

**Review of Kiyokazu Nakatomi's
Nothingness and Love of Japanese Philosophy
(Beyond the difficulties of the Corona Crisis)**

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Makoto Ozaki¹

**ОТЗЫВ О КНИГЕ Киёказу Накатоми
Небытие и Любовь в японской философии
Макото Одзак**

Nakatomi's new book is the third one written in English and shows a new trend in the Japanese intellectual history attempting at wide spreading out into the world the Kyoto School philosophies represented by Nishida, Tanabe and Watsuji, by expressing their thoughts in the current world common language. As the eminent French biologist and philosopher Prof. Dr. George Chapouthier recommends, Nakatomi's book pursues a possible synthesis of western and eastern philosophy on the basis of the Buddhist and Taoist traditional principles of Emptiness and Nothingness which are never sheer nothingness but rather the ultimate reality of all phenomena without its own substantial being, and this attitude may be the inheritance of the past philosophers as the Japanese traditional intellectual trait which compounds the different elements of ideas in a single system of thought. Another principle of love is also common to Tanabe who emphasizes the self-sacrificing love represented by Jesus Christ as well as the Bodhisattva's practice to save other people before reaching his own enlightenment, and this may be somehow influenced by Christianity imported into modern Japan. In fact, Tanabe himself demonstrates Christian theodicy from his own dialectical logic of species. It is of significance today to research into Christian theology in comparison to and integration with Buddhist philosophy as the globalizing tendency, and Nakatomi too is not exempted from this historical situation in his dare account of a possible unification of the three big religions as mentioned in his book.

While Nakatomi explains Aristotle's idea of movement as the transition from potentiality (*dunamis*) to actuality (*entelecheia*), Tanabe is critical of this Aristotelian view as still being involved in the logic of self-identical being in opposition to the self-negating conversion which is entailed by the perpetual self-emptying activity of Emptiness itself. Tanabe's criticism of Aristotle's logic of self-identity of being extends to Hegel and Heidegger as the descendants of Aristotle, and this distinction between Tanabe and western philosophers is crucial even for Nishida's logic of self-

¹ Sanyo Gakuen University, Okayama, Japan.

identity in absolute contradiction. Tanabe criticizes Nishida's Absolute Nothingness as Place or Topos for turning out into Absolute Being in the end.

In Tanabe's view, Aristotle makes a distinction between activity on the level of the individual subject and movement pertaining to the substantive being, and the continuity of the movement from the past is negatively mediated by the individual subjective activity in the present as the actualization of potentiality, i.e., complete actuality (*entelecheia*). The actualization of potential essence is brought about by the subjective activity, and this is the crucial point of Tanabe's triadic logic of species in connection with the individual and universality as the dialectic of negative mediation attaining to the universal state existence for all humankind in the form of species qua genus. So, it is not constrained to the nationalistic state existence in the narrow sense in its true intention in retrospect.

Inasmuch as for Aristotle activity (*energeia*) is in conformity with movement (*kinesis*), for Tanabe *eidos* can become the living active life only in the developing movement which is mediated by the matter as the historical substratum. Only through the mediation of the subjective action is the historical substratum perpetually renewed as a unity of the relative and the absolute that is both two and one, as it were.

The main point of the logic of species is, in my view, the dialectical unification of the individual, the state existence on the level of species, and the genus-like universality in and through negative mediation; in particular, the state existence is the substratum in relation to the individual's subjective action as the species in which the genus-like universality is concretely realized. After the WW2, Tanabe revised the significance of the state existence in terms of the expedient being which is not absolute as such.

In my view, one of the richness and depth of Tanabe's intellectual activity might be the forgotten significance of repentance for sin and evil, *metanoia*, even in relation to the current global crisis of the biological threat. The issue of evil is one of the main points of the logic of species as radically involved in both human persons and the state existence, upon which Tanabe is not optimistic but serious enough in line with Kant, and this problem is to be much more discussed in connection with the nascent global crisis even in a wider perspective of Taoist inactive naturalness as well.

Anyway, to interpret a text is to clarify its deeply hidden meaning, as Gadamer holds, and hence, it might be highly significant to explicate the fertile implications and connotations of Tanabe's thought and further develop them into the possible solutions of the world problems.

What is important is not sticking to the letters on the surface but understanding of their spirit in depth, as Tanabe emphasizes (*From the scheme of time to the scheme of the world*), for the purpose of perpetually constructing a relevant theory to the contemporary world beyond the historical limitations by integrating the new different elements such as the theory of the big bang, the expanding universe, dark matter, dark energy, etc., on the basis of the metaphysical and ontological principle of Absolute Nothingness as the dialectic.

As Nakatomi duly points out, Tanabe exposes himself to the self-contradiction regarding his advocacy of Shinran's way of *metanoia*, and this seems to me to be a tentative escape from his failure of justifying the state existence as the appearance of the Absolute analogous to Christ or Bodhisattva to the imaginary authority of the mythological Buddha far from the actual world as a shocking reaction to the unexpected defeat of the war. Even if so, however, independently of his dependence on Shinran, repentance for sin and evil as such is fundamental in both Christianity and Buddhism, for even the state existence is regarded as the expedient being which is neither good nor bad in itself, and its value depends on the free subjective acts of the individuals in his later revision. The duality of species should be more carefully articulated with reference to Tanabe's revised logic in which repentance for sin and evil plays an essential role, otherwise it would be unfair in dealing with his whole structure of thought.

It might be rather easy to accuse someone of its failure which is reflective of the historical actuality of its own age afterwards, and anyone cannot transcend the historical limitations. As Hegel famously remarks, a philosopher is not a prophet but the son of his age, and Heidegger indicates that humans err and errancy dominates human beings through and through. Hence, repentance is the necessarily indispensable element of human action in general. One should refrain oneself from drawing a hasty conclusion but rather learn more about the thinking way profoundly concealed of the philosopher in question in expecting a fruitful dialogue and construction in the future by virtue of disclosing the originary essence of truth forgotten so far.

The problem is why Tanabe fails to justify the state existence, and this is, in my view, inevitably connected with the long history of Japan in which the mentality of Japanese people at large has been formed, especially intimately related to the emperor system having been established since the ancient time. Apart from the historical context, the problem of the state existence in modern Japan might not be resolved. The Kyoto School philosophy is not an abrupt emergence but the historical accumulation contiguous with the previous ages in which Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, and Neo-Confucianism as a new synthesis of them have been superposed as the underlying substratum. Within this historical framework, Nishida, Tanabe, and Watsuji display respective integration of diverse ideas in their own constructive efforts, particularly, in confrontation with western philosophy.

In the last days, Tanabe was engaged in interpretation of the Mallarme's symbolic poem on the relation of freedom and destiny in terms of the triadic logic of absolute negation with the aid of Heidegger's key concept of *Ereignis* which is translated into the moving or dynamic origin in contrast to many other interpretations of the static sense. This might be an acutely distinguished point referred to his article dedicated to Heidegger whose position is seen as still in the bondage of western traditional idea of Being from Tanabe's viewpoint of dialectic of death. Moreover, Tanabe mentions the hidden link between the poet Rilke and Heidegger in anticipation of a new era in which the last God shall arrive as the retrieval of the primary origin concealed so far, though

Tanabe does not explicitly know about the last God during his life-time due to Heidegger's unpublished work concerned with the last God. These issues should be more closely elaborated from a comparative perspective beyond Nakatomi's touching upon Mallarme.

Anyway, the endeavors made by Nakatomi might be contributing to a further advancement of a higher unity of eastern and western thought in a comparative and synthetic manner.

The aim of this book is the development of Japanese philosophy and the overcoming of the corona problem, which is currently the biggest issue. Regarding Japanese philosophy, I treated the philosophies of Kitarō Nishida, Hajime Tanabe, and Inazō Nitobe. The philosophy of Nishida begins with Pure Experience and ends with Absolute Nothingness. This nothingness is the flow of life that originates from the nothingness of Lao-tzu in ancient China and the energy that fills the universe. This idea is the basis for the Creation from Nothingness in physics. On the other hand, nothingness works in our thinking as a negative word. It was the philosophy of Tanabe that thoroughly enforced this negativity and preached the Absolute Dialectic based on dialogue. In response to this theoretical philosophy, Nitobe spread the traditional Japanese concept of "Bushidō" to the world by using the European philosophy. I now ask, is it possible that Japanese philosophy can respond to contemporary problems? The answers are in my papers on education, economics, brain physiology and the corona crisis. Infectious diseases bear philosophy. It is the time when a new philosophy is born.



Kiyokazu Nakatomi

Nothingness and Love of Japanese Philosophy

Beyond the difficulties of the Corona Crisis



Kiyokazu Nakatomi was born in Japan in 1955. He studied politics and economics at Meiji University, Tokyo and now he works at Chiba Prefectural Matsuo High School as a social study and ethics teacher. He is the author of "Philosophy of Nothingness and Love" (Hokuju Company Tokyo, Lap). His papers are published in 10 languages in 17 countries.



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