

BOOK REVIEWS

Japanese and Continental Philosophy: Conversations with the Kyoto School. Edited by Bret W. Davis, Brian Schroeder, and Jason M. Wirth. Studies in Continental Thought. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2010. 346 pages. Paperback \$27.

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The work of the Kyoto School's founding member, Nishida Kitarō (1870–1945), and the three generations of philosophers that he inspired, is distinguished by an original engagement with the historical canon known as Western philosophy from the perspective of modern and pre-modern Japanese thought. This new volume is a promising sign of the growing recognition for the Kyoto School as a significant philosophical interlocutor on a global scale. But the school's growing success is not without controversy. In the views of some, there are grounds for suspicion of fascism, given the nature of political ties between Germany and Japan at the time of the school's inception. In the views of others, the close involvement of many of the school's philosophers with Japanese Buddhism limits the relevance of their work to religious apologetics. In striking contrast to these critical attempts at limiting the school's relevance, still others would claim a special priority for the school as a pioneer of *the* new form of philosophy best suited for our globalized world. *Japanese and Continental Philosophy: Conversations with the Kyoto School* offers a variety of contributions by recognized scholars in Kyoto School studies that will help many, even those outside of the field, to understand some of the possible grounds for, and objections against, these various views, and to further the task of evaluating their accuracy.

The main purpose of the text, as defined by one of its editors, Bret W. Davis, is to develop “*philosophical exchanges* between the Kyoto School and modern and contemporary Western philosophers in the Continental tradition” (p. 2). In this respect, the text's publication in the series Studies in Continental Thought is a landmark gesture of invitation towards the book's

intended audience of “students and scholars trained in Continental philosophy” (p. 3). It is true that while there are already quality publications which, respectively, introduce the school, assess its politics during World War II, focus on its contributions to inter-religious dialogue, and gather top scholarship to enrich the global conversation about the Kyoto School, this new collection by Davis, Schroeder, and Wirth is unique for the work’s unified and successful commitment to advancing the school as a dialogical partner of Continental philosophy.

The work is comprised of five thematically organized sections with three or four contributions in each, totalling seventeen essays plus the introduction. The themes of the sections—the Kyoto School and Dialogue; Self and World; God and Nothingness; Ethics and Politics; and Grammar, Art, and Imagination—will be relevant to diversified studies, and excellent translations from Japanese and German make the volume a valuable resource for English-language scholarship.

The first part of the volume, entitled “The Kyoto School and Dialogue,” introduces the theme of dialogue with an essay by Ueda Shizuteru translated from the Japanese with helpful notes by Davis. Ueda is Professor Emeritus at Kyoto University and the current leading figure in the tradition of the Kyoto School. In his essay here, Ueda suggests that the most important contribution to dialogue by the Kyoto School is its capacity to critique the contemporary threat of a “homogenized world” in which cultural differences would be stifled (p. 31). The Kyoto School, Ueda writes, “may well come to be seen as one paradigm for the interculturality and multiculturalism that is becoming such a prevalent concern in the world today” (p. 22). These fruitful possibilities for intercultural dialogue are further thematized in an essay on cultural appropriation by Davis himself, and an essay on mediation by Sugimoto Kōichi, a specialist in Zen Buddhism and the Kyoto School.

The second part of the volume, entitled “Self and World,” gives us examples of what concrete forms an intercultural dialogical paradigm might take in diverse combinations of figures and texts. The contribution to philosophy by Ōhashi Ryōsuke presented in this volume helps establish the claim for the school’s intercultural dialogical strengths in recognizably Continental language. Ōhashi, it should be noted, is a scholar of significant repute, especially with respect to the development of the field of Kyoto School studies in German academia. Ōhashi’s essay here, translated from the German by Wirth, suggests an intercultural definition of philosophy by arguing that the work of Nishida and Nishitani Keiji (1900–1990) exhibits foresight of “the

necessity of ‘the worldly world’ in which every cultural world, precisely in the place where it maintains its creative subjectivity, co-determines this ‘world’ without recourse to ego-centered domination, let alone to Orientalism or Occidentalism” (p. 80). The possible contributions of the school to the phenomenology of self and world are further explored as David Jones and Davis, in manners distinct from one another, each engage the philosophical relation between Nietzsche and Nishitani, while Steffen Döll presents Ueda’s phenomenology in a critical take on Descartes, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty.

The third part of the volume brings some of the best scholarly minds in the field to bear on a now familiar topic: “God and Nothingness.” Here John Maraldo draws together Marion and Nishida on the topic of the gift in their shared project of critiquing “onto-theological assumptions” (p. 145); Gereon Kopf draws from the work of Jin Y. Park in aligning Zen discourses with post-modernism as a way of arguing that “non-substantial a/theology does not eliminate the notions of god, self, and history, but rather discloses the radical existential ambiguity of what is signified by the *markers* ‘god,’ ‘self,’ and ‘history’” (p. 170); and Thomas J. J. Altizer suggests that the Kyoto School, as exemplified by Nishida, promises a “new theology” (p. 189) that might in some sense be “simultaneously Buddhist and Christian” (p. 184). In all three cases, the great potential of the Kyoto School, particularly for broadening our conception of the philosophy of religion beyond sectarian discourses, is made strikingly clear.

In considering this potential, I would add a methodological point concerning the sources outside of the Western canon of philosophy that were brought to the dialogue with Continental philosophy by the Kyoto School philosophers themselves. A disproportionate amount of Kyoto School scholarship, both inside Japan and around the world, has thus far been centered on Nishida and Zen Buddhism, even when other figures or traditions are mentioned or discussed. Taking scholarship about the work of Nishida’s student Nishitani Keiji as an example, we see such a trend as already dominant two decades ago in D. S. Clarke Jr.’s statement that “the wisdom of the East” that Nishitani brings to bear on the problems of Western modernity is represented by Nishida and Zen Buddhism.¹ While Nishida, Zen Buddhism, and the East/West paradigm are undeniably central to the thought of many members of the Kyoto School, scholarship on this school can nevertheless open up

¹ Clarke’s introduction to *Nishida Kitarō*, by Nishitani Keiji, trans. Yamamoto Seisaku and James W. Heisig (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), p. xii.

the boundaries of these themes as we develop a broader appreciation for the diversity of the school's sources.

The last two parts of *Japanese and Continental Philosophy: Conversations with the Kyoto School* especially open past some of these boundaries. In part 4, "Ethics and Politics," an essay by Brian Schroeder assesses respective notions of alterity in the social ethics and religion of Tanabe and Levinas. Recognizing the importance of Pure Land Buddhism in Tanabe's work, Schroeder forays into the involved, but consistently neglected, relationship between the Kyoto School and Pure Land Buddhism (a welcome exception to this neglect is the work of Melissa Anne-Marie Curley in, for example, "The Subject of History in Miki Kiyoshi's 'Shinran'"²). Also in part 4 of this text, Erin McCarthy further develops her long-term project on the ethical possibilities of a non-dual subjectivity conceived as "betweenness" in Watsuji Tetsurō's notion of the human being and feminism. Here, McCarthy constructs a dialogue between Watsuji's social ethics and Luce Irigaray's ethics of the couple given their common ground as critics of "the concepts of selfhood, body, and ethics as they have appeared in traditional Western philosophy" (p. 212). These are followed by two essays which illustrate the contentious issue of how to evaluate the Kyoto School's political status: Bernard Stevens condemns the school's purported project to "overcome modernity" (p. 229) as well as more general inadequacies for political thought that he sees in Nishida and Zen (p. 241); while Graham Parkes argues that accusations of the Kyoto School as purportedly fascist are "short on facts" and usually rely on "guilt by association" through references to some of the school's members' ties to Heidegger (p. 247). This suggests that there are significant developments still to come in considering the ethical and political dimensions of the school as more diverse sources and interlocutors are taken into consideration.

The final part of this work, "Grammar, Art, and Imagination," evidences the value of the school as exceeding the category of an "other" to Continental philosophy. In this respect, it is worth recalling the plain fact that while translated into several languages today, the Kyoto School scholars principally wrote in Japanese, for modern Japanese people. This suggests that their reappropriation of conventional Japanese sources in new ways spoke, not only to a lack perceived in the "other," but also to a more directly felt philosophical need (for a discussion of philosophy as "dire necessity" [*konkyū*] in

² *Frontiers of Japanese Philosophy 2*, ed. Victor Sōgen Hori and Melissa Anne-Marie Curley (Nagoya: Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture, 2007), pp. 78–93.

relation to the school see the introduction to Keta Masako's *Nishida Kitarō 'Zen no kenkyū'*³). As Rolf Elberfeld suggests in his discussion of the philosophical uses of the grammatical form of the middle voice, certain questions and approaches "no longer allow themselves to be pigeonholed in the all too facile opposition of Western and Eastern thinking" (p. 269). Nor, as should also be evident, was the thought of the Kyoto School first made dialogical by the work of today's scholars. As Jason M. Wirth writes in his exploration of art and true expression, when it comes to dialogue with the Continental tradition, this is a "dialogue at which the Kyoto School for its own part excelled" (p. 287). This dialogue was already at work in the very formation of the school. As Fujita Masakatsu brings to light, the impetus behind the thought of Miki Kiyoshi (1897–1945) was to discover, through dialogue with figures such as Immanuel Kant, Alexander Baumgarten, Maine de Biran, Helmuth Plessner, and George Sorel, "a power capable of giving logical (i.e., *logos*-informed) expression to the impulse of *pathos*, which we inevitably harbor insofar as we exist as embodied human beings" (p. 317). Ending in prison in 1945 where Miki had been confined under the Peace Preservation Act partly because of his Marxist views, and where his unfinished essay *Shinran*, on the founder of Japanese True Pure Land Buddhism, was discovered, Miki's life itself was an embodied intercultural dialogue.

Davis maintains in the introduction to this work that "the philosophies of the Kyoto School are themselves inherently dialogical, commuting between Eastern and Western philosophical and religious traditions" (p. 2). By bringing to the fore the inherently dialogical character of the Kyoto School, and putting it in contact with more broadly recognized developments in Continental philosophy which have occurred since the school's establishment, this volume opens up the possibility of radically questioning any essentialist division between Eastern and Western philosophy. By translating the work of top Kyoto School scholars for English-language readers, this volume effectively encourages intercultural exchange. By exploring topics now familiar within the field, this volume also exhibits the mastery of a discipline that has already discovered some of its own unique strengths. Exceeding even the editors' self-stated intention to "invite new voices into this dialogue with Japanese philosophy" (p. 3), this work raises still unfamiliar voices from within the diversity of the school's sources, and depicts philosophy as a global dialogue that is already well under way. The work is a valuable resource for inspiration and study that will enrich the research of anyone

³ Tokyo: Kōyō Shobō (2011), p. viii.

interested in the Kyoto School, Continental philosophy, and/or intercultural dialogue.

Zen Buddhist Rhetoric in China, Korea, and Japan. Edited by Christoph Anderl. Volume 3 of the series Conceptual History and Chinese Linguistics. Leiden: Brill, 2012. xvi + 474 pages. Hardcover \$166.

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This book of collected essays is definitely a welcome volume for scholars of Chan studies. Here leading specialists in Buddhist studies and East Asian linguistics analyze the interplay of language and doctrine in Chan/Sōn/Zen literature. It especially includes pre-Chan Buddhist literary developments in India and China, so as to trace continuities and changes in the application of rhetorical strategies in the overall framework of Buddhist literature. The keynote of this volume is explicitly expressed in its introduction: “The division between ‘China,’ ‘Korea,’ and ‘Japan’ is to a certain degree artificial, and especially in the early stages of Chinese Chan and Korean Sōn, these regional divisions only make limited sense” (p. 1). Christoph Anderl’s ninety-four-page introduction staggeringly sets out all the aspects of current rhetorical studies of Chan/Sōn/Zen texts in an attempt to develop a linguistic methodology. Anderl’s effort is to be highly esteemed, for such a task demands a high level of integrity and a comprehensive understanding of Buddhist language as well as thought; otherwise one might risk a fallacy of applying methods dedicated to analyzing the *form* of Buddhist terminology to explaining the *content* of the ideas. Fulfilling its pan-Buddhist scope, admirably, there are three articles on India, two on Japan, four on Korea, and four on China. Through this diachronic and comparative approach, the work aims to illustrate the great complexity and the multifaceted features of Chan literature in the respective sociopolitical and socio-religious contexts. Despite regional, temporal, and vernacular varieties, all of the authors focus their discussions on linguistic devices and “rhetorical modes” that have been used in the texts in question.

Starting from the Indian side, Jens Braarvig selects some important Mahayana Buddhist literature, including the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa* and *Bodhisattvacaryānirdeśa*, to illustrate their contradictory characteristics: these Mahayana sutras may have a logical form but still are strongly characterized by the “rhetoric of emptiness,” which expresses an anti-rhetorical and anti-logic