



Carlo Saviani, *L'Oriente di Heidegger*

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Nishitani Keiji, *Nichilismo e vacuità del Sé*. A cura di Carlo Saviani

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CARLO SAVIANI IS ONE of a growing number of Italian scholars pursuing the translation and interpretation of twentieth century Japanese philosophy, in particular, the works of the Kyoto school thinkers. Beginning with Renato ANDOLFATO's translation of Nishida Kitarō's *I and You* in 1996 and Matteo CESTARI's 2001 publication of two essays by Nishida previously unpublished in any Western language, indications are that the legacy of Gino PIOVESANA's classic introduction to Japanese philosophy is alive and well. In the near future readers can expect to see an Italian version of Nishida's final essay on "Religious Worldviews and the Logic of Locus" now being prepared by Tiziano Tosolini and *A Study of the Good* by Enrico Fongaro.

Saviani has been concentrating his efforts on translations of Nishitani Keiji, the first fruit of which is contained in the three essays that make up *Nichilismo e vacuità del Sé*. A brief introduction to Nishitani and his thought, accompanied by a solid bibliography, make up the first third of the book. Two of the pieces he chose for translation, "The Awakening of Self in Buddhism" and "The I-Thou Relationship in Zen Buddhism," were made from the English, and the third from the German, "Die religiös-philosophische Existenz im Buddhismus." Neither have appeared previously in Italian.

Since Saviani makes his translations from Western languages, he cannot be expected to capture nuances of the original Japanese that often get flattened out in the translation. For example, behind the concatenations that have to be gone

through to render the variety of terms for the notion of “self” and “awakening” lies a richer Japanese vocabulary for which there are as yet no standard terms in Italian. Having struggled with similar difficulties in other Western languages (many of them still unresolved), I am encouraged to see that there is a concerted effort among young Italian scholars of Japanese philosophy to bring these questions into open forum.

In any case, as far as I am able to judge, Saviani’s instinct for the right philosophical term is reliable and the reader can study and cite his work with confidence. At the same time, his solid grounding in the continental philosophers that Nishitani himself was most familiar with makes him alert to the flow of the argument, which he reproduces with a clarity and lightness of style at least as good as the English and German texts he is working with.

Saviani is now at work on several fronts, the most ambitious of which is an Italian version of Nishitani’s *Religion and Nothingness*. If that book meets with anything like the success it has had in the English-speaking world, we can expect its publication to mark a milestone in the advance of Japanese philosophy into religious, philosophical, and theological thought in Italy.

In *L’Oriente di Heidegger* Saviani gives us a glimpse into the stimulus to and scope of his interest in non-Western philosophy. In addition to making use of the important collections of essays edited by Graham PARKES on *Heidegger and Asian Thought*, Saviani widens his resources to a range of works on the subject, which he neatly lays out in a bibliography (85–94). Equally helpful is an annotated list of references to Asian thought in Heidegger’s own work (14–17).

The work is divided into two parts. The first part takes up Heidegger and Taoism; the second, Heidegger and Zen. An appendix includes a translation of two essays, one on each of the themes. The first is a sampling of the discussion between Heidegger and Hisamatsu Shin’ichi; the second, Paul Shih-yi Hsiao’s recollections of working with Heidegger on the translation of the *Tao te-ching*. (Unfortunately in this book, as in *Nichilismo*, the burden is put on the reader to hunt through the text and notes to find the titles of the originals from which the translations were made. This information should have been clearly presented at the head of the translations.)

As Saviani recognizes, Heidegger’s approach to the East was ambivalent. On the one hand, he seems to have taken a “nihilistic” view of Buddhist thought from Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, and as a result pays it little attention as such. In addition (as Saviani fails to note), he insisted that the word *philosophy* and what it represented belongs exclusively to the tradition that comes from the ancient Greeks, and that the German language enjoyed a special privilege in its development. At the same time as Heidegger harbored this skepticism, he seemed persuaded that dialogue with Asian thought could redefine the task and scope of philosophical thoughts.

Saviani himself seems to locate the most promising point of contact in the encounter of Heideggerian thought with the writings of the Kyoto school, above all

Nishida and Nishitani. He is not unaware of that young scholars from Nishida's circle, and later D. T. Suzuki and Hisamatsu, were crucial in piquing and then nourishing the interests of the young Heidegger. More specifically, he focuses on the concept of nothingness and tries to make connections between the rich polysemy of the term in Eastern thinkers and the obscure use of related terms in Heidegger's writings.

These are still largely uncharted seas and it will be some time before there is a common language for drawing the maps. Saviani tries to bring some order and distinction among terms such as *nulla*, *niente*, *nullità*, *nihilum*, *vuoto*, *vacuità*, *nienteggiare*, and *annullare*, but since his primary referent is Heidegger's German and Western translations of Eastern texts, this is only a first step. What is more, I am not sure that his choice of *nulla* for a negative sense of nihility and *niente* for the positive sense of nothingness is the only one. Although the latter term long since strayed from its etymological sense of non-being or non-living (*nec [g]entes*), that sense is still recoverable. Moreover, a newly edited manuscript of Luigi Marzini from 1634 (OSSOLA 1997) proposes a recovery of the polysemy of *nulla* and goes a long way to restoring connotations that are often remarkably close to the Sino-Japanese terms of Asian philosophers.

Similarly, in his discussion of "non-doing" and "non-self," Saviani bends over backwards to show the variety of meanings of the Chinese character 無, but he does not take into account the special nuance added when it is replaced with 非. In this regard, although he uses the term *senza-io* to render the German term *Ich-losigkeit* (26), he does not seem to realize the shift of meaning between *without* and *non* that the Chinese characters signal.

The details of Heidegger's encounter with Taoism, and to some extent also with Zen, leave the impression that it was the oracular-sounding, imprecise but suggestive prose of German translations of ancient Eastern texts that attracted Heidegger above all. The translations of the appendix confirm this. Whether it is his intention or not, Saviani reconfirms the fact that Heidegger's encounter with the East was at best an *abstract preparedness* for the redefinition of philosophy; in the concrete, he balked at the idea of a philosophy grounded in nothingness complementing philosophies of being. It is this task that remains to be done.

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