

Philosophy Live : A Perspective from Japan

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CHAPTER 8

TRANSCENDENT OR IMMANENT: BEING BEYOND ~~GOD~~

In order to recognize that which *is*, we recognize it in contrast to that which *is not*. But *that which is not*, recognized in opposition to *that which is*, is [thus] still an oppositional being. True nothing must be that which envelops such being and nothing; there must be a *basho* wherein such being and nothing are established. The nothing that opposes being by negating it is not true nothing. Rather true nothing must be that which forms the background of being.⁸²

—Nishida Kitarō

Efforts have been made to prove the existence of God: If God is perfect, God must exist, for were God not to exist it would mean that God is imperfect, lacking the attribute of existence compared to things that do exist. Proofs like this have something of the aura of hocus-pocus, but have been evoked on and off ever since the writings of theologian Anselm of Canterbury (1033–1109) in the European Middle Ages.

Kant is said to have refuted once and for all Anselm's proof in his *Critique of Pure Reason*, pointing out the disjunction between existence in concept and existence in reality. For example, there is a clear distinction between the concept of 10,000 yen and the actual 10,000-yen bill. After all, conceptualizing something as a perfect being does not prove that it actually exists. Kant also critiques the cosmological and natural theological arguments attempting to prove the existence of God. The cosmological proof goes that, since the workings of the world follow the laws of cause and effect, the procedure of tracing each effect to its cause would eventually bring one to that "first cause," which must be God. According to the natural theological argument, the reason there is order in the world is that there is a purposeful creator. Kant faults both these lines of argument because they cite issues immanent to the world (the law of cause and effect, order) in the attempt to prove the existence of God, who transcends that world.

⁸² Nishida 1987, "Basho" (Place), p. 77; translation from Krummel and Nagatomo 2012, p. 55.

All of these attempts to prove the existence of God, however, are based on logic and reason, but one may wonder: Can rational proofs for the existence of God really convince people? Perhaps proofs for the existence of God presuppose faith in God. In medieval Europe of Anselm's time, the presence of God was taken for granted, no one doubted the

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words in the Bible, and the function of human reasoning was simply to work in support of what was recorded there.

With the development of science in Europe, advancements in learning brought the realization that the statements made in the Bible could not always be taken literally. The story may be only legendary that Galileo Galilei, called before the

Inquisition because of his views supporting the then-heretical theory that the earth revolved around the sun, muttered, "And yet it moves" after being sentenced guilty, but it illustrates that even the strongest human authority cannot halt the advance of science. The story of God's creation of heaven and earth, as related in the Bible's *Book of Genesis*, proved particularly incompatible with science and was eventually rejected. The structure of the universe as demonstrated by science was profoundly different from the way it was explained in the Bible. The final blow came in the nineteenth century with Charles Darwin's theory of evolution. Those who were convinced of the scientific finding that human beings had, like all other creatures, evolved from lower forms of life, could no longer simply accept the Bible's story that God had created man and woman in his own image, though fundamentalist Christianity even today considers the account given in the Bible to be irrefutable truth and rejects the theory of evolution.

Amid the advances of modern science, philosophers began to rely less on the Bible than on reason in their thinking regarding the divine. They were not ready to abandon their faith in God, but they sought to understand God on the basis of logical, rational human reasoning rather than the scientifically ungrounded words of the Bible. This is the trend known as Deism. Among the Deists was Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677) who, although influenced by Judaistic mysticism, came to reject the transcendental nature of God and consider that God was Nature itself. He believed that the order of Nature followed geometric laws and could be understood according to human reason. Spinoza was much condemned for what was called his pantheism, which was considered non-Christian and akin to atheism.

With progressive developments in science and rationalism, the advocates of atheism and materialism grew stronger. Denis Diderot (1713–1784) and the Enlightenment scholars of the Encyclopedist school denounced the corruption of the Catholic Church and its clergy and propagated a materialist atheism that became a driving force in the French Revolution. That trend led in turn in the nineteenth century—with Ludwig

Feuerbach's (1804–1872) *The Essence of Christianity*—to the idea that the consciousness of the infinite is the same as human consciousness of the self, ascribing the problem of religion to the problem of humanity. God, he wrote, is human beings' projection of the essence of themselves. This view turned the tables on previous views of religion, exerted a great influence on the critique of religion, and was adopted by Marx and Engels in their materialist vision.

In the critique of Christianity in the nineteenth century, another philosopher who played an important role was Friedrich Nietzsche. Seeing Christianity as a religion of the *ressentiment* of the weak, Nietzsche rejected its tenets and declared, "God is dead." While Feuerbach and Marx welcomed the advent of liberation from religion as a desirable trend of the future, Nietzsche warned of the nihilistic collapse of values that would result from the death of God. Yet he himself asserted a stance of "active nihilism," which he believed would make it possible to overcome such hopeless nihilism, and he anticipated the appearance of the *Übermensch* (overman) who would have superhuman powers. The "death of God" debate did indeed deal a decisive blow to Christian belief and had a serious impact. For any believer faced with this "God is dead" challenge, simple and naive faith in God was no longer possible.

The atheism that developed fully in nineteenth-century philosophy also had a great influence on twentieth-century philosophy. Among other philosophers, Heidegger inherited Nietzsche's critique of the modern rationalist and humanist position, and set forth the idea of the "oblivion of Being." According to Heidegger, thinkers from the time of the Greek philosophers had concentrated their search on *that which is*, and had lost sight of the basic condition of Being itself. In that sense, every system of traditional metaphysics was wrong. He argued that Being, which lies in the backdrop of each individual existent, was exactly what ought to be the essential subject of philosophy.

Heidegger's ontology-centered philosophy is notable for having focused attention on the backdrop that supports all that exists. This aligns with the notion of *myō* as juxtaposed to *ken*, as described earlier in this book. However, there is something very frustrating in trying to understand what specifically he was referring to by the very abstract concept of "Being," because, as I have mentioned before, there is some doubt as to whether existence is really the primary question, revealing that the problematization of existence has been part of the tradition of Western philosophy. For example, even though we do not know if something objectively "exists," there are cases in which, for example, the dead can be a major issue for us; the position I have taken in this book is that *relations precede existence*.

[Heidegger] argued that Being is exactly what ought to be the essential subject of philosophy—but is existence really the primary question?

In the latter part of twentieth-century France as well, while the atheism of Sartre was initially dominant in mainstream philosophy, gradually the influence of Heidegger led to a critique of Jean-Paul Sartre's (1905–1980) ideas and set in motion efforts to rethink the problem of God—the movement that came to be known as the “theological turn of phenomenology.” The leaders of this movement included Emmanuel Lévinas and Jacques Derrida in the Judaic tradition, and from the Catholic viewpoint Michel Henry (1922–2002) and Jean-Luc Marion (b. 1946). Here I would like to look briefly at Marion's *God Without Being* (1991; Fr. 1982).

Marion's sense of “God without being” does not mean he takes the atheist position of rejecting God. Rather, he seeks to engineer a major shift in approaches to the problem of God. First he argues that it is pointless to ask whether God “exists” in the same way that other existing things exist, or try to pinpoint the attributes of God. God should not be treated as an identifiable or singular entity. Then, unlike Heidegger, he does not think of “Being” as primary, as it measures God by an attribute of existence. Indeed, the existence of God does not even have to be an issue, since God transcends existence; God is, namely, “God without being.” To express this idea of God as transcending existence, Marion wrote God with an “x” through the word, as ~~God~~.

God without being does not appear because appearing in any phenomenal manifestation would involve limitation as belonging to “those that exist,” thereby invalidating the transcendent God. Marion referred to such “appearing gods” as idols. Idols, says Marion, assign a visible form to that which is invisible, so they inevitably close the channels of access to the invisible. Icons, by contrast, he says, provide a way of making something that is invisible be seen as something unseeable, and he believes the icon uses the visible nature of a thing to open up the channels toward that which cannot be seen. Idols rigidify something as visible, whereas icons liberate the vision so as to enable us to “perceive” the invisible.

So, how does such a ~~God~~ work in this world? Marion sees this in terms of gift. In this world, it is ~~God~~ who gives the things of the world the gift of existence or the gift of being those that exist. This is ~~God's~~ love (agape), the self-submission to crucifixion. Marion goes on to discuss this idea in relation to the receiving of the Eucharist, but I will not go into the details here.

There is much in Marion's ideas that can be useful to our journey into philosophy. As mentioned before, there is no real point in discussing the *existence* of the Other who belongs to the realm of *myō*. Although there is some question about whether the use of such terms as idol and icon are appropriate, the Other of the *myō* world is not something that can be optically visualized through idols. Always there will be something that cannot be understood. One might well say that what had been expressed in terms of icons (to borrow Marion's terminology) in medieval Japan was gradually visualized, like apparitions (*yōkai*) in the Edo period, and became idol-like.

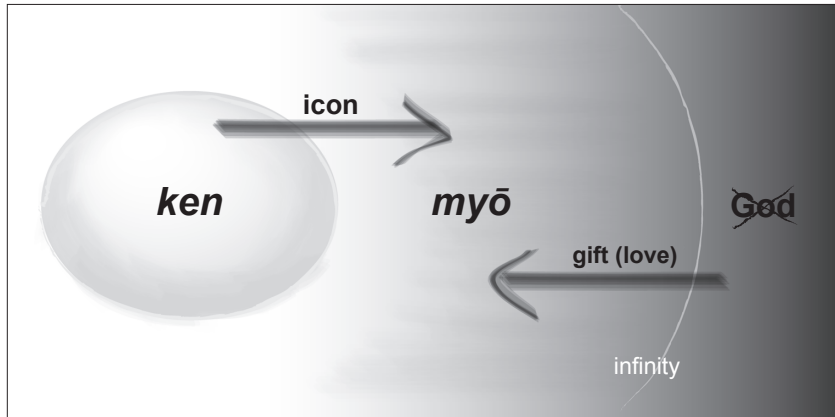


Figure 4 *Ken*, *myō*, and Marion's motifs of icon and gift

Marion's argument rests on the premise of Judeo-Christian monotheism and is therefore different from the Japanese notion of the otherworldly realm of *myō*. Marion's ~~God~~ would lie at the very farthest reaches of the otherworldly *myō*. It is not within this world, but completely transcends it, being "further again" beyond anything we can grasp. That means the gift of God's love is conceived to come over a vast distance, perhaps as shown in the diagram in Figure 4, in which the realm of *myō* is brighter the closer it is to *ken*, and darker the farther it is from *ken*, and with ~~God~~ situated infinitely beyond that. The diagram shows arrows moving in two directions, one extending from *ken*—representing the human seeking of ~~God~~ through the medium of an icon—and the other aimed at *ken* from the remote distance of ~~God~~, from which love reaches out over the distance. Love ("gift"), which specifically took the form of the visualized Christ in the flesh, appeared as the manifestation of the existence of the otherworld. In Judaism, Christ was not of the flesh, which signifies how great is the distance between the ~~God~~ and the *ken* world of human beings and the division between them. Of course, if the relationship between the two was completely shut off, there would be no connection. God relates to the world of humans through the words of prophets.

Such a scheme draws quite a striking contrast with the view in Buddhism. The teachings of Jōdo (Pure Land) Buddhism come close to this idea of ~~God~~, and indeed, Jōdo Shinshū (True Pure Land) school developed its doctrinal structure in modern times based on the model of Christianity. But basically Buddhism does not adhere to the idea of a transcendental deity. In Jōdo teachings, in fact, it is a human being known as Hōzō Bosatsu (Dharmakara Bodhisattva), who, after taking the vows of the ascetic and engaging in spiritual training, becomes a buddha. So the Buddha is not conceived as transcendent or absolute. Buddhism adheres to the belief that there is always a connection between

the invisible realm of the otherworldly and the visible human world. So, as also touched on in Chapter 5, the structure of the worlds of Western monotheism and of *ken-myō* as found in Asia and Japan are fundamentally different. Christianity and Buddhism are frequently compared, but in fact they are completely different in nature.

A ~~Nothing~~ Transcending Both Something and Nothing

So how is the world conceived in Asian religion and philosophy? In some cases, as in the Confucian idea of heaven, we do find the dimension of the transcendent, but even there, no image of a God-as-Creator, transcendental God as is conceived in Judeo-Christian monotheism. What advanced philosophical thought in China about the principles and structure of the world was the dualistic principle of yin and yang in the classic works *Yi jing* (Wade-Giles: *I ching*; Eng. *Book of Changes*) and the philosophy of *wu* (nothingness) in the *Dao de jing* by Laozi (604–531 B.C.).

It is particularly the *Dao de jing*, incorporating the principle of yin and yang, that deals with the generation of all things. The 40th chapter of the *Dao de jing* says, “All things in the world come from being. And being comes from non-being,”⁸³ suggesting that non-being is more basic than being. Based on that idea, Chapter 42 says that “Dao produced the one. The one produced the two. The two produced the three. And the three produced the ten thousand things.” According to this interpretation, the Dao is that basic *wu*, one is “being,” two is heaven and earth, and three is the result of the spirit of yin-yang at work in heaven and earth.⁸⁴

Thus nothingness is the primary principle that precedes something. The workings of that principle become what is called no-action (*wu wei*). This is as Chapter 37 says: “Dao invariably takes no action, and yet there is nothing left undone.” “No action” means literally doing nothing; it says that no deliberate action is needed, nature will take care of everything. As written in Chapter 51, “Dao produces them [all things]. Virtue fosters them. Matter gives them physical form. The circumstances and tendencies complete them. Therefore the ten thousand things esteem Dao and honor virtue.” All things will proceed, without orders from anyone, because Nature takes its course. From this comes the often-quoted expression “*mui shizen*” (doing nothing and taking things as they come).

In India this principle of the cosmos is identified as Brahman, and the ideal is for the Ātman or spiritual principle of the individual to become one with Brahman. Because of this, Brahman is considered not as transcendental but as part of this world. Buddhism, meanwhile, rejects this sort of substantial principle, and makes “no-self” its central principle. Buddhism is critical of metaphysical arguments, teaching that, rather

83 *Dao de jing* (Chan) 1963, p. 160. All quotes from *Dao de jing* in this section quote this edition. —trans. See also Ames and Hall 2003.

84 See Hachiya Kuniya’s note in *Dao de jing* (Hachiya).

than indulging in abstruse speculation, one should simply and assiduously pursue some practical goal as a path of release from the suffering of this world. For example, with regard to what happens after one has escaped from suffering and attained Nirvana, what sort of condition that is and whether it persists, Buddhism eschews answers.

All the same, Buddhism does not necessarily abandon the issues of the fundamental principle of this world. Especially in Mahayana Buddhism, the metaphysical problems that had been denied in original Buddhism made a comeback. In its doctrines we see the truths that undergird the world expressed in such terms as *shinnyo* (Sk. *tathatā*; the ultimate nature of all things), *hosshin* (Sk. *dharmakāya*; Buddha's Dharma body), and *hokkai* (Dharma-realm). These describe the world that opens up upon achieving enlightenment; the world that is hidden to those mired in earthly desires (*bonnō*). Those freed from earthly desires, it is thought, will find the truths of the world revealed. In contrast to the world clouded by our desires, and fraught with divisions, biases, and attachments, the original nature of the world was believed to be one of equality, completely free of biases.

The concept of *hosshin* is of particular interest. This term came into being in the course of the development of the Buddha-body (*buddha-kāya*) theory. As mentioned, the buddha was originally a person who had achieved enlightenment, not a transcendental being or absolute god. Since in achieving enlightenment, the historical buddha saw the truth of the world, it is thought that he became one with Truth, and that that unity came to be called *hosshin*.

Later the three bodies of Buddha (*trikāya*) theory developed, proposing the *hōjin* (reward body) and the *ōjin* (manifestation body) along with the *hosshin*. The *hōjin* is the buddha body that can be realized through training, for example, an individual buddha such as Amida Buddha. The *ōjin* is a buddha that assumes a certain temporary manifestation for the purpose of saving people. In contrast to those is the *hosshin* buddha, which is the embodiment of the truth that is immanent in the world. *Hosshin*, therefore has a very strong pantheistic quality. The potentiality that everyone has of becoming a buddha is called "buddha-nature" (*busshō*; Sk. *buddhadhātu*) or "buddha-womb" (*nyoraizō*; Sk. *tathāgatagarbha*). Thus, Buddhism does not involve any sort of transcendent deity with truth always inherent within.

This may seem to be the classical East Asian worldview, but let us look at the way Nishida Kitarō understood those ideas in the modern age and reconstructed them as his theory of "the place of nothingness." As discussed in Chapter 2, Nishida's *An Inquiry into the Good* launched the development of a genuinely Japanese philosophy through his proposal of the idea of "pure experience." After publication of *Jikaku ni okeru chokkan to hansei* (Intuition and Reflection in Self-consciousness) in 1917, Nishida's thinking moved in a new direction through his *Hataraku mono kara miru mono e* (From the Acting to the Seeing), published in 1927. It is in this work that he expounded the idea of "place" (*basho* or *ba*) that was to become the core of Nishida's philosophy from that time.

The epoch-making writing that established his reputation was the essay entitled “Place.” “Place” refers to the “place of emplacement.” How did he arrive at this concept and what significance does it have?

Nishida wrote, in his *Inquiry into the Good*, that pure experience was the streaming of experience in consciousness, and he thought that it was the only true reality we have. When pure experience divides into the subjective and the objective, specific things make their appearance. Thus pure experience is what is experienced as the sole reality, and at the same time it can also be the “place” where all manner of things appear. Although subject and object are undivided in pure experience, such experience rests, if anything, mostly upon subjective experience. When we objectify that experience and extract its structure, the universal nature of phenomena in which things are in their “places” is revealed.

To start from the most elemental, in order for physical things to exist, they must have a “place” called space. However, that physical space is something that is abstracted through thought, and if we return to the more basic structure of cognition, things are conceived as appearing in the “place” of consciousness. In order for consciousness to cognize the object, it is impossible for the two—the subjective and the objective—to be completely separate, so we must think of consciousness as enveloping both, a place where the two interrelate. “Place,” therefore, is not something that can be determined monosensically; it must be conceived as layered.

Yet if what is involved is that kind of layering, insofar as endless oppositions must be accommodated, increasingly larger “places” will be necessary, meaning that the final “place” will never be attained. And this brings us back to Nishida’s words quoted at the opening of this chapter:

In order to recognize that which *is*, we recognize it in contrast to that which *is not*. But *that which is not*, recognized in opposition to *that which is*, is [thus] still an oppositional being. True nothing must be that which envelops such being and nothing; it must be a *basho* wherein such being and nothing are established. The nothing that opposes being by negating it is not true nothing. Rather true nothing must be that which forms the background of being.⁸⁵

The *is not* that is not in opposition with *is*, the bottomless *is not* that incorporates both *is* and *is not*—should probably be written, along Marion-esque lines, as ~~*is not*~~. Then we should also use “~~X~~,” along the lines of Heidegger’s ~~Sein~~. Indeed, one may ask if there is any difference between the ~~*is not*~~ and the ~~X~~.

⁸⁵ Nishida 1987, p. 77; this translation is from Krummel and Nagatomo 2012, p. 55.

Considered in view of the concept of “place,” however, *is not* or ~~*is not*~~ would be more appropriate. This is because, since “place” is the backdrop against which things act, it can only serve its purpose by being concealed in the shadows. The *Dao de jing* gives the examples of the “non-being [of the hubs of the wheels],” the “non-being” inside a clay pot, and the “non-being” within a house to illustrate the utility played by the emptiness within things (Chapter 11).⁸⁶ The place of non-being (*mu*) is able to fulfill being (*yü*), only because of its non-being. Thus with this idea of “place,” Nishida was able to follow in the wake of the East Asian traditions.

Incidentally, the idea of “place of non-being” has a close connection with analysis of the logical structure of language. Aristotle defined the individual as substance, or “what can be a subject, not a predicate.” The proposition that “A is B” signifies that to A is attached the nature of B. For example, when we say, “This is a chair,” we mean to say that the entity that is “this” belongs to the nature of “chair.” Thus, it is the individual substance that we try to define the subject A to its limit.

In contrast to Aristotle’s emphasis on the subject, Nishida focused on the predicate. A predicate presents a universal or a general nature of the subject that envelops the subject. In contrast to the being (that is perceived as the subject “this”), the predicate cannot be individually substantialized and, taken to its greatest extent, it can avoid all constraints until it can only be described as “is not” (non-being). This view seems to rest upon the structure of the Japanese language, for Japanese does not necessarily require a subject. As explained by seminal linguist Tokieda Motoki (1900–1967) in his ideas on the “nested-boxes” structure of language, the elements of a Japanese sentence are part of an assembled structure that is ultimately enveloped by the predicate. Seen in that light, we can say that Nishida’s concept of “place” is based not so much on a Western-language-oriented as on a Japanese-oriented mindset.

Nishida’s logic of “place” thus involves a flexible worldview that is distinct from Western-derived ideas. Not only that, it can be applied in the natural sciences. Magnetic and gravitational fields have been understood since antiquity, while relativity theory and quantum physics are developing new kinds of theories regarding place. In Gestalt psychology, efforts are being made to view human psychology not as simply the accumulation of individual elements but within the framework of “place-related” structures. The philosophy of place thus has applicability that corresponds to the new sciences. Place involves the structure of the *ken* world, but of course not just that; it can also be said to display the mandala-like structure including the realm of *myō*. Nevertheless, place is always immanent to the world and does not allow for an absolute God that transcends the world.

86 *Dao de jing* (Chan), pp. 144–45.

The Conflict of Immanent and Transcendent

After the publication of his essay on place, Nishida's later philosophy, which was premised on the idea of *basho*, steadily pursued the subject of the individual, and in this process, his ideas on religion matured. Since he had first expounded his theory of pure experience, Nishida had always been concerned with the nature of the self. His notion of place, as well, took shape from the idea that the world unfolds in the place of consciousness as pure experience. In his view, the individual is contained within the world/place while at the same time one dimension of the consciousness of the individual is a place that incorporates the world. This can be described as the macrocosm and the microcosm including each other. The world as a whole is reflected within the consciousness of the individual. Put in the language of Kegon school Buddhism, it closely resembles the idea of "one-is-all" (*ichi soku issai*). In Western philosophy, it is close to Leibniz's idea of monads.

The individual is thus composed of various contradictions, and Nishida described the nature of the individual filled with contradictions even as it maintains its identity as one of "absolutely contradictory self-identity." He explained this idea for the first time in an essay of the same title published in 1939 in the third volume of *Tetsugaku ronbunshū* (Collected Essays on Philosophy).⁸⁷ Up until the middle of his career, Nishida's perspective centered on matters of epistemology, and he did not treat the social activity of the individual in detail, but in his later period, the activity of the individual in the historical world was the core of his attention. He examined the element of self-negation involved, along with the dimension of time, in the self of the past and building toward the future. One of his important achievements was clarifying the fact that the self has within it a trait of self-negation.

Taking such a position, how did Nishida view the absolute God? In his essay on "absolutely contradictory self-identity" (*zettai mujunteki jiko dōitsu*) Nishida sets forth his position on "the Asian religions of *mu*." He expounds his theory of *sokushin zebutsu* ("the mind itself is Buddha"), saying "we die absolutely in the depths of self-contradiction, and then can be true to the principle of 'all-is-one' (*issai soku ichi*)."⁸⁸ If we pursue the self-contradictory including self-denial within the self as far as possible, he says, we reach the principle of "one," which is the basic principle of all things. In the same essay he writes of the transcendent one (*chōetsuteki issha*), but we find that in fact he is referring to the absolute-contradictory self-identity of ourselves. "Always, we face things that directly transcend the world of the individual, that which transcends this world."⁸⁹ This individual "I" itself has a quality of the transcendent, and in that respect, there is no essential disparity between "I" and the transcendent (God).

⁸⁷ "Zettai mujunteki jiko dōitsu," Nishida 1939.

⁸⁸ Nishida 1989, p. 80.

⁸⁹ Nishida 1989, p. 81.

In his essay on the “absolutely contradictory self-identity,” Nishida focuses his discussion mainly on the relationship between the self and the world (place), and although he does talk about religion, it is not necessarily his central topic. By the time of the final essay of his career, “Bashoteki ronri to shūkyōteki sekaikan” (The Logic of Place and the Religious Worldview; 1945), however, he tackles the problem of religion directly, from the viewpoint of place. It is an extremely complex and difficult essay, but it is there that he seeks to construct a theory for explaining the different aspects of Jōdo Buddhism, Zen, and Christianity.

The new concept that is the center of Nishida’s exposition is “inverse correspondence,” which is his answer to the problem of the relationship to the Other in “place.” The relationship of each individual in its “absolutely contradictory self-identity” is a relationship of mutual negation and thus “inverse correspondence.” This is best expressed by the words of Daitō Kokushi (1282–1338): “okukō ai wakarete shuyu mo hanarezu” (eternally apart, yet not separated even for a moment). Daitō’s words, Nishida says, explain the relationship between humans and God (using the Christian term).

Nishida’s ideas are of much interest, but there is some question in my mind as to whether the notion of inverse correspondence can really help explain the relationship between the divine and humans that are disparate in nature. Inverse correspondence may be effective in explaining the relationship of homogeneous individuals but cannot explain the heterogeneity between God and humans. As mentioned above, in Buddhism, even in the Jōdo school, the Buddha is not an absolute being different from human beings, so can be explained by inverse correspondence. In the case of the Judeo-Christian religion, it seems that God cannot really be explained using just the inverse correspondence concept.

Nishida says, “The God that is thoroughly immanent and at the same time transcendent in everything is the truly dialectic God.”⁹⁰ However, God in the Judeo-Christian tradition cannot be called both immanent and transcendent. Rather it is the Other of the realm of *myō* that has that quality of being at once immanent and transcendent. The Other is always beyond one’s comprehension, and in that sense transcendent. Yet the “place” of *myō*, insofar as it relates to oneself, is to that extent immanent.

The Others of the realm of *myō* are numerous. As we have already seen, there are the dead, the indigenous gods of Japan, Buddhist deities, the apparitions known as *yōkai*, evil spirits, and even characters that appear in novels and computer games. The Other is not limited to “those that exist.” Even what does not exist, if it is related to the “I” and exerts any power or influence upon me, that is an otherworldly Other. Even the members of one’s family, friends, colleagues—they are all others one cannot completely understand

90 Nishida 1989, p. 329.

with qualities of “transcendence” from our point of view. Even I myself, in that elements of myself are incomprehensible to me, am part of the realm of the Other.

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Our relationships with the Others of the realm of *myō* have, in a sense, the dimension of what Nishida called inverse correspondence. On the one hand there is a vector toward assimilation with the Other, but on the other hand, another vector to rejection and exclusion of the Other. Like a magnet placed in a magnetic field, depending upon how we are situated, we may be excessively attracted to and seek to integrate with the Other

or, contrarily, excessively resist or reject it. Our relationship with the Other is always somehow uncomfortable, and finding a suitable position with which to relate to it is invariably difficult.

We can also to a certain extent understand how Nishida interpreted the self as an “absolutely contradictory self-identity.” Why I say “to a certain extent” is that how far one can actually achieve “self-identity” is not really all that clear. As discussed in Chapter 7, the self quite readily divides into different identities and also merges and unifies with the Other. It is impossible to substantialize the self. Recognizing that the self does not take substantive form, we ought to see the self as a loosely integrated entity.

Here, we might like to consider the question of whether the two schemes—the conception of the monotheistic God discussed above and what we call *ken* and *myō*—could possibly be compatible. Often monotheism and pantheism are diametrically opposed. According to the once-espoused theory of the “evolution of religions,” pantheism is the primitive, and therefore inferior, form of religion, and monotheism is the most advanced form. In response to that then-ascendant theory, a movement arose in nineteenth-century Japan condemning the traditional views of gods and buddhas (*shinbutsu*) as superstition, and in modern Japan the movement developed to reinterpret Buddhism according to the modern forms of religion. Some attempts were made in Jōdo Buddhism to draw parallels with Christianity by reinterpreting Amida Buddha as a monotheistic deity. In the meantime, some emphasized the anti-theist character of Zen and sought to assert its superiority to theist religions including Christianity.

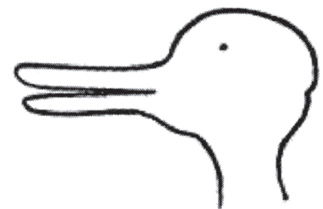
In recent years, the notion of monotheism’s superiority in discussions of religious evolution has proved unsupportable, but something of a reaction has formed in tandem with the rise of nationalism in Japan in which Japanese pantheism is lauded and monotheism is criticized. The argument goes that monotheism is intolerant and militant while pantheism is tolerant and peaceable. Such simplistic arguments are obviously biased and completely out of the question, and it could be quite dangerous if such notions become popular belief in society.

Rather than viewing Western monotheism as antagonistic to the religions of Japan and Asia, Nishida Kitarō proposed a framework that would accommodate both. That framework was the development of absolutely contradictory self-identity into the concept of inverse correspondence, based on his theory of “place,” but it ended up homogenizing all religions and ignoring their distinctions. That meant that despite the transcendent nature of the absolute God, when incorporated into the world of *myō*, God became immanentized, and the distinction between the absolute God and humanity was no longer acknowledged. Obviously such a treatment was not the appropriate way to understand monotheistic religion.

Indeed, can one even think about the God of a monotheistic religion, the Buddhist deities, or the gods of Japan’s indigenous beliefs in the same dimension? Can we really bundle both of these under the same category of “religion”? Today there is much discussion of religious diversity and efforts are being made toward the coexistence of diverse religions. Meaningless conflict between religions is certainly something that must be brought to an end and coexistence of religions is important. However, without understanding the structure of these religions and attempting to have them coexist only on the surface, we cannot get at their essential nature.

As mentioned before, I myself believe that traditional religion in Japan, Buddhism included, can be understood in the context of the *ken-myō* structure of the world (see page 64, Figure 3). By contrast, the transcendence of the monotheistic God is even more remote than the farthest limit of the world of *myō*. That means that the two are in different dimensions and cannot be viewed in the same way. Put the other way around, the two do not compete, nor do they represent an either-or choice. The two are different in nature and are to be located in different places schematically.

As for whether these two traditions of belief could practically be combined to create a syncretic set of beliefs, that, too, would not be feasible. To believe in both at the same time would mean to consider both in the same dimension. That reminds one of a figure that can appear to be two things at the same time, like the drawing that looks like both a duck and a rabbit which Wittgenstein was fond of referring to in illustrating his ideas on different ways of seeing the same thing.



If one focuses on the protrusions at the left as “ears,” one sees a rabbit’s head; if one focuses on them as the bill of a duck, the picture appears to be of a duck. But one cannot see the two images at the same time; when one is focused on the picture as a rabbit, the features of the duck are hidden and vice versa.

In the same way, a religion based on the immanent and a religion based on the transcendent are both possible, but they cannot be incorporated into the same scheme,

so it is difficult to believe in them at the same time. While the two coexist, it is important to firmly recognize that they are schematically different.