

## Japan and the West: A Review of Thomas Kasulis's *Engaging Japanese Philosophy: A Short History*

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*Engaging Japanese Philosophy: A Short History*. By Thomas Kasulis. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2017. 784 pages. Paperback: ISBN-13: 978-0-8248-6979-3.

THOMAS KASULIS has authored another magnificent text on Japanese philosophy for Anglophone scholars and students, one which is surely to become a classic “must-read” in the field. His *Zen Action / Zen Person*<sup>1</sup> may be one of the best books for introducing the Zen perspective to the Western student, and his *Shinto: The Way Home*<sup>2</sup> is certainly an eloquent philosophical exposition of Shintō 神道 tradition and thought. His recently published *Engaging Japanese Philosophy: A Short History*, as the title suggests, invites the Western reader to *engage* Japanese philosophy through a detailed discussion of its thinkers, ideas, and history. The text provides a suitable introduction to the various facets of Japanese philosophy—its many trends and movements—throughout the ages. A full 784 pages, despite its subtitle (“A Short History”), it comprises detailed analyses of individual thinkers and schools of thought, and in addition to discussing their key concepts, also covers the historical and cultural contexts that engendered those ideas. Any reader familiar with Kasulis’s other works will not be disappointed, and the novice will surely appreciate his pedagogically effective and engaging style of writing. His writing provides ample concrete examples, as well as personal and real-life anecdotes, which many

<sup>1</sup> Kasulis 1987.

<sup>2</sup> Kasulis 2004.

will be able to relate to, thereby making philosophical concepts come alive. He also provides diagrams to explain otherwise difficult-to-understand ideas. The book is quite broad in content, covering both premodern thought and modern and contemporary academic philosophy and related fields, and is suitable for both the beginner and advanced scholar. From undergraduate students, graduate students, and lay philosophers to seasoned scholars, readers of various stripes will find the book of interest as it serves both as an introductory text on the subject but also provides deep analyses and discussions on philosophical subjects, authors, concepts, and schools of thought. Besides philosophy, it crosses over into the fields of history, intellectual history, and Japanese studies. As the author states in his preface, the book is for those who want “to explore Japanese philosophy as an alternative or complement to western philosophy” as well as those interested in “Japanese culture, thought, and history” (p. 1). It is also for those who may be unfamiliar with, but interested in, Japan or Japanese culture. Scholars of philosophy unfamiliar with Japanese philosophy can also appreciate the discussion of the culture and history of Japan, for the work provides a necessary background for understanding the philosophies. In the following review, I will begin by spelling out the impressions that came to me while reading through the book. I will follow this both with a discussion of what I take to be the author’s main thesis in his reading of Japanese philosophy, as well as with questions the book raised for me. I will also include a discussion of what I think are its weaknesses, though these are far outweighed by the volume’s strengths.

The organization of the book is as follows. After the preface, there is an introductory chapter, “Engagement,” in which Kasulis spells out his approach to Japanese philosophy. Following this, the body of the text covering the history of Japanese thought, is divided into four parts: “The Ancient and Classical Periods,” “The Medieval Period,” “The Edo Period,” and “The Modern Period.” This is followed by a conclusion and a section of “reference material” with information about Japanese pronunciation, names, and language in general.

As we can see from the book’s organization, the history starts from the ancient beginnings of Japanese history and continues to modern and contemporary times. But it also has seven chapters each focusing on a specific key thinker, whom Kasulis deems to be especially important: Kūkai 空海 (774–835), Shinran 親鸞 (1173–1263), Dōgen 道元 (1200–1253), Ogyū Sorai 荻生徂徠 (1666–1728), Motoori Norinaga 本居宣長 (1730–1801), Nishida Kitarō 西田幾多郎 (1870–1945), and Watsuji Tetsurō 和辻哲郎

(1889–1960). Each thinker represents a distinct trend or school—esoteric Buddhism, Pure Land Buddhism, Zen Buddhism, Tokugawa Confucianism, Native Studies, and modern academic philosophy, including the Kyoto school—ranging from the Heian 平安 (794–1185) through to the modern period. He chooses these thinkers as “paradigmatic of the Japanese tradition” so that “if readers can understand them, they will have the background to read and understand” (p. 4) many other Japanese philosophers. The selection is quite good and I think his assessment of them as paradigmatic is fair. In addition to these seven chapters, there are six chapters on the historical contexts of these thinkers that capture the “mood and spirit of the historical periods” in which Japanese philosophy developed. The events of Japanese history he covers may not always be familiar to the expert philosopher or even scholar of Japanese philosophy, and in this respect the chapters provide good and useful background material for understanding the philosophies that developed within their contexts.

The history begins with the ancient period and the symbolic figure of the prince Shōtoku Taishi 聖徳太子 (574–622) and the role he played in forming the intellectual culture of the period as exemplified in his *Seventeen-Article Constitution*, a hybrid document which draws on Confucianism, proto-Shinto (indigenous *kami* 神 worship), and Buddhism. Kasulis argues that this hybrid of “idealized Confucian role-defined behavior” and Buddhist “personal surveillance of our innermost motives and propensities” (p. 68), combined with proto-Shinto’s justification of imperial rule, provided a “tripodal foundation of imperial rule in the immediately ensuing centuries” (p. 71). He goes on to explain how the ongoing Japanese aspiration to emulate Chinese civilization through absorption and assimilation during the Nara period provided the foundation for the emergence of later sophisticated philosophizing as exemplified by Kūkai a few centuries later in the Heian period. In this chapter, Kasulis also provides us with the details of the composition of the historical chronicles *Kojiki* 古事記 and *Nihon shoki* 日本書紀 and the related transformation of the Japanese language. His discussion of the linguistic and functional difference between the two chronicles and their significance for later developments in Native Studies (Kokugaku 国学) supplements what he has discussed in his book on Shinto. All of this is shown to be relevant to later philosophical developments. In a similar vein, he provides detailed discussion of the Buddhist “schools” of the Nara 奈良 period (710–794), which while lacking in creativity, provide a philosophical foundation for later developments in the Heian and Kamakura 鎌倉 (1185–1333) periods, especially with their importation of

the Mahayana concepts of insubstantiality (emptiness, nothingness), interdependence, the bodhisattva vow, the threefold embodiment of the Buddha, universal enlightenment, and skill-in-means (Skt. *upāya*; Jp. *hōben* 方便), and so on. The expository discussion, providing examples from our everyday experience, is both helpful to the novice of Buddhism and insightful to the advanced scholar. And, his discussion of Emperor Shōmu 聖武 (701–756) provides insight into the beginning of the syncretism and alignment of proto-Shinto with Buddhism that became the mainstream for much of Japanese history. This beginning chapter as a whole thus provides the necessary historical backdrop for the rise of Saichō 最澄 (767–822) and Kūkai with their creative developments in the Heian period, which further the development of Japanese Buddhism. Of the two, though, Kasulis considers Kūkai the philosophically more significant and devotes an entire chapter to him.

The chapters on these two thinkers are some of the more eloquent and clearest expositions I have come across. For example, the chapter on Kūkai was a fine explication of his metapraxis of mindbody and microcosmic/macrocosmic holism. What surprised me in Kasulis's discussion of Kūkai was that, contrary to many works that I have read on the subject, he does not think it appropriate to call Shingon 真言 Buddhism a form of Tantric Buddhism. It is certainly the case that historically Shingon stems from the lineage of Indian Vajrayana—or what then was called “Mantrayana” in Sanskrit, of which the Japanese *Shingon* is the translation—for Kūkai had studied in Chang'an 長安, China, with Vajrayana master Huiguo 惠果 (746–805), who received his initiation from the Indian monk and translator Amoghavajra (705–774). And, Vajrayana is often equated by scholars with Tantric Buddhism. Kasulis gives two reasons for distinguishing Shingon from Tantric Buddhism: Kūkai's concern with metapraxis as opposed to ritual instruction, and Kūkai's unique distinction between esoteric and exoteric (p. 612, n. 77). Kasulis tells us that most scholars who are themselves Shingon Buddhists avoid characterizing Shingon as Tantric, though I would have liked to see some references to these previous scholarly discussions. Another example is his analysis of Shinran, which plumbs the philosophical profundity of his thought, which in its association with a so-called devotional sect of Mahayana Buddhism, at first sight may seem unphilosophical, or as far from philosophy as one can get. Kasulis here is successful in capturing the multi-sidedness of the ontological, epistemological, and ethical dimensions of True Pure Land (Jōdoshin 淨土真) thought. The explication of the oscillation between selfless engagement and self-delusion, entrusting faith and persistent karmic afflictions, egoless ascent to the Pure Land

and return from the Pure Land to compassionately help others, and so on in Shinran's philosophy succeeded in intensifying my interest in Shinran's thought. The chapter on Dōgen also provides a fine explication of his metapraxis, explaining Dōgen's justification for his exclusive emphasis on *zazen* 座禪. The chapter on Motoori Norinaga is also good. Norinaga and other Native Studies theorists and their discourse are often shunned by academic philosophers, including Japanese academics (at least those in philosophy departments) today. Thus, to render Norinaga's theory of language and poetics in a philosophically feasible way is an accomplishment. The chapter convincingly shows that Norinaga deserves more philosophical attention. Along with the space given to Kokugaku theorists in his earlier edited volume, *Japanese Philosophy: A Sourcebook*, coedited with John Maraldo and James Heisig,<sup>3</sup> we may hope that this chapter will encourage more future philosophical investigations and conversations on this school of thought. I should also mention that in the chapters surrounding those dedicated to individual thinkers, Kasulis provides excellent introductions to the Tendai 天台, Shingon, Zen 禪, and Pure Land (Jōdo 淨土) sects, as well as to additional Buddhist, Confucian, Shinto, and eclectic trends of thought, including excellent discussions of other significant thinkers like Hōnen 法然 (1133–1212), Nichiren 日蓮 (1222–1280), Hirata Atsutane 平田篤胤 (1776–1843), and others.

Once we pass the classical and medieval thinkers and schools, we get to the modern period. The early part of the chapter on Nishida Kitarō provides a good overview of Nishida's relationship to his predecessors Inoue Enryō 井上円了 (1858–1919) and Inoue Tetsujirō 井上哲次郎 (1855–1944)—both academic philosophers. In particular, he examines their schemes involving the use of the term *soku* 即—Enryō's "principle *soku* matter" and Tetsujirō's "phenomenon *soku* reality"—which are often overlooked in Anglophone scholarship on Nishida.<sup>4</sup> The discussion of the relationship of Nishida's philosophy to general cultural trends, such as the "I-novel" (*shishōsetsu* 私小説), is also interesting and relevant. Kasulis then touches upon the influence of William James (1842–1910), the Neo-Kantians, and Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762–1814), among others. In general, Kasulis follows the common and paradigmatic reading of Nishida's thought as a combination

<sup>3</sup> Heisig, Kasulis, and Maraldo 2011.

<sup>4</sup> *Soku* in Japanese has the sense of "immediately," "at once," "that is (to say)," "namely," and so on. But in Japanese philosophy it is often used as a copula in the sense of "is," "as," "qua," or "sive," that connects terms ordinarily considered to be opposites.

of Western philosophy and the experience of Zen practice. This formula of Western philosophy plus Zen experience too easily invokes the simplistic dichotomy of Western reason and Eastern experience. The real situation was more complex and, even at this early stage in Nishida's oeuvre, there were other sources for Nishida, such as Christian writings, including the Gospels, scholastics, mystics, and contemporary theologians, as well as his family religion of Pure Land Buddhism and Shinran. Nonetheless, this paradigm at least serves as a useful entryway for the novice beginning to learn about Nishida.

The discussion of Nishida's philosophy per se begins chronologically, starting with a good beginner-friendly introduction to his notion of pure experience (*junsui keiken* 純粹経験). I found Kasulis's exposition of the concept of pure experience as a flowing unity that unfolds into thought and reflection, and as constitutive of our own individuality and of reality itself, to be quite clear and helpful. What struck me in these discussions was Kasulis's novel use of "auto-," instead of "self-," to translate the Japanese *ji*-自. He describes what Nishida means by "experience" as an "auto-structuring field" that constitutes the "I" and not the other way around. The field is thus *auto*-formative, and the term for this aspect that has previously been rendered in English as "self-awareness," or as I have recently been using, "self-realization" (*jikaku* 自覚), is thus for Kasulis an "auto-awareness." This works quite well since what Nishida means by *jikaku* was never simply the awareness of an individual consciousness or ego-self. Kasulis explains in a footnote that the *ji* of *jikaku* "must always mean 'self' in the sense of 'auto' (*onozukara* おのづから) and not 'self' in the sense of the 'self' of oneself (*mizukara* 自ら) or as autonomous agent (*jiko* 自己)" (p. 668, n. 67). This is convincing. It also agrees with Nishida's appropriations during the same period of the nineteenth-century German philosophical concept of the will (*Wille*; Jp. *ishi* 意志), which he used in conjunction with *jikaku* and *chokkan* 直観 (intuition), none of which simply involve an individual *cogito*. I admit therefore that this is worth considering for future translations of my own, and I may have to adopt it. The discussion eventually leads to his novel, but gentle, and reader-friendly, explanation of Nishida's logic of place (*basho no ronri* 場所の論理), with its distinction between relative and absolute nothing(ness) (*sōtai mu* 相對無, *zettai mu* 絶対無; pp. 465–68) and of the predicate (*jutsugo* 述語) as an "experiential field that takes expressive form" in judgments (p. 469). Here Kasulis explains Nishida's logic of the predicate (*jutsugo no ronri* 述語の論理) as signifying an experiential event preceding its expressions in terms of subject and object. This exposi-

tion of Nishida's difficult theory is one I can recommend in courses where students are being introduced to Nishida. It is also one of the best explanations I have seen of Nishida's *basho* theory, whether in English or Japanese. Kasulis goes on to introduce the criticisms of Nishida's theory by his contemporaries, such as Takahashi Satomi 高橋里美 (1886–1964) and Tanabe Hajime 田辺元 (1885–1962). This helps to better acquaint the reader with the contextual dynamic behind the ongoing unfolding of Nishida's ideas as he responded to his critics.

What I found lacking, however, in Kasulis's discussion of Nishida are some of the finer points of his dialectical philosophy developed during the 1930s. This becomes noticeable in a later chapter on World War II and its aftershocks, where Kasulis discusses Nishida's 1944 essay titled "*Kokutai*" 国体 on the so-called "national body." Kasulis finds in this essay the totalitarian tendency of subsuming the individual into the whole (p. 525). But a look at Nishida's concepts of the dialectical universal (*benshōhō-teki ippansha* 弁証法的一般者) and its reverse determination (*gyaku gentei* 逆限定) by many individuals from the 1930s might provide an avenue for redeeming Nishida from any such totalitarian tendency. Precisely when Kasulis raises the logical problem in Nishida that "a unity does not allow a point from within itself to criticize that unity" (p. 525), Kasulis appears to ignore Nishida's concept of reverse determination (*gyaku gentei*) that played an important role in his dialectics of the 1930s. It is with his notion of the dialectical universal, which includes its reverse determination, that Nishida replaces his earlier appropriation of the Hegelian concrete universal (*gutai-teki ippansha* 具体的一般者) to release individuals from being mere pawns for the "cunning of reason" and to empower them as autonomous creators. The resulting picture of the world is of a complex dynamic whole of multi-determining points, a totality, but one which allows for individual creativity. Kasulis discusses the dialectics of Tanabe and Watsuji, but for some reason neglects to cover this aspect of Nishida's philosophy, which is an important development in Nishida's philosophical oeuvre.

The chapter on Nishida is followed by a chapter on Watsuji Testurō. It begins with a clear exposition of his philosophy of *fūdo* 風土 (milieu, climate) and interrelationality in human ethics, but eventually also unfolds a variety of issues, especially in relation to society and the state, such as the problem of cultural relativism, the morality of the state, the relation between states, and the relation between the state and ethnicity, or a "people." What defines a "people"? In reading Kasulis's explication of Watsuji, for example, one wonders whether, in equating the Japanese "nation" with

the Japanese “people,” Watsuji essentializes each as the “totality of Japanese” (p. 515). Kasulis’s critique is that in equating or transforming the *nin* 人 of *ningen* 人間 into “the people” (*minzoku* 民族) and *gen* 間 into “the state” (*kokka* 国家), Watsuji melded them into a totality of “allness” (German, *Allheit*; p. 517).

The volume next provides chapters covering postwar and contemporary developments. These chapters should provide fresh insights even to those already familiar with Japanese philosophy. For example, his discussion of postwar religious philosophy—or what he calls “philosophy *in* religion”—and philosophy *of* religion, including Shinto theology, Buddhist scholarly philosophy, Christian-Buddhist dialogical philosophy, Kyoto school philosophy, and other forms of philosophy of religion (such as in Izutsu Toshihiko 井筒俊彦 [1914–1993] or Critical Buddhism) is particularly interesting. The inclusion here of some of the more major postwar philosophers beyond the Kyoto school, such as Kimura Bin 木村敏 (1931–), Hiromatsu Wataru 廣松渉 (1933–1994), and Sakabe Megumi 坂部恵 (1936–2009) is also of value to Western scholars exploring Japanese philosophy. There are also concise discussions of the postwar philosophies on the body, somatics, and the philosophy of self, as well as on contemporary philosophical discourse on language, especially the Japanese language, which include comments on linguists like Tokieda Motoki 時枝誠記 (1900–1967). In addition to this latter discussion, Kasulis provides his own explication of the structure of the Japanese language in the supplementary “Reference Material” at the end of the book, which will surely benefit philosophy students trying to make sense out of Nishida’s predicate theory as well as much else in Japanese philosophy.

Accompanying the expository material of the book is Kasulis’s own thesis concerning both method and content. He is not shy about presenting his own philosophical approach to Japanese philosophy and comparative philosophy in general. Readers of Kasulis’s other scholarship will recognize throughout this book some of these philosophical positions and motifs that he has expressed in previous works, such as the “holographic” model. It is particularly in the first chapter (“Engagement”) of the book where he explicitly argues for his positions. While he is often convincing in an enticing way, not every scholar of Japanese philosophy will, of course, agree with everything he argues. In the preface, he mentions the difficulty of defining Japanese philosophy, and rejects “the idea that Japanese philosophy shares some common essence that can be captured in a simple definition” (pp. 15–42). This caveat will perhaps serve to counterbalance his attempts

to draw out some common characteristics of Japanese philosophy and my criticisms in regard to this. His attempt to delimit the character of Japanese philosophy—which he understands more in the sense of a Wittgensteinian *family resemblance* than an *essence* (p. 5)—is accompanied by attempts to distinguish Japanese philosophy from Western philosophy. This dichotomization into two distinct families of philosophy—Western and Japanese—is certainly useful for heuristic purposes in providing a starting point for students and scholars unfamiliar with the topic. Nevertheless, there may be an implicit tendency to ignore, or underemphasize, some significant overlaps between the two, which are especially noticeable in Meiji and post-Meiji Japanese philosophy, as well as within Japanese academia today.

One of the more important distinctive features of Japanese philosophy, reiterated throughout this book and standing in contrast to modern Western academic philosophy's turn towards detached knowing, is its stress on engaged knowing. Kasulis argues that detached knowing involves external relations while engaged knowing involves the paradigm of internal relations. The introductory chapter on “engagement” thus prepares the reader for the ensuing “short history” by inviting the reader to *engage* Japanese philosophy, which is itself characterized by *engaged* knowing. Throughout the book, Kasulis underscores this motif, which is recognizable in much of traditional, modern, and contemporary Japanese thought. So, we might say that this is one major thesis he presents in the book. Another characteristic, closely related to engaged knowing, is the integral unity of bodymind as opposed to the mind/body dualism characteristic of modern Western philosophy (pp. 29–32). This is because engaged knowing means knowing with one's body and mind as an integrated whole. This comes out especially in his discussion of Kūkai's esoteric metapraxis, in the interpenetration of knower and known that involves the whole of bodymind on multiple levels. Especially when Kasulis juxtaposes the examples of subject/object non-duality from a slew of classical Japanese thinkers his argument for the significance of engaged knowing within the context of Japanese thought seems valid. In addition to Kūkai's *nyūga ganyū* 入我我入 (“[cosmos] entering me and my entering [cosmos]”), some other examples he provides are Dōgen's *genjōkōan* 現成公案 (“presencing of things as they are”) and *hishiryō* 非思量 (“without thinking”), Shinran's *shinjin* 信心 (“clarified mind,” which Kasulis explains, however, as a disappearance of faith-holder and object of faith) and *jinen hōni* 自然法爾 (“happening of itself”), and Norinaga's aesthetics of *kokoro* 心 (“mind” explained as a mind-field of objects, artist, and medium [p. 425]). And, as accompanying such bodymind

engagement, Kasulis also points to assimilation as opposed to refutation as the dominant characteristic of argumentation in Japanese philosophy, involving allocation, hybridization, and relegation (pp. 36–39). This is quite interesting and he provides some convincing examples from both premodern and modern Japan to make his case. All of this also provides the context for how later modern Japanese thinkers, influenced by Western philosophy, will approach the issue of dualism—subject/object, idealism versus realism—that had plagued Western intellectual history. Nishida’s philosophy of absolute nothing(ness) (*zettai mu*), for example, is thus given a fine exposition in light of this broader cultural motif of “engaged knowing” even if Nishida himself did not always explicitly relate his ideas to these premodern thinkers. Working off of his hypothesis concerning “engaged knowing” as characteristic of Japanese philosophy, Kasulis concludes that Japan’s best philosophy indeed “does not reduce to being a detached understanding of either reality or of other philosophers’ ideas of reality,” but rather “constitute a Way” (p. 575). And leading up to this, by integrating his insights on Japanese philosophy as involving “engaged knowing,” Kasulis also provides a wonderful definition of philosophy itself as “not a static *standpoint* as much as a *walking* the path, a proprioceptive act of auto-aware engagement that is always adjusting, counterbalancing, and moving on” (p. 530). Certainly, this ought to be the spirit of philosophy, worldwide, whether East or West, North or South.

While I applaud this latter point—in regard to “engaged knowing” and its concomitant characteristics—I do feel at the same time, however, some misgiving in relation to it. Kasulis asks the important question of how one can “uncover hidden cultural bias, imagine both the limits and possibilities of alternative terminologies, and evaluate major historical shifts in the history of philosophy as philosophers encounter ideas from other cultures” (p. 575). Some scholars advanced in the field may find tedious such repeated warnings about the cultural prejudices we carry and bring into our reading of philosophical texts. Nevertheless, it certainly does not hurt to ask that question when doing philosophy, and the novice needs to know that this is a prerequisite to philosophy. But in asking such questions we also might consider what is this *other* as opposed to our *own*. He states, “you cannot fully understand philosophy . . . unless you also engage a philosophical tradition other than your own” (p. 575). So here my question is, what is *other* and what is *own*? Are *other* traditions simply *other* than one’s own? Does the *othering* of the *other* as *different* lead to a kind of reification, as *exotic*? When its difference from Western philosophy is underscored, are we exoticizing Japanese

philosophy in some subtle way, treating it as *other* but nonetheless *definable* as *other*? The first chapter was the most generalizing in this regard, helpful to the novice, but perhaps disputable on some points for advanced scholars. Kasulis indeed warns us that his overgeneralizations concerning Japanese philosophy are meant not for the experienced scholar but for the sophomore in unfamiliar territory (p. 2). He provides the caveat that “everything in this chapter is not a universal statement about Japanese philosophy but a generality” and assures us that he is “not making any universal claims or trying to delineate some mysterious Japanese essence” (p. 41). He reminds us that engaging in generalization is a helpful device for learning as we “typically learn new ideas by beginning with the general” and that “as we encounter even more evidence, generalizations improve with modification and qualification” (pp. 41–42). Indeed, generalizations are heuristic entryways into a new topic. Nevertheless, does the generalization, together with its delimiting contrasts, in itself reinforce the old Orientalist dualism of East versus West, or the Japanese one of *Nihon* 日本 versus *sekai* 世界 (“world”; that then reduces *sekai* to *gaikoku* 外国, or “foreign country”)? So, despite Kasulis’s caveats, I still fear the tendency towards such reification, not only of “Japan” but also of the “West,” such as in the introductory chapter’s detailed discussion of the characteristic differences between the Western way of thinking and the Japanese way of thinking, or when he states later that the Western list of concepts more readily generates *what* questions as opposed to the Japanese list that generates *how* questions (p. 583). When he says the central epistemological question for Japanese philosophy is not “what is knowledge?” but “how does knowing occur?” (p. 31), giving the example that Nishida’s focus on judgment is in the *act* of judging and *how* it comes about, one might question if this is also not the concern of much of the latest developments in contemporary (twentieth to twenty-first century) European philosophy, such as in phenomenology, post-structuralism, and hermeneutics. Was not phenomenology precisely about looking at the *how* of appearance and experience? And does setting up such a dichotomy, as if between distinct “essences”—yes, despite his caveat against essentializing—between Japanese and Western philosophy, then serve to construct false expectations or unreliable anticipations that ignore those that do not fit the scheme?

The objectification of Japanese philosophy, presenting it as *other* to Western philosophy by generalizing its characteristics as distinct, in the worst-case scenario could turn it into an exotic monolith, ignoring the diversity of philosophical trends, often contradictory, within both Japan and the West. For instance, Kasulis raises Shinran’s critique of rationality

or (calculative) thinking (*hakarai* はからい) as an example of a seminal theme in Japanese philosophy (p. 586), but we may find comparable parallels in the Western tradition, despite the Western emphasis on rationality, if we were to look into the Christian lineage of Paul, Augustine, and Luther. And of course, some may argue that this intellectual lineage of Christianity is not “philosophy,” but a similar controversy attaches itself to Shinran. In fact, much of what Kasulis says of engaged knowing may be applicable to the best philosophies in the West. When he says that “from a Japanese standpoint, a philosophical text is not like a cookbook or a manual . . . in which a parcel of information is wrapped up and delivered to the reader . . . [but] . . . is an invitation to join the writer and to learn . . . how she or he arrives [at what he/she says]” (p. 31), could not one say the same about *any* good philosophy text, Japanese, Western, or any other? We cannot deny that “the western emphasis on a discrete self detached from reality” (p. 451) had been the main current under the influence of Plato and Descartes, but that has been changing throughout the twentieth century in European philosophy, and we see this change in other fields as well, as in, for example, theoretical physics, with relativity theory and quantum physics. Those more recent and contemporary postwar, post-Heideggerian developments of philosophy that seem to better meet the criterion of engaged knowing by shedding the mind/body, subject/object dualistic paradigm of modernity are ignored. Moreover, some comments made about even major pre-World War II thinkers appear reductive, oversimplified, or misleading, such as when he appears to present Nietzsche as an advocate of free will (p. 483) in contrast to Watsuji. And when discussing the dualism that plagues Western philosophy, he presents it in several places in terms of empiricism versus idealism. This dichotomy, however, is ill-put and does not help to make his case. For empiricism is an *epistemological* position usually contrasted with rationalism in the history of modern philosophy, while idealism on the other hand is a *metaphysical* position contrasted with realism or materialism. Empiricism as such is not necessarily an alternative to, or in contradiction to, idealism. In fact, one can be both an empiricist and an idealist, the most famous example being George Berkeley. Even David Hume’s empiricism could be considered an idealism.

Speaking of exclusions, some postwar non-religious philosophers were not included in the text, presumably for not fitting that general characteristic of what Japanese philosophy is supposed to be. One such major twentieth-century thinker not included in the main body of the text, and mentioned only in an endnote, is Maruyama Masao 丸山真男 (1914–1996). In the note, Kasulis claims Maruyama “tended to overlook the epistemological

tension between engaged versus detached knowing that underlies . . . the social, political, and moral issues at stake” in the new Japan (pp. 616–17, n. 110). This claim may surprise those familiar with Maruyama’s advocacy for democracy in postwar Japan in his popular and well-known lecture and essay, “‘Dearu’ koto to ‘suru’ koto” “‘である’ことと‘する’こと” (“Being” and “Doing”),<sup>5</sup> in which his distinction between “being” “*dearu koto*” and “doing” “*suru koto*” seems to parallel Kasulis’s distinction between detachment and engagement. In this work, Maruyama underscores the importance of citizens to actively *engage* in democracy by *doing* it rather than being detached observers of political players, passively accepting the latter’s decisions. The irony here, however, is that Maruyama seems to be suggesting that this is something postwar Japanese need to learn from the Americans. Of course, even if Maruyama is correct here, we might attribute this to Japan’s unique modernization process, spanning from the Meiji era and leading up to the wartime regime, and this in itself does not necessarily contradict Kasulis’s general thesis concerning the traditional centrality of “engaged knowing” in Japanese thought. My point is that we need at least to be aware of the complexity of the situation to avoid simplified dichotomies between cultures.

I agree with Kasulis’s disappointment that academic philosophy in Japanese universities for the most part is focused on Western philosophy without covering Japanese philosophy. He concludes that contemporary Japanese philosophy ought to proceed with a “more general recognition” that philosophy, while a “global enterprise,” also “commonly reflects a regional flavor” in its individual instances (p. 521). The statement is probably meant for most philosophy departments in Japan. But I do think that the more important and creative Japanese philosophers of today are aware, consciously or not, of their Japanese cultural environment and historical background. The statement is agreeable, but becomes problematic if it is interpreted to mean that one should philosophize *intentionally* in a way that reflects that recognition, that is, to intentionally attempt to express one’s alleged “Japaneseness”—the “regional flavor”—in philosophizing. The consequence would be a kind of artificial nativism. I do not think that is what he wants to say, as, for instance, we certainly would not tell our American university students to philosophize or write philosophy papers in a way that reflects their American flavor. Any genuine philosopher, consciously or unconsciously, will be affected by, and be responsive to, their environment, including their immediate region, but also by global cross-regional

<sup>5</sup> Maruyama 2003, Maruyama 2019.

flavors that increasingly affect us today in an age of mass communication and mass media. This should be a given for true philosophizing anywhere. And certainly, the impact of Japanese philosophy with its Japanese “flavor,” as Kasulis states, should not be limited to Japan, but should be appreciated all over the world, in the same way that German idealism and British empiricism are no longer confined to their regions of origin (p. 521).

In reading the book, the reader needs to keep in mind that the Japan/West dichotomizing and generalizing that comprise much of the text are here provisional heuristic devices that provide entryways into thinking about Japanese philosophy. The reification of Japanese philosophy as, *reductively* and *monolithically*, other than Western philosophy, would prevent the Western reader from reading its texts simply *as philosophy* on an equal footing with *any other* philosophy. That is certainly not Kasulis’s intent. If Japanese philosophies are to be treated *philosophically* on equal ground, or on an equal playing field, with Western philosophies, and not as historical or anthropological or cultural curiosities, we will need to step beyond the limits of dichotomizing schemes. Only thus will Japanese philosophy become truly relevant for Western philosophers. So, I think the next stage in the Western appreciation of, or approach to, Japanese philosophy, especially post-Meiji philosophy, which certainly has much in common with Western philosophy, should be to treat it as *philosophy as such* so that, for example, one may read Nishida alongside Heidegger or Husserl as equals and *as philosophers*, rather than as a *Japanese* philosopher alongside a *Western* philosopher.

Aside from the major point concerning his thesis on engaged knowing and his generalizations of Japanese philosophy in distinction from Western philosophy and the related issues I raised above, there were some additional passages that made me ask questions. At the risk of nitpicking, I would like to point them out although these may be minor issues. One question that arose concerned the logic of *soku*. Kasulis mentions that to his knowledge “no Japanese philosopher ever attempted to make a formal system of logic based on *soku*” (p. 663, n. 23). I was not sure exactly what he meant by “formal system of logic,” but presumably metaphysical systems like those of the two Inoues and Nishida, which he had already discussed, are excluded. But I immediately was reminded of Yamauchi Tokuryū 山内得立 (1890–1982), a member of the Kyoto school and a student of Nishida, and his 1974 work *Logos and Lemma (Rogosu to renma ロゴスとレンマ)*,<sup>6</sup> in which he works upon Mahayana Buddhist logic. I was also reminded

<sup>6</sup> Yamauchi 1974.

of Deguchi Yasuo 出口康夫 (1962–) of Kyoto University who has more recently written on Buddhist logic, Mahayana, and Zen, and on Nishitani Keiji 西谷啓治 (1900–1990) of the Kyoto school, who brought these topics together with the insights of analytic philosophy. Deguchi has also written and lectured on the topics of a “logic of *soku*” (*soku no ronri* 即の論理) and the “logic of emptiness” (*kū no ronri* 空の論理).<sup>7</sup> Would these perhaps count as “formal systems of logic based on *soku*”?

Speaking of Nishitani, Kasulis’s statement that Nishitani drew on Nazi ideology (p. 523) was surprising, but that this was due to his association with Heidegger in Freiburg (p. 538) was even more than somewhat confusing. Certainly, Nishitani in the wartime symposia discussions and presentations referred to Nazi theorists like Karl Haushofer, and Nishitani did study under Heidegger in Freiburg in the 1930s. Nevertheless, Nishitani’s ethnocentric statements about the Japanese race or *ethnos*, to which the nation’s “moral energy” is linked, in themselves were not unusual for the time and not necessarily attributable to Nazi ideology—especially when he and the other discussants argued against Aryan supremacy—but also not recognizably Heideggerian. Statements about the differences between races or ethnicities were not rare during that period globally, whether Nazi or non-Nazi. Having studied with Heidegger at the time in Freiburg in itself is no evidence that his racialist views on the Japanese race vis-à-vis other Asians—indeed, a Japanese “race” into which the assimilation of certain other Asian ethnicities was possible, in contrast to Nazi biological essentialism—were due to Heidegger’s influence. After all, there were plenty of other known philosophers who had studied with Heidegger without identifiable racialist views, such as Hannah Arendt (1906–1975), Herbert Marcuse (1898–1979), Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900–2002), and Karl Löwith (1897–1973), among others. Henri Bergson, with whom Nishitani had originally wanted to study, is suggested instead as a possible French Jewish alternative who could have led Nishitani into different directions had he had the opportunity to study with him. But we might remember here that Bergson’s concept of the *élan vital* was a popular influence upon the Italian Fascists and French proto-fascists, if not the German Nazis.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Deguchi 2015.

<sup>8</sup> In fact, Nishitani refers to Bergson’s *élan vital* in the third of the infamous Chūōkōron discussions of 1941–42, *Sekaishi-teki tachiba to Nihon* 世界史的立場と日本 (The World-Historical Standpoint and Japan) although this is not in the English translation in the *Sourcebook* by Heisig, Kasulis, and Maraldo (2011). See Kōsaka et al. 1943, p. 326.

I also would like to mention one more issue, not related to the content of the book, but with its format. There are a number of places in the volume where texts mentioned lack references or where citations are not given. This probably would not concern the beginning student who is delving into the topic for the first time, but for seasoned scholars this is frustrating. Pagination from the companion text, *Japanese Philosophy: A Sourcebook*, appears in the margins for certain quotations and paraphrases for cross-referencing purposes, and this is helpful. But this is not enough if one wants to get to the Japanese original. And not every text, author, or idea discussed appears in the *Sourcebook*. For example, where does one find some of the titles by Watsuji listed on p. 481? Out of a number of titles listed, bibliographical information is given for one of the works (*Dōgen the Monk*) but not the others. And I do wish that bibliographical information for Japanese sources aside from their translations in the *Sourcebook* could have been given for authors like Sakabe Megumi or Ueda Kenji 上田賢治 (1927–2003) discussed in the section on postwar philosophy. Nor could I find any source at all for Tokieda Motoki, only sources for other thinkers impacted by him. Perhaps I am asking for too much here, and Kasulis has already accomplished quite a lot with this book. There is also a missing reference for Izutsu Toshihiko 1956 (cited on p. 677, n. 140), although this most likely is a typographical error and probably refers to Izutsu 1982 (*Language and Magic*) which *is* listed in the reference list. I was able to catch that error because I am familiar with Izutsu's work, but a reader not familiar with Izutsu would be confused by the reference. There were additional typographical errors as well, like missing words in endnotes, but this is to be expected in such a long work, is difficult to avoid, and can be fixed for a future edition.

Despite the issues and questions raised above, I must emphasize that this book is a tremendous accomplishment and its positive features far outweigh any shortcomings. The book is well worth the purchase and the time to read. It will be a classic textbook in the field. Philosophers, as well as intellectual historians and Japanologists, will benefit from it. It serves as an excellent companion to the *Sourcebook*, and used together, the two volumes would provide an excellent selection of required readings for a course on Japanese philosophy, whether for undergraduate or graduate students. I only hope that the book will receive sufficient attention among philosophers of the Western traditions beyond the usual Asian studies crowd that the University of Hawai'i Press often markets its books for, since they are the ones who need to be introduced to this material. If we are not to continue "preaching

to the choir,” books like this need to be advertised at mainstream—that is, Western—philosophy conferences, in addition to Asian studies, religious studies, or comparative philosophy conferences.

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