

Philosophy Live : A Perspective from Japan

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CHAPTER 6

TOGETHER WITH THE DEAD

Even though one dies, the *existenz* [of the deceased] that is bound to the [living] in mutual love will be resurrected—thanks to the merits of pious acts—in an existential communion that transcends life and death, and will thus participate [in this communion] for all eternity. This is given faith and witness by the *existenz* who receives the merits of the other’s pious acts. . . . In such a communion, each *existenz* is resurrected in spite of death, and while being taken up by eternal absolute nothingness-*qua*-love, simultaneously participates and communes as the medium [of absolute nothingness].⁶⁶

—Tanabe Hajime

We all die, and we realize this is obvious, something we cannot avoid. All the same, death bewilders us and there is nothing we can do about it. Death is not something we experience ourselves but rather is something that happens to those close around us. A person stops breathing and ceases to respond to anything, and eventually the body begins to decompose, producing a foul smell, and maggots set about their business. To have someone you lived with and loved suddenly change that way is frightening and defies all understanding. Understandably, from the days when human beings began to live a “human” life together, they performed various rituals for the burial of the dead.

What may have happened to those who have died, then? Assuming that the strength that had formerly moved the body has disappeared, where did that strength go? The way people answered this question was influenced by their conclusion that the strength that moves the body derives from something called “life force.” When people died, since the first thing that happened was that they stopped breathing, it was thought that breath was the basis of life force. That idea of life force was later embodied in the idea of the “spirit” or “soul.” This concept led to the Greek “psyche” and the Indian “Ātman.”

When the spirit or soul that was the basis of life left the body, where did it go? That was the next problem. That it just disappeared as soon as a person died didn’t stand to

⁶⁶ Tanabe Hajime *tetsugakusen*, vol. 4, p. 22.

reason. It must still be somewhere. The reasoning they came up with developed into various ideas of the afterlife. The idea of divine judgment can be found among many peoples, and developed into scenarios of the dead going to heaven or hell.

Rather distinctive among these ideas about death is the Indian idea of reincarnation. This idea is said to have emerged because of the fear that the soul that was reborn after death in heaven might die a second time. If the soul dies after death again, so the reason-

Socrates: Death is not to be feared . . . It is either a state of utter nothingness . . . or a matter of the spirit changing one abode for another.

ing must have followed, rather than remaining after death in the same state for eternity, it would die there once more and then be reborn in a different form. The theory of reincarnation could be used effectively to explain not only what happened to the spirit after death but what state it had been before being born into this world, and it showed that the spirit would cycle through all manner of

states in a repeated process of incarnation for eternity. Buddhism taught that reincarnation moved through the Six Realms (hell, realm of hungry ghosts, animal realm, realm of *asuras*, human realm, and heaven). The notion that the virtue or wickedness of one's previous life would determine the circumstances of one's next life led to the use of the theory of reincarnation as the basis of ethics.

Friedrich Nietzsche's (1844–1900) theory of eternal recurrence could be called a variant of the theory of reincarnation, but in the sense that all things are believed to be repeated over and over exactly the same, it is a kind of determinism. If everything is repeated the same, irrespective of one's efforts, then all is futile, and this is why it is said that eternal recurrence is the epitome of nihilism.

Even if we do not argue quite to that extreme, to be part of such an eternal cycle of reincarnation is tormenting. All is well if the future world is a happy one, but one never knows how some kind of mistake could land one in hell. This led to the notion that the ideal would be to escape from the cycle of reincarnation. In Indian philosophy and religion, it was thought that when the individual spirit (*Ātman*) merged with Brahman (the fundamental principle of the universe), it would be released from the cycle of incarnation and reach the world of eternal life. In Buddhism, too, the ultimate goal was release from the cycle of reincarnation—Nirvana. Nirvana was thought to be the state of eternal tranquility from which all the earthly desires that were the cause of continual reincarnation were eliminated.

And how was death seen in the history of Western philosophy? Socrates (B.C. 470–399), thought to have been the founder of philosophy, did not write down his own ideas; they were recorded by his student Plato (B.C. 427–347?) in the so-called dialogues. The first of the dialogues, “The Death of Socrates,” tells us that the matter of death was a major issue from the very beginning of the history of Western philosophy.

Through the dialogues, Socrates advocates his idea of the “knowledge of one’s own ignorance,” declaring that the so-called wise men of his day in fact did not know anything that mattered. His stance, however, was condemned as misleading the young, and he was sentenced to death. Socrates accepted this unreasonable sentence with composure, however, and drank the poison he was ordered to take to end his life. Death is not to be feared, he says, because it is either a state of utter nothingness and the dead feel nothing, or it is just a matter of the spirit changing one abode for another; so neither is a bad thing.⁶⁷

The view of the afterlife as expressed in Plato’s *Apology* is thus rather simplistic, but when we come to his *Phaedo* (On the Soul), we find it clearly explaining the idea of the separation of the spirit from the flesh and its immortality. Separation from the flesh means that the spirit is no longer troubled by the sensations and desires of the flesh and can perceive the truth. That is what the “idea” (*eidos*) is. It is the very thing that the philosopher should truly seek. And thus, the goal of people who are engaged in the pursuit of philosophy in the true sense is none other than death—to complete their death.⁶⁸

In response to a question as to why people seek after ideas, Plato explains his theory of anamnesis or memory of things from a previous existence. From before their birth, he says, people were in the world of ideas, and it is from there that they were born into this world and to which they return when they die. This notion that people come and go between the world of life and the world of death is essentially a kind of theory of reincarnation.

It is noteworthy, therefore, that the very source of Western philosophy, which seems at first glance to be governed entirely by reason, was concerned with the matter of death, which cannot be resolved in a rational fashion. When we look at religions, we see that Christianity began with the death of Jesus, and Buddhism as well developed greatly after the death of the historical Buddha. But even philosophy, which might seem to be at odds with religion in so many ways, in fact, also takes death as its point of departure. This convergence was concealed in many earlier works of philosophy. Plato’s theory of the “idea” is acceptable, but the matters of immortality and incarnation are taken as mere parables, and have been handled in a rather lighthanded fashion. That evasiveness has compromised their study (and ours as well) of the legitimate issues of philosophy. How did such a strange state of affairs come about?

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⁶⁷ *Apology*.

⁶⁸ *Phaedo*.

In the medieval West, the immortality of the soul continued to be the central problem of philosophy. The standpoint of medieval philosophers was that of Christianity, so naturally the existence of God and the immortality of the soul were closely intertwined and the basic premise of their understandings. They rejected the theory of reincarnation found in Plato: since God created all things out of nothing, the soul came into existence through the act of God, not through reincarnation. However, the soul, once created, was eternal. The soul would be judged according to the deeds of one's life and would either be led to eternal happiness with God in heaven or be cast into hell for eternity.

The concept of God's judgment was, like that of reincarnation, an uncompromising view of what came after death. Thus as long as everyone in Western society was Christian and they shared its view of the soul, all was well. With the advent of the modern age and the development of scientific thinking, however, it was no longer so easy to believe these things. Nothing that happened after death could be proven by scientific verification. The soul could not be defined or measured by scientific means, and the ideas of heaven and hell did not fit into the framework of the worldview offered by science. The scientific worldview grew more and more materialistic in every respect.

For all its merits, however, can science answer all questions? Just as philosophy is not the slave of theology, neither is it in thrall to science. Isn't the role of philosophy to work not within science, but to return to the matrix that makes scientific awareness possible and define the limits of reason? That was the significance of the work of Kant. Under "Transcendental Dialectic" in his *Critique of Pure Reason*, he takes up, along with the existence of God, the existence of the soul, and argues that it is an issue that cannot be resolved using "pure reason." Then in *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant resurrects the existence of the soul that he previously rejected, together with the existence of God, from the standpoint of practical reason: when the highest good is to be realized, there need be eternity and immortality of the soul, not limited by the finite world.

In this way, the eternity of the soul after death is recognized as necessary for practical reasons, but is excluded from the realm of pure reason, with the result that the matter was dismissed thereafter from the mainstream issues concerning philosophy. Philosophy should not be the slave of science, and yet the world that is recognized by scientific cognition was considered the one-and-only world. After that, issues of anything that might transcend this world were sealed off. Death is thought to represent the end of the self as a cognitive subject, so there is no meaning in inquiring into the matter of what may happen after death. Wittgenstein said that, "death is not an event of life. Death is not lived through"⁶⁹ (6.4311). That is correct, indeed. One does not experience death; one is no longer a person of this world, so it cannot be called an experience. Death is

⁶⁹ *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*.

something that is shown, not talked about. And since death is not problematized, the problem of what comes after death is not discussed either.

But not talking about death did not mean that the questions about death ceased to exist. Karl Jaspers (1883–1969) understood death to be the “limit situation” of humanity, and in Heidegger’s philosophy as well, death played an important part. Ordinarily, people are buried in the tumult of their world mindless of their “authentic self.” Death, too, is kept out of sight and leveled. In order to regain our authenticity, one has to relate to death in advance. Through the freedom obtained by anticipating one’s one death, says Heidegger, one can perhaps gain a grasp of the whole reality of present existence.

Heidegger’s notion of “anticipating” death is based on the fact that it is impossible to experience one’s own death. It is precisely because of that impossibility that the act of anticipating death transcends our everyday awareness. After all, death remains the ultimate ending, and we cannot know anything about what lies beyond it. It reminds us of the paradox of Achilles and the tortoise: as long as we try to grasp it logically, Achilles can never overtake the tortoise, no matter how fast he runs. Trying to understand what happens when Achilles catches up with the tortoise and overtakes it carries no interest at all for the sophistic philosopher.

But what happens in reality? Just as it is obvious that Achilles will overcome and pass the tortoise, death will eventually overcome us, and we know it. That being the case, is there really any need to even talk about “anticipation?” Of course, depending on the situation, anticipating death may be a very realistic issue. Death is directly confronted by, for example, patients who have been told they have only a short time to live, the young special-forces pilots sent off on suicide-bombing missions during World War II, or criminals who receive the death sentence. But such examples do not represent what one can call ordinary circumstances. Heidegger tended to elitism, disdaining the everyday lives of ordinary people as inauthentic. But how can an “authentic” condition be found by keeping such a distance from ordinary daily life? The starting place of philosophy ought to be ordinary awareness in ordinary life, which is certainly authentic. Such scorn for the ordinary seems to me to be the beginning of the demise of philosophy. So Heidegger, with his antipathy for the ordinary and the every day, had his own reasons for giving his sympathies over to the heroic ideology of the Nazis.

Shift of Concern from Death to the Dead

Heidegger remained concerned solely with the matter of one’s own death, and he was critical of those whose inquiry focused on the matter of death of a third person. In reality, however, it is impossible to truly address one’s own death since, under ordinary circumstances, it is not something that can be experienced. What we experience as a natural part of our daily lives is the death of others. In his book *Death*, Vladimir Jankélévitch (1903–1985) considered death in terms of the first person, second person, and third

person. Third-person death is the general death of others. First-person death is one's own death, and second-person death is the death of an Other, but an Other who was very close to one and whose death therefore has a very great impact on the first-person individual.

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Jankélévitch's ideas have been widely referred to in nursing and caregiving in Japan and offer much insight, but there are problems in applying them just as they are. One problem is whether the grammatical-term categories are really appropriate. I would like to examine this in more detail in the following chapter, but here I would like to say that it is not that easy to divide relationships into the

first, second, and third-person categories. Another problem is that Jankélévitch—seeking to grasp death as a moment that changes “before death” into “after death”—divides the matter of death into “this side of death,” the “moment of death,” and “the other side of death,” and holds that nothing exists on “the other side of death.”

As Kant confirmed, the hypothesis of the eternal life of the soul after death is impossible to verify. But that does not necessarily mean that it is appropriate to jump to the conclusion that nothing exists after death. In the philosophy of the West, as in the case of Socrates, in most cases only one of two options is considered: either the soul lives on after death or there is nothing after death. Particularly since Christianity teaches that the soul is eternal, there is a strong tendency to dichotomy: either to believe or reject that teaching—the all-or-nothing approach. But are these two diametrically opposed views necessary?

It was Japanese philosopher Tanabe Hajime (1885–1961) who presented a completely new viewpoint in the face of this deadlock in the philosophy of death. Tanabe was a student of Nishida Kitarō and became his successor as professor of philosophy at Kyoto University. Although he was much influenced by Nishida, he was critical of his predecessor and is known for his revision of Nishida's philosophy in the form of the “theory of species.” In contrast to Nishida's binomial philosophical basis of a universal field called the “place of nothingness” (*mu no basho* 無の場所) and the individual, Tanabe proposed the neutral “species” as intermediate between the universalistic “class” and the individual, and thereby tried to approach the issues of ethnic group and state. As his way of resisting the trend of the times, he had intended this concept to restrain the recklessness of the Japanese people, but ultimately he compromised with the state and cooperated with the war, sending off many students to battle. He would later come to deeply regret his own actions. After the war he criticized his previous stance and emerged an advocate of a “philosophy of metanoia (repentance).”

Tanabe had not originally explored much in the direction of the philosophy of religion, but in his book *Zangedō toshite no tetsugaku* (Philosophy as Metanoetics; 1946), he shows that his interest in Christianity and Buddhism had deepened based on his reading of Shinran's *Kyōgyō shinhō*, a series of commentaries on Buddhist sutras. In that process, he came to delve into the problem of death. Particularly after the death of his wife Chiyo in 1951, he established the new and original philosophy of "existential communion" with the dead. This theory is propounded in his posthumously published long essay "Sei no sonzairon ka shi no beshōhō ka" (An Ontology of Life or a Dialectic of Death; 1958) and in his masterful essay "Memento Mori" (1958). He described this theory as his "philosophy of death," but in fact it is a "philosophy of the dead."

Tanabe wrote "An Ontology of Life or a Dialectic of Death" as his contribution to a collection of essays published in commemoration of Heidegger's 70th birthday, and it had the ambitious intention of critiquing Heidegger's "existentialism of life" and establishing a "dialectic of death." In Tanabe's estimation, Plato's approach was more convincing than that of Heidegger, who had described "anticipation" of death but had not really grappled with the problem of death itself and ended up only by examining the ontology of life. Tanabe refers to Plato's theory, in particular the work *Parmenides*, as the "dialectic of death," and contrasts it with Heidegger's. While the "ontology of life" clings to existence, the "dialectic of death" maintains throughout a dialectical contradiction in which "existence and non-existence are at once one and different." After death is "no longer existing" (*mohaya arazu*) while before birth is "not yet existing" (*imada arazu*). Tanabe thinks that kind of non-existence is, indeed, closely related to our existence in this world. Existence cannot stand on its own; it has to be related to non-existence.

Tanabe's philosophy of death was, as we have seen, on the one hand rooted in the history of Western philosophy, while on the other, as shown in his concept of "death resurrection," involved with the religious problem of death. The idea of resurrection from death obviously stems from the story of Jesus Christ's death and resurrection, but Tanabe says this is inadequate: what happened in the case of Jesus was a miracle, he points out, and is not something that can occur to just anyone. Here Tanabe has recourse to Buddhism. In Buddhism, a bodhisattva is a person who returns, even after death, to save others. In this case, not just a person such as Jesus Christ, but anyone who has the aspiration to save others, can be reborn in the Buddhist sense of resurrection from death.

The mutual love between [one person and another] is what makes possible existential communion between the living and the dead.

Since this explanation is rather abstract, let us look at Tanabe's summary of the Case 55 story taken from the *Blue Cliff Record*, a source he often drew on for examples, involving Dōgo and Zengen.

When the young Monk Zengen, who was absorbed with the question of life and death, paid a visit accompanying his Master Dōgo to one of the supporters of their Buddhist temple to express his condolences, he asked the Master, hitting the coffin, “Is it life or death?” The Master merely said, “I won’t say it is life. I won’t say it is death, either” . . . Later, when Master Dōgo passed away and Zengen told Sekisō, a senior disciple, what had happened at that time, Sekisō simply said again, “I won’t say. I won’t say.” At that moment, Zengen realized for the first time that it was the Master Dogo’s solicitude for him that the Master had not answered his question, wanting Zengen to realize this particular reason for himself. So the Master’s love had moved Zengen, and Zengen is said to have taken up the vocation of repentance and appreciation, having become aware that his Master had been resurrected despite having died, and continued to live on in Zengen’s mind.” (“Memento mori”)⁷⁰

The “death and resurrection” described here is not that of a particular divine being—Jesus Christ—nor a matter of what comes after death. It is the resurrection of the dead for the living.

The question is how is that possible? Tanabe writes, “What the dead had fervently wished for in life is, for the living, a love forever renewed even after the death [of the Other]. This love works ceaselessly, mediated by the love of the living for the dead. And as the mutual existential communion of love, it makes death and resurrection possible.”⁷¹ In other words, for the existential communion of love to take place between the living and the dead, there had to be love on the part of the deceased continuing from the time while alive on one side, and on the other the love of the living for the person who has died. The mutual love between the two is what makes possible existential communion between the living and the dead. The love of a teacher for a student and the student’s tireless passion for learning under the guidance of the teacher can overcome the barrier of life and death, and the dead will be reborn to the living and will continue to guide the living.

Tanabe’s philosophy of death was an innovative idea that could overturn previous notions about death. In philosophy before that, conceptions of death were limited to the two options—either the soul is eternal or the soul no longer exists upon death, and one could only choose between the two. The eternity of the soul is not something that can be verified according to scientific logic. But to say that the soul no longer exists after death is all too nihilistic, and does not explain why rituals held for the dead are so common. If a person is no longer exists at all after death, it would probably be meaningless to even discuss such a thing as the dignity of the deceased. What Tanabe did was to consider the

70 *Tanabe Hajime tetsugakusen*, vol. 4, pp. 18–19.

71 Sueki 2015, p. 129.

problem of the dead from the viewpoint of the *relationship* between the dead and the living. The problem is not the *existence* of the dead person or the dead person's spirit. What is important is what relationship the dead had to the living and what relation the living had to the dead. There too, relationship precedes existence.

As we considered earlier, thinking about death in ancient times developed in close relation to burial and rituals for the dead. The point of departure for the problem of death is not one's own death but what to do when confronted with the death of another. Where Heidegger ultimately went wrong was in thinking that the death of another was not an authentic concern and that only one's own death was authentic. On that point, Jankélévitch at least considered the death of another, although there is not really as great a difference between second- and third-person death as he maintains. Even in the case of the death of someone in a third-person relationship, there are cases where the dead never allow the living to be unconcerned with them.

In Chapter 5 I discussed the matter of the Other. I proposed that we consider, not in terms of the ethical relationships between people, nor by making the leap to the absolute, but by looking at the realm of the Other in between. The Other is both the incomprehensible and that with which we have to have some relationship. So the dead, too, is Other, and I would say belongs to the realm of *myō*, the other world, as discussed in Chapter 5. Indeed, the dead seems to be the Other that is most representative of all Others.

The Dead as Other

Here, I would like to elaborate somewhat on the issue of the Other. The deities of Japan's traditional religious world would be an example. The *kami* are not the absolute; they represent beings that are remote from ourselves and that cannot be dealt with the way we deal with other human beings. Inasmuch as they are phenomena beyond ordinary sensory perception that are cognized only in our consciousness, they must be no more than superstition—figments of our imagination. That may be so, but we cannot really prove such beings do *not* exist either; no one can say categorically that what cannot be perceived with the senses *does not exist*.

In the Ae no Koto ritual celebrated after the harvest is completed on the Noto peninsula of Ishikawa prefecture, for example, the gods of the fields are invited into homes as an expression of gratitude. Just as if they were actually present, the gods are given a bath, served food, and invited to relax. This tradition follows the teaching of the *Analects* of Confucius that “the gods should be honored as if they are present among us.” In modern times, there is a tendency to encourage such performance of ritual with the thought that “even if the gods do not exist, we might as well perform according to the tradition, just acting *as if* they existed.” That is not the case, of course, with Ae no Koto. The idea involved is that a ritual has to be performed for the deities, though they cannot be detected with the senses, since they *are* present.

The issue is not whether something objectively exists or not. Gods and buddhas are by their nature different from things or human beings that we see and grasp with our physical senses, so it is not even a viable question to ask whether or not such divinities exist on the same level as ourselves. Such a question is futile and meaningless. The real question to ask, rather, is what kind of relationship we have with that Other. Here, the fact that relationship precedes existence is the most fundamental of axioms. It is possible to have good relationships with the other, but one kind of relationship regarding beings that cannot be grasped with the senses is to ignore or reject them. This was the stance adopted by many of Japan's so-called philosophers who introduced modern Western philosophy to Japan.

Relationships with the dead are different from the usual relationships among the living, but they are not completely cut off.

The same holds true, for example, with the *kami* of the outhouse or the *kami* of the cookstove, two household deities that were customarily enshrined in almost every Japanese household until recent times, or regarding *yōkai* (apparitions) or *yūrei* (ghosts). Uchiyama Takashi, who criticizes modern philosophy from his unique standpoint of deep commitment to daily life, tells us that the ancient Japanese belief that foxes were semi-divine creatures that could trick and cheat human beings appears to have disappeared. Stories of such phenomena were told up until about 1965, he says, and after that time, there were no more accounts of being tricked by a fox.⁷² That turning point falls right in the midst of Japan's rapid economic growth era. Until then, foxes had been viewed with reverence as Other; they were thought to be messengers of the gods and the supernatural. From a certain point on in the 1960s, however, foxes came to be seen as simply animals, to be driven away when they proved bothersome to human beings. In other words, the nature of the relationship between foxes and humans changed. Perhaps today, video game characters, for example, may be seen as a new Other.

When we think of the Other in this way, the dead fall naturally into the category of the Other, too. Communication with the dead in the usual sense is impossible. No matter how we might appeal to the dead, they do not respond in words. And yet, our relationship with the dead does not cease. Even though we can no longer see the person nor hear his or her voice speaking, the dead call out to the living and tell us things. Relationships with the dead are different from the usual relationships among the living, but they are not completely cut off. Anyone who has experienced the death of someone close must have experienced this.

What is interesting is the fact that until now all philosophers, with the exception of Tanabe Hajime, have consistently ignored this very real experience. One reason might

72 Uchiyama 2007.

be that, as mentioned above, since the problem of existence had always taken precedence in Western philosophy, the strange relationship with the dead, whose existence cannot be ascertained (and is rather an “identity and difference of existence and non-existence”), was never really taken up. Another reason is that in the Christian way of thinking, when a person dies, the spirit lives on eternally, but comes under the rule of God, and through God’s judgment the spirit is assigned either to heaven or to hell. There is no place in this scheme where the living can intervene on behalf of the dead, nor where the dead can influence the living. The spirit may be eternal but it is unrelated to the living. So as a result, the relationship between the living and the dead is not problematized.

In Buddhism, by contrast, although it is indeed said that your destiny in the next life depends on your deeds in this life (*jigō jitoku*), from quite early in its history, the idea of *ekō* developed. *Ekō* is the idea that the bodhisattva directs accumulated virtue not only to its own enlightenment but for the sake of others. Through this, Tanabe says, the bodhisattva can thereby influence the fate of the living even after death and, conversely, the living can affect the destiny of the dead. It is quite possible that there is this kind of profound relationship between the living and the dead through existential communion.

The story of Dōgo and Zengen demonstrates this idea in a specific way that is very easy to understand. Even after a person has died, that person does not cease to guide the living, and by following the lead of the person who has died, the living may be led to enlightenment. And that is not a phenomenon limited to just Dogo and Zengen. Indeed, through Zen meditation, practitioners can come face to face with the Buddha or with the founders of their school. In meditation, time is transcended. What is experienced is not just awareness of eternal time; the past is literally reborn in the present. This sort of awareness is inconceivable if we follow a linear view of time, but time does not simply follow a linear flow from past to present to future. The primordial conception of time is not linear; linear time is something that has been constructed. Time is intertwined, the past entering into the present and the present entering into the past. The reason that we can remember events of the past and that we have sudden and spontaneous flashbacks has to be because the past is deeply involved with the present.

The primordial conception of time is not linear; linear time is something that has been constructed.

Among the various Others we have been considering, what is specific to the dead is that they are the Other who were once with us, but are no longer. This is, of course, referring to their presence as limited by the physical senses, and does not refer to their existence beyond that plane.

In this way, Tanabe’s philosophy of the dead not only deepens our understanding of the Other; it also has great significance in overturning conventional ideas about the nature of time. But Tanabe’s assertions about the relationship of the living to the dead

have been forgotten for a long time. One reason for this is that scholarship in philosophy in Japan has overwhelmingly emphasized the introduction of Western philosophy and simply ignored theories and ideas that did not conform with the paradigms of what was introduced. Among Tanabe's ideas, while the "theory of species" modifying the work of Nishida has received some scholarly attention, the "philosophy of death" he developed in his later years has hardly been examined at all.

After Tanabe, another who, though not a philosopher, furthered the study of the dead was Uehara Senroku (1899–1975). Uehara was a follower of Nichiren Buddhism and a historian who became a leader of liberal historiography in postwar Japan, but after his wife Toshiko became ill and died in 1969, he led a secluded life in Kyoto and pursued his ideas on "struggling alongside with the dead." Uehara, probably unaware of Tanabe Hajime's "philosophy of death," developed his ideas through his own speculation and experience, and the result is presented in the collection of essays *Shisha, seija* (The Dead, the Living) published in 1974.

Uehara's wife Toshiko died of cancer, but a number of medical mistakes were made and inappropriate treatments were prescribed by her doctors. The title of the book expresses Uehara's commitment to "struggle" and protest against the bungling that hastened her death "together" with his deceased wife. Beyond that private battle, however, it signals his quest, by universalizing his experience, of the possibility of "existing together, living together, and struggling together" with the deceased. This is done through virtuous practices conducted for the sake of others.

Uehara expresses his ideas very succinctly in the short essay "Shisha ga sabaku" (The Dead Judges) (included in *Shisha, seija*). He calls attention to the fact that society has become "a world entirely of the living." In society before modern times, the dead were welcomed into daily life and they continued to be part of society through such customary rituals as the midsummer Bon and the New Year Shōgatsu, but no one pays attention to the dead any more. His idea that the "dead judge" comes out of this line of his thought. Judgment is not passed by "God," he believes, but by the dead; indeed, it is the dead who pass judgment on the living.

The people massacred at Auschwitz, in Algeria, and in My Lai, before that the Koreans killed following the 1923 Tokyo earthquake and the Chinese killed in Nanjing by Japanese, the Japanese killed by the United States in the Tokyo air raids and the Hiroshima and Nagasaki atomic bombings—they all sit in judgment. Without fighting alongside with those dead in the interlocking layer structures of the past, it will be impossible to overcome the obstinate and encrusted evil that pervades our government and society.⁷³

73 Uehara 1987, vol. 16, p. 54.

Those who died as a result of wars, terrorism, or pollution are not beings who have disappeared into the past. They constantly and consistently point the finger of accusation at the living. Only by struggling alongside those dead will the living be able to change the world they live in. Through that struggle with the dead, the dead give strength to the living and can change the world of the living.

Tanabe's philosophy of death, too, while triggered by the personal experience of the loss of his wife, had a social relevance sensitized by the historic advent of the atomic age. In Tanabe's view, the possibility that the atomic age might bring about the annihilation of humankind suggested a pessimistic view of the future and his idea of "existential communion" with the dead, too, had a strong soteriological significance. By contrast, Uehara sought through his idea of "struggle with the dead" to actively confront the issues of the world of the living, and that greatly broadened the scope of discussion regarding the dead.

Only by struggling alongside the dead will the living be able to change the world.

Today, the era of Cold War with its high risk of nuclear war may have ended, but the hoped-for peace has not arrived; no end is in sight in the quagmire of war between the apparently limitless violence of U.S. "imperialism" and its extremist guerilla and "rogue state" foes. Even for Japan, problems remaining from the war that ought to have ended decades ago continue to rear their tenacious heads, aggravating the national feelings of peoples around Asia. The past does not go away; the dead have not disappeared into nothingness. Tanabe's and Uehara's ideas on the dead will surely be a great source of strength for our society from now on.

To consider the dead inhabitants of the realm of *myō* (the other world) is to place them close to the category of Shintō gods (*kami*) and Buddhist deities, and that fits fairly in tune with the traditional Japanese view of life and death. The dead are frequently called *hotoke*—buddha—and this does not seem odd to us either. The idea of *sokushin jōbutsu* (lit., "immediate rebirth as a buddha") that developed in Japan originally referred to those who became enlightened in this world and became buddhas, but the idea gradually changed from enlightenment in this world to enlightenment in the next. In that process, the idea of *ekō*, or the transference of merit, emerged, and is believed to have led to the concept that the dead could achieve buddhahood through the help of the living. Insofar as *hotoke* (buddha) is not an absolute being but something people turned into, there was nothing unnatural in people becoming buddhas after death.

Japan's *kami* deities, too, are not unrelated to the dead. It is said that death is abhorred in Shintō, but the custom of holding rituals for the appeasement of the spirit of person who died harboring some grudge against the living was widely practiced from around the Heian period (794–1185), the typical example being the cult of Tenjin that arose to quell the spirit of Sugawara no Michizane (805–903). At the peak of a distinguished

career, Michizane had been slandered by upstart rival Fujiwara Tokihira (871–909) and assigned to the remote post of Dazaifu. After he died there, far from the center of power where his talents would have flourished, his furious spirit is said to have visited disaster upon the capital. By holding rituals dedicated to Michizane as a *kami* deity called Tenjin, it was thought that the curse brought by his spirit was broken. In due course, Tenjin was transformed into a peaceful god of learning and today is considered a guardian deity. Father of Japanese folklore Yanagita Kunio (1875–1962) wrote that the spirits of the ancestors change from frightening *aratama* deities to peaceful guardian *nigitama* deities who would protect their descendants, and that belief stems from the same idea.

The notion that not only the *kami* and buddhas of traditional belief, but also the dead are part of the otherworldly realm of *myō* is persuasive. The dead have high affinities with the *kami* and Buddhist deities, and within the realm of *myō*, it is probably the dead who have the closest relation to the living. Indeed, the dead could be called guides into the world of *kami* and Buddhist deities. One might say that any attempt at philosophy that does not properly situate these deities in its purview does not really qualify as a philosophy of Japan.