

HEIDEGGER AND THE LOTUS SUTRA ON THE BEGINNING: OPENING UP OF TRUTH AS UNHIDDENNESS (ALETHEIA)

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ABSTRACT. *There might be some affinity between Heidegger and the Lotus Sutra concerning the beginning. For Heidegger western history began with Greeks as the first beginning and now comes to the end, preparing for the other beginning of a new history in which the last God may appear. In the Lotus Sutra the historical Buddha reveals his own eternal origin in the countless past and predicts the appearance of the unseen Buddha hidden in the depth in the eschatological time, i.e., the mappo era. While Heidegger's idea of the other beginning as the retrieval of the still deeply hidden origin of the first beginning is restricted to the finite history, the notion of the eternal original Buddha suggests his cyclic reappearance in history after the demise of the historical Buddha in the anticipatory form of the Supreme Conduct Bodhisattva. Heidegger's concept of the last God may correspond to the anticipatory Bodhisattva.*

KEYWORDS: *the first beginning, the other beginning, the last God, the eternal Buddha, the mappo era, the anticipatory Bodhisattva*

Heidegger inherits Nietzsche's expectation of Dionysos as the future God who is now absent but to be reborn by tracing back to the ancient pre-Socratic Greek beginning of western history. This is a kind of Messianism combined with the Greek divine. Heidegger regards Nietzsche as the end and completion of western metaphysical history sunk into the oblivion of Being itself since the early Greeks and seeks for a new beginning which is expected to come by the return to the original beginning still hidden in the deep ground of the first beginning of the Greeks. But this is a philosophy of temporalized origin, i.e., confined within the finitude of history, as the destiny of time immemorial, as J. Habermas comments.

In contrast to the general Buddhist cyclic view of history, the modern Japanese philosopher affiliated with the Kyoto School, Tanabe's view of history is limited to the present moment in which the end and the beginning of every present are dialectically unified with each other, without forming a linear durational history, due to his involvement with Zen Buddhist thought, though he is much influenced by Heidegger and later critical of the abstractness of Zen as well. Viewed from the perspective of Tanabe's own triadic logic of species, he should take into consideration historical time as an epochal duration on the species-like level, i.e., a particular entity, mediating between the present moment as the individuality and eternity on the level of the genus-like universality with full seriousness.

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On the other hand, for Heidegger, the other beginning is deeply hidden in the first beginning of western metaphysical history and is to be disclosed and restored. This is the type of the origin-resuming philosophy, and may be influenced by Nietzsche's idea of the eternal return of the same within the finite scope of history. According to the Lotus Sutra, however, the profoundly concealed eternal origin of the historical Buddha *Sakyamuni* is retrospectively revealed, and the eternal original Buddha is expected to reappear in the eschatological *Mappo* era. This is nothing but the eternal recurrence or return of the eternal original Buddha in history.

As it is the task of philosophy for Hegel and Heidegger to reconstruct the oldest, archaic source forgotten and hidden in history, so it is the Buddha's salvific aim to restore and repeat the innermost essence of human beings sunk into oblivion in the long journey in the remote past in the nascent age.

With regard to the historical beginning of Western thinking, Heidegger traces its primordial origin back to the pre-Socratic Greek philosophy, and this is called the first beginning, while seeking for the other beginning of a new history which is deeply hidden in the first beginning. For Heidegger, history has the duality of the principle, *arche*, and the purpose, *telos*, which are united with each other in line, and his view of history may be much influenced by the Christian eschatology. On the other hand, Japanese Buddhism regards history as the decline since the demise of the historical Buddha Sakyamuni from the declining viewpoint of history, and this is the so-called "the Mappo era". This may correspond to the Christian and Heideggerian eschatological view of history. Furthermore, Heidegger's idea of the other beginning may resemble to Japanese Buddhism, in particular, the Lotus Sutra type proclaiming the new commencement of history as the return to the eternal origin in the end time of history, i.e., the Mappo era. This means the coincidence of the eternal origin and the historical time in paradox.

While for A.N. Whitehead time is irreversible with the cumulative orientation towards the future in one way, according to Christian eschatology Jesus is known in the light of his end and his origin in the light of his future, that is, the end of time is paradoxically linked to the beginning of eternity, only at the *eschaton* is the divinity of God realized, the future remains open but not open-ended with the actual arrival of God's eternity, as J. Moltmann and W. Pannenberg articulate. Heidegger's thought might be de-theologized in content along with these current theological propensities for eschatology from the intellectual historical perspective.

Within the ambit of Buddhist philosophy, Zen and the Lotus Sutra are divergent from each other with regard to making a distinctive epoch or durational period of history; Zen is centered upon a moment of every present without mediating the historical epochs between the present and eternity with the result of the immediate unity of the present time and eternity, remaining abstract, whereas in the Lotus Sutra time is not uniform in content but consummates at the end whereby the end of time returns to its beginning as the dialectical unification of time and eternity in the cyclic recurring movement through the mediation of the historical durational epochal time. In this respect, Christian eschatology and the Lotus Sutra Buddhist thought are akin to each other in terms of the relation of time and eternity, and Heidegger might not be

exception of this line of thought from the intellectual historical perspective.

So, Heidegger says that the last god is the oldest, most inceptual god,, The appropriation into the event first provides the time-space of the appearing of the last god,, The last god grounds the essential occurrence of that which is called eternity (*The Event*, p.197), and that the last god is the other beginning of the immeasurable possibilities of our history (*Contributions to Philosophy*, p.326). He also points out that the inception is begun again more originally to repeat and retrieve it in order to transform it into the other inception (*Introduction to Metaphysics*, p.41). The essence of the originary origin has still remained concealed. The first beginning is not the originary origin. The beginning of the originary origin occurs at the end. The originary origin is to come in the last. The past comes out of the future. So, C. Baracchi suggests that the future may be disclosed as the past to come; the past may reenact itself in repetition. The other beginning is nothing less than the first beginning more primordially understood. The other beginning points to the inceptual manifestation of the heretofore necessarily, essentially non-manifest. The transition from the first to the other would indicate the becoming manifest of the “hidden history”, of the history of the first beginning, hidden in as well as hidden to the first beginning, i.e., a retrieval of the first beginning as the other beginning (*Heidegger and the Greeks*, pp.23–38). The first and the other beginning are supposed to be ultimately the same as the reenacted origin more originally in which Being takes place as unhiddenness or opening up of the primordial truth in the future. This signifies the cyclic return and repetition of the past hidden originary origin in the form of a new course of history once more. There might be the correspondence between Heidegger’s concept of the beginning and the eternal Buddha as the self-projected and self-transformed Bodhisattva in anticipation of the future. So, J. Sallis mentions that the other beginning, beginning beyond the end of metaphysics, is at the same time a return to the first beginning, a return that enters into the first beginning so as to grasp it more originally than in the first beginning, so as to grasp somehow that which, though essential to the first beginning, remained-in the first beginning-concealed (*Heidegger and the Greeks*, 180).

For Hegel, too, the Absolute is the self-negating, self-alienating and self-returning movement; only in the end the beginning presupposed is first realized, i.e., the cyclic self-becoming temporal process in which the Absolute appears. In analogy to Hegel, when the historical Buddha completes and ends his saving activity, he also returns to his own eternal origin and projects himself onto the future as the anticipatory Bodhisattva once again. This deeply concealed structure of truth is revealed and opened up by Nichiren. Hence Nichiren might be supposed to be the realized effect of the eternal Buddha’s self-movement in the end.

B. Crowe mentions that repetition is an activity that gives the past a new future, participating in the unfolding history of one’s own tradition, i.e., the realization of the promise of something radically new hidden in what is old (*Heidegger’s Religious Origins*, pp.193, 264). Heidegger also says that the other beginning transforms being by leaping into its more original truth,, The leap into the other beginning is the return to the first, and vice versa (*Contributions*, pp.144-145).

Hence, Tannen (the 6th abbot of the Chinese Tendai School, 711–782) says that although the harvest is brought about in the present, it is primordially caused by the original seed. Nichiren also states that the penultimate enlightenment is turned out into the ultimate one by reverting to the original dimension of the inceptual words. These statements signify that the present effect is resulted only from the return to the original root. In other words, the past potential cause is reenacted in the present actual effect in and through the mediation of reversion to the primordial origin.

In the modern secularized world Heidegger thought God in terms of the concept of Non-God, though he was deeply influenced by Christian theology from the outset of his carrier. His primary concept of *Ereignis* (Event of Being) is nothing but the secular idea of the Incarnation of God in history which can be traced back to its original root as the primordial event of God in eternity prior to history. His idea of Being is another expression of God as the hidden divine vis-à-vis the manifest God, and is identified with *Ereignis* and *Anfang* (beginning) in the end, though he never goes beyond the finiteness of history.

Whereas for Heidegger the Western history of metaphysics reverts to the original ancient Greek idea of Being and comes to the end in the present era in which the last God as the other beginning of a new history may appear, the historical Buddha reveals his own eternal origin in the countless aeons ago and anticipates the appearance of the unseen Buddha so far hidden in the depth in the eschatological future, according to the Lotus Sutra. The Supreme Conduct Bodhisattva might be parallel to the eternal archetype of the Incarnation of God, i.e., the Son of God, predestined to appear in history in the human form of Jesus. If so, then, who is the historical person or entity as incarnated of the eternal original Buddha? According to Nichikan's (the 26th abbot of the Taiseki Temple, 1665–1726) interpretation, the historical person Nichiren is identified with the eternal original Buddha incarnated and appeared in the actual existence of space and time of the so-called mappo era. If so, what is the difference between the historical Buddha Sakyamuni and Nichiren? The key notion is the beginning: the beginning of the long edifying process of the Buddha's saving activity. For Nichiren, the Lotus Sutra aims at the beginning of the mappo era in which the unseen Buddha is expected to come out in the anticipated form of the Supreme Conduct Bodhisattva symbolizing the active mediation between eternity and time. This anticipating Bodhisattva is not a real entity but the image or projection of the transition from the eternal Buddha to the historical future. The revelation of the eternal origin of the historical Buddha is at the same time the return to the primordial hidden origin which has not yet manifested hitherto. The return to the original beginning of the historical Buddha is in accordance with the cyclic reappearance of the eternal Buddha in a new stage of historical development of his activity. This is anticipated as the proleptic pre-appearance of the eternal Buddha in the form of the Supreme Conduct Bodhisattva self-projected into the future. After 2000 years since the historical Buddha's extinction, the mature time has now come to self-manifest the eternal Buddha's essence in fullness and entirety. This eschatological expectation is conceived to be realized in history by the appearance of Nichiren who recognizes himself as the reincarnation of the anticipatorily prefigured

Bodhisattva of the Supreme Conduct as the penultimate occurrence of the eternal Buddha as such.

On the other hand, the Buddhist idea of the mappo era has the double meaning: one is the end of the old time in which the Buddha's previous saving activity completes with the result of harvest, and the other is the beginning of a new time in which the Buddha returns to his eternal origin hidden so far and inaugurates a novel activity of planting the seed as the cause for the future unredeemed humans. The mappo era is not only the end but also the beginning, i.e., the last time as the hidden beginning in which the oldest, most archaic Bodhisattva in prolepsis in a meta-historical sphere is anticipated to appear in the future. Hence Heidegger's idea of the last and ultimate God who may come in the other beginning of a new history as the futural retrieval, return and repetition of the even still profoundly concealed origin of the first beginning, i.e., the old history, might bears a resemblance with the proleptic Bodhisattva as the other, self-negated and self-alienated form of the hidden essence, i.e., the eternal origin, of the historical Buddha, who is apprehended to be realized in the historical person Nichiren eventually, whereas Heidegger's idea of the last God remains simply expected and indefinitely obscure.

Even the oldest Chinese classic *the Book of Change* says that the end is the same as the beginning in the circular manner. This signifies that time is endlessly cyclic in character on the ontological principle. For Heidegger only in the end of the first beginning, the new other beginning arises as a result of opening up the essence of truth as unhiddenness. For Hegel a progress towards the future is in concomitant with a regress into the past, i.e., original truth. In the Buddhist concept of the mappo era as the final time, human beings are able to restore their own Buddha-seed lost in the far past. Although the Buddha attained is the completion and end of the old history, nevertheless, it is not yet ultimate but penultimate. Something is still hidden in it. This is the other beginning, à la Heidegger. It does not directly and by itself take place in history. But, on the contrary, solely in the end of the old history, i.e. the mappo era, the hidden beginning can occur in history. This is the identity of the historical end time, i.e., the mappo era, and the eternal origin as the hidden beginning. The end returns to its eternal beginning and reveals its original essence in the future of history.

By the way, some criticisms of Heidegger made by his contemporary K. Jaspers might be worthy of mention. For example, Jaspers says that what is expected and promised does not appear, i.e., Being itself or Truth itself, though touching upon the quasi-true; Heidegger reconstructs his thought by gathering various words and sentences from the old thoughts, especially from the biblical and theological phrases, preparing for something which is absent for the moment; his interpretations of many texts are different from the usual ones in the long run, always remaining unresolved, e.g., his curious notion of the four fields; his concept of history of being is ambiguous and not designated definitely; his style of writing is the prediction and preparation simply anticipated as an escape for the future, setting up a new thing, like a divinized prophet; he inherits the theological traditions and waits for the Advent (*Parousia*) of Christ, as R. Safranski comments that Heidegger's way of thinking is a kind of

metaphysics of the second coming of Christ. Even though all these comments might be keen and relevant, it might be quite certain that Heidegger gets in touch with what is essential, as Jaspers himself recognizes, in comparison to Buddhist philosophy, in particular, the Lotus Sutra type of Buddhism. In fact, Jaspers, in the similar way to Heidegger, holds that we are now facing the second axial age in which a new paradigm of the way of thinking is in pursuit of establishment, vis-à-vis the first axial age in which such great teachers as Socrates, Confucian, Sakyamuni and Jesus appeared and their teachings have been no longer valid any more.

The Buddha attained, stood by the past effect as the potential being, and the Bodhisattva in attainment, standing in a position of the present cause as the acting subject, are mutually mediated through conversion in negation with each other in the direction of spiral evolutionary process of time on a cosmic scale of the universal or multi-verses history of saving activity without ceasing. On this point, the Lotus Sutra thought may be divergent from Heidegger's.

As J. Moltmann points out, there are two kinds of concepts of eternity: one is relative eternity, and the other absolute eternity. Relative eternity refers to aeon or aeonic time over against absolute or essential eternity. With regard to the eternal Buddha, more accurately speaking, what is revealed by the historical Buddha is not eternity itself or absolute eternity without beginning but relative eternity with beginning as the far long past, i.e., finite eternity. This finite relative eternity is called the first fruit or effect of enlightenment as the becoming Buddha, and hence it is inferred that there must be the more profoundly hidden cause of that effect. This is nothing but absolute essential eternity without beginning and designated as the most ultimate perfect, i.e., eternal original Buddha in the proper sense. Hereby there might be some parallel between Heidegger's idea of the first beginning vis-à-vis the other beginning and the first effect of enlightenment of the Buddha in the countless aeons ago as relative finite eternity vis-à-vis the authentic eternal original Buddha without beginning as absolute eternity situated in the primordial cause of enlightenment, despite the difference between within and beyond history.

For Heidegger, in the inception logos as gathering is the happening of truth as unconcealment, and unconcealment as the essence of truth happens only in so far as it is brought about by the work of the word (*Introduction to Metaphysics*, pp.199–204). This statement is highly significant in that the inceptive logos as the locus of the gathered eternal ideas implies the affinity with the Buddhist *mandala* in which all words or names of the diverse Buddhas and the manifold Bodhisattvas are symbolically gathered. According to Heidegger, Logos is constant gathering, the gatheredness of beings that stands in itself, that is, Being (*ibid.*, p.138). The essence of logos as gathering yields an essential consequence for the character of *legein* which as gathering is related to the originary gatheredness of Being, and Being means coming-into-unconcealment. This gathering has the basic character of opening up, revealing. Language is the happening in which Being becomes word and revealed as the formation that opens beings up. Thus, in originary saying, the Being of beings is opened up in the structure of its gatheredness (*ibid.*, pp.181–183). These statements may stem from the Biblical source of the God's Word in the very eternal beginning.

In contrast to the western and biblical tendencies towards the primal Word in eternity, the eastern way of thinking tends to inaugurate from Nothingness or Emptiness prior to the genesis of the universe. Even though, however, the Tendai School of Japan regards the letters, words or language as being no less than expressive of truth itself in turn. Behind this reciprocal identity of word and truth lies the way of thinking tending towards affirming actuality as the self-manifestation of truth, pertinent to the Sino-Japanese mentality reflective of the agricultural society based upon the stable land with cyclic time, vis-à-vis the Indian tendency towards negating actuality in search of eternal ideality. From this intellectual traditional heritage, words or language as such are recognized as nothing other than truth, and entail the production of *mandala* as the archetypal gestalt of gatheredness of all Buddhas and Bodhisattvas in the integral symbolical system on a cosmic scale by contemplation of mind.

As J. Attali suggests, in as much as nostalgia for the so-called golden age, i.e., the ideal society in the remotest past, i.e., the archaic time, even in time immemorial, is accompanied by the future hope as paradise in general in East and West, a search for Being itself as the primordial origin of all beings, forgotten and hidden under the deeper ground of manifesting consciousness on the surface, is concomitant with the reenactment of the past origin as the futural retrieval: the return to the origin entails the future development; hereby the resurrection from the dead might be tenable, as in the cases of the Christian mythic story and the Indo-Buddhist idea of *avatara* or re-incarnation of the eternal divinity or permanent entity as ultimate reality.

According to the Lotus Sutra, especially the main chapter on eternal life of the Buddha, the eternal Buddha, in spite of the transcendence of perpetual perishing and arising in essence, ceaselessly continues to be born and dead in appearance in infinite repetition for the sake of the final and ultimate salvation of all sentient beings in the entire cosmos through the negative mediation of self-transformation and self-development in a diversity of different forms and other disguises. Hence, the eternal Buddha might be cogently in accord with the bio-cosmological reality that is characterized by the coherent mutability, causality in reversal, spiral evolutionary process of the dynamic cyclic movement towards the purpose as a consequence of the perpetual self-negating activity of Absolute Negativity or Emptiness in its cyclic return to itself for the self-realization of its original essence in history in principle.

Hereby some comparison to the Aristotelian bio-cosmological entity called *entelecheia* should be made with reference to K. Khroutski's elucidation on the matter in the following: for Hegel, much influenced by Aristotle, the identity of subject and substance entails the self-manifestations of the Absolute in the ongoing process of history, the appearances of essence in the finite region, in the negative way. Likewise, when the historical Buddha reverts to its own eternal origin, its ontological status is converted in negation into the potentiality for the active orientation towards actuality, viewed from the Aristotelian perspective. Upon the Whiteheadian analysis of perishing on the same level as the Aristotelian analysis of becoming, when the historical Buddha as the actual entity subjectively perishes, it is turned out into the objective immortality as the real potential in the form of causality

towards the future without losing its actuality. Therefore the eternal Buddha as the self-reverted origin by the historical Buddha might be analogous to Aristotle's notion of *entelecheia* as the unity of the opposed poles of potentiality and actuality in the movement of the dynamic cyclic process of its self-actualization in its further active orientation of potentiality towards the actual self-development for the future in the anticipation of the self-transformed otherness of the Bodhisattva in and through self-negation in succession.

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