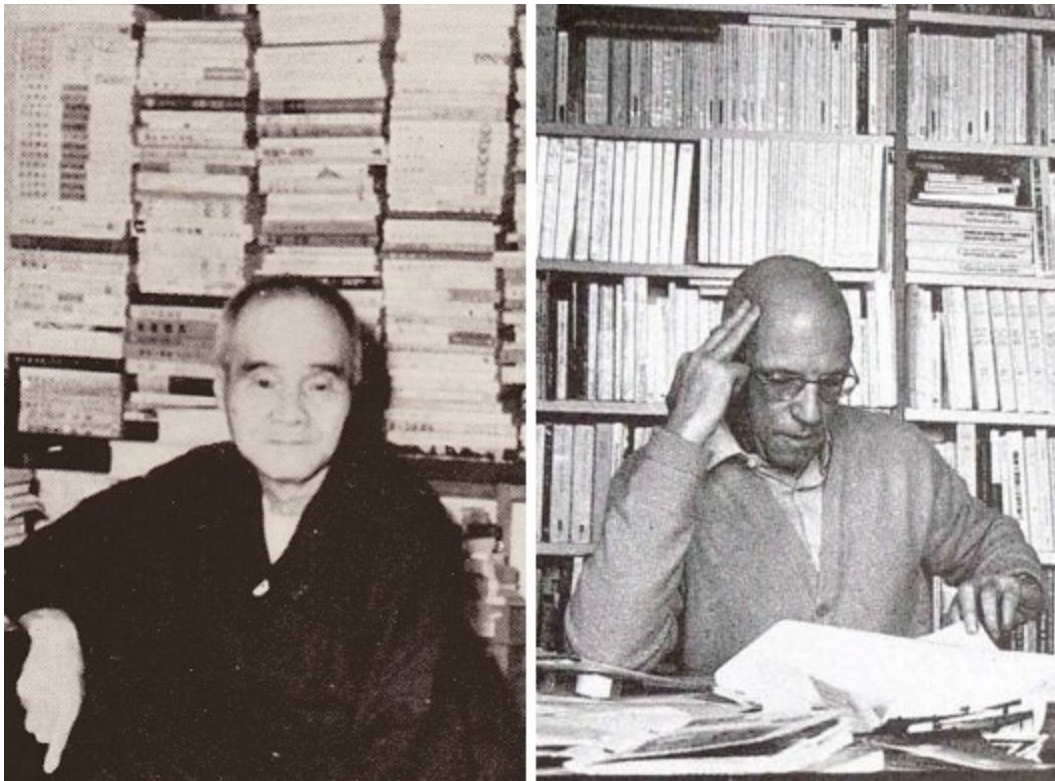


Nothingness, Nihilism and Personal Transformation  
in  
Tanabe's *Philosophy as Metanoetics* and  
Foucault's *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*



MA Thesis

Dennis Prooi

Student Number: 361917

Word Count: 25,627

Number of ECTS: 18

Date of Completion: August 8, 2017

Faculty of Philosophy  
Philosophy of Man and Culture  
Erasmus University Rotterdam

Supervisor: dr. Henk Oosterling

Advisor: prof. dr. Han van Ruler

## Table of contents

1. Introduction	1
2. Conceptual history East and West	
2.1. The study of Japanese philosophy in the West	6
2.2. Zen Buddhism as an ideological construct	10
2.3. The origin of the philosophy of nothingness: Hegel	13
2.4. Nihilism from Hegel to Tanabe	16
3. Tanabe: Philosophy as Metanoetics	
3.1. Nishida philosophy	20
3.2. Shinran and the <i>Kyōgyōshinshō</i>	23
3.3. Absolute nothingness as absolute mediation	26
3.4. <i>Zangedō</i> as the way of transformation	29
3.5. Penitence and nihilism	32
4. Foucault: The Hermeneutics of the Subject	
4.1. Surpassing 'man': from subjection to subjectivation	36
4.2. The care of the self	39
4.3. Conversion: <i>epistrophē</i> , <i>convertere ad se</i> and <i>metanoia</i>	42
5. Spirituality as metanoetics	
5.1. The Zen of the self	45
5.2. Self-renunciation as self-care	47
6. Conclusion	51
Bibliography	54

## 1. Introduction

The two philosophers who form the subject of this thesis may strike one as strange bedfellows. Tanabe Hajime (1889-1962),<sup>1</sup> the Kyoto School philosopher often considered to have been an intellectual accomplice of the militarist regime that took Japan into World War II, condemned the irrationality of the Japanese people and its leaders immediately after the war's conclusion and called for national repentance in the form of the willful, obedient surrender of the self to a religious Other-power. The contrast with the philosophy of Michel Foucault (1926-1984) could perhaps not be greater. Not only did Foucault analyze the way in which religion is an instrument those in power use to discipline bodies, he also attempted to devise a range of tools that enable us to resist disciplinary power, and ultimately elaborated on techniques of the self that subjects may use to constitute themselves as subject. If one understands Tanabe to propose a new form of religious discipline for the Japanese nation, and Foucault as a political activist who combines the rejection of the religious with a call to spirituality, then the two can be taken as each others' opposites. In this thesis, however, I want to depart from the idea that the two had in common a concern for the practical transformation of the self in an intellectual climate marked by nihilism. Tanabe attempted to overcome this nihilism through a form of post-Christian religiosity, one that is infused with Buddhist elements. Foucault returned to the source of Western civilization and showed how pre-Christian societies employed a non-universalistic ethics of self-management. This common struggle against nihilism forms the basis of the question that is the driving force behind this thesis: could we understand Tanabe's call for self-abandonment as a Foucauldian technique of the self?

Bringing two seemingly unrelated thinkers from opposite sides of the globe to the same table and making them speak on the topic of nihilism and ways of overcoming it seems to be an arbitrary exercise. It is not, however, when one realizes that both Tanabe and Foucault were thoroughly familiar with German idealism and its offspring, namely Marxism, phenomenology and existentialism. They additionally seem to have been equally familiar with the works of the early Christian theologians. There is every reason to situate Tanabe and Foucault in the exact same philosophical tradition – a tradition we can call 'Western' only if we keep in mind that Western philosophy had multiple points of contact with the East in its history, and has thus carried within it distinctly Oriental elements at least since Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831). It is perhaps this feature of Western philosophy that provided the condition of possibility for its rapid assimilation by the Japanese intellectuals active towards the end of the Meiji period (1868-1912), when German idealism first reached Japan. Already in 1911, a mere two generations after

---

1 In line with convention, Japanese names are written with the family name coming first.

philosophy's introduction to Japan, Tanabe's predecessor Nishida Kitarō (1870-1945) published *Zen no Kenkyū*,<sup>2</sup> a work widely regarded as the first original contribution of the Japanese to Western philosophy.

The Kyoto School of philosophy, of which Nishida and Tanabe are the main representatives, slowly formed around the figure of Nishida after he took up the chair in philosophy at Kyoto University in 1914. There, he continued his attempt to explicate the Buddhist worldview in terms of the Western philosophical conceptual apparatus. The Zen Buddhism we are familiar with today is one of the most engaging, and on many levels problematic, fruits of his labor – labor that was and is continued by his direct successors and those influenced by him, both in the East and the West. Tanabe, who took over Nishida's chair at Kyoto University in 1928, tried to overcome Nishida by rejecting Zen and turning to Pure Land Buddhism. His novel interpretation of the latter form of Buddhism was made possible by reading Christian ideas on conversion into the thought of Shinran (1173-1263), one of Pure Land Buddhism's most important reformers.

Although the complicity of the Kyoto School in the militaristic ideology of wartime Japan meant the popularity of Zen in Japan itself took a blow after the conclusion of World War II, it gained popularity in the West from the 1970s onward and eventually drew the attention of Foucault. When he visited a Zen Buddhist temple in 1978, he had just published the first volume of *L'Histoire de la Sexualité (La Volonté de Savoir)* and began to shift his interest to practices individuals use to constitute their own subjectivity. This interest would lead him to investigate the cultures of self-care known to Antiquity in the following years. In the lectures of 1981-82 at the Collège de France, Foucault argued that historians had thus far overlooked the Hellenistic and Roman model of self-care. Their self-care was aimed at the kind of self-constitution that Foucault wished to see revived in contemporary society. There are reasons to believe that Foucault saw in Zen an Eastern variant of the Hellenistic culture of self-care, albeit one that constituted the self in an entirely different way.

Nishida's Zen, however, is at heart a philosophy of the non-self. Since Foucault wished to draw attention to the care of the self for the sake of the self, their thought is fundamentally at odds. Foucault had only limited access to reliable materials on actual Zen practice, leading him to misconstrue a philosophy marked by a metaphysics of non-self as a spirituality of self-care. He moreover does not seem to have realized that the modern Zen he was confronted with had undergone significant reform during the Meiji period by intellectuals such as Nishida, who worked to have it fit Western philosophical sensibilities. Yet it is interesting that Foucault wanted to take his

---

<sup>2</sup> Translated as *An Inquiry into the Good*; See Nishida, 1990.

investigations into the care for the self into an intercultural direction. It is for this reason that I am interested in considering whether Nishida's successor Tanabe could offer Foucault the kind of Eastern model of self-care that he may have been looking for.

Since Tanabe combines the Christian penchant towards self-renunciation with the Buddhist notion of nothingness, we *prima facie* have every reason to assume that Tanabe is not in the least concerned with self-care. Tanabe himself claims to have overcome nihilism by means of a transformation of the self made possible by the saving grace of a force that is decidedly non-self: the Other-power of absolute nothingness. The self that emerges from this process barely resembles the kind of self that Foucault reconstructs from the works of Hellenistic and Roman practical philosophers, but it *does* appear to be a self, and *does* seem to be one that requires constant care and attention. Whether Tanabe offers what we may call a care of the self is a difficult matter to resolve, and requires that we untangle the way in which self and non-self interact in Tanabe's philosophy.

My central argument in this thesis is that Tanabe does offer an alternative model of self-care, but that it is neither distinctly Eastern, nor able to help us resolve the problem of nihilism. He offers an alternative model of self-care, because the renunciation of the self Tanabe proposes does not lead to the destruction of the self, but rather to its resurrection to serve as a medium for compassion. Our transformed self can only subsist, however, as long as we ourselves are willing to function as a receptacle for absolute nothingness. This requires a certain level of vigilance and attention to the self that we also find in Hellenistic self-care. The term 'absolute nothingness' may make it sound as though Tanabe's model of self-care is distinctly Eastern, but I argue that it is not. His reliance on the Christian notion of conversion, *metanoia*, and inheritance of Hegel's philosophy of nothingness place him squarely within the same philosophical tradition that his mentor Nishida, too, is a part of. This tradition is, as I will demonstrate, neither Eastern nor Western. Finally, Tanabe cannot help us resolve the problem of nihilism because the values he restores at the other side of personal transformation are decidedly Christian. The compassionate self that Tanabe thematizes moreover does not engage in self-constitution, but is made subject to a greater power.

The next section begins with a brief review of literature on the study of the Kyoto School in the West so far. I here conclude that we should place the Kyoto School in a wider context of East-West interaction that has been going on for at least three centuries. The Kyoto School is not the origin of a Buddhist philosophy of nothingness – for this, we actually need to turn to Hegel, who first incorporates Eastern nothingness into his philosophical system. His discussion of nothingness and his own secularization of the Christian God results in the fact that Hegel also stands at the beginning of the problem of nihilism. In order to meaningfully discuss the problem of nihilism as it

presents itself in Western philosophy, I distinguish between five different forms of nihilism and relate the thought of their respective representatives. We shall see that Foucault's spirituality of self-care allows us to resolve the problem of nihilism because it shows how individuals can engage in self-constitutive practices. His nihilism can therefore be called affirmative: he celebrates the immanent nature of all values and rejects any attempt at forcing people to conform to transcendent ones. Tanabe overcomes nihilism by advocating a philosophy of personal transformation aimed at turning the self into a medium for absolute nothingness. To his mind, however, the self only has value to the extent that it engages in compassionate action towards others. It is for this reason that I find his solution to nihilism unsatisfactory.

Section three presents an overview of Tanabe's 1946 *Zangedō toshite no Tetsugaku* (translated as *Philosophy as Metanoetics*). Since I assume the reader not to be familiar with the history of Japanese philosophical and religious thought, I will attempt to make Tanabe's philosophy insightful by first treating the work of his most important intellectual adversary – Nishida – and ally – Shinran. I then show in what way Tanabe adopts and adapts concepts from Shinran to formulate his criticism of Nishida's philosophy. According to Tanabe, Nishida's understanding of absolute nothingness – as a transcendent place where opposites such as self and non-self are united – is misinformed, since the kind of intellectual intuition Nishida relies on to apprehend such a place is based in reason. Tanabe argues that we can only experience absolute nothingness as a force that is mediated in human action. Only action, and not intuition, realizes absolute nothingness – and we have to personally transform to turn ourselves into empty receptacles capable of channeling it into this world. The power of absolute nothingness is very subtle: we have to first fully exhaust our own powers of reason and sink into despair, before we notice that there is a compassionate non-self at work through all of human history.

Section four mostly concerns Foucault's lectures of 1981-82 (edited and translated in the 2005 book *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*), but also briefly considers his earlier work. I show how Foucault isolates a particular kind of self-care that he claims historians to have hitherto overlooked, and reconstructs from Hellenistic and Roman practical philosophy. Within the Hellenistic and Roman cultures of the self, the technology of the self known as 'conversion' gains the form of *convertere ad se*, or conversion to the self. Foucault explicitly distinguishes this form of conversion from its Christian counterpart *metanoia*, which requires a break of the self within the self. Foucault thinks that the care for the self, and the spiritual practices that accompanied it, was degraded in modern philosophy in favor of the injunction to know oneself. Part of the reason why Foucault is eager to reconstruct the self-care found in Antiquity is because it shows us how individuals might

constitute themselves as subject using the techniques available to them, rather than have their subjectivity be the result of disciplinary forces.

In section five, with the relevant works by Tanabe and Foucault discussed in detail, I make up the balance by returning to the question posed at the beginning of the introduction, namely whether we can understand Tanabe's call for self-abandonment as a Foucauldian technique of the self. Additionally, I consider to what extent Tanabe's philosophy can be understood as an Eastern variant of Hellenistic self-care. I argue that, while Tanabe does incorporate into his philosophy the Christian form of conversion, *metanoia*, he does *not* include its corresponding techniques of the self. In early Christianity, self-care is replaced with pastoral care, meaning its techniques of the self revolve around confession, not self-constitution. In Tanabe, I shall distinguish between a technique of the non-self and a technique of the self. The former is aimed at self-exhaustion: it has one exhaust all options available to one to resolve the antinomies of reason on one's own strength, so that one may realize one's own powerlessness. It is at this moment that personal transformation by the Other-power of absolute nothingness occurs. The new self that emerges from this process, however, requires a technique of the self that is similar to Hellenistic self-care in that it is aimed at concentration on the self. This is because the transformed self risks relapsing into its old self-confident habits.

In the conclusion, I sum up the main results of my investigation, and briefly consider what the Foucauldian model of spirituality can tell us about the difference between the Zen of Nishida and Tanabe's form of Pure Land Buddhism.

## **2. Conceptual history East and West**

This section is divided into four subsections. I begin the next subsection by critically discussing three authors who have contributed to the study of the Kyoto School in the West. My concern here is mostly methodological. I argue that we should pay close attention to the way in which East and West are intellectually caught up in each other. The necessity of such an orientation is made clear in subsection 2.2., in which I show that the kind of Zen known to philosophers in the West is a product of the late nineteenth, early twentieth century Japanese encounter with modern Western categories and sensibilities. In the subsection 2.3., I show how Hegel incorporated the Eastern notion of 'nothingness' into his dialectical philosophy, thereby paving the way for his eventual appropriation by the philosophers of the Kyoto School. Subsection 2.4. concerns a discussion of the various forms of nihilism that have appeared since the development of the philosophy of nothingness.

### **2.1. The study of Japanese philosophy in the West**

The Kyoto School of philosophy formed around the person of Nishida during the first half of the twentieth century. Without the work of Tanabe and the challenges it presented Nishida with, it is unsure whether there would have been such a thing as the Kyoto School at all. As Marxist philosopher and contemporary critic of the Kyoto School Tosaka Jun (1900-1945) argued, Nishida's philosophy would in that case have most likely simply been known as just that: Nishida philosophy (*Nishida tetsugaku*; Heisig, 2001: 3). Although Tanabe was initially Nishida's student and followed in his footsteps, the two would increasingly grow apart as Tanabe's own thought matured. The fact that Tanabe tried to overcome Nishida's basic philosophical position undoubtedly contributed to the vitality of Kyoto's intellectual climate.

Both Tanabe and Nishida were eventually caught up in Japan's expansionist ambitions. Manchuria was invaded in 1931, and the second war with China erupted in 1937. Increasing turmoil in the government led to the establishment of a militaristic regime that strictly policed all intellectual thought. Especially Tanabe, who by the time World War II was in full swing had *de facto* become the main representative of the Kyoto School, came to be associated with right-wing nationalism, and was found to be an apologetic of the regime that had led Japan to its ruin. This is perhaps the main reason why the Kyoto School fell into disrepair in the years immediately following World War II. It were Western thinkers that – in the seventies and eighties of the previous century – would eventually display an interest in Japanese philosophy.

Japanese philosophical thought was brought to the attention of a Western audience as early as 1963, when Gino Piovesana's survey *Recent Japanese philosophical thought, 1862-1962*



appeared. Piovesana takes Japanese philosophy proper to have started when Nishi Amane (1829-1897) and Tsuda Mamichi (1821-1903) returned from their study in Europe – Leiden, to be exact – in 1865. It was from this moment onward that Japanese intellectuals began to reject traditional forms of thought such as Confucianism and Buddhism. Piovesana notes the dwindling popularity of the *Kyoto-ha* (Kyoto School) in his time, and observes an on-going transition to a predominantly Marxist approach to philosophy. He considers Nishida's original contribution to philosophy to have been the logic of place – *basho no ronri* –, which combines Oriental nothingness with Western categories. Nishida is appreciated by Piovesana as one of the few Japanese thinkers who did not completely abandon old Buddhist thought (1964: 199-205).

Since Japan was by and large considered not to have a philosophical tradition of its own until Piovesana's work hit the shelves, the value of his contribution to the Western study of the Kyoto School should not be underestimated. The work has, however, become outdated in its approach: Oriental nothingness had already been made into a Western category of thought long before Western philosophy was transmitted to Japan, and it can also be argued that Nishida in fact *did* abandon old Buddhist forms of thought. His reinvention of Zen Buddhism implies a tacit rejection of traditional Japanese Buddhism that should not go unnoticed – but more on this in the next subsection.

Another milestone in the study of the Kyoto School is James Heisig's 2001 work *Philosophers of Nothingness: An Essay on the Kyoto School*. Heisig is also quick to recognize Nishida's original contribution to philosophy, and claims the rapid assimilation of Western philosophy in Japan to have been nothing short of miraculous. He argues one has especially to consider that the Japanese entered the Western philosophical tradition at a particularly challenging moment in history, standing '...on the shoulders of post-Kantian preoccupations with epistemology, scientific methodology, and the overcoming of metaphysics' (Heisig, 2001: 13). Besides this difficulty, Western philosophy found itself to be just one among many available (and well-entrenched) systems of thought, and its merits had to be defended by a wide range of thinkers before its value was recognized. Prior to Nishida, the influence of Western philosophy had therefore only been superficial, as it had initially to compete with traditional systems of thought such as Confucianism and Buddhism. It was Nishida, or so Heisig argues, who ultimately managed to prepare the Japanese mind for a more pervasive penetration of Western philosophical thought. Nishida used Western philosophy as a framework in which to situate, elaborate and defend Zen Buddhism as a tradition capable of overcoming the modern philosophical dichotomy of subject and object. His work made the Japanese realize that they were in a position to not just assimilate Western thought, but even improve it.

As is the case with Piovesana's contribution, I find myself rather critical of Heisig's approach. I think that framing the emergence of the Kyoto School as a 'miracle' wrongly discharges one of the need truly to seek out the historical factors that have contributed to its possibility and formation. Western philosophy was, for two reasons, not as alien and difficult to comprehend to the Japanese as Heisig makes it seem: first, it had already been impregnated by Eastern concepts before it was transmitted to Japan; and second, the Japanese could readily draw on the conceptual framework offered by Confucianism – which had been perfected during the preceding Tokugawa period (1603-1868) – in making sense of the new intellectual current they were confronted with. Though incompatible with Western philosophy, the availability of a conceptual framework as sophisticated as Confucianism both hampered – since it was staunchly entrenched in the minds of Japan's intellectual elite and their institutions of greater learning – and enabled – since it provided an analogous system of thought from which unfamiliar concepts could be interpreted and translated – Western philosophy's eventual assimilation. We should therefore not assume the Kyoto School of philosophy to be firmly rooted in Buddhist thought alone, but also situate it against the normative background of Tokugawa Confucianism.<sup>3</sup>

The most recent attempt at coming to terms with Japanese philosophy has been offered by Henk Oosterling in his 2016 book *Waar geen wil is, is een weg: doendenken tussen Europa en Japan*. One of his struggles lies with the problem of Orientalism: the idea that the Western way of viewing the Orient is always romantic and idealized. In Western writings on the subject, the East is implicitly or explicitly turned into an Other for the West, and as such is deprived of the ability to represent itself. The implication would be that the East is a thing-in-itself that cannot be known by the West apart from its representations, spelling doom for our hopes of ever getting to the bottom of Asian thought. Oosterling, however, shows the situation to be even more complicated than that. At least as far as philosophical thought is concerned, East and West are inseparably caught up in each other. The Other we think is *outside* of us, is rather *inside* of us, a fact of which we have hitherto merely been unaware and therefore clouds our judgment. Orientalist critique might accordingly benefit from a Kantian sort of Copernican Revolution.

Similar to Oosterling, many theorists have gone beyond the work in which the problem of Orientalism was first sketched out: Edward Said's 1978 book *Orientalism*. Its counterpart Occidentalism (referring to the way in which non-occidental cultures romanticize or demonize the West through stereotypical representations) is today also a subject of vigorous academic study and

---

3 Scholarly work into the Confucian roots of Kyoto School philosophy is as of yet only beginning to take off. In specific case of the influence of Neo-Confucian philosophy on Nishida's ethics, see Walsh, 2011.

debate.<sup>4</sup> Arif Dirlik's understanding of Orientalism especially deserves mention here as it perhaps comes closest to thematizing the kind of interplay Oosterling envisions: Orientalism should not be seen as a thing (as Said understood it), but rather as a relationship working in two ways (Dirlik, 2008: 389). The party being orientalized might be more complicit in the affair than Said would like to admit. Dirlik's take on Orientalism opens a theoretical path to what we may call practices of self-orientalization – the internalization and intentional reproduction of the gaze of the Other by the Other. I am here thinking in particular about the westernization of Japan over the course of the Meiji period, when the Japanese invented a great number of traditions out of thin air in order to be able to present Japan as a Western power. The Japanese not only submitted to and aligned themselves with the representations made of them by the West, but also actively produced new representations that were meant to elicit a specific (and of course favorable) view of Japan by westerners. I show how this works more concretely when presenting the case of Zen Buddhism in the next subsection.

Of the three authors presented in this section, the basic approach developed by Oosterling is most promising when applied to the kind of comparative work I am undertaking in this thesis. Not only does his methodological point of departure lie in the idea that East and West are inextricably linked, but he is also fittingly critical of the kind of invented traditions mentioned above. He furthermore elaborately discusses two themes that are central to this thesis, namely the historical development of the idea of nothingness in philosophy, and the struggle with nihilism that accompanied it. It is against this background that I come to compare and discuss Foucault and Tanabe in section five.

However, I also disagree with Oosterling on a couple of points. First, similar to the previous authors, I think Oosterling underestimates the influence of Confucian thought on Japanese philosophy. This leads him to put too much emphasis on its Buddhist character, which is incredibly risky precisely because Western ways of understanding Japanese Buddhism have been shaped almost entirely by the late nineteenth, early twentieth century self-orientalizing construct of Zen Buddhism. Second, although Oosterling does dismantle Zen Buddhism as a Meiji period invention, he seemingly fails to recognize that there is no such thing as 'Shinto as the original worldview of Japan' (2016: 41). Shinto, too, has been demonstrated<sup>5</sup> to be an ideological construct without any parallels in the centuries preceding the Meiji period. Third, I find it rather difficult to project the intellectual adventures of a few Japanese thinkers onto the worldview of the Japanese population as a whole. Buddhism, for example, is by no means understood in Japan as a religion of immanence that is devoid of transcendent gods; in fact, if one takes such a view then almost all behavior

---

4 See Buruma & Margalit, 2005.

5 See Kuroda, 1981.

observed at Japanese shrines and temples no longer makes any sense whatsoever. It is highly questionable if philosophy should cross over into the realm of anthropology to replace ethnographic research. I would say that we can refer all philosophical constructs on the nature of the Japanese people to the realm of *nihonjinron*,<sup>6</sup> that is to say, armchair attempts at finding out what makes the Japanese people unique. More important to my purposes in this thesis, however, is the fact that Tanabe himself departs from the idea that there are transcendent gods and worlds. I will return to this point when discussing Tanabe's *Zangedō toshite no Tetsugaku* in the third section.

## 2.2. Zen Buddhism as an ideological construct

Among Japan's many Meiji period invented traditions Zen Buddhism is one of the most problematic, because it not only affected Japan internally but also drew and continues to draw the interest of the outside world. The reason Zen in particular is taken up in this subsection, is because we cannot ignore the influence this problematic form of Buddhism has exerted on the minds of the two philosophers under scrutiny in this thesis. On the one hand we have Tanabe, who inherits Nishida's approach to Zen, but ultimately rejects it in favor of Pure Land Buddhism. We will see that Tanabe does with Pure Land Buddhism what Nishida did with Zen: reinterpret and reformulate it to fit Western philosophical sensibilities. On the other hand, we have Foucault, who had a fascination for Zen, as is evidenced by his visit to a Zen Buddhist temple in 1978. The problem with Foucault is that he obtains his understanding of Zen primarily from a few problematic publications on the subject, most notably Eugen Herrigel's 1948 book *Zen in der Kunst des Bogenschießens*. Although I will return to Herrigel in subsection 5.1., it is relevant to note here that his understanding of Zen was influenced by the work of Daisetsu Teitarō Suzuki (1870-1966), the Japanese intellectual who popularized Zen in the West. Suzuki and Nishida collaborated to reform Zen in order to adopt it to the Western philosophical project. This means that, by the time it reached Foucault, Zen had already been reinterpreted twice: the first time through the self-orientalizing lens of Japanese intellectuals such as Suzuki and Nishida, and the second time by westerners such as Herrigel.

One of the most compelling articles on the topic of the constructed character of Zen Buddhism is Robert Sharf's 1993 *The Zen of Japanese Nationalism*. To my surprise, the insights offered by Sharf have yet to find fertile ground in comparative philosophy. His own characterization of intellectualized Zen Buddhism as it has been put forth by Japanese philosophers such as Suzuki and Nishida is highly illustrative, so I reproduce it here:

---

6 日本人論: 'the theory of the Japanese people.'

Zen has been touted as an iconoclastic and antinomian tradition which rejects scholastic learning and ritualism in favor of naturalness, spontaneity, and freedom. According to some enthusiasts, Zen is not, properly speaking, a religion at all, at least not in the sectarian or institutional sense of the word. Nor is it a philosophy, a doctrine, or even a spiritual technique. Rather, Zen is “pure experience” itself – the ahistorical, transcultural experience of “pure subjectivity” which utterly transcends discursive thought. The quintessential expression of Zen awakening, the *kōan*, is accordingly construed as an “illogical” or “nonrational” riddle designed to forestall intellection and bring out a realization of the “eternal present.” (1993: 1)

Sharf goes on to demonstrate that traditional Zen Buddhism is actually the very opposite of what has been put forth by Nishida and others. Besides being conceptually incoherent, their reinvented kind of Zen lacks any basis in Buddhist doctrine. Traditional Zen Buddhism does not reject ritual, but is one of the most ritualistic forms of Japanese Buddhism available. Enlightenment is not some subjective experience that allows one to ascend to mystical heights not available to unenlightened commoners, but is instead an elaborately staged public ritual performance. Solving *kōan* by no means serves to overcome the limitations of discursive thought, but is actually a form of scriptural exegesis that allows students to demonstrate their mastery of the Buddhist canon (Ibid.: 2).

The traditional form of Zen Buddhism can be readily explained by considering the position of Buddhism in Japanese feudal society. Buddhist sects were players in a dynamic and rather explosive field made up of various political entities. State sanction was important for the legitimization and continued prosperity of any sect; it was thus important strictly to control the higher levels of the priesthood. This explains the carefully choreographed ritual character of the traditional variant of Zen enlightenment, which in practice meant gaining political power. Zen enlightenment appropriated a new role for itself when Japanese society transitioned from feudalism to modernity with the help of a handful of Japanese philosophers, who themselves were often nothing more than Buddhist laymen.

How did this remarkable collapse of Zen Buddhism into its opposite come about? With the opening up and subsequent modernization of Japan, Buddhism came to lie under siege by political reformers who were of the opinion that old superstitions of foreign origin should make way for the establishment of a single, modern Japanese identity. Already in his 1935 work *Nihon Ideorogiron*,<sup>7</sup> Tosaka argued that Japanese Buddhists were practically forced to cooperate with the modern state in order to survive. Buddhism in Japan had been brought to the brink of destruction when the newly

---

7 日本イデオロギー論: 'the theory of Japanese ideology'; see Tosaka, 1977.

installed Meiji government decreed immediately in 1868 that Buddhism be separated from Shinto, Japan's so-called native religion. The latter was taken to be Japan's indigenous way of being, and thus preferable to outside religions. In the face of such a decree, Japanese Buddhist sects could either attempt to realign themselves and play into the hand of nationalist identity politics, or face eradication. The reformers of Buddhism that emerged from this harsh political climate were generally priests that had received a Western-style university education and as such were internationally-minded.

The one who would effect Zen Buddhism's most radical metamorphosis into the form as we know it today was Suzuki. He studied Zen Buddhism on and off during his studies at Tokyo University. In 1897, he moved to the United States to study with Paul Carus (1852-1919), a German-American orientalist and scholar of religion. Carus thought that scientific and religious truth were essentially one and the same, and that this unified truth should be the object of our faith. He considered Buddhism to be the closest to his preferred form of scientific religion because it concerns itself solely with '...a consideration of the pure facts of experience' (Ibid.: 15). These views were certainly welcomed by Japanese intellectuals who wished to posit Buddhism as capable of unification with the spirit of the new age of 'enlightened rule'.<sup>8</sup> Suzuki thus found himself serving as a bridge between those in Japan who wished to see traditional Japanese Buddhism adapted to modern times and westerners who were intrigued by Oriental religions. It was in this capacity that he was able to redraw the map of Japanese Buddhism as he saw fit. As Sharf argues, Carus may have exerted much more influence on the formation of this new Buddhism than Suzuki himself was willing to admit at a later stage in his life.

Through Suzuki, the influence of Carus extends all the way to Nishida. Both studied at the same university, and it had been Suzuki that had introduced Nishida to the practice of Zen. Nishida's concern for, as Carus had put it, the 'pure facts of experience' is immediately obvious on the opening pages of his 1911 maiden work *Zen no Kenkyū*. Nishida, however, ultimately draws his inspiration mostly from Carus' contemporary William James (1842-1910) and the latter's idea of 'pure experience', or that which Nishida translates as *junsui keiken*. The attractiveness of Nishida's early work, according to Sharf, lay in that it provided the proponents of new Japanese Buddhism with the idea of a universal kind of truth accessible only to those who fully grasped Zen (naturally, the Japanese themselves). Especially once the Japanese became highly critical of the extent of their own westernization, Nishida's self-confident ideas allowed Japanese intellectuals to squarely reject Western universalist claims. All of this occurred not long before Nishida became caught up in the

---

<sup>8</sup> 'Enlightened rule' is the literal meaning of the term 'Meiji', 明治.

strong political need to legitimize Japan's expansionist policies in Asia. Suzuki and Nishida contributed to realigning Zen Buddhism, not as a form of Japanese spirituality, but as the truest manifestation of the Japanese spirit itself, which, needless to say, included a great willingness to selfless sacrifice for the greater good. At this point, the nationalist identity politics heralded by the Meiji period had come full circle. Hence, the Zen of Japanese Nationalism.

What are we to make of Sharf's argument? To be more precise: what are its consequences to the project of comparative philosophy? Restricting myself to the relevance of Sharf's writings to what is attempted in this thesis, my answer is threefold. First, philosophy necessarily has a constructed character. While we, as philosophers, need to be careful in dealing with Zen Buddhism too naively, we should never forget that all of philosophy is artificial, and that although ultimately all philosophy *could* be understood as an ideological product of its time, the artificiality of philosophy (which implies a certain amount of spontaneity) at the same provides the very opportunity to overcome its historical and ideological situatedness. We can therefore grant Sharf the argument that the Zen of Suzuki and Nishida differs from traditional Zen Buddhism, while at the same time pressing on to deal with the philosophical implications of their works. The fact that Sharf deems Nishida's reinterpretation of Zen Buddhism conceptually incoherent does not mean – especially not to philosophers – that we should give up all attempts at understanding it.

Second, my point in bringing up Sharf is also to place his account in the broader historical context of East-West interactions (on which I will expand in the next two subsections by drawing on Oosterling's work). In this sense, Sharf's work as summarized above is instructive in that it provides us with a way to understand how philosophical ideas traveled from the West to Japan and back between 1868 and 1945. This historical account, however, has both a prequel and a sequel.

Third, inspired by Sharf's closing words, we should pay heed to what we might call the 'Narcissus-effect', that is to say, the inability of Western philosophy to recognize its own semblance in the mirror. The reason why Zen Buddhism appeals to many Western intellectuals may not be due to its Oriental character, but rather because it appears to us as strange yet familiar, and as such exerts a magnetizing pull on our imagination. Many philosophers who have intellectually engaged with Japan up to now have merely failed to recognize their very own image in the mirror held up to them – Foucault forming no exception.

### **2.3. The origin of the philosophy of nothingness: Hegel**

Heisig typifies the philosophers of the Kyoto School as philosophers of nothingness, and sees in Nishida a genius who managed to apply Buddhist insights to Western philosophy. Drawing on

Oosterling's work enables us to criticize Heisig's view: the Kyoto School thinkers mostly 'adopted and adapted' the Hegelian understanding of nothingness (2016: 207). Since Hegel himself was influenced by early European studies into Eastern thought, considering Nishida to have been a genius is a variant of the Narcissus-effect: Heisig fails to recognize that Nishida himself was effectively looking into a mirror when he took up the study of philosophy. This also explains why earlier Japanese intellectuals had been unable to make Western metaphysics productive – the philosophers they studied lacked the feature of having implicitly or explicitly dealt with Eastern thought. Nishi (the intellectual first to return from Europe in 1865 together with Tsuda; not to be confused with Nishida) focused on the empirical philosophy of Auguste Comte (1798-1857) and John Stuart Mill (1806-1873), not on German idealism (Takayanagi, 2011: 81). Comte and Mill had to be translated and defended from a Confucian framework, which did yield a rich amount of philosophical vocabulary, but could in the end be nothing more than a *prolegomena* of things to come. German idealism remained largely unnoticed until 1893, when Raphael von Koeber (1848-1923) began teaching aesthetics and hermeneutics at the University of Tokyo. Nishida was one of his students (Bárceñas, 2009: 17). The groundwork that had already been done from a Confucian perspective at this point mixed in with the familiarity innate in Hegelian thought, producing the possibility of Nishida's work and thereby that of the rest of the Kyoto School, including Tanabe.

Perhaps the biggest difference between the thinkers of the Kyoto School and Hegel is that the former positively appreciate nothingness. The higher ontological regions of Western metaphysics have always been occupied by the fullness of being that is God, whereas the Eastern tradition considers the ultimate to be the emptiness of *nirvana*. Kyoto School philosophers therefore have less to lose in positing nothingness to be absolute. Tanabe defends the fitness of the Japanese for dealing with the topic of nothingness from the idea that Western philosophers are without exception haunted by Christian theism and have consistently failed to throw off its yoke – something which Tanabe himself does not have to do.

Even though nothingness plays an important role in Hegelian dialectics, Hegel's philosophy is ultimately a philosophy of being. As Oosterling points out, the idea of nothingness as a *lack* of being is constantly in the background when Hegel recounts the role of being and nothingness in world history. Hegel identifies Parmenides as the thinker of being and Heraclitus as the thinker of becoming, and then finds that nothingness is not thematized as such in the Western philosophical tradition. We are confronted with the notion via the East – by Buddhism, to be exact. Nothingness becomes constitutive of Hegelian ontology in the *Wissenschaft der Logik* (published between 1812 and 1816). Hegel here departs from the question: 'what is being in its totality?' He finds that in



answering this question, we quickly stumble upon a multitude of negatives: nothing we can think of is being in its totality. This tension forms the basis of the Hegelian dialectic. We never grasp being in its totality, but only a limited part of it. This part may appear to us as though it were total, but such smaller totalities are eventually negated, after which they become a part of a new totality that has been enriched by the negation of the one preceding it (Oosterling, 2016: 233-236).

Hegel's understanding of Eastern nothingness is thus tailored to play a key role in his formal-ontological philosophy. Since he posits nothingness over and against being, the fundamental role nothingness has in Buddhist thought – not as lacking being, but rather as constitutive of it – is lost in his system. Oosterling shows how Hegel does manage to get closer to the original meaning of Buddhist nothingness in his later lectures. We see a change from the way in which he understands nothingness in the *Wissenschaft der Logik* in his 1824 lectures on the transmigration of the soul. Here, nothingness is no longer taken to be a lack of being; it dawns on Hegel that the Buddhist understanding of nothingness rather points in the direction of a particular – substantial – kind of being, namely one that is in an eternal state of rest and without determination. In the lectures of 1827, nothingness is once again redefined: it now becomes an ontological category, namely not-being. Hegel here comes to terms with the Buddhist penchant for not-being in Christian terms, writing that while it seems somewhat strange that there are people in the world who consider God to be nothing, we should not understand this to mean that they take God not to exist. Rather, Hegel argues, God to them is empty, that is to say, not determined by anything (Ibid.: 244-250).

Oosterling connects Hegel's appreciation of nothingness in Eastern thought to contemporary debates concerning nihilism by showing how Hegel is motivated by providing a defense of Baruch Spinoza's (1632-1677) pantheism. Hegel in many ways attempted to perfect Spinoza's substance monism. In Hegel, the Christian God is transformed into a secular principle, the Absolute Spirit, which alienates itself from itself to return to itself by becoming the historical World Spirit and in that capacity marching through history in a continuous dialectical dance of determination and negation. Although Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) is commonly seen as the philosopher that first declared the death of God, it is undoubtedly in Hegel that the possibility of the negation of the Christian God presents itself. Already in Hegel's digestion of Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) do we see how Hegel appreciates the limits imposed by Kant on the knowability of God, and applauds the latter's suggestion to proceed in moral matters *as if* God does not exist. From the perspective of Hegel's dialectical philosophy, the challenges posed by Kant, Spinoza and the Eastern religions to the Christian faith will result in a deeper realization of true nature of God and meaning of religion. Since he made such daring claims, it is perhaps no surprise that Hegel had to defend himself from

the charge of atheism again and again over the course of his academic career (Ibid.: 229-231).

#### **2.4. Nihilism from Hegel to Tanabe**

Hegel's discussion of the nature of nothingness forms the origin of the philosophical debate on nihilism as it is with us today. To be sure: if we consider nihilism to consist of a fundamental groundlessness, that is to say, an impossibility to find a stable ground from which we can deduce the truth and meaning of human life, then Hegel's own philosophy is most certainly *not* nihilist. But his discussion of the nothingness characteristic of Buddhism and his own secularization of Christian theism leads subsequent atheist thinkers to consider the prospects of human existence in a groundless universe – or, specifically in the Western case, human existence after Christianity. Oosterling discusses four types of nihilism at various points in his book, namely passive, affirmative, negative, and reactive nihilism. I will take each of these up in turn. Doing so allows me at the same time to show how the concept of nothingness constantly takes on new meanings and dimensions in the works of the philosophers after Hegel.

Passive nihilism is attributed to Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860) by Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900). Schopenhauer, a lifelong rival of Hegel, went much further in incorporating Eastern elements into his thought, making it the basis rather than just a part of his philosophy. He is inspired mostly by the *Upanishads*, and uses this work to criticize the rational, autonomous subject that was made the centerpiece of all philosophical reflection through Kant's Copernican Revolution. Kant neatly separates the world as we can know it through the senses from the world as it subsists in itself. What we perceive are never the objects as such; we are merely dealing with appearances, which are the combined result of our senses being affected by the things as they are and the application of forms of intuition – space and time – innately available to the human mind. Schopenhauer identifies Kantian appearance with the Hindu veil of Maya, which refers to the illusory nature of the things surrounding us. Behind this illusion Schopenhauer intuits a will to live that envelops everything, is greater than anything, and manifests itself in humans as desire. Man is thus not a rational being capable of making autonomous decisions, but is rather caught up in the will to live and as such subject to a variety of uncontrollable urges that constantly well up from inside of him. Since Schopenhauer thinks that even knowledge and truth are ultimately nothing but an expression of this primal will to live, and that our frail subjectivity can only be swept away by it, he can be characterized as a pessimistic nihilist. It is the penchant to submission to a greater power that Nietzsche would typify as passive nihilism.

Nietzsche posits his own affirmative nihilism as a remedy against the passive nihilist

tendencies he finds all around him. We should not merely realize our own insignificance and yield to the will to live underpinning everything, but rather actively embrace it – *amor fati*. Christianity is the attempt to avoid having to stare the meaninglessness of our suffering in the eyes by taking our life in the current world to be nothing but a prelude to our life in the next. Nietzsche declares Christianity spiritually bankrupt and calls for a revaluation of all values, for which he initially turns to Buddhism. How Buddhism and Schopenhauer figure in Nietzsche's attempts to overcome nihilism is discussed in detail by Benjamin Elman in his 1983 article *Nietzsche and Buddhism*. In *Die Fröhliche Wissenschaft* (1882), Nietzsche shows himself terrified by Schopenhauer's challenge, and wonders whether existence can reasonably be said to have any meaning at all. Schopenhauer's own answer lay in the adoption of the attitude of the ascetic. This asceticism would be the reason why Nietzsche, initially greatly impressed with Schopenhauer, eventually rejected his thought: Schopenhauer remained '...stuck in a Christian-ascetic moral perspective, even though he had renounced any faith in God' (Elman, 1983: 678). This negative evaluation of Schopenhauer went hand in hand with the eventual rejection of Buddhism as a form of passive nihilism, which according to Nietzsche did recognize suffering for what it was, but was unable to cope with it in any other way than through ascetic practice.

In *Nietzsche et la Philosophie* (1962), Gilles Deleuze (1925-1995) obtains the notion of negative nihilism via a reading of Nietzsche's *Zur Genealogie der Moral* (1887). Negative nihilism refers to the universal human need to posit a fiction (of, for example, a world beyond the sensible one) in order to gain dominance over and suppress active forces – that is to say, take power away from the strong and channel it to the weak. In Christianity, the fiction concerns that of another, paradisiacal world, where one is allowed to go if one lives a morally exemplary life. The need to love one's neighbor and have compassion for the weak is meant as a device to keep the powerful docile and deny the will to power. This is what Nietzsche refers to when he speaks of the will to nothingness: the inherent human tendency to devalue life in favor of a fantasy that renders the will to power docile and controllable.

Deleuze argues that, to Nietzsche, nihilism is not an isolated event, but the motor of a history that is cyclical and universal. In this history, negative nihilism is always followed by reactive nihilism. In the reactive phase, the fiction invented in the first stage is discarded, but the values installed by means of that fiction remain firmly in place. In Western societies reactive nihilism reared its head during the Enlightenment, when man took the place of God. Even though the imaginary elements of the negative fiction were dismantled during this period in Western history, the system of morality it installed in the minds of men has by and large been left untouched.

The will to power continues to be denied, the will to nothingness confirmed – even without the need of the original fiction. It is at this point that reactive nihilism begins to collapse into what Deleuze calls passive nihilism, the third stage. We already encountered this stage in Schopenhauer, who, as we have seen, proposes asceticism as a way out of what he perceived to be our predicament, thereby surrendering himself to the will to live. Deleuze, following Nietzsche, proposes the need for a fourth stage, that of affirmative nihilism, in which the will to live is affirmed, our inclination to submission nullified and the will to nothingness finally overcome.

Oosterling mentions, in passing, another form of nihilism that is not on a par with the four I discussed above: philosophical nihilism. This form of nihilism simply concerns the philosophical position that no metaphysical essences exist (Oosterling, 2016: 217). I would say that the philosophers of the Kyoto School all adhere to philosophical nihilism, since they prefer to consider the ground of reality from the perspective of nothingness. Whether they succeed in completely avoiding the metaphysical fictions of being posed by their Western counterparts is a matter that is taken up in the next section.

How do these various forms of nihilism relate to Foucault and Tanabe, respectively? There is plenty of reason to assume that *all* Western attempts at affirming nihilism are at present still forms of reactive nihilism. I think Nietzsche understood this when he wrote that the question of the meaning of existence will take a few centuries to be '...heard completely and in its full depth' (1974: 308). What I take him to have alluded to is that one cannot abandon well-entrenched philosophies and religions so easily, so that the question of the meaning of existence ends up getting continuously postponed while temporary answers and solutions are formulated. Turning to the East and investigating into Zen Buddhism can legitimately be understood as Foucault's attempts to find practices of the self not tainted in any way by the specter of Christianity – it is in this sense that Foucault's nihilism could be taken to be reactive. However, as I will show when discussing his work in section four, Foucault does provide us with a glimpse of what an affirmative nihilism could look like when he considers the culture of self-care found in pre-Christian societies. Once we realize that values need not be timeless and transcendent to make life meaningful, and that we therefore do not need to project onto an otherwise empty universe the ontological fullness of God, we can see how self-care allows us to appropriate immanent values shaped within the communities we are a part of and live a life of significance.

I already mentioned that Tanabe deems the Japanese uniquely fit to take up the task of explicating nothingness as the ground of reality since Japanese thought is not tainted by centuries of Christian philosophical discourse, but rather rooted in Buddhist sensibilities. It is for this reason that

Tanabe could be taken to subscribe to the view that the philosophers of the Kyoto School are the only group of intellectuals capable making philosophical nihilism productive as affirmative nihilism. Tanabe would argue that the atheist philosopher who rejects the Christian God as the ultimate form of being and subsequently claims to be free of metaphysical daydreaming merely affirms life *through* rejection, and is therefore always reactive – precisely the kind of problem Foucault runs into when he seeks to find the solution to nihilism in non- or pre-Christian cultures. Tanabe believes that the Kyoto School philosophers arrive on the philosophical scene without having first to reject metaphysical essences, thereby suggesting they naturally embrace affirmative nihilism.

Whether Tanabe could see through the argument presented above remains to be seen. As I will discuss in the next section, Tanabe attempts to overcome the deficiencies he himself considers to plague Zen by turning to the Pure Land Buddhism of Shinran. It can, however, seriously be doubted whether this move enables him to develop a truly affirmative nihilism. If Deleuze is right, and nihilism is the universal (and thus cross-cultural) motor of history, then we have every reason to designate Pure Land Buddhism as a form of negative nihilism that itself needs to be overcome. Even if the struggle with nihilism is not universal, we still need to take into account the extent to which Tanabe's own reading of Pure Land Buddhism is influenced by quintessentially Christian themes and concerns. Tanabe is at risk of being nothing more than a reactive nihilist – or worse, a passive one.

### 3. Tanabe: Philosophy as Metanoetics

The next subsection begins with a summary of the thought of one of Tanabe's primary influences: Nishida. Since I do not have the space to go into any detail, I limit myself to the discussion of three of Nishida's central concepts that figure and obtain new meaning in the work of Tanabe. Subsection 3.2. concerns the ideas of Shinran. Tanabe produces a novel interpretation of Shinran's work, and makes it figure in his attack on Nishida's philosophy. In subsection 3.3. and 3.4., I discuss Tanabe's philosophy of self-transformation in detail. Since Tanabe is most certainly not the easiest thinker the Japanese philosophical tradition has to offer, throughout this discussion, I continually relate his ideas to those of Shinran and Nishida in an attempt to make his contribution to Japanese thought as intelligible as I possibly can. In section 3.5., I consider to what extent Tanabe manages to overcome the problem of nihilism as I presented it at the end of the last section.

#### 3.1. Nishida philosophy

In *Zangedō toshite no Tetsugaku*, Tanabe develops his own unique philosophical position by discussing the ideas of major figures that make up the intellectual tradition of both the East and the West. The primary influence on the work, however, goes unnamed: Nishida. Tanabe had not been on good terms with Nishida ever since he published a rather critical essay on his former mentor's work in 1930.<sup>9</sup> *Zangedō toshite no Tetsugaku* would appear in 1946, one year after Nishida had passed away. Even though the name 'Nishida' does not appear even once in the work, to the reader familiar with *Nishida tetsugaku* (Nishida philosophy), it is easy to identify the parts of the text in which Tanabe is criticizing Nishida and attempts to overcome him. In this regard, the work could be considered a rather peculiar homage to the man that single-handedly shaped modern Japanese philosophy. The philosophical position Tanabe maneuvers himself into in *Zangedō toshite no Tetsugaku* is only intelligible if one has at least a rudimentary grasp of *Nishida tetsugaku*, so it is necessary to devote a few paragraphs to it here.

Since I do not have the space to treat Nishida in great detail, I limit myself to introducing three major concepts that he developed over the course of his philosophical career: pure experience (*junsui keiken*), absolute nothingness (*zettai-mu*) and action-intuition (*kōiteki chokkan*). Especially the latter two of these form the object of Tanabe's vehement criticism. The summary of Nishida's thought as presented here is indebted to John Maraldo's 2015 version of the article on Nishida's philosophy in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* and Heisig's chapter on Nishida in *Philosophers of Nothingness: An Essay on the Kyoto School*.

---

<sup>9</sup> Titled 西田先生の教を仰ぐ, or 'looking up to the teachings of Nishida'.

Nishida's early work concerns an explication of his notion of pure experience. By introducing this concept, he hopes to overcome the Cartesian distinction between subject and object. Nishida argues that experience is not something that happens to subjects when their sensory apparatus is confronted with external objects. Experience does not emerge from the interaction between mind and world, but is *prior* to this relation. This can only be the case if experience is constitutive of basic reality. The implications are radical. If experience is not produced when subjects are affected by objects but instead precedes both of these, then experience cannot be said to need a self to occur. To use an example: the experience of reading this particular text, Nishida would argue, does not first require a person endowed with senses and certain cognitive abilities plus a piece of paper with text scribbled on it in order to be possible – rather, there exists an experience we may call 'reading-of-this-text' that is prior to both subject and object that grounds our personified experience and any subsequent judgments we make on the basis of it.

Nishida later grows dissatisfied with the psychologism latent in the idea of pure experience, but remains bent on identifying an absolute that lies beyond basic oppositions such as object and subject. The idea of absolute nothingness becomes the workhorse of Nishida's metaphysics from the mid-1920s onward. We have seen how to the Hegel of the *Wissenschaft der Logik* nothingness consists in a lack of being. The Hegelian definition of nothingness as non-being or a lack of being is understood by Nishida as *relative* nothingness. He takes this kind of nothingness to be a subjective construct, and opposes it to the objective world of being. Similar to what he did when he overcame the opposition of subject and object by introducing the notion of pure experience, Nishida now posits a place (*basho*) where relative nothingness and objective being are united and all contradictories self-identical – the place of absolute nothingness (*zettai-mu no basho*). This place as a whole is opposed to the world of relative-nothingness-and-objective-being, and as such cannot be defined in relation to any item or opposition from that world. Looking at the Japanese term is instructive here: *zettai-mu no basho* literally translates to 'the place where all opposites are severed'.<sup>10</sup>

From the standpoint of absolute nothingness it becomes possible to see how every item in the world as we ordinarily experience it can be defined, not in terms of substances and accidents (or subjects and predicates), but as a part of a series of oppositions and relations. I identify myself through that which is not-I – and any item or relation in the world can be understood in this fashion. Nishida overcomes Hegel by situating relative nothingness inside the place of absolute nothingness,

---

10 絶対無の場所. The word 絶対 (*zettai*) is often translated as 'absolute', but it consists of 絶 (*zetsu*), the verb of which, 絶える (*taeru*) can mean 'to sever', and 対 (*tai*), 'opposite'.

but remains close to Hegel in maintaining negation as the motor of his philosophical system. If we take Hegel to be the first philosopher of nothingness, then Nishida completes the latter's latent promise: a philosophy that no longer departs from, nor requires, the substantiality of being but that is able to support its own weight by positing a place of absolute nothingness functioning through constant negation. Nishida's philosophy turns transcendence inside-out and thereby becomes radically immanent.

Removing the transcendent from the picture and theorizing a metaphysics of radical immanence yielded an interesting new ontological perspective, but it at the same time made it appear as if humans are denied any agency and determined by a universal that, although limitless and full of possibilities, goes absolutely nowhere. It is no surprise that it were philosophers with an interest in Marxism (newly introduced to Japan at the time) who would become Nishida's harshest critics – Tosaka and Tanabe leading the charge during the early thirties. This criticism leads Nishida to develop a positive account of selfhood and a philosophy of history. From the late thirties onward, Nishida begins to consider how human activity contributes to the self-awareness of absolute nothingness, which is now understood to be thoroughly historical. Our world arises from human interaction and is itself a *basho* within which opposites are united. History should not be understood in a purely temporal manner as a substantial past that haunts and determines us – rather, it is a place that comes into being with our interactions and is therefore never completely given to us. As the *basho* of the unfolding of the world, history consists of an endless amount of moments – the eternal now or absolute present –, each determined by what came before it but at the same instance characterized by absolute nothingness, that is to say, the ever-present undetermined possibility of the creation of something novel. History does not lie behind us as a fixed entity, but is continually open and changing, arising through individuals that are both determined by that which has already been created and capable of the production of something new.

It is against the background of the interaction of self and world that the notion of 'action-intuition' can be sketched. We ordinarily consider ourselves capable of acting on the world. If I write an influential book, I might change the course of history. At the same time, I myself am an object in the world that is acted upon. The inspiration for the book I write occurs to me passively (for example when I read a book written by someone else), and is not an active choice. When I am inspired, the world affects me. We can thus consider our relation to the world in two ways, either seeing ourselves as active agents or as passive receivers. From the standpoint of action-intuition, we understand how these two viewpoints are resolved in considering the role of the body. The body connects the self to the world. We normally view the body as though it were an instrument of the



self, or the mind. However, this limited understanding of the body completely overlooks the fact that we can have *embodied* knowledge in which the difference between the subjective – or mind – and the objective – or world – fades to the background. When I write a book, the book at the same time writes me. It is not as if what I am going to write is already within me, merely waiting to be written – rather, a text comes into being in the interplay between writing down my thoughts and my thoughts being shaped by what has been written down. There may even be moments where I lose any sense of an autonomous self and write as if possessed by the text itself, merging with it.

### **3.2. Shinran and the *Kyōgyōshinshō***

Having a basic grasp of *Nishida tetsugaku* is necessary but not sufficient if one wishes to understand Tanabe's philosophy as it unfolds itself in *Zangedō toshite no Tetsugaku*. Some knowledge of Pure Land Buddhism and Shinran is also required. It is for this reason that I begin this subsection with a few remarks on the history of Pure Land Buddhism in Japan, after which I briefly introduce Shinran's main work, the *Kyōgyōshinshō* (the first partial translation in English of which as *Shinran's Kyōgyōshinshō: The Collection of Passages Expounding the True Teaching, Living, Faith, and Realizing of the Pure Land* was produced by none other than Suzuki). In the next section I go on to show how Tanabe, to speak with Oosterling, 'adopts and adapts' concepts from Shinran's *Kyōgyōshinshō* in order to have these figure in his attack on *Nishida tetsugaku*.

Buddhism first arrived in Japan in the first half of the sixth century via Korea. Between the sixth and the tenth century many new different sects of Buddhism emerged on the Chinese mainland. During this period, contact between Japan and China slowly began to intensify. Transmission of new forms of Buddhism to Japan was only possible when the state chose to sponsor missions to China, since sending out expeditions was an extremely costly affair. These missions were thus scarce; several decades could pass without an envoy. The state was not interested in Buddhism as a means to relieve the existential suffering of the people through the spiritual teachings of the Buddha – rather, Buddhism was seen as a means to obtain magical spells that could be used for state protection, each sect potentially offering more powerful spells than the other. This changed over the course of the twelfth century. The Japanese monk Hōnen (1133 – 1212) challenged the elitism of state-sponsored Buddhism and produced a simplified form of Pure Land Buddhism that made it readily accessible to everyone, even those who did not have the skills or time required to decipher complicated Buddhist texts (Bowring, 2005: 6-7).

Shinran, one of Hōnen's students, simplified the practice of Pure Land Buddhism even further and popularized it to the extent that even today Pure Land Buddhism – and most certainly

not Zen Buddhism – is the most widespread sect of Buddhism in Japan. The teachings of Shinran are contained in the *Kyōgyōshinshō*, a work that should mostly be seen as a commentary on already existing Buddhist texts. Shinran thinks that we are now living in the age of *mappō*,<sup>11</sup> the period in time when the teachings of the Buddha have become corrupted and therefore devoid of salvational power. This means that even the most talented of people can no longer rely on them. Shinran claims that any hopes of achieving salvation through self-power (*jiriki*)<sup>12</sup> should be abandoned completely. Cultivating virtues and chanting the name of the buddha Amida (a practice known as *nembutsu*)<sup>13</sup> is no longer considered sufficient to reach the Pure Land. Here, it is important to understand that Japanese Buddhism knows many different buddha's, the most powerful of which are believed to live in pure lands that people can reach through rebirth. The Pure Land of Amida is one such ideal world where the temptations of ordinary life do not exist and from where it is thus many times easier to attain enlightenment. When he was still an ordinary person, Amida vowed to lead all sentient beings to salvation should he himself reach enlightenment. Shinran argues that we should have faith in the vows of Amida completely – meaning we should not see *nembutsu* as a way of obtaining the merit required to be worthy of rebirth in his Pure Land, but rather as an expression of gratitude for a gift that he bestows upon us. We should, in other words, rely on the Other-power (*tariki*)<sup>14</sup> of the buddha Amida for our personal salvation. We cannot do anything else, powerless as we ourselves are (Ibid.: 264).

Since Shinran takes himself to be powerless, defiled and as such unworthy of salvation through *tariki*, the *Kyōgyōshinshō* is full of self-decapitating remarks. The work is written under the name 'Gutoku Shinran',<sup>15</sup> which literally means 'Shinran the bald fool'. He is constantly aware of his own sinful nature, and considers himself nothing more than an ordinary *bonbu*, or someone who is caught up in his *bonnō* (the 108 mental states that defile the mind and make one unable to see past the illusion of worldly desire). In the history of Japanese Buddhism, or Buddhism in general, he takes a special place for eating meat, drinking alcohol, having a wife and even children. Shinran thought that only foolish people who believe that they can obtain salvation through *jiriki* adhere to the Buddhist precepts. Full reliance on the *tariki* of Amida buddha means indulging in earthly life makes no difference to the chances of being saved, since Amida vowed to save *all* sentient beings, including the most sinful among us.

---

11 末法, 'the end of Buddhist law'.

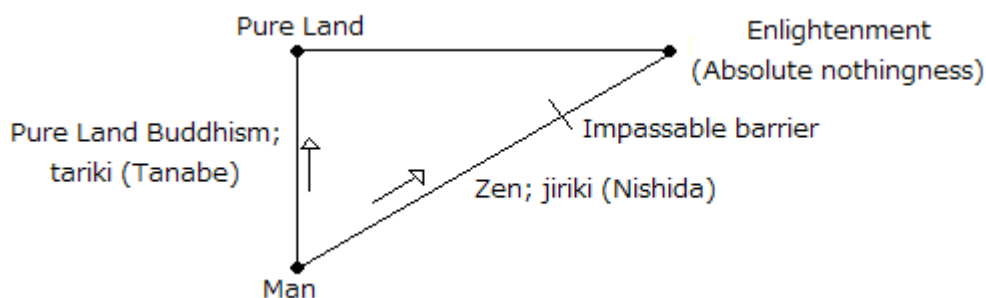
12 自力, 自 means 'self', and 力 means 'power'.

13 念仏, literally 'visualizing the buddha'.

14 他力, 他 means 'other'.

15 愚禿親鸞.

For the sake of clarity, let me here present a simple diagram to illustrate what the difference between Zen Buddhism and Pure Land Buddhism is when considered from Tanabe's perspective.



Nishida's reliance on Zen means he thinks enlightenment can be reached by means of *jiriki*. This is to say that the self has to perform certain ascetic-intellectual techniques in order to reach the absolute. One can, for example, engage in sitting meditation (*zazen*) or solve, as Sharf calls them, non-rational riddles called *kōan*. The problem with Zen is that one has somehow to overcome ordinary discursive reality in order to reach the absolute, which in practice means one has to pass through an impassable barrier. In the end, therefore, extremely few people are recognized to have attained enlightenment by means of Zen. The Pure Land Buddhism Tanabe turns to in *Zangedō toshite no Tetsugaku* proposes that one should abandon self-power and rely on *tariki* instead in order first to gain access to the Pure Land. From there, it is believed to be many times easier to perform the work required to gain enlightenment. One needs to keep in mind that Tanabe's treatment of the difference between these sects of Japanese Buddhism is highly intellectualized, and therefore in no way represents the actual difference between them. For example, the Pure Land is ordinarily seen as a real location one goes to after death if one has expressed genuine faith in Amida's vows, and attaining enlightenment means one no longer is subject to the chain of rebirth. To Nishida, enlightenment rather refers to the mental state in which one gains clarity regarding pure experience. Tanabe's Pure Land figures in his thought as the in-between place where self and other interpenetrate. We shall see how this works in more detail in the next subsection.

Two remarks are in order before I go on to show how Tanabe makes use of Shinran's concepts of *jiriki* and *tariki* when formulating a critique on Nishida's take on absolute nothingness. First, much of Western philosophy is tainted by the penchant for taking Zen Buddhism as *pars pro toto* for all of Japanese Buddhism. While modern Zen may have disavowed its gods, Pure Land Buddhism has not. Many Japanese *do* understand Amida as a transcendent being residing in a transcendent other-world. If we understand all Japanese Buddhism as singularly concerned with immanence, we cannot make any sense of the point of departure for Tanabe's philosophy because he, too, begins from the idea that Amida is a transcendent being before going on to show how

transcendence and immanence actually form a dynamic unity.

Second, some commentators have been highly critical of Tanabe's appropriation of Shinran. Ueda Yoshifumi, for example, writes that Tanabe fails to '...faithfully incorporate so much as a single concept in its entirety from Shinran' (Heisig, 1990: 134). Be that as it may, I think it is important to note that Tanabe himself wrote that he did not intend to '...expound a philosophy based on the Shin sect [the Pure Land Buddhism introduced by Shinran, DP] by offering a philosophical interpretation of the dogma of “salvation through invoking the name of Amida Buddha with pure faith in Other-power” as it was propounded by Shinran' (1986: 20). I therefore tend to agree with Keel Hee-Sung, who is of the opinion that Tanabe touches upon some important aspects of Shinran regardless of the correctness of his interpretation (1995: 6). These important aspects, however, mostly lit up because Tanabe projected insights obtained from the study of Christian theologians onto Shinran – but more on that in section five.

### **3.3. Absolute nothingness as absolute mediation**

Now that the position of Tanabe's main philosophical adversary in *Zangedō toshite no Tetsugaku* – Nishida – has been elucidated and his primary intellectual ally – Shinran – identified, it is time to turn to the work itself. Its density and richness makes it nearly impossible to present systematically. The many Western philosophers Tanabe takes up and treats in great detail moreover would themselves first require elaborate introduction as they are certainly not the easiest the tradition has to offer – not even mentioning frequent excursions made to Eastern thinkers. It is for this reason that I have to limit myself to a survey of the major concepts deployed by Tanabe specifically in relation to the main themes under scrutiny in this thesis, namely nothingness, nihilism, and the possibility of affirming these through personal transformation. In this subsection, I show how Tanabe understands absolute nothingness – not as a transcendent *basho* enveloping reality, but as an Other-power realized in and mediated through action.

The following passage should be read with *Nishida tetsugaku* and Shinran's *Kyōgyōshinshō* in mind:

Some [Nishida, DP] may imagine a self-identical totality directly accessible to the grasp of intellectual intuition, but the nothingness we are speaking of here [in *Zangedō toshite no Tetsugaku*, DP] cannot be intuited at all. In the case of “action-intuition” [...] action is understood as the functioning of self-power that is at work in aesthetic expression-and-formation. It has nothing at all to do with action based on the Other-power of absolute nothingness. This

latter both is and is not an action of the self: it is action based upon nothingness, and to that extent contains everywhere in itself “openings” to nothingness, through which being and nothingness [...] ceaselessly interpenetrate each other. (Tanabe, 1986: 46)

From the publication of *Zen no Kenkyū* onward, Nishida's critics started wondering what epistemological methods he had used to gain access to the idea that there is an experience prior to subject and object that furthermore grounds the two. Since such experience cannot, by Nishida's own account, be attributed to any agent (and certainly not a transcendent one), Nishida must somehow have been able to hear the voice of the voiceless. Pure experience might not need a self to occur (as it is prior to subject and object), but to have knowledge of it, it is at least necessary that the self be able to intuit it. This intuition in turn arises out of attempts of the self to remove the self from ordinary experience. It is for this reason that Nishida came to be labeled a Zen mystic immediately after the publication of *Zen no Kenkyū*.<sup>16</sup> The charge of mysticism made it sound to Nishida as if his account of pure experience was deemed nothing more than a figment of his own imagination. The reinterpretation of pure experience as absolute nothingness should be seen as Nishida's attempt to provide logical necessity to what had earlier dwelt in the realm of the subjective rather than the universal – that is to say, Nishida now argues that reality *must* operate along the lines he proposes, or else our experience of it does not make any sense. Let me label the two strategies Nishida deploys in earlier and later work as respectively intuitive and deductive.

Tanabe faults both strategies for departing from the same place: *our* experience. In the intuitive strategy, absolute nothingness is intuited by having the *self* remove the self from the picture. In the deductive strategy, it is reality that has to make sense vis-à-vis the *self* and the way in which it experiences the world. Since the self is fundamentally grounded in being, it is in fact powerless to reach absolute nothingness on its own accord. What Nishida intuits is therefore not absolute nothingness, but, as Tanabe calls it, 'superficial being' (Ibid.). If nothingness is to be absolute, then it cannot be an object of our intuition. Neither can it be an item or relation in reality, nor a *basho* within which items and relations gain their identity through opposition. The *basho* of absolute nothingness belongs to objective being; true absolute nothingness, Tanabe argues, is a *power* that exists only in its *mediation*. It lacks any transcendent ground enabling it to be prior to reality in the form of a place where all opposites are united and all contradictions annulled. Absolute nothingness rather needs a receptacle or medium to actualize itself through, namely

---

16 To avoid confusion it is important to note that, in Japanese, *Zen no Kenkyū* is written as 善の研究. The character 善 means 'good', while the character for Zen (as in: Zen Buddhism) is written as 禪. The title thus does not refer to Zen Buddhism, but to the good – hence, it is translated as *An Inquiry into the Good*.

human beings. To Tanabe, absolute nothingness is a power working inside of us that we can act upon to realize it as a force shaping history – realize both in the sense that we become aware of its activity and in the sense that we mediate it and bring it into the concrete world.

What is the difference between action based on action-intuition and action based on Other-power that is alluded to in above citation? Nishida thinks that next to being a passive receiver of inspiration in intuition, I am able to create something on my own accord. The standpoint of action-intuition resolves the tension between creator and created at a higher level – a *basho* where the self no longer plays a role. But to Tanabe, there is no need for a higher level at which contradictions can be resolved. There is therefore also no need to abstract all the way to the highest standpoint – *zettai-mu no basho* – in order to annul all contradictions in self-identity. Instead, absolute nothingness exists solely in its mediation, meaning that there is no ground beyond the world of things from where it operates. Contradictions are not resolved, but allowed to be – to interpenetrate. Action based on Other-power can therefore be understood to both be and not be an action of the self. It is an action of the self, because it is I who do it. But I can do it only in virtue of the grace of the Other-power of absolute nothingness that allows me to subsist through its own constant self-negation. Interpenetration should here be understood as reciprocity: it is I who allows Other-power to work through me through voluntary self-negation, and it is Other-power that allows me to subsist through constant or passive self-negation – only breaking to the surface through our actions.

Since Tanabe's argument is highly abstract, let me explain it using the example of writing a book once more. According to Nishida, one can think of a writer as an active agent or as a passive receiver. Nishida abstracts ordinary experience to a higher standpoint where oppositions such as active and passive, subject and object, are resolved – in the case of artistic creation, the standpoint of action-intuition. This corresponds to the experience of writing a book and losing oneself in writing it – autonomous self making way for embodied interaction. To Tanabe, however, this is not at all what happens. Absolute nothingness is not a place or standpoint, but a force that reveals itself in *our* actions. The self is not annulled upon letting absolute nothingness work through oneself. Oppositions are rather allowed to persist in contradiction, and there is thus no need to presuppose a higher ground at which they are to be resolved. Tanabe himself attributes *Zangedō toshite no Tetsugaku* to the workings of absolute nothingness – meaning he lent his hands to have Other-power express itself through the book – but it are still Tanabe's hands that wrote it, and it is *only* Tanabe that could have written it. This is what it means to say that absolute nothingness *is* absolute mediation: it only exists – that is to say, becomes a part of relative being – when people allow it to work through them, become a medium for its expression. Realizing this to be the case allows us to

let contradictions exist as they are, and for example state that Tanabe is-and-is-not the author of *Zangedō toshite no Tetsugaku*.

Since only Tanabe could have written *Zangedō toshite no Tetsugaku*, absolute nothingness is thoroughly historical. Other-power does not randomly take possession of a bum in the streets to have its word written. People have to make themselves fit for the reception of Other-power – they have to personally *transform* in order to become its medium. Tanabe attributes his discovery of the true workings of absolute nothingness to the writings of Shinran, meaning that Other-power has a history prior to, and will continue to have a future after, Tanabe. Absolute nothingness is therefore not similar to Hegel's Absolute Spirit, which realized itself in Hegel and through him gave us a glimpse of the teleology inherent in the march of history. There are other constellations of being that can realize Other-power – constellations that Tanabe, as a historical and relative being, could not even begin to imagine. The dialectics of *jiriki* and *tariki* is profoundly non-teleological; their dance will never end.

### **3.4. *Zangedō* as the way of transformation**

*Zangedō toshite no Tetsugaku* is best summarized as a book about the breaking through of Other-power throughout history in the guise of a whole host of people who acted as its medium. It tells the history of the self-realization of absolute nothingness *in* human consciousness and *through* action. The philosophers Tanabe treats are all sorted according to the extent to which they contributed to the realization of Other-power. This treatment creates two camps: that of the sages, and that of the *bonbu* (the sinful commoners Shinran identifies himself with). Although his name is not explicitly mentioned, it is easy to infer that Nishida belongs to the camp of the sages, or those that presume they can reach the absolute by means of *jiriki* alone. Tanabe presents himself as a part of the camp of the *bonbu*, or those who have accepted that they can get nowhere on the basis of *jiriki* and have surrendered themselves to the power of *tariki*. It are *bonbu* such as Shinran who, since they have renounced all hope at finding truth on their own, are able to contribute towards the realization of absolute nothingness in the historical world.

To Tanabe, the main difference between sages and *bonbu* is that the latter, in their desperate renunciation of *jiriki*, have experienced transformation or conversion at the hands of *tariki*. In the case of the sagely *Nishida tetsugaku*, one does not have to transform in order to arrive at the truth of absolute nothingness since it is taken to be a level of reality – *zettai-mu no basho* – at which self and other are self-identical opposites. The way to obtain this absolute is through contemplative intuition, and it can be comprehended wholly on the basis of one's own power. In essence, Nishida

formulates a philosophy of death: in order to be able to contemplate absolute nothingness, the self needs to, at least momentarily, completely perish. To Tanabe, however, the death of the self is not sufficient to attain the truth – death is not the end but the beginning. As soon as the self drowns in the realization of its own powerlessness and incompetence, it dies and is at once resurrected by Other-power. Tanabe's is a philosophy of death-and-resurrection. New life is a gift originating from *tariki* that fundamentally *transforms* the self – it is now a self that is animated by Other-power, and as such is a self that can act as a medium for absolute nothingness in this world.

We are now in the position to elucidate both the English and Japanese titles of the book: *Philosophy as Metanoetics* and *Zangedō toshite no Tetsugaku*. Tanabe himself translates *zange* as metanoesis, but does so to make clear that both terms have their own specific connotations and as such cover different aspects of the same transformative philosophy. To begin with the term 'metanoesis',<sup>17</sup> Tanabe deems it appropriate to describe his philosophy with because it etymologically implies a transcendence of reason. We have seen how Tanabe takes Nishida to rely on intuitive reason to come to his idea of absolute nothingness. Tanabe argues that the philosophy of reason, especially as it reaches fruition in Kant, should be subject to an absolute critique, which is to say that reason should be made to turn around and question itself, rather than be limited in its use through a transcendental investigation of the faculties of the mind. Such an investigation can, according to Tanabe, only get constricted in a range of antinomies and contradictions that reason cannot resolve on its own. If reason itself is questioned instead, it is inevitably revealed that reason is in fact powerless to reach truth as it is precisely reason itself that is the source of deception. Since reason is unable to overcome its inner contradictions by means of *jiriki*, any breakthrough that is made in this regard can only be attributed to the functioning of something which is not-self, namely Other-power. Only at wit's end does *tariki* unveil itself. It is at this stage that a revival of philosophy occurs: *tariki* not only restores the self to new life, but also effects the birth of a trans-rational philosophy-that-is-not-philosophy (*tetsugaku naranu tetsugaku*).

Tanabe's trans-rational philosophy is not one of contemplation, but rather of action. Tanabe sums up the difference between the old and his new philosophy in terms of going to (*ōsō*) and returning from (*gensō*) the Pure Land:

[...] metanoetics may be described as a philosophy of action following the path of *gensō*, while ordinary mysticism may be described as contemplative speculation following the path of *ōsō*.

The doctrine of *gensō* is thus of special significance in enabling metanoetics to bring about a

---

17 The word is the compound of the Greek *μετα*, beyond, and *νοϋς*, reason.



revival of philosophy. (Ibid.: 3)

According to Tanabe, the problem with *Nishida tetsugaku* is twofold: not only does it solely rely on *jiriki* and therefore misunderstand the nature of absolute nothingness, it also cannot be translated to a philosophy of action, because it remains stuck at the level of self-interested mysticism. The philosophy of action Tanabe is here proposing has one not only realize the nature of absolute nothingness (*ōsō*), but also effects the transformation of one's self from one that is full of *jiriki* into one that is an empty (*kū*)<sup>18</sup> receptacle for the mediation of *tariki* through action (*gensō*). The joy of a self restored to new life is accompanied by an ethical call to be compassionate towards other people and aid them on their own path to transformation. Tanabe here undoubtedly has the ideal of the bodhisattva in mind. In Buddhism, bodhisattva's are beings who, rather than remaining in *nirvana* upon reaching enlightenment, return to this world in order to work towards the salvation of other beings. It here needs to be noted that, to Tanabe, salvation does not exist apart from human action – he in fact writes that '[...] salvation by the absolute is realized only through the reciprocal influence of relative beings on one another' (Ibid.: 30).

The method of a philosophy as metanoetics is the way (*dō*) of *zange*. To understand what Tanabe takes *zange* to mean, it is instructive to turn to his personal struggle with nihilism. He laments how his inability to do something about the deplorable state Japanese society had fallen into during the latter years of Second World War caused him great distress. His greatest source of frustration was that philosophy seemed powerless to do anything about the situation, and that he himself could not come up with a new philosophy able to lead the way forward. He writes:

I spent my days wrestling with questions and doubts [...] until I had been quite driven to the point of exhaustion and in my despair concluded that I was not fit to engage in the sublime task of philosophy. At that moment something astonishing happened. In the midst of my distress I let go and surrendered myself humbly to my own inability. I was suddenly brought to new insight! My penitent confession – metanoesis (*zange*) – unexpectedly threw me back on my own interiority and away from things external. (Ibid.: 1)

*Zange* can occur when one reaches the limits of *jiriki*, and realizes that self-power is not sufficient to reach the truth. Only when one truly regrets having ever been so reliant on *jiriki* and lets the self die to the 'blades of antinomy' can resurrection by the grace of *tariki* occur – and no sooner (Ibid.: 9). Tanabe sums up the consequences for philosophy of his experience of conversion by *tariki* on

---

18 空, the more well-known Sanskrit equivalent of which is *sunyata*.

the following page:

*Zange* thus represents for me an experience of Other-power acting in and through *zange* to urge me to a new advance in philosophy. I entrust my entire being to Other-power (*tariki*), and by practicing *zange* and maintaining faith in this Power I confirm the truth of my own conversion-and-resurrection experience. [...] This is what I am calling “metanoetics”, the philosophy of Other-power. I have died to philosophy and been resurrected by *zange*. (Ibid.: li)

Tanabe seeks to reform the whole of philosophy on the basis of Other-power. Henceforth, it is no longer enough simply to repeat the old philosophy using the new knowledge of the Other-power of absolute nothingness. This is because philosophy is by nature reliant on *jiriki*. What is therefore necessary is not a philosophy *of* metanoetics, but a philosophy *as* metanoetics. The former would rely on the self and its urge to use reason to charter a course for metanoetics to sail – but such betrayal of Other-power cannot but end in utter failure. Metanoetics can only be *practiced*; it informs a philosophy of action that realizes the compassion characteristic of the absolute in this world through the mediatory role of relative beings – us. Tanabe thinks that the practice of *zange* should therefore not be limited to a few people, as if there are a select chosen-ones. Instead, he recommends it is the way forward for the entire Japanese nation and eventually the world as a whole.

### **3.5. Penitence and nihilism**

I am left with two issues to resolve in conclusion of this section. In continuation of the questions posed at the end of section two, I here first consider whether Tanabe develops an affirmative nihilism or remains stuck in one of the three preceding forms of nihilism instead. Second, towards the end of this subsection I make a few brief remarks about Tanabe's covert attempt at delegating blame for this own dubious actions before and during Second World War to the Japanese people in general and *Nishida tetsugaku* in particular.

At the end of section two, I posited that we can designate Pure Land Buddhism a form of negative nihilism if we adhere to the Deleuzian view of nihilism as a universal history. Pure Land Buddhism devalues the world we live in through the installation of a fiction that channels the will to power into an imaginary domain (the Pure Land) and onto a fictitious being (the buddha Amida). Pure Land Buddhism developed different ascetic means (cultivating virtues, performing continuous *nembutsu*) to collect the merit required to be worthy of rebirth in the Pure Land. Shinran does not

herald the phase of reactive nihilism – I rather take him to be a negative nihilist *pur sang*. He does not discard the fictive elements of Pure Land Buddhism, but rather deems human beings incapable of living the kind of moral life that is required of them by the fiction. This leads him to consider all human action in this world as without any worth or meaning. Shinran practices what he preaches and does whatever pleases him, seemingly living in accordance with his impulses and therefore the will to power – but he does so only because he wants to demonstrate his renunciation of any reliance on sinful *jiriki*. His ultimate goal is to show that he has genuine faith in Amida's vows by surrendering his personal lot completely to salvation through *tariki*.

Fast forward to Tanabe, and we arrive at a completely different religious and philosophical landscape. Western philosophy has been introduced to Japan, and its struggle with reactive and passive forms of nihilism is inherited by the Japanese philosophers of the Kyoto School. They try to resolve the question of the value of human existence by departing from the stance of philosophical nihilism (the position that no metaphysical essences exist). Tanabe in particular claims to have overcome nihilism – but even if he has, this is no reason to consider him an affirmative nihilist. Whether we can designate him an affirmative rather than a reactive or passive nihilist hinges on two questions: *how* has he overcome nihilism, and *what* does he find at the other side of it? In answering these questions, it should become clear that there is no reason to assume Tanabe has worked his way even past reactive nihilism.

Let me first, however, dissociate philosophical nihilism from affirmative nihilism in order to make clear that the two in no way imply one another. Characteristic of affirmative nihilism is that it provides value to human life without presupposing the grand metaphysical imaginaries in one way or another taken for granted by negative, reactive and passive nihilism. The reason philosophical nihilism is not on a par with any of the other forms of nihilism is because the latter all concern the *value* of human existence, whereas the former is simply the philosophical position that no metaphysical essences exist. We have seen how Nishida is a philosophical nihilist because he designs a metaphysics without substances and subjects. Tanabe inherits Nishida's philosophical nihilism and further argues that there is no transcendent *basho* emptied of substances and subjects, but that absolute nothingness only exists in mediation. Their philosophical nihilism in no way helps them with the question of value. In fact, if anything, Tanabe inherits Nishida's struggle to provide value, and it is because of this that he eventually finds himself forced to turn to *tariki*. In doing so, however, Tanabe develops a philosophy of nothingness that, even more than Nishida's, strongly resembles the grand metaphysical fictions affirmative nihilism seeks to overcome.

The early Nishida (that is to say, the Nishida of pure experience) is similar to Schopenhauer

in many regards; both would argue that we need to rely on intuition in order to comprehend the ground of reality. But with Nietzsche, we can criticize Schopenhauer and Nishida for failing to make their mysticism productive as a valid philosophical strategy. In fact, Nishida himself seems thoroughly aware of this in his 1917 *Jikaku ni okeru Chokkan to Hansei* (translated as *Intuition and Reflection in Self-Consciousness*), in which he in almost Tanabean fashion admits that:

This work is a document of a hard-fought battle of thought. I must admit that after many tortuous turns I have finally been unable to arrive at any ideas or solutions. Indeed I may not be able to escape the criticism that I have broken my lance, exhausted my quiver, and capitulated to the enemy camp of mysticism. (1987: xxiii)

After arriving at this dead end in this thought, Nishida would begin his turn to absolute nothingness in order to have it do the work pure experience never could. This turn does not imply that asceticism is no longer an important theme. Since the self has to eliminate itself in order to graze the open fields of higher *basho*, we are asked to dispose of our immediate urges in order to be able to see ourselves as part of a much bigger whole. Similar to Schopenhauer, our ordinary subjectivity can to Nishida ultimately only be swept away by this bigger whole – our true self (to the extent that it can be called a 'self') turns out to be located at a plane that is only barely accessible to us. I therefore take Nishida to be a passive nihilist.

Tanabe, however, regresses back to what I think can be no more than a reactive kind of nihilism. Interestingly enough, Tanabe's reactive nihilism forms the motor of his history of metanoetics. The self that arrogantly or ignorantly relies on self-power to ascend to the truth finds itself frustrated at each and every turn. Those who have exhausted every possibility of reaching the truth through *jiriki* eventually experience an existential crisis that makes them realize the futility and valuelessness of human life. We have seen that those people who confess (*zange*) and are penitent of their former arrogant reliance on *jiriki* are met with the transformative grace of *tariki*. It is at this point that the death-and-resurrection of the self occurs, and value is bestowed upon existence in the form of the ethical call to compassionate action. To be sure, Tanabe does *not* promote asceticism. Similar to Shinran, he deems asceticism as yet another form of self-power. Transformation occurs when one abandons the self, but such self-abandonment is not a kind of work. One cannot be trained in it, as is the case with the Zen Buddhism of Nishida. To Tanabe, what ultimately destroys the self is not the self itself, but Other-power. What is necessary is voluntary submission to *tariki*, not asceticism. One has to be penitent and ready to submit oneself to the

instance that can right one's wrongs. Tanabe's nihilism is therefore at least passive.

What makes Tanabe's nihilism reactive is that it resurrects the values of old once the other side of nihilism is reached. The self is allowed to persist after its transformation, but it is only in the service of the Other-power of absolute nothingness that it has a right to exist. Value is obtained wholly from one's function as a medium for *tariki*. Tanabe does discard the old fictions, as he treats Amida buddha as one of the many masks of absolute nothingness. That Amida and his Pure Land transcend us to Tanabe simply means that they are not-self. The historical masks of absolute nothingness become manifest through those who have undertaken the way of *zange* and found themselves exposed to an Other-power they could not discursively identify. After transformation through *tariki*, absolute nothingness becomes an immanent force working through us – this is what it means for transcendence and immanence to form a dynamic unity. At no point, though, is the self allowed to shape its own values, or engage in any form of self-constitution. Such affirmative nihilism would by Tanabe be discounted as yet another form of reliance on sinful *jiriki*. We thus find Tanabe resurrect the entire value system of Christianity at the other side of nihilism – the very values from which the philosophers after Hegel tried to plot an escape. Neither Nishida nor Tanabe therefore offer us any hope of attaining any kind of affirmative nihilism.

In closing, let me make a few remarks on Tanabe's philosophical method of *zange* and his rivalry with Nishida. With his penitence, Tanabe attempts to deal a blow to *Nishida tetsugaku* that might have been fatal to it had it not been for Tanabe's own grave shortcomings. What I take Tanabe effectively to say in *Zangedō toshite no Tetsugaku* is that Nishida's philosophy is nothing but an 'ordinary mysticism' that is solely concerned with intellectual daydreaming. Nishida seeks a way to reach the Pure Land, but he does not answer the ethical call of returning from it and realizing compassion in this world. Put in stronger terms: Tanabe seems to fault *Nishida tetsugaku* for having made Japanese philosophy powerless to resist state power and for having capitulated wholly to the irrational ambitions of extreme right-wing militarists. The problem here is that Tanabe himself espoused views that were far more accommodating to fascist ideals than anything Nishida ever did or said. By proposing a philosophy of remorse and positing it as the way forward for the entire Japanese nation, Tanabe seems to be projecting responsibility away from his own role as an intellectual mouthpiece of a state espousing obedient emperor-worship and onto a people that were themselves nothing but powerless victims of the warped ideals of the elite. His complicity in bringing about the ruin of Japan and his subsequent half-hearted apology-that-is-not-an-apology in *Zangedō toshite no Tetsugaku* is perhaps the main reason why Japanese intellectuals even today prefer to steer clear of Tanabe's philosophy.

#### **4. Foucault: The Hermeneutics of the Subject**

This section first provides a brief biography of Foucault, and discusses some of his most important works in short. This is done in order to situate his lectures of 1981-82 in the broader context of his philosophical project. In subsection 4.2., I delve into the content of the lectures in more detail and reconstruct the historical development of the care of the self as it is presented by Foucault. Subsection 4.3. concerns one of the most important technologies of the self known to the West: conversion. We here see how Foucault sharply distinguishes between a type of conversion that is explicitly aimed at turning to the self – the Hellenistic and Roman *convertere ad se* – and a type of conversion that is aimed at self-renunciation – namely Christian *metanoia*.

##### **4.1. Surpassing 'man': from subjection to subjectivation**

It is easy to see how the loss of World War II dealt a severe emotional blow to all Japanese nationals – a blow that made Tanabe sink into the valuelessness of existence and led him to expound a philosophy of collective *zange*. Although his call was not heeded, Tanabe did attempt to step into the spiritual vacuum left behind by the ravages of war. In the case of France a spiritual crisis rapidly unfolded itself as well, even though the country had emerged from the war victoriously. The war was won, but the cost had been terrible. The once great colonial powers suddenly found themselves politically marginalized and scrambling for resources to restore order in their foreign possessions. News of what had taken place in concentration camps made it clear to everyone that Europeans could be just as savage as unenlightened, uncivilized barbarians. The inherent worthlessness of human life was palpable to everyone, since all knew or had heard of somebody that had not returned from the war alive.

It is in this difficult time that Foucault develops himself intellectually. He completes his university education in the years immediately following the war. At the time, studying philosophy at a French academic institution meant studying the history of philosophy through a Hegelian perspective. Outside of the university, Jean-Paul Sartre's (1905-1980) brand of existentialism was stepping into the spiritual vacuum left behind by the experience of World War II. Foucault found himself satisfied by neither of these approaches. Hegel had explained the world in rational and teleological terms, but what had happened during Second World War seemingly defied all sense and purpose. Foucault therefore found Hegelian approaches to history difficult to conciliate with the challenges his generation was facing. Sartre's formal philosophy of the subject did the exact opposite of what Foucault wanted to do: historicize experience, and show how there is no a-historic and transcendent subject that can function as the universal cornerstone of all of philosophy. From

the 1950s onward, Foucault draws his inspiration from Nietzsche, in whom he recognizes an important intellectual ally in his battle against the autonomous and radically free subject (Foucault, 1991: 44-46).

While Sartre attempted to overcome the nihilism of the post-war years by immediately reaffirming the position of the subject, Foucault's struggle with nihilism lasted all his life and his entire philosophical career. Although Sartre's existentialism did stare the meaninglessness of existence in the eye, what it proposed in terms of philosophical strategy constituted no radical break with the past. Instead, it once again delegated all power to the subject, and further bestowed upon it the ability to shape its own essence to escape the clutches of determinism. Similar to Tanabe, Foucault felt the pull of the radical Other. He sought to experience the limits of subjectivity and wanted to find out what was to be found at the other side of its decomposition. Staring the meaninglessness of existence in the eye, as Sartre proposed, was thus not enough for Foucault: he wanted to *experience* nihilism, and be *transformed* by it. In order to be able to behold the Nietzschean 'Superman' that shaped his own values, it was first necessary to surpass 'man' – and Foucault had set out to somehow cross the abyss between them (Ibid.: 48).

It is in the 1966 work *Les mots et les choses: Une archéologie des sciences humaines* that the idea of 'man' is critically examined and unmasked to be a temporal construction. There is no such thing as a transhistorical form of human subjectivity that informs the experiential regime of any person regardless of their background. Rather, the current understanding of 'man' is embedded in a wider body of knowledge (*savoir*) that governs the way in which we can speak of things. The being we call 'man' is a quintessentially modern epistemological category. In contrast to Sartre's radically free subject, Foucault shows how our current form of subjectivity is the result of epistemological processes that take place outside our immediate control. Ways of speaking about things form normative constellations of knowledge called *epistemes*, which in any given period *a priori* determine what is considered truth. The crowning achievement of modern philosophy – the autonomous and rational subject – is shown by Foucault to be nothing but a historical contingency that holds validity only in the modern *episteme*. The subject can, as a mere formal given, therefore never form the basis of any timeless values.

The production of subjectivity in the modern period is detailed in Foucault's 1975 *Surveiller et punir: Naissance de la prison*. Modern society depends on a highly sophisticated economy of specialized bodies for its functioning. People have been disciplined – that is to say, bodies have been drilled, ordered and individualized – in order to perform certain tasks within specific organizations and institutions. Specific constellations of knowledge and power form the condition

of possibility of my subjective experience of myself as autonomous; I am moreover expected to behave autonomously, as doing so constitutes the social norm. The autonomous subject is the preferred mode of *subjection* in the modern period, because this form of subjectivity is advantageous to the way in which society needs to be run. Since I have been disciplined to be autonomous, I will correct myself if my performance is sub-optimal, or deviates from normalcy. For example, when I fail a test at school, I will tell myself I should work harder in order to pass the test. When I steal candy and have to spend a night in prison, I will tell myself that stealing is wrong and vow never to do it again. Disciplinary power thus relies on certain instruments in order to be possible, such as the examination (e.g. a test at school) and hierarchical observation (e.g. a panopticon prison). These instruments do not rely on the use of force in order to get people to perform certain behavior, but rather install truths that people identify with and that get them to police themselves – it is this that our autonomy consists in.

In the lectures of the 1981-82 given at the Collège de France, Foucault turns to consider how people are not only passive products of disciplinary power, but can also *subjectivate* themselves. As a person, I am free to constitute my own subjectivity by committing myself to certain rules, norms or habits. To be sure, this does not mean that Foucault now admits the existence of an a-historical autonomous subject. Rather, he finds that each historical epoch offers different sets of techniques – which Foucault refers to as 'technologies of the self' – that people might use in order shape their own subjectivity. Not only the techniques, but also the selves that are the object of such techniques vary from period to period. In the modern age, the self is an object of knowledge that is produced in a discursive field controlled by the human sciences. In Antiquity, however, the self was similar to a piece of marble that individuals had to shape for themselves. People were concerned with a particular *ethos*, or a way of relating to the self, and techniques that allowed them to take care of the self. Foucault's contention in the lectures of 1981-82 is that, today, we have completely disconnected from a culture of self-care – and since we have, we have also lost the accompanying kind of techniques of the self that allow us to constitute our own subjectivity. In an important sense, this makes us powerless to resist the practices of subjection that Foucault had problematized in his earlier work.

Before going on to show how the care of the self developed in Western history and what caused its demise in the next subsection, let me first consider the extent to which Foucault manages to overcome nihilism. I have already mentioned in my earlier explication of nihilism that the West is unable to escape the specter of Christianity. Our nothingness is the nothingness of an empty universe in which we can no longer base values in God, or in the autonomous subject that usurped



His throne. The reason Foucault points the way to affirmative nihilism is because he shows entirely different ways of experiencing the world to be at least *conceivable* – ways that do not rely on notions such as 'God' or 'autonomous subject' to provide life with meaning. Values are, contrary to what has been attempted in modern Western philosophy, never transcendent, but immanent to historical periods. The present-day Western experience of nihilism did not even arise in historical epochs in which people did not rely on transcendent values to provide existence with meaning. Instead, in times gone by a fulfilled and meaningful life may well have consisted in taking care of the self – of gaining mastery over the self. People thus did not fear the nothingness of death in itself – they feared dying before having achieved a fulfilled life. If we can reactivate this part of our Western heritage, or obtain it from non-Western cultures, then we might reach beyond the nihilism that has been imposed on us through centuries of Christianity.

#### **4.2. The care of the self**

In his 1981-82 course Foucault argues that, in the specific case of the West, a culture of self-care has been supplanted by a culture of self-knowledge. In Antiquity, the two were inseparable. The Greek care of the self – the *epimeleia heautou* – went hand in hand with the Delphic precept of *gnōthi seauton*, or 'know thyself'. Over the course of many centuries, the *epimeleia heautou* ended up slowly being discredited in favor of the *gnōthi seauton*. The result is an entirely different relationship between truth and subjectivity. We have seen that, in the modern age, subjectivity is produced through practices of subjection that couple certain truths (offered by the human sciences) to subjects. Discourses such as that of psychiatry offer practitioners knowledge that they use to tell me the truth about myself; I have moreover been subjected to these discourses from before I was even born. In Antiquity, by contrast, the truth about oneself could not be discovered through knowledge alone. Rather, one's socio-cultural environment provided one with certain techniques that enabled one to realize the truth about oneself through self-constitutive work. Truth was a practice, and needed to be embodied by means of repetitive exercises that conditioned one's self (that is to say, one's impulses and bodily needs) in certain ways. Attaining the truth was therefore a matter of performing the kind of labor that allowed one to effect self-transformation.

The process via which the *gnōthi seauton* was made the leading principle of obtaining the truth is termed by Foucault the 'Cartesian moment'. It is in the philosophy of René Descartes (1596-1650) that we see the *epimeleia heautou* definitively downgraded; henceforth, it is no longer necessary that I transform myself in order to obtain the truth. Rather, the truth is readily available to me if I perform basic, self-introspective mental exercises. The formal fact of my self-existence

forms the basis for my access to further knowledge, and knowledge is henceforth obtained simply for its own sake. Foucault speaks of a 'Cartesian moment' in order to make it clear that Descartes did not single-handedly bring about the demise of the *epimeleia heautou* in favor of the *gnōthi seauton*. Instead, he stands at the end of a long development in which the *epimeleia heautou* passed through Neo-Platonism and Christianity, and was slowly but surely completely reformed.

With Descartes, it is the form of thought called 'philosophy', and no longer the practice of what Foucault calls 'spirituality', that rises to prominence. Philosophy concerns itself with determining the conditions and limits of a subject's access to the truth. The reason why it is interested in these limits, is because philosophy is solely concerned with obtaining true knowledge. Spirituality, on the other hand, concerns itself with (historically variable) practices and exercises that subjects need to carry out in order to access the truth. The goal of spirituality is not knowledge, but the self. The self needs to transform in order to become worthy of the truth. Foucault ascribes three characteristics to spirituality in order to distinguish it from philosophy: first, subjects do not have access to the truth by virtue of being a subject; second, subjects need to transform in order to gain access to the truth; and third, once access to the truth has been gained, the subject who sought it out gains more than simple knowledge – rather, his entire being is affected by the truth. He becomes, so to say, enlightened by the truth, and sees himself and the entire world around him in a new light.

What happens to the *epimeleia heautou* as it passes down from the Greeks, via Hellenistic and Roman culture, to the early Christian theologians, and what are the different kinds of selves that form its aim? The case of the Greeks is illustrated by Foucault by drawing on the *Alcibiades*, one of Plato's dialogues. Socrates was not the one to invent the care of the self, but instead stands in a longer Greek tradition. He vehemently argued in the *agora* for the importance of taking care of the self, which in his case meant that one should not only care about fame and wealth but also about one's soul. In the *Alcibiades*, the soul (*psukhē*) is not the substantial one we know from the *Phaedo*, where Plato treats it as a prisoner of the body. Rather, the soul spoken of in the context of the *Alcibiades* is the soul as subject – the instance or agent that makes instrumental use of the body in order to produce certain linguistic expressions, or wield certain tools.

Alcibiades is a young man from an aristocratic family who has the ambition to go into politics and govern others. The problem with Alcibiades is that he does not take care of himself, even though he is at the age when he should. Since others mostly desired him for his beauty, no care has ever been offered to his soul. At the same time, he lacks both the education and the standing to be able to be successful in politics. It is here that Socrates admonishes Alcibiades that he should

know himself (that is to say, he should realize his position vis-à-vis his more capable political rivals) and apply himself to the *epimeleia heautou*. Through the Socratic method, Socrates reveals to Alcibiades that he does not have any particular skill (*tekhnē*) he needs to be better at governance than his rivals; worse, he does not even have a clue what good governance is to begin with. Socrates assures Alcibiades that there is no need to panic; after all, through Socrates, he discovers that he is ignorant at precisely the right age when it is appropriate to begin taking care of the self.

In ancient Greece, then, the care of the self is restricted to the class who have the wealth and status to invest in it, and furthermore something one engages in at an appropriate age. Since the care of the self is so dependent on status, it is related to power. The reason Alcibiades has to learn to care for the self is because in doing so, he becomes better at governing not only himself, but also others. Self-care is possible through self-knowledge – the *gnōthi seauton* and the *epimeleia heautou* are thus dynamically entangled. Self-knowledge can be obtained by remembering the world one's soul originated from: the divine realm. Since the divine is the measure of everything, the self can be known by considering how one's soul reflects in the divine. Once contact with the divine has been established, the soul is endowed with wisdom (*sōphrosunē*), and this wisdom can be put to use at any moment in the world below by recalling one's visit to the divine realm. Equipped with this wisdom, the soul is able to conduct itself properly, which is to say that it becomes able to distinguish right actions from wrong ones. It is equipped with *sōphrosunē* that Alcibiades gains the capacity to properly govern the *polis*.

In the Hellenistic period, and in the work of the Cynics, the Epicureans and the Stoics, the care of the self changes. No longer is the care of the self exclusively reserved for the elite, or those who are destined to wield power. Instead, the care of the self turns into a general principle; one is expected to take care of the self regardless of status or age. The ultimate goal of the care of the self is no longer the ability to govern others. The self, not the *polis*, now becomes the end of self-care. Moreover, the way to care for the self is no longer primarily through self-knowledge. Rather, the care of the self now involves a whole range of practices, which must repeatedly be exercised throughout one's life. The care of the self is thus transformed into the art of living, a *tekhnē tou biou*. Where Socrates attempted to make Alcibiades see that he was ignorant and did not have the professional skills he needed to govern others, the care of the self in the Hellenistic period rather revolves around training oneself to be able to deal with the many setbacks one will face in life. This training has a corrective aspect: the care of the self is meant to make one give up bad habits, to liberate us from our inner evil. Contrary to the youthful ignorance of Alcibiades, it is never too late to correct one's behavior and start taking proper care of oneself. Since the Hellenistic care of the

self is meant to prepare one to deal with afflictions such as diseases, it not only concerns itself with the soul, but pays a kind of attention to the body that cannot be found in Plato.

### **4.3. Conversion: *epistrophē*, *convertere ad se* and *metanoia***

One of the most important technologies of the self known in the West is conversion. The kind of conversion we are familiar with through Christianity should be sharply distinguished from conversion as it was known in Greek, and Hellenistic and Roman culture. In Christianity, conversion is hardly a way of taking care of the self – it is much rather aimed at self-renunciation. To anyone who was a part of Hellenistic or Roman culture the idea of conversion called to mind the image of turning to the self and away from the outside world. It played a central role in the self-care of the period. Conversion was thought to be necessary in order to free one of distractions and allow one to turn to the one place in the world that is free of disturbances: the self.

In Plato, the idea of conversion is found in the notion of *epistrophē*. It consists, first, in turning away from appearances; second, in the acknowledgment that one is ignorant and needs to care for the self; and third, the possibility – through self-knowledge – to become able to establish contact with the divine realm. The *epistrophē* thus sharply distinguishes between the world of appearances below and an ideal world above where truth resides. Through knowledge of the self, it is possible to attain the truth, and knowledge of the truth liberates one from the world of appearances. In realizing one's ignorance and taking up the task of self care, one is able to visit the divine realm – once that realm has been visited, one can recollect one's stay there and use one's memory to obtain true knowledge on how to act.

The notion of conversion changes in the Hellenistic and Roman cultures of the self. Seneca, to use a prominent example, speaks of '*convertere ad se*' (converting to the self). No longer is there a sharp division between this world and the other, nor is this division relevant. Instead, there now exists an opposition between what is inside our control, and what is not. What one is freed from using Hellenistic techniques of the self is thus not the world of appearances or the body (as a prison for the soul), but the need to control what is fundamentally uncontrollable. The care of the self is not aimed at gaining access to the true and thereby becoming able to govern others, but at establishing an adequate relation to the self. The adequacy of this relationship does not depend on the recollection of true knowledge through a connection with the divine realm, but rather on the set of exercises that one habitually repeats over the course of one's life. Where the Greek *epimeleia heautou* was meant for young people, in Hellenistic and Roman culture, the care of the self is aimed at old age, since it is then that people are able to benefit from the fruits of their labor.

The Christian notion of conversion, *metanoia*, is again different. The word denotes both penitence and a radical change of thought and mind. *Metanoia* has three characteristics. First, it involves a sudden change, that may or may not have been elaborately prepared. Christian conversion requires '...a single, sudden, both historical and metahistorical event which drastically changes and transforms the subject's mode of being at a single stroke' (Foucault, 2005: 211). Second, this drastic transformation triggers a transition from one type of being to another (e.g. from death to life, or from mortality to immortality). Third, conversion is only possible insofar as a break takes place in the subject. In *metanoia*, one renounces oneself, dies to oneself, and is reborn anew in a different self that no longer resembles the earlier form of being.

What are the differences between respectively *metanoia* and *convertere ad se*, and *metanoia* and *epistrophē*? In the case of the former, first, the break that is effected in *convertere ad se* is not between self and self, but rather between self and surroundings. This break is necessary to free oneself from distractions and grow closer to the self. It is thus a break *for* the self, not *within* the self. Since one slowly needs to turn towards the self and the labor that comes with the care for the self pays off at old age, this break between self and surroundings is not swift and radical, as in Christian *metanoia*, but time-consuming. It takes up one's entire lifespan. Second, in *convertere ad se*, one does not renounce the self, but has the self constantly in one's gaze or sight. One must turn to look towards the self, rather than away from it. Third, one must not merely turn the eyes towards the self, but concentrate on one's entire being. In the Hellenistic culture of the self, conversion is a long and continuous process in which one establishes certain relationships with the self in order to gain mastery over it. This is why Foucault does not speak of trans-subjectivation in the case of *convertere ad se* as he would in the case of *metanoia*; rather, *convertere ad se* is a matter of self-subjectivation, of making the self one's subject.

In the latter case of the difference between *metanoia* and *epistrophē*, Foucault refers to an article written by Pierre Hadot, who argues that *metanoia* and *epistrophē* are two great models of conversion in Western culture. In the *epistrophē*, one experiences a return to the source. One awakens to the light, and at the same time discovers that the source of light is at the same time the source of being. The way to tap into this source is through recollection (*anamnēsis*). *Metanoia*, on the other hand, involves a drastic change of the mind. Through *metanoia*, the subject dies to himself and is reborn, that is to say, radically renewed.

Foucault argues that historians have hitherto overlooked Hellenistic self-care and its accompanying form of conversion, which is neither *epistrophē* nor *metanoia* but something caught in between. What especially interested him are the many references to the act of looking found in

the works of the Cynics, the Epicureans and the Stoics. In other words, in the *convertere ad se*, it is important to turn one's gaze inwards. However, this does not mean one that is supposed to inspect the self, as though one is performing a kind of hermeneutical decipherment of the self. Rather, turning the gaze towards the self means one concentrates on the self, makes the self one's goal. Looking at the self means one is not looking at anything else; indeed, in the Hellenistic and Roman culture of the self, looking at others (out of curiosity, for example) was considered a waste of time. What is necessary is that one pays full attention to one's aim, which is the self. Doing so enables one to subjectivate the self, to become the master of one's self. To Foucault, such self-subjectivation was possible only because of the availability of tools and techniques that were offered by one's socio-cultural environment. The problem is that, today, such tools are largely lacking – what we indeed need to do is devise new tools suited to this day and age that enable us to subjectivate ourselves.

## 5. Spirituality as metanoetics

Now that I have discussed the relevant works of Tanabe and Foucault, it is time to return to the question posed at the beginning of this thesis, which I can now begin to answer: can we understand Tanabe's call for self-abandonment as a technique of the self? And if we can, then to what extent could Tanabe's philosophy figure as a variant of the Eastern model of self-care of the kind Foucault may have been looking for? In subsection 5.1., I first discuss two sources that contributed to Foucault's understanding of Zen, and show why his interpretation clashes with the Zen of Nishida. In subsection 5.2., I then turn to consider what are the differences between Tanabe's form of self-renunciation and its Christian counterpart, before going on to show to what extent Tanabe's spirituality resembles Hellenistic and Roman practices of the self-care.

### 5.1. The Zen of the self

In the lectures of 1981-82, and at the end of the first half of the lecture outlining the various forms of conversion known in the history of Western spirituality, Foucault makes an interesting remark. He says:

What separates us from the aim, the distance between oneself and the aim, should be the object, once again, not of a deciphering knowledge (*savoir*), but of an awareness, vigilance, and attention. Consequently, you see that what we should think about is [...] an athletic kind of concentration. [...] We are much closer here to the famous archery exercise, which [...] is so important for the Japanese, for example. (Ibid.: 222)

Foucault is without a doubt referring here to Herrigel's *Zen in der Kunst des Bogenschießens*. It is in reading Herrigel that Foucault possibly stumbled upon what seems to be a technique of the self in a foreign culture, one that indeed appears close to the care of the self as he distills it from Hellenistic and Roman practical philosophy.

Herrigel spent some years between 1924 and 1929 teaching philosophy in Japan while he studied *kyūdō* (Japanese archery) under Awa Kenzō. *Zen in der Kunst des Bogenschießens* is Herrigel's personal account of his attempts to master the Japanese bow. Awa figures in the text as a Zen master who teaches Herrigel correctly to shoot his bow without effort. Doing so requires Herrigel to repeat exercises over a long period of time – not to gain any technical proficiency with the bow, but rather to let go of everything that is distracting him from perfectly hitting the mark. We see the parallels with what Foucault admires in Hellenistic and Roman spirituality. In Japanese

archery as Herrigel presents it, one must turn the gaze from the outside (distractions, irrelevant worries on how to wield the bow, et cetera) to the inside and keep one's focus on one's true aim: the self. Herrigel should not obtain mere know-how, but realize the truth that the self is ultimately no different from the Buddha, and neither is the mark. Since the Buddha envelops everything, including the self and the mark one shoots at, the self effectively *is* the mark.

Profound as this may sound, if we pay heed to Sharf's lesson, we have every reason to be critical of this account of Zen – apprehensive, even. In his 2001 article *The Myth of Zen in the Art of Archery*, Yamada Shōji argues that the account of Japanese culture presented by Herrigel in his book is based on grave (and possibly even intentional) misunderstandings. Awa himself had no experience with Zen, and neither did he unconditionally approve of it. Yamada shows how Herrigel himself became fascinated with Zen by reading the works of Suzuki. Under Suzuki's influence, Herrigel erroneously assumed Zen to be at the basis of all Japanese culture. He was in fact the first even to establish a link between Zen and *kyūdō*, as none had existed before. There is every reason to assume that Herrigel projected his own enthusiasm about Zen into *kyūdō*. We should therefore treat *Zen in der Kunst des Bogenschießens*, not as a study of Japanese culture, but as an orientalist account of how westerners view Japan, inspired by the works of a man – Suzuki – who himself, as I showed in section 2.2., reformed Zen to fit with Western sensibilities.

Be that as it may, Herrigel presented an account of Japanese culture that fascinated Foucault. This fascination could finally be made productive in 1978, when Foucault had the chance to visit a Zen temple in Japan. It was probably with Herrigel in mind that he talks with the head priest of the temple, Ōmori Sōgen, about his interest in Zen in that particular period in his intellectual career, saying: 'What interests me most, is [...] the practice of Zen, its exercises and rules. For I believe a totally different mentality from our own is formed through the practice and exercises of a Zen temple' (1999: 110). Foucault engaged in meditation, and reports that he can imagine the focus on the posture of the body to lead to new relationships between mind and body, and body and the external world. It is not a stretch of the imagination to read into Foucault's remarks the beginning of his ideas concerning techniques of the self as he would present these only a few years later in the lectures of 1981-82. Combined with his brief reference to Herrigel in the lecture on conversion, we see how Foucault may have imagined Zen as an Eastern variant of self-care – one that could possibly be reconciled with the Hellenistic and Roman cultures of the self.

If I am correct in assuming all this, then a problem presents itself. Modern Zen philosophy – and the temple Foucault visited certainly qualifies as modern, as Ōmori had ties to the Kyoto



School<sup>19</sup> – has consistently sought to unmask the self as illusory. Nishida, we have seen, spent his life attempting to create a metaphysics of no-self – first through the notion of 'pure experience', and later by means of absolute nothingness. The self is at best a temporal necessity one has to work with until one has reached the point – or, in Nishida's terminology, the *basho* – at which it can be abandoned. Zen characterizes itself by deploying what we may call techniques of the non-self. For example, in meditation, one focuses on the body rather than the self, and in *kōan*, the focus lies on the illusory nature of the discursive self.

The Hellenistic and Roman care of the self that Foucault is interested in does the exact opposite of Nishida's Zen. It requires people to turn to the self, pay attention to the self, and concentrate one's full being on the self. Writing letters of self-examination to a friend is not meant to unmask the self as a temporary illusion, but rather to treat it as an explicit object of care. If one is focusing on the self in the practice of modern Zen at all, then this is only in order to become aware of the way in which the self blocks a correct understanding of the empty nature of everything.

We can, of course, avoid this problem when we know Foucault's understanding of Zen to have been erroneous. Foucault, with Herrigel in mind, assumes Zen to revolve around a specific relationship to the self, namely one of concentration and vigilance – a kind of *convertere ad se*, if you will. However, Foucault does not realize that the kind of spirituality Zen departs from does not resemble Hellenistic self-care, but is rather much more similar to Christian self-renunciation – the very kind of spirituality he is seeking to distance himself from.

## 5.2. Self-renunciation as self-care

Although the conclusion that modern Zen cannot be considered as an Eastern variant of Hellenistic self-care is hard to avoid, demonstrating this is not what I set out to do at the beginning of this thesis. Rather, I wanted to consider whether Tanabe's call for self-abandonment can be understood as a Foucauldian technique of the self. More specifically, I wanted to see whether Tanabe's understanding of Pure Land Buddhism can offer the kind of Eastern variant of Hellenistic self-care that Foucault was looking for, where Nishida's Zen cannot.

We have seen that Tanabe's form of self-renunciation comes eerily close to its Christian counterpart. Christianity does offer techniques of the self, but all these fit inside a technology of the self that does not concern itself with self-care. Instead, the kind of care we find in Christianity is pastoral, meaning that people no longer constitute their own subjectivity but do so through the mediation of God, the community, or a priest. This creates a wholly different kind of self – a self

---

<sup>19</sup> See Dogen, 1999.

that is confessional. It is from the confessional self that Foucault wishes to move away, in favor of a self that is more similar to the aesthetic object of self-care as we encounter it in Hellenistic and Roman culture. If Tanabe's self-renunciation, the aim of which is transformation by *tariki*, is to be understood as a variant of Hellenistic self-care, then I have to distinguish it from Christian self-renunciation, the aim of which is to breed a confessing self.

Foucault was to discuss the change from Hellenistic self-care to Christian pastoral care in the fourth volume of *L'Histoire de la sexualité*, but passed away before it could be completed. We can nonetheless still understand how Foucault viewed Christian spirituality by considering parts of the lectures of 1981-82. Foucault furthermore discusses specific techniques of the self deployed in early Christian confession in more detail in the 1988 edited book *Technologies of the Self*.

Two things are important here. First, in Christianity, the technology of the self known as 'conversion' obtains the form of *metanoia*. Let me here briefly repeat its three characteristics, according to Foucault: first, it involves a sudden change; second, it requires an event that instantly changes a subject's mode of being; and third, this event triggers a transition from one type of being to another. If we compare this characterization of *metanoia* to the one Tanabe offers in *Zangedō toshite no Tetsugaku*, it should be immediately clear that Tanabe speaks of metanoetics in exactly the same way. As soon as the self sinks into a deep existential despair and confesses it is utterly powerless, a sudden transformative moment occurs in which *tariki* restores the self to new life. What makes Tanabe's reading of Pure Land Buddhism Christian is that it neatly applies the idea of *metanoia* to Shinran's writings.

Second, the kind of self that is the object of Christian pastoral care is confessional. Foucault defines Christianity as a confessional religion aimed at salvation. It is a salvation religion, because it is supposed to lead individuals from one reality to another. It is confessional, in the sense that it obliges individuals to accept certain truths as dogma. Christian pastoral care is aimed at getting people to know themselves so that they can recognize temptations and desires; these must then be confessed to God or a priest, who bear witness to the individual's confession against himself. It is this that Christian self-renunciation consists in.

The early Christian disclosure of the self had two main forms: *exomologēsis* and *exagoreusis*. *Exomologēsis* is the dramatic display of oneself as a sinner and penitent. This form of disclosure must be public in order to demonstrate the true rupture of oneself with one's past self. Foucault stresses that *exomologēsis* is not verbal, but '...symbolic, ritual and theatrical' (1988: 42). *Exagoreusis* revolves around the practice of verbalizing exercises aimed at self-examination that are reminiscent of the kind of techniques of the self we find in Stoicism. Its aim is to distinguish

thoughts that lead to God from those that do not. This is the earliest form of a Christian hermeneutics of the self; in *exagoreusis*, the self is understood as a storehouse of secrets that need to be unveiled and deciphered. However, the self, because it deludes itself, cannot decide for itself which thoughts are good, and which are bad. This form of self-examination therefore requires the presence of a spiritual director – a priest – who can assist us in deciphering our secrets. Since a priest is a person of more experience and wisdom than ourselves, we should obey his instructions.

How does this second aspect of Christian spirituality – techniques of the self aimed at confession – relate to Tanabe? First, since *exomologēsis* is theatrical, we have every reason to assume that, by publishing *Zangedō toshite no Tetsugaku*, Tanabe is himself performing a kind of *exomologēsis*. The work's theatrical nature, however, makes it hard to escape the impression that Tanabe's penitence is mostly a rhetorical device. Tanabe is presenting himself as a kind of everyman, similar to Shinran presenting himself as a *bonbu*. Tanabe is hardly disclosing himself, precisely because he does not show himself to be repentant about the kind of issues – such as his complicity in Second World War – he should be repentant about. This is the first hint that Tanabean self-renunciation does not revolve around a self-deciphering kind of confession. This ties in to the second technique, *exagoreusis*. Tanabe does not propose one needs a spiritual director that aids one in one's self-examination. One deals directly with *tariki*, and is supposed immediately to recognize one is transformed by a power that does not originate with the self.

This means that Tanabe does incorporate the Christian mode of conversion, *metanoia*, into his philosophy, but that he does not appropriate the Christian confessional techniques of the self. He proposes wholly different techniques of the self, instead. The first is a kind of technique of the non-self that is aimed at self-exhaustion: what we need to do is exhaust the self, consider everything the self is capable of, try out all our options, and ultimately come to the conclusion that the self is supremely powerless. Similar to the techniques of the non-self Nishida employs, this technique is not aimed at self-care. Once the self is emptied of any hope of finding truth on the basis of *jiriki*, transformation by Other-power occurs. The self is not sublated by absolute nothingness, but rather becomes its medium. Self and non-self interpenetrate. It is at this point that a kind of self-care is required that is similar to the one found in Hellenistic and Roman culture. One has to be vigilant of this new self, concentrate on it, because it is always at risk of slipping back into believing that it accomplishes things because of *jiriki*; it might even attribute its discovery of *tariki* to the use of its own wits. The self, emptied to be a receptacle of absolute nothingness, must remain empty – and it is the responsibility of the transformed person to make sure it is. We therefore have constantly to attend to the self, and make sure that it remains in the position to mediate the compassion of

absolute nothingness. The kind of self that is the object of self-care in Tanabe is the in-between place where self and non-self interpenetrate. We have to perform *zange* continually in order to make sure that we do not fall back onto the sole reliance on the power of *jiriki*.

To what extent, then, could Tanabean self-renunciation be seen as an Eastern variant of Hellenistic self-care? It resembles *convertere ad se* in that it requires a vigilant and diligent attitude towards the self. Transformation is moreover an integral part of Tanabean self-care, even though one first has to apply techniques of the non-self before any care of the self becomes necessary. One major difference, however, is that at no point the self is meant to constitute itself. After having been transformed by *tariki*, the new self becomes a part of the history of the mediation of Other-power in this world – a history that transcends the self. Its values are therefore not immanent to any particular historical epoch. Instead, the self overcomes nihilism by taking upon itself the historical task of realizing the value central to absolute nothingness: compassion.

## 6. Conclusion

When I set out to discuss the philosophy of Tanabe and Foucault in this thesis, I wanted to do so according to three thematic notions that I took these two thinkers to be concerned with, namely nothingness, nihilism and personal transformation. Both were confronted with a spiritual vacuum left behind by the ravages of war, and to both this meant that old forms of subjectivity could no longer lead the way forward. Foucault showed how, in Hellenistic and Roman culture, immanent values were shaped through self-care. Tanabe thought that reliance on the self needs to be abandoned in favor of a life of compassionate action that realizes the Other-power of absolute nothingness in this world. This raised the central question of whether we can understand Tanabe's call for self-abandonment as a Foucauldian technique of the self and, if we can, whether Tanabe's philosophy can figure as an Eastern variant of Hellenistic self-care.

In the second section, I first set up the methodological background against which Tanabe and Foucault could meaningfully be discussed. I began by discussing a few authors on the Kyoto School whose works are suggestive of a gap between Eastern and Western philosophy. It deserves mention here that in *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* Foucault, too, repeatedly stresses that the characteristics of spirituality as he discussed them only apply to the case of the West.<sup>20</sup> This implies Foucault must have assumed Eastern spirituality to be different. And while Western and Eastern spirituality may indeed be different, what I have attempted to show in this thesis is that we should pay heed to the *origin* of Eastern spiritual practices. Modern Zen philosophy is not Eastern without qualification; it is just as much a product of Western sensibilities and categories of thought. In the end, therefore, I settled for the methodological approach of Oosterling, who assumes East and West to be inextricably caught up in each other. This approach allowed me to place Foucault and Tanabe in the same philosophical tradition, and warranted a comparative treatment of their work.

In the third section I turned to an explication of Tanabe's work *Zangedō toshite no Tetsugaku*. I showed that the influence of Nishida is palpable throughout the entire book, even though his name is not mentioned once. For this reason, I first offered a short summary of Nishida's most important concepts. I then briefly looked into the thought of Shinran, before showing how Tanabe critiques Nishida's understanding of absolute nothingness on the basis of the distinction between *jiriki* and *tariki*. According to Tanabe, absolute nothingness is not a transcendent *basho* where the opposition between self and non-self is annulled, but rather a force that requires mediation through human action to realize itself and as such allow self and non-self to persist and interpenetrate. Although Tanabe claims to overcome the problem of nihilism by bestowing new

---

<sup>20</sup> See, for example, Foucault, 2005: 15.

value on the transformed self, which now becomes an active mediator of compassion, I have argued that Tanabe ultimately does not provide us with a nihilism that is affirmative. His conceptualization of absolute nothingness as compassion not only resurrects the entire value system of Christianity at the other side of personal transformation, but also condemns any and all reliance on *jiriki* as worthless and even sinful. Tanabe therefore admits of no room in his philosophy for constitution of the self by the self.

Foucault's *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* formed the primary work of the fourth section. He shows how the cultures of Antiquity were not familiar with the kind of subject that needs to be deciphered, as this kind of subject was formed only through centuries of Christian pastoral care. In the Hellenistic and Roman culture of the self we see how the self is something that is shaped through certain exercises and practices that need to be repeated over the course of one's life. One of the most important technologies of the self known to the West, conversion, was understood by the Christians as a turning away from the self, as a kind of break of the self with the self; in Hellenistic and Roman culture, however, one had to convert to the self, meaning one had to bring it under one's attention and concentrate on it. The reason why Foucault approaches a nihilism that is affirmative is because he shows how a lack of transcendent value to life may in times past have been no problem to those individuals who, through self-care, appropriated immanent values.

Finally, I returned to the question posed at the beginning of the thesis in section five. Tanabe combines the Christian form of conversion, *metanoia*, with the writings of Shinran in order to produce his transformative philosophy. He does not, however, also incorporate the techniques of the self that go with the Christian spirituality of self-renunciation. Christian techniques focus on the disclosure of the self. In pastoral care, one turns away from the sinful self by internalizing a set of rules and prohibitions offered by a spiritual director who has more experience than oneself. Tanabean self-renunciation does not depend on a spiritual director, and neither does it assume the self to be a vault of secrets waiting to be deciphered. Instead, it first relies on a technique of the non-self that I described as self-exhaustion, which has one realize the valuelessness of one's own existence by exhausting all existential options based in *jiriki*. Once the self has been transformed by the saving grace of Other-power, a kind of care of the self is required in which one focuses on the new self in order to make sure it does not relapse into the belief in, and reliance on, self-power. In contrast with the Hellenistic care of the self, however, the self that has been restored to life by *tariki* does not engage in self-constitution. Rather, the self has to work to remain an empty receptacle capable of realizing the compassion of absolute nothingness in this world.

In closing, it is interesting to consider what the application of Foucault's conceptual

framework of spirituality means to the difference between the Zen of Nishida and the Pure Land Buddhism of Tanabe. Foucault would not consider Nishida's Zen spiritual, because it does not depend on personal transformation. It is a philosophy in the sense that it concerns itself with the conditions of access to the truth. What one must do to gain access to the truth in Nishida's philosophy is remove the self from ordinary reality. To do so, Nishida proposes certain techniques of the non-self, such as solving *kōan* and meditation. This makes Nishida a product of what Foucault calls the 'Cartesian moment', which is ironic because it is precisely the Cartesianism inherent in modern Western philosophy that Nishida wishes to go beyond. With its focus on practice and the need for transformation, Tanabe's philosophy does qualify as spirituality. In fact, we might say that Tanabe himself foresaw this when he called his philosophy a *tetsugaku naranu tetsugaku*, or philosophy-that-is-not-philosophy. It is possibly where philosophy dies that spirituality may bloom.

## Bibliography

- Bárceñas, A. (2009) Modern Japanese Aesthetics and the Neo-Kantians. In: Bouso, R. & Heisig, J. W. (Eds.) *Frontiers of Japanese Philosophy 6: Confluences and Cross-Currents*. Nanzan.
- Bowring, R. (2005) *The Religious Traditions of Japan: 500-1600*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Buruma, I. & Margalit, A. (2005) *Occidentalism: The West in the Eyes of Its Enemies*. Penguin Books.
- Deleuze, G. (2006) *Nietzsche and Philosophy* (Tomlinson, H., Trans.). New York: Columbia University Press.
- Dirlik, A. (2008) Chinese History and the Question of Orientalism. In: Burke, E. & Prochaska, D. (Eds.) *Genealogy of Orientalism. History, Theory, Politics*. University of Nebraska Press.
- Dogen, H. (1999) *Omori Sogen. The Art of a Zen Master*. New York: Routledge.
- Elman, B. A. (1983) Nietzsche and Buddhism. In: *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 44, no. 4, pp. 671-686.
- Foucault, M. (1988) Technologies of the Self. In: *Technologies of the Self. A Seminar with Michel Foucault* (Martin, L. H., Gutman, H. & Hutton, P. H., Eds.), pp. 16-49. London: Tavistock Publications.
- Foucault, M. (1991) *Remarks on Marx. Conversations with Duccio Trombadori* (Goldstein, R. J. & Cascaito, J., Trans.). New York: Semiotext(e).
- Foucault, M. (1994) *The Order of Things. An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Foucault, M. (1995) *Discipline & Punish. The Birth of the Prison*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Foucault, M. (1999) *Religion and Culture* (Carrette, J. R., Eds.). New York: Routledge.
- Foucault, M. (2005) *The Hermeneutics of the Subject. Lectures at the Collège de France, 1981-82*. (Gros, F., Eds., Burchell, G., Trans.). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Hegel, G. W. F. (2010) *The Science of Logic* (Giovanni, G., Trans.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Heisig, J. W. & Unno, T. (1990) *The Religious Philosophy of Tanabe Hajime*. Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press.
- Heisig, J. W. (2001) *Philosophers of Nothingness. An Essay on the Kyoto School*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Herrigel, E. (1999) *Zen in the Art of Archery*. New York: Vintage Books.



- Keel, H. S. (1995) *Understanding Shinran: A Dialogical Approach*. Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press.
- Kuroda, T. (1981) Shinto in the History of Japanese Religion. In: *The Journal of Japanese Studies*, vol. 7, no. 1, pp. 1-21.
- Maraldo, J. C. (2015) Nishida Kitarō. In: *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Accessed online [04/19/17]: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/nishida-kitaro/>
- Nietzsche, F. (1974) *The Gay Science. With a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs* (Kaufmann, W., Trans.). New York: Vintage Books.
- Nietzsche, F. (1998) *On the Genealogy of Morality* (Clark, M. & Swensen, A. J., Trans.). Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company.
- Nishida, K. (1987) *Intuition and Reflection in Self-Consciousness* (Viglielmo, V. H., Trans.). Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Nishida, K. (1990) *An Inquiry into the Good* (Masao, A. & Ives, C., Trans.). New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Oosterling, H. (2016) *Waar geen wil is, is een weg*. Amsterdam: Boom.
- Piovesana, G. K. (1963) *Recent Japanese Philosophical Thought 1862-1962: a Survey*. Enderle Bookstore.
- Piovesana, G. K. (1964) One Hundred Years of Japanese Philosophy 1862-1962. In: *Contemporary Religions in Japan*, vol. 5, no. 3, pp. 199-206.
- Said, E.W. (1978) *Orientalism*. Penguin Books.
- Sharf, R. H. (1993) The Zen of Japanese Nationalism. In: *History of Religions*, vol. 33, no. 1, pp. 1-43.
- Shinran (2012) *Shinran's Kyōgyōshinshō: The Collection of Passages Expounding the True Teaching, Living, Faith, and Realizing of the Pure Land* (Suzuki, D. T., Trans.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Takayanagi, N. (2011) Japan's "Isolated Father" of Philosophy: Nishi Amane 西周 and His "Tetsugaku 哲学". In: *Whither Japanese Philosophy? III Reflections through other Eyes*. University of Tokyo Center of Philosophy.
- Tanabe, H. (1986) *Philosophy as Metanoetics* (Takeuchi, Y., Trans.). Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Tanabe, H. (2010) *Zangedō toshite no Tetsugaku 懺悔道としての哲学*. Iwanami bunko.
- Tosaka, J. (1977) *Nihon ideorogiron 日本イデオロギー論*. Iwanami bunko.

Walsh, D. (2011) The Confucian Roots of zen no kenkyū: Nishida's Debt to Wang Yang-Ming in the Search of a Philosophy of Praxis. In: *Asian Philosophy*, vol. 21, no. 4, pp. 361-372.

Yamada, S. (2001) The Myth of Zen in the Art of Archery. In: *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, vol. 28, no. 1-2, pp. 1-30.