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# Does Emptiness Reflect or Transform?

## Swedenborg's Gardens and Kyoto School Tensions

This paper tries to argue that the Kyoto School's assertion of the concept of emptiness has given it a certain unique approach in facing the post-Kantian challenges of modern Continental philosophy. However, emptiness as a solution also makes emptiness a problem in that the relationship between emptiness and self raises dilemmas and conflicting cosmologies. In this paper I use the example of the mystic Emmanuel Swedenborg and how D. T. Suzuki and Immanuel Kant reacted to him. While Suzuki warms to the unifying mysticism of Swedenborg's vision, Kant sees his works as something not to be embraced but to be explained. And, indeed, Kant finds himself disturbed that he cannot fully explain Swedenborg away. A world that produces Swedenborg is ultimately undecidable and non-unifiable.

Ultimately, I argue that Tanabe Hajime, whilst using the concept of emptiness the same as his Kyoto School counterpart, D. T. Suzuki, he tends to provide descriptions of self and the world that cohere more closely to Kant than to Swedenborg and Suzuki.

KEYWORDS: Kyoto School—Tanabe Hajime—D. T. Suzuki—emptiness—Karatani Kōjin—Kant—Marxism

According to Nishitani Keiji, *absolute nothingness*, or what I will term *emptiness*,[1] is the "distinctive and common basis that sets" the philosophies of Nishida Kitarō and Tanabe Hajime, (and hence the general Kyoto School), "apart from traditional Western philosophy."[2] What emptiness offers, I would argue, is a basis to meet the challenge the "Copernican Revolution" of Immanuel Kant has wrought in modern philosophy. This revolution has centered the self as the source of sensibility and understanding through which the world gives itself as world. However, in centering the self, the self has also become decentered and surplus to the world. The self is at once a part of the world and nature, existing in it and determined by it. But it is also that which, through its own free conscious action ("free" because nobody else can be conscious for you) becomes the way by which that same world is understood and made intelligible. The self is both a part of nature, and a free agent transcendent of it. This is the antinomy that Kant describes

1. Perhaps I am courting controversy by linking the words "nothingness" and "emptiness" so easily like this. However, I justify this move, firstly, on the grounds that there is no explicit dictionary definition based proscription from seeing the two terms as synonymous (and this works for 無 and 空 in Japanese, too). Of course, as with any two words, there will be apparent differences of nuance when one ponders them long enough. One word, maybe, is a bit space-ish, the other, perhaps, a bit object-oriented-ish. But these distinctions are vague, subjective afterthoughts and not fixed distinctions. Secondly, both terms, when usually used by the Kyoto School, are designated to be "absolute." This important modifier logically grants them natural synonymy, since to do otherwise would be to take away their "absolute" nature. Thirdly, I hope it is obvious from this paper that when the Kyoto School did talk of nothingness and emptiness, they defined and shaped these terms through their work. I would like to add that it is precisely because the Kyoto School were so undogmatic (from a Buddhist perspective) about the traditional definitions and usages of these terms that they are qualified to engage, as active and authentic participants, in the conversations of Continental philosophy, Kantian or otherwise.

2. Nishitani 1960, 180.

in the Prolegomena: "There are in the World Causes through freedom" and "There is no Liberty, but all is nature."[3]

This conundrum is, to some extent, reflected in the tension between self-power *jiriki* (自力) and other-power *tariki* (他力) in the Buddhist tradition. Is the self the author of its own salvation or is it the puppet of a wider karma? If it is the former, does this not imply the very essentializing of the self in the face of the basic Buddhist doctrine of non-self (無我)? If it is the latter, then how does the self experience its experiences of the world? Where is self-consciousness when there is no self?

I want to argue here that in espousing emptiness, the Kyoto School is providing a twofold solution to this antinomy: firstly it is locating the space for the self that does not fit into the world it generates. Secondly, it is providing the grounds by which that self, the empty self, experiences value and intelligibility in the world. Emptiness has value because it is surplus. However, I want to further argue that this solution also creates a problem since the question will remain of how the self (which is not seen to experience absolute annihilation—there is no nihility in Kyoto School Buddhism) actually relates to emptiness. Does it empty itself into a complete transparent unity with the emptiness, or does it submit to the emptiness in an absolute exchange that provides value but leaves the self and the emptiness still there, intact? In a way, we can see this as a conflict between two separate metaphors of emptiness: emptiness as a "mirror" or emptiness as a "field of vision." As a *mirror*, emptiness is that which reflects the all in the all in an eternal harmony. Differentiation is visible and experienced, but is ultimately based upon a failure to see the final meta-layer of emptiness through which what is different is really what is being reflected back. In this view, the self is merely an instance of something greater and all embracing. Alternatively, as a *field of vision*, emptiness is that upon which a self-contained self emerges that will see the other not as its own reflection but as that which is irreducibly other specifically because the field, as emptiness, does not offer any further levels, and hence any further unity. All that remains is absolute mediating submission to the other in an exchange that offers value emergent from an emptying emptiness.

This tension between emptiness as a mirror and emptiness as a field of

3. KANT 1902, 106.

vision vibrates, it can be argued, through the Kyoto tradition with Suzuki and Nishida arguing for a reflective emptiness, and Tanabe arguing for a transformative one.[4] And with that, the Kyoto School finds itself facing the same aporias and arguments that have ruptured other traditions in the wider field of Continental philosophy: including, *inter alia*, Hegel versus Kierkegaard, and humanism versus structuralism. These similarities are not due to some perennial ur-philosophy throwing up the same thoughts eternally, but due to the fact that all traditions after Kant must deal with Kant's third antinomy—that our consciousness is free as we are determined. And so to tell, then, the tale of these tense torques in the trends and tendencies of the Kyoto School (and wider Continental tradition) I start with the unlikely figure of Emanuel Swedenborg.

## The curious case of emmanuel swedenborg

Emanuel Swedenborg was a successful scientist who in later life had various long and sustained visions of heaven, or rather conscious visitations to heaven, where he had extensive conversations with angels and other beings there, about which he wrote a large volume of works. These works, which are in many ways a combination of ethnographic descriptions of the spirit world and extensive theorizing about this world, act as empirical testimonies of one who experienced this world first hand.[5] A key concept that Swedenborg used in his understanding of the spiritual world that he witnessed was "correspondence." This is the notion that what happens here in the physical material world we experience here on Earth corresponds to parallel happenings in the heavenly world of which Earth is just one disclosed part. The idea is that the material and spiritual are not separate zones but differing levels of divine purity (within the wider meta-divine zone of God and His creation). Both layers map onto each other but with the spiritual shining its influence into the material. As Swedenborg explained:

4. I will only quote Suzuki and Tanabe to illustrate these positions. However, to demonstrate that Nishida can be put with Suzuki, let me quote from Nishitani who describes the position of Nishida which Tanabe opposed: "Nishida's position further implies that all things move and have being annul themselves and come to be seen as shadows reflected within the self. Behind it all, a kind of seeing takes place with no agent doing the seeing" (Nishitani 2016, 182).

5. See, for example, Lachman, 2009.

> For whatever in universal nature has not correspondence with the spiritual world cannot exist, having no cause from which to exist, consequently from which to subsist. The things that are in nature are nothing but effects; their causes are in the spiritual world, and the causes of these causes, which are ends, are in the interior heaven.[6]

The power of Swedenborg's idea is that it provides a naturalist-style explanation of the spiritual. That is, the spiritual is an extension of nature into which we can move without losing the material. The fact that Swedenborg, as he claimed, was able to travel to the spiritual world just through his consciousness demonstrated that the conscious mind traverses the spiritual and material divide. The conscious is not a soul or spirit hiding in the material until death sets it free. It is part of both the material and the spiritual. Our inner psychology, something that is empirically verifiable and scientifically respectable, is also the gateway between the material and the spiritual. Consciousness is a mystery (as even the hard-core materialist philosophers of *new mysterianism* will admit), we cannot account for what it is and where it truly comes from. Probe it a bit more and we may find ourselves stumbling headways through the doors of perception between the known and the unknown. The case of Swedenborg 'proves' this is possible. The conclusion being that the supernatural is merely the natural more expanded, and the paranormal is merely the normal when it is better known.

## Swedenborg and suzuki

D. T. Suzuki was the first to translate Swedenborg into Japanese. In all, he translated four of his books between the period 1910 to 1914.[7] Suzuki also wrote two short books (『スエデンボルグ』 in 1913 and 『スエデンボルグ：その天界と他力観』 in 1924) about his studies of Swedenborg and his interest and admiration for him. It is worth pondering the attraction and connection between Swedenborg, the (semi-)Christian spirit-seer and Suzuki, the formidable philosopher of Zen. On a general level, Swedenborg

6. Swedenborg #5711.

7. These were: 『天界と地獄』(*Heaven and Hell*)『新エルサレムとその教説』(*The New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Doctrine*)『神智と神愛』 (*Divine Love and Wisdom*) 『神慮論』(*Divine Providence*).

and Suzuki are members of a vague but substantial reaction to the pure materialist and science-ist ideologies that have emerged in modern times. Without denying the truth and validity of neither the findings of science nor its rational methods, both Swedenborg and Suzuki see these truths as partial and incomplete. The methods of science only go so far. But consciousness can go further. Furthermore, as has been argued fully and clearly in a recent book by Nasu Rika, Suzuki's key concept of *reisei* (霊性) very much coheres with Swedenborg's vision of the spiritual realm in that it entails a rigorously non-dualist vision of the material-spirit divide. The spiritual is not over there at the other side of time or space waiting for your material end but is right here right now.[8]

However, what concerns us most here, specifically, is Suzuki's approval of Swedenborg's idea of "correspondence" and how it dissolves the antinomy of freedom and determination, and how, for Suzuki, it may connect to emptiness. Firstly, Suzuki explains correspondence in terms of two other key Swedenborgian concepts: wisdom and love. He writes "When, based on the principle of correspondence, the relationship between wisdom and love is applied to the body, the will becomes the heart and the understanding, the lungs."[9] The Swedenborg system of concepts is further tightened and set in motion with the idea of Divine Providence, which connects the love and wisdom to humans in a way that transcends the freedom versus determinism problem. As Suzuki writes: "The mysterious workings of providence are not perceived by ordinary folk. All that people can do is to exhaust their faculty of reason and to exercise the power of their freedom, entrusting what remains to the workings of heaven. In this way, Swedenborg tried to skillfully harmonize the arguments for predestination and free will."[10] Humans are free but radiated full through by the love and wisdom of the immanent divine realm in which they already dwell but of which they are not fully aware. This is Swedenborg's view. Was it Suzuki's? It is worth looking at a later and lesser known work by Suzuki entitled *The Field of Zen*. Unlike many other books by Suzuki, it tends to avoid the flood of quotations from Zen and Buddhist literature which marked him as the erudite scholar that

8. See Nasu 2017.
9. Suzuki 1996, 32.
10. Ibid., 34.

he was but which often hampered clear expression of the systems and connections in his thinking. *The Field of Zen* is mostly talks that Suzuki gave to the London Buddhist Society on a fairly impromptu basis according to the book's compiler, Christmas Humphreys. As such, it gives a clearer insight into his overall philosophical visions than many of his other works. In a 1958 talk to the Buddhist Society published in the book he discusses the key Buddhist concepts of *prajñā* and *karuṇā*. He remarks:

> Swedenborg talks about Divine Wisdom and Divine Love. If wisdom corresponds to Prajna and love to Karuna we can say that Christianity and Buddhism agree in this respect. We cannot have just one without the other. Buddhism talks about Sunyata, and Sunyata is emptiness, the object of Prajna; Karuna corresponds to this world of multitudes. So Prajna is the oneness of things and Karuna is the many-ness of things.[11]

Here we see connections being made between wisdom and love to emptiness, which has been described as the object of prajna. But wisdom and love are ultimately the same, as Suzuki implies in this quote and states later on.[12] And emptiness, which facilitates both is "not a negation but an affirmation."[13]

In another talk in 1953 (reconstructed from a student's notes) we see Suzuki make a further Swedenborg-style move, this time in relation to the issue of *tariki* versus *jiriki*, the equivalent, I would claim, to free-will versus predestination. Like Swedenborg, Suzuki sees the dialectic between them as a false dichotomy born from a failure to see fully the correspondence between the transcendent and the material, a failure than can be overcome (Swedenborg-like) corporeally through consciousness. He is recorded to have said:

> There is an absolute level of consciousness or unconsciousness which comes by particular meditation. When this is reached, there arises one consciousness-instant or *Ichi-nen* out of perfect equilibrium. Out of the one *nen*, one thought-instant arises. God is in his perfect Emptiness. This awakening of one *nen* out of perfect uniformity of consciousness is Zen and Shin.[14]

11. Suzuki 1980, 38.
12. Ibid., 40.
13. Ibid., 41.
14. Ibid., 77.

Here we see the function of emptiness. It unites the consciousness, the material, with the spiritual, without collapsing one into the other. Furthermore, it dissolves the *tariki* versus *jiriki* paradox because with emptiness the free self is not determined by anything (it arises in emptiness), but, at the same time, this free self is not separate from the world since emptiness unites the two allowing no room for a substatialized self-contained self (all is emptiness). What is this emptiness like, then, from which the self and world arise but which ensures neither is separate? "It is like a mirror," as Suzuki writes in another work, *The Essence of Buddhism*.[15]

## Swedenborg and kant

Immanuel Kant was another reader of Swedenborg, who, like Suzuki, felt compelled to account for and respond to his works. Some have argued that Kant was in parts sympathetic to Swedenborg's claims or at least open minded about them.[16] But either way, in a book entitled *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer* Kant did explicitly ridicule Swedenborg's mystic claims. What is interesting, though, is how Kant seems puzzled by how difficult it is to actually articulate the grounds he feels to justify his dismissal of Swedenborg. Swedenborg is quite wildly shaking him from dogmatic slumbers.[17] Two issues stood out in particular. Firstly, there was the problem of space and time and how to know for certain that someone, such as Swedenborg who experiences them in a disjointed way, (travelling to the spiritual realm without moving) can be declared to be dreaming (as in seeing a false vision) rather than really experiencing what they claim. Pre-Critique, this was a problem for Kant. By the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant has decided that intuitions of space as simply the human standpoint but also states "It is not

15. Here is the full passage: "For emptiness is formlessness and has no selfhood, no individuality, and therefore it is always with form. Form is emptiness and emptiness is form. If emptiness were something limited, something resisting, something impure in the sense of allowing something else to get mixed with it, it would never be with form, in form, and form itself. It is like a mirror; as it is empty and is holding up nothing as its own, it reflects anything in it that appears before it. Emptiness is again like a crystal thoroughly pure and transparent: it has no particular color belonging to it; therefore it takes any color that comes before it" (Suzuki 1983, 48).

16. Johnson, 2002.

17. As David-Ménard points out: "Ce n'est donc pas Hume qui a reveille Kant de son sommeil dogmatique." It was Swedenborg (David-Ménard 1990, 7).

necessary, moreover, that we should limit this manner of intuition in space and time to the sensibility of human beings. It may be that all finite thinking beings must necessarily agree with us in this regard (though we cannot decide this)."[18] Perhaps there are angels who transcend time and space. It seems for Kant this was not decidable.

But furthermore, Kant also highlights a problem that seems not at first directly connected to Swedenborg but into which he is pushed by the puzzlement about Swedenborg that overwhelms him. This is the problem of the other: the impenetrable consciousness of others which is, ultimately, what gives our world its eternal undecidability. How do we see the world when we know others see it too, and see us seeing it too? Kant writes:

> Formerly, I viewed human common sense only from the standpoint of my own; now I put myself into the position of another's reason outside of myself, and observe my judgements, together with their most secret causes, from the point of view of others. It is true that the comparison of both observations results in pronounced parallax, but it is the only means of preventing the optical delusion, and of putting the concept of the power of knowledge in human nature into its true place.[19]

The key word here is "parallax" which Karatani Kōjin (a Japanese philosopher who hurls for the Continental team) has highlighted as being a fundamental insight in the philosophy of Kant and ultimately the Continental tradition. The point about "parallax" is that it suggests the notion of a transcendental other, the ultimately opaque other that is as centered in its world as one's own self is in one's own world. Ultimately there is no viewpoint that unites the viewpoints of the self and the other. Only stark parallax, with no in-between blurring or overlapping of the two. Indeed, Kant's whole transcendental project, which seeks to go beyond rationalism and empiricism, does so by avoiding any comforting all unifying position. As Karatani comments: "Upon reading his strangely self-deprecating *Dreams of a Visionary Explained by Dreams of Metaphysics* [i.e. *Dreams of a Spirit Seer*], one finds it impossible to say that he was simply thinking from a place between these two poles. Instead, it is the 'parallax' between positions that acts."[20] This

18. KANT 2007, 65 and 73.
19. Quoted in KARATANI 2003, 1. Translator not cited.
20. Ibid., 4.

notion of parallax emerges in the *Critique of Pure Reason* "in the form of antinomy, which exposes the fact that both thesis and antithesis are nothing more than 'optical delusions'."[21] Karatani illustrates Kant's transcendental viewpoint with the concrete example of a photograph, in contrast to that of a mirror. He says, "Compare the two. Although the mirror image can be identified with the perspective of the other, there is still a certain complicity with regard to one's own viewpoint. After all, people can see their own image in the mirror as they like, while the photograph looks relentlessly 'objective.'"[22] The difference seems to be that with a mirror the distinction between self and other can be made to disappear through the actions of the self which can alter its view of the world so that the other and the self reflect each other into a harmonious one. On the other hand, the photograph is a reminder that one's self is seen in the world by other 'selves', that one's own self is effectively not dissolvable into the world, because one's self will never be at the site where this is to happen. No matter how much you lose your self and attain non-self, you are still a self for some other. You may go away in your own consciousness, drop off mind and body (to quote a Zen phrase) but you are still there for the rest of the world to see. This parallax cannot be transcended and ultimately closes off any greater unity of self and other.

It is useful then, at this stage, to pair off, on one side, Swedenborg and Suzuki with their espousal of "correspondence," the philosophy of cosmic mirrors and antinomies of freedom and determinism being dissolved through absolute self-reflections between self and world, and Kant and Karatani on the other side with their "parallax," the philosophy of camera-like localized focal switches of fields of perspectives where antinomies never dissolve but oscillate, and the self and the world are forever seeing each other seeing the other.

Karatani, as he says himself, owes much of his thinking "to the 'tradition' of Japanese Marxism."[23] As such, it can be surmised that he would have little interest in the absolute emptiness of the Kyoto School. But there is a case to be made for linking parallax to emptiness and this is when we re-envisage it as an exchange between self and other. Karatani himself has been making the

21. Ibid., 3.
22. Ibid., 3.
23. Ibid., xiv.

argument for prioritizing "exchange" over "production."[24] And it is worth meditating on the difference between the two, exchange and production, at their most basic and, not specifically Marxist, level. Production is about change, a constant change that has a certain equality to it. The things, the products, the objects, that emerge from a production system are different to each other, but no better nor worse from each other. They are like animals produced from the process of biological evolution in that there is no meaningful difference in their value. (This holds whether we take production to be an extension of biological evolution or an analogy to explain it). Charles Darwin famously wrote in the margins of a book on natural history "Never use the words higher or lower."[25] The radicalness of this vision, that biological differentiation is not a matter of higher or lower, should also extend to our views of production systems. No product is any higher or lower than another, it is merely different. The point is that production, like evolution, happens in a totalizing unity with no point within the system to ascribe value or judgement to its units.[26] Only God or humans, standing outside of evolution, can say an elephant is "higher," as in superior, to an amoeba. Only the consumer, the terminal point of the production chain, can give more value to a tube of toothpaste over a loaf of bread. In other words, for value and judgement we need the point of exchange (the intersection of the system, and its infinite dynamics, with the finite of a now point in time) rather than the eternal line of production.

The connection of all this to Buddhism (and hence the Kyoto tradition) has been made, utterly unintentionally, of course, by another from the "'tradition' of Japanese Marxism," Uno Kōzō, a political economist. In his introduction to his book on *Capital* he wrote the following:

> Quite some time ago (and circumstances being what they were I can't speak to its accuracy), a colleague of mine in my days at Sendai, a specialist in Jap-

24. Karatani 2014.

25. Hmolpedia, http://www.eoht.info/page/Darwin+on+higher+and+lower (accessed April 30, 2018).

26. Karatani explains: "The problem is, insofar as you look at material processes or economic substructures from the perspective of modes of production, you will never find the moral moment.... If we rethink the economic base from the perspective of exchange, broadly defined, then there is no need to posit a moral dimension exterior to 'economy.' The moral moment is included within the modes of exchange" (Karatani 2014, xix).

> anese religious history, once told me this story: how the venerable Hōnen, having read the entire Tripitaka for the fourth or fifth time, hit upon the invocation of Amida Buddha—"Namu Amida Butsu," or "Hail to thee, Amitabha Buddha." Although I personally have no sense of the preciousness of invoking the name, the fact that out of this enormous text, Hōnen found its heart in these six characters struck me as interesting, and I've never forgotten it. Not that I regard *Capital* as a sutra, to be chanted as my morning devotion. The first time I read *Capital* was also the only time I read it from beginning to end, slogging through and with little understanding of what I read. But since then, from time to time as occasion arose, I've reread it, eventually going through it entirely a number of times and discovering its essence in the notion of the "commodification of labor power.[27]

Now let's be clear, the central point being made here is the fact that the biggest of books are often encapsulated in the shortest of phrases: "Namu Amida Butsu" for the Tripitaka sutras and the "commodification of labor power" for *Capital*. And yet there is an uncanny connection between these two particular concepts. It is that both amount to that which does not fit the system from which they are produced. Nenbutsu is a string of characters in a text but it is the very string that turns the text, the sutra, into more than just a text to be read, a line of characters to be processed, but into a moment of salvation that transcends the very text from which it came, rendering it obsolete, a means that has now been sublated by the almost magical force of the nenbutsu chant. Similarly, the commodification of labor is that site in the production process by which an extra surplus value, something not previously in the system, enters it in an almost non-material manner.

Let me then pluck this happy synchronicity between Uno and Hōnen, this steely point of convergence between separate threads in the tapestry of the wider Continental tradition, and weave my tale once more into the fabric of Buddhist discourse and dialogics. Hōnen, let us recount, asserts that the simple chanting of *namu-amida-butsu* ensures salvation. This is because the power of an individual human is too limited in itself to attain liberation. Instead a plea to the power of the Bodhisattva Amida must be made. The plea need only be simple since the power of Amida is so vast. This is the beginnings of *tariki* Buddhism, that tradition which believed that salvation

27. Uno 2005, 930.

is to be attained through the power of the other rather than the meditative exertions of the self. However, we should note here that Hōnen's account still contains *jiriki* tendencies, in that the act of nenbutsu, as simplified as it might be, still needs to be initiated by the self. It is extreme minimum *jiriki* rather than pure *tariki*. However, Hōnen's disciple, Shinran goes a step further towards *tariki* in arguing that one is already saved by the grace and power of Amida. And nenbutsu, the chanting of the name, is not a plea for salvation but the spontaneous expression of gratitude for having been saved.

As Yanagi Sōetsu explains it, "According to Shinran, everything depends on the functioning of the Buddha who makes his appeal to all sentient beings. For Hōnen, it was from the devotee to the Buddha; for Shinran, this process was reversed."[28] For Hōnen the self must go to the other, but with Shinran, the other must come to the self. However, curiously, Ippen, another later follower of Hōnen goes one step further in the dialectics of *jiriki* and *tariki*, and points out that it is neither the self that goes to the other nor the other that goes to the self, since such a line of thinking still privileges *jiriki*, that is, a self (whether mine or Amida's) using their own power. Instead Ippen argues for a radical *tariki* vision where salvation is simply the all being the all, or emptiness being emptiness. There is no going or coming between self and other. Nenbutsu is not a cry for help or gasp of gratitude. It merely happens. It is just the name itself, the word, nothing else. Again, as Yanagi explains it:

> If we make out the Buddhist Dharma to be the nondualistic view, then it is desirable for us to seek a more profound standpoint. The Name (the pronouncing of the Nembutsu), which is able to eliminate this duality, contains within it man's actual rebirth in the Pure Land. So instead of man contemplating Buddha or Buddha contemplating man, one must attain the realm where Nembutsu is just Nembutsu, and nothing else.[29]

However, one cannot help here but question whether Ippen may have gone too far in his dialectics and crashed into the sclerotic cosmology of an absolutely mechanical universe. This is the cosmology of production, where what happens happens, without differentiation or value. The Name emerges

28. Yanagi 1973, 43.
29. Ibid., 43–44.

because it has emerged, whether shouted by a Hōnen, sung by a Shinran, or typed by accident by a monkey banging a keyboard. Perhaps here the dialectics have gone too far and we need to go back a cog to Shinran and the notion of *tariki* as the other coming to the self. The crucial point to note is that Shinran's other going to self and Hōnen's self going to other are not symmetrical moves. Self to other is the traditional vision of the self, us free-willing beings, moving in a world of others. Shinran's other to self move is the world of parallax, in that, the other's coming to the self can only ever happen from the standpoint of the self. The other is actually not "there" until it/he/she approaches the self. This is the point about parallax. We do not see the other's point of view (this would amount to mind control or telepathy and the self just simply becoming a "different" self) instead we see the other, as the other with the other's point of view, from our point of view. There is no change, only exchange: The other and the self in mediation. And here I let Tanabe Hajime, in the cloak of Shinran's terminology, complete the description I want to make.

> Nothingness can never be conceived of directly and without mediation, and anything so conceived cannot be nothingness. Nothingness necessarily entails the mediation of being and cannot imply the negation or annihilation of mediation. Being plays its mediatory role only when it is preserved and restored to life in negation. For this reason, nothingness is always accompanied by mediating activity of being and becomes manifest through this mediating being. This is what is called "empty being." Furthermore, our limited self exists as empty being to the extent that it mediates nothingness. To the extent that it entails a positive return to the world (*genso*) that is at the same time its "being returned to the world" as a true bodhisattva cooperating with the Great Compassion of nothingness, the self performs the action of gratitude toward the Great Compassion of nothingness. In this way, nothingness is practiced and witnessed to in gratitude for Great Compassion and reaches self-consciousness in the core of the self.[30]

It is worth reminding ourselves of what is at issue here: Do we see the emptiness that underlies the cosmos as one that involves absolute self-reflection so that all differentiation between self and other melts one into the other, to the extent that all fits into the cosmic picture, each corresponding

30. Tanabe 2016, .251 (1986, 143).

to the other, cancelling each other out in a final harmony of the many in the one and the one in the many? Or do we see emptiness as that one point of vision at which self and other create and sustain the differentiation that defines each other, where difference is not essentialized into being but does not ever go away either, where the many is both not one and not not one. In essence, then, there are two versions of emptiness: as a cosmic mirror or as a field of vision. Or in other terms: correspondence or parallax.

## Seeing nature

Ultimately the issue is one of vision. How can we see the world in pure emptiness? Sight always implies a seer and that which is seen. This further implies differentiation of a material kind. When consciousness goes from the material into the spiritual does it become blind in an epiphany of pure empty non-differentiation? Or is there still something there to be seen? In Swedenborg's account, the spiritual world is still chock full of what really should found only in the material world. But Swedenborg does explain that the objects that can be seen in the spiritual world are merely symbols and representations.[31] The result is that the spiritual world, which has to take on the form of materiality to be seen, becomes just like the material world. As Kant describes it, Swedenborg "Thus... speaks of gardens, extensive objects, dwelling-places, galleries, and arcades of the spirits that he saw with his own eyes in the brightest light."[32] It is curious, then, that for Swedenborg there seems to be a reversal of the usual assumption that symbols are more abstract, more pure, more spiritual than the material they symbolize. In Swedenborg's view, it is the material, not the spiritual, which provides the symbolic. This may seem like the triumph of materialism. Swedenborg in attempting to describe the spiritual has merely reprioritized the material

31. Kant writes: "The important thing in this symbolic connection of corporeal things as images to the inner spiritual state is that all spirits represent themselves to each other at all times under the semblance of extended forms, and the influxes of these spiritual beings among each other simultaneously arouse in them the appearance of yet other extended beings, and likewise of a material world in which images are merely symbols of their inner state, but nevertheless cause such a clear and enduring deception of the senses that it is the same as the genuine sensation of such objects" (Kant 2002, AK 2: 364).

32. Ibid.

and shown the actual irrationality implied in belief in the purely spiritual. The spiritual without the material is not visible, and hence not verifiable. In telling us there are gardens in the spirit world, Swedenborg has shown us that gardens can only ever be material. But is this the full picture? Let's take Richard Dawkins's view, expressed by Douglas Adams, that "Isn't it enough to see that a garden is beautiful without having to believe that there are fairies at the bottom of it too?"[33] And this is true, of course. To enjoy a garden you do not have to believe in fairies. However, you do have to believe in gardens. And philosophically this can be equally problematic when you are too crude a materialist. For to believe in gardens is to reject the mechanical view of nature, and to acknowledge that the mindless flow of processes, the eternal biological production of difference can be paused and reframed for higher transcendent appreciation. Otherwise we have no standpoint from which to see the garden. All disappears with the transparency wrought by a materialist view which sees nature as endless, mindless, and blind production. The materialist will see through all the appearances of spiritual value in the world. But, as C. S. Lewis points out in *The Abolition of Man*:

> You cannot go on "seeing through" things for ever. The whole point of seeing through something is to see something through it. It is good that the window should be transparent, because the street or garden beyond it is opaque. How if you saw through the garden too?[34]

In essence, the spiritual needs the material to be seen and the material needs the spiritual to be known. What can unite the two and close this aporia is emptiness. It is emptiness which does not fall into either but allows for their interpenetration and the valuing of both.

However, how we see through our emptiness still remains the question. In *Zen and Psychoanalysis* D. T. Suzuki describes what he sees as the essential difference between East and West by comparing a Basho haiku to a poem by Tennyson. In both poems the poet sees a flower and is moved by it. Basho writes a simple description and expires an appreciative "kana(!)." All in just seventeen syllables, of course. Tennyson, by contrast, plucks the flower he sees and muses "but if I could understand/What you are, root and all, and all

33. Quoted in Dawkins 2007, "dedication."

34. Lewis 1944, 81.

in all/ I should know what God and man is."[35] Basho, the Easterner, is passive and one with nature. Tennyson, the Westerner, is analytic and scientific. Robert Sharf has (rightly) taken Suzuki to task for the breathtaking simplicity and inaccuracy of Suzuki's conclusions from these two poems.[36] However, the problem is not just the wacky orientalism and hopeless dualism (oh the irony!), but the fact that Suzuki has got the Tennyson poem wrong. For Tennyson is not expressing the mind of scientific analysis.[37] What he is expressing is the parallax of self and other. Tennyson sees the flower and in seeing the flower is seeing his own transcendental self in the world, that which stands before the world (and addresses flowers in the second person) but which can only have a partial knowledge of that world, and is unable to transcend the intuitions of time and space to know *even* one flower in-itself (*Ding an sich*), root and all, and all in all. But even so, there is an exchange of meaning here, as the other gives to the self the world and its value. This is the world of differences and mediation, full of human life and its tales and mysteries. The human self situated in emptiness as transformation. It is the emptiness, I argue, Tanabe, (who tellingly was another Japanese philosopher who dipped into the streams of the Japanese Marxist tradition), sought to describe.[38] And here I quote him once more:

> Being and nonbeing are ceaselessly being transformed into each other, interpenetrating and intermingling with each other, so that it cannot be circumscribed systematically by a logic of identity or comprehended in unified form by intuition. Light and darkness continually give way to each other like the flickering of a lantern; things are ever turning inside out and outside in; being and nonbeing are engaged in incessant interchange with each other. In action the inner workings of this transformation reach self-consciousness as the core of nothingness. Such is the historical world.[39]

And such is emptiness as transformation.

35. Suzuki 1960, 1–3.

36. Sharf 1994.

37. If Tennyson had been in scientist mode he would have said, "but if I could label you and describe certain processes you go through I should understand you. And issues of what God and man is are irrelevant here."

38. Nishitani writes: "Tanabe's standpoint shows the influence of the Marxist thought popular when he was writing" (Nishitani 2016, 186).

39. Tanabe 2016, 440–1 (1986, 293).

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