

Japan and the West in D. T. Suzuki's Nostalgic Double Journeys

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DAISETZ Teitaro Suzuki's long life (1870–1966) closely parallels the history of modern Japan since the Meiji Restoration of 1868. Like modern Japan, Suzuki's life and ideas are a complex mixture of the “West” and the “East,” modernity and tradition. The traditional elements of Suzuki's work center on Zen Buddhism, while the “Western” elements focus on American sensibilities which he directly experienced over the nineteen-odd years he lived in the United States.¹

By the time he went to America at the rather young age of twenty-six, Suzuki had already attained *satori* (悟り) under the young Zen master Shaku Sōen 釈宗演 (1859–1919).² Suzuki's Zen is radical in two seemingly opposite senses. It is radical because his *satori* is a breakthrough of what is called

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¹ Suzuki's initial stay in America lasted eleven years (1897–1908). His subsequent sojourns in the States (which were sometimes interrupted by his travels to Mexico and Europe) are as follows: 1949–1952; 1953–1954; 1955–1959.

² Shaku Sōen was a very open-minded man for a Zen priest in those days, who, despite his master's opposition, studied at Keio University. After attending the World Parliament of Religions held in Chicago in 1893, Sōen recommended Suzuki to Paul Carus, who needed an assistant for his English translation of Lao Tze's *Tao Te Ching* 道德經.

the bottomless bottom of traditional Buddhist “truth”³; it is also radical in its incorporation of modern “Western” elements, including English, to express verbally his *satori* experience via Zen *shisō* or Zen thought. In spite of this second radical element, the unorthodox nature of Suzuki’s Zen seems to reside primarily in the first sense, in that it is deeply rooted in the traditional Mahayana teachings. It is this radical element derived from tradition that has wrongly led many in the “West” to criticize Suzuki and Zen in general, claiming that Suzuki is a narcissistic cultural and/or militaristic nationalist, or that Zen is an existential hoax. These criticisms arise from, and in turn point to, the fundamental and crucial difference between the “West” and “Japan” or, more generally, between the “West” and the “East.”

I consider the difference between “West” and “East” to be not so much a geographical and/or racial one as one of sensibilities and mindsets: the one dualistic, the other non-dualistic. Suzuki says: “When we geographically talk about East and West, we must draw a boundary somewhere. Rather, it is our mind that is Eastern or Western.”⁴ I will further examine the East-West issue later when discussing Suzuki’s *soku-hi* (即非) logic (A is A because A is not A) and Maraldo’s criticism of what he calls Suzuki’s “spiritual nationalism.”⁵ Here, I wish to touch briefly on how I have come to hold the above views regarding the Western and Japanese mindsets. My first encounter with Zen and D. T. Suzuki took place during my high school years. Although I majored in English at a Catholic university in Tokyo, my interest in Zen and Suzuki was further stimulated by the knowledge that many Catholic priests, including Thomas Merton, William Johnston, and Heinrich Dumoulin, were seriously interested in Zen Buddhism. While impressed by their erudition and profound understanding of Zen, I sensed a significant difference between their Catholic, monotheistic sensibilities and those of non-monotheistic Zen. This difference seemed to parallel that between English literature, my major, and my own indigenous sensibility. I soon realized that Suzuki’s

³ Scholars like Matsumoto Shirō and Hakamaya Noriaki argue that Zen is *kitaisetsu* (基体説, Skt. *dhātvavāda*) or essentialism, and that because of this it is not Buddhism as preached by the Buddha. Whether or not Zen concurs with the Buddha’s Buddhism, I don’t think that Zen is essentialist. This is because of its *soku-hi* logic, on which I will further elaborate later in this essay.

⁴ SDZS 2, p. 226. Hereafter, quotation marks around such terms as “East/West,” “Japanese” and “Western” will be omitted for stylistic reason, but they should be assumed, unless these terms refer to actual geographical regions and/or ethnic groups.

⁵ Maraldo 1994, pp. 336–40.

experience with Zen and Western sensibilities paralleled my own. Ever since, my principal academic interest has lain in drawing analytical comparisons between East and West, or more specifically, between Japan and the West.

Though I would continue my studies in North America, and currently teach Japanese and comparative literature at an American university, my twenty-five year stay in Canada and America has not altered the basic view of Japan and the West I acquired through both Suzuki's writings and direct contacts with Canadians and Americans. Put simply, the Western mindset is dualistic or monotheistic; that of the East or Japan, non-dualistic or non-monotheistic. In my view, this fundamental difference underlies what I perceive to be fatally misdirected criticisms raised by many Western, and some Japanese critics against Suzuki and Zen in general.

I

Below I elaborate on this difference by examining a selection of Western criticism of Zen and Suzuki. This examination will also shed light on the nature of Suzuki's "nostalgic double journeys" to both the past (traditional Japan) and the future (the modern West).⁶ I will begin by discussing the "orthodox" example of such criticism by the writer Arthur Koestler, who derides Zen as "an existential hoax" at best and "a web of solemn absurdities" at worst.⁷ The point of Koestler's criticism—also a basic criticism directed against Suzuki and Zen in *Rude Awakenings*, on which I will touch shortly—is that Zen and Buddhism lack a code of social ethics, a serious omission in Koestler's view. In *The Lotus and the Robot*, Koestler writes of several discussions that he and his friends had with Zen abbots through interpreters:

They [the abbots] were emphatic in their denials that religion had any bearing on social ethics. When we asked them whether they were indifferent to the persecution of religion in totalitarian countries, one of them answered:

⁶ See the following passage from Jean Paul, quoted by Ernst Bloch:

I say: Why does one forget about a superior and unique quality of music? About its power to make one nostalgic, not for the old, deserted land, but for a land that hasn't been stepped on, not for a past, but for a future? (Bloch 1985, p. 200.)

⁷ Koestler 1961, p. 233.

‘A horse eats in Tokyo and a horse in Osaka is no longer hungry.
A Sputnik goes up in Moscow and the shares fall in New York.’

That was in the classic koan tradition, and it got us nowhere.⁸

Koestler further questions the abbots by quoting one of Camus’ heroes who “ignored the cry of a drowning woman, and was subsequently destroyed by guilt.” “After a few meaningless exchanges,” Koestler writes, “one of the abbots said: ‘Guilt is a Christian idea. Zen has no home. It is glad for converts, but does not seek to make proselytes.’ At least this was the version given to us by one of our lamentable translators; but it fitted the general trend of the discussion.”⁹

At another discussion, Koestler’s group asked a renowned Buddhist scholar how the Buddhist ideal of tolerance would deal with an evil such as Hitler’s gas chambers. The scholar answered, “That was very silly of him [Hitler] . . . Evil is a Christian concept. Good and evil exist only on a relative scale.”¹⁰ Koestler concludes that Zen has nothing to contribute to the moral recovery of Japan—or any other country.

Aside from Koestler’s “lamentable” translators, the real cause of what seem to be dialogues at cross-purposes between Zen and the Western mind is, I believe, that the two function on two fundamentally and crucially different levels. These dialogues play out like a match between a traditional Japanese sumo wrestler and a Western-style wrestler, an intellectual and spiritual contest between two fundamentally different mindsets. Suzuki repeatedly points out that the Western mindset is based upon the division of God and the world (or God and the devil), and that it tries to “unify” the two, whereas the Eastern mindset functions the other way around; or more precisely, in the latter mindset, that “unity” (or better, non-division) already underlies division.¹¹ Suzuki calls this kind of superimposition the logic of *soku-hi* (A is A because A is not-A).

Before I discuss Suzuki’s *soku-hi* logic further, however, I would like to touch on some of the most recent criticisms directed against Suzuki and Zen. In the recently published *Rude Awakenings*, a collection of essays on Zen and the Kyoto School centered on the philosopher Nishida Kitarō 西田幾多郎 (1870–1945, who was Suzuki’s close friend), Christopher Ives attacks

⁸ Ibid., p. 272.

⁹ Ibid., p. 273

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 274.

¹¹ SDZS 2, p. 21; SDZS 3, pp. 184–92.

Suzuki's alleged militaristic nationalism by quoting, in his own English translation, a passage from one of Suzuki's earliest writings, *Shin shūkyōron* 新宗教論 (*A New Treatise on Religion*), published in 1896:

There is a violent country [China], and insofar as it obstructs our commerce and infringes upon our rights, it directly interrupts the progress of all humankind. In the name of religion, our country refuses to submit itself to this. For this reason, unavoidably we have taken up arms. [. . .] For the sake of justice and justice alone, we are simply chastising the country that represents injustice, and there is nothing else we seek. This is a religious action.¹² (Problematic parts underlined by Hagiwara.)

Ives' translation seems to me a distortion of Suzuki's original, which with my modifications would read:

Thus, should there be a violent country, and insofar as it obstructs our commerce and infringes upon our rights, it directly interrupts the progress of all humankind. In the name of religion, our country refuses to submit itself to this. Thereupon, unavoidably we will take up arms. [. . .] For the sake of justice and justice alone, we are simply chastising the country that represents injustice, and there is nothing else we seek. This is a religious action. (Modified parts underlined.)

The original is as follows.

故に暴国あり、来たりて吾商業を妨害し、吾権利を蹂躪せば、是れ直に人類全体の進歩を中絶せしめんとするもの、我国は宗教の名に由りて之に服従すること能はず。是においてか已むを得ずして干戈を動かす・ 但々正義の為に不正を代表せる国民を懲さんとするのみ。吾豈に何の求むる所あらんや。是之を宗教的挙動と曰ふ。¹³

Judging from the time when Suzuki wrote *Shin shūkyōron*, he might have had China (Ch'ing dynasty) in mind when he refers to "a violent country," but he never mentions "China" in his treatise.¹⁴ Again, judging from his

¹² Ives 1994, p. 17.

¹³ SDZ 23, p. 139–40.

¹⁴ Incidentally, I think it is historically inaccurate to perceive the Ch'ing dynasty as "China," that is, a unified nation state like the People's Republic of China. The Ch'ing (Manchu) dynasty invaded and conquered the Ming dynasty, which in turn had established

time, Suzuki even might have had Russia or other Western countries in mind. However, Ives argues that Suzuki advocates and justifies Japan's attack on China in the Sino-Japanese war. Apparently, this argument is based on the reading of Suzuki by Ichikawa Hakugen 市川白弦 (1902–1986), who quotes the above passage and somewhat hastily identifies the “violent country” as “China.”¹⁵

Aside from the issue of the correct identification of “a violent country,” I consider Ichikawa's critique of Suzuki and Zen to be, in the final analysis, “Western” in that it is based, in the end, on a binary oppositional mindset. In this sense, his critical stance is essentially the same as that of Koestler and his successors in *Rude Awakenings*, and thus his criticism of Suzuki misses the mark. In his “Zen Buddhist Attitudes to War,” which is also included in *Rude Awakenings*, Hirata Seikō 平田精耕 discusses Ichikawa's distinction between two kinds of freedom: “desecularized freedom” (脱俗の自由) and “secular freedom” (世俗の自由). Notes Hirata:

When Zen speaks of freedom, it is usually in the sense of desecularized freedom, as in the famous line in the *Record of Lin-chi*: “Become a master of your circumstances; wherever you stand is the right place” (隨處作主、立處皆真). This kind of freedom is attained when one is able to accept life just as it is, when one is able to say, like the Sōtō master Ryōkan, “In times of misfortune, misfortune is fine.” Such freedom persists even in the midst of suffering.

But desecularized freedom is not able to bring about political or social reform. Freedom of the type achieved through the American and French Revolutions—freedom from political oppression—is what Ichikawa calls “secular freedom.” Desecularized freedom is vertical by nature and secular freedom is horizontal. For Ichikawa, the true freedom of Zen today lies at the point where these vertical and horizontal planes intersect.¹⁶

itself by overturning the Yüan (Mongol) dynasty. Moreover, not only did the Ch'ing dynasty rule the conquered Ming (Han) people by utilizing the latter's bureaucrats and political systems, it had to allow other ethnic groups within its territories, such as the Tibetans, the Mongols, and the East Turkmens, a large degree of politico-social independence and autonomy.

¹⁵ Ichikawa 1993, p. 36.

¹⁶ Hirata 1994, pp. 11–12.

If Hirata's interpretation of Ichikawa's ideas of freedom as stated here is accurate, Ichikawa's "point where these vertical and horizontal planes intersect" is, it appears to me, far from "the true freedom of Zen," since Ichikawa's "point" is ultimately dualistic in its presupposition of the two planes or axes that intersect it. Hirata argues that "the world of Zen is not located at the point where the horizontal and vertical dimensions of human life intersect, but at the point where both dimensions drop out of the picture."¹⁷ In my view, this "pointless point" is the locus of Suzuki's *soku-hi* logic, upon which I will later elaborate in connection with such interrelated issues as self and the other, ethics, God, love and compassion, and "bite" and "nip."

In any case, it seems to me that both Ichikawa and Ives have drawn a distorted image of Suzuki as a militaristic nationalist. I also think it unfair that Ives, and Ichikawa to a certain degree, ignoring Suzuki's historical location, single out his *Shin shūkyōron*, a treatise written when he was only twenty-six, in order to criticize him. As Taitetsu Unno has remarked in an essay on the Kyoto school, "Whenever we criticize past thinkers, we must remember that they are of another age in a different political climate, facing their own unique problems which may be beyond our comprehension."¹⁸ It is not difficult to criticize in hindsight Suzuki's lack of a bird's-eye perception and foresight of the world situation around the turn of the 19th century and a few decades later. However, when Japan was dragged into the international power struggles between Western imperialist nation states around the mid-19th century, to Suzuki and many other Japanese, their situation must have seemed to be primarily that of self-defense, survival and independence rather than wayward imperialist invasions of the neighboring countries.¹⁹ How many of us now can see, even in hindsight, World War II not merely as struggles between the Allies (the good) and the Axis countries (the evil), but predominantly as the imperialist and colonialist wars between the first and the late comers?²⁰ And this imperialism is arguably a culmination of modern Western history, which in turn has its roots in the ancient Greco-Roman and the Judeo-Christian civilizations. Needless to say, this kind of perception is not to exonerate the atrocities perpetrated by both the Allies and the Axis

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 13.

¹⁸ Unno 1997, p. 247.

¹⁹ See Hirata 1994, pp. 8–11.

²⁰ See, for instance, Stinnett 2000.

countries that engaged in the imperialist wars. However, it will certainly provide us with a more nuanced view of the issue in question as a whole and, more specifically, of the situation in which Suzuki was placed around the end of the 19th century.

We should also be aware that, combining rationalistic thinking with the Zen spirit, Suzuki had relativized the “nation state” very early in his career, and was strongly critical of the Emperor system and Japan’s militarism before and during the so-called Pacific War.²¹ He also repeatedly criticized the feudalistic backwardness of Japanese society and customs as seen, for example, in the empty formalities of Japanese people and the poor housing conditions.²² These criticisms, however, reflect his deep love and concern for his country. I think that Suzuki’s type of nationalism, should it be called such, neither contradicts with Zen philosophy nor constitutes a strong criticism of any individual or nation. Promoting the “national interest” of one’s own country would not necessarily contradict with one’s pacifist ideology. Otherwise, we would immediately have to put into action the logical conclusions of Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* (the tenet of whose arguments on the constructing of nation states seems to me to be irrefutable): a successive return of a nation’s land/territory to the former inhabitants, as well as the total abolishment of borders.

II

The question of nationalism parallels that of “self,” or better, “self-identity,” which in turn is related to the issue of the Other and that of “nostalgic journey.” Zen’s *soku-hi* logic (A is A because A is not-A), which underlies these issues, explains the seeming contradiction between Suzuki’s relativization of “nationalism” and his sincere concern for his native country. In *soku-hi* logic, nationalism (a metaphor of one’s own “self”) is both affirmed and negated at the same time: one is neither oneself nor the Other, or (“topologically”) both at the same time. Suzuki’s “nostalgic double journeys” have the same logical mechanism: his nostalgia for the past (i. e., the Zen tradition

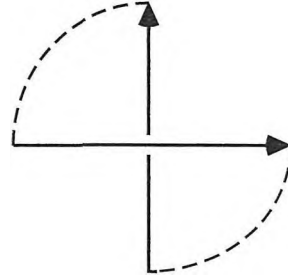
²¹ His criticism of the Emperor system and the ideology of *kokutai* (国体, national polity) dates back to the early period of his stay in America. See SDMS, pp. 241, 244–45, 278; Suzuki 1899b, pp. 70–71; and Suzuki 1899c, pp. 71–72. Also, see Kirita 1994, pp. 54–55 and Unno 1997, pp. 262–64.

²² SDZ 17, pp. 169–82; SDMS, pp. 257, 296, 301, 321; Kirita 1994, pp. 56–57; Unno 1997, p. 264.

Figure 1



Figure 2



and Japan's heritage) "topologically" (as in "this" and the "other" sides of the Möbius band) twists into his "nostalgia" for the future: modern ("Western") sensibilities, or vice versa (see Figure 2).

Below, I will further elaborate on these issues by examining the criticisms directed against Zen and Suzuki in *Rude Awakenings*, in which Jan Van Bragt, for instance, argues that the logic of *soku-hi* annihilates the Other, because of its homogeneous and self-referential non-dualism²³ (a criticism, also shared by other critics like Sharf).²⁴ On the other hand, in the same book, Maraldo criticizes Suzuki's Japanese spirituality (*nihonteki reisei* 日本的靈性) as a cultural/spiritual nationalism,²⁵ while Robert Sharf condemns Suzuki's Zen as a twentieth-century construct.²⁶ These criticisms, sophisticated though they may be, are along the lines of Koestler's, and arise, in my opinion, from the fundamental and crucial difference in premises or logical arenas between Western and Zen thought. Zen's *soku-hi* logic appears homogeneous and tautological in the Cartesian-Newtonian homogeneous temporo-spatiality (i. e., on the object level), the basis of the Aristotelian law of identity, which engenders, in my view, Koestler's sense of social ethics, Maraldo's and others' negative view of nationalism, and Sharf's criticism of Suzuki's Zen as a modern construct. The *soku-hi* logic is not a homogeneous logic, because it has a "topological" twist built into it just as does the Möbius band or the Klein bottle. "*Shiki* (色) and *kū* (空)" or "A and not-A" are not

²³ Van Bragt 1994, pp. 252–54.

²⁴ Sharf 1994, pp. 50–51.

²⁵ Maraldo 1994, p. 339.

²⁶ Sharf 1994, pp. 44–51.

homogeneously identical, as indicated by the cross-point of the horizontal (*shiki/A*) and vertical (*kū/not-A*) axes (see Figure 1), but “topologically identical” (see Figure 2).

Suzuki often points out that while the West focuses on the dualistic state following God’s decree, “Let there be light,” Zen concentrates on the state before God created the world, or more precisely, on the “moment” he says, “Let there be light.”²⁷ But this “moment” is not T. S. Eliot’s “still point of the turning world” (*Four Quartets*) or the point at which the coincidence of opposites (e. g., the noumenal and the phenomenal) takes place, as Sharf, from the homogeneous standpoint of identity, would mistakenly put it²⁸ (see Figure 1). Rather, it is a “moment” at which eternity, *kū*, the noumenon (or the divine) “topologically crosses” time, *shiki*, the phenomenon (or the mundane) (see Figure 2). This “topological moment,” a “topological synthesis” of eternity/ death and time/life, is the “locus” of what Suzuki calls *reisei* (靈性) or spirituality, the source not of love, but of compassion. This “moment” is also the *ultima Thule* of Suzuki’s “nostalgic double journeys,” whose apparently opposite “goals”—one is past/Japan, and the other, future/the West—ultimately “coincide” in his “*fumo mishō izen no shinmenmoku*” (父母未生以前の真面目; one’s true face/self [that “exists”] before one’s father and mother were born). This “true face/self” (*shinmenmoku*) is the “true Other” or what the Zen master Rinzai 臨濟 (Chin. *Lin-chi*) would call “*shakuniku danjō no ichi mui no shin ’nin*” (赤肉団上の一無位の真人; the true man with no title who sits on a mass of reddish flesh). One encounters this true self/man (the Other) in the eternal past or in the eternal future, which means that one will never meet it (in history or this three-dimensional tempo-spatiality), which in turn means that one has already met it here and now at the “topological cross section” of “time” and “eternity.” Rinzai’s “true man with no rank” (eternity/noumenon) sits here and now “on a mass of reddish flesh” (phenomenon or this world).

Thus, the “goal” of Suzuki’s “nostalgic journey” is not limited to traditional Japan, his native country and culture; his “goal” is nowhere, and thus it can be anywhere, be it America, India, or any other earthly country and culture. This is the true nature of what I call Suzuki’s “nostalgic double jour-

²⁷ SDZ 27, pp. 63–64, 264.

²⁸ Sharf 1994, p. 50. This is a fatal mistake, and this alone indicates that the foundation of his entire criticism of Zen and Suzuki, sophisticated and convincing as it may sound, is very shaky, or at least that his criticism is totally misdirected.

neys,” which critics like Koestler, Ives, Sharf, Maraldo, and Van Bragt would incorrectly label as “narcissistic and homogeneous cultural/spiritual nationalism.” They would argue that this kind of nationalism annihilates the tension of good and evil and the Other’s ethical struggles for human rights in the asymmetrical I-Thou relationship. To this charge, Suzuki would counter-argue that this type of struggle is precisely the cause of human misery and suffering, not the other way around. I will further touch on this issue later in this essay.

Criticizing Nishitani Keiji’s “home-ground” (the “goal-less goal” of Suzuki’s “nostalgic double journeys”), where “[t]he self itself returns . . . by killing every ‘other,’ and, consequently, killing itself,” Jan Van Bragt asserts the importance of the rights of the Other in its asymmetrical relationship to the “I.” He further quotes from Lévinas, the recent *locus classicus* of many critics:

If it [history] claims to integrate myself and the other within an impersonal spirit, this alleged integration is cruelty and injustice, that is, ignores the Other.

. . . the relation with the Other does not have the same status as the relations given to objectifying thought, where the distinction of terms also reflects their union. The relation between me and the Other does not have the structure formal logic finds in all relations. The terms remain absolute despite the relation in which they find themselves.²⁹

Lévinas’s asymmetrical I-Thou relationship is intriguing because it seems to parallel the “topological” asymmetry between the individual and the title-less true man (*mui no shin’nin*: the “Other” in Zen), or that between life/the phenomenal and death/the noumenal in the *soku-hi* logic of *reisei* (spirituality). Both Suzuki and Lévinas seemingly concur with each other on the issue of responsibility and ethics:

For instance, seeing a baby about to fall into a well, even a bad man who is morally lax in daily life would rush to save the baby. His action springs up from his unconscious; he never thinks such things as he should save the baby, people would praise him for saving it, he would be rewarded, and people would be excited and

²⁹ Van Bragt 1994, p. 254.

pleased . . . [T]his is *mukuyū gyō* (無功用行, motiveless act) or to let the Great Compassion (*daiji daihi* 大慈大悲) of *jinhōni* (自然法爾; as-it-is-ness) function. Insofar as we contribute to today's society, I consider *mukuyū gyō* to be the most important thing.³⁰

Without knowing how to swim, to jump into the water to save someone is to go toward the other totally, without holding back anything of oneself. To give oneself totally to the other to respond to his unspoken request . . . his 'Thou shalt not kill.' But above all, it is no longer just a question of going toward the other when he is dying, but of answering with ones [*sic*] presence the mortality of the living. That is the whole of ethical conduct.³¹

However, Lévinas's asymmetrical hospitality/love between "I" and "Thou" crucially differs from the "topological" asymmetry of *reisei* on three interrelated points: power, monotheism, and anthropocentrism. Suzuki points out that the Judeo-Christian sense of love hides a component of power because it issues, after all, from the monotheistic God of justice (right), who may punish sinners and destroy enemies according to his law (commandments).³² Thus, Suzuki asserts that Jesus' self-sacrificial love/hospitality for humanity, the Other, takes the form of punishment, or better, God's self-punishment/destruction.³³ This kind of "self-punishment/destruction" by God, based on his righteousness, in turn seems to be reflected, for instance, in God's asymmetrical/paradoxical injunction and command to Moses and Abraham: "Thou shalt not kill" and "Kill thy son."

The idea of God's "self-punishment/destruction/sacrifice" also seems related to the Christian injunction, "Love thy enemy," which Suzuki finds inadequate because it presupposes someone or some object apart from, and in confrontation to, oneself; Suzuki argues that there is no enemy in the first place.³⁴ This is one crucial difference of premise between the Judeo-Christian sense of love/ethics and that of Zen. The Judeo-Christian sense of love and ethics will encourage one both to love/forgive and to execute wrong-doers like Eichmann. Meursault in Camus' *The Stranger* presumably refused such love and ethics as expressed in the magistrate's words that there

³⁰ SDZ 29, p. 178.

³¹ Lévinas 1999, p. 164.

³² SDZ 27, pp. 266–67; SDZS 2, pp. 31, 99.

³³ SDZ 27, pp. 268–69; SDZ 29, pp. 159–61; SDZS 2, p. 99.

³⁴ SDZS 2, p. 156.

is no repentant sinner whom God will not forgive. I see a parallel between the Meursault/magistrate pair and that of the Zen master and Koestler in the issue of love and ethics. It is not that Meursault and Zen lack God; rather their God is radically different from that of the magistrate and Koestler. To reiterate Suzuki, "Christianity begins after God has created the world, whereas in Buddhism, one starts with God before He has created the world."³⁵

III

It is this difference, I believe, that renders the Buddhist idea of "ethics"/compassion non-anthropocentric (and non-dualistic), as expressed in the following remarks:

The other day, I [Suzuki] saw a movie scene, in which a big snake swallowed something like a small snake and a frog. The scene was so cruel that I felt like saving the frog out of the big snake's mouth . . . But, snakes and lions eat [small animals] because they are hungry. If we take their prey away, they in turn will be in trouble. However, I think that to wish to solve such a situation arises from our Great Compassion or, to put it more Buddhistically, from *mida no hongan* (弥陀の本願; the original vow of the Amitābha Buddha).³⁶

On the other hand, the Judeo-Christian monotheistic God's asymmetrical love/hospitality and responsibility towards the Other are highly anthropocentric, as Genesis clearly declares. The Judeo-Christian sense of love and responsibility ultimately excludes and hierarchically degrades non-human beings, be they sentient or non-sentient. It seems to me that this anthropocentrism is concentric with Eurocentric modernity, in which the "natives" of Africa, North and South Americas, and other non-European worlds have often been treated as sub-humans. Of course, anthropocentrism and ethnocentrism have been universal; they are an aspect of human nature. (This is tantamount to saying that the dualistic, common sense thinking/mindset is a universal aspect of human nature. In this sense, we are all "Westerners.") However, the Judeo-Christian type is one of the most fundamental and

³⁵ SDZS 3, p. 191. The "before" and the "after" in this quote must not be conceived only in terms of linear time. They indicate, so to speak, a logical "before" and "after."

³⁶ SDZ 29, p. 175.

systematic versions. Coupled with the Greco-Roman sensibilities, the Judeo-Christian anthropocentrism forms the foundation of Western modernity, which, since the time of the Renaissance, has been colonizing the heterogeneous world (of animism, pantheism, and other sensibilities) into the homogeneous world of monotheism and capitalism.³⁷

The asymmetric relationship between “homelessness” (change/*samsāra*) and “nostalgia” (for constancy/home/*nirvāna*) in Suzuki’s Zen Buddhism, on the other hand, is based on the “topologically” asymmetric logic of *sokuhi*, and it takes after, for instance, the “nostalgic journey” of a Zen mendicant (*unsui* 雲水, which literally means “cloud and stream”), for whom there is no place that is not his or her home (see also Figure 2). Hence, we often come across such Zen expressions as *zuisho ni shu to naru* (to become a master at any place) and *ōmushojū nishō goshin* (応無所住而生其心; with no abode, one

³⁷ Concerning the relationship between monotheism and capitalism, see Yoshizawa 1994, Iwai 1985, and Karatani 1995. Also see Seki 1982; Seki detects the origin of capitalism in Platonism and Christianity (“Platonism for the mass,” according to Nietzsche). Moreover, if we were to follow Benedict Anderson’s arguments in his *Imagined Communities*, no one race or ethnic group would have the right, either religious or historical, to claim a land to build a nation-state on. See also the following dialogue between Asada Akira and Edward Said:

[Said]: Habermas is a perfect Eurocentrist. In an interview, he actually says that all of his assertions are not applicable outside Europe. Formation of agreement through dialogues by citizens with good sense sounds nice, but Palestinians are not invited to the dialogues.

[Asada]: If such dialogues should work, the tragedies of the nineteenth century, not to mention those of the twentieth century, wouldn’t have happened. Habermas’s theory, so to say, is a nostalgia for the excessively idealized eighteenth-century Europe.

[Said]: What is important is that in the theories of Habermas and his followers, dialogues solely appear as form. It might be a highly desirable form, but I cannot help sensing hollowness in it.

[Asada]: I think that Habermas’s theory of dialogue owes a lot to Arendt’s philosophy, especially her interpretation of Kant. Of course, Arendt herself leans too much towards European humanism. In spite of that, however, her view that in thinking about “human rights,” one must start, first of all, with the situation of those who are chased out of their countries, like, for instance, the Jews during World War II, contains a truthfulness based on a historical experience, unlike that of Habermas type formalists or the cynical “human rightists.” As far as this view of hers goes, I hold Arendt in high esteem. I believe that it is from the standpoint of the Jews who were chased out of a public space that she puts importance on a public space for dialogues. I think that standpoint is also that of the present-day Palestinians. (Asada 1994, pp. 75–76.)

attains *satori*). The spirit/logic of *soku-hi* also underlies the Buddhist idea of *rin'ne* (輪廻; transmigration) and its correlate, the Bodhisattva ideal of compassion (*bosatsu gyō* 菩薩行), both of which, for instance, the Noh play *Yamanba* (山姥; Mountain Crone) beautifully exemplifies.³⁸ Suzuki's "nostalgic double journeys" also exemplify all these elements, and thus they are journeys not only to traditional "Japan" (past/non-dualism/the noumenal), but also to the modern "West" (future/dualism/the phenomenal).

It is from this kind of comparative perspective that we should reconsider, for instance, Maraldo's following misdirected criticism against Suzuki and his idea of "Japanese spirituality" (*nihonteki reisei*):

Any difference between an essentially Japanese spirituality and an ideological Japanese spirit is lost to us. We look for diversity and historical conditioning in religious expressions, not for a privileged experience that might be the unchanging core of a tradition. The attempt to express a core in "Western" as well as "Eastern" terms finds sympathy no longer. We question the centrality of singular voices of authority . . . Finally, we labor to establish non-Japanese voices of authority on Japanese Buddhism, and our efforts there vie with the *Western* tradition of hearing in Suzuki a guru of the East.³⁹

Maraldo's criticism appears to exemplify the recent "deconstructionist," "dialogic," and "postcolonial" trend that seemingly advocates "non-monologic and non-Eurocentric" impartial approaches to different cultures. While I consider the trend itself to be legitimate, I also wonder if it is used at times to mask a strong crypto-Eurocentrism, which represents nothing more than a Habermasian (and perhaps a Kantian) modernist ideology of "(Western) modernity as an unfinished project." The hidden agenda of such a project, it seems to me, is to bulldoze the heterogeneous world into homogeneous Western modernity and civilization under the slogan, "globalization."⁴⁰ Behind the apparently impartial mask of this kind of globalization may lie an Orientalist condescension and complacency towards the non-West, which is actually the white man's burden mentality in disguise.

While Lévinas's sophisticated sense of asymmetrical love/hospitality and

³⁸ See Suzuki's "'Yama-uba,' a Nō Play" in his *Zen and Japanese Culture*.

³⁹ Maraldo 1994, p. 340.

⁴⁰ See note 37.

ethics may differ from Habermasian Eurocentrism, it can nevertheless be fatally Eurocentric in its anthropocentric and monotheistic theology, because it excludes other non-anthropocentric and non-monotheistic sensibilities such as those of pantheism and Zen (Zen, of course, must not simplistically be identified with pantheism).⁴¹

Based on the foregoing examinations, I consider that what Koestler, Sharf, Ives, Maraldo, and others may believe to be Zen's passive quietism, the lack of social ethics based on the sense of Alterity (Otherness), is in fact a caricature of Zen. Their misunderstanding is imposed on Zen by their modern "Western" homogeneous and narrow sense of identity, or by their Lévinasian sense of ethics, which can be equally homogeneous and parochial in its monotheistic/universalistic theology. I also think that when Maraldo and others criticize Suzuki's idea of "Japanese spirituality" as nostalgic "cultural nationalism/essentialism," this is a rather limited view, which perhaps arises from their crypto-Eurocentrism.

To reiterate, Suzuki points out time and again the ultimate futility of the commotion and busyness of "Western" ethics and love, which only focus on the state that follows the creation/separation of God and the world, God and the devil.⁴² Suzuki would argue that this conception of ethics and love is vain and even complacent because it is ironically the type of dualistic approach

⁴¹ See also the following:

"Universal humanity" exists nowhere than in one's ideological thinking, which disguises one's own prejudice as impartiality. The interior of a human being is formed historically and differently in each culture, depending on the way the individual and his or her community are related with each other. We cannot carelessly bundle together the interior of the people who live in the Christian and Islamic societies (which officially uphold the belief in the monotheistic, absolute God) and that of the Japanese since the Edo period. (Momokawa 2000, p. 11.)

⁴² SDZ 20, pp. 160–62. Suzuki also puts this point as follows:

Zen annihilates all concepts, all consciousness, all relationships, and all subjects and objects. Therefore, all consciousness, all concepts, all relationships, and all subjects and objects undeniably exist. This is obviously a logical contradiction, because being and non-being exist at the same time. Thus, myopic people regard Zen as delusion and nonsense. However, why is it that they themselves are performing this delusion and nonsense without questioning their contradiction? Nay, why is it that no matter how much they make a fuss over their contradiction, they cannot eternally escape from their contradiction? Zen calls this "binding oneself with no rope" (*mujō jibaku* 無繩自縛). (Suzuki 1899a, p. 39.)

advanced by Koestler, Sharf, Ives, and Maraldo that aggravates and amplifies the violence, destruction, and resultant misery and suffering of humankind and other sentient beings. This misery and suffering form a vicious circle since they further necessitate this type of meddling, or what such critics would call “social ethical interference,” with the core problems.

IV

This statement, however, does not simplistically mean that Zen is pacifist (in the usual sense), or that it can solve all the problems of humankind. What Zen can do, in my view, is not necessarily to eliminate human suffering, but to save us from prematurely and complacently believing that ethics are opposed to evil. (The irony of this complacent belief is that it makes ethics and evil “bite” each other, thereby causing piercing pain and suffering to humanity. Zen, so to speak, is a way to turn this kind of “bite” into a “nip,” on both of which I will further touch later on.) Zen’s view/premise, it seems to me, is not that we need ethics because we have problems/evils (i. e., because we fell, or better, because God separated himself from the devil), but that we have problems because we have ethics; or, to be more precise, problems/evil and ethics/good are co-arising like the “two sides” of the Möbius band. The *soku-hi* logic (God is God because God is not-God) is the fundamental component of this view.

Zen’s *soku-hi* logic can also deal effectively with Sharf’s charge that Suzuki’s Zen is a modern construct. *Soku-hi* logic deconstructs such binary thinking as construct/illusion vs. truth/reality. Ultimately, what is not “construct” in human affairs? In *Outlines of Mahayana Buddhism* (published as early as 1907), Suzuki refutes the charge that Mahayana Buddhism is a deviation from the Buddha’s original teachings. Suzuki argues that no religion with vibrant life, be it Buddhism or Christianity, can remain static; it changes and grows dynamically, thereby maintaining its “original” spirit.⁴³ However, this statement should not be confused, as in Sharf, with a mere “apologetic distinction drawn between the ‘essence’ of a tradition—the source from which a tradition springs—and the cultural forms through which it is made known.”⁴⁴ Suzuki’s point is based on the *soku-hi* logic (which also underlies Bashō’s idea of *fueki ryūkō* (不易流行, or “constancy in change”), which does not allow simplistic, Platonic and Neo-Platonic oppositions such as the

⁴³ Suzuki 1963, pp. 11–16.

⁴⁴ Sharf 1994, p. 45.

“noumenon (origin)” and the “phenomenon (manifestation)” or “content” and “form.”

“Modernist” in his own way, Suzuki throughout his life strongly advocated cleansing conventional religions of superstitions, correcting social injustice (including inequalities between men and women as well as between the rich and the poor), and improving society through science, technology, and other rationalistic, progressive, and liberal sensibilities of the Western Enlightenment.⁴⁵ As mentioned earlier, Suzuki is very critical of what he perceives as Japan’s irrational and obsolete Emperor system and Japanese militarism, which culminated in the Pacific War. Of Japan’s defeat in the war, Suzuki comments that Japan was not defeated by American materialism but by the American spirit which he sees represented in the [gleaming] fuselages of the B-29 bombers that flew over his cottage on a hilltop in Kamakura towards the end of the war.⁴⁶ (This will largely modify Sharf’s hasty charge that Suzuki and Zen categorically regard and criticize the West as materialistic.)⁴⁷

It is in this wider context that I believe we need to view Suzuki’s Japanese spirituality (*nihonteki reisei*), which Maraldo criticizes as a cultural/spiritual nationalism.⁴⁸ In the first place, Suzuki’s *soku-hi* logic supports the idea of

⁴⁵ SDZ 17, pp. 169–82; SDMS, pp. 257–58, 260–62, 264, 270; Yamamoto 1898, p. 29; Unno 1997, p. 264.

⁴⁶ Suzuki Shigenobu 1969. Also see SDZ 32, p. 274.

⁴⁷ Sharf 1994, pp. 46, 47. See also the following remarks by Suzuki:

I do not consider materialistic progress to be [human] arrogance, but rather I consider it to be a prerequisite for our free spiritual activities. I believe that removing the obstacles which nature sets against humans’ material existence arises from the human desire for spiritual freedom. (SDMS, p. 257.)

We should be aware that Suzuki’s logic of *soku-hi* “topologically” synthesizes spirit and matter. Zen’s down-to-earthness, which arises from *soku-hi* logic, is a kind of materialism.

⁴⁸ Like other critics, such as Ives and Sharf, Maraldo’s criticism of Zen and Suzuki is often based on misinformation and/or one-sided views on Zen and Suzuki’s ideas. For example, contrary to Maraldo’s assertion that Suzuki’s idea of *reisei* (spirituality) is relatively new (Maraldo 1994, p. 337) [and thus hides the hidden agenda of cultural nationalism—Hagiwara’s interpretation], Suzuki had used this concept, if not in exactly the same sense as in his *Nihonteki reisei*, as early as 1896 (SDZ 23, pp. 142–143, 145). Suzuki also uses the word, *reisei* in his translation of Swedenborg’s *Angelic Wisdom Concerning the Divine Love and the Divine Wisdom* (SDZ 25, pp. 63, 138). Also, I think that Maraldo is one-sided when he argues that Suzuki proposed an idealized religiosity [i.e., Japanese spirituality] in the belief that the Western world was overcome by materialism (Ibid., p. 340). As can be surmised from

cultural “uniqueness”⁴⁹; in the second place, the argument that I put forward in this essay suggests that even at present, the Western understanding of Zen has remained essentially static since the 1950s, the time of Koestler. This, of course, is not to say that Westerners are incapable of understanding Zen. Suzuki certainly would not have subscribed to such a view. If such had been his view, how could one explain the numerous volumes of his writing on Zen in English and his frequent visits to America and Europe to lecture on it until nearly the last moment of his death at the age of ninety-five?⁵⁰ Upon his return from one of these visits, when a former Japanese student of Suzuki asked him, “Could Americans understand Zen at all?” he immediately responded: “Do *you* understand it?”⁵¹ Suzuki’s *higan* (悲願), or earnest wish was to communicate to the West and the rest of the world (including his own country) the Zen sensibility, which he justifiably thought was best preserved and developed in what he called “Japanese spirituality,”⁵² and this wish, I believe, is a legitimate impulse that issues forth from Buddhist compassion (spirituality).⁵³ Suzuki’s “nostalgic double journeys” also stem from this Buddhist compassion (or *bosatsudō* 菩薩道; the Bodhisattva ideal), which (“topologically”) manifests “past” and “future” simultaneously, both *ōsō* (往相; “nostalgic journey” to the noumenal/non-dualistic “past” of Buddhist *satori/nirvāṇa*) and *gensō* (還相; “nostalgic journey” back to the “future” of the dualistic phenomenal and the mundane).

the episode of the B-29 bombers, Suzuki’s view of the West is far more sophisticated than Maraldo envisages.

⁴⁹ See also note 41.

⁵⁰ See also Suzuki’s idea on “Eastern” and “Western” mindsets quoted in the introductory part of this essay.

⁵¹ Matsukata 1975.

⁵² There is a parallel between “Japanese spirituality” and other elements of Japanese culture, such as haiku and sushi. They are unique to Japanese culture, but can be appreciated and enjoyed by anyone in the world.

⁵³ Here, one may see, together with critics like Maraldo (1994, p. 338), a tautology in my, and by extension, Suzuki’s logic: spirituality issues forth from spirituality. We must not forget, however, that this seeming “tautology” or a kind of self-referentiality is based on, or rather, issues forth from, the paradoxical logic of *soku-hi* (A is A because A is not-A). In my view, Suzuki expresses this apparent tautology and self-contradiction as “*gō ga gō o yaburu*” (業が業を破る; karma breaks karma [itself]) (SDZ 29, pp. 174, 176-77). To put it differently, “God is God because God is not God.” Herein lies, according to Suzuki, the radical source of the Mahayana sense of compassion and “ethics.” This is also the source of the “nip” rather than the “bite,” on which I will touch below.

V

To conclude, I would like to reiterate that Buddhist compassion/ “ethics” as it emanates from the *soku-hi* logic must not be confused with or judged by the fundamentally dualistic “Western” sense of love and ethics. Zen does not strive to become a panacea for evils. A “Western” sense of ethics regards evils as, so to speak, a “bite,” whereas Zen is a way to see them as a “nip” (no pun intended). According to Anthony Wilden,

[t]he ‘nip’ is paradoxical. It is not a ‘presence made of absence’, but something far more complicated and significant. Without any use of negation, it says: ‘The sign which is now being communicated does not denote what would be denoted by the same act (the bite) which this act (the nip) denotes.’⁵⁴

A “presence made of absence” is the “bite,” where eternity and time or the infinite and the finite “cross/bite” each other (see Figure 1). It is Hitler’s concentration camps seen from the Lévinasian sense of ethics; it is also Eliot’s “still point of the turning world” in the midst of the bombing of London by V-II rockets. The “nip,” so to speak, “deconstructs” and “dis-joints” (see Figure 2) the “biting” pain into “nipping play.” Of course, this does not mean that the “biting” pain decreases or disappears (in the common sense). One expects such a decrease or disappearance in the dualistic realm after God separated light (good) from darkness (evil). The elbow does not bend outward. This is what the Zen monk Ryōkan 良寛 (1758–1831) meant in saying that the best way to deal with calamities is to meet them. This is also what Hakuin 白隠 (1685–1768), another Zen monk, meant when he said: “Enlisting the help of other foolish saints, one tries to fill the well [of suffering] with snow.” “Nip” in Zen “ethics” is not to negate interference (i.e., ethical acts); rather, it points to the paradox of the ultimate futility of interference without the sense of its ultimate futility. In other words, God is God because God is not God, or, to quote an anonymous haiku:

<i>Hama made wa</i>	浜までは	Up to the beach,
<i>Ama mo mino kiru</i>	海女も蓑着る	Even the divers wear a straw raincoat:
<i>Shigure kana</i>	時雨かな	The autumn rain!

⁵⁴ Wilden 1977, pp. 151–52.

It is in this kind of context that we should read Suzuki's seemingly shocking remarks: "[Zen] may be found wedded to anarchism or fascism, communism or democracy, atheism or idealism, or any political or economic dogmatism."⁵⁵ With his Mahayana Bodhisattva ideal of compassion, Suzuki deplored the then-escalating arms race between Soviet Russia and America, but at the same time he said that the extinction of humankind through nuclear wars might also be acceptable.⁵⁶ I think that Suzuki's apparent contradiction makes perfect sense as *soku-hi* logic, based on the "topological moment" of the creation and destruction of the entire universe. We must not forget that Zen's seemingly benign idyllic image as expressed in such sayings as *yana-gi wa midori, hana wa kurenai* (柳は緑、花は紅; willow is green and flower is red) and *hibi kore kōjitsu* (日々是好日; every day is a good day) is "topologically" one and the same with a cosmic holocaust. Suzuki says:

Peace in the realm of spirituality (*reisei*) transcends the extinction of humankind or some such. It is irrelevant to whatever scientists or historians say. This is because the peace I am talking about is not affected by the length of time nor the width of space. Unless we gain this kind of peace, no matter how much we make the commotion of a peace movement, it will end up being the hollow noise of a trumpet.⁵⁷

It is only through this kind of radical thought, I believe, that we can effectively address the hidden complacency of the "Western" sense of love and ethics, which fails to face its ironic propensity to engender and support the very evils it seeks to counter. Suzuki's "nostalgic double journeys" both to "Japanese spirituality" and to the "modern West," a manifestation of his Bodhisattva ideal based on the *soku-hi* logic, will enable us to see these unsolvable "evils" not as ironical "bites," but as profoundly paradoxical "nips."

⁵⁵ Suzuki 1959, p. 63.

⁵⁶ SDZ 27, p. 264; SDZ 28, p. 549; SDZS 3, p. 287–88. This will effectively refute stereotypical caricatures of Zen as exemplified in the following passage:

They [the purveyors of Zen] blithely cite Jōshū's injunction to "wash your bowls," and insist that true Zen is to be found in the midst of daily activity—in "chopping wood and carrying water." . . . (Note that the examples of "daily activities" invariably recall the tranquil existence of a medieval forest monastery, rather than the unrelenting technologized chaos of modern urban life.) (Sharf 1994, p. 50.)

⁵⁷ SDZ 28, p. 555.

Abbreviations

- SDMS *Suzuki Daisetsu mikōkai shokan* 鈴木大拙未公開書簡.
 SDZ *Suzuki Daisetsu zenshū* 鈴木大拙全集.
 SDZS *Suzuki Daisetsu zadan shū* 鈴木大拙座談集.

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