

PREFACE

What does philosophy look like from the perspective of Japan? How could a fresh perspective from Japan contribute to philosophical understanding and insight in general? In contrast to introductory works English readers may have encountered previously, with their weight on Western philosophy, orderly chronological presentation, and attempt at compact comprehensiveness, this book offers a more eclectic, somewhat meandering, and unabashedly personal view.

Assured that scholarly, objective treatments of philosophy can be found elsewhere, my first purpose is to present ideas I have been mulling in the course of my four decades of research and writing about Buddhism and philosophy for the contemplation of the reader. By showing what we can do in the way of philosophical speculation, I invite the reader to follow along the path of philosophical inquiry. Only those who are willing to venture into somewhat difficult philosophical terrain will perhaps want to accompany me on this journey. Whether this trail leads the reader to approve or to refute the ideas presented herein, if only the journey provides a chance to savor the fascination of pursuing ideas for their own power, the reader will have fully grasped how important it is to do so and will have acquired the capacity to put that pursuit into practice. That, in fact, is one of the purposes that I hope this book will achieve.

Our own thinking can only benefit and gain credence by respecting the achievements of the philosophers of the past and building upon their treatment of the issues at hand. That past need not be limited only to the traditions of Western philosophy but can turn also to the work of modern Japanese philosophers, as well as the various traditions of Asian thought. Modern Japanese philosophy now has a history of well over one century, so in embarking on philosophical speculation from a Japanese perspective, I will tap into that lineage for what it can add to the discussion.

For a very long time, philosophy has not manifested a power capable of lighting the way forward into the future. Still, people cannot go on living in blind pursuit of material goods alone. Never before have we been in greater need of philosophy that can give us hope and ideals—not borrowed ones, but our very own, understood on our own terms, whatever our culture or country. Even if this book does not immediately fulfill such a need, perhaps it will offer some stimulus that will enliven discussion, moving things even in a small way, in that direction.

I invite you to join me in embarking on the challenge of exploring philosophy live, from a Japanese perspective.

SUEKI Fumihiko