

VIEWS & REVIEWS

Cosmology and Metanoia:

A Buddhist Path to Process Thought for the West

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IN RECENT MEMORY, much worthwhile literature has appeared regarding the complexities of Alfred North Whitehead's relationship to Buddhist metaphysics. Without doubt, process thought has served as a fruitful path for Western scholars in their efforts to gain a more refined appreciation of the cultural vision and religious insight of the East. Generally, this literature presumes that the strangeness of Buddhist thought to the West can be overcome, or at least lessened, by interpreting it with a process metaphysics. According to this interpretive strategy, in which the familiar is used to render the exotic more understandable, Whitehead's process metaphysics serves as a heuristic device for overcoming the alien character of Buddhist thought to the West. While acknowledging the usefulness of this approach, it should be noted that the strategy presupposes that Whitehead's thought is in fact no stranger to the Western intellectual tradition. I believe this presupposition needs to be called into question.

In presuming Whitehead's familiarity to and compatibility with the West, his interpreters overlook an opportunity for appreciating process thought as a critique of modernity arising from a religious standpoint beyond it. With this missed opportunity in mind, I propose another route which reverses the usual approach of using process thought to interpret Buddhism. Given the current results of inter-religious dialogue, it might now be possible to use our understanding of Buddhist religious experience to interpret the strangeness and virtually unprecedented character of Whitehead's metaphysics to the West. In effect, Buddhism

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might offer a path through which the West might make Whitehead's process cosmology its own. The reflections that follow are guided by two hunches. First, although this new approach requires a religious reading of Whitehead, it is a reading that is rooted in a Buddhist, not a Christian cosmology. Second, I believe this approach will put us in a better position to appreciate process thought not only as a critique of modernity, but as a religious vision which opens up post-modern religious possibilities for both Christianity and Buddhism.

These reflections are organized as follows: (1) an appreciation of the alien character of Whitehead's cosmology to the *Weltanschauung* of traditional Christian theism and the presuppositions of the Enlightenment, (2) an argument for recognizing the Buddhist warrants for Whitehead's cosmology by means of a brief comparison of Alfred North Whitehead with Nishida Kitarō, and (3) a religious interpretation of Whitehead's cosmology based on the debate between Tanabe Hajime and Nishida Kitarō on the meaning of absolute nothingness.

I

God and the world stand over against each other, expressing the final metaphysical truth that appetitive vision and physical enjoyment have equal claim to priority in creation. But no two actual entities can be torn apart: each is all in all. Thus each temporal occasion embodies God, and is embodied in God. In God's nature, permanence is primordial and flux is derivative from the world: in the World's nature, flux is primordial and permanence is derivative from God. Also the World's nature is a primordial datum for God; and God's nature is a primordial datum for the World. Creation achieve the reconciliation of permanence and flux when it has reached its final term which is everlastingness—the Apotheosis of the World.¹

These words, taken from the final pages of *Process and Reality*, are

¹ Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality* (New York: Macmillan, 1929), p. 529.

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confounding for their seeming lack of consistency with the elaborate metaphysical *itinerarium* which precedes them, yet arresting for the compelling religious vision they express. It is in vain that we search for a foundation or even an anticipation of this thought in the rationalism of the West's Enlightenment. Nevertheless, the power of the religious vision expressed herein is no more alien to the West's intellectual heritage than the strangeness of Jesus' proclamation that the Kingdom of God is *at hand*. It is the very strangeness of this vision that promises to Christianity a restoration of what the modern spirit has taken from it: the lived sense of the immediacy of the divine to the world and the fulfillment of time in this immediacy.²

Both his secular critics and Christian theologians have interpreted the late Whitehead as an apologist for Christianity. Certainly by the time of the writing of *Process and Reality* God has become a paramount issue for his metaphysics. How can contemporary Christianity, which has yet to overcome fully Pascal's modern dichotomy of the philosophical and religious meaning of the divine, affirm Whitehead's metaphysical God as the living God? The Christian theological tradition, quite as much as modern secular thought, struggles with the task of incorporating Whitehead's religious vision into its own. If, as Whitehead claims, Buddhism is "a metaphysics generating a religion,"³ then Christianity must be recognized as a religion perennially in search of a metaphysics, and for this reason, a religion whose lack of an adequate metaphysical conception of God is both the index of its incompleteness and the hallmark of its own unsettled religiosity. Instead of metaphysics, Christianity looks to the "tremendous fact"⁴ of Christ; a fact that can be generated from neither neo-Platonic nor any other brand of metaphysics; a fact that ultimately defeats metaphysics by its eternal unwillingness to be bound by conceptualization. If this "tremendous fact" resists any attempt at being encompassed within the horizon of the Western metaphysical tradition (as Whitehead argues), might its religious meaning be interpreted from within the intellectual horizon of the East?

² Thomas Altizer, "The Buddhist Ground of Whitehead's God," *Process Studies* 5/4 (1975): 227-236.

³ Alfred North Whitehead, *Religion in the Making* (New York: Meridian Books, 1960), p. 50.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

This would at first seem to be an unlikely possibility. In Whitehead's interpretation, Buddhism is "the most colossal example in history of applied metaphysics" the defect of which is that a metaphysical system is "a neat little system of thought, which thereby over-simplifies its expression of the world."⁵ In this respect, it is Christianity and not Buddhism which should be more open to the historical novelty of "fact." Yet "fact," for Whitehead, refers not only to the novelty of the Christ-event asserted by Christian belief, but carries with it a peculiar meaning that lays claim to a privileged position within his metaphysics. After arguing that any "summary conclusion" regarding the meaning of the order of nature (such as "The Absolute," "Brahma," or "God") jumps from the conviction about the existence of order to "the easy assumption that there is an ultimate reality which, in some unexplained way, is to be appealed to for the removal of perplexity," Whitehead offers the intriguing comment that this "summary conclusion" constitutes "the great refusal of rationality to assert its rights." Instead, he suggests that "the sheer statement, of what things are, may contain elements explanatory of why things are."⁶

More simply put, Whitehead insists that every fact has its own intrinsic reality, or *value*.

Realization therefore is in itself the attainment of value. But there is no such thing as mere value. Value is the outcome of limitation. The definite finite entity is the selected mode which is the shaping of attainment; apart from such shaping into individual matter of fact there is no attainment. The mere fusion of all that there is would be the nonentity of indefiniteness. *The salvation of reality is in its obstinate, irreducible, matter-of-fact entities, which are limited to be no other than themselves. (emphasis mine)*⁷

Perhaps no other aspect of Whitehead's thought registers with more strangeness than his assertion of the salvific meaning of "obstinate, irreducible, matter-of-fact entities." This assertion, however, is alien

⁵ Ibid., p. 50.

⁶ Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* (New York: Free Press, 1925), p. 92.

⁷ Ibid., p. 94.

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not only to the ethical monotheism of Western Christianity. By wedding "fact" to "value," Whitehead unites what the rationalism of the Enlightenment divides. It is, in effect, a critique of modernity from a standpoint foreign to it.⁸

Whitehead's debt to Buddhist thought is a problem that will continue to be debated. However, not only their affinities, but also their multiple differences testify to his relationship with the Buddhist religion vision. The soteriology of matter-of-fact entities is but one example. This being the case, the relationship of Whitehead's process metaphysics to the Buddhist philosophy of Nishida Kitarō is merits our attention.

II

Nishida and Whitehead present cosmologies of such daunting complexity that, in trying to compare them, only a sketch of the manifold problems for interpretation can be offered here. Two issues suggest themselves for special attention: (1) their preference for the "immediacy" of concrete experience in developing a metaphysics, and (2) the quality of "totality" in their respective cosmologies.

Both Nishida and Whitehead are concerned with the immediacy of concrete experience as a metaphysical underpinning for cosmology. Whitehead, addressing the "fallacy of misplaced concreteness," argues against the "abstractions" of being and substance in favor of a metaphysics of "presentational immediacy." As this concept holds certain affinities with Nishida's views regarding "pure experience," so also Whitehead's concern with the fallacy of misplaced concreteness parallels in some respects Nishida's preoccupation with an "existential matrix ontology."⁹ Experience is factorable into different levels ("worlds") based on an ontology of latticing apriorities of experiential concreteness. Most abstract are the objects of the physical world; in-

⁸ For a discussion of the post-modern possibilities of Whitehead's thought, see Thomas Altizer, "The Buddhist Ground of Whitehead's God," *Process Studies* 5/4 (1975): 227-236.

⁹ The phrase is taken from the analysis of David Dilworth. See his "Introduction: Nishida's Critique of Religious Consciousness," in Nishida Kitaro, *Last Writings* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1987), p. 14.

creasingly concrete (experientially) and increasingly self-contradictory (logically) are the biological world and the historical world. The most concrete and self-contradictory level of all is the "place of absolute nothingness" (*mu no basho*). Clearly Nishida shared Whitehead's dissatisfaction with the "misplaced concreteness" of being and substance and looked for an alternative in the immediacy of concrete experience.¹⁰

If "immediacy" is a shared value in their respective metaphysics, the notion of "totality" is a common characteristic of their respective cosmologies. This is apparent in a comparison of Whitehead's notion of process and Nishida's views regarding the "place of absolute nothingness." Both Nishida and Whitehead attempt to account for historical reality with categories which escape the presuppositions of both Aristotelian logic and Hegelian dialectics. In Nishida's case, this means that the historical world of "action" arises from the "place" of absolute nothingness, which constitutes "the matrix of all becoming." Within this matrix, "the universal vanishes and at the same time there is immediate transparency from particular to particular."¹¹ Whitehead understands "process" as an ongoing "concrescence of prehensions." This leads him to make the following extraordinary claim:

In a certain sense, everything is everywhere in all times. For every location involves an aspect of itself in every other location. Thus every spacio-temporal standpoint mirrors the world.¹²

Both Nishida and Whitehead are in agreement that every event is virtually present in every other event. Whitehead seems to affirm the "immediate transparency from particular to particular," when he claims

¹⁰ These similarities, however, should not obscure several important differences which distinguish these two thinkers on the issue of immediacy. Nishida holds that not only being, but dynamism as well must be counted as abstractions arising from the ultimate apriority of absolute nothingness. In contrast, Whitehead recognizes beings as an abstraction, but not dynamism. In this respect, it would seem that Whitehead's notion of process is not fully congruent with Nishida's views regarding the "eternal now."

¹¹ *Hatarakumono kara miru mono e* (From the Acting to the Seeing) in *Nishida Kitarō Zenshū* 4:207.

¹² Alfred North Whitehead, *Science in the Modern World*, p. 133.

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that "each is all in all."¹³ Nishida extrapolates his understanding of the interpenetration of all implied by his matrix ontology with Nicholas of Cusa's image of the infinite circle whose center is everywhere. Both images suggest what might be called a "cosmology of totality" in which all dualism and distinction are overcome by the coincidence of opposites. This feature common to their respective cosmologies can be clearly seen in their way of addressing the problem of the relationship between God and the world.

In his final essay, "The Logic of Place and the Religious World-view," Nishida clarifies his understanding of God and the world as a "contradictory self-identity" (*mujunteki jikodōitsu*).¹⁴ Transcendence and immanence, absolute and relative, permanence and flux, God and creature: all the differentiations that reason imposes on "pure experience" are unified into a paradoxical totality of self-identity when grounded in the place of absolute nothingness. Somewhat similarly, Whitehead, while addressing the problem of the "dipolarity" of God, comments:

All opposites are elements in the nature of things, and are incorrigibly there. The concept of God is the way in which we understand this incredible fact—that what cannot be, yet is.¹⁵

Whitehead's position approaches Nishida's cosmology in that the totality and immediacy of God and world can be apprehended only in the abandoning of object-logic and its principles of non-contradiction and simple self-identity. Does not Whitehead's notion of the "salvation of reality by the co-inherence of fact and value" express the "suchness" and "original naturalness" (*jinen*) of God and the world as much as Nishida's position regarding the "eschatology of the ordinary" reflects Whitehead's soteriology of the "obstinate, irreducible matter of fact entity"? In order to defend this vision of the mutual embodiment of God and world, Whitehead and Nishida are required to sustain an uncompromised non-dualism which presupposes the coincidence of opposites as its logical form. If this is in fact the case, then we must also ask if Whitehead does not approximate Nishida's notion

¹³ Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, p. 529.

¹⁴ Nishida Kitaro, *Last Writings*, p. 69.

¹⁵ Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, p. 531.

of absolute nothingness in his process cosmology.¹⁶ For both Nishida and Whitehead, nature and consciousness, God and world no longer form a dualism of subject and object. Both elements are immediately apprehended in an encompassing "total presence."¹⁷ It is only within this totality, the "place" wherein every contradiction comes to be seen as a paradoxical self-identity, that the salvation of reality can be discerned in the matter-of-fact.

¹⁶ As with the suspicion of abstraction and the preference for a concrete logic, the similarities to be noted between "process" and "place" should not be allowed to obscure a significant difference distinguishing Whitehead from Nishida. Following Charles Hartshorne, it should be remembered that in Whitehead's understanding of the process theory of creativity, "universal relativity" implies an *asymmetrical* (one-way) causality in which events flow from past into present. See Charles Hartshorne, *Creative Synthesis and Philosophic Method* (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1970), pp. 205-26. Interpenetration is emergent: antecedents lead to new actualities because concrescence (creative synthesis) takes novelty as its principle. In Nishida's case, "unhindered interpenetration" is construed rather differently. Paraphrasing Hartshorne, it might be described as a *symmetrical* causality in which past, present and future events affect one another simultaneously. Addressing this problem, Abe Masao observes that in place of the uni-directional, successive and "non-reciprocal" (symmetrical) character of creativity in Whitehead's scheme, Nishida is unwilling to assign any priority to conjunction over disjunction in articulating his understanding of historical action in absolute nothingness. The world of historical action therefore is entirely asymmetrical: past, present and future mutually arise out of the "eternal now." See Abe Masao, "Philosophy, Religion and Aesthetics in Nishida and Whitehead," in *The Eastern Buddhist*, 22/2 (1987): 58. While Whitehead's "togetherness" is emergent and novel, Nishida's "eternal now" constitutes the simultaneity of the "unhindered interpenetration of particular and particular" of Kegon (Hua-yen) Buddhism. For a detailed and carefully drawn analysis of this problem *vis-a-vis* Hua-yen Buddhism, see Steve Odin, "The Metaphysics of Cumulative Penetration: Process Theory and Hua-yen Buddhism," in *Process Studies* 11/2 (1981): 65-82.

Hartshorne's distinction between symmetrical and asymmetrical relativity and Abe's views regarding non-reciprocal and reciprocal causality may not be the final word on this complex problem. To my knowledge, no commentator has exhausted the possibilities attending Nishida's views regarding creativity. In the final period of his writings, addressing himself specifically to the problem of "action" in the historical world, Nishida insisted that historical experience involved a movement "from the created to the creating." This position seems to mitigate somewhat a strictly asymmetrical/non-reciprocal interpretation of historical "action" in Nishida's thought.

¹⁷ Thomas Altizer, "The Buddhist Ground of Whitehead's God," p. 233.

III

Tanabe Hajime (1885-1962), Nishida's younger protege at Kyoto Imperial University, offers a "minority report" on the meaning of absolute nothingness. Their collaboration dates from roughly 1911 and continued in Kyoto after Tanabe's studies in Germany with Husserl and Heidegger. However, beginning with his lectures in 1930, Tanabe became increasingly critical of the *Nishida tetsugaku*, especially the notion of "place" as a metaphor for absolute nothingness. During the war period (1941-1945), Tanabe underwent a personal crisis which led to a painful and gradual metanoia that profoundly transformed his understanding of philosophy. Starting in 1941 (through the good offices of his student, Takeuchi Yoshinori) the influence of Pure Land Buddhist texts is increasingly discernable in his lectures. These developments led to the publication in 1946 of *Philosophy as Metanoetics* (*Zangedō toshite no tetsugaku*).¹⁸ Here Tanabe mounts a major criticism of Nishida's position regarding absolute nothingness which has issued in a debate that continues to this day.

Although Tanabe's break with Nishida can be traced (in print at least) from 1930, the publication of *Philosophy as Metanoetics* in 1946 presents a mature crystallization of his position vis-a-vis the *Nishida tetsugaku*. In this work, Tanabe mounts a philosophy of religion from an existential orientation which includes critical commentaries on Kant, Hegel, Schelling, Pascal, Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, Heidegger (and the omnipresent but never mentioned Nishida), guided by the Pure Land teachings of Shinran (1173-1262).

Throughout the work, Tanabe insists that his aim is not to offer a philosophical reflection about the meaning of repentance (*zange*), but rather to argue that philosophy itself necessarily entails repentance, conversion, and the eventual transformation of subjectivity. Only the extent that speculation leads to this transformation can it rightly be called a philosophy. Accordingly, the path of repentance, or "metano-

¹⁸ Tanabe Hajime, *Philosophy as Metanoetics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, Takeuchi Yoshinori trans., 1986). The original Japanese edition was published by Iwanami Shoten in April of 1946.

etics" (*zangedō*) is not merely one philosophy among others, but the only possible philosophy.

"Metanoetics" carries the sense of "meta-noetics," denoting philologically a transcending of noetics, or in other words, a transcending of metaphysical philosophy based on contemplation or intellectual intuition achieved by the use of reason.¹⁹

In effect, Tanabe is envisioning a radical transformation of philosophy as a purely rational and academic discipline. A proper understanding of *meta-noesis* leads neither to what he terms "ordinary mysticism" nor to yet another philosophy based on the "self-power" (*jiriki*) of reason for criticism, but rather a "philosophy that is not a philosophy;" viz. a discourse completely reoriented by the religious experience of transformation by "other-power" (*tariki*). Thus philosophy itself, indeed, the only possible philosophy, is the discourse which results from the awakening of subjectivity through graced transformation and conversion. *Tetsugaku*, in other words, is the path of *metanoia*, *zangedō*.

Tanabe develops the logic of metanoetics, what he calls the "absolute critique," by means of a commentary on Kant's First Critique and Hegel's response to it.²⁰ Pure reason seeks to establish itself as absolute knowledge about reality. Kant recognized the disruption of this quest in his discussion of the antinomies of pure reason. In order to exempt pure reason from self-contradiction, Kant was required to adopt an agnosticism regarding the *noumena*, which led to the exclusion of speculative metaphysics and theology from the realm of pure reason. Hegel also recognized this disruption of reason in the antinomies but, unlike Kant, attempted to reestablish reason (and thereby metaphysics) dialectically by means of a conceptual *Aufhebung*. Tanabe rejects both Kant's agnosticism and Hegel's *Aufhebung* as different solutions which share in the same inappropriate aim of protecting reason from its own innate self-contradiction. Instead, he heightens the problem by denying outright pure reason's ability to criticize itself radically (moving beyond Kant) as well as its ability to overcome antinomy with dialectics (against Hegel's solution). The problem of the limits of

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 2.

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 36-57.

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pure reason is not one of eliminating contradiction, but recognizing reality's profound and abiding self-contradiction. Kantian critical philosophy is not radical enough to meet the requirements of Tanabe's vision of a transformed philosophical discourse, due to Kant's Enlightenment presuppositions, the reason that criticizes is never required to submit itself to criticism. In effect, the transcendental ego remains intact and reason is allowed to retain for itself the principle of non-contradiction.

In contrast to Kant's attempt to preserve reason's "self-power" for criticism and non-contradiction, Tanabe calls reason to "awaken to itself" and its inherent self-contradiction by reaching toward greater self-consciousness.

Just as self-awareness must break through itself by awakening to a consciousness of nothingness, so must the self-criticism of reason run aground on the impassable antinomies of the one and the many, the whole and the individual, infinity and finitude, determinacy and spontaneity, necessity and freedom. Criticism has no alternative but to surrender itself to this crisis of self-disruption, and to overcome it by allowing itself to be shattered to pieces.²¹

Thus far, Tanabe has led us no further than the wastelands of modernity's unbridled criticism. His purpose, however, is not modern in this sense. Given his *faith* that critical reason can be "awakened" through its *zange* and transformed through *tariki*, Tanabe offers a critique of reason that is religious, and I believe, post-modern. If not the synthesis of the Hegelian *Aufhebung*, in what sense is "allowing itself to be shattered to pieces" also an overcoming of reason's absolute disruption?

It is both a matter of destiny and ultimate truth that in the pursuit of full autonomy, reason must finally break down. But where can reason, shattered and sunk into sheer nothingness, find a foothold from which to break out of its crisis by breaking through itself, from which to be transformed and resurrected from nothingness to new being? . . . The depths of reality as a whole can be fathomed only when we are con-

²¹ Ibid., p. 38.

vinced that the absolute consists solely in the transformative power of absolute nothingness.²²

Therefore Kant's critique of reason is not the ultimate standpoint for philosophy, but rather a compromise that leaves the subject intact. Kantian criticism and Hegelian dialectic presume that the subject is a substance and therefore must cling to the principle of non-contradiction. Branding this type of reason the "logic of self-identity" and rejecting the discourse based on it as a "self-power" (*jiriki*) philosophy, Tanabe offers in its place the "absolute critique" in which reason "dies" by surrendering to its innate self-contradiction in the hope of "rising" through the transformative grace of absolute nothingness experienced as other-power (*tariki*).

Implicit in his criticism of Kant and Hegel, however, is a criticism of Nishida. Tanabe pointedly rejects the notion that absolute nothingness can be realized in an aesthetic intuition into an experiential immediacy prior to the opposition of subject and object. True nothingness is not a "pure experience," but rather the transforming event of "other-power." Were the absolute to "exist" immediately (and thereby for it to be intuitable) it would be Being, not nothingness. In order for it to be absolute nothingness, two conditions must be met: (1) it can "exist" only to the extent that it is mediated by the self-negation (*zange*) of the relative, and (2) it cannot arise as a simple negation of the relative, but rather as its absolute negation in which negation itself is negated in a radical affirmation. Since absolute nothingness has no intelligibility or existence apart from the death and resurrection of finite subjectivity, instead of Nishida's metaphor of "place" for absolute nothingness, Tanabe speaks of "absolute mediation."²³ Absolute nothingness, as religious self-awakening, is realized only in the transforming action of other-power. But the "otherness" of *tariki* cannot place it in opposition to the relative or else it would not be the true absolute. This point, on which Tanabe and Nishida are in agreement, leads Tanabe to speak of the mediation of absolute nothingness by relative being, instead of its *basho*, for the metaphor of "place" presumes that the absolute can be known noetically in an aesthetic intuition into the undifferentiated

²² Ibid., p. 39.

²³ Ibid., pp. 151-192.

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immediacy of being when in fact it can be experienced only meta-noetically in the transformation of subjectivity by other-power.

Tanabe's interpretation of absolute nothingness constitutes an important alternative to Nishida's views. Although he never mentions Nishida by name, that Tanabe has his former teacher in mind is abundantly clear to any reader familiar with Nishida's work. Three points are outstanding.

Most fundamentally, Tanabe criticizes Nishida's intuitionism for its failure to grasp true religious consciousness. If the absolute is intuitable, it can be known noetically in contemplation, or what Tanabe calls "ordinary mysticism." This mysticism is "ordinary" in that (1) it takes as its basis the "self-power" (*jiriki*) of speculation (e.g. Hegel) or *ecstasis* (e.g. Plotinus) and is aimed at the recovery of lost immediacy to the absolute, (2) it does not require the death and resurrection of the ego, and (3) it does not arise in the action (event) of other-power. As Christianity objects to Plotinian mysticism for replacing the radical death of subjectivity symbolized by the cross with a pantheistic aesthetic based on an ontology of emanation, so also, Tanabe criticizes Nishida's interpretation of the religious as an intuition into undifferentiated totality.²⁴

Second, Tanabe criticizes Nishida for not distinguishing himself sufficiently from Hegelianism. Hegel recognized the disruption of reason in the Kantian antinomies but thought that this disruption could be overcome in historical dialectics. Hegel, however, is not dialectical enough for Tanabe. Reason's contradiction in the opposition of thesis and antithesis is resolved in a synthesis that restores reason to its former state. This is a disruption, but not the "absolute disruption" that constitutes the death and resurrection of reason and lead to its transformation. Hegel's *Begriff* quite as much as the self-identical reason of the Kantian critique, must deny its own innate self-contradiction. In Tanabe's reading, the Hegelian *Aufhebung* leads inevitably to an intuited totality of Being, not the emptiness (*shunyata*) of true nothingness. Similarly, since Nishida's dialectic of the "absolutely contradictory self-identity" leads toward aesthetically intuited totality, it cannot be accepted as an adequate interpretation of Buddhist nothingness. In Tanabe's view, the negation of negation, understood

²⁴ Ibid., pp. 166-168.

as the restoration of self-identity²⁵ presumes an aesthetic intuition of being, not nothingness as transformative power (*tariki*). Tanabe's quarrel with Nishida parallels somewhat Kierkegaard's criticism of Hegel. Hegel and Nishida presume that truth is a whole which allows it to be apprehended and interpreted conceptually through the intuition of totality. For Kierkegaard and Tanabe on the other hand, truth is fragmented, not total; ironic, not aesthetic. Ultimate truth is known only in the death and resurrection of the self that is the hallmark of faith, not speculation based on the inherent power of reason for self-criticism. It touches the subject intensively, not extensively. It is the grace of that which is other than the self (*tariki*), while not being opposable to the self (the absolute mediation of nothingness) and also not the achievement of self (*jiriki*).

The third major objection that Tanabe raises against Nishida concerns the suitability of the metaphor "place" for absolute nothingness. Tanabe directly contradicts Nishida's text in rejecting the *mu no basho* as the "abstract universal."²⁶ Once again, Tanabe objects that the aestheticism and intuitionism implicit in the notion of a *basho* of nothingness cannot account for concretely historical and properly ethical existence because it does not take the *metanoia* of the relative and its transformation by other-power as its criteria. Tanabe develops his point by drawing on the Pure Land Buddhist doctrines of *ōsō* (going to the Pure Land) and *gensō* (the Bodhisattva's return to this world).²⁷ The standpoint of *basho* lacks the idea of *gensō* by reason of its ethically indeterminate character. Only when the religious is understood as the even of other-power can the concrete socio-historical "direction of transformation" be determined. Instead of *basho*, which remains in the realm of noetics, Tanabe holds up the meta-noetics of "absolute mediation" in which subjectivity is transformed.²⁸ The absolute does not exist as a totality disclosed in an intuition into undifferentiated experiential immediacy. It has no existence whatsoever apart from the finite being of the relative. In place of Nishida's immediacy and totality, Tanabe argues for a concrete, historical and

²⁵ Ibid., p. 57.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 11. Nishida clearly considers it the concrete universal.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 11.

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 18-19.

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ethical mediation of absolute nothingness without recourse to what is in Tanabe's assessment the abstract universal of "place."

IV

These deliberations have been guided by a belief that the unprecedented nature of Whitehead's metaphysics in the Western intellectual tradition needs to be better appreciated, especially for its post-modern possibilities, and that this might be achieved by reversing the normal procedure of using process metaphysics to interpret Buddhism. Reading Whitehead from the perspective of *Nishida tetsugaku* serves to underscore to alien quality of process thought to the Western intellectual tradition by suggesting some Buddhist warrants for its metaphysics and cosmology. If a Buddhist reading of Whitehead highlights the distance of his texts from his Western audience, perhaps an interpretation from the perspective of Tanabe's religious critique of immediacy and totality might lessen this distance by suggesting a way for the West to appropriate the post-modern religious vision underlying Whitehead's process cosmology.

Whitehead's cosmos is not simply the quantum world of Planck, Heisenberg and Bohr. It is instead a cosmos fully known only in a religious apprehension. Undoubtedly a religious interpretation is required to account fully for the obstinate interest that we witness late in Whitehead's career regarding the paradoxes of God and world, primordial and consequent natures of the divine, permanence and flux. This point confronts us immediately with the problem of what kind of religious apprehension is most suited to Whitehead's cosmos. In this paper, I have argued for the suitability of the Buddhist-oriented philosophy of the Kyoto School for interpreting Whitehead to the West. The Kyoto School offers us two figures whose philosophical positions are clearly guided by the religious insight of Mahayana Buddhism, yet who present differing views on the nature of its religious experience. If Nishida's intuitive religiosity of immediacy and totality helps Whitehead's Western interpreters to appreciate more fully the novelty of his metaphysics, perhaps Tanabe's metanoetic transformation of immediacy and totality will suggest a way for the West to awaken to Whitehead's religious vision.

Whitehead's cosmos is not the world of the Greek *logos*. The

Western intellectual tradition annuls the actuality of the world by subordinating the immediacy of experience to what transcends it. Dichotomy is introduced into the heart of actuality requiring the world to be known as something other than itself: *logos*. The dichotomy in the Western consciousness is reflected in the West's cosmology as well. Creation, object, fact, temporality, etc., appear in the Western cosmos as formal opposites of subjectivity.

In the Enlightenment period, this dichotomous cosmos and consciousness was exaggerated through the dialectical use of reason. In this respect, modernity presents us with a peculiar gnosticism.²⁹ It is gnostic in that it promotes a negative relationship between fact and value as a means of denying what Whitehead affirms: the salvation of the world by matter-of-fact entities. Process metaphysics underscores the gnostic plight of modernity. The dualities of nature and consciousness, God and world, long to be restored to their concrete immediacy and totality. The fact that Nishida's view regarding the "eschatology of the ordinary" seems to be the closest analogue to Whitehead's soteriology suggests once again the possibility that Whitehead's process cosmos can be better understood by the West if it turns away from its own modernity and looks to the religious vision of Buddhism.

This latter point suggests the appropriateness of appreciating Whitehead's philosophical achievement as a particularly creative and singular example of the West's longing to overcome the self-alienation at the heart of its own dualistic subjectivity. Process thought presents us with a concrete example of a post-modern cosmology calling for a post-modern consciousness. Whitehead's cosmos arises when the West overcomes what it learned during its Enlightenment: "the great refusal of rationality to assert its rights." But it must be noted immediately that the rationality Whitehead has in mind is not the Enlightenment's artificially narrowed notion of instrumental reason, but rather a *ratio*

²⁹ Eric Voegelin's famous diagnosis of modernity naturally comes to mind. Without wanting to ignore the relationship that may exist between Whitehead's process metaphysics and Voegelin's ideas regarding the "tension of existence," for present purposes the term "gnosticism" refers simply to the modern separation of fact and value. For a discussion of process thought as a critique of gnosticism in this sense, see Thomas Altizer, "The Buddhist Ground of Whitehead's God," p. 233.

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awakened and transformed by the immediacy and totality of the real. If Whitehead's cosmology arises through the liberation of reason, the post-modern consciousness appropriate to this cosmos arises not through a direct conceptual application of metaphysics, but through a *metanoia* in which the death and resurrection of reason reflects in formal logic the death and resurrection of subjectivity in the religious experience of existential transformation.

Thus, Whitehead presents modernity with a new religious language which requires the transformation of modernity's preference for criticism. *Process and Reality* confronts us with a discourse which requires an awakening of subjectivity in order to be fully apprehended. In a real sense, Whitehead's process cosmos will be "known" finally by the West only when it practices something akin to Tanabe's metanoetics: i.e., forswearing any claim to establish absolute knowledge through criticism in the hope that, through the death and resurrection of reason and the transformation of subjectivity, ordinary language itself might become the mediation of truth which transcends criticism. In fact, Whitehead himself may have been practicing something very much akin to Tanabe's *zangedō*. Especially in the final part of *Process and Reality* Whitehead seems to move from the establishment of his cosmology by means of his metaphysics more and more deeply into a critique of this cosmology by means of his religious vision. We witness, in the final passages of this difficult text, a gradual negation of his own categories. In a way that is difficult to reconcile with the reflections that have preceded it, Whitehead claims that "God and world stand over against each other . . ." even while he asserts that ". . . each is all in all."³⁰ Here, not only the language of dichotomy but also the language of totality have undergone a *zange* in the hope of mediating a religious vision whose meaning Whitehead's cosmology does not exhaust. Nishida's logic of "place" helps us to establish the kinship of this cosmology with the Buddhist heritage. Tanabe's meta-noetic logic suggests a way that the post-modern longing of the West might find in this cosmos a fulfillment.

³⁰ Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, p. 529.