communication, this means that both “self” and “other” are equally particular expressions of the same humanity and that there is unity in diversity. If these Buddhist thinkers are right, the place where self-awareness leads to an understanding of the other is the starting point for inter-cultural understanding and peace education.

However, Kōyama believes that the notions of reciprocity and mutuality may be too idealistic and, if we consider the previous paragraph, would require a long process of religious practice. More realistic is the practice of listening to the dialogue partner and practicing sensitivity towards the other as well as the common context. Heisig calls this attitude, following Kōyama, “antiphony.”³ His model for the practice of antiphony is a jazz performance where every musician is aware of not only the presence but also the contribution of the other and yet maintains his/her individual interpretation of a common theme or, in moments that are even less reconciliatory, one’s own contribution to the common context. Similarly, partners in such a dialogue would not dissolve their particular standpoints into an imagined agreement or consensus but maintain their own

1. For a more detailed discussion of a philosophy of expression, see my “Peace Through Self-Awareness: A Model of Peace Education Based on Buddhist Principles” (KOPF 2015) and “Philosophy as Expression: Towards a New Model of Global Philosophy” (KOPF 2014).

2. Dōgen famously said that “to study the Buddha way is to study the self; to study the self is to forget the self; to forget the self is to be actualized by the ten thousand dharmas; to be actualized by the ten thousand dharmas is to cast off body and mind of self and other” (DZZ 1: 7–8.).

3. Another short version of my discussion of Heisig’s “antiphony” can be found in KOPF 2015.

individuality and thus enrich the conversation. When this happens, cacophony makes way to antiphony.

This has implications for an inter-religious dialogue. First, and Heisig is very clear about the importance of this, it is not traditions but individuals that engage in dialogues. Citing the Kyoto school philosophers as “the clearest examples” of such an attitude, Heisig explains how he envisions dialogical engagement:

The captivating thing about them is precisely that they did take up the challenge of making a contribution to philosophy as persons *of* a Japanese culture but standing *on* a world forum. They spoke not as one cultural universe *facing* another, but as one culturally determined human mind to any mind that wished to listen, Japanese or foreign.

(HEISIG 2013, 132)

It is not one tradition that speaks to another but “one culturally determined human mind to any mind that wished to listen.” This is important as, too frequently, we pretend that it is, e.g., Christianity and Buddhism that engages in a conversation when, in fact, it is particular Christians and Buddhists with their particular experiences, hopes, and fears that converse with each other. If we remember the individuality of our conversation partners, we are free to see the diversity within traditions and open to identify similarities between individual beliefs, practices, and attitudes even across religious traditions. Concretely, Heisig envisions a “multi-philosophical culture” to function as “the antithesis of the varieties of monolithic philosophical culture against which the West’s commitment to plurality has risen in defiance again and again throughout its history” (HEISIG 2013, 138).

So how can we facilitate such a dialogue conceived of as antiphony concretely? Heisig believes that a good

place to begin is an internal antiphony conducted at the borderlands where the conflicting horizons melt into each other. Antiphony requires ideas like nothingness and desire to resound off of one another in all directions, a shifting standpoint from which the echoes are not annihilated by an intervening abyss within consciousness where deep can call the deep.

(HEISIG 2013, 130–31)

It is this emphasis on the individuality of the conversation partners that brings out particular similarities as well as particular differences between them and that breaks down the illusion of both, an imagined cultural divide and the desired harmony of agreement and consensus. The rhetoric of the former is destructive, the vision of the latter unrealistic. We cannot overcome the basic predicament of human existence and, subsequently, of interpersonal, intercultural, and inter-

religious dialogue: particularity and subjectivity. It is the praxis of antiphony that brings out the particularities and complexities of life.

This antiphony is what makes a dialogue fascinating and scary at the same time. It is fascinating because it reveals our experiences and interpretations thereof beyond generalizations and simplifications; it is scary because it shows the limitations of our own subjective standpoint and position. Ultimately, the goal of a dialogue thus conceived of as antiphony is not to convince the other of the truth of one's own subjectivity but to realize that our own subjectivity and experience may not be true for others. Or, as Heisig observes, "the final vocation of philosophy and ultimately religious doctrine as well is to prepare us to watch and wait for the cracks that practice pokes into our guiding fictions" (HEISIG 2013, 142). In practical terms, he suggests that "modes of thought" that prioritize traditions and civilizations "are best left to fade into the wings on their own, yielding to the light of more urgent problems that press on the philosopher's conscience" (HEISIG 2013, 139). Engaging in conversations with an intent to listen and not to convince the other is difficult, because such a dialogue questions our presuppositions as well as our constructed identities and may make us uncomfortable. However, this attitude not only is the only way to affirm diversity, it is also the only way to be true to oneself.

Abbreviations

- NKZ 西田幾多郎全集新版 [Complete works of Nishida Kitarō]. 20 vols. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1988.
- DZZ 道元禪師全集 [Complete works of Dōgen], 2 vols. Ōkubo Dōshū 大久保道舟, ed. Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1969–1970.
- T *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新修大藏經. Edited by Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次郎 and Watanabe Kaigyoku 渡辺海旭. 85 vols. Tokyo: Taishō Issaikyō Kankōkai, 1924–1932.

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