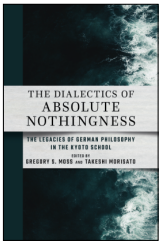
Book Reviews



Gregory S. Moss and Takeshi Morisato, eds., *The Dialectics of Absolute Nothingness: The Legacies of German Philosophy in the Kyoto School*

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It is a well-known fact that the influence of German philosophies, especially German Idealism, cannot be understated when discussing the formation of the Kyoto School, one of modern Japan's most original philosophical traditions. Indeed, many philosophers in the Kyoto School have written in two languages: Japanese, which is their mother tongue, and German. This indicates how their thoughts have been shaped by a German-speaking environment. Moreover, as the editors have pointed out, when asked for an entry point into their own respective philosophical systems, many philosophers of the Kyoto School would point the inquirer toward German Idealism. For instance, when Nishida Kitarō was visited by Miki Kiyoshi, a first-year student at the time, he was asked the age-old question, "What should I read first in studying philosophy?" In response to this question, Nishida did not directly answer, but simply pulled out a German edition of *The Critique of Pure Reason* (p. 2). For the founder of the Kyoto School, Kant's first *Critique* is not merely considered as an introduction to *his* system of philosophy, but to philosophy in general. From the perspective of the Kyoto School, Kant's *Critique* lacks a certain completeness or, otherwise, does not fulfill its philosophical task. This is a sentiment that is shared by many of Kant's own successors, such as J. G. Fichte, F. W. J. Schelling and G. W. F. Hegel. In fact, in his essay entitled "Hegel's Dialectic as Seen from My Standpoint," Nishida proclaimed that, despite some disagreements, he felt closest to Hegel in terms of their philosophical tendencies. As we shall see, Tanabe Hajime, the co-founder of the school alongside Nishida, also conceived of

his *magnum opus*, *Philosophy as Metanoetics*, as a self-overcoming of the Kantian critique. In this book, Tanabe reached a position that he called "absolute critique," which, according to him, operates according to an "absolute dialectic" that is not only a development from Kant, but also from Hegel.

Despite the inescapable points of contact with German philosophy, scholarship on the Kyoto School has rarely engaged in any extensive research on the apparent interactions between these two traditions of thought that were seemingly separated from each other by both time and space (i.e., the German Idealists were all active in early 19th century Germany, whereas the Kyoto School philosophers were all from 20th century Japan). Save for a few notable outliers, such as Peter Suarez's *The Kyoto School's Takeover of Hegel*, and John Krummel's "Hegel and Nishida" chapter in his *Nishida Kitarō's Chiasmatic Chorology: Place of Dialectic, Dialectic of Place*, there are almost no book-length contributions that seriously investigate the legacies of German philosophy in the Kyoto School.

In this sense, *The Dialectics of Absolute Nothingness: The Legacies of German Philosophy in the Kyoto School*, co-edited by Gregory S. Moss and Takeshi Morisato, is a monumental work. This is true in two senses. First, it helps fill in important gaps in scholarship on the Kyoto School concerning the German roots of this intellectual movement. Second, it is noteworthy as an attempt to practice "world-philosophy" itself, insofar as it shows how philosophical themes and problems from German philosophy transcended spatial, temporal, and cultural boundaries to blossom in the minds of Japanese thinkers in the twentieth century.

For example, as volume editors Moss and Morisato have shown in their beautifully written introduction, the philosophical development of Nishida, the founder of the Kyoto School, can plausibly be characterized as a continual struggle with the so-called "problem of the missing difference." This is a problem that is also highly visible within the work of philosophers from the German Idealist and Romantic traditions (pp. 6–7). For the early Nishida, a *basho* is a universal predicate that confers upon things their determinate being. For instance, a human being can only be determined as such insofar as it exists within the predicate or *basho* of "humanity." This predicate or *basho* can be multiply instantiated and encompass a multiplicity of human beings (p. 5). Whatever does not fall within the *basho* of "humanity" does not instantiate this predicate and cannot be counted as a human being. But insofar as these things exist, they must themselves fall within other *bashos* that stand alongside the *basho* of humanity, i.e., the *basho* of cats, dogs, inanimate objects, etc. Therefore, determinate beings that fall within their respective *bashos* can be differentiated from each other, insofar as their *bashos* can be differentiated (p. 5). That is, for Nishida in his middle period, a *basho* only confers determinate being or existence upon things that are other than the *basho* itself, thus they can-

not confer being or existence upon themselves: the *basho* "humanity" itself is not a human being. In other words, the *basho* itself does not exist within itself alongside other determinate beings that exist within that *basho*. In this sense, a *basho*, for Nishida, is a *relative nothing* — a nothingness in relation to the beings that are determined by the *basho* (p. 6).

But this does not mean that the *bashos* are not determinate beings. As we have seen, determinate beings can be differentiated from one another insofar as their respective *bashos* can be differentiated as well. But how are the *bashos* themselves determinate and differentiated from each other? What is the source of their determinate being? Nishida tells us that the determinate being of the *bashos* themselves come from their being implaced in even *higher bashos* (p. 5). For instance, the *basho* of "humanity" exists within the *basho* of "mammality," alongside which also exist the *bashos* of "cats" and "dogs;" and the *basho* of "mammality" exists within the *basho* of "animality," alongside which exist other *bashos* like the reptiles or amphibians, etc. Therefore, for Nishida, most *bashos* are merely *relative* nothingness (as well as relative being), for they are *nothing* with regard to the particulars that exist within themselves, but they are being insofar as they themselves stand within some even higher *bashos* that confer upon them their determinate being.

However, when we come to the highest *basho* within which every relative being and relative nothing are implaced, then we naturally arrive at one of Nishida's most original contributions to the history of philosophy: the notion of "absolute nothingness." Namely, since everything that exists is implaced within some determinate *basho* that is itself included within higher *bashos*, we arrive at the highest *basho* under which everything stands, i.e., the *basho* of Being. The *basho* of Being is the highest *basho* or the most universal predicate, for everything that exists must *be*, thus they must instantiate the predicate of Being. There cannot be anything outside the *basho* of Being, for outside of it is *nothing*, which does not exist and cannot be. But since the *basho* of Being is the highest *basho*, it itself cannot stand under any higher *basho*, for otherwise it would not be the *highest basho*, but at best the *second* highest. However, if things (as well as the lower *bashos*) can only receive determinate being insofar as they stand under some *basho*, and if the highest *basho* of Being stands under absolutely no higher *basho* which can confer upon it any determinate being, then the *basho* of Being is not only relatively nothing, but *absolutely nothing* (p. 6). The *basho* of Being is not only nothing with respect to the things that stand under it, but it cannot be at all, for it cannot receive determinate being from anywhere. The *basho* of Being is absolutely nothing, because it is absolutely *indeterminate*. As absolutely indeterminate, the *basho* of Being cannot be differentiated from *anything*, including Nothing, or the relative *bashos* or the things that stand under them. In other words, the *basho* of Being, which underlies everything that

is, should be absolutely *undifferentiated*. If we follow Nishida's logic here, we must conclude that *to be* cannot be differentiated from *to not be*, and the *being* of things cannot be distinguished from their *non-being* (p. 6).

As Moss and Morisato demonstrate, Nishida's theory of the *basho*, and its arrival as absolute nothingness as absolute undifferentiatedness, is a logical reformulation of Nishida's earlier position in his maiden work, *An Inquiry Into the Good*. In this work, Nishida argues that fundamental reality consists of what he calls "pure experience," an "immediate and undifferentiated intuition," which "lies at the ground of all differentiated experience and ultimately conditions the differentiation between subject and object" (p. 7). However, by reformulating this position from his earlier career, Nishida has also rekindled a profound philosophical difficulty that is latent in his maiden work. Namely, given that fundamental reality is ultimately undifferentiated, how does differentiation come to be? In fact, how can anything that is different come from undifferentiatedness? One cannot even relegate difference or anything that is different from undifferentiated reality as an *illusion* or a *falsity* that is adulterated by the finite mind (as many philosophers in the West and some Buddhists might argue), for even the very *existence* of illusion and falsity is something that is already different from the eternal truth of undifferentiated reality. Therefore, the problem can also be asked in the following way: given that reality is fundamentally true, how does falsehood come to be? If one adopts the view that *ex nihilo nihil fit*, then difference should not exist. For fundamental reality as undifferentiatedness is absolutely devoid of differentiation, and differentiation cannot come from that which has no differentiation. From the point of view of fundamental reality, difference should not be, and it should be undifferentiatedness through and through. This is the dreaded "problem of missing difference" that Nishida seems to have encountered as early as *Inquiry*, against which he struggled until the end of his philosophical career.

Moss and Morisato, in their introduction to the volume, argue that Nishida's version of the "problem of the missing difference" is a reformulation of a strikingly similar issue that the German Idealists and Romantics raised, which can be best summarized by the following quote from Friedrich Schlegel: "why has the infinite gone out of itself and made itself finite?" (p. 7). With this short recapitulation of how Nishida comes to the same problem that the German Idealists have been occupied with, Moss and Morisato are capable of showing that the legacies of German philosophies are not artificially introduced by the Kyoto School philosophers. Instead, there is an organic connection between both sides, insofar as they are struggling against the same set of philosophical problems. Seen in this light, the legacies of German philosophy become an extremely important theme to explore for scholars of the Kyoto School, not only for understanding *how* the philosophers

of the Kyoto School have come to the position that they occupy, but also *what* they offer as a solution to overcome the problems they find in German philosophy. This uncovering of a common ground in terms of a problem, as well as the subsequent analysis of the respective solutions to that problem, is where *The Dialectics of Absolute Nothingness: The Legacies of German Philosophy in the Kyoto School* truly shines as a brilliant piece of philosophical work.

Upon surveying the entire volume, we can say that there are three questions implicitly guiding the contributed chapters:

1. What is reality? What is the mind's relation with reality as such?
2. What is religion? What is philosophy's relation with the religious attitude?
3. What is nature? What human expression is best suited to grasp nature as such?

While these questions are closely intertwined with one another, I will here treat them as separate questions that serve as structural guidelines of the positions presented in the volume.

(1) The question of the true nature of fundamental reality and of the mind's access to such a true nature is one of the major themes for several chapters in this volume, especially the chapters concerning Nishida's and Tanabe's philosophy.

In his chapter, Dennis Prooi shows that the early Nishida (in his *Inquiry*) was mainly focused on the idea that fundamental reality is an absolute undifferentiatedness, i.e., *pure experience*. Furthermore, he shows that this idea was heavily influenced by the British Idealist F. H. Bradley (p. 63). Prooi demonstrates that for the Bradley of *Appearance and Reality*, predicates or concepts like quality and relation, by which things can be differentiated from each other, do not exist in reality as such and are mere phenomena that are produced by the finite mind. This is because the concepts of quality and relation are *self-contradictory*, which cannot be true for reality as it is in itself, which is completely self-consistent (p. 73). Prooi argues that, throughout *Inquiry*, Nishida maintained the same distinction between appearance and reality that Bradley did. For Prooi, Nishida follows Bradley in taking differentiation to be a product of conceptual thought that only belongs to the realm of appearances, which are abstracted from fundamental reality (p. 74). Despite their similarities, Prooi reminds us that one important difference between the early Nishida and Bradley, which might have significant ramifications for Nishida's theory, is that while Bradley strictly asserts that reality must be self-consistent, the early Nishida thinks that reality is self-contradictory (p. 76). The view that the early Nishida conceives of reality as an undifferentiatedness is corroborated by Inoue Katsuhito, who argued that Nishida holds a "theory of phenomena-*sive*-true reality" (p. 17). Similarly, Yujin Itabashi also argues that the early Nishida conceived

of reality as the "one (unity) and many (differentiation) of subject and object" (p. 44). This fundamental reality, Itabashi contends, is the "unifying power" that Nishida appropriated from Arthur Schopenhauer's notion of "groundless will," which is an "activity that is directly recognized without the form of subject–object or the form of the principle of sufficient reason" (p. 45). However, Itabashi argues that, while Nishida received important hints from Schopenhauer in developing his notion of fundamental reality as "groundless will," Nishida's position is an advancement from Schopenhauer's, insofar as Nishida provides an immanent logic in this "groundless will." Through this logic, the will is said to gain (self-) knowledge of itself *as groundless will*, which Nishida calls "intellectual intuition" (p. 53). Namely, in virtue of the "negation of the will" through the self-activity of the groundless will, the will can gain a certain form of self-knowledge, which accounts for the possibility of its being known in philosophical reflection, something that is absent in Schopenhauer's account of the will (p. 58).

In contrast to these discussions of Nishida, Takeshi Morisato argues that, for Tanabe, reality is fundamentally "individual" (p. 112) and "contingent" (p. 114). Moreover, since the human mind or reason only thinks reality through "universality" and "rational necessity" (p. 119), there is an "irreducible difference" between thinking and reality (p. 116). However, the fact that there exists an irreducible difference between thinking and reality does not mean that reality cannot be thought, but rather that we need a different form of thinking in order to account for the dynamic movement of thinking and reality. In other words, we require *dialectical* thinking (p. 115). For Tanabe, Hegel's discovery of dialectical thinking is an important philosophical feat, because it is the only form of rational thinking that "emphasizes the contingency of reality and existence on the one hand," but also "proclaims the rationality of reality and takes the rationalization of reality in and through the concept as the task of philosophy, on the other" (p.115). Thus, Morisato argues that, for Tanabe, Hegel's dialectical thinking consists in an "infinite creative process" that feeds on the irreducibility between the rationality or necessity of the concept or thinking on the one hand, and the irrationality or contingency of reality on the other (p. 116). That is, *contra* his teacher Nishida, who posits reality as a fundamental undifferentiatedness, Morisato argues that Tanabe's vision of reality is fundamentally *differentiated* from thought, which does not prevent, but rather enables an infinite process of intellectual movement that never reaches a perfect unity. By identifying the legacy of Hegel's dialectics in Tanabe's thinking, Morisato also claims that Tanabe advances the idea of dialectical thinking. This is true insofar as Hegel, in Tanabe's final analysis, posits a harmonious unity of mind and reality at the end of his philosophical system, which "puts an end to this infinite and creative division" (p. 116) and terminates the dynamic movement of think-

ing and reality. To save Hegel's dialectics from Hegel himself, Morisato argues that Tanabe digs deeper into the nature of dialectics than Hegel did, thereby discovering a fundamental "principle of negation" or a "nothingness" (p. 127) that resides outside of thinking, negates thinking, and gives birth to the dialectical movement of thinking and reality. Thus, Morisato praises Tanabe as a truly original "dialectical thinker," who "cultivated his ability to think and write his process of thinking as a dialectician," but then went "beyond its limit and to articulate the content of his metaphysics as absolute dialectic" (p. 137).

Interestingly, Kazuaki Oda argues in his chapter that, Kuki Shūzō, a student of Tanabe, precisely argued against his teacher's "dialectics of absolute nothingness" because of Kuki's emphasis on a "philosophy of *primal contingency*" (p. 206). According to Oda, Kuki views Tanabe's notion of "nothingness as absolutely negative purposiveness" and the subsequent dialectics of absolute nothingness as "a principle that converts contingency into necessity" (p. 214). This conversion, Oda claims, "negate[s] the contingency of any contingent beings," and by negating the particularity of the contingent being and converting it to the universal, "it is no longer this initial contingent being that someday returns to nothingness on its own" and we are prevented from seeing the "the contingent reality in its original image" (p. 221). In contrast to Tanabe's dialectics of "*nothingness*, *negation* and *ethics*," which supposedly reduces every contingency to the necessary self-determination of nothingness, Oda argues that Kuki presents his opposing view of "*being, affirmation* and *beauty*" (p. 217), which affirms the contingency of being, for it is the fact of beings that they just *are*, without further ground that justifies their existence (p. 220). Thus, from Oda's contribution, we see how the emphasis of the "contingency" of being leads, on the one hand, to Kuki's position of "absolute being," which is diametrically opposed to Tanabe's position of "absolute nothingness," a position that, according to Morisato, arises from the same emphasis for the "radical contingency" of being that disrupts the necessity of thinking (p. 114).

Despite the differences between Nishida and Tanabe, the commentators mentioned in the above chapters all agree on one point: that for Nishida and Tanabe, the idea of "reality" is closely associated with the concept of "absolute nothingness," which involves a certain *transcendence* or *negation* of the principles of traditional logic. For Prooi, Nishida's reality as "undifferentiatednes" is "beyond distinctions such as subject, relation, and object," which are artifacts of the conceptualizing mind, do not belong to reality itself (pp. 69–70). For Itabashi, Nishida's reality is a groundless activity that is absolutely free, because it is "neither grounded in any sense, nor based on the principle of sufficient reason, but lies in its own activity that is present in itself" (p. 48); and for Morisato, Tanabe's reality is fundamentally differentiated from thinking, and contains within itself a "nothingness" that

is the "translogical" or "trans-ontological principle," which defies Hegel's ultimate "panlogicism" and "initiates the whole ontological process of being and thinking without completion" (p. 135).

(2) We can also find many overlapping insights into the question of the nature of religion and its relationship with philosophical thinking from the authors who wrote on this topic.

For Moss, Tanabe's *magnum opus*, *Philosophy as Metanoetics*, is a "radicalization of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, for it is not only a critique of pure reason, but also a critique of the critique of pure reason," which is appropriately denoted by Tanabe as "absolute critique" (p. 79). According to Moss, Tanabe views Kant's critical philosophy as being tasked "to set limits on what reason can and cannot know" and "to impose limitations upon reason's legitimate use" through reason's own power alone (p. 82). What this means is that the *Critique* is reason's own attempt to cognize and draw its own limitations according to the laws of reason, for instance, the principle of non-contradiction. It is in this sense that Tanabe deems Kant's *Critique* as an exercise in the *self-power* of reason (p. 82). However, as Tanabe observes, Kant merely assumes that reason, by virtue of its own self-power, can set its own limitations by itself and never asked the critical question pertaining to critical philosophy itself: "*Can reason successfully draw the limit between reason and what transcends reason by virtue of its own self-power without falling into contradiction?*" (p. 84). For Tanabe, the answer to this question is negative. The *Critique* is supposed to set a limit to reason's legitimate use and knowledge by positing an "absolute difference between what reason can know and what *transcends* reason" (p. 82). But every time reason draws the limit, reason ends up violating and overstepping the limit that it sets for itself, for "[w]henever one attempts to draw the limit between reason and what transcends reason, one must know what is *excluded* from the domain of rational knowing," as Ludwig Wittgenstein also argued in his *Tractatus* (p. 84). But to know what transcends reason is to know what lies on the thither side of reason's limit, something that is supposed to be unknowable by reason, insofar as the limit is drawn absolutely. Therefore, "reason can only *consistently* find *relative* limits" (p. 85) that are transgressable whenever one performs the self-critique of reason, and via its own self-power, reason never draws the true, *absolute* limit of reason that it can never overstep. In Moss' words, "*the critique of pure reason can only succeed by failing to succeed*" (p. 85). However, in reason's very experience of *failure* to draw its own limit by self-power, reason *experiences* a limit that it did not draw by itself: reason's limit is that *it cannot draw its own limit*. In other words, "*the impotence of reason to set its own limits is itself a limit of reason*" (p. 88). Since reason did not draw this limit itself (insofar as, had it done so by itself, this would once again fail as a limit), then it must be drawn by something other to reason's self-power, what

Tanabe calls the *Other-Power* (p. 88). Therefore, by following the logic of Kant's *Critique* to its fulfillment, Tanabe claims that the very experience of failure gives rise to an "*action-faith-witness*" of something truly beyond the limits of reason, something truly *trans-rational*, which can properly be deemed as a "*religious* experience" (p. 100). However, according to Moss, Tanabe is also quick to remind us that the religious must be intimately intertwined, or in Tanabe's words, "*mediated*" by human reason and philosophy (p. 100), for it is precisely through the *failure* of reason that the divine is revealed in religious experience. And if reason did not try to comprehend itself in philosophy, as Kant's *Critique* attempts to do, then reason *cannot fail*, and subsequently, the divine Other-Power cannot be revealed or experienced. Therefore, religion as an experience of the divine Other-Power "demands an *act of reason*" and cannot be a blind faith separated from the practice of philosophy, for "*philosophy itself is a religious practice*" (p. 100) that gives witness to the divine in its very failure. This is the meaning of the title of Tanabe's book: philosophy *as* metanoetics.

Jason Wirth argues that a similar intimacy between the task of philosophy and religion also exists between Nishitani Keiji and Schelling. Wirth argues that the initial proximity between Nishitani and the late Schelling can be established by the increasing untenability of religion and religious attitudes during their respective times. Both call for a "philosophical renegotiation of what it means to be religious" in the midst of such crisis. Moreover, for both philosophers, religion was "a matter of absolute nothingness." Thus, "religion as a matter of absolute nothingness is inseparable from philosophy" (p. 142). That religion is closely connected to the notion of "absolute nothingness" for Nishitani should be of no surprise. After all, Nishitani named his *magnum opus Religion and Nothingness*, indicating the close relation between religiosity and the experience of nothingness. Through the encounter with the nihilistic and existentialist philosophy that was prevalent in the West during his time, Nishitani similarly identified a fundamental *kyomu* (虚無) or "nothingness" that lies at the ground of human existence (p. 148). But in the face of such nothingness, Nishitani does not "resolve to fabricate in human action what one ontologically lacks," unlike his French existentialist contemporaries, such as Jean-Paul Sartre. Instead, he claims that we need to "dig down into the Great Doubt occasioned by it to surrender one's being" in order to arrive at the "field of emptiness" (p. 149). This consists in an experience of what Dōgen famously describes as *shinjin datsuraku* (身心脱落), the falling away of body and mind (p. 145), or what is the same, what Nishitani describes as the experience of absolute nothingness. According to Wirth, this is also Schelling's view in his late positive philosophy. For Schelling, negative philosophy "had as its grandest task to reveal the ideal ground of the real, the derivation of all things from that which

is absolutely not a thing" (p. 150). But, as negative philosophy arrives at the *idea* of such a groundless ground, reason realizes that the absolute as the groundless ground "resists all positivity (God, the absolute), yet which paradoxically manifests" (p. 152). Or in other words, the absolute reveals itself at the end of negative philosophy as a self-contradiction, which denies and negates all rationally discriminatory claims made by reason in negative philosophy, a *nothingness* that destroys conceptual predication. By arriving at the margins of rationality and experiencing the failure to describe the absolute by conceptual means, reason transforms itself into the form of a positive philosophy, which now "'discerns' (*erkennt*) and 'presents' (*darstellt*) the 'unprethinkable' (*unvordenklich*) life of the absolute" (p. 152). By arriving at positive philosophy, reason is capable of seeing the "non-duality of the earth below and the heavens above" (p. 154), just like how, for Nishitani, all distinctions, including that of phenomenon and noumenon, fall away, such that "[b]eings appear just as they are because appearance has no front or back" (p. 149). Consequently, for both Nishitani and Schelling, religion and philosophy are inseparable from each other, and in a quote that resembles Kant's proclamation in the *Critique*, "[r]eligion without philosophy is blind; philosophy without religion is vacuous" (p. 147). Despite their coincidence, Wirth notes that Nishitani is, in the final analysis, discontent with Schelling's vision of philosophical religion, insofar as the latter continues to promote the idea of a "revelation" of God as absolute nothingness. For Nishitani, this is too "historical" and "anthropocentric" (p. 144), whereas a philosophical religion should be realized through the "realization" of reality in its "*suchness*," which is not something "hidden, waiting to show itself" in the progress of history, but always-already there at the bottom of human experience (p. 145).

Finally, Bret Davis' chapter on Ueda Shizuteru's idea of religion as "non-mysticism" or "trans-mysticism" (p. 183) also expresses a similar construal of the relationship between religion and philosophical thinking. In his comparison between Christian mysticism and Buddhism, Ueda argued that the thoughts of Meister Eckhart came the closest to the "trans-mystic" position that characterizes Buddhist thought, which is the fulfilment of the logic of mysticism. For Eckhart, the traditional conception of the Christian God as the divine Person and the creator of the world is insufficient, because it is a *limited* or *finite* concept of God insofar as God *excludes* and is *separated* from the finitude of its creatures. Therefore, Eckhart claims that the true God cannot merely be the personal God but must be the "Godhead (*Gottheit*)" that is the "impersonal (trans- or prepersonal) essence of divinity" (p. 188). But to arrive at such a Godhead, one must let go of or negate one's attachment to God as separate from the ego. This is expressed by Eckhart's claim of "letting go of God for the sake of God" (p. 187) and achieved also by letting go of the ego who is separate from God, in an experience of a "non-dual union with the divine"

(p. 187). As such, Eckhart speaks of this Godhead as a "nothingness" (p. 188), for no determinate predication can be conferred upon it such that it can be distinguished from anything. But like Zen Buddhism, argues Ueda, Eckhart does not, and cannot, merely remain at a mystical absorption in the union with the Godhead as absolute nothingness. Otherwise, the Godhead would exclude anything that is outside of this mystical non-differentiation, thus ceasing to be the undifferentiated Godhead. Therefore, the logic of mysticism, for Ueda's Eckhart, also requires a movement out of mysticism itself or a "self-overcoming of mysticism," (p. 185) something that Ueda finds in Eckhart's unorthodox depiction of the Biblical story of Mary and Martha (p. 188). This is what Ueda means by "trans-mysticism," which is a "*movement through and out of* mysticism" (p. 183). This, according to Davis, is a definitive characteristic of Zen Buddhism and is best expressed by the famous *Ten Ox-herding Pictures*, which consists in a journey towards the total annihilation of distinctions between the ego and the divine in the emptiness of the circle, as well as the movement out of the undifferentiated emptiness back to the differentiated life of the everyday (p. 192). Just like Eckhart's Godhead, however, there is a danger of dwelling in the experience of absolute nothingness, "where all things lose their differences and distinctions," a mere *unio mystica* (p. 192), or in Hegel's famous words in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, "a night in which all cows are black." But according to its own logic, this undifferentiatedness must ultimately negate itself and be broken through, and must be returned to the distinctions and differentiations of the everyday world (p. 195). Therefore, insofar as the conceptual and reflective thinking involved in the practices of philosophy employ distinctions and differentiations, a true religion as "trans-mysticism" cannot merely exclude philosophy, but must ultimately return to and be united with it. This is a view that is implicit in the self-overcoming logic of the trans-mystic movement. Despite their similarities, Davis nonetheless criticizes Eckhart's failure to thoroughly follow the logic of trans-mysticism, for he still retains a "residual mysticism" (p. 193), for Eckhart's thought still "begins and ends with the Godhead as a transworldly source and an eschatological end of the created world," whereas Ueda's trans-mysticism and Zen "begins and ends with the everyday world" (p. 195). According to Davis' Ueda, this indicates an incomplete negation of the Godhead as a trans-worldly entity through whom the finite world is redeemed, through whose divine light all of the created world looks like an "angel." Yet, for a thorough-going trans-mysticism, the divine is absolutely nothing and is not separate from the created, everyday world, which is itself always-already divine in its own suchness and is expressed in Buddhist phrases like "[m]ountain as mountain, water as water."(p. 196)

(3) The third and final significant theme amongst the chapters in this volume is the concept of nature. Most of the contributors agree that human beings can

only experience nature in an aesthetic attitude. What exactly this aesthetic attitude consists in, however, is a matter of dispute. For instance, Masamichi Ōnishi explicates Kimura Motomori's disagreement with Fichte, despite the importance of the latter in shaping the former's thought (p. 227). Specifically, although Kimura wrote his doctoral dissertation on Fichte (p. 3), he nonetheless criticizes Fichte, and German Idealism in general for remaining on a "standpoint of human culture" that simply regards nature as mere "material" for human expression (p. 228). According to Ōnishi, Kimura's discontent with Fichte's and the German Idealists' alleged dismissal of nature as mere "material external" is repeated throughout his career. This lasts from his first book, *Fichte*, to his last work, *Culture and Education in the Nation* (pp. 228–9). To combat this apparent duality that poses the human as "formation=expression" against nature as mere "material," Kimura suggested that we can conceive of nature as an "external or 'outside as *thou*'" (p. 229). In his chapter, Cody Staton also corroborates that, for Kimura, the German Idealists, especially Hegel, have the tendency to think that "art—as a product of human creativity—surpasses natural beauty" (p. 235). This position is likely to rob nature of any value in itself, be it aesthetic or not. Instead, nature would only have value as a material that passively receives form from human expression. This is what Kimura identifies as the "Hegelian notion of subsumption wherein the subject merely engulfs the other in its efforts to achieve a greater expression of itself" (p. 244). By drawing on Schiller's distinction between the "sensuous (material) and rational (formal) drives" in the human being, and the "third, fundamental drive" that Schiller calls the "play-drive" which synthesizes the two (p. 234), Staton argues that Kimura also presents his idea of "expression" in a similar fashion, which is "an activity that exteriorizes the interiority of the individual, thus exposing reason or spirit in nature itself" (p. 243). By positing "expression" as a blurring of the boundary between the interior (mind) and the exterior (nature), Staton argues, Kimura presents us with a mode of experiencing nature as "beautiful precisely because they exceed the reach of human volition" (p. 249), or to use Kant's words, of experiencing nature as the "sublime" (p. 236). Staton claims that this aesthetic attitude towards nature as the sublime object is shared by Kimura and Schiller, and can be said to alleviate the rigid opposition between the mind (form) and nature (material) by virtue of a "suspension of the tyranny of the will by way of the beautiful" (p. 249).

On the other hand, Takashi Hashimoto challenges this depiction of German Idealism regarding the relationship between nature and the aesthetics. First, Hashimoto emphasizes the importance of the concept of "nature," not as mere material that receives form from the outside, but as an autonomous activity in its own right, which is well-illustrated throughout Schelling's entire philosophical career. Hashimoto emphasizes that Schelling, especially the early Schelling in *First Outline of*

the Philosophy of Nature and *System of Transcendental Idealism* – is adamant about drawing the distinction between nature as a "mere product," or *natura naturata*, and nature as a "pure activity" or "pure productivity," something that Schelling calls the *natura naturans* (p. 292). Since nature as *natura naturans* is not exhaustible by nature as *natura naturata*, which is the totality of natural objects that are the target of natural sciences (and, possibly, the material for human art), nature is not merely something that waits passively for the conferral of form from the human mind. Instead, it is something "absolutely nonobjective" (p. 292) and possesses its own autonomous freedom. Thus, instead of nature obeying humanity, the "human must obey to its autarchy" (p. 292). In his later career, however, Schelling qualifies his earlier views about nature, which now only belong to the "movement of thinking," a movement limited to the realm of "negative philosophy" and one that must be supplanted by a "positive philosophy" (p. 296). But as Hashimoto has argued, Schelling is merely revising his earlier views to fit with his later philosophy of religion, such that "the task of positive philosophy is same as the philosophies of nature and art, namely, the recovery of the human 'relationship to nature' by way of the revival of *natura naturans* in mythology" (p. 302). Yet, even with these changes to his philosophy, as Hashimoto presented it, it still remains the case that, for Schelling, the appropriate mode of experiencing nature as *natura naturans* is through artistic expression, instead of the aesthetic experience of nature as the sublime, which emerges in the form of a "new art" that can only be realized by a return to the "poetic or artistic world," alongside the realization of a "new mythology" and "philosophical religion" (p. 303). Schelling's view of nature as being fully expressed in artistic or poetic depictions, Hashimoto argues, is also corroborated by the Kegon Sutra (p. 309), the Buddhist text that underlies the thought of Doi Torakatsu. This is because, for Hashimoto, the poetic expression of the Lotus Matrix World in the Kegon Sutra, which depicts nature and the world as "the art of painting in which the mind paints freely like an artist" (p. 310), as freely creating itself, shares the same motif with Schelling's late philosophy, because it "describes nature—as it is in itself, or in its suchness— as the beautiful symbol of our mind, without marvel" (p. 304).

Given the diversity of research on the legacies of German philosophers in Kyoto School that is presented in this volume, the themes that are explored are simply too various to include every single contribution in the above schema. Therefore, I must here also mention the other equally excellent chapters that do not fit my narrative as well, but nonetheless deserve attention. Raquel Bouso demonstrates a close link between Nietzsche's three phases of human spirituality (e.g., the camel, the lion, and the child) in his *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, and Nishitani's own three stages in combating religious nihilism (e.g., being, nothing and absolute nothing-

ness). This detour to Nishitani gives an account of Nietzsche's remark about the "European form of Buddhism," and debunks the conventional interpretation of Nietzsche's denouncement of Buddhism as merely "life-denying" and reintroducing Nietzsche's positive remark about Buddhism regarding "the affirmative or positive aspect of the 'Buddhist nothingness'" (p. 166). Hiroshi Abe argues that, despite their common position as dialecticians, Watsuji Tetsurō's dialectic differs from Hegel's insofar as the latter is criticized for thinking from a "standpoint of being" (something for which Nishida also criticizes Hegel), whereas the former belongs to a "dialectics of absolute nothingness" (p. 254). According to Abe, even though Watsuji fully realizes the importance of "negativity" in Hegel's philosophy (p. 260), Watsuji's version of dialectics is essentially different from Hegel's, insofar as the former's dialectics consists in the "dual movement" of "negativity," which is grounded by another movement of "absolute negativity," whose "essence lies in emptying or realizing itself in the other" (p. 262). For this reason, Abe argues that Watsuji's dialectics is closer to Nāgārjuna's dialectics of emptiness, rather than Hegel's supposed dialectic of being (p. 266). Finally, Anton Sevilla-Liu has explored the relationship between Mori Akira's philosophy of education and how it is influenced by Karl Jasper's existential philosophy. By incorporating Jasper's concept of *Existenz* (p. 274), Sevilla-Liu demonstrates how Mori constructs a philosophy of education that views students as concrete individuals that are equipped with their own unique subjective experiences or "situations" (p. 285), and how a healthy pedagogical relationship between teacher and students must take the latter's external challenges (e.g., global modernity and Japanese modernity), as well as internal challenges (e.g., limit situations), into account (p. 288).

It is true that one of the strongest points of this volume lies in the diversity of its research. It is unfortunate, however, that this strength is also intertwined with its most glaring weakness. That is, even though all the chapters are well-researched and function as self-contained contributions to Japanese philosophy, none of the chapters explicitly engage with each other in any significant way, be it positively or negatively. This leads to some important exegetical and philosophical problems being brushed aside. I have already tried to sketch some apparent disagreement amongst the contributors themselves in (1) and (3). For instance, how can Nishida and Tanabe have such opposing views about reality, i.e., undifferentiated and differentiated from the finite mind, but still both end up with the same notion of absolute nothingness, which negates conceptual predication and the traditional principles of logic to some extent? What motivates the rift between Nishida and Tanabe, given their apparently similar conceptions of reality? Moreover, how can both Tanabe and Kuki begin with the radical contingency of reality and humanity that could not be fully conceived by the rational concept, but, again, end up

with opposing views of absolute nothingness and absolute being? Putting their own assessments aside, is there *really* a philosophical difference between these two positions? And if so, what is it? Or given their agreement on the mutual mediation of philosophy and religion, is there any difference between the positions that begins with philosophical thinking and ends with its mediation with religion, and another that begins with religion and ends with its mediation with philosophy? That is, is there any difference between Tanabe's Shin-Buddhist inspired metanoetic philosophy of "absolute critique," and Ueda's (who follows the early Nishida) Zen-Buddhist inspired "trans-mysticism"?

The issues mentioned above are some of the most apparent questions that immediately arise when we look away from the individual chapters in this volume and inspect their relationship with one another. But where there is a problem, there is the need for further elucidation. So, the flaw with this volume can also be understood as a merit, for it provides the chance to identify the philosophical problems that persist between these texts. This in turn can prepare fertile ground for further engagement and exploration of the Kyoto School and its relationship with German philosophy in the future. Moreover, the volume perfectly succeeds in completing its own self-assigned mission "to build a foundation for further inquiries into the world significance of classical German philosophy by raising our historical consciousness of its impact and relevance in Kyoto School thought" (p. 4). Hence, I wholeheartedly recommend *The Dialectics of Absolute Nothingness: The Legacies of German Philosophy in the Kyoto School* to not only the specialists or scholars of Japanese or German philosophy, but to any student of philosophy who desires to practice philosophical thinking on a global scale.

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