

Philosophy Live : A Perspective from Japan

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AFTERWORD

This small volume is of a rather different character from any of my previous books. As I wrote, it seemed to me that my entire life of research was a kind of preparation; in fact, perhaps it was to write this book that I have been fortunate to live this long. The content is such that it might be out of place at the time of this publication, but I believe it will prove its true value, if not now, then perhaps some decades hence.

Aiming as a kind of sketchbook of overall themes in philosophy, the book does not attempt to fulfill the highest demands of so-called scholarly rigor; rather, it is designed to open the reader's mind and to suggest various avenues of inquiry that could lead philosophy out of the ivory tower and out into broader horizons.

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Let me briefly describe the series of events that led me to write this book. I have been fascinated by philosophy since my school days. I found it difficult to accustom myself to society's ordinary ways of thinking from my youth, and the sense of being a misfit caused me quite a bit of pain and hardship. I first set out to study Western philosophy, but partly due to the difficulty of mastering several other languages I gave up midway; I then turned to Buddhism, and the only reason I limited myself to subject matter relating to Japan was that I was by nature too timid and withdrawn to go overseas. Nevertheless, within the field of Buddhist philosophical studies, I worked as hard as I could to the limit of my abilities until the age of fifty.

At that point, I suddenly seemed to have run out of steam. I began to feel haunted by the thought that the whole time I had been running away from issues that were very basic. It was around that time that I participated in a study group made up of leading intellectuals (known as "chishikijin") outside my field. Amid that group, my sense of unease with the obsessions of Japanese scholarship reached a peak. I was out of place. What these people were talking about and thinking about was a different world from mine. It was all in my native Japanese, but they didn't even seem to speak the same language. I was irritated with myself for being unable to articulate the source of my unease.

When I contemplated what to do about the situation, I realized I needed to go back once more to the basic issues of philosophy and find my own language of philosophy. I even thought about going back to university to study philosophy. Unfortunately, I was not in a position to do that right away, so I floundered and flailed, feeling like a man overboard who had never learned to swim. My efforts to keep afloat were not getting me anywhere until I discovered the trick of creating an anonymous website, where I simply wrote like crazy, whatever came to mind. Unlike today, when it has become

perfectly common for people to run on as much as they please in personal blogs or via Twitter, in those days creating a website was rather difficult, and I had a hard time. The painful record of my bruising struggle through several years of self-study of philosophy was later published in 2009 under the title *Boku no tetsugaku modoki* (My Attempts at Philosophy), 2 vols. (Transview).

And thus my thinking gradually began to take more articulate shape. I finally found my voice in *Kindai Nihon no shisō, saikō* (A Reconsideration of Modern Japanese Thought), 3 vols. (Transview, 2004–2010), *Bukkyō vs. rinri* (Buddhism versus Ethics) (Chikuma Shobō, 2006), *Nihon Bukkyō no kanōsei* (The Potential of Japanese Buddhism) (Shunjūsha, 2006; also “Shinchō bunko” paperback edition in 2011), and other works. It was in 2007, in *Tasha, shisha, watashi: Tetsugaku to shūkyō no ressun* (The Other, The Dead, and Myself: Lessons in Philosophy and Religion) (Iwanami Shoten) that I was able to include the word “philosophy” in the title of one of my works for the first time and suggest my own particular interpretation.

Then a publisher asked me if I could write a more accessible book called “Nihon o tetsugaku suru” (Doing Japanese Philosophy). For something like that, I thought I would rather narrow the subject a bit and make it “Nihon kara tetsugaku suru” (Doing Philosophy from Japan) in which I would try to systematize and lay out my own overview of philosophy. That would be fine, I was told, and I promptly began preparations, but my study of philosophy still being rather superficial, the project made little headway. It was only several years later that I finally felt equipped to write something along the lines of the original plan. However, by that time, the publishing situation had changed and the plan was dropped.

So it was just by chance that in 2010 Nakajima Hiroshi of Transview offered to publish the book. I began to actually write the manuscript, but it was difficult to get blocks of time to write, so it took nearly two years to finish. After the draft was finished, I tried to give the book a sense of unity, but ultimately it remains somewhat rough and in need of further polishing.

My efforts to publish thus far have almost always been either strongly resisted or rejected outright, and showered with derision or contempt. I have somehow kept on coming back, nevertheless, and have surely acquired a thicker skin as a result. No doubt this book is destined for the same fate. By now I am getting old and too brittle to put up much of a fight. Still, I am determined to concentrate my strength and keep going along this rather lonely road of mine a little longer. Perhaps this time my efforts will be rewarded.

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