

## THE PLACE OF JAPANESE PHILOSOPHY

English translation of 日本の哲学の場所: 欧米から見た□  
日本の哲学

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For the first time in the twenty-first century, philosophy is headed towards becoming philosophically universal. Although philosophers have aimed at such universality from the beginning, they have been bound, for the most part, by cultural assumptions that have blocked the path before them. This is a rather bold statement to make for a legacy that reaches back over twenty-five centuries, but I know of no humbler way to express what seems to be taking place. The fact is, the philosophical tradition from the pre-Socratic era to the present has suffered from a certain failure of coincidence with its own aims that have become too much of a problem to ignore any longer. The full story of how this internal contradiction became a habit of thought, and how these challenges were systematically parried, may have to wait for the wisdom of hindsight. For now, it is enough to recognize that the cracks in the habit are too wide for it to hold together much longer.

The idea of philosophical universality, as we have come to know it, is a rather peculiar logical mixture. To make this clear, first consider the following two propositions:

- (a) Language is universal.
- (b) English is a universal language.

On the surface, both statements seem to be true enough, but the adjective *universal* has different logical functions in each of them. In the case of language as such, the term refers both to a synchronic historical fact that is at the same time a diachronic fact. That is to say, independent of culture, time, and economic and political conditions, there is not, nor has there ever been, a human society without language. But in the case of the English tongue, the claim is only synchronically, not diachronically, universal. Even if English should in fact become the second language of every human society on earth, this would still be conditioned by historical circumstances.

It was not always so and there is no reason to assume it will remain so forever. Nor does this disallow the possibility of other equally universal languages. The idea of universality allows for enough ambiguity that it can be applied to the general notion of language and to the dominant tongue of the present without the two propositions contradicting each other.

Now consider two more propositions:

- (a) Philosophy is universal.
- (b) The Western philosophical tradition is a universal philosophy.

Logically, they are of the same type, but the contradiction is more problematic. The claim that philosophy as such is universal implies that there is no society in which philosophy has nothing to say, just as there is no society that does not have a contribution to make to philosophy. To accept this claim is to orient thought towards the pursuit of truth wherever it is to be found; to dispute it is to forfeit that pursuit for bigotry. On the contrary, the statement that the particular philosophical tradition of the West, in all its variety of forms and throughout its long and illustrious history, constitutes a universal philosophy, in the end is a mere synchronic fact, not a diachronic one. There is no doubt that Western philosophy has been studied and applied across times and cultures, and in that sense it qualifies as *de facto* universal. But it is not universal in the same sense in which philosophy itself is. Its universality is that of a *historically dominant particular*. The fact that this dominance has lasted so long tends to blur the distinction between philosophy and Western philosophy, and thus to exclude the claim of other philosophical forms to universal relevance.

However, there is one important difference between philosophy and language. Whereas a particular language like English can absorb elements from other languages in the process of becoming dominant, it cannot open itself to the basic structures of other languages without losing its identity. There is no such thing as a “linguistic forum” in which different languages can communicate with each other through a shared grammar. Philosophy, on the other hand, is of its nature a forum for dialogue, and as such, not only can extend itself across particular traditions, but must do so. In other words, it is committed from the start to making the universality of historical dominance subservient to the universal search for truth.

It is this transition from the universality of cultural dominance to a properly philosophical universality that has begun to take place in our

times. Resistance to the change in conventional thinking is understandably strong, though rarely expressed directly. One of the clearest statements ironically comes from Martin Heidegger who, despite the influence of Taoist and Buddhist thought on his turn away from metaphysics, obscured the patrimony in an insistence on the dominance of the Western philosophical tradition:

The often heard expression “Western-European philosophy” is, in truth, a tautology....The word *philosophia* appears, as it were, on the birth certificate of our own history; we may even say on the birth certificate of the contemporary epoch of world history which is called the atomic age. That is why we can ask the question, “What is philosophy?” only if we enter into a discussion with the thinking of the Greek world. But not only *what* is in question – philosophy – is Greek in origin, but *how* we question, the manner in which we question even today, is Greek.<sup>1</sup>

In more measured terms, the analytic philosopher Arthur Danto rejects the contribution of Asian thought, as he resists calling any of it “philosophy,” to Western moral philosophy on the grounds that it is too alien:

The fantastic architectures of Oriental thought...are open to our study and certainly our admiration, but they are not for us to inhabit....The factual beliefs they take for granted are, I believe, too alien to our representation of the world to be grafted onto it, and in consequence their moral systems are unavailable to us.... No one can save us but ourselves.<sup>2</sup>

In each of those instances, both of which are typical, the rejection of Eastern philosophies from the forum is proportionate with the problem at hand. It is a question of a habit of thought – the habit that I said at the outset is

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Heidegger, *What is Philosophy?* (New Haven, CT: College & University Press, 1958), pp. 31, 35. See Reinard May, *Heidegger's Hidden Sources: East Asian Influences on his Work* (London: Routledge, 1996).

<sup>2</sup> Arthur Danto, *Mysticism and Morality: Oriental Thought and Moral Philosophy* (New York: Basic Books, 1972), pp. vii, x–xi.

showing signs of coming apart at the seams. I believe the closing of the forum, and hence the notion of “philosophical tradition,” to what lies outside the West, is primarily a failure of will. The logical reasons against it, and the non-coincidence with the founding principles of philosophy, are too obvious. What is needed is a cultural disarmament of philosophy, a deliberate decision to abandon the aim of global dominance, and the liberation of universality from particularity. This is what I meant by making philosophy, philosophically universal.

There is a Sufi story about a group of pilgrims making the Haj to Mecca. The time comes for prayer and the pilgrims pause to spread their rugs on the ground and bow their heads down towards the Holy City to pray. One of them, a simple craftsman, bows down in the opposite direction, with his feet pointed to Mecca. An Imam happens to walk by and begins to upbraid the man in front of the others, “Blasphemer! Do you know that it is an insult to point your feet towards God?” The man stands up to face the Imam, “I am sorry master, I did not know. But if you could be so kind as to show me where God is not, I will point my feet in that direction.” The same question must be put to the Western philosophical tradition: Show us a culture or society in which philosophy has nothing to say and which has nothing to contribute to philosophy, and let us exclude them from the philosophical forum. In the meantime, let us suffer the irreverence of de-Westernizing the philosophical forum as a necessary means to expose the unreflected bias that has coiled itself up like a snake in the bosom of philosophy.

### **Cultural Block Universe, East and West, Western Learning and the Japanese Spirit**

The cracks in the habit of seeing philosophy as a fundamentally Western enterprise have shown up mainly in the West, where they have reached a breaking point in the past generation. This could not have happened without positive inspiration from the East. One of the strongest stimuli from modern Asia is well known not only in Japan but also in the West. Nishida Kitarō and principal figures in the Kyoto school after him, like Nishitani Keiji and Tanabe Hajime, are thought to have opened the philosophical forum to a truer universality. Although I was fortunate enough to live in Japan while this was going on, I am not in a position to account for the fascination with these thinkers or the reasons for their success. At most, I can try to reflect on some general impressions I have gathered over the past twenty years of contact with scholars from the West

interested in their writings. In doing so, I refrain from dealing with particular concepts in order to focus on what I called earlier the ongoing cultural disarmament of philosophy.

The first impression, I am afraid, will fall hard on the ears of professional Japanese philosophers, but I shall repeat it nonetheless. The contribution that Western philosophers look for in Japan is not the sort of contribution that mainstream philosophy in Japan has been trying to make in the past 150 years. The ideal of “Western learning, Japanese spirit” that inspired early interest in philosophy was an internal matter for Japan’s process of modernization and, as such, was of interest to students of Japanese intellectual history, but held little interest for the philosophical community. Preoccupation with the enhancement of the Japanese spirit retreated further and further into the background, so that by the 1960s it had become virtually invisible for most of Japan’s students of Western philosophy. The West expected another ideal to take its place, namely the ideal of making a Japanese contribution to a philosophical world forum. So far, Western philosophers have tended to ignore Japan because they perceive that this has not taken place.

In the opening remarks to the first issue of *Philosophy East and West*, John Dewey, although not a student of the East, expressed a positive mood of openness to an Asian contribution to philosophy:

Under the pressure of political *blocs* that are now being formed East and West, it is all too easy to think that there are cultural “blocks” of corresponding orientation. To adapt a phrase of William James, there are no “cultural block universes” and the hope of free men everywhere is to prevent any such “cultural block universes” from ever arising and fixing themselves upon all mankind or any portion of mankind. To the extent that your journal can keep the idea open and working that there are “*specific* philosophical relationships” to be explored in the West and in the East and between the West and East, you will, I think, be contributing most fruitfully and dynamically to the enlightenment and betterment of the human estate.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> John Dewey, “On Philosophical Synthesis,” *Philosophy East and West* 1/1 (1951), p. 3.

To the eyes of the West, this is a challenge that rank-and-file teachers and scholars of philosophy in Japan have ignored. Structurally, Western and Asian philosophies have been kept at arms length in Japanese academia, remaining even more isolated than in Western academia. The fact that this has brought suffering to a number of young doctoral students in the country eager to break the mold is an indication that things may be about to change. But for now, the idea of philosophy contributing to the “enlightenment and betterment” of humanity is all but eclipsed by the preoccupation with earning recognition as a specialist in the words of one or another Western thinker. Seen from the outside, the “system” has failed to produce either Western philosophers raised in Japanese culture or Japanese philosophers fluent in Western philosophy. It is important for the career and self-image of a young academic to publish in international journals, but it is not met with comparable recognition in the West. In Japan, the concern is to produce a higher percentage of distinctively Japanese contributions. Time and again, Japanese academics disappoint their Western counterparts by mirroring their own standpoint back to them, often clumsily, thus reinforcing the impression that they would be better suited to offer the kind of unique criticisms and original viewpoints that one would expect of a culture different from the West.

In some cases, the shock of discovering this fact has led some scholars to look more seriously at Japan’s original philosophical ideas and try to represent them to the West. My impression is that these efforts are taken more seriously abroad than they are inside Japan, where the idea of belonging to a “cultural block universe” seems to be a necessary condition for self-identity, or where treading outside one’s specialization is viewed as a philosophical sin rather than a virtue. In this way, the efforts have contributed to the bias that this Western philosophical tradition is, and should remain, primarily a Western phenomenon.

What is captivating about the Kyoto school philosophers is that they did take up this challenge, aiming at a contribution to philosophy made as persons *of* Japanese culture but standing *on* a world forum. They spoke not as one cultural universe facing another, but as one culturally determined human mind to any mind that wished to listen, Japanese or foreign. Curiously, there is little complaint in the philosophical writings of Tanabe, Nishitani, or Nishida about the exclusion of Japanese thought from the philosophical tradition. Rather than rattle their chains at being denied access to the philosophical tradition as equals and studying it as a foreign object, they simply set out to do philosophy. They did it for a Japanese

audience, making no efforts to have their works translated for Western consumption. If their Japanese readership found them hard-going at times, and complained about what they were doing to the language, the Kyoto school works read quite naturally in translation and – insofar as I am able to judge – on a whole, read better in Western language than their Western counterparts' translations read in Japanese.

These efforts, as it turns out, have been much stronger arguments against exclusivity than any complaints against the cultural hegemony of philosophy. They can be read, with profit, by philosophers in the West with little or no knowledge of Asian intellectual history. This says a great deal about the quality of their performance. As I have never hesitated to state, they stand shoulder to shoulder with the best Western philosophers of their age. They are not only intelligible to the West, but they have also made a distinctive Japanese contribution to the philosophical tradition. Perhaps this is why the slide away from “specific philosophical” questions into the defense of a “cultural block universe” during a brief period is eyed with such disappointment. It hardly had the effect of discoloring their whole work; on the contrary, it is the adventure of their work as a whole that has discolored their more or less nationalistic escapades of thought, to the point that no nationalist or Japanist (Nativist) for the past fifty years has cited Nishida, Tanabe, or Nishitani in their support.

### **Redefining the Notion of Philosophy**

The Kyoto school, in any case, is only a small part of the challenge of Asian thought to the Western philosophical tradition. Indeed, its successes have prompted attention to more general demands lying beneath the surface for entirely too long. If these demands are not met, it is likely that they will slip back into oblivion, at home and abroad, as quickly as they rose to attention. Fundamentally, I see two problematic areas, the first one more conscious in the West and the second in Asia. In neither area can one count on leadership from educational establishments. On the contrary, they will almost certainly wait until a path of least resistance has opened before stepping up and announcing their permanent “reforms.” The initiative will have to come from within the community of scholars and the young students themselves.

The first area has to do with redefining the notion of philosophy in the West, so as to return to the philosophical forum an examination of the realms of intellectual history and activity in the East from an exile to the departments of Asian Studies or Religion. Current definitions will only be

displaced by a deliberate effort to name large areas of thought as “philosophy” without the qualification of “Asian,” which seems – at least at present – to cancel out what it means to specify. If the Japanese studying philosophy abroad were to meet the custom of having Asian thinkers dealt with as a normal part of courses on epistemology, cosmology, logic, and the history of philosophy, it is likely that they would bring the habit back with them before long. But, however this comes about, it will require texts to work with.

Journals and cultured societies dealing with a range of Asian philosophies have generated a wealth of material in the West over the past fifty years, which has led to a revision of contents in recent encyclopedias of philosophy, and to an impressive array of doctoral dissertations and monographs on particular scholars. Still, the results are fragmented. In the case of Japan, there is still no comprehensive sourcebook of material from Kūkai to Nishida available in any Western language.<sup>4</sup> It is a project many of us have talked about for the past fifteen years, but has yet to surface.

A second problematic area that bedevils the introduction of Asian thinkers into the philosophical world forum is the absence of an Asian philosophical tradition to compare with the West. The very idea of comparison is a difficult proposition on almost every count. To begin with, its underlying assumptions seem to be at odds with one another. On the one hand, the question could only arise from within a context that has such a

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<sup>4</sup> The only works of any length I know of by Western scholars dealing with this wide picture are: Gregor Paul, *Philosophie in Japan: Von den Anfängen bis zur Heian-Zeit* (Munich: Judicium, 1993), which only goes up to the Heian era and works from a definition of philosophy that would exclude the Kyoto school philosophers; Peter Pörtner and Jens Heise, *Die Philosophie Japans: von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart* (Stuttgart: Kröner, 1995), which is extremely limited in its treatment of thought since the nineteenth century; and Jesús González Valles, *Historia de la Filosofía Japonesa* (Madrid: Editorial Tecnos, 2000), which treats pre-nineteenth-century thought in too cursory a manner. The recent book by H. Gene Blocker and Christopher I. Starling, *Japanese Philosophy* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 2001), offers a good survey and statement of the problem but is too short to serve the purposes of a working text.

tradition, rather well defined, long studied, and widely accepted both academically and spiritually. This is the standpoint that sets out looking for similarities, overlaps, and differences. Whatever else it finds is likely to reconfirm the validity of the standpoint from which it set out, even if sorting out the findings is enough of a job without worrying about whether the original question might have been biased from the start.

That is one side of the picture. On the other hand, if this sort of comparative tradition is *not* sought, everyone ends up a great deal poorer. What Western intellectual history describes as “philosophical” gives a kind of magnet effect to dip into the vast spiritual resources of the East and draw out whole clusters of phenomena that are not often seen as having anything to do with one another. Not only does it offer a challenging counterposition to the philosophical tradition of the West, it suggests new affinities and different ways of understanding the East itself.

These two implications would appear to cancel each other out. If one focuses on covert “Orientalism,” one foregoes the possibility of stimulating a new self-understanding in Eastern traditions. Directing the focus on the search for philosophical ingredients in the East, one easily lose sight of the inventiveness and exportation of categories going on.

It would seem simple enough just to propose a less parochial definition of philosophy, one open to variations wider than those known in the West. Unfortunately, the impasse remains, because more is involved than merely overcoming the imparity between the one who controls the questions and the one being questioned. In an important sense, there is nothing like a philosophical tradition in the East for the simple reason that in matters of spiritual tradition in general there is no “East” in the same sense that we can speak of a “West” – at least not yet. The difficulty does not lie in the traditions that might constitute a cross-cultural “Eastern philosophy” that are too many and too varied to permit a general classification. It is rather that these differences are not viewed within a tradition of shared texts. Geographically, and even more politically and economically, the East can be roughly identified. But the spiritual heritage of particular regions remains locked behind the heavy iron bars of language.

In the West, variety is the key; and culture, geography, and language play an important role. The difference is that major texts have been translated into languages that make them available to the general public. For the scholar, a reading knowledge of classical languages and a couple of major European languages leaves one equipped to survey the entire field comfortably. Or perhaps better put, it makes possible the idea of

a field. This situation does not exist in Japan and its neighboring countries in the East. Over fifty years ago, the British historian, E. W. F. Tomlin, complained that only one ten-thousandth of the relevant literature in the East has been translated into Western languages.<sup>5</sup> The situation in the East, though better, is still appalling. The lack of a common fund of translated texts available to Chinese, Japanese, and Korean scholars is aggravated by the fact that the number of scholars who can move freely in these three languages is no more than a small coterie. Broaden the scope to Mongolia, Central and Southeast Asia, and the distance from a true “philosophical tradition” grows greater still. What we have, instead, are particular traditions of thought – in the Far East, one thinks of the examples of Kamakura Buddhism, Shilla Buddhism, or Neo-Confucianism – that grow from common origins but end up fragmented by linguistic differences. Japanese scholars with knowledge of Chinese can recapture a part of wider history; so can Korean scholars studying the origins of Korean contributions to the field. But a living “tradition” that embraces all three is nonexistent.

As seen from the perspective of the West, without the development of these two projects, general surveys of philosophies, in particular Asian languages in Western languages and a common corpus of texts shared by philosophers in the East, the pursuit of comparative studies is likely to remain piecemeal and beset with Western definitions of what constitutes philosophical discourse.

### **The Kyoto School of Mysticism**

These problems aside, there is still a question of stimulating points of contact between Japanese philosophy and the Western philosophical tradition. Assuming that the notion of philosophy has to be broadened not only geographically but also ideologically, there is no reason to restrict contact with mainstream philosophy itself. Indeed, even with the contributions that Japanese philosophy has to make to Western philosophical questions, there is no reason to restrict their resources to the writings of established philosophers. Rather than seek directly to house Western philosophy in those “fantastic architectures of Oriental thought,” which Danto found uncomfortable quarters, it is possible to enter

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<sup>5</sup> E. W. F. Tomlin, *The Oriental Philosophers: An Introduction* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), p. 15; originally published in 1950.

philosophy from its own fringes – in particular from the esoteric traditions of the West which have emerged from underground to play an important role in contemporary modes of thought.

Far from mere compliance with the fads of “New Age” thinking, what I have in mind is very much in line with what the Kyoto school philosophers were doing. The criticism that these thinkers have blurred the lines between religion and philosophy that have taken so many centuries to draw – and hence to liberate philosophy from being a mere *ancilla theologiae* – is likely to be taken seriously only in those circles least disposed (because of theological intolerance) to accept the contribution of Japanese philosophical thought to begin with. Still, at the same time, it is important to keep the philosophical tradition distinct from apologetic “theologies” affiliated with particular belief systems or sacred texts of whichever historical religion.

This is not the place to argue for the affinities between the esoteric traditions of the West from Gnosticism to alchemy with the history of Japanese philosophical thought. Suffice it to say that there is at least one element of that tradition that has already served as a meeting point and that needs to be explored further, namely, mysticism. It comes as no surprise to find the great Italian scholar of mysticism, Ellemire Zolla, declaring that the philosophy of the Kyoto school is “the most important philosophy of the twentieth century.”<sup>6</sup> The fact is, the interest in Western mystics by Japanese thinkers has opened the theorists in the West to the contribution that Eastern philosophy has to make to their own thinking.

The question is vast, but perhaps central is according the primacy in philosophical thought to experience – the starting point for Nishida, Tanabe, and Nishitani – that provides the immediate point of contact. Happily, this contradicts a longstanding way of contrasting Japanese and Western thought that continues to obstruct the idea of a common philosophical forum. I allude to one example.

For many years, D. T. Suzuki was fond of likening Zen to Western mysticism in his attempt to explain it to his audiences in the English-speaking world. Heinrich Dumoulin repeated the comparison in his 1959 book, *Zen: Geschichte und Gestalt*. When the 1965 English translation

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<sup>6</sup> This comment is cited on the cover of the Spanish translation of Nishitani’s *La religion y la nada* (Madrid: Siruela, 1999).

reached D. T. Suzuki, the year before he died, he wrote a review in English where he states:

I cannot go further without remarking on the major contention of this book, which is that Zen is a form of mysticism. Unfortunately, some years ago, I too used the term in connection with Zen. I have long since regretted it, as I find it now highly misleading in elucidating Zen thought. Let it suffice to say here that Zen has nothing “mystical” about it or in it. It is most plain, clear as the daylight, all out in the open with nothing hidden, dark, obscure, secret, or mystifying in it.<sup>7</sup>

To anyone familiar with the major texts of the Western mystical tradition, the attempt to disassociate it from Zen on the grounds of its obscurity sounds wildly off the mark. If anything, the literature of Zen reads darker and more mystifying. But there is more to Suzuki’s words than meets the eye.

Absent of the first-hand experience of sitting in meditation, much in Zen appears alternatively esoteric and ridiculous. The same holds true for those who read the texts of Western mysticism without any feel for the experiential basis. This is why masters of both traditions have insisted, as Master Suzuki himself does, that bewilderment is not the fault of the tradition but of those who look at it from the wrong standpoint. What Suzuki was offering to his Western readers was not an arcane Oriental wisdom, but a straightforward remedy for what he saw as fundamental “rationalism” and addiction to a two-valued logic of Western intellectual history. The mystical tradition, as he understood it, did no more than replace rationalism with mysticism – hence the need to disassociate Zen from it.

As the understanding of Western mysticism increased in Japan, Suzuki’s strictures were not only forgotten but turned on their head as Western mysticism came to be seen as a way to help clarify the philosophical foundations of Zen. Still, I think Suzuki has put his finger on a question of importance to many Western students of Japanese philosophy.

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<sup>7</sup> D. T. Suzuki, *The Eastern Buddhist* 1/1 (1965), p. 124. In the same year, as we know from his later writing, Suzuki was reading Eckhart’s *Sermons*.

Conventional wisdom in Japan, both popular and scholarly, subscribes to Suzuki's criticisms of Western rationalism as somehow unsuited to the national temperament of the Japanese. While there is virtually no major movement or thinker in the intellectual history of Europe and the Americas that does not have its coterie of specialists, the study is carried on with the cold eye of the objective scholar, and applications to the realities of everyday Japan are filtered through more or less explicit assumptions of inalienable cultural differences. In this way, benefits or "rational" thoughts are given free rein to penetrate those aspects of modern life that depend on it but remain a forbidden entry to the unfolding of the Japanese soul from ancient times to the present. Matters of science and reason that are held to transcend cultural differences are pursued with the same fervor and devotion to objectivity as anywhere in the world. Matters of the heart, language, and religious experience are restricted to the collective, though widely varied, pursuit of a self-understanding that will – indeed *must* – forever elude the understanding of the West. The fact that this assumption fits the archetype in the form of rationalism found in any number of styles in modern societies, known as ethnocentrism, is itself the subject of objective study in Japan, but self-understanding is deliberately kept immune to influence from the results of such comparisons. Indeed, this self-immunization is seen as an unavoidable consequence that will never make sense to the prying eyes of the outside observer.

The Western scholar of Japanese philosophy, though seeking to make philosophy truly universal, often feels shackled by this subtle opposition. This is why things like the dialogue of Kyoto school philosophy and the mystical tradition of the West, which directly challenges the modes of language and thought that uphold this conventional wisdom, are so welcome. The dominant metaphor for criticizing rationalism as unsuited to understanding the depths of Eastern spirituality is really very simple. Spirituality is like a fixed amount of water to be divided between the glass of "reason" and the teacup of "feeling." The West puts the greater part of the water into the former, the East into the latter. As reason increases, feeling decreases, and vice versa (some, and Suzuki was among them, would replace feeling with "experience," but the effect is the same). When one is doing scientific research or writing about Western history, one empties the teacup into the glass; when thinking about the Japanese soul, one empties the glass back into the teacup. Every attempt to seek a "balanced" approach in self-understanding has to reckon the loss of what defines each, hence, ending up with an artificial and meaningless portrait.

The Kyoto school philosophers, like many students of the Western mystical tradition, raise a voice in protest against this way of thinking. Both show a dualism of reason and experience to be a caricature as much as of the Eastern mind as of the Western. They show it not in any secret encoding hidden within the texts but very much on the surface. They see the human capacity for reflection like a small island set in a vast sea in the mystery of existence. To make the island larger does not reduce the size of the sea. It increases the size of the shoreline, hence, its contact with mystery.

The clue to keeping this viewpoint foremost, as we learn from mystical literature, is not to challenge its lack, but rather to insist on the primacy of experience. Primacy does not have to mean temporally first, or even hierarchically first, as Nishida and Suzuki tended to think. There is no need to see the primacy as one of comparing value, as in the claim that “experience is primary to reason.” I would rather understand the term to mean “absolutely and immediately relative.” That is to say, it always comes into the picture, it is always part of the equation, and it is unavoidably present. This is not to say that it is itself an absolute, or that it somehow transcends or eclipses reason, memory, and moral judgment. It merely states that whereas most things are related indirectly to most others, in mysticism, as in the Japanese philosophy of the Kyoto thinkers, experience is *always directly related* to any discussion. Conversely put, to abstract from concrete experience is as serious an offense as a logical contradiction is in syllogistic thinking. I believe it is this affinity that has drawn scholars of mysticism to an interest in the Kyoto school, and Kyoto school philosophers to mysticism. If this be “fantastic architecture,” then it is an area of philosophy’s own background – or underground – that it has not figured out how to incorporate into the philosophical forum. Here again, it is the universality of philosophy that is the greater victim, not that which has been excluded. The word “philosophy” may be, as Heidegger says, inscribed on the birth certificate of Western history. But unless its many other names are recognized on the birth certificate of other civilizations, there is little hope of a world philosophical forum rising up to stem the ongoing colonialization of thought that marches under the banner of “the global human community.”