

KETA Masako 気多雅子, *Shūkyōkeiken no tetsugaku: Jōdokyō sekai no kaimei* 宗教経験の哲学—浄土教世界の解明 [A philosophy of religious experience: An inquiry into the world of Pure Land teachings], Tokyo: Sōbunkan, 1992. 5+276+11 pp. Indexes. ISBN 4-423-23016-X.

This work by a young Japanese scholar, a graduate of Kyoto University's Department of Religion, is well worth presenting to the English-reading public. It

is not only a refreshingly original study of Pure Land Buddhist religiosity, but it also indicates a possible direction of future development for an already venerable tradition in Japanese religious thinking: the Kyoto School of philosophy.

Indeed, the book clearly evinces the spirit, if not completely the style, of that philosophy in its positive evaluation of religion and in its bringing into the greatest possible proximity the realms of religion and philosophy (metaphysics). The following sentences provide a good indication of the author's outlook:

In its very mode of being, philosophy of religion participates in the matter of religion....Its students must throw themselves body and soul into the circular relationship of philosophy and religion. (p. 16)

It is our task to evoke the reality of the religious world by clarifying the fact of religion in its specific actuality. But the motive for this evocation must lie within reason itself. (p. 17)

A further point of continuity may be found in the fact that for Keta, just as for her predecessors in the Kyoto School, the prototype of religion lies in so-called historical religions, especially Buddhism—an attitude that occasionally makes it hard to accommodate “tribal” religion (cf. especially pp. 26 and 35–37).

The novelty of Keta's approach lies in her proposal for a phenomenological (Husserlian) rather than a directly metaphysical style of philosophy, and in her attention to a wider (or more deeply layered) range of religious phenomena than that considered by Nishida Kitarō or Nishitani Keiji, both of whom liked to concentrate on a few peak experiences while blissfully ignoring the majority of phenomena usually studied in the history of religion.

The book can be divided into two unequal parts. The first part, comprising chapter 1, explores the “possibility of a philosophy of religion” and settles on a method. The second part, chapters 2 through 6, then applies this method in an investigation of selected aspects of Pure Land Buddhism.

Part one offers an insightful analysis of the paradoxical status of the philosophy of religion and endeavors to make two main points. The first is that there is a need for a philosophical clarification of religion that, unlike nineteenth-century philosophy and religious phenomenology à la van der Leeuw, “does not reduce the object [of religious experience] to the subject, to the structure of human existence.” For “the view that religious phenomena can be reduced to immanent human experiences of humans misses the paradoxical relationships within religion, and thereby devalues religious phenomena from their original mode of being” (p. 23). The second point is that religious experience provides a universal perspective for observing and comparing all religions, and therefore that the phenomenological investigation of religious experience, with a methodology that is “open to metaphysical speculation” (p. 22), is the approach most appropriate for the philosophy of religion.

It may be asked, however, whether the author has sufficiently differentiat-

ed her concept of “religious experience” from “religious phenomena” in general, and from religion as the basis of cultural tradition. Furthermore, in her effort to show the inherent comparative possibilities of religious experience, Keta appears to unduly universalize the element of choice among the different religious positions.

In part two she applies her method to various elements of Pure Land religiosity. Since this section is basically a collection of articles published on different occasions over a ten-year period, no systematic analysis of the Pure Land religion should be expected. Still, the topics are well chosen. They are all of existential importance in Shinran’s religiosity and find their counterparts in other religions. Keta’s treatment of the topics, while taking the traditional interpretations of Shin Buddhist “theology” into account, manages each time to open up a novel viewpoint, mainly through the judicious use of phenomenological descriptions of human existence from the philosophies of Kierkegaard, Max Scheler, Heidegger, and so forth.

For the reader’s benefit, I shall now attempt a rapid overview of the contents of the book, though such a treatment will not be able to do justice to its riches, of course, nor find room to indicate the reservations I did occasionally feel.

Chapter 2 reflects on “universality and individuality in religion” in two rather disjointed steps. First, the meaning of religious individuality for Shinran is investigated—with the help of Kierkegaard’s concept of the “solitary person”—based on Shinran’s relationship to his master Hōnen and his much-quoted statement “When I deeply ponder the Vow of Amida, which arose from five kalpas of profound reflection, I realize that it was entirely for the sake of me, Shinran, alone” (*Shinran hitori ga tame* 親鸞一人がため). Second, the ideas of Original Sin and tathāgata-garbha are taken up as “religious universals” and contrasted with the philosophical universals found in Hegel and in Husserl. The conclusion that emerges is that religious universality is qualitatively different from philosophical universality: in philosophical universality the individual disappears, while in religious universality the meaning of the universal and of the individual can be seen only in their mutual reflection.

In chapter 3 we are offered a phenomenological analysis of the structure of the *nenbutsu* as a “religious word.” In the process the following elements come under review: the relationship of *nenbutsu* and Amida; the deepened understanding of the *nenbutsu* as word in the historical shift in its interpretation from “viewing Amida” to “recitation of his Name;” and the relationship of *nenbutsu* and faith in Shinran’s *Sangan-tennyū* 三願転入.

In chapter 4, Shinran’s position as “neither a monk nor a layman” initiates an investigation of the following topics: the centrality of monasticism in Buddhism; monasticism as embodying the essence of religiosity in its abandonment of “dwelling” (Heidegger); the meaning of Shinran’s rejection of monkhood; and the question of whether this rejection can still have a mes-

sage for us in this age of loss of *Heimat* (home).

Chapter 5 takes up the relationship between evil and religious salvation through an investigation of two Pure Land texts: the story of the patricide king, Ajātasatru, in the *Contemplation Sūtra*, and section 13 of the *Tannishō*, wherein Yuien is asked by his master, Shinran, whether he would obey him if he told him to kill a thousand people. This leads to a comparison of evil in Kant and Buddhism, an analysis of repentance and its relationship to the past and future, a consideration of Shinran's seemingly deterministic view of karma, and a reflection on the nature of murder.

Chapter 6 takes up the idea of the Pure Land. Beginning with the notion that "the problem of the Pure Land and the problem of death belong essentially together," Keta discusses the lessons to be learned from the experience of another's death. A further analysis is offered of what the Pure Land idea signifies beyond the original Buddhist idea of liberation: salvation for all (and for the world) by a saving world.

There is no doubt that many objections could be raised against particular points made by the author, and that not a few times Keta's conclusions seem a trifle too hasty, but it is equally true that her often surprising angles on the questions treated set one thinking, and may even succeed in blowing a fresh wind into the musty corridors of Pure Land doctrinal reflection.

**Jan VAN BRAGT**

*Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture*