

## Movements

Dora Fischer-Barnicol

When I received the invitation to contribute to this memorial volume for Nishitani Keiji and began to recollect our meetings and conversations, the notion of '*Werdegang*' came to mind. The term is difficult to translate, the nuances of meaning multifarious: '*Werdegang*' as 'evolution'. I thought of how the German translation of Nishitani's book *Was ist Religion?* (*What is Religion?*) evolved to its final state. But also '*Werdegang*' as a kind of movement, a progression. And memories of our walks kept recurring. Perhaps it is the manner of movement that made me regard these two as being related. Going for a walk is not hiking; it is not strenuous and has no need of a destination. It is movement which is sufficient unto itself, a progression. Thus, '*Werdegang*' might be described as the imperceptible filling up of a given form, a form that proved to be the movement itself.

In 1976 Nishitani visited Heidelberg for the last time. He arrived in late autumn and it was unusually cold and gloomy. Because it was damp and there was frost, the trees were almost leafless. Our first walk took us to a narrow path just above the mountain cemetery. There was nothing special or extraordinary there, not even a nice view, just the delicious smell of decaying leaves and, unfortunately, a cold drizzle. I was already feeling a bit guilty, not having offered something more worthwhile to him and the guest he had brought along, when Nishitani said: "How wonderful it is to walk along such a natural path." I mention this small event, because even now I regard it as a sort of key to the easiness of our being together then, and later.

Originally Nishitani had planned to stay in Heidelberg for only four days, but eventually he stayed for two weeks. At first I felt that I should provide a schedule for him. At my request Rainer Specht at the University of Mannheim invited him to his special seminar on Hegel's logic. Nishitani accepted the invitation, but, I felt, mainly because he wanted to see Rainer Specht again and didn't want to disappoint me. I also attended the seminar, and later on, when I talked to Sensei, I had to confess that I had understood next to nothing. All night long he tried to answer my questions and explain the "identity" problem until he finally smiled and said: "Leave Hegel alone; a philosophical girl should not worry about things like that." I have felt relieved ever since.

Fortunately, the scheduled days passed quickly, and Nishitani was able to

follow his own rhythm again. We had the first snow, and he never got tired of looking at the huge Christmas trees that are put up in the squares of Heidelberg at the beginning of December. Hot spiced wine and sausages from the Christmas fair, toys for the children, a students' bar at Handschuhsheim with its out-of-date existentialist atmosphere, where we felt terribly old ("or maybe younger than the students"), and, again and again, long walks through the silent forest. We recited each other poems and moved them as close to each other as possible. Maybe it was at this point, imperceptibly at first, that the '*Werdegang*,' the evolution of my translation started. An awareness for the coloring and the tone of words brought with it also an awareness of the differences in our languages. And isn't it only through an awareness of distances that we can hope to bridge the gap?

In 1978, at the end of May, I received a telephone call from Fritz Kroeger, an old friend, who had just returned from Japan. He told me he had a great assignment for me: he asked me whether I was willing to translate Nishitani's book, *What is Religion?* By that time two thirds of the book had been translated into English. Fritz Kroeger, the altruistic mediator, had already recruited Dr. Siegfried Unseld (Suhrkamp and Insel Verlag) to publish the book. He laid before me the plan that Nishitani and Takeichi Akihiro had conceived. In his letter to me Professor Takeichi wrote:

"First, Mrs. Fischer-Barnicol should translate those parts of the English version (chapters of this translation were being published in the *Eastern Buddhist*) into German that have been corrected by the author himself—they differ slightly from the Japanese text. The English version should be considered as the basic text. Later Dr. Claudia Lennel should correct this translation by comparing it with both the Japanese and the English texts. This improved version is then to be sent to Professor Nishitani, to be corrected by him. After he has checked it, Dr. Eberhard Scheiffele, who is currently employed at the University of Kyoto . . . will correct it once again, paying special attention to the German philosophical terms, etc.; as philosopher as well as philologist we hold him in high esteem. Thus the German edition could well emerge as the best of all versions . . . "

As Nishitani, probably encouraged by the progress of the English translation, had now taken the initiative in launching a German translation as well, we had to make use of this opportunity. For many years there had been unanimous agreement among friends and scholars that a German translation of *What is Religion?* was long overdue. There had been several such attempts in the past, but without the cooperation of Nishitani they were not granted any success. I was rather apprehensive at first, but I gladly declared my readiness to accept the assignment as given, even though I considered the planned procedure of this translation-expedition to be overly complicated.

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Would the team of translators ever get to the open terrain of the text itself? Or would all their energy be spent in figuring out which road to take? Not to mention another difficulty which had to be overcome in order to guarantee the success of the project: how to persuade Nishitani to sacrifice his precious time for yet another tough and tedious translation? He had, indeed, declared his willingness to correct the translation, if necessary; but knowing that he was occupied with so many different things and knowing also his very special feeling for time, I had serious doubts as to whether we would be able to meet the publisher's deadline, no matter how generous it might be. Another problem that could not be underestimated was the English language, which would be the basis for my translation as I could not fall back on the Japanese original. English differs substantially from German in that it doesn't have the latter's abstract concepts or its beautiful cyclopean word-formation and syntax. Thus, in English, philosophical notions frequently have to be paraphrased by using untypical word-formations. The result in the translation is a loss either of originality or of precision. Hence, from a dreary, rainy holiday in the Black Forest I wrote to Nishitani that I would trust myself with this assignment only if he promised to sketch the route the translators were to take, that is, to be something like a 'scout', a 'pathfinder.' Only then would there be a chance of our ever 'baking fresh bread.'

Nishitani answered right away: "I had just finished writing a letter to you and stepped outside to give it to my friend (who was leaving for Germany). At that very moment the postman arrived and handed me a whole bunch of different things. What a surprise to find your letter from Leimib among them. I had almost the same feeling that people in the old days used to refer to as 'the hand of God.' Please, accept the offer by Insel Verlag. You would thus create an immense happiness for me. I am afraid, though, that my book is not 'freshly baked bread' at all; it is rather 'mouldy academic bread,' but that does not really matter. I think you will be able to turn it into 'fresh bread.' . . . Then I will do everything in my power to ensure that we do get 'new bread,' something fresher than the old sandwiches." He kept his promise.

The success of the translation was also due to Dr. Scheiffele's dedication. He regularly presented Nishitani Sensei with excellent revisions of my manuscript and discussed them with him. Without Dr. Scheiffele the German translation would not have obtained its present lucidity. (Dr. Lennel, because of other obligations, had decided not to take part.)

A translator serves as mouthpiece for someone else's thoughts. But therein lies the problem. How to adequately render in German, at one remove as it were, a text originally conceived and written in Japanese, a language with wholly different properties? Not that I was worried that my translation would be insufficiently German, but would the author's voice still be heard, his tone

and rhythm still be detectable? Part of the translator's craft is to convey exactly the quality of 'strangeness' from the original to the translation without departing from the normal usage of his own language. When, for example, should one sacrifice literalness, not at the expense of content, but to preserve a deeper sense of meaning? And how to preserve content while remaining comprehensible? Every bit as important as an exact translation of technical terms would be the translation of Nishitani's way of speaking and writing. Searching out the contours of his language in individual words or their flow would be a matter for analysis and careful judgement on a sentence to sentence basis: a too ready acceptance of the obvious in a word, and one runs the risk of missing the real point, of losing sight of Nishitani's style of thinking, of the flow of meaning, its '*Werdegang*,' which he himself understood as asking questions rather than providing answers.

Naturally enough, we weren't always in agreement as to how these aims might best be achieved. I was opposed, for instance, to using the term 'personality' ('*Persönlichkeit*') in regard to God. I considered it an 'anthropomorphic heresy.' Nishitani, however, argued that he was consciously using the term in accordance with Kant and his followers and insisted on using it, even though he understood my objection. Consequently, the English word 'personal,' as an attribute of God, was in most cases translated into German as '*persönlich*,' whereas the German word 'personal' was used only with expressions such as 'problem' ('*Problem*'), 'relation' ('*Beziehung*'), 'reference/bearing' ('*Bezug*'), 'aspect' ('*Aspekt*'), 'point of view' ('*Gesichtspunkt*'), etc., although this was not always done consistently. Another example: in which case does the English word 'real' mean '*wirklich*,' when should it be translated as 'real'? In many cases Nishitani preferred the word 'real,' as he wanted to avoid the implicit effect or consequence, the potentiality ('*Wirkung*') of the word '*wirklich*.' In the case of 'to realize' we almost always used the rather dull word '*realisieren*,' because in German it has the same dual meaning of 'seeing, perceiving' and of 'making something come true, establishing a reality.'

The translation of Japanese terms and basic expressions was more difficult. '*Ego-teki*,' for instance, had been translated into English as '*perichoresis*' or '*circumincessio*,' a Christian term from the doctrine of the Trinity. As we did not want to replace one incomprehensible term with another, we decided to use the expressions '*wechselseitige Durchdringung*' ('mutual penetration') or '*Ineinandersein*' ('being within one another'), thus approaching the Christian concept of the 'One being within the Other' of the Holy Trinity. Then there is the word '*soku*' (i.e., the essential inseparability of two entities), a word that relates opposites to each other and keeps them in suspense, thus expressing an inverse correspondence. In this case we used the Latin word '*sive*' (life-sive-

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death, death-*sive*-life), that had already been established in the translations of Nishida's works. I could go on giving examples of similar difficulties.

When the translation of the last chapter was completed, I suggested to Nishitani to slightly alter the final paragraph. His answer was: "Regarding the suggestion you made in your last letter (15th October 1981): it concerns the final paragraph of Chapter 6. I myself do not like this paragraph any more. It seems to me to be a superfluous addition. But at the same time I hesitate to eliminate it altogether. It is in the Japanese and English editions and it will remain there. I would suggest the following modification—how do you like this: 'True equality . . . is an equality in love. Only on the field of emptiness, *which is an integral part of the structure of all highly developed forms of religion*, does this become possible. Unless man's thinking and doing take place on *such a religious field*, the various problems that beset humanity can never really be solved.'" (I have underlined the new passages.) This was yet another example of Nishitani's thinking in terms of community, of unity with others; a way of thinking which, I hope, has been also having an impact upon my personal '*Werdegang*.'

When we met again in Kyoto in 1983 the German book had been published, and Nishitani already spoke of 'liquidating' certain passages he considered too rigid, looking for subtler transitions. While taking walks on the hill near his house we decided for the time being to leave the text unchanged. The process of its formation, its '*Werdegang*,' was completed. With all its consistencies and inconsistencies 'our' book had finally been born.

It was the beginning of fall and the persimmons shone brightly in the gardens of Kyoto.