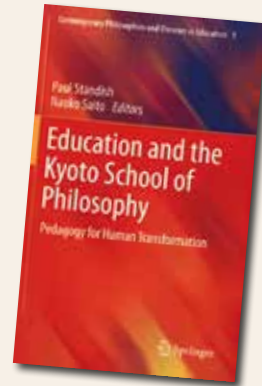


BOOK REVIEW

Education and the Kyoto School of Philosophy: Pedagogy for Human Transformation

Edited by Paul Standish and Naoko Saito

Springer, 2012
190 pages. ISBN 978-9-4007-4046-4

Over the past three decades in the English-speaking world, the Kyoto school of philosophy has gone from almost complete obscurity to being the most well-known school of Japanese thought and one of the key research subjects in Asian philosophy. There now are more than a dozen full-length translations of key works by Nishida Kitarō, Tanabe Hajime, Nishitani Keiji and other members, as well as several anthologies containing their work. However, in the secondary texts in English, research has been focused almost entirely in three directions: First, introductions of the Kyoto school or a particular philosopher within it, second, comparative religious philosophy, and a distant third, discussions of the political problems surrounding the Kyoto school.

It is in light of this that Paul Standish and Saito Naoko's edited volume, *Education and the Kyoto School of Philosophy*, is truly groundbreaking. After years of building a workable base for Kyoto school research in English, the time has come for this school's philosophies to be put to work. For certain, exegeses of these philosophies will always be important. But there is something genuinely exciting seeing them come alive in a field that is undoubtedly contemporary and close to everyday life.

This volume contains sixteen essays from authors from six different countries. There is thus a range of themes that is held together by the core thread of Kyoto school and education. First, there are essays introducing heretofore neglected figures of the Kyoto school and its pedagogy. Kōyama Iwao might be familiar to some as a heavily-criticized wartime propagandist. He is cast in a much more positive light here, as he links up to figures that many in English-speaking countries may have yet to hear of, like Kimura Motomori and Mori Akira. Yano Satoji's essay on philosophical/educational anthropology, Tanaka Tsunemi's essay on clinical pedagogy, and Nishimura Takuo's essay on Kimura and Friedrich Schiller, all provide interesting leads for possible subjects of research (other than the usual suspects).

Second, there are essays discussing figures surrounding the Kyoto school and education, both in Japan and outside of it. There are in-depth discussions of Johann Herbart, Martinus Jan Langeveld, Alfred North Whitehead, American Transcendentalism, Natsume Sōseki and even Zeami. Here, Saito, Suzuki Shoko, Bas Levering, Nishihira Tadashi, Steven Fesmire, Steve Odin, and Lynda Stone share novel comparisons.

These first two strands are necessary for building up to the third strand: discussions of key problematics that arise when we think of the Kyoto school's theories together with

the practical demands of education. It is here that the essays really begin to intertwine and weave a tapestry quite relevant to the concerns of education in postmodernity.

The first key issue that arises is that of “development.” In several essays, it is suggested that the process of human transformation that occurs across a lifetime of education has a rhythm, a dialectic of negations through which the human being develops. In Odin’s essay, we see that Whitehead applies Hegelian dialectics to find three moments in education: first, the stage of romance, where a student, in wonder and curiosity, falls in love with the world, second, the stage of precision where discipline and learning are acquired, and third, the stage of generalization where one returns to pre-reflective romance in a way that is guided by the discipline one has acquired. He connects this to Nishida’s development of pure experience from pre-reflective, to reflective, to *trans*-reflective pure experience. We see a similar dialectic in Nishihira’s essay on Zeami, the greatest philosopher of Noh drama. Here, we see the movement of a disciple from lacking skills (similar to the raw romantic stage above) to an acquisition of skills (discipline) to going beyond skills (generalization), and with an additional stage of “double-eyes” which emerges from no-mind (*mushin* 無心), as an awareness of skills that has transcended any attachment to them.

However, in his essay on Nishida, Standish strongly criticizes this assumption of progression/development as incompatible with the true openness of the idea of “transformation.” He argues that theories of stages of development are objectifications of human becoming that tend to lose sight of the variety of human experience. And quite appropriately, he connects the above stages to the Rinzai view of enlightenment, and the process of awakening to and overcoming the great doubt. He criticizes these views and calls for one of continuous negation, such as is found in Stanley Cavell’s skepticism (and perhaps in Jacques Derrida’s deconstruction as well).

This is something that Nishimura Takuo rebuts in his discussion of Kimura and Schiller, arguing that the above theories are not of developmental “stages,” and that the key problem is not developmental stages themselves, but “that such factors of ‘development’ and ‘progress’ may be abstracted from the living dynamics of practice and negatively operate to reduce the variety and vitality of practice.” I think this is an important argument for both philosophers of education and those studying the Kyoto school.

This brings us to the second major problem of the role of the *negative moment* in education. The key to maintaining the vitality of this development without abstracting it into a teleological ladder is to focus on the negative moments, the self-overcoming that is necessary for human transformation. Standish’s essay on Nishida already presages this focus, which is seen in his reading of nothingness as a “non-positing of self” in the face of dualisms like matter and consciousness. One can read his focus on “transcendence down” or a seeking of transcendence *within* everydayness as an “emptying of emptiness,” a double-negation that effects a non-attachment to the very nothingness of self.

This negation is quite brilliantly developed by Andrea English in her essay on learning as a form of negation. Building primarily on Herbart, she presents an idea of learning as an encounter with otherness that disrupts the self with a sense of perplexity and even existential anxiety. She also highlights the otherness between people—such as between teacher and student—that she sees as lacking in the Kyoto school, as in her criticisms of Nishida’s “I and Thou” (*watakushi to nanji* 私と汝), making way for an easy link to philosophers of alterity like Derrida and Levinas. Given this difference, learning is thus not an accumulation of

facts that builds the self, enforced by a teacher on a student, but rather an unlearning, a disillusionment with and collapse of old patterns of thought, that allows for the arising of the new. This interruption is not one enforced by a teacher on a student, but involves a different dynamics of tact and mutual unfolding.

This theme is supported by other essays, like that of Kim Chae Young. In this comparison of Nishida and William James, we see a possibility for religious education as grounded on religion as this experience that *punctures* ordinary consciousness with the realization of death, evil, and sin.

This discussion of negativity has brought us directly to the third theme, which is a rethinking of community on the register of nothingness. Yano Satoji's essay on education as gift giving points out how education can be the perpetuation of community as closed, the myths of community (or the myths that found community), which are rooted in a sense of indebtedness to the "founding fathers." Against this, he argues for a different mode of education as a "pure gift giving," a "pedagogy geared toward limits" that opens up the community in sharing the untotizable—the negative, the unanswerable question. I think this concretely illustrates the connection "in nothingness" between teacher and student that Andrea English previously expressed, with an image of teaching that conveys not facts but the continuous disturbance of living questions. Furthermore, Steven Fesmire's essay broadly compares the Kyoto school with American Pragmatism, and shows how the negation of a closed sense of self opens up the person not only to the community or to humankind, but to the very ecosystem he or she is part of. He applies this to a new vision of moral education as one that constantly awakens the awareness of this relationality. And to further nuance this connectivity, Saito's complex reading of Henry Thoreau, Lawrence Buell, and Stanley Cavell focuses on images of crisis, rift and transcendence, to highlight both the connectedness and the isolation of the person—a sense of community always disturbed by irreducible singularity.

However, while the sustained questioning on transformation, negation, and connection is the highpoint of this volume, it is not without its weaknesses. First, there is a large amount of typographical errors scattered throughout the book, and an unfortunate lack of clear conventions in the Romanization of Japanese terms. While they do not impede the use of this volume, they can be somewhat distracting. And second, this book also has the limitations that come with being the first of its kind. There seems to be a gap between those who are well-versed in the Kyoto school and those who are specialists in education, and the few authors who straddle both fields effectively do not entirely compensate for the others. However, perhaps this weakness itself can function as a call for those who will continue this work and pursue these problems further.

Reviewed by Anton Luis Sevilla