"Faith and grace in the thought of Tanabe Hajime and of Søren Kierkegaard"

Henneberg, Peter

ABSTRACT

The subject matter of this essay is to compare the conceptions which Søren Kierkegaard and Tanabe Hajime have of the notions of religious faith and of divine grace. The investigation was triggered by the observation that Tanabe’s philosophy owes much to the thought of Kierkegaard, and by the fact that Kierkegaard has been trained as a Danish Protestant theologian while Tanabe adopted for himself positions of Japanese Pure Land Buddhism. After a rigorous analysis of the notions of faith and grace that specifically seeks to eliminate the impact of the cultural and religious context in which the terms are used, the paper sets out to demonstrate that in spite of important differences which render their respective religious standpoints incompatible, the two philosophers share some common ground between them, albeit in an unexpected form. The religious belief of Kierkegaard is based on the “absurd” idea that almighty God has become finite man in Jesus Christ, whereas Tanabe holds ...

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Faith and Grace in the thought of Tanabe Hajime and of Søren Kierkegaard

Dissertation doctorale présentée par

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en vue de l’obtention du titre de docteur en philosophie et lettres

Directeur de thèse: Prof. Dr. Bernard Stevens

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Many individuals have contributed so that this thesis could successfully be realized, and can do no more than to thank them all for their encouragement and continuous support.

My thanks go to Prof. Dr. Bernard Stevens who suggested the subject matter to me and who stood ready to provide assistance when needed. My thanks go equally to Prof. Dr. Jacques Scheuer and to Prof. Dr. Gilbert Gérard, also of UCL, who as members of my committee provided guidance and support. Writing a thesis is sometimes a very lonesome business that requires more than just a normal amount of stamina, determination and simple “stick-to-ity” on the side of the writer if what he has begun with much optimism is to result in a positive outcome.

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I appreciate the services of Mrs. Valérie Martin of the secretariat of the ISP; she helped me across some of the administrative obstacles that traditionally pave the way towards finalizing the academic effort. I am further much in debt to the library staff of both KUL and UCL: they did not hesitate to apply their ingenuity and resourcefulness to the task of locating, often in libraries outside of Belgium - and sometimes across the oceans -, all those publications which I found necessary to read as this study evolved.

Last but not least my thanks must go to my wife Maria who never shared any of her views with me but instead continued to provide support when most needed. Without her belief in what I was doing I probably would not have succeeded the way I did.
In what follows I am proud to present things that are both interesting and new. However, that what is interesting is not new, and that what is new may not be interesting.¹

¹ From the annals of Oxford University
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Abstract:

The subject matter of this essay is to compare the conceptions which Søren Kierkegaard and Tanabe Hajime have of the notions of religious faith and of divine grace. The investigation was triggered by the observation that Tanabe’s philosophy owes much to the thought of Kierkegaard, and by the fact that Kierkegaard has been trained as a Danish Protestant theologian while Tanabe adopted for himself positions of Japanese Pure Land Buddhism.

After a rigorous analysis of the notions of faith and grace that specifically seeks to eliminate the impact of the cultural and religious context in which the terms are used, the paper sets out to demonstrate that in spite of important differences which render their respective religious standpoints incompatible, the two philosophers share some common ground between them, albeit in an unexpected form. The religious belief of Kierkegaard is based on the “absurd” idea that almighty God has become finite man in Jesus Christ, whereas Tanabe holds that the ultimate nature of reality is empty absolute nothingness, a concept that can only be captured in the form of contradictory, hence apparently illogical statements. For both religious faith thus is not founded on rational analysis of fact. A further result is that divine grace always requires a freely acting, autonomous subject as its originator. For Kierkegaard this subject is the personal God of Christianity, who acts in miracles that can only be experienced in the privacy of inwardness. For Tanabe, on the other hand, divine grace is caused by abstract Other-power that becomes manifest in the Great Compassion of the Original Vow. For him too, divine grace is but a matter of private personal perception and belief.

The paper concludes that the logical contradictions in Kierkegaard’s and Tanabe’s positions on faith, and the problematic of the origin and nature of divine grace can be resolved if use is made of two recent developments in philosophy. Dialetheism, which is essentially based on a critical review of the “laws of thought”, offers means to bring initially incompatible standpoints together and to make them compatible without having to sacrifice any of their differences. Alain Badiou’s interpretation of Georg Cantor’s theory of infinite sets, and Adam Miller’s application of this model to the problematic of divine grace serve to demonstrate that the phenomenon of divine grace can be accounted for without there being the need to invoke causation by a freely acting, autonomous subject.
Preface

The topic of this essay is to compare how two philosophers, Søren Kierkegaard (1813 - 1855) and Tanabe Hajime (1885 - 1962), understand the notions of religious faith and of divine grace. To the uninitiated reader this will seem to be a matter of little consequences. For one, the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard has the reputation of being all too much focused on things religious in order to be of more than passing interest to the majority of people. This is a prejudice which totally ignores the fact that Kierkegaard has long been recognized as being the “father of existentialism”, which is to say the originator of that philosophical movement which had been popular in Europe during the 1950s and ‘60s. Kierkegaard is thus a philosopher whose importance is not to be disputed even though his books sometime present tedious reading. And what is to say about Tanabe Hajime? This Japanese philosopher is hardly known outside of his native country, partly because only very little of his literary output has so far been translated into a western language, and partly also because his name has been linked to a group of philosophers who willingly or not have supported the ultra-nationalist and imperialist politics of the Japanese militarist Government from about 1930 up to the military defeat in 1945. However, as one of the recognized experts of twentieth century Japanese philosophy has noted,

one has, deliberately or otherwise, to ignore the greatest bulk of the writings of (Tanabe and others) to arrive at the conclusion that anything approaching or supporting the imperialistic ideology of wartime Japan belongs to the fundamental inspiration of (his) thought. Insofar as (he) did willingly add support, it may be considered an aberration from (his) own intellectual goals.¹

In this assessment Tanabe is thus an important philosopher who has the potential to make important contributions to the evolution of “world philosophy”. But what does that mean in practical terms? What is it that Tanabe can contribute? What are his fields of expertise, and where can we learn more about him and his thought? In the attempt to find an answer to these and similar questions, what one will soon find out is this: Tanabe is considered the cofounder of a loosely knit group of Japanese philosophers that is known as “The Kyoto School”, and that his main contribution to the evolution of that school has been his “Logic of the Specific”². But there can be no doubt that the originator and Übervater of that group has been Nishida Kitarō (1870 - 1945), and that Tanabe for most of the time stood in the shadow of Nishida’s unique philosophical genius. Much of Tanabe’s own professional career is thus marked by his desperate struggle to liberate himself from the intellectual pressure which Nishida exerted on him. It was only after the end of the war, and after Nishida’s death, that Tanabe did develop what has become known as his mature “religious philosophy”³. This reputation of Tanabe as being not a philosopher of religion but rather a “religious philosopher” is mainly based on the only book of Tanabe’s which has ever been translated in full, his Philosophy as Metanoetics⁴. About this book Steve Odin writes that it is

¹ Heisig, James W., Philosophers of Nothingness - An Essay on the Kyoto School, University of Hawai‘i Press, 2001, pg. 6, parentheses added by myself.
² The Japanese phrase used by Tanabe has been variously translated as “Logic of Species” and as “Logic of the Specific”. I shall use the latter term.
⁴ Tanabe Hajime, Philosophy as Metanoetics, translated by Takeuchi Yoshinori with Valdo Viglielmo and James W. Heisig, University of California Press, 1986.
one of the most original, creative, and important philosophical texts to have emerged from what has become known as the “Kyoto School” of Japanese Buddhism ... a monumental work in the philosophy of religion.

Odin’s short appreciation gives a good summary of what are the main characteristics of this work: it is written from an (apparently) distinctive Buddhist perspective, it is shot through with a jumble of Sino-Japanese terms and concepts most of which, if not all, are unknown to all western readers who are not familiar with Eastern religions and Buddhist philosophy, and it unashamedly criticizes some of the most renowned names in the history of western philosophy, starting with Plato and Aristotle and working its way through St. Augustine and many medieval philosophers, Pascal, Kant Hegel, Fichte, Schelling, Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, Heidegger, to name but a few. Tanabe must have known their works in much detail, because whatever he may have to say about them is cast in words which are not easy to comprehend if one is not familiar with the philosophical thought of those whom Tanabe criticizes. This creates the impression that Tanabe did not write for any western audience but that instead he had a domestic Japanese readership in mind who might be more interested in Eastern than in western thinkers, or else, that he was simply trying to clear his own mind. The book thus does not make up for easy reading. Such state of affairs is still aggravated by the fact that what Tanabe has to say is cast into a logic that seems to disregard basic laws of thought, such as the law of non-contradiction, and which handles concepts such as “absolute nothingness” which since the times of Greek philosophy, and certainly since Hegel, had been put to rest in definitive form by western philosophy. With this as a background it does not come as a surprise that the uninitiated reader will consider Tanabe as being an exotic, enigmatic and mysterious author who can at most be considered to be of marginal interest, and who is a philosophical oddball. So, why read Tanabe? My own answer is: curiosity!

My encounter with Tanabe has been in three stages at three different times. I first saw his Philosophy as Metanoetics in a bookstore shortly after it had been published. At that time I was still actively engaged working as a research scientist, and already a short glance at the table of contents of the book convinced me that this was much too difficult and certainly much too devious reading to be of any interest whatsoever. The second time when I did hold the book in my hands was when I was looking for a topic on which to prepare a thesis paper as part of the final exams as a student of philosophy at the Katholieke Universiteit in Leuven. Again, I was quickly convinced that some other subject matter would be better suited for my immediate purposes, and I quickly put the volume to one side. But this time the sting had somehow caught on and I felt unhappy about having shied away from what seemed to be haunting me as a challenge. Therefore, when I prepared myself to work on a doctoral thesis I decided that finally I would have a look at what this was all about: philosophy as metanoetics ...? One thing was certain: as a pensioner I had nothing to lose and much to gain - so why not read Tanabe?

Pure curiosity and enthusiasm for what was new and unexplored are not enough in terms of contents and substance to motivate a research program under the auspices of professional philosophers. There was thus a need to specify the subject matter and to home in onto a specific problem area that I could study and unfold into something that potentially could add up to a better understanding of the philosophy of Tanabe Hajime. Also, there was no room for uncertainty that I had to accept some clear-cut restrictions: although I had some knowledge of the Japanese language this was by no standards sufficient for me to be able to read
any Japanese philosophical literature. I thus would have to work with translations only. Further, the main focus of my research interest could not be on transporting Japanese thought to Europe because that would require a more or less unrestricted access to Japanese sources of primary and secondary literature by and on Tanabe and his contemporaries, the vast majority of which is available in Japanese language only. In other words, all I could hope to achieve was to assess Japanese philosophy from a distinctly western perspective, which is to say, from the perspective of someone who has been trained in western philosophical categories, someone who is willing to listen to Eastern thought and follow Eastern arguments, but also someone who at the end of the day will not hesitate to find a truthful answer to the unforgiving question of what is ultimately the added value for the western reader of studying Tanabe? But this still did not clarify the precise topic of my future research project. I am therefore thankful to Prof. Dr. Bernard Stevens of UCL for drawing my attention to the fact that Tanabe himself has repeatedly acknowledged how much his philosophy had been influenced by the thought of Søren Kierkegaard. Prof. Steven’s suggestion was that I should focus on the conceptions which these two philosophers have of notions of “religious faith” and of “divine grace”.

There can be no doubt that Tanabe and Kierkegaard have much in common even though their vitae and intellectual backgrounds are very different. First there is the issue of religious faith. Kierkegaard was a Protestant theologian who had changed direction to become a philosopher, while Tanabe was basically a Buddhist thinker who, however, held an equal distance also to Zen and to Christianity. There was thus a commonality of interests which both men shared and this was an attention given to matters religious even though they would not agree on what the essence of religion was. Knowing that this represents a serious problem to those who profess another religious belief, commentators of Japanese philosophy have agreed to speak of “the religious” when they refer to religiously motivated thought. But this is not the only common ground which Kierkegaard and Tanabe share. Kierkegaard’s basic concern was to make his fellow countrymen aware of the challenges posed by the New Testament to their way of living, and of what it meant to be a Christian; his philosophical position was to stress the role of the existential decisions which each human being has to take, and thereby to highlight in the act the importance of human subjectivity. Tanabe for his part was following a similar path. As a Buddhist he was wary of all sorts of abstract intellectual speculation; his interest was instead directed at observing and analyzing the conditions under which the human individual exists in this world. This defines a commonality and an overlap in the sense that both men were interested in highlighting aspects of individual existence; it also puts a disparity into relief in that they differ in the metaphysical underpinning which they give to human existence. For Kierkegaard the purpose of human existence is to respond to the Christian eschatological promise as put forth in the Gospel, while for Tanabe the central purpose in life is to escape samsāra and to enter nirvāna. Both men share as a common conviction that human freedom is not limited by anything else but the decisions which each human individual is willing to take, but they differ in their respective interpretation of the ethical demands by which human freedom is limited, and on how these demands are set up. While for Kierkegaard “the ethical” is God’s command as laid down in the Decalogue, Tanabe views the “love of neighbor” as being a necessary consequence of how the individual human life, and history as a whole, evolve. More specifically, Tanabe and Kierkegaard agree to the fact that there is human sin and what
Kant calls “radical evil”\(^5\) but they disagree on how these concepts are to be understood and how they should be filled with material content. Going further to more specifically religious subjects, Tanabe and Kierkegaard agree that there is what Rudolf Otto has named “The Holy”, but they would disagree on what the nature of this “Holy” actually is\(^6\). As to the contents of religious belief, Tanabe and Kierkegaard would agree on the need to perform acts of faith as the motion by which the human individual connects itself with the Transcendent and they will also agree that the Transcendent responds by bestowing acts of grace, but they will not agree on what the contents of such acts is, and on how they come about.

From the above I can cannot but conclude that Tanabe and Kierkegaard are joined together by an intricate relationship whose basic characteristic it is that on one hand their thoughts evolve from a common anthropological root in which human existence is grounded, while on the other hand they differ in the way in which this human existence is philosophically worked out in the form of a coherent and cohesive logic. This can most easily be explained by reference to their individual backgrounds. Kierkegaard is a convinced Christian who firmly believes in the Christian doctrine as the guideline for tackling the problems of daily life; Tanabe, on the other hand, views human existence from the point of view of the Buddhist religious paradigm. Therefore, while they both live in the same world and share it, their perceptions of reality differ. This difference must of necessity give rise to diverging conclusions about how to interpret the phenomena by which reality becomes manifest.

With this analysis as a base and a background I can now address the problematic of how to structure the confrontation of two thinkers who are rooted in vastly different cultural and religious backgrounds. As a starting point, it seems reasonable to expect that they should somehow be ready to agree on what is basic in the sense of being common to all humans, but that they must of necessity disagree on what is conditioned by their respective cultural and religious education and experiences. One indispensible ingredient of the analysis must therefore be that the “Principle of Charity” should be applied as and when necessary. In its most simple expression the intention of this principle is to ensure that in interpreting the thought of a philosopher the interpreter must attempt to make the best possible sense of what the other has said, and to assign meanings so as to maximize the overall truth of the other’s utterances without sacrificing in the act the standards of rational dialogue and critique. Another condition must be to turn away from focusing on conclusions that are the result of protracted deductions from basic religious and other doctrine, and to search instead for the principles on which these conclusions are based, and how these principles relate to what is common to all men. The background is this: on one side we have phenomena that are part of the animal baggage common to all human beings: for example the emotions of love and hatred, of sadness and of joy, of understanding and agreement based on rational analysis and the tendency to refute what is considered to be nonsense, the distinction of what is morally right from what is considered to be wrong, etc. On the other side we have undeniably been formed by exposure to the specific cultural and religious background in which we live and which conditions the details of how we react when we are challenged to cope with some specific situation or circumstances: It is one thing to love or hate, it is quite another thing to decide which person or thing we shall love or hate, especially if we are somehow obliged to give reasons for such a decision. Therefore, if for the

\(^5\) In 1993 a PhD thesis has been written at KUL on this subject by Lee Moon Hoi.

subject matters of “religious faith” and for that of “divine grace” we manage to separate what is animal from what has been conditioned and added by culture and religion, then we should be in a good position to open a dialogue on the question of in what way Kierkegaard and Tanabe agree, on what are their differences, and - most important - on how to explain any of the discrepancies that may come to light.

Such a discussion may at first sight appear to be very abstract and also difficult to implement. There is, however, one aspect which in my view seems to be fundamental and which I must address. This has to do with what in some circumstances is referred to as “axioms” or “doctrine of thought”. By this I mean to following: when we reflect about culture and religion, and on the role which they play in the life of the human individual, we usually refer to a set of norms that serve as guidance when we as human individuals have to take some specific decisions, irrespective of what the context of that decision may be. These “norms” are very broad and are certainly not restricted to what is morally or metaphysically accepted and what is not. Rather, what I have in mind is the sum total of all rules and regulations, values and standards of behavior, and so on, according to which our lives are organized and which form the factual basis for us being able to act in a coherent and cohesive manner. Hegel has introduced the notion of Zeitgeist (Ger.: the mental attitude, spirit, genius temper of an age and a people) to express this. Another way to express this same thought is to speak about the mental framework that structures our lives. While some of these rules and regulations, values and standards of behavior, etc. may be publicly enunciated, there are also those which have been tacitly agreed and which for this reason are not publicly referred to. Such norms are undisclosed, but they nevertheless actively condition our reactions and our general everyday comportment. Therefore, if we want to identify what is related to the cultural and religious environment as compared to what is part of the basic animal baggage, it does not suffice to restrict the analysis to what is publicly enunciated, because what has been tacitly agreed will also make its pressures known.

This raises the general question of whether it will ever be possible to separate what is animal from what is religio-culturally conditioned. If expressed in these terms, the question certainly poses a difficult problem for which there may be no general answer. But this does not preclude the possibility that there may be some special cases in which such a separation can be implemented. The key problem seems to be to decide what criteria we should use to distinguish between what is animal and what is due to culture and religion. Interestingly it is Tanabe’s mentor and predecessor in the chair of philosophy at Kyoto Imperial University, Nishida Kitarō (1870 - 1945), who - in following William James (1842 - 1910) - has highlighted the role of “pure experience” as a means to approach the bedrock levels of human experience of reality. According to Nishida such pure experience can take on two forms: it can be inputs received from the empirical world, and it can be basic patterns of acting and reacting that cannot be reduced to anything more primordial and which must therefore correspond to the anthropological base level of our animal baggage.

What I have described is a heuristic method which in principle can be falsified at any time by contradictory evidence. However, although such a threat exists, this does not invalidate the pragmatic value of the approach as a means to structure what would otherwise be a tangle of incompatible and inconclusive ideas and phenomena. Therefore, if the method works and if the achieved results can stand the test of rational criticism, then for lack of something better this shall be my method of choice. More specifically, if it is possible to structure the
phenomena such that we can identify reactions which somehow seem to be close to those of a young child then that should give us the confidence which we need in order to be able to speak of pure, that is to say direct experience, in other words experience which has not been adulterated by some sort of thought and which hence is without addition of deliberate intellectual discrimination. But, as Nishida has made clear in his writings, this kind of experience is not at all restricted to small children; rather and as Nishida has argued, such “pure” experience is realized before the split between subject and object occurs. Due to criticisms raised by his disciple Tanabe and also by others, Nishida later preferred to speak of “action-intuition” instead of pure experience. What is essential in this context is that such action-intuition occurs in a state of consciousness in which the human subject is fully aware of what is going on, in which he or she agrees with what is happening and how it happens, but in which the human individual does not actively process the stimuli of his or her experiences. As Nishida maintains, it is important that any such reaction of the human being is not an act of deliberately exercising one’s free will in selecting one of several possible choices, but rather that it is an act which takes place intuitively and outside the realm of conscious human judgment, and thus that it is not based on intellectual analysis. The challenge then is to implement these general principles and to put them actively to work.

In what follows I shall concentrate the investigation on the subject areas of religious faith and of divine grace in the thought of Tanabe Hajime and of Søren Kierkegaard. There are specific reasons why both philosophers had an interest in these matters:

1. during the war period (1940 - 45) Tanabe has gone through a severe personal crisis from which he emerged through an existential experience of conversion and transformation for which he could not find any explanation other than to assume that some unspecified “Other-power” had intervened on his behalf. Such an explanation would not make any sense at all if it was not backed by what must properly be called religious faith, which is to say faith in what others have called “the religious”. Based on this existential experience Tanabe has developed his “metanoetic” philosophy that is based on and which incorporates the two elements of religious faith and of divine grace;

2. Søren Kierkegaard’s concern and contribution to philosophy was to have drawn attention to the subjective level of human existence. His paradigmatic case was that of Biblical Abraham for whom the phenomenon of faith took the form of a religiously motivated individual subjective decision which - in Lutheran parlance - must be supported by divine grace.

Given that this is the level at which the two philosophers have a commonality of interest, the task is to investigate and state whether it can be reasonably assumed that Tanabe and Kierkegaard share comparable, parallel concepts of faith and of grace, and, still more basic, whether we may use any such terms when a monotheistic religion (Christianity) and one that denies the monotheistic concept of God as the Supreme Being (Buddhism) are involved in an act of comparison. This quite naturally raises the question of whether or not Buddhism is a form of atheism, and whether or not the answer to this question does have an impact on how the notions of religious faith and of divine grace have to be interpreted. Clearly, these are problems that are related to the much broader issues of inter-religious dialogue between

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7 Tanabe is an adherent of Shinran’s True Pure Land Buddhism. The teachings of this school are built around the concept of Amida Buddha and of his Pure Land in the West, concepts that appear to be parallel to those of the personal God of Christianity and to its notion of the paradise. Such apparent similarity is, however, misleading insofar as the True Pure Land school of thought does not deny that man’s ultimate goal must be to become extinct in nirvāṇa. The notions of Amida Buddha and of his Pure Land are nothing more than a “convenient means” designed to help those who do not have the resources to enter nirvāṇa by virtue of their own merits.
world religions. This dialogue is an area which in the past has gone through phases of both enthusiasm and of disillusionment, and which for this reason I cannot attempt to address.

There is also the dimension of the inter-cultural dialogue. This problematic has in the past been linked to the issue of political and economic power and supremacy of individual nations, and to the power balance between nations and continents. As such it has a long and uneven history that is closely linked to the rise and fall of the colonial empires during the last several centuries. Needless to say that whereas the stumbling block for inter-religious dialogue is to be found in the rigidity of religious orthodoxy, the fate of inter-cultural dialogue has often been dominated by mechanisms and ideas that seemingly had little in common with cultural excellence. It cannot therefore be my goal to enter into any such troubled waters. Rather, I must contain myself to argue my case in a logically coherent and cohesive manner, leaving the rest to those who are better qualified for the job than I am.

Having worked as a scientist in a research laboratory, my working style will necessarily be influenced by the approach which I have taken in addressing problems in the area of the natural sciences. One characteristic will be that I tend to consider the problem at hand as an object which I can hold in my hands and which I can turn around at will such that I can look at it from different angles and perspectives. I shall use this method with the aim to encompass the problem in a circular way, addressing one layer of analysis at a time before I move on to the next. As I follow this procedure I gradually become ever more specific until I finally reach a point at which I can single out one or more issues of which I have been able to convince myself that they are crucial. The aim is to address these issues in the hope that the results of the analysis will enable me to solve what initially had been given as a problem.

As Popper and others have shown, such an approach implies the notion of fallibility. This is to say there is the intrinsic possibility that any conclusions may be proved wrong by new or added evidence. As a scientist this does not disturb me. It is a truism that traditionally philosophy claims to be on the lookout for metaphysical theories which are so general that they can cover every aspect of reality. Hegel, for example, was one proponent of this view who was searching for an all-encompassing system. However, the harsh historical reality is that not only did Hegel in his lifetime not succeed in creating such a system or theory, fact is also that he has been revised and criticized, notably by Kierkegaard who notoriously made bitter fun of what he considered to be Hegel’s inflated pretensions. But Hegel is not the only example from the history of philosophy to convince me that philosophical analysis is always fallible and prone to correction and revision, and that any such criticism shall in turn also be subjected to the fire of rational scrutiny which in turn is based on still better evidence and fact.

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8 Elberfeld, Rolf, Kitarō Nishida (1870 - 1945) - Moderne japanische Philosophie und die Frage nach der Interkulturalität, Rodopi, 1999, pg. 21 - 52. This book provides a good summary of issues that have been relevant in defining the relationships between Japan and the West.

9 Popper, Karl R., Objective knowledge : an evolutionary approach, Clarendon, Oxford, 1992
1. **Introduction**

As is well known, the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard (1813 - 55) had initially been trained as a Protestant theologian, but he later turned direction to become a philosopher whose primary aim it was to explicate the meaning of Christianity to his fellow countrymen. It is therefore appropriate to assume that his thought was that of a theologian who used philosophical and also other forms of reasoning in order to explicate his belief. 

The Japanese philosopher Tanabe Hajime (1885 – 1962), on the other hand, was one of the founding members of what has now become known as the Kyoto School of Philosophy. His aim was to bring Eastern and Western traditions of thought together in order to amalgamate these into novel forms of reasoning and philosophical conceptions. As I shall have to explain in more detail later, Tanabe essentially argued from a Buddhist philosophical perspective, criticizing major western philosophers, such as Plato and Aristotle, but also Kant, Hegel, and the one who influenced him most, Søren Kierkegaard.

Both philosophers share a strong interest in subject matters that straddle the borderline which separates philosophy from religion. More specifically, both have studied extensively the problematic of religious faith and of divine grace, although it must also be noted that Kierkegaard’s interest in the subject of grace was essentially limited to the problematic of grace and its relation to human free will.

It is a truism that “faith” and “grace” have both a mundane and a religious connotation. While what is mundane about these two notions is basically common to all human beings and may be said to be related to their animal baggage, this is not so for the specifically religious connotations and interpretations that these terms have received in the literature. As already a quick look at some of the standard reference manuals will show, it is a quite commonly accepted practice that western thinkers tend to explain the mundane sense of both concepts by making reference to Antique Greek and Roman philosophical and juridical ideas, whereas according to these same authors the religious contents can only be explained in Christian religious terms. There is thus a general bias in the literature, and this represents a serious problem to me if I intend to compare the thoughts of two thinkers who clearly belong to different cultures and intellectual traditions.

What I have in mind when I speak about having a problem with bias is perhaps best explained by way of an example. Early on when I prepared myself for this paper I found a book written by Russell H. Bowers, Jr. that exposes the problematic of inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue in an exemplary manner. Bowers’ intention is to examine the religious philosophy of the Japanese philosopher Nishitani Keiji (1900 – 1990) with a view to establish the foundations for a Christian-Buddhist dialogue. To this end he essentially compares specific claims and statements made by Nishitani with quotations taken from the Gospel. There is of course nothing wrong with such an approach, but it also should not come as a surprise that Nishitani’s thought never fully coincides with what is written in the Bible. Given Bowers’ basic stance as an evangelical theologian, such an outcome is predictable even before one has started to read the book. Therefore, if my declared intention is to show that

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Buddhism and the Christian faith are incompatible, then this is a perfectly acceptable approach. If on the other hand my basic hypothesis is that Buddhism and Christianity may well have important if divergent contributions to make in areas which are not directly related to matters of basic religious doctrine, then Bowers’ might not be the right approach.

This then raises two questions which both need to be answered before I can continue with what I have set out to do: compare the thought processes of Tanabe and Kierkegaard on religious faith and on divine grace. These questions are:

- what is to be the ultimate goal of this study?
- what method is most appropriate to achieve that goal?
2. **Goals and method of the study**

In principle there are three basic options available for conducting the study. The first would be to consider each philosopher individually without making any reference to the other one. The outcome would be two independent monographs that I can place on the bookshelf side by side, or else on different shelves, because there is absolutely no intention to have any kind of a dialogue that connects one author to the other. Clearly this cannot be the chosen alternative. Another option is that of Bowers’ book. In this case I assume one position, for example the western Christian view, and then discuss Tanabe’s Buddhist thought from that perspective. The downside of such an approach is that the two philosophers are not treated as being equal and of the same intellectual quality. As Rolf Elberfeld aptly explains\(^\text{11}\) this has been the standpoint of “Eurocentrism”, a standpoint which many western thinkers had made their own before the end of WW II. In the meantime, however, things have changed and a different attitude now prevails. The essential characteristic of this new approach is that the western tradition is no longer considered to be the exclusive measure of all things, but that instead it is being recognized that other traditions also have the potential to make important contributions, such that what previously was considered to be the exclusive domain of European philosophy alone may now evolve into and become “world philosophy”\(^\text{12}\). Understood in this sense, then, the goal of the study must be to present the thoughts of both philosophers such that each one can explicate what his views are without any interference from another side, while at the same time I must structure this presentation in such a manner that what both have in common and where they diverge also becomes apparent, while there must be precautions to inhibit that any such differences may become destructive for the other side. Ultimately my goal must be to prepare and present the material in a form that not only clearly explains overlaps and divergences, but which also provides an opening that enables me to understand the reasons which have lead each philosopher to assume the position that he has chosen for himself.

If the assumption is correct that the root cause for incompatibilities such as those which Bowers has highlighted must be sought in the cultural and religious context into which a philosopher is embedded, then the natural consequence to be drawn from the point of view of method of analysis is that my intention must be to:

- clearly identify and state for all concepts and terms which I use what are their culturally and religiously conditioned elements and connotations;
- isolate what is culturally conditioned from what is common to all human beings in all cultures beyond and above any specific religious or cultural adornments.

If I use such a method of analysis my hope is that I should be able to explain what the two philosophers share as a common basis, and also as a byproduct why they have evolved in different directions. In other words, if I can separate what all humans share from what is culturally and/or religiously conditioned, then I have a chance to get to the anthropological root of the phenomenon of both religious faith and of divine grace. The idea guiding this

\(^{11}\) Rolf Elberfeld, *Kitarō Nishida (1870 – 1945) - Moderne japanische Philosophie und die Frage nach der Interkulturalität*, Rodopi, Amsterdam, 1999, pg. 21 - 52

approach is that the different perceptions have evolved from this root in much the same way in which the leaves of a tree are related to its roots.

Taking this notion of the “anthropological root” further, I must distinguish between two layers, that what is animal in man, and that what he has acquired as part of his cultural and religious heritage and background. Taken in such broad and sweeping terms, this intellectual heritage and background is not easily identifiable and I must therefore adopt some more specific and precise terms. What I have in mind when speaking about a philosopher’s intellectual heritage and background is the set of deliberate and also of unconscious pre-philosophical choices which he has made at some point of time and in the process of becoming a member of a specific society; Hegel uses the term *Sittlichkeit* (Ger.: *ethical life and custom*) as an approximation to indicate that at least part of it may not be consciously present in the mind of the philosopher at all times. But this is not sufficient. Another and also very important component to consider are the philosophical axioms, the *first principles*, which the philosopher adopts for himself and from which he works. Again, some of these philosophical axioms may be clearly pronounced and enunciated while others are tacitly active in the background.

All axioms and pre-philosophical choices are important and must be considered because each one of them may potentially have an impact on the detailed position which a philosopher assumes. Only if we clearly understand by what chain of reasoning a philosopher arrives at some specific conclusions can we also hope to be able to engage in a fair comparison. This comparison will not address some specific statements and conclusions but will instead be focused on what in mathematics and the natural sciences are called the invariants of a problem, which is to say the rock bottom upon which the philosopher places his own reconstruction of reality. In summary then, if my intention is to understand the thought process of the philosopher I must search not only for what are his theses and conclusions, but I must also try to identify from what basis and under what assumptions he has worked.

This defines a very ambitious work program. Clearly the subject matter of intercultural and interreligious dialogue is multifaceted and shot through with issues of extreme complexity. It would therefore be much too tall an order if I was to solve the problematic of such dialogue in a general form that could claim to have broader significance. Rather, my aim must be to limit the scope of this paper and contain the problem such that there is sufficient leeway for the issues of religious faith and of divine grace to be gainfully addressed and solved.

This leads me to introduce the following specifications of the method of work:

- all basic terms that are essential for the analysis to follow must be defined such that what is animal is clearly distinguished from what is culturally or religiously conditioned;
- reality must be described in terms that include all that is, but which at the same time are broad enough to give each philosopher the latitude which he needs to be able to express himself in his own terms;
- basic concepts and assumptions that later prove to be essential must be made explicit without making specific reference to any one of the two philosophers. This includes basic philosophical terminology which is essential for introducing and discussing both Tanabe and Kierkegaard.

If I follow these principles through I should be able to present the thought of Kierkegaard and Tanabe in a way which takes note of the fact that Christianity and Buddhism are both
world religions that not only have evolved largely independently from one another, but which also both claim that they can explain reality in a coherent and cohesive fashion such that the spiritual needs of the faithful can be satisfied.

One more clarification is still necessary. Philosophy is not in a position to adjudicate any specific truth claims of either one religion but instead it must basically take specific religious doctrines as an input and a primordial given that is made available to it from another source which is clearly and unambiguously outside of its control. For this reason philosophy cannot undertake to prove or disprove any such inputs; all what philosophy can do is to apply the fire of rational criticism and in the process to analyze the inputs and to compare them with other similar such givens. To avoid possible misreading and also to be very specific about this issue, I do not profess any uncritical arbitrariness in religious or metaphysical matters. There can be no doubt that any one such position must lay open and present its credentials. I do hold, however, that such credentials may not be founded on philosophy, but that they may instead be based on insights that transcend the limits set to the philosophical enterprise, such as is for example the role attributed to Divine Revelation in the Biblical faith, or the truth value of the sacred scriptures, that is the Sūtras (: collections of the discourses or teachings of the Buddha) and Śāstras (: Mahāyāna commentaries on philosophical issues in the Sūtras) upon which Buddhist religious belief is based.
3. Method of analysis

The purpose of this chapter is to instantiate the general principles which I have discussed in the preceding two chapters. Following the tasking as specified, this chapter will need to be subdivided into sections as follows: first I must address the meaning of the English terms “faith” and “grace”. As I study the notion of divine grace I must also speak to the phenomenon of the “miracle”. Next there are some technical terms that are basic for the analysis to follow. On the one hand there is a need to establish a general philosophical framework that will enable me to structure divergent philosophical positions along similar lines. There is also the need for a precise delineation of some basic terms such as philosophy, theology, and religious philosophy. One specific area that must be addressed is the problem of how to describe the basic characteristics of reality conceived as “ultimate” or “the absolute”. I shall address these issues by creating a general skeleton of terms such that any one philosopher will be able to find the room which he needs to expose his views. In this task I must prepare myself that in some aspects Eastern and Western philosophical traditions differ essentially from one another, and as deemed necessary I must address this in sufficient detail. At the end I draw some conclusions which are based on the insight that we as human beings are intrinsically finite, and that this conditions how we as individuals perceive reality to be.

3.1 The meaning of the English words “faith” and “grace”

Neither Kierkegaard nor Tanabe were native speakers of English. Kierkegaard wrote in his native language, Danish, and Tanabe published his books in Japanese. Since most readers who are interested in reading the works of these philosophers master neither one of these two languages it has become customary to focus on translations of their works into English instead. This is why I consider it important to mention that the onus of a faithful rendition of the concepts of faith and grace into English rests with the translators. I can only assume that the translations at hand are reliable from that linguistic point of view.

Under this assumption it then is reasonable to consider the ways in which these two words are generally used in an English language context. This I shall do in two different ways. First I shall examine the accepted usages for these two words. For this task I shall base myself on the entries that I can find in Webster’s Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language. In a separate second step I will then address in some detail the material content of both terms. Finally some conclusions shall be drawn that must provide guidance when I address the thought of Kierkegaard and of Tanabe.

3.1.1 “Faith”

3.1.1.1 Accepted uses of “faith”

The first thing to note when addressing the field of meaning associated with “faith” is that is closely paralleled by the companion term “belief”. Also, while the verbal expression for faith is the compound of “to have faith in ...” there exists a parallel verbal expression “to believe”. This is an indication of the fact that these words are not identical but that there are subtle differences in meaning. Also to note is that in some way “knowledge” is related to “faith”,

while one antonym is “distrust”. Common to all of these words is that they can have secular and religious connotations.

In *Webster’s Dictionary* we find the following examples of accepted uses for “faith”:

1. confidence or trust in a person or thing: *faith in another’s ability*.
2. belief which is not based on proof: *he has faith that the hypothesis would be substantiated by fact*.
3. belief in God or the teachings of religion: *old pilgrims, strong in their faith*.
4. belief in anything, as a code of ethics, standards of merit, etc.: *to be of the same faith with someone on all matters*.
5. a system of religious belief: *the Christian faith; the Jewish faith*.
6. the obligation of loyalty or fidelity in a person, promise, engagement, etc.: *failure to appear would be breaking faith*.
7. the observance of this obligation; fidelity in one’s promise, oath, allegiance, etc.: *to act in good faith*.
8. Christian theology: the trust in God and in His promises as made through Christ and the Scriptures by which man is justified or saved.
9. in faith, in trust, indeed: *in faith, he is a fine lad*.

For the acceptance no. 5 the following synonyms are listed: *doctrine, tenet, creed, dogma, persuasion, religion*, while *disbelief* is the antonym for acceptances no. 1 and 2.

Although it might be tempting to look into some of the medieval or for that matter Latin uses and roots of the words, this would certainly not add much specific information that is likely to be relevant in a non-western context. I will therefore instead turn next to the related term of “belief” and its accepted uses. In *Webster’s Dictionary* we find:

10. something believed; an opinion or conviction: *the belief that the earth is flat*.
11. confidence in the truth or existence of something not immediately susceptible to rigorous proof: *a statement unworthy of belief*.
12. confidence; faith, trust: *a child’s belief in his parents*.
13. a religious tenet or tenets: *the Christian belief*.

For reasons of clarity it is of interest to look also into the accepted use of the associated verb “to believe”:

14. v. i.: to have confidence in the truth, the existence, or the reliability of something, although without absolute truth that one is right in doing so: *only if one believes in something can he act purposefully*.
15. v. t.: to have confidence or faith in the truth of (a positive assertion, story, etc.).
16. v. t.: to have confidence in the assertions of (a person).
17. v. t.: to have a conviction that (a person or thing) is, has been, or will be engaged in a given action or involved in a given situation: *the fugitive is believed to be headed for the Mexican border*.
18. v. t.: to be more or less confident, suppose (usually followed by a noun clause): *I believe that he has left town*.
19. v. t.: believe in:
   19.1: to be persuaded of the truth or existence of: to believe in Zoroastrianism, to believe in ghosts.
   19.2: to have faith in the reliability, honesty, benevolence etc. of: *I can help only if you believe in me*.

Given the above differentiations, several thoughts and observations come to mind including the following:

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14 Several of the standard reference works explain the notions of faith and of grace in this way.
1. faith and belief are related but not identical in meaning, although the differences seem to become almost unnoticeable in some of the accepted meanings. Leaving this partial overlap to one side, it appears that “faith” is related to the agent having faith, while “belief” refers to that which is believed;

2. contrary to belief, faith does not have a verbal equivalent. To express the fact that one has faith in someone or something one would have to use phrases such as “to have faith in ...”;

3. to have faith or to believe involves a movement of having trust and confidence in someone or something. This trust and confidence are not rooted in any form of demonstration, proof or similar assurance, since in that case we would no longer speak of having faith but of having knowledge;

4. only an individual person can have faith. Impersonal things cannot perform the act of placing trust or confidence in someone or something. Also, when we speak of the collective faith of a group of people, for example “the faith of the Catholic Church”, that what is implied by the word “faith” is the doctrine, tenets, etc. in which the members of this group place their trust and in which they have confidence. In other words, what is implied here as the agent having faith is an object, be that physical or mental, but not an act. Only an individual human subject can have faith in the strict sense of the word;

5. what we have faith in or believe is an attribute of someone or something which we could verify - at least in principle, e.g. that the earth is a sphere or that a persons actually tells us the truth - or else what we have faith in or believe may be something which can never be verified, i.e. the assertion that God exists. In the first case I speak of faith or belief in things secular, while in the second case we are dealing with instances of religious, or metaphysical faith or belief;

6. some objects of religious or metaphysical belief may be real – e.g. the God of Christianity really exists for the Christian faithful - while other objects may be the product of our fantasy, as for example five-legged horses, golden mountains, and unicorns;

7. faith always has an object. This object may be a person or a thing, be that immanent or transcendent. Thus the act of having faith or of believing must not be confounded with the object in which we place our trust and our confidence.

In summary we may conclude that the basic meaning of “having faith” is to be ready to place one’s trust and confidence in another person or a thing. However, the acceptances 3, 4, 5, 6, 10, 11, 13 above apparently do not quite fit this simple description, and it seems that something crucial must be missing. This I shall elucidate as follows.

Up to this point I have assumed that the act of having faith comes into being in isolation. This, however, may not be an adequate assumption, because to have faith in real life, to place one’s trust and confidence into a person or a thing, is never an isolated act but instead always has some specific background and context associated to it which serves to provide for a specific intellectual and emotional situation. I trust in God because I am convinced that He exists; I have faith in the teachings of the Bible because I have good reason to assume that its contents has been revealed; I am confident that a specific person will act as I hope he or she will because I have known that person for many years; I adopt a certain code of conduct because this code of conduct has been generally accepted within the community in which I live. These examples indicate that it is mandatory to broaden the scope and to consider the general context in which a specific instantiation of an act of having faith takes place. It is only natural that a person who is ready to place his or her trust and confidence into someone or something does not regard the object of such faith as having come to this world from nowhere. This would be the attitude of a very young child. An older individual will invariably project some of his or her hopes, beliefs, mind-set and expectations onto the proposed object of faith, thereby creating the specific context that will make him or her feel comfortable in having faith and believing.

This raises the question of why the person having faith should be prepared to have trust and confidence. To address this issue we must consider the broader context of how the “seat of faith”, that is to say the person having faith, is related to the “object of faith”, i.e. the person
or thing into which the trust and confidence are placed. More specifically, before someone is prepared and ready to commit him- or herself to an “act of faith”, this person must have been given some good reasons to convince him or her that the act of faith is justified and that there will be no deceit. Clearly these are personal judgments which others may not be prepared to share, but they are undoubtedly important for the individual concerned.

Common to all individuals would be that any act of faith is always embedded into a stream of mental processes that have begun in the past and which shall continue into the future. Of these processes we can say that they are not isolated but instead are related to one another such that what follows in time always somehow depends on what has happened in the past. More specifically, if I were to have faith in a person or a thing that I do not know, this would be in utter contradiction to what common sense tells me to do. For example, why should I give my purse to someone whom I have never met before? The answer to this question is of course very simple: I shall not do so because I do not have the assurances that the person in question is trustworthy. The same consideration applies to any other tangible or imaginary object or thing, be that a book, a work of art, a sign post on the road, or anything else. I shall not rely on such things unless I am assured that they are not fakes but that they may instead be trusted at face value. The key is thus that in order to feel comfortable I must have an appropriate degree of assurance that the act of faith is justified.

This is true independently of where such assurances come from. In technical terms this is the problem of the epistemological context into which the “object of faith” is embedded. For example, if some human individual makes a certain assertion, then my own assurance that what the other person asserts is true will either be founded on my own knowledge of that person, or else these assurances will be based on what some third individual tells me. If on the other hand the “object” is a thing, my assurances may come either from my own assessments of the quality of that thing, or else I must have faith in what some other person tells me. In any case it is essential that I feel satisfied and comfortable with my decision to have faith or to believe. In other words, to have faith in someone or something always requires assurances which must either arise from within my own subjectivity, or else they must be based on the testimony of another human individual whom I consider to be trustworthy.

This has nothing to do with the fact that I can make a mistake or that there may be deceit. Those considerations always come in hindsight: I cannot have committed a mistake and I cannot find myself deceived unless I have first gone through the motions of having had faith and of having placed my trust and my confidence into someone or something. In some instances the person having faith will act with certain mental reservations and this may be a reason to speak of degrees of faith, trust and confidence. Those distinctions are certainly important when we discuss specific cases in hindsight, but for the present context they have no relevance. There is other no way but to admit that in performing the act of faith I always must commit myself unconditionally. I can use my money to buy some high risk shares of whose value I am only partially convinced. The point is that I must either commit myself and buy, or leave things as they are and buy not. Once the shares have been bought and I then find out that their value has collapsed, any mental reservation that I may have had when I bought them do not count because by buying I committed myself unconditionally. Thus

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15 This need not necessarily be transferable to other societies. Japanese people, for example, have been reported to reserve a place in a cinema by laying their purse on the seat and then leaving the room. Nobody will steal that purse, and everybody will respect the right of the person to keep the seat.
independently of whether or not I had mental reservations, the result is necessarily the same, namely the money which I have spent is lost.

In conclusion, the concept of faith is best described as the act of placing one’s trust and confidence into someone or something in a specific instance for a specific occasion after having been satisfied by one’s own assessments or else by the assurances of another human being in whom I trust, that this act of faith is not only justifiable, but that actually is justified.

3.1.1.2 Material aspects of “faith”

So far I have focused my attention exclusively on the formal aspects and attributes that are associated with the use of the English word faith. This formal approach and structure must now be filled in with specific meaning and material content. Such content can be derived from various sources, including the analysis of a personal relationship with another human individual, the analysis of a faith relationship that is based on some specific individual and personal experience or on a religious conviction, or any other instantiation of placing one’s trust and one’s confidence in someone or something. In all cases the formal elements which I have identified for the notion of “faith”, namely

- the “seat of faith”;
- the “act of having faith”;
- the “object of faith”;
- the “context of assurance”.

will all take on a distinct meaning that is specific to the particular case at hand. Given that faith has a broad range of both secular and religious connotations I shall use two different approaches to discuss the material contents of “faith”. The first of these approaches goes back to Louis P. Pojman’s analysis of the notion of faith in Kierkegaard’s philosophy, while the second I have found in one of the general reference books of philosophy.

In his study Pojman has offered a schema for how the notion of having faith can be structured in accordance with the degree of mental preparedness and readiness of the individual concerned to commit the act of faith. This is not the only way to approach the subject matter, and there can be no doubt that other such schemata could also be drafted, but I have selected this proposal because it covers two aspects that are of special relevance in the present context: Pojman’s proposal

- addresses matters of religiously motivated faith;
- has a direct bearing on one of the philosophers that concern us here.

I have not been able to find any study of Tanabe or for that matter of any other Buddhist philosopher in which the subject of faith has been analyzed in a comparable fashion. There should be no reason however, why Pojman’s proposal would not be applicable also to Tanabe unless we categorically assume that Christian religious faith cannot and must not be put on a par with Buddhist religious faith. However, there is no apparent basis to justify such an assumption. More specifically, Pojman’s contribution is in my view significant since it

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addresses the animal basis of a perennial and ubiquitous anthropological phenomenon which sits at the root of the many diverse distinctions and shades of having faith that we can tell apart. Another argument in support of choosing Pojman is that the intrinsically relational character of the phenomenon of faith does not in itself suffice to explain what is implied on the side of the acting individual. Such knowledge can only be derived by means of a separate act from additional input sources. Pojman has performed such an investigation, and it is for this reason that his results can help to obtain useful clarifications. We cannot exclude that the insights so gained will be biased in some way by Kierkegaard’s religious Christian background and philosophical outlook. I must come back to this as and when appropriate.

Some more background information may help to clarify the point. As I shall have to explain in more detail later, Tanabe relates the notion of faith to the working of Other-power\(^\text{17}\), with Other-power being a foundational concept in his metanoetic\(^\text{18}\) philosophy - without the help of Other-power no salvation from personal depression and despair! Yet Tanabe never makes “faith” - and for that matter also “grace” - a prime topic for his reflections. To him the act of having faith is an unproblematic, primitive notion that need not be discussed in any detail. As a philosophical concept it is always present in Tanabe’s thought process, but this presence is under the guise of terminology taken from the canon of Buddhist philosophy, whereas the English word “faith” is explicitly used only at some rare occasions in *Philosophy as Metanoetics*. This same observation also applies to Tanabe’s use of the word “grace”. The result is that if we want to study Tanabe’s treatment of the phenomenon of faith we must scrutinize the text for specific contextual instantiations of the concept that are implicit in the text. It goes without saying that a more detailed understanding of the concept will be of great help analyzing the text and in classifying the results. As is the case, Pojman’s proposal, which has been developed specifically for the application to Kierkegaard, turns out to be in my view sufficiently general in scope such that it can also be applied to other contexts, and in particular to those in which the emphasis is on religious faith.

In deriving his classification scheme, Pojman has taken a broad view of Kierkegaard’s literary output in the sense that he did not constrain himself to what is written in the *Philosophical Fragments* and in the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. Rather, he also took Kierkegaard’s *Early Papers*, the *Stages of Existence* and the *Later Papers* into account, that is to say books which Kierkegaard has published under various pseudonyms over time and with different intentions. Since it cannot be denied that Kierkegaard understanding of faith may have evolved over time it is a valid question to ask whether Kierkegaard did always hold the same view of faith and for that matter of grace. It is quite possible that Kierkegaard’s views may have evolved over time. This might be an interesting topic in itself, but it is not clear what impact the clarification of any such details might have in the present context.

This is Pojman’s proposal\(^\text{19}\) for the material categories of “faith”:

\[\begin{align*}
\text{a) Aesthetic faith: an immediate, animal intuition. This is primordial faith, the stuff out of which faith proper must grow. It is the passionate, imaginative, subjective element in man.}
\end{align*}\]

\(^{17}\) *Other-power* is a Buddhist term that signifies what transcends human finiteness. Occasionally Tanabe identifies this Other-power with the concept of God, but this does not imply that he embraces the notion of the God of Christianity. A good approximation for what Tanabe has in mind is probably Rudolf Otto’s notion of “The Holy”.

\(^{18}\) Tanabe Hajime, *Philosophy as Metanoetics*, o.c.

\(^{19}\) Pojman, o.c., pg. 129 - 30
b) **Ethical faith**: commitment to ideals and, in particular, the rational order which is part of natural law. Faith is reasoned allegiance to the ideals which reason discovers.

c) **Religious or existential faith**: a second immediacy, an attitude of passionately holding onto an object (proposition) in spite of apparent evidence. This type of faith is also immediate - that is spontaneous - but appears after a certain sophistication in the ethical realm.

d) **Ordinary belief**: common sense, prepositional belief. It is “belief” in the sense of automatic judgment or assessment of evidence. It differs from animal faith in having evidence or being empirically based, but it is part of our animal heritage.

e) **Faith as an organ for apprehending the past** (history): the function or process of making the past present (“contemporary”). The believer, through a resolution of will, appropriates the testimony of others for his own purposes. He decides to believe. This is a volitional type of belief.

f) **Salvific faith**: that form of faith or belief which is a combination of miraculous grace and the effort of the will. Grace must be present as the condition that enables the subject to believe. This type of faith is necessary to believe the “Paradox”, which is against all reason. Here, faith is both above and against all reason.

g) **Faith as hope**: a modified form of religious faith which suggests an attitude of living as if an important proposition were true.

It appears that this scheme is structured according to how we usually determine what assurances we have when in a specific instance we feel ready to place our confidence and trust in someone or something:

- immediate, animal intuition which we can find in individuals of all ages and which for adults can be based on reasoned assessment of empirical evidence and experience;
- trust and confidence in what some other individual claims or testifies with as effect that we either trust him or her, or else believe in what he or she asserts;
- trust and confidence in the contents of a scripture, for example the Gospel, a religious book, a poem, or some other source.

As a general rule we can conclude that we as an individual tend to be satisfied if we feel comfortable with what we believe because it strikes a chord and thus resonates with some of our views or desires, or else when some other individual bears witness to the truth of some factual or mental object. It is in this last case that we are either convinced as a result of a reasoned or emotionally driven thought process of our own, or else that we feel confident because of the assurances given to us by some other individual. This latter case is particularly relevant for the religious context where we deal with salvific claims and promises which we cannot empirically verify, but of which we must instead assume with trust and the confidence that what we hope for and what is promised will actually become true at some point in time. In such circumstances it is the testimony, or an unbroken chain of testimonies, that can be traced down to some specific individual in whose integrity and utter reliability we are ready to believe. Depending on the particular situation there may be additional supportive evidence but in the last instance it is either our own conviction or a conviction that is based on someone else’s assertion and testimony that ultimately makes us believe in the truth of what has been asserted. This leads me to distinguish several constituent elements that partake in the act of having faith in someone or something:

- a context of general assurances;
- an individual who places his or her trust and confidence in someone or something;
- an object into whose authenticity and credibility we place our trust and confidence;
- the act by which the individual having faith and the object of its faith are connected.
The act of "having faith in" someone or something can thus be modeled as a binary relationship that involves a general "context of assurances" and which is constituted of three related elements: a "seat of faith", an "object of faith", and the "act of having faith". The "context" is the background into which the binary "relationship of faith" is embedded. This relationship is unilateral and directed. It originates at the seat of faith, the individual human being who by performing the act of faith connects him- or herself to the object of that faith.

There are other ways in which the subject matter of specifically religious faith can be addressed. I have selected one such schema which I found in one of the reference books of philosophy and which originally was drafted for application to the Christian faith. However, religious faith in a Christian context is itself not a monolithic thing but instead implies diverse connotations, and this is why I assume that the scheme to be presented should also be applicable to other non-Christian religions without too much of a problem:

1. faith denotes a kind of knowledge that is different from empirical knowledge;
2. faith is a synonym for assent;
3. faith is used linguistically in a way similar to declaring: "I believe in ..."
4. faith is a synonym for religion. What a religion has "faith in" is a distinguishing characteristic of that religion. One speaks of the Christian faith, the Judaic faith, etc.

There are several ways in which the word faith so defined can also be used in non-religious contexts. For example, a person has "faith in science". Therefore, since "faith" has different connotations it is incumbent upon me to explain what these diverse readings imply and what it signifies when the term is used for Christianity, Pure Land Mahāyāna Buddhism, and Zen. I shall examine this.

Faith as knowledge: in this variant faith denotes a kind of knowledge that is different from that acquired through reason. The important truths affirmed by faith cannot be proved either by deduction or induction, nor are they like the truths of mathematics or the truth relationships that hold in symbolic logic. A person can make the tacit assumption that life makes sense. He can know with the highest degree of certainty that this is a true assertion, and he can use this knowledge as a key to understanding all of life, but there is no way to demonstrate the truth of his knowledge. The only proof in faith-knowledge is corroboration with one’s own experience. Similarly in areas such as science and technology, axioms or first principles are accepted as a given without supporting proof. Martin Luther (1483 - 1546), for example, was a theologian who explicitly stressed that having faith means having trust in the sense of the surrender of the whole person to God.

Luther, and with him most other theologians, was not satisfied with blind faith and therefore was interested in the object of one’s faith. As a consequence, the question whether faith-knowledge must be consistent with and supported by other kinds of knowledge has ranged prominent in religious discussion. Over time different positions have been taken, but it now seems to be broadly accepted that religiously motivated faith-knowledge must not be in contradiction with other kinds of knowledge, especially scientific knowledge. However, the

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20 Mahāyāna Buddhism is one of the four varieties of Buddhism that are generally distinguished, the others being Hinayāna Buddhism, Tibetan Lamaism, and Zen. Tanabe’s philosophy is partially rooted in a specific form of Mahāyāna Buddhism, i.e. Pure Land Buddhism, and in Zen.
debate is still ongoing in some religious circles; one such example is the debate between creationists and evolutionists about Darwinism and the age of the universe.

Faith as assent: in non-technical language the terms “faith” and “assent” are often used interchangeably. One may read that a forest fire has broken out in Australia. One accepts the statement as true and respects it, even though one has never been to Australia and also has no empirical evidence to support the assertion. Instead one assents to the proposition upon the credit of the person who proposed it; in the present case one trusts that the journalist tells the truth. Similarly a scientist builds on the knowledge that others have acquired. In theory, what the scientist accepts on faith could be verified through scientific procedure, but he saves himself time and trouble by accepting the conclusion in good faith. In religion where there is a belief in the transcendent, the situation is somewhat different. The Holy Scriptures present primordial experiences and insights gained from the impingement of the transcendent on the ordinary. Supporting experiences by the faithful are also recorded and over time have become part of the treasury of the religion. Without such transmission of religious content there could be no sharing of the content and no individual appropriation of it. The propositions made can be scrutinized for internal consistency, but a prerequisite for accepting them as true is an uncompromising commitment to their content, a commitment that precedes assent. Therefore, the adherent of a religion is expected to accept on faith, that is to concur with the propositions of his belief, and this is then how faith becomes a synonym for assent. Thomas Aquinas has defined faith as “the act of the intellect assenting to a divine truth”. Even though the ultimate goal for the adherent to a religion may be the participation in divine love, or forgiveness, what is essential as a prerequisite is faith in the sense of assent to what is believed as a revealed truth.

To assent to something may either mean to have “faith that” or to “believe that”. Such a difference in meaning can best be dealt with when we differentiate between what is scientifically (I believe that ...) and what is religiously (I have faith that ...) implied. In order to clarify the difference we must look at the structures of reasoning in science and religion. Apart from improvable axioms the conclusions of science are publicly verifiable in the sense that anyone with the proper training could arrive at the same conclusion. That is not so in matters religious. More specifically, particular religious experiences cannot be repeated in experiment. If God is accepted as the ultimate, then we must accept that His existence is sui generis and unlike anything else. The experience of God is never objective; it is always personal. One cannot prove that God exists, although numerous people have experienced God. In contrast, scientific statements are objective, and scientific experiments can be duplicated. The dogmatic base of a religion emerges within a community of faith and is transmitted to those who already have or are prepared to engage in a faith commitment. Only within this context are dogmas subject to inquiry, criticism, and validation. Furthermore, religious

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21 When speaking about the „existence of God“ we must differentiate between what the word “God” designates in religious as compared to its use in philosophy. In religion “God” designates a transcendent entity of otherwise nondescripct nature. We can make pictures of God, but these cannot replace God. By contrast, “God” in philosophy designates a functional concept which is introduced because of some logical necessity. Kant has pointed at the normative function which that notion has for practical reason. Such a concept of God is a fabrication of the human mind, an idol, and as such it is different from the God of religion.
judgments are always in terms of symbols, which, unlike signs, participate in the reality towards which they point. In other words, only some parts of the meaning of the system of religion can be derived from a conceptual framework, while the highest truth in a religion can be attained only in a special kind of religious experience, which cannot be objectively or publicly validated. This is what is implied by stating that one has “faith that” religious propositions are true.

Faith as commitment: in this variant the word faith is used to assert that ”I believe in …” a certain person or thing. To speak of having faith means having confidence and trust in another person or thing. Important for this reading of the term are not only the elements of trust and confidence, but also those of surrender and submission. Especially because of these latter connotations did faith as a commitment become a key concept in the Bible and in the subsequent Christian religious literature. Martin Luther has repeatedly emphasized the need to surrender the whole person to the will of God. Paul Tillich (1886 - 1965) defined faith as the state of being ultimately concerned. Everyone has concerns, some are urgent and others are not. If an individual’s concerns claim to be ultimate, these concerns demand total surrender and in return promise total fulfillment. By comparison, a nation, the acquisition of wealth, worldly success, or any other loyalty could claim ultimate concern, but, if they could be destroyed or could not fulfill their promises, they would not be ultimate, and would instead be idols. Faith involves the conscious and unconscious levels of the person, his or her rational and non-rational faculties, the emotions, and the will. Tillich believed that man is driven toward an ultimate concern beyond what are only finite and conditional concerns, because he possesses an element of the infinite within himself. What concerns man ultimately cannot be approached in the same way as ordinary knowledge nor can it be subjected to ordinary handling, for it is always infinite and transcending.

Man constructs a picture of God to whom he gives his allegiance. But the ultimate itself, the “Ground of being”, always transcends man’s picture of it so that the picture is always subject to criticism and change.

Faith as a relationship: in all of the above analysis faith has always had the characteristic of a binary relationship connecting man with either God, or the Transcendent, or a person, or a thing. It is also a directed relationship in the sense that man is in a state of “believing in …”, “trusting in …”, “having faith in …” that which opposes him. If we eliminate all religious connotations and other contents from this relationship, we end up with an intentional relation of man towards someone or something, i.e. the object of faith.

![Voluntary orientation](Voluntary orientation towards Man Object of Faith)

Included in this relationship is an element of acceptance and devotion such that man exposes himself to the risk that what he has faith in might perhaps not be worth it. Yet he is nevertheless convinced that his faith is not misplaced. Since taking a risk and placing one’s trust in someone or something has the connotation not only of loyalty and of a sense of

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22 Heb. 11, 1
responsibility, but also one of submission and of surrender, the act of having faith can pictorially be represented by an arrow that like one’s mind is directed from the human subject towards the object of faith.

Philosophy must analyze the elements of this directed binary relationship one by one and also in combination with as its purpose to explain what these elements mean in a given metaphysical context.

3.1.1.3 A relational model for Faith

This directed binary relationship is shown in the following diagram in which I have used a slightly modified terminology, and to which I now must add some qualifications.

![Diagram of Seat of Faith, Act of Having Faith, and Object of Faith](image)

A relational model for “faith”

Not included in this diagram is the “context of assurances”. This may either be a one-time input or else some longer-term perspective for the “Seat of Faith”. However, irrespective of whether we speak about ordinary or religious faith, the Seat of Faith must always be a human subject, because a lifeless thing cannot perform an act of religious devotion or simply place its trust and confidence in the object of its faith. Also, the religious subject would not be satisfied with believing in its faith object if it was not assured that this object is loving, compassionate, and ready to inspire it with hope. This is a feature which all religions have in common, namely that there is some kind of a salvific promise that evokes in the faithful the conviction that in the end their faith will be rewarded by compassionate understanding of their desires and expectations. Using a more formalistic terminology, we may say that the act of having faith and of placing trust and confidence in the object is being paralleled by a positive feedback from the object of faith through which this object inspires the subject with hope of being understood and well received. The following modified diagram reflects this.

![Diagram of Subject of Faith, Trust & Confidence, and Compassion & Hope](image)

The religious Subject places its Trust and Confidence in the Object - the Object inspires the Subject with Compassion and Hope

Assuming that from a structural point of view the model captures the essence of what the users of the English phrase “having faith in ...” intend to imply when they invoke the notion of faith, we can now conclude that the diagram correctly depicts the anthropological matrix for all mundane or religiously or culturally diverse instantiations of the phenomenon of faith. The advantage of this representation is that it enables us to isolate all connotations that may be culturally or religiously relevant and to compact these into the “context of assurances”. In
this way I shall be able to compare the instantiations of religious faith in the thought of Kierkegaard and, Tanabe knowing that their concepts of faith are conditioned by religious convictions that ultimately must be considered incompatible with one another.

With this in mind it is now possible to define precisely which questions should be posed to a philosopher as he fills the concept of faith with specific contents: there is first of all the specific religious and cultural context in which the philosopher lives and in which he writes. Here the task is to investigate and explain the role that religious or cultural faith plays for the human individual, and how this faith is expressed. In this analysis the emphasis must be on religious tenets and doctrine, and not on ceremonial items. As is the case for both Tanabe and for Kierkegaard, the philosophers themselves willingly provide much helpful information on this specific aspect. The task thus is to identify such inputs and to state their significance. As the case may be, this kind of information could be enhanced by further inputs that can be compiled from secondary literary sources. Of Kierkegaard we know that he was a theologian and that he had been trained in the doctrine of the Danish State Church. Later and in the context of his views on divine grace the problem of his relationship to the thoughts of Martin Luther (1483 - 1546) shall arise; it will be dealt with in this manner. Tanabe, as was already mentioned, had strong inclinations towards the Buddhist Pure Land sect founded by the Japanese monk Shinran Shōnin23 (1173 - 1262). In this case it is possible to find reliable information about this sect, Mahāyāna Buddhism and on the veneration of Amida Buddha in for example a recent study by Heinrich Dumoulin24. Additional sources that deal with this subject area shall be mentioned as needed and also in the bibliography at the end.

This leaves me with the three elements of which the binary faith-relationship is constituted and which must be explained: the “seat of faith”, the “object of faith”, and the “act of having faith” that connects the former two elements with one another and thereby creates the essence of the context of faith.

It becomes thus the task of the individual philosopher to provide a detailed analysis of each of these elements and of their role in the overall process. By this I mean that it would be too simplistic a view to assume that having faith is a primitive unilateral static relationship. To the contrary, we cannot exclude that the interaction between the seat of faith and its object may be dynamic and complex and that it may involve mutual exchanges and transformations that have an impact on the state of mind of the faithful individual and that will also include the object. We must thus allow for the possibility that the act of having faith is not static but instead distinctly dynamic, involving change:

23 Shinran was a disciple of Hōnen (1133 - 1212) whose doctrine of the Pure Land School he deepened and expanded. His basic teaching can be summarized by such concepts as self-power and Other-power, various stages of religious life, Amida Buddha as Other-power, and rebirth in the Pure Land. Self-power refers to the belief in one’s capacity to attain enlightenment, while Other-power is “that which is free of calculation”. While self-power is manifest within the subject-object dichotomous mode, Other-power is awakening to the non-dichotomous reality. Ultimately, self-power cannot be recognized apart from appreciating Other-power, and the latter cannot be fully realized without exerting the former to its utter, breaking limits. The aim of the Pure Land path is abrogating self-power for Other-power as the center of one’s life. Birth in the Pure Land has two implications: although our defiled bodies remain in this world (samsāra), our minds play in the Pure Land to become fully awakened. After having been awakened one returns to the world of samsāra to work for the deliverance of all sentient beings. The motion of going to the Pure Land and returning to samsāra is the fullest manifestation of the life of the Bodhisattva, philosophically expressed as the simultaneous activity of ascent and descent. Both are made possible by the working of Other-power

24 Heinrich Dumoulin, Understanding Buddhism - Key Themes, Weatherhill, 1994, pg. 105 - 10
as the human individual places his or her trust and confidence on someone or something he or she establishes a relationship that did not exist before or that was initially dormant and that is now activated; also
- there is the possibility that the two terminal elements of that relationship will be transformed by the exchanges that take place as the relationship of placing trust and confidence builds up and comes into force.

A philosopher who makes use of the concept of faith must be asked to explain this process of conversion, transformation and change in the context of his philosophy, or else he must argue why the process is static.

To summarize, viewing “faith” in this manner as a purely formal binary relationship between two distinct poles has two specific advantages:

- as a model it is empty of any specific meaning and thus empty of any religious or cultural connotations, and by this token does not by itself introduce any bias;
- as a structural relationship it highlights the aspect of communication and transport that takes place between the two poles.

The person having faith is related to the object of this faith by the motion of placing trust and confidence, and - by implication - of receiving something in return. It is not relevant whether other human beings, outsiders, become involved in this act. What is important is that the single individual that is concerned performs the act with respect to either one object or to a set of objects. Having faith, therefore, is basically a private affair and thus need not be part of the public domain of inter-personal communications. This does in no way preclude that several individuals may become united as they share in the same object of faith, and by this token may be considered to form a group. Good examples of such group-forming are the Christian Churches, as are political parties and other kinds of civil or religious associations. What is at issue is thus the true nature of the phenomenon of faith. This I will discuss further in the context of Kierkegaard’s religious philosophy. Suffice it to say that if having faith is an altogether private affair, then it seems reasonable to investigate into the ontological status of the communication that the act of having faith instantiates between the individual and the object of its faith. It seems to be a fact that, while he or she relates to the object of faith, other humans have no means to verify any statement that someone has actually performed an act of faith. Those who are not directly involved in the process have nothing to go by but the assertion of the individual in question, which they then can either believe or reject. In other words, for others to believe that someone has placed his or her trust and confidence into someone or something requires once again a new act of faith. There may also be other factors that can help to corroborate a declared act of having faith. This however is no substitute for the need that any onlooker must ultimately perform an act of faith of his own. If thus, as would seem to be the case, faith and the act of having faith are private matters and thus beyond public control, it is nevertheless true that the object of faith may be an element in the public domain which can be shared with other human beings. Religious tenets, assertions, doctrines, and any other type of proposition that can be made part of the public domain can thus be subjected to public scrutiny for truthfulness and logical consistency. From an epistemological point of view we must therefore distinguish between the truth-value of the assertion that someone has performed an act of faith, and the truth-value that is associated with the object of that act of faith. This latter issue has strong bearings on the philosophical concept of truth. If the truth claim for an object of faith, e.g. a religious doctrine, is that it is the objective expression of an absolute truth, then the veracity
of this truth claim must be demonstrated beyond doubt. Under no circumstances is it possible that such a demonstration be replaced by opinion. This can be achieved in two different ways: the truth claim must either be supported by a rigorous demonstration of its veracity, or else it must be founded on an unconditional faith commitment. In the first case the truth claim becomes a part of the public domain; in the second it is a purely private matter that belongs to the domain of subjectivity.

The philosopher’s involvement is to investigate how the truth-value of a proposition can be verified, that is to investigate how that what is believed can be shown to be true. Such an investigation makes sense only on the assumption that truth, hence absolute truth-values, exist and that these can also be demonstrated. This however is a contentious issue to which philosophers have stated their reservations. Willard Van Orman Quine and others contend that the individual’s ontological commitment is constitutive for determining what truth is, thereby denying the notion of absolute truth. Others relate the problematic of truth more generally to the questions of what reality is made of and how it can be coherently and cohesively explained. Considered in this way it follows that a philosopher’s position on “faith” and faith-related truth claims is linked to how he understands reality to be.

3.1.2 “Grace”

In this section I shall use the same techniques as those that I have applied to the analysis of the meaning of “grace”. Starting with a review of the accepted uses of the English word “grace”, I address the material contents of the notion, more specifically that of divine grace. At the end I propose a model for the basic phenomenon of grace that takes the form of a binary relationship. As this discussion proceeds I must also briefly look into what is implied by the notion of “miracle” as this proves to be a concept that is essential for understanding the phenomenon of “divine grace”.

3.1.2.1 Accepted uses of “grace”

In English, as in most other western languages, the word “grace” often has a religious or metaphysical connotation. This is part of our common Christian heritage and cultural background. Since it is by no means clear to what extent other cultures or other religions would allow for any notion of grace that would be similar to the Christian understanding of the word, I consider it to be an important task to establish a definition that is stripped to the extent possible of all connotations that might otherwise affect its use when applied in a non-Christian context. With this in mind I shall apply the same strategy which I used above to analyze the notion of faith: examine the accepted uses of the word “grace” in the English language, and to consider words having a closely related or an opposite meaning.

In English, “grace” can be used as a noun as well as a verb. Accepted uses of the English noun “grace” are:

1. elegance or beauty of form, manner, motion, or act.
2. a pleasing or attractive quality or endowment
3. favor or good will

Some authors contend that the phenomenon of grace is a specifically Christian concept which cannot be used in any other culture or religion. These authors deny that the word grace may be used in non-religious contexts.
4. a manifestation of favor or good will, esp. by a superior: *It was only through the Dean’s grace that she wasn’t expelled from school.*
5. mercy; clemency; pardon: an act of grace.
6. favor shown in granting a delay or temporary immunity.
7. law: an allowance of time to a debtor before suit can be brought against him after his debt by its terms becomes payable: *He was given thirty days grace.*
8. theology:
   a. the freely given, unmerited favor and love of God.
   b. the influence or spirit of God operating in man to regenerate or strengthen him.
   c. a virtue or excellence of divine origin: the Christian graces.
   d. also called State of Grace: the condition of being in God’s favor.
   e. also called State of Grace: the condition of being one of the elect.
9. moral strength: *the grace to perform duty.*
10. a short prayer before or after a meal, in which a blessing is asked and thanks are given.
11. a formal title used in addressing or mentioning a duke, duchess, or archbishop, and formerly also a sovereign
12. classical Mythology: the goddesses of beauty, daughters of Zeus and Eurynome ...
13. music: grace note
14. fall from grace:
   a. theology: to relapse into sin or disfavor
   b. to lose favor with someone in power: despite his good connections he fell from grace again.
15. have the grace to: *would you have the grace to help, please?*
16. in someone’s good or bad graces: regarded with favor or disfavor by someone: *it is a wonder that I have managed to stay in her good graces this long.*
17. with bad grace (also with a bad grace): reluctantly; grudgingly: *he apologized, but did so with bad grace.*
18. with good grace: willingly; ungrudgingly: *she took on extra work with good grace.*

Similarly, the accepted uses of the English verb “to grace” are (transitive use only):

19. to lend or add grace to; adorn: *many fine paintings graced the rooms of the house; numerous trees and flowers grace the landscape.*
20. to favor or honor: *to grace an occasion with one’s presence*
21. music: to add grace notes, cadenzas, etc., to (derived from Latin *gratia*: favor, kindness, esteem; also *gratus*: pleasing)

Synonyms for some of listed acceptances of the noun “grace” are by number of the listed acceptance:

1. attractiveness, charm, gracefulness, ease, symmetry
4. kindness, kindliness, love, benignity, condescension

Similarly we find the following antonyms for some of the acceptances of the noun “grace”:

1. ugliness.
4. animosity.
5. harshness.

Verbal synonyms for acceptance no. 19 are: *embellish, beautify, deck, decorate, ornament; enhance, honor, dignify*; the antonym associated with this same acceptance is: *disfigure.*

Without the attempt to justify the claim in detail I now confine myself to state that it is commonly accepted, at least in a western philosophical and religious context, to use the word “miracle” as a synonym for the effect of grace. Although there is no unambiguous indication for a one-to-one correspondence between these two terms - both terms can be
and often also are used independently of one another - it will later prove to be helpful to consider how “miracle” and the adjective “miraculous” are defined.

For the English word “miracle” we find in Webster’s Dictionary:

1. an effect of extraordinary event in the physical world which surpasses all known human or natural powers and is ascribed to a super-natural cause;
2. an effect or event manifesting or considered as a work of God;
3. a wonder, marvel;
4. a wonderful or surpassing example of some quality: this machine is a miracle of efficiency.

Similarly for “miraculous”:

5. performed by or involving a supernatural power or agency: a miraculous cure;
6. of the nature of a miracle; marvelous;
7. having the power to work marvelous, outstanding, or unusual effects: miraculous drugs.

While there are no synonyms or antonyms for “miracle”, we find as synonyms for the definition no. 6 of “miraculous” the following entries:

- wonderful, extraordinary.
- miraculous, preternatural, supernatural refer to that which seems to transcend the laws of nature.
- miraculous usually refers to an individual event which apparently contravenes known laws governing the universe: a miraculous answer; a miraculous success.
- preternatural suggests the possession of supernormal gifts or qualities: dogs have a preternatural sense of smell; bats have a sense of hearing that is preternatural.
- supernatural suggests divine or superhuman properties: supernatural aid in battle.

In addition, the following antonyms of “miraculous” are listed for definitions 5 and 6:

5. prosaic; commonplace;
6. natural.

Given these definitions and associated explanations the following should be noted:

- the words “miracle” or “miraculous” refer to an individual event that happens in nature;
- the effect of a miracle is said to surpass all known human or natural powers and for this reason it is ascribed to a super-natural or for that matter unexplained cause;
- the effect is also said to contravene known laws that govern the universe. These laws are often called “laws of nature”;
- the effect or event of a miracle is said to manifest the work of God or else they are considered to be a work of God. Some authors prefer to use the expression “Divine Powers” instead of the word “God”. A-religious or atheist thinkers usually prefer to speak of “chance” or “coincidence” or use a similar term that is close to the notion of the unexplained and obscure.

One outstanding characteristic that is common to all variant meanings for the words “miracle” and of “miraculous” is that they refer to something unpredictable because what they refer to cannot be ascribed to any of the known human or natural powers, because the event of their happening and the effects which they produce contravene the known laws that govern the universe. Another way of expressing this is to say that the incidence of the event of a miracle or something miraculous, and their ensuing effects are not limited by the constraints which factors such as human or natural powers and laws governing the universe
might impose, such that the range of the possible effects are not limited by these or any other impositions. Instead anything is possible because all restrictions have been lifted. Using a different set of words, it can also be asserted that the range of possible effects of a miracle is “unlimited”; one can also say - using mathematical terminology - that the number of possible options for the effects is “infinite”. There is no need to stress that these all are statements that contain notions which have not been defined and which for this reason need to be analyzed and explained. Suffice it to say that I must come back to this issue when I introduce the theory and explanation which Alain Badiou\(^{26}\) has offered as an aid to dealing with the notion of the miracle as an immanent - as opposed to transcendent - phenomenon.

Going now back to the above linguistic differentiations there is a need for some clarifications on Miracle” and “grace”. The following comments come to mind:

1. an act of grace is always freely given and unmerited. There is no a causal relationship that can be invoked in order to stimulate an act of grace, nor can such an act ever be compelled. Total autonomy on the side of the originator of the act of grace is an indispensible characteristic of the entire process. Therefore only a freely acting human being, God, or a supra-natural power can grant an act of grace;
2. human beings can be coerced into performing or for that matter abstain from performing what to outsiders may appear like an act of grace. But in such a case the essential quality of grace, that it be granted without coercion, would be missing. God, or by logical extension supra-natural powers\(^{27}\), can only be called graceful because He or the supra-natural power is free and above all limitation;
3. the act of grace necessarily requires an originator of the act and a recipient. The act is instantiated as a kind of transport or communication that relates the originator to the recipient. Through the act of grace something is changed and a new state is acquired that is different from what was before. The thing changed can be either something empirical, e.g. a sickness is cured, or a subjective condition, e.g. the state of mind is changed;
4. it is often not easy to identify one particular happening or occurrence as being an effect of an act of grace. For example, if a prisoner is set free then this will only be considered to be an effect of worldly grace if it is accompanied by some appropriate documentation. This is very distinct from the perception of the prisoner who suddenly discovers that he is once again a free man. On the one hand there is objective proof that an event of grace happened, while on the other hand a prisoner who is not aware that he has been officially pardoned, only perceives that his condition has changed and that he is free from prison. This is also true for effects of religiously motivated grace. The recipient perceives that a change has occurred but he can only conjecture what has caused that change. Instantiations of divine grace are therefore often controversially discussed;
5. in general terms, the assessment of the effects of an act of grace has an objective and a subjective side. Objectively a condition of the empirical world is changed and this change can be identified and verified as the case may be. Subjective changes always occur in the realm of subjectivity and for this reason are confined to the inwardness of the subject and not accessible to other subjects. They become known only if the concerned individual publicly communicates that something has happened;
6. in cases of religiously motivated acts of grace it is customary to invoke the concept of the “miracle”\(^ {28}\) as the means to capture the change which the act of grace has provoked. The word “miracle” is here

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\(^{27}\) Non-Christian religions do not necessarily subscribe to a Christian concept of God.

\(^{28}\) There is much theological and also philosophical literature on the subject of miracles. One example of a skeptical discussion is David Hume’s *Of Miracles*, in: *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Stephen Buckle (ed.), Cambridge University Press, 2007, pg. 96 - 116; also: *The Evidence for Miracles is Weak*, in: *Philosophy of Religion - Selected Readings*, Oxford University Press, USA, 1996, pg. 389 - 398
used to express that an outstanding or unusual event, thing, or accomplishment has happened of which it is assumed that it can only be explained by an act of divine intervention in human affairs;

7. to identify one particular event as being an act of divine grace and to classify its effects as a miracle are both tasks which are not easily accomplished. The difficulty is twofold: first the factual must be identified and stated in terms that leave no room for doubt that what has happened is not in accordance with what was to be expected if the “laws of nature” were to be applied, while, secondly, a borderline must be crossed that separates the statement of a fact from any interpretation of that fact;

8. the expression “laws of nature” is ambiguous and ill defined. Usually the word “law of nature” is reserved for the relationships of cause and effect that govern the processes in the natural sciences. It is a truism that such laws are empirically based and thus subject to constant improvement or change. It is therefore not the case that the “laws of nature” are universal and unchanging. Rather, we can never exclude from consideration that empirical observations may indicate that the known laws are not in agreement with nature and that for this reason they must be adjusted accordingly;

9. given that the “laws of nature” are fallible, what is necessary when an event occurs that supposedly can be ascribed to divine grace, is that the probable causes for that event become clearly and unambiguously documented and identified. From the analysis of such occurrences two types of explanations have emerged: the religiously faithful will opt for an intervention of God or the divine, while those who do not believe will invoke a concept of contingency, pure chance, mere accident.

The impartial observer of an event that is supposed to be the result of divine grace finds himself confronted with a twofold dilemma:

- he must identify and isolate the event as such, either because he has observed it himself, or else because it has been reported to him as being “special” and not in accordance with “the laws of nature”;
- he must attribute this event to a cause which he cannot clearly identify as such and which for this reason must forever be intrinsically controversial.

The interpretation of an event as being the effect of divine grace will therefore always be a matter of subjective private assessment, and not of objective demonstration and proof.

Worldly occurrences of “grace” are not intrinsically problematic because the event of the occurrence and its effect can be observed in the public realm of inter-subjectivity. This is not the case for the notion of “divine grace”, because that has a connotation of privacy and subjective awareness. Some of the effects that can be attributed to divine grace may be open to public scrutiny, e.g. if a sickness is healed, but it is also possible that these effects will only be subjectively experienced by the individual concerned. If that is so then the only way in which other human individuals can come to know that the event did happen is by means of a communication into the public domain. In this act the individual can do no more than bear witness to the fact that he or she has undergone a particular experience and that this was the result of divine intervention. There can be no objective proof of such an assertion and it is forever a matter of personal assessment and judgment whether it is in fact justified to invoke the concept of divine grace. Notions such as miracle, chance and probability, but also fantasy and imagination have a bearing on this matter, as have the notions of having faith and of believing.

Any particular occurrence of an event of grace is always embedded into a global context. This context consists of a sequence of past happenings in the sphere of existence of the individual. Together these happenings condition this sphere. They include the evolution of the state of mind and the religious convictions of the individual, his physical condition and that of his belonging to a group. They are also the cause for any other developments that may take place in the sphere that is of active as well as of passive interest to the individual.
Taken together, the individual undergoes an evolution over time that creates a specific situation for him which - like the focal point of an optical lens - creates a specific outlook on life, its circumstances and the potentially adverse effects that may emerge. Experience tells the individual that its own resources do not suffice to avert any calamity which the future has in store for him. In this case the only hope is that some outside agency shall intervene in his or her favor. Therefore, because the individual feels that he or she is in bad need for support he or she will direct their hope and expectations towards that agency waiting that it will intervene. If for some reason the individual is not prepared and ready in principle to project his or her hope and expectations onto that agency then there will also be no reason to attribute any beneficial or for that matter adverse effects to that same agency. To use a different set of words, I can only believe that Zeus will help me if I believe in him and in his godly powers; otherwise there would be no conceivable reason at all why I should construct any linkage between that mythical figure and my own life. This is also true of any mundane agencies that for whatever reason may be of relevance to me. For example, if a prisoner is deeply convinced that the head of state is a personal enemy, then when he or she is pardoned he or she will not believe that this was due to an act of clemency but will instead assume that this is some ambush or trap that will ultimately be to his or her own disadvantage. In other words, if the concerned individual is not prepared and ready to project his or her hope and expectations onto the agency then what objectively must be called an act of grace is subjectively perceived as contingency, pure chance, mere accident, or malicious act.

An act of grace is an act by which the recipient obtains a favor or other unmerited gift from a source that acts autonomously and freely. Because of this inherent autonomy and freedom, the “seat of grace” cannot be a lifeless thing but must instead be a human being or someone or something that has a nature which is comparable to that of man. Because of this reason, the “seat of grace” is commonly thought to be either human or the God of the monotheistic religions or some divine Being of a comparable nature. Similarly, only a conscious human being can receive an act of grace, for it simply does not make sense to assert that a lifeless thing has been granted a favor. As for living beings that do not qualify as being human, they may receive a gift which a human being would consider being an undeserved favor, but of which it cannot be said that such a being would consider it as an act of grace. In other words, the concept of grace is a notion that can be used only for human and celestial beings, and which connects source and recipient in a binary relationship that conjoins two poles. The task at hand for the philosopher is, therefore, to analyze and explain the three elements which constitute the act or event of grace.

Philosophical discussions of the phenomenon of grace have in the main tended to disregard issues concerning purely mundane instantiations. One of the reasons is that at least for those philosophers who do not refute the notion of God, only divine grace can be genuine grace while any graceful act by a human individual is intrinsically limited by human finiteness, and because finite man is subject to the economy of cause and effect and for this reason never fully autonomous and free. Divine grace is, therefore, the subject of choice for philosophical deliberations.

3.1.2.2 The material contents of “divine grace”

In the course of the history of philosophy western authors have repeatedly claimed that the concept of “grace” is a typically Christian religious concept which does not fit into any other
context, be that another religion or something happening in the empirical world. This claim is backed by the rationale that from a Christian perspective only God is almighty and omnipotent. Therefore only He can truly act out of His own free will, while all human activities ultimately depend on His consent and for this reason are always conditioned and never really free. The necessary conclusion is that “grace” can only be “divine grace”. This is the Christian theological point of view. Philosophically of interest is the question whether other interpretations for the term “grace” and of the nature of the originator of the act of grace are conceivable that would be acceptable for Christians and nonbelievers alike and that therefore would function as an equitable middle ground that all can tolerate. Whatever the result may be, it cannot be denied that such a solution can only be found if neither side of the argument persists uncompromisingly in their position.

The subject of grace has been controversial since the period of enlightenment and before. Only few philosophers have contemplated this matter, and most have rejected it as being irrational and not open to rational scrutiny. Medieval philosophers, on the other hand, have been inspired by the many ramifications and theological implications of the concept of divine Grace. Collectively they have developed a series of logical distinctions that can be graphically reflected in diagrammatical form. In this diagram, the following cases have been singled out: *Not Created* Grace is God’s own Grace which is intrinsically part of His nature. Created grace, on the other hand, is that Grace which He bestows on His creation.

![Divine Grace Diagram](image)

**Medieval distinctions of Divine Grace**

God is the seat of Grace pure and simple and as such the root cause of all other forms and expressions of grace. *Created* Grace is the instantiation of His Divine Love which He always and at all times gives to His creation. In the Christian interpretation, this is the grace by which the created world and everything in it can flourish. It keeps the forces of nature in balance and ensures that calamities and harm are counterbalanced by what is favorable and supportive to the thriving of all beings. Such grace is available to the whole creation and is for that reason not exclusively directed to any specific being as can be seen in the following distinction: Grace *gratis data* is the manifestation of His Divine Love which He always and at all times gives to His creation and to all that is in it. Grace *gratum faciens* is His graceful response to the particular needs of some specific individual who finds him- or herself in a specific situation: the individual receives habitual Grace when he or she is baptized because this is a prerequisite for his or her salvation, while actual Grace is awarded according to some specific need, as are for example the cure of a serious illness or the safe return from a dangerous voyage. I have included this scheme here because it puts some aspects of the phenomenon of grace into relief which - *mutatis mutandum* - have a broader significance than what the medieval philosophers had in mind because it establishes a structural schema that is not restricted to a Christian religious interpretation only. I shall come back to this issue later when I discuss the positions of Kierkegaard and of Tanabe on the subject of grace.
It will be helpful for understanding how some western philosophers, including Kierkegaard, Kant and Hegel have dealt with this subject if I recapitulate some of the bitter controversies that over the course of the history of philosophy have flared up in Europe. In the orthodox Christian interpretation which the medieval philosophers shared, grace denotes both the basic attitude of God towards man and the gift by which He makes man’s response to Him possible. From this perspective it becomes possible to establish a linkage between such diverse topics as are grace and forgiveness, grace and man’s works, nature and grace as something “supra-natural”, and divine grace and man’s free will. Over the centuries these connections have become the core issues that have fuelled some fierce theological and philosophical disputes, including:

1. the controversy between St. Augustine and the British monk Pelagius about man’s free will that was truncated by the second Council of Orange (529);
2. the bitter controversies following the publication Martin Luther’s Preface to Romans and the ensuing decisions taken by the Catholic Council of Trent (1545 - 63) about how to reconcile freedom, grace and the doctrine of predestination;
3. the disagreement of views between Catholics and Protestants concerning the “means of grace”, i.e. whether the efficacy of the sacraments as channels of the divine grace depends on the performance of good works, or instead, whether their working depends only on the faith of the recipient.

Among the many and openly divergent positions that have been taken in these disputes two stand out as being particularly significant:

a) that divine grace is intrinsically irresistible;
b) that man can act freely and is able to resist grace.

This shows that in the West the reflections on grace generally tend to straddle the border which separates the field of philosophy from that of theology, even though the actual subject matter is rather limited in scope and only addresses one specific, if important aspect of the phenomenon of divine grace. I must come back to this issue when I compare the views on grace that Kierkegaard and Tanabe have held.

3.1.2.3 A relational model for “grace”

The phenomenon of grace is complex and involves several factors that cannot easily be captured in a straightforward manner. I offer the following relational model for the notion, as it enables me to isolate the relevant components and how they interact:

This model is an abstraction and seems to be in need for some further elaboration. More precisely, cases like the accepted uses numbered 1, 2, and 19 above apparently do not fit into this schema because there is no freely acting autonomous subject who out of his or her own spontaneous decision performs an act of grace. Although this seems to be an irrefutable observation I maintain that the model is correct and that it is not in contradiction with the definition of grace as being the act in which a human individual receives a favor or an unmerited gift. Technically this problem can be resolved as follows: the recipient of grace,
the human individual, projects his own expectation and anticipations onto the “seat of grace” such that this seat can then react “as if” the presumed autonomous seat of grace was actually acting as a free agent. For example, a picture can only grace an exhibition if I am prepared in principle to expect that some pictures can be extraordinarily beautiful; an extravagant lady can grace an event only if I am convinced that women can look very pretty and attractive. In order that such a mechanism of projection can work, it is necessary that the “seat of grace” is endowed with some intrinsic quality which is “dormant”, and which can be “activated” in and through the act of projection. With this in mind the above diagram needs to be modified as follows:

![Diagram of interaction between human individual and seat of grace]

Assuming that from a structural point of view this model captures the essence of what the users of the English words “grace”, “receive an act of grace” have in mind when they use the word, we can conclude that this diagram correctly represents the anthropological matrix for all mundane or religious or culturally diverse instantiations of the phenomenon of grace. The important advantage of the procedure that has led me to this result is that been possible to isolate what may be culturally or religiously relevant and to compact it into a context where in the human individual projects his or her expectations and anticipations onto the subject of grace. As it will be the case, it is now possible to compare the views of Tanabe and of Kierkegaard of whom we know that they hold religious views that are divergent and intrinsically incompatible with one another.

Based on this result it is now possible to state precisely which questions should be asked from a philosopher who fills the concept of grace with specific contents: there is no need to stress that any mundane instantiations of grace are not problematic and for this reason need not be considered in detail. This leaves the topic of divine grace of which we can expect that Tanabe and Kierkegaard shall have vastly diverging interpretations and which for this reason must become the focus of interest. This naturally raises the issue of the specific religious and cultural context in which the philosopher lives and in which he writes. The task is to investigate and explain the role that divine grace must fulfill and how it is instantiated. In this the emphasis must of necessity be on religious tenets and doctrine which the philosopher must elucidate. Tanabe readily supplies a wealth of information, which however is shot through with terms that he has borrowed from the Buddhist literature and which he intertwines with freely used western terminology. These terms are generally not known to readers who are not specialists in the field. The task here is to find a translation and a transposition that expresses the contents in a language that is more palatable and more akin to western ways of expression. Kierkegaard, on the other hand, hardly ever addresses the subject of grace; he never makes it a prime subject of his investigations, fact which in turn has not spurned much
secondary literature. The task thus is to find ways that can be used to somehow approximate Kierkegaard’s thought. This problem can be solved by going back to his appropriation of the theology of Martin Luther.

Before I continue with the explication of the above diagram I should return to one of the examples that I have used to illustrate the diagram: there will be little doubt that a beautiful picture or work of art, if it is not well presented, will not produce the same effect as it would have done if the presentational context would have been more favorable. What makes this context and how it works will dependent upon the physical and emotional condition of the person looking at the picture, whether he or she is prepared and ready to concentrate the mind on the picture, and to indulge in its beauty, or if instead he or she is not interested or otherwise distracted. Some persons will not react favorably even if the presentational context is optimal, while others will notice the beauty even if the presentational setting is poor. In other words, the fact that a person is exposed to receiving an act of grace is not an objectively manifest event but something which can only be subjectively noted and experienced. It only becomes objectively recognized as an act of grace if the individual concerned names it so. This subjective quality of the phenomenon of grace is an essential characteristic to which I shall come back when I discuss the contribution made by Alain Badiou.

Returning now to the above diagrammatic representation of the phenomenon of grace as a binary relationship we observe that in addition to the overall context there are three more elements in need of an explanation:

1. the subject of the act of grace;
2. the human recipient of that act;
3. the act that conjoins the subject to the recipient.

The individual philosopher must explain the nature of both the subject and of the recipient, and what precisely is implied by the notions that an act of grace is originated and received. The overall context determines the conditions under which the human recipient perceives the effects of grace as being a favor and an underserved gift. It is thus important that we distinguish clearly between the act of grace and its associated effects. As was said before, the effect of the grace may be something that happens in the public domain, or else it may be restricted to the sphere of the private and subjective, as would be the experience of a spiritual conversion and transformation, or it may be a healing from a state of deep depression of which only the external epiphenomena can be noted by others. The other important aspect of any act of grace is the manner in which it is experienced and recognized by those who are somehow involved. We know that only the effects of grace may become a part of the public domain; the act of grace itself is something that the human individual must be assess and judge in private. In order that the act of grace becomes philosophically relevant we must expect that the philosopher can bridge the gap separating subjective privacy from what is public and that he can expose as an object of the public domain what grace is and how its effects become instantiated.

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29 One biblical example is the conversion of Saulus who on his way to Damascus became Paulus. Similarly Tanabe in the Preface to Philosophy as Metanoetics speaks of his relief from his personal crisis as an act of subjective conversion and transformation caused by the grace of “Other-power”.
3.1.3 The effects of the religious and cultural context

One of the results of analyzing the conceptual implications of the notions of “faith” and of “grace” was that they cannot be reduced to simple binary relationships; rather, they imply an interaction between the human individual and its opposing pole, i.e. the object of faith or the seat of grace. This interaction essentially takes the form of a projection by the human subject onto what opposes it. In the act of faith the human individual has acquired from various sources which comprise his own personal experiences and the testimony of other individuals, a number of pieces of information which are channeled and consolidated such that some favorable or negative appreciation of the object of faith results. This appreciation then becomes the basis for assessing the specific elements that are relevant when an act of having faith is to be performed. This is to say, the human individual has an overall assessment of the object of faith which may be positive or negative or neutral. Based on this general assessment the individual then considers the details of what is implied when the act of faith is performed. This can involve an assessment of the risks involved, of potential gains and losses, of trustworthiness and of the quality of the supporting evidence, and others such elements. It is by no means the case that such an assessment is made on purely logical grounds. Rather, emotional and other non-rational elements may sway the decision-making process in one direction rather than another. What is important here is the fact that the inputs to this operation come from different sources and have different forms.

Trusting and having confidence in a person or a thing is never an isolated event. Instead it is one event in a continuous chain of events that go back to our early days when we were still a child and which will end when we die. The essence of this chain of events is that a continuous unending stream of impressions comes to our mind which provide information about our surroundings and more specifically the persons and things with which we come into contact. These impressions can have different forms, including sense impressions, thoughts and ideas, and stimuli that initiate thought processes. Taken together, these events serve as the means that help us to cope with the challenges of daily life. As we live and breathe we are continually exposed to all kinds of impressions which we must process and put into perspective in order to understand what is going on around us. When we hear a voice we must identify the person who is addressing us; when we hear a sound we must be able to tell that this is our telephone ringing; when we drive on the road we must recognize where we are and what to make of the traffic and the traffic signs; and so on. There is a never ending need to analyze these impressions and to put them into the appropriate order and perspective. If we were to fail to do so the results would be disastrous for us and also for others. If we misread a traffic light we might cause an accident; if we do not answer the telephone we might miss an important call; if we do not understand a message directed to us we might commit a serious error that could cost us a lot of money. Many impressions continue to reach us, and the task is to assess and interpret them in the correct way. Clearly this requires a lot of attention and also mental resources which may momentarily not be at our disposal as and when needed. Nature is aware of these difficulties and is ready to offer its help. One form by which the task at hand is partially alleviated is that many of the assessment processes are performed semi-automatically such that we hardly take note of their existence. Instead of going through a long and complicated chain of reasoning we assess certain situations on the basis of previous experiences. Also we tend to accept or reject certain things or persons on the basis that they do not fit into the pattern of what we are generally ready to accept or reject. But as we rely on automatic or semi-automatic
assessments there are always also chances and risks involved. This is exemplified by the reactions of different test persons to a picture puzzle. Some say that they see a glass of wine while others believe that the picture shows the silhouette of two faces opposing each other. The fact of the matter is that both interpretations are correct and that it depends on the individual mindset of the test person which of the two options he or she will be prefer.

If we assume that what is the case with picture puzzles has a more general significance, then it does not take much to realize that the same kind of inputs may be interpreted in different and sometimes opposing ways depending on how they are interpreted by the human individual. In the case of the picture puzzle the consequences and repercussions of choosing one interpretation over the other are negligible. If on the other hand some vital decisions have to be taken that involve a lot of money or that may become decisive for our future, then suddenly the situation becomes a different one and the fact that we have made what later turns out to have been the wrong choice may have a critical impact on our future and may entail grave and irreversible consequences that we then have to bear. The way in which we deal with the environment in which we live and act is thus not at all something that we may recklessly neglect. It is for this reason that I will focus on one specific aspect which is of great importance in the context of having faith and putting one’s trust and confidence into a person or a thing.

The example of the picture puzzles has made clear that how the same set of impressions will be interpreted depends upon the specific mindset of the viewer. This mindset is conditioned by factors, such as mood, previous experiences, longer term convictions, and personal prejudices and preconceived ideas which together can be roughly classified as belonging to three distinct groups:

- animal;
- religious;
- cultural.

Animal is the propensity of man to put his or her trust and confidence into someone or something, or to hope for an act of grace in the form of an undeserved gift of some sort.

By religious I mean the totality of thoughts, concepts and value sets which can somehow be traced back to our exposure to things religious in a most general way during our forming years and after. It involves notions, ideas, and concepts to which we subscribe, but also those which we either ignore or which we refute. This group of inputs covers all those that have a religious implication and which turn out to be relevant in the specific situation.

Cultural, by way of contrast is the label for all other factors which taken together constitute the general view of the world in which we live and act. It consists of all mental stratagems and procedures that enable us to deal with the facts of daily life. For instance, a person who for all of his or her life has lived in a tropical jungle under primitive conditions will find it very difficult to adapt to our western style of living, because he or she must learn to handle all the things which we have been used to throughout all of our lives: language, computers, cars, technology in general, traditions, arts, clothing, social skills and conventions, etc. This person will, on the other hand, be aided by the need to maintain certain basic functions without which life would not be possible. These I call anthropological; they come with our
animal package and involve maintaining our physical and mental health, basic social contacts and exchanges, and the like.

Taken together, the sum total of these factors and influences forms the key by which we as a human individual decode the impressions that reach us from the world in which we live and by which we maintain the contact with the human beings that surround us. We can say that the totality of all that forms our personal perception and world view is comparable to the clef on a sheet of music. Without the clef, not even the most gifted musician would be able to identify what it is that has been written on the sheet of music. He might be guided by previous experience and may be able to make a guess, but without the clef there is indistinct vagueness but no certainty.

On the basis of the above discussion we must modify the diagrammatic representation of the act of “having faith in ...” in several respects. First we must allow for the general cultural and religious context of the subject of faith. With respect to the act of having faith these influences can be represented as external inputs that impinge on the subject of faith and which he or she must focus and channelize with respect to the object of faith with as a result that they become condensed into a judgment of quality and qualification of the object of faith. In other words, the subject uses previous experiences and knowledge of past facts as the means that enables him or her to form an opinion about the object into which he or she is to place his or her trust and confidence. It may be considered to be an undisputed fact that nobody would be willing to have faith in someone or something without the necessary assurances that make him or her feel comfortable. These assurances are provided by means of the clef, which is the sum total of all personal knowledge and experiences. This does not preclude that other individuals who have a different clef may not agree with the assessment.

The summary assessment is then projected by the individual onto the object of faith as an expectation and general assent. This projection thus makes the object appear in a specific light such that all doubt and uncertainty about its qualities and trustworthiness are broached and consequently that the individual feels comfortable to perform the act of having faith. This does not rule out that at some later point in time the correctness of the decision may be questioned. What is important here is the fact that without a clearing away of the mental obstacles, even if that is only for a short moment, no act of having faith will ever be possible and will be performed. Clearly the subject may have mental reservations, but these reservations have no impact on the act of faith: in essence the act of faith either takes place or it does not take place, because placing one’s trust into someone or something and having confidence in it is an act of total and unconditional surrender. In other words, performing conditional faith is not at all an act of having faith but instead it becomes a wager: it is comparable to risking a sum of money on an uncertain event, be that gambling on something on which bets are laid.

The diagram on the next page summarizes this analysis of the phenomenon of “having faith in” in graphical form. It shows that the subject of faith is exposed to inputs from various sources including religion, culture, and the “animal baggage”. Taken together, these inputs are focused and channelized such that an assessment of the object of faith results. If this assessment is favorable, then it is converted into a set of expectations which the subject projects onto the object of faith and which in turn provide the subject with the necessary
assurances about the qualities and qualifications of the object of faith. In this way possible mental obstacles are cleared away and the act of faith may be performed.

The advantage of this analysis is that now the cultural and religious elements may be clearly identified and isolated as those elements that are external to the act of having faith and which comprise of

- the general cultural and religious context for the subject;
- the projections and expectations which the subject has with respect to the object of faith;
- the assurances which the subject has about the qualities and qualifications of the object.

A similar analysis can also be made for the phenomenon of grace. Here the starting point must be that the human individual who receives an act of grace becomes aware that grace by way of experiencing a miracle: he or she becomes exposed to an event which clearly is an unsolicited gift and for which there is no explanation other than that somehow a freely acting autonomous subject must be the cause of the event. Putting to one side all questions related to the problematic of acts of grace that are attributed to human actors we may safely assert that the author(s) of acts of divine grace must be accredited with all of the necessary qualifications of acting freely and in absolute autonomy.

The mind-set of the human subject who is hoping for an act of divine grace is conditioned by factors that are similar to those which we have identified for the subject of the act of faith. They comprise of:

- the animal package;
- influences related to the cultural context;
- religious convictions and doctrine.

Taken together these influences form the clef by which the subject assesses the experience of the miracle as the hallmark of the happening of the act of grace. It is not necessary to stress that the experience of a miracle is always a matter of subjective assessments and diverging or controversial views by other human individuals about the particular circumstances of such an act of grace may always be possible. This subjective character of the phenomenon is not something that potentially could invalidate the analysis; rather, it only stresses the fact that the experience of miracles and therefore of acts of divine grace is notoriously difficult to communicate to other human beings, and that such communication will always be in the form of someone witnessing that such an event has occurred. Such witness must in turn then be received by an act of faith in the credibility of the witness.

The following diagram summarizes the results of the analysis of receiving an act of grace:
The basic relational structure consists of a human subject, the recipient of grace, to whom the seat of grace, God or some Celestial Power, directs an act of grace. The act of grace may in some cases be accompanied by the occurrence of some specific miracle while in other cases the effect of grace is of a permanent nature and does not depend on some specific miracles. Both the act of grace and any miracle that goes with it are phenomena whose existence and meaning the recipient can recognize only in the subjectivity of his or her inwardness; they are strictly private and not open to immediate public scrutiny. This is the reason why the recipient of the act of grace must acquire a specific mindset that enables him to become aware of the divine intervention.

This mindset which prepares the human subject and makes it ready for the perception of acts of divine grace is formed by focusing and channeling the inputs of the cultural and religious context of the recipient such that his or her specific needs are met. In accordance with the animal baggage, which is basically a propensity to hope for help and understanding from others when in need, the human individual develops an attitude of faith and of hope in the seat of grace that accords with the religious and cultural inputs. This clears the mind from doubt and uncertainty and thereby creates a state in which it is ready to subject itself to the clemency of the originator of grace who hopefully acts with benevolence. As faith and hope are being projected, it appears to the faithful as if the seat of grace responds by giving assurances such that the human subject feels that he can proceed in comfort.

Grace and its effects are only subjectively perceptible. Speaking in objective terms they are phenomena which manifest themselves in ways which are not readily discerned and which for this reason must be decoded before they can be understood. The key to this decoding is provided by the cultural and religious background of the individual. Taken as bare facts the indications that signal the occurrence of an act of divine grace and of a miracle are such that divergent interpretations are possible. Therefore, in order to read the evidence correctly, a specific key is required. This key, when applied to the phenomena puts them into the right perspective and mental order, and by this token reveals that an act of grace and a miracle have happened. I have compared this key to the clef on a sheet of music. The human individual forms this clef by consolidating the various cultural and religious inputs that come from his

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30 The interplay of placing one’s faith and hope and receiving in turn assurances that justify the act of faith has the form of a loop argument which is similar to that of begging the question: the two moves depend on each other. The salvific promises that are somehow embedded in the religious and cultural heritage and background are the basis for placing faith and hope onto the seat of grace. The same heritage is also the matrix from which the assurances grown which the seat of grace impresses on the faithful.
environment and background such that his or her needs resulting from the animal baggage are covered and respected.

Again, this analysis enables me to separate what is conditioned by culture and religion from what is the essence of the act of grace, i.e. its nature as a binary relationship. It also clearly identifies the presence of a component which is common to all human beings and which I have called the animal baggage, that is to say an anthropological basis which all human beings share. It now becomes the task of the philosopher to identify the various elements which together make up the relationship of grace and to analyze and explain them in his own terms. Using this specific kind of an approach enables me to compare notions of faith and of grace in terms of a structure which on the one hand is a close approximation to what is the essence of religious faith and of divine grace, while on the other it also allows me to spell out in detail what is conditioned by our animal baggage, and what are the embellishments that religion and culture provide.

3.2 A metaphysical framework

In a series of radio lectures which he gave shortly after the Second World War, entitled Der Philosophische Glaube, Karl Jaspers (1883 - 1969) has proposed the notion of “The Encompassing” as a conceptual framework that in principle is capable to reach out to the limits of reality and to embrace it as a whole. For reasons that I hope to explain shortly I find this to be an intriguing and useful concept:

- it encapsulates all major building blocks from which reality is made and which not any one individual philosopher but the philosophical community as a whole has identified as being relevant;
- it can for that reason serve as a convenient framework to establish a basis for classifying philosophies that would otherwise be considered to be incongruent and incomparable.

One technical objection that can be raised is that Jaspers was a western thinker and that his notion of the “encompassing” is the essence and residue of the process by which western philosophy and metaphysics have evolved over time, and that it therefore may not claim to have been deeply rooted in one or more of the Eastern philosophical traditions. It therefore seems reasonable to assume that it must be intrinsically biased against any concepts that are not fully in line with the axiomatic foundations of western philosophy. While on the surface this would appear to be a valid argument, it neglects important aspects:

1. the proposed framework is structural and formalistic, and for this reason does not necessarily embrace any preconceived meanings or contents. Its basic structural elements, notions and relationships must be filled with contents by the philosopher who is always free to affirm, modify, or refute them;
2. western philosophy is not at all a monolithic tradition but instead incorporates a vast variety of different styles and positions. In recent years for example, Japanese philosophers have begun to investigate whether they can find any parallelism between Eastern and Western philosophers. Several such correspondences have in fact been identified, if until now mostly as special occurrences;
3. even if were the case that the framework is infested with religious or cultural bias, it also holds true that Tanabe Hajime has been familiar with western philosophy and terminology, and that in his

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32 Jaspers was aware of Eastern philosophy and philosophers: Die großen Philosophen, Piper,1988
33 Typical examples for such work can be found in the oeuvre of all major members of the Kyoto School of Philosophy, notably Nishida, Tanabe, Nishitani, but also Masao Abe, Ueda Shizuteru and others. One prominent exponent of ideas that are akin to Eastern philosophical thought is Eckhart (ca. 1260 - 1327).
authorship he has actively drawn on this knowledge. This assures the presence of a degree of affinity between his thought and the proposed framework;

4. if in defining the framework all assumptions are clearly stated and a supporting rationale is given, then a degree of additional latitude is provided to accommodate the views of individual philosophers.

In a book which is a sequel to what has already been mentioned\textsuperscript{34} Jaspers uses the phrase „philosophisches Grundwissen“ (Ger.: fundamental concepts of philosophy) to characterize what his framework in essence is intended to be, namely a philosophical meta-system which can accommodate all systems of which he as a philosopher is aware\textsuperscript{35}. Over the years Jaspers devoted much effort to developing the details of his concept\textsuperscript{36} which in this way has become quite explicit. I read this concept as a proposal for a basic background structure which I can use as a heuristic device to bring philosophers together who otherwise might be considered much too unwieldy to be readily amenable to any kind of comparison. However, if such a procedure is to be successful it will be necessary to suppress much material detail and to restrict the comparison to what are the basic elements and characteristics and to develop any assessments from that point. In accepting this as a strategy I shall defend the thesis that some fundamental differences between Kant, Hegel, Kierkegaard, and Tanabe can be explained by considering how they relate to some of the pre-philosophical choices which an individual philosopher has made but for which he might not provide any explicit rationale. In searching for such choices I must therefore be prepared to consider any tacit assumptions that may be implicit in the concepts and terminology that the philosopher uses as his professional toolkit. In addition I must also pay attention to the degree by which such choices determine the metaphysical outlook of a philosophy.

The proposed framework consists of elements, their properties, and relations between these elements. For it to be free of any cultural or religious bias and as a consequence to become useful as a means of comparison all constituents must be emptied of specific contents. Their only purpose will then be to serve as the formal variables in a logical network set up to have connectivity and relational dependencies. Before these variables can be used they must be filled with material content, and this is the task of the individual philosopher. This process is commonly called the “interpretation” of a model, which is the process of application in one specific case. Because the variables are initially empty of any material content, they may be either used or refuted according to the needs of the specific philosopher. It is important, however, that irrespective of whatever choices the philosopher may make he will be obliged to explain any such choice by providing an appropriate rationale. In other words, one of the functions of the framework will be to serve as a structural skeleton to which a philosopher must respond. Another feature of this framework is that those variables which a philosopher refutes do not vanish but instead stay in the picture as empty sets\textsuperscript{37}. For example, if an atheist philosopher refutes the concept of God he still cannot escape from the need to have to account for Rudolf Otto’s\textsuperscript{38} “The Holy” as a basic phenomenon of human existence.

\textsuperscript{34} Karl Jaspers, \textit{Der philosophische Glaube angesichts der Offenbarung}, R. Piper & Co. Verlag München, 1962, pg. 111 ff’

\textsuperscript{35} In \textit{Die großen Philosophen} Jaspers demonstrates that he had detailed knowledge of most of the important Eastern philosophers, including Confucius, Nāgārjuna, Lao-Tsu, and Buddha.


\textsuperscript{37} I shall come back to this in more detail later.

In a first move Jaspers decomposes reality into three separate but interrelated realms:

1. the realm of subjectivity and of individual privacy. It is sometimes not quite correctly called the self. This realm is proper to each human individual; it can neither be shared with other human individuals, nor is it open to public inspection and scrutiny. Although the individual may elect to communicate to others about what is private to him, e.g. his thoughts, feelings, sensations, emotions, volitions, etc., he or she can do so only by means of a translation of the material contents into verbal or non-verbal expressions which can then be communicated. Any form of a direct access of others to this realm is precluded;

2. the public realm of inter-subjectivity. This realm is that part of reality in which all human individuals share, and which for this reason is open to public scrutiny. By this I mean that sensual impressions can be verified or falsified if adequate means of communication are used, thoughts can be exchanged and logically examined, feelings and emotions can be verbalized and communicated, etc. In other words, this public realm is the sphere of the tangible and mental “things” which are ready for public consumption. This is the realm in which human individuals appear to one another as “objects” that are recognized as being “other” only on second thought. Example would be the way in which we consume the performance of an artist on a stage, or the reports in the media about politicians and other individuals;

3. the transcendent realm. Here I follow Kant’s conception of the “thing-in-itself”. This realm is thus the place of the transcendental dialectic and its associated illusions; that is to say it is the place for those concepts and assertions which our mind can handle but which are beyond empirical inspection and verification. To this I add as a qualification:
   (i) there are those “things-in-themselves” that obviously correspond to objects in the public domain and which therefore have some sort of a connection to empirical reality;
   (ii) there are those notions which by their very nature must be classified as being the products of pure imagination or superstition: unicorns, spectres, five legged horses, etc. Such notions are generally and without exception excluded from any further considerations.
   (iii) there are those “things-in-themselves” of which Kant has claimed that they have an indispensable normative function for the application of the practical reason: God, freedom, and the immortality of the soul. These and similar concepts are objects of religious concern and are included.

Included in the transcendent realm is what Rudolf Otto calls “The Holy” or “The Sacred”. By this he distinguishes a specific kind of “thing-in-itself” that is of primarily religious concern and which thereby has a quality of its own. I call this the truly transcendent because it is accessible only if an act of religious faith is performed.

The purpose of distinguishing this realm of reality from the other two is to create some dedicated space for a subject matter which, at least in the western philosophical and religious traditions has certainly been the cause of some most intensive and protracted arguments with as core issue the problematic of the “existence of God”. Although this question has been discussed since man began to reflect on himself, it still remains to be as far removed from finding and answer as it has ever been the case. Simply put, the problematic is this: is there a part of reality which we as human beings can conceive in our minds, but which eludes all attempts of empirical verification? Therefore, if such a realm exists, how can we be certain of its existence, in the light of knowing that for example it is an easy task to show that our mind is very well capable of concocting imaginative objects, such as unicorns, mountains of gold, five-legged horses, and so on, of which we know that they are mere creations of our fantasy which definitely do not exist.

Given that such a realm - if it exists - eludes all attempts of scientific verification, two questions come to mind which both need to be explained and clarified:

The idea of the holy : an inquiry into the non-rational factor in the idea of the divine and its relation to the rational, Oxford University Press, London, 1965
- how can we conceptually distinguish this realm from what is empirically real?
- how must we conceive the intrinsic nature of this realm to be?

The answer given to the first question depends on how we define what empirical reality is. As already a short glance at one of the books on the history of western philosophy will show, this problematic lays opens the whole breadth of metaphysical positions that have been proposed and defended over time, and which include - in broad and sweeping terms - on one side materialist and neo-positivist views that deny everything transcendent and who ascribe all expressions of reality to matter, and on the other side of the argument those views which unabashedly affirm that this realm exists. The problem of the first mentioned position is that it cannot capture the whole of reality and that, therefore, its proponents must follow Wittgenstein who notoriously stated:

Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent.39

The problem of the latter view is that metaphysical objects, however they may be conceived, are always abstractions from reality, that they are never individually concrete, and that they never can be immediately experienced. For example, do numbers exist or are they but abstraction based on counting concrete things like apples? The philosophical problem that lingers behind the first question above is thus not only that of whether or not God exist, but also that of delineating what is concrete and experiential from what is only an object of thought. Additional uncertainty results from the fact that the status that we should assign to emotions and sensations is also subject to debate. More questions can be asked in function of the position which the individual philosopher adopts for himself.

Kant for one has introduced the term “transcendental” to differentiate that which is experiential and immanent from that which transcends experience but not human knowledge. More specifically, Kant uses this term to refer to things which relate to experience as determined by the mind’s makeup, and also to what refers to this makeup. This includes not only the “ordinary” things-in-themselves40, but also those things of which we believe that they transcend the natural, e.g. the Christian God. Therefore, if we exclude what are clearly products of fantasy, we have that which is abstract, hypothetical, ideal, and theoretical. To this list we must add that which is supernatural, supra-natural, ultimate, that is to say that what is real but which transcends the limits of all possible experience and verification.

This should not blind us to the fact that it is by no means certain that a philosopher will be ready to accept that any such realm exists. We therefore have a situation in which the borderline separating the empirical from the transcendent is not fixed but moving in the sense that for some philosophers it is a clearly defined and easy to recognize given, while for others it is shifted to the limits of our understanding with nothing beyond; many intermediate positions between these extremes are conceivable.

Turning now to the problematic of the intrinsic nature of this realm, we have no choice but to admit that there is no way by which we could ever hope to come to know what ultimately is the truthful answer. This state of affairs does not, however, preclude the possibility of

39 Tractatus, 7.0: Wovon man nicht sprechen kann, darüber muss man schweigen.
40 „Ordinary“ things-in-themselves are those which somehow relate to real things in the realm of subjectivity and of individual privacy as well as to real things in the public realm of inter-subjectivity.
forming hypotheses and of subsequently testing these hypotheses by way of exploring their rational and logical consequences. Looking back over the history of philosophy in both the East and the West we can conclude that a vast range of options have been proposed which all are designed to describe the conjectured nature of God, the Absolute, Ultimate Reality. These options cover the whole range from unconditional affirmation to outright rejection, and include a whole range of intermediate positions. In this context it is important to note that any one such description of the intrinsic nature of God, the Absolute, Ultimate Reality, has both a philosophical and a religious significance. The religious meaning is posited by religious orthodoxy as axioms that can only be accepted or rejected, whereas the philosophical content becomes an object that is open to the fire of rational criticism.

Next I need to introduce some general assumptions about these realms which I shall use later as philosophical axioms:

a) the realms are limited with respect to one another. Their borderlines are intrinsically insurmountable. They cannot be reduced to one another, be that as pairs or in their whole. This implies that if a philosopher chooses to reject one or more of the realms he creates an empty set. Consequently he must explain how he accounts for the existence of that set and why he refuses to fill it with content.
b) the realms are close to one another but do not share common borderlines. They are instead separated by a distance.
c) the realms are inexhaustible. In other words, it is impossible as a matter of basic principle to totalize any or all of their features and characteristics or other contents. This assumption is supported by the empirical fact that humanity continues to amass new knowledge about reality without there being any indications that an end to this process is in sight. Therefore, if a philosopher claims differently, the onus is on him to explain his choice as must do those who accept the assumption of inexhaustibility;
d) a corollary to (c) is that the regions are intrinsically shot through with alterity, otherness. If the assumption of inexhaustibility is true, then what is new is other. Using different words, our knowledge of reality is limited by our human finiteness: we cannot totalize reality and to capture the “One” from which everything would be deductible is beyond our intellectual capabilities. Again, whatever position a philosopher takes must be supported by an appropriate rationale;
e) The realms are internally rational and are rationally connected to one another by logical links. This does not preclude that there may be circumstances when what we observe appears to be irrational, but this irrationality is to be attributed to our human finiteness and does not mean that reality is not rationally constituted.

As I shall discuss in more detail later, the Buddhist philosopher Nāgārjuna has developed a conception of the notion of truth that implicitly depends on assumptions similar to those labeled (c) and (d) above.

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42 Nāgārjuna (c. 150 - 250 CE) is the first and most important philosopher of the Mahāyāna Buddhist tradition who has been widely discussed in the subsequent Buddhist literature in the whole of South East Asia. Even today his doctrines are still very influential and form the doctrinal basis for much of Buddhism in Japan. Shinran’s Jōdo-shin-shū (Jap. True Pure Land sect) is one offshoot of this tradition which under the guise of Amidism, i.e. the belief in the Great Compassion of Amida Buddha, is constituent for Tanabe’s religious philosophy. The works of Nāgārjuna include the Milanadhyakārikā Prañā (Skt.: The fundamental Verses of the Middle Way), the Śānyātasaptati (Skt.: The Septuagint of Emptiness), and several others for which, however, his authorship seems to be in limbo. As a metaphysical writer he is the founder of the Mādhyamika (Skt.: middle way) philosophy which is grounded on the Prajñāpāramitā sūtras. Some authors have alleged that Nāgārjuna may himself have been involved with the composition of some of these texts. In any case it is a fact that his thoughts can be traced back to the views articulated in these sūtras in that they are developed along the lines of exposing and defending the central doctrine of these texts which is that all phenomena are empty of essence. Nāgārjuna’s importance is linked to his philosophical program, which consists of the interpretation of emptiness and of his
For assumption (e) I offer the following two comments:

1. the only means at our disposal to handle reality are human reason and rationality. Therefore, if we do not assume that the whole of reality is shot through with rationality, the only other open option would be to assume intrinsic total chaos. This would be contrary to how we as human beings experience reality to be;

2. the assumption of rationality is basically a rejection of irrationality as a concept. If, as may be the case, human reason cannot fully explain reality, this only means that we are not dealing with things irrational but instead with things trans-rational\(^{43}\).

Should a philosopher disagree with this assumption (e), then he must state his reasons and must provide a rationale for his choice. More specifically, he must explain how he accounts for those phenomena that, such as are the emotions and moods, are commonly considered to be irrational.

Jaspers has developed this framework by adding further details. For the present purposes it is sufficient if I restrict myself to this general outline as a convenient basis to clarify some basic terms and terminology of which it will become apparent that it they are essential for the execution of the task at hand.

3.3 Clarification of some basic terminology

Certain terms which I must define if I intend to discuss the philosophies of Kant, Hegel, Tanabe and of Kierkegaard, straddle the difficult borderline that separates things religious from things philosophical. Philosophy and religion both share a vital interest in what is of metaphysical concern, but they work from different backgrounds and pursue different goals. This is certainly true for the western tradition, where philosophy and theology have over centuries rived for intellectual supremacy. The reason is that philosophy and its religiously motivated equivalent, theology, are both concerned with explaining reality, and that both provide answers, each in its own specific way, to that same set of existential questions which man has forever posed to himself. During part of the Middle Ages both disciplines were united under the same roof of “first philosophy” until such time when a separation became inevitable. Since that period their relationship has been wrought with fundamental disagreements over almost any metaphysically relevant issue. Both philosophy and theology have unremittingly claimed to be in the possession of truth, understood to be absolute truth, while there was not sufficient commonality such that the gap separating them could ever be closed\(^{44}\). We have no indications whether or not this difference between rational analysis

document of the two truths, and which is highly original in that it provides a rigorous account of the Buddhist mystical intuition that not only the human person but also all phenomena are impermanent, interdependent, and without self. Nāgārjuna wrote at a time when Mahāyāna Buddhism was a nascent movement. The totality of his writings provides the philosophical foundation and a defense of the doctrinal probity of that movement. Nāgārjuna’s contribution can be summarized in five points: the doctrine that all phenomena, including emptiness, are empty; the doctrine of the two truths and the account of their relationship to one another; the deployment of both positive and negative tetralemmas; the claim that mādhyamaka is not a philosophical position on par with others, in that it is not an account of the nature of reality, but a refusal of all such accounts; the attack on epistemological foundationalism. Most relevant in the current context are (1) the doctrine of emptiness of all things, and (2) that of the two truths which exist side by side.

\(^{43}\) Trans-rational is another term for saying that a rational explanation is not at hand. Such an explanation may become available as more or better details of the situation are known. This may be the case either at short notice or as the result of a long-term development e.g. in the natural sciences and other areas of human knowledge.

\(^{44}\) Medieval philosophers have called this a relationship between hostile brothers.
and religious contemplation has ever been worked out and become as rigorously important in the Eastern tradition as was the case in the West. This leaves me no choice but to address the problematic. More specifically, I must investigate what is constitutive for the philosophical enterprise on the one hand, and how it is distinguished from theological reflection on the other hand, irrespective of any specific cultural and religious contexts. An additional concern is that the results must be presented such that they can serve as a means to characterize what is common to individual philosophies and how these differ.

Kant, Hegel, Kierkegaard, and Tanabe have each written extensively on matters religious. In crude approximation, Kant was a Prussian Lutheran Protestant; Hegel has sometimes been accused of pantheism; the basic tenets of Kierkegaard were mainstream Danish Protestantism, while Tanabe was arguing from a religious background that held an equal distance to Christianity, Pure Land Buddhism, and Zen. It would thus be a mistake to indiscriminately use concepts and terminologies that are known to have been conditioned by one specific tradition, because in that case cultural and religious bias could not be avoided and the Principle of Charity would not be respected when the comparison is made. There is no other way but to examine and clarify the meaning of those terms and concepts that are critically important for the analysis. These terms are: religion, theology, philosophy, and, most importantly, religious philosophy.

Time and space do not allow me to develop rigorous definitions that could meet all conceivable intellectual requirements. Rather, I must contend myself with finding an overarching framework which as a meta-language allows me to deal with specific issues related to these terms and concepts.

3.3.1 Religion

Heisig’s phrase about Tanabe’s being “a religion that is not a religion” can be interpreted in different ways depending on how the term religion is defined:

1) on one side there is the concept of a religion that is defined by the combination of having faith in for example a salvific promise, a doctrine, a tradition, a set of rituals and observances, and usually also some sort of an institution. This is the concept that we apply when we distinguish for example the five world religions from one another, from animism and from other expressions of primitive religious belief. I call this the conventional definition of religion;

2) the other concept is much more abstract, and is based on redefining what is to count as “religion”. If for example tradition, rituals and observances, and also the institutional aspect are suppressed as being not relevant we have as defining elements only doctrine and the faith in this doctrine. I call this the abstract definition of religion.

What is essential here is that the truth of religious doctrine cannot be demonstrated but must be believed. In other words, religion in general and abstract religion in particular is based on a set of axiomatic assumptions whose truth is not questioned within the religious

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45 Somewhere James W. Heisig has called Tanabe’s position a “religion that is not a religion”. Tanabe’s aim was to abstract himself from the specificities of anyone particular religion such that he could address the problem of religion in a more general sense. Heisig, James W., Foreword, in: Tanabe Hajime, Philosophy as Metanoetics, University of California Press, 1986, pg. XXI

46 By “principle of charity” I mean that a presumption is made in philosophy whereby preconceptions about an argument, a topic, or a belief are momentarily set aside in the attempt to gain a better understanding of what an author had in mind. In essence, one starts from a simple desire to get the point.
context, such that faith takes the place of proof. It is not important whether this faith is conditional or unconditional, whether the belief in the axiomatic foundation is in the form of an unlimited commitment or whether it depends on some conjoined reasoning\(^ {47}\). Typical examples of axiomatic doctrine would include: the denial of the existence of God (atheism), the denial of the spiritual dimension of reality (materialism), or the assumption that life is nothing but a tangle of physical and chemical processes that need to be unraveled (scientism). None of these doctrines has ever been demonstrated to satisfaction, which is also the case for the Christian doctrine of life and redemption after death. What is essential is that such doctrines are believed in good faith by those who profess it.

From a philosophical point of view the advantage of the abstract understanding of religion is that it does not introduce any elements which by their nature would be alien to the purpose of the philosophical enterprise, which is to give a rational account of reality, including any defining statements of what “reality” is. In this approach it is left open to discussion whether the elements of transcendence and of a (personal) God are essential ingredients of this “reality”. What is necessary, however, is that the logical account of reality must be all-inclusive, but it is not necessary that this account should include only elements that can be fully explained. In other words, there must be room for things trans-rational. The absolute truth of any particular such religious logic can only be ascertained in faith but it cannot be proven. Religion so defined must of necessity include the element of faith.

Examples of such “religions” taken from the history of philosophy would include the natural theology of Proclus\(^ {48}\), the materialism of Karl Marx, the nihilism of Friedrich Nietzsche, the General Religion of Humanity\(^ {49}\) of Auguste Comte, and the Philosophical Faith\(^ {50}\) of Karl Jaspers. It may not appear to be an obvious fact that these philosophies shall be counted as a “religion”. However, what all of these different varieties of philosophy have in common is that they propose some doctrine which in one way or another claims to explain the totality of everything there is, while the truth of these claims cannot be proven and must therefore in final analysis be accepted by an act of faith to which there is no alternative\(^ {51}\).

Kant was a Prussian Lutheran Protestant, Kierkegaard had been trained as a theologian of the Danish Protestant State church who later became a philosopher, and Hegel held distinct pantheist tendencies, while Tanabe was keeping his distances from Christianity, Pure Land Buddhism, and Zen. What these four thinkers had in common was that they each had chosen a set of philosophical doctrines which was to become the indispensable basis from which they then could proceed in the unfolding their thoughts. None of the four thinkers has ever argued these doctrines in the sense of demonstrating that they had to be accepted unconditionally and without there being any possibility to refute them. Instead each philosopher had adopted them by way of a pre-philosophical choice. This fact that even the most rational philosophy has an unproven axiomatic basis introduces the problematic of how to delimit

\(^{47}\) Pascal’s wager would be one example for conditional religious belief.

\(^{48}\) Proclus, The elements of theology, A.C. Ionides (tr.), Holmes and Meier, New York (N.Y.), 2001

\(^{49}\) Comte, A., Lagarrigue, J., Catéchisme positiviste ou sommaire exposition de la religion universelle, Temple de l’humanité, Rio de Janeiro, 1957

\(^{50}\) Karl Jaspers, Der Philosophische Glaube, o.c.

\(^{51}\) To be very specific, the point is not whether in the final analysis one or more of these philosophies are true, but whether we accept them as being true. This includes both ontological and logical statements and claims, which are intertwined in order to support each other. What would be needed is to demonstrate the truth of these claims and statements independently of one another. In any one of the cited cases this has not been done.
what is purely religious from things philosophical. For this purpose I must turn to an interest
which both theology and philosophy share and which is to reflect on what is ultimate.

The following table summarizes the discussion. It distinguishes between what is convention-
ally implied by the term “religion” when the term is used not used as technical in a specific
context, and which of the defining aspects will be of primary interest for the discussions to
follow.

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Definitions of “Religion”

3.3.2 Rational reflections on what is ultimate

There is widespread agreement that the final purpose of philosophy - more precisely that of
metaphysics - is to reflect on what is ultimate. The tool that is applied in this process is that
of an unconditional rational criticism such that every assumption is being scrutinized
rationally by asking for a justification and by testing the consequences against those drawn
from some other hypothesis that potentially would also serve the purpose. In the end each
philosopher will present his personal views in the hope that they shall be accepted as being
of general relevance. Philosophy thus claims that it does not invoke the element of faith on
the side of the philosopher.

Religion is similarly concerned with those ultimate questions that have occupied man since
the dawn of history. It provides answers of its own which are in competition with those of
philosophy. Religion always involves the element of faith to justify its claims, but since it
needs to defend itself against the rational attacks of philosophy it must present its positions
and specific answers such that they are compatible with the philosophical approach. In other
words, religion must be presented rationally. This is the task of theology. Its role is to
present things religious in such form that they can be checked for internal consistency and in
the process may be subjected to rational criticism. This purpose is achieved if the statement
of the articles of faith is separated from any conclusions that can be derived from these
articles. In this way the logical structures of the religious teachings are made transparent.

Philosophy and theology both use the methods of logical reasoning and of unconditional
rational critique. I now must explain how they differ by going back to the framework of 3.2.

3.3.2.1 Theology

Etymologically the compound “theology” is composed of two words of Greek origin, theos
(δεόζ), which the word for God or the gods if there are more than one, and logos (λόγοζ)
which means a coherent and cohesive, internally consistent account. Understood from its
linguistic origin, theology is a narrative of God in monotheistic religions, of the gods in polytheistic religions, and by an extension of the basic meaning, also a narrative account of the transcendent realm. Specific qualifications of *logos* in its more commonly used form *logic* are that the narrative of the transcendent realm must meet the standards set by human reason, and that the account which theology provides must be open to rational criticism. Historically this last requirement became relevant in Ancient Greece when the traditional narratives of religion were exposed to intellectual inquiry that was instigated by Greek and Hellenistic philosophy. The urge was increased when the early Christians were confronted with the prevailing pagan cults and thus saw the need for themselves to defend their belief against the attacks from skeptics of high intellectual standards. Theology thus became the means of choice to present the core of the Christian creed, especially its salvific aspects, by explaining rationally what Christianity meant to its followers. Theology thus had the double functions of providing a theoretical analysis of the supra-natural, and of explaining the impact of religion on the conduct of daily life. In other words, theology and ethics became intertwined.

With this very abstract outlook on the theological enterprise as a background the following conclusions come to mind:

1. theology is based on a body of alleged knowledge, which can be in the form of a specific religious doctrine or else it can be a set of axioms about the transcendent realm. Religion takes this body of knowledge as an axiomatic input and as a given, which it does not discuss. This input is usually in the form of some religious writing such as the Bible or the Sutras of Buddhism, but the precise origin and nature of this source is not essential which therefore can also be a set of assertions made by a philosopher or some other person;

2. given the dogmatic inputs that are specific to a religion, theology develops a rational account of aspects of the transcendent realm with the purpose to elucidate what it considers to be the essential internal structure of this realm;

3. religions always have a practical side, be that in the form of a salvific promise, a set of rituals and observances, a source for moral standards, or any combination thereof. It is the task of theology to provide for the linkage which connects what is supernatural with the exigencies of the contingent empirical world, and to provide guidelines for the conduct of life;

4. by way of an extension of this thought, theology may also serve as a means to reconstruct reality - or aspects thereof - using its insights into the nature of the transcendent realm as the starting point.

This understanding of theology and of its role translates into the overall framework of 3.2 as follows: The transcendent realm is separated by an insurmountable border from the private subjective and from the public, inter-subjective realms. By its foundational set of axioms and doctrines theology is firmly rooted in the transcendent realm. Theology uses the axioms and doctrines to explicate this transcendent realm, and to reconstruct or elucidate aspects of the other two realms. Graphically this can be represented by the diagram on the next page.

This diagram offers a purely formal, structural view of theology as a logical enterprise. It is relevant in the present context because this view does not depend on any specific religious or metaphysical assumptions and by this token can be applied indiscriminately to all religious or metaphysical contexts. More specifically, if a philosopher denies the existence of the transcendent realm, this realm and the field of theology become empty sets, while the model itself is still valid. If, on the other hand, the existence of the transcendent realm is neither affirmed nor denied, but instead left in abeyance, the model implies that reality is limited and that it cannot be decided whether or not there is something on the other side of
Theology in its role of explaining reality

this limit. The specific form which this boundary takes will depend on the context. Some philosophers have positively affirmed that there is no transcendent realm. In that view the limit of reality is only notional and is pushed back to an infinite distance. It seems odd to speak about theology in such a context, but irrespective of the name there is a need to explain reality taking that vanishing boundary as a basis. A historical example for this kind of position would be the dogmatically mechanistic outlook on reality that resulted from the philosophy of nature of Isaac Newton (1643 - 1727) and its interpretation by Pierre Simon de Laplace (1749 - 1827) and by others who collectively transposed Newton’s mathematical insights into a metaphysical doctrine which defended a rigorously established determinism. This metaphysical doctrine meets all criteria of the abstract understanding of religion. For this statement to be true it is not relevant that the metaphysical doctrines are derived from empirical observations of natural phenomena. It is important however, that they are given the status of irreducible axioms and therefore are neither questioned nor criticized. Needless to say that all empirical observations are fallible and that new or better observations may invalidate the doctrine.

3.3.2 Philosophy

Philosophy has a basis and an orientation which are quite different from those of theology. Philosophy starts as a reflection on reality. Its aim is to develop and defend a rational explanation of reality, and a reconstruction of this reality. Philosophy also reflects on what is ultimate, and in this process it must transcend the sphere of the empirical things in the attempt to reach out into the realm of what transcends the empirical. Since in the aftermath of Kant it is not possible to ever get a hold on this domain, philosophers can approach the subject matter only theoretically. To this end they develop hypotheses and conjectures which they subsequently subject to the same procedures and standards of rational criticism as apply to the analysis of things empirical.

Philosophy differs from theology in that its foundational assumptions never have the status of being absolutely true, because they are always subjected to a process of revision and rational criticism in the light of newer and better insights into reality. In their pursuit of truth philosophers agree and accept, or disagree and reject the theories of other philosophers. As a consequence it appears to be the case that truth, especially absolute truth, is never attained and can at best only be approximated. In this sense one might say that philosophy is to a degree intrinsically coincidental even though certain insights have successfully resisted some
of the most extensive and severe criticism. An example in point is the modern reception of the Antique Greek philosophers: we accept their basic insights as being of all times while at the same time we reject many of their detailed reasoning as being wholly incompatible with our modern views about reality.

Philosophy conjectures about things transcendent. This may either be in the form that the existence of a transcendent realm is affirmed, and that subsequently metaphysical theories are developed with the aim of explicating the transcendent. This is called the metaphysical project. Or else the philosopher rejects the existence of things transcendent. In this case no metaphysical theory is developed and the philosopher’s metaphysics is an empty set. This is the case for those philosophers who, like Wittgenstein\textsuperscript{52}, cannot account for what transcends the limits which they have set for themselves.

\begin{center}
\begin{tikzpicture}
  \node (t) at (0,0) {Transcendent Realm};
  \node (m) at (0,-1.5) {Realms of Subjectivity and of Inter-Subjectivity};
  \node (a) at (0,-3) {Philosophy in its role of explaining the Transcendent};
  \node (mt) at (0,-3.5) {Philosophers who in principle acknowledge that the transcendent realm is not empty have assumed different positions with respect to Rudolf’s “Sacred” or “Holy”\textsuperscript{53}. Some have denied that God exists, while others accept it but account for His existence in diverging ways. Some medieval philosophers, Aquinas, Anselm, Bonaventure were deeply awed by the supernatural that exceeds human comprehension, while on the contrary Hegel’s \textit{Philosophy of Religion} culminates in the assertion that

\begin{center}
the content of the Christian religion as the highest evolutionary stage that any religion can have is fully identical with the contents of the true philosophy.
\end{center}

Hegel continues with asserting that philosophy is proof of the truth that God as Love, Spirit, and Substance and that it is a process that forever returns to itself:

\begin{center}
man knows of God only insofar as God in man knows of himself.
\end{center}

Philosophy is essentially the knowledge of knowledge, the self-consciousness of God within the infinite self-consciousness. Hegel identifies human knowledge with the completion of the reality of God. This is the highest pretension that any philosophy has ever made. Using a more formalistic wording we must distinguish between those philosophies that acknowledge the “Holy”, “Sacred” as being trans-rational and beyond human comprehension, and other

\textsuperscript{52} Wittgenstein, L., \textit{Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus}, 7
\textsuperscript{53} Otto, Rudolf, o.c.
philosophies which posit an intrinsic superiority of human reason over things that are holy and sacred.

In summary, theological deductions are based on metaphysical doctrines whereas philosophy starts from an analysis of reality and conjectures about the transcendent. Both are different views of the same totality of real things and events. These views overlap when the immanent and the transcendent meet. This is conventionally the locus for the unfolding of metaphysics. It is also the place of the religious philosophy of Tanabe Hajime. Since the precise meaning of “religious philosophy” is not self-evident it needs to be examined next.

3.3.2.3 Religious philosophy

Wilhelm Weischedel has identified four different ways in which the linguistic compound of “religious philosophy” can be explained:

1. religious philosophy as an instrument supporting an already existing theology, usually the revealed Christian theology. Many medieval thinkers, for example Thomas Aquinas, Anselm of Canterbury, and Bonaventure belong into this category. Their declared objective was to take religious doctrine as an unshakable basis for their thought processes when addressing philosophical problems;
2. religious philosophy pursuing the explication of religious attitudes and behavior as an independent task in its own right. Under this category we can count, for example, William James’ The Varieties of Religious Experience, and Henri Bergson’s Les Deux Sources de la Morale et de la Religion;
3. religious philosophy understood as philosophical theology. Schleiermacher’s Reden über die Religion, the Catéchisme Positive by Auguste Compte, Hegel’s Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion, and Proclus’ Elements of Theology are examples of blueprints for a philosophical theology;
4. religious philosophy as the act of criticizing religion. Ludwig Feuerbach’s Das Wesen der Religion is one example for this kind of an approach.

The notion of a “religious philosophy” is diffuse, shows many diverging facets, and has been used in a variety of ways. It is for this reason that I find it to be necessary to clarify this term before using it. More specifically, Taitetsu Unno and James W. Heisig have introduced the words to characterize Tanabe’s philosophy. However, they never clearly explain what they mean by this term, but on the basis of the above differentiations we may conclude that what they probably had in mind was an interpretation similar to that of option 3 although Tanabe’s use of Pure Land and other Buddhist concepts and terminology could also suggest a community of interest with option 1. More precisely: if I read Tanabe as a representative of interpretation 3, then I must assume that his main concern is to provide a coherent and cohesive account of his view of reality as it is and the role man has to play in this reality. This in a nutshell would explain his metanoetic bend, his promotion of the existential communion sanctorum and of a metanoetic life style in general. If on the other hand I assume option 1, then my reading of Tanabe will be that his intent is to provide evidence for the superiority of Pure Land Buddhism, and of its metaphysics of absolute nothingness. Both interpretations are possible because Tanabe’s metaphysical deductions are extremely rational and they avoid any form of a religious or philosophical dogmatism.

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55 Weischedel, W., Der Gott der Philosophen - Grundlegung einer philosophischen Theologie im Zeitalter des Nihilismus, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt, 1998, pg. 3 ff
56 Tanabe uses a very affirmative style to express himself. However, what would seem to be a dogmatic assertion is in fact not more than a thesis in need of explanation and supporting rationale.
If we consider the breadth of Tanabe’s writings that have to date been translated we must conclude that Tanabe’s concerns reach beyond what is implied by option 3. However, in the context of discussing the concepts of religious faith and of divine grace it is appropriate to assume that this interpretation, option 3, is sufficiently close to what is Tanabe’s concern. Kierkegaard’s philosophy, on the other hand, is basically an attempt to explicate to his contemporaries what in his, Kierkegaard’s, view is the essence of the Christian faith. His religious philosophy must therefore be classified under option 1. I have already associated Hegel’s philosophy of religion with option 3, whereas Kant’s *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*\(^{57}\) would come close to option 4 with some elements that also belong to option 2.

Since the philosophers who mostly interest me in the rest of this study have such diverging motivations and positions when they contemplate faith and grace, it will be helpful to keep the above distinctions in mind. Otherwise some of their comments may appear to be out of line and incompatible. Only if we know from what point of view a philosopher argues his case can we assess what relevance his comments and rationale have in the given context. Weischedel’s distinctions therefore shall serve as a guide in the effort to discriminate between on one side a reality which is common to all, which all share, and which is the world in which we live, and, on the other side, the different outlooks on this reality which the philosophers have adopted for themselves. Religious philosophy is one instantiation of a field in which the difference between reality and how it is reconstructed becomes important.

But before I can continue, another basic issue must be clarified.

### 3.4 A metaphysical challenge

#### 3.4.1 Is it Being or Becoming?

Already pre-Socratic philosophers, notably Parmenides (early 5\(^{th}\) c. BC) and Heraclitus (c. 500 BC), had realized that it is by no means obvious whether reality should be considered as being static and eternal, or rather as being dynamic and forever changing. This question is of course related to the problematic of whether the ultimate principle that can serve to explain reality must be assumed to be an eternal substance, essence, substrate, or whatever the good word may be, or whether this ultimate principle is instead a process of never-ending becoming and perishing.

Over the course of the history of philosophy most famous thinkers have expressed their views on this problematic without there being a universal agreement on what should be the final view on this matter. Although it would be an interesting task to study and compare the evolution over time of these basic philosophical positions this paper cannot be the occasion to enter into a discussion that would certainly have to begin with Plato and Aristotle, that would of necessity have to confront Hegel, and that must reach beyond Hegel and into the present. The result of such an investigation would be that over the centuries many important modifications have been added to the simplistic views of Heraclitus and Parmenides, but that nevertheless the discussion is still open and far from being settled and closed.

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Before I continue my discussion, however, I must pick up a remark made by Alfred North Whitehead. In *Science and the Modern World*\(^{58}\) he introduces the notion of the “fallacy of misplaced concreteness”. *Misplaced concreteness* is a critique of the view that the aim of modern science, and the perception of reality that has been shaped by it, should be to analyze reality in a process of radical simplification and logical reduction. For example: Newton has introduced the law of gravity and has been able to explain the motion of the planets using the laws that Kepler (1571 - 1630) had found. The results of his calculations were so stunning that it was assumed at the time that Newton had unraveled all of the mysteries of the universe. However, as new data became available in the form of improved measurements, scientists soon realized that his calculations did not suffice to explain the observational data and that a modification of the theory was unavoidable. These inputs were provided by Einstein’s (1879 - 1955) special and the general theories of relativity. Thus, in a process that over time became more and more refined new dependencies were discovered of which nobody had ever thought before. It is thus fair to say that starting from some simple hypothesis the understanding of the universe developed into a body of knowledge that has left Newtonian mechanics far behind and which now involves some of the most advanced results of theoretical physics. Some philosophers, amongst them Popper\(^{59}\), speak in this context of a process of trial and error, of verification and falsification, in the attempt to come to terms with this evolutionary development of knowledge. Whitehead, on the other hand, has opened a somewhat different perspective on the problem. According to him, natural phenomena have dependencies which in number and complexity are so rich that no scientific theory can ever take more than only the most important ones of these into account. The reason behind this statement is that rather than accepting that he faces a problematic that could never be solved, man has a tendency to search pragmatically for simplifying approximations which suffice to solve the concrete problem at hand. In so doing he deals with reality in a way that is in accordance with his perceptions of this reality. For example, there is no need to introduce general relativity if the observational data can be explained by classical mechanics. Whitehead’s “misplaced concreteness” then is the term which can also be used to describe this pragmatic procedure. Of all the factors than in some way or other influence a given situation the human mind will select and focus on only those which it considers to be important, while none of the other factors are given any attention. Since such an approach is a simplification of the problematic which can only be justified heuristically, it bears the danger of being proven wrong by new evidence which shows that other factors are equally relevant and even more important than those that initially had been selected for further study. Whitehead does not contend himself with analyzing merely the history of the natural sciences. Rather his scope is so broad that it can capture all aspects of the human endeavor to cope rationally with reality. His thesis, therefore, is not based on the evolution of the natural sciences alone but is underpinned by examples that he takes from all areas of knowledge of the empirical world. This broad basis is his justification to assume that what he has brought into relief as a phenomenon in the context of the natural sciences is also applicable to the history of philosophy, and more specifically to the way in which key terms and terminology have evolved over time. With this in mind I find that Whitehead’s notion of the *fallacy of misplaced concreteness* is a good introduction to the way in which I shall now proceed to discuss the problematic of being and becoming. In the course of this analysis I shall defend the thesis that the process of selecting


\(^{59}\) Popper, Karl R., *o.c.*
one of the two basic options, static Being or perpetual Change, can be interpreted is being one of misplaced concreteness.

3.4.2 Masao Abe’s explication of the problem

In what follows I shall be guided by Masao Abe\(^{60}\) (1915 - 2006) who with a view to the differences that exist between Eastern and Western philosophies has proposed that neither one of the two options are good approximations to reality if they are considered in isolation, and that only a form of synthesis of both can provide the solution. His thought process proceeds as follows.

It is undoubtedly the case that reality\(^{61}\) has both an aspect of perseverance and of change, and it is equally true that whether we consider some phenomenon to be static or dynamic depends to a large extent on the time scale during which we look at things. To a child the mountains and the sea are eternal while for the evolutionary geologist they are transient and quasi ephemeral. For the Ancient Greek and for Nietzsche reality was a never ending repetition of the same, while the theory of the “Standard Model” of modern cosmology tells us that the evolution of the universe is linearly directed and changing. Therefore, if the distinction between a static and a dynamic view is a matter of the individual standpoint, then the conclusion must be that in principle both aspects are equally valid and that either one of them is the result of a movement that starts with a logical abstraction based on empirical facts with the aim to arrive at a logical narrative that creates a logical context for what has been observed. Another way of expressing this is to speak about forming a theory that serves the purpose of standing in for the unmediated experience of reality. The experience is immediate, direct, changing and always dated while the theory is unchanging and constantly at our disposition whenever we may want to make use of it. Experiences are our contact with the reality in which we live, while theories are a product of our mind and serve the function of providing a logical model of reality. Since Gödel\(^{62}\) (1906 - 78) we may no longer assume that any such theory or model can prove by its own means and conceptual resources that it is completely true. There is always the possibility of coming to conclusions that do not correspond to reality as it ultimately is.

Masao Abe has taken up this thought with the aim to investigate the logical basis of two parallel philosophical theories of reality: idealism and empiricism\(^{63}\). His intention is to show that both theories can be reduced to the same set of input data, which are then processed in different ways so as to arrive at opposing models of reality. His reasoning runs as follows\(^{64}\): It cannot be denied that “man has not been satisfied with living only in immediate reality, only in the phenomena of sensation, only in the present world”. Behind the immediate he longs for the existence of an “imperishable world that is to say for an invisible world behind the

\(^{60}\) Masao Abe, Zen and Western Thought, University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu, 1985, pg. 83 - 120
\(^{61}\) I refer to the concept of the lifecycle that applies equally to the organic and to the inorganic world.
\(^{62}\) I refer to the incompleteness theorems of Kurt Gödel. To date no proof has as yet been given that his theorems have a significance that is broader than application to formal logic for which they were designed. I do believe, however, that Gödel has raised a general suspicion concerning logical theories. Thus, until a proof to the contrary has been presented it cannot be assumed that a metaphysical theory can prove its own completeness. Therefore, being intrinsically incomplete the theory may potentially also be insufficient. By logical extension, if it is not sufficient to describe reality it will inevitably lead to results that can be contested.
\(^{63}\) Masao Abe uses both terms generically.
\(^{64}\) O.c., pg. 81 f
visible world, for laws at the basis of phenomena, for meaning behind events, for ideals on the other side of actualities”. In other words “man is in search of something which transcends the present world, something that is unchanging and eternal”. Yet in so doing,

he comes also to reveal a perspective which denies the existence of ideals which transcend the reality of the present, and of the eternal things, and to manifest a standpoint which insists that this present world of the individual events is the one and only existing world. Consequently, the tension between actualities and ideas, immanence and transcendence, individual and universal, temporal and eternal, runs incessantly through human existence, ever making human life itself problematic. (pg. 83–4)

Masao Abe calls this the opposition and tension between *ji* which is the Japanese word for the particular, and *ri* which designates the universal. He continues:

human existence is penetrated through and through by the opposition and tension of *ji* and *ri*, and precisely thereby, humanity cannot help but be aware of itself as a problem (pg. 84)

In Buddhist philosophy

*ji* means the actual, phenomena, particular, temporal, and differentiated, while *ri* connotes the ideal, noumenal, universal, eternal, and undifferentiated. (pg. 84)

He observes that above all difference of nuance that may exist between individual thinkers, both in the East and in the West, as they use terms connoting either *ji* or *ri*

Buddhist and Western thought differ greatly in their concrete understanding of what the ideal and universal are. (pg. 84)

Although Masao Abe’s declared aim is to compare concrete Eastern thought - that is the thought of members of the Kyoto School of philosophy - to concrete Western thought - that is the philosophy of Plato, Aristotle, Kant, and others - he nevertheless strikes a chord that has a much greater and general significance than this context might suggest. He writes:

There are standpoints which attempt to grasp and comprehend the totality of the opposition and tension between *ji* and *ri* by taking the former (*ji*) as foundational. These are the various empiricist positions common to both East and West. In contrast to them, other standpoints endeavor to grasp and comprehend the same totality of the opposition and tension between *ji* and *ri* by taking the latter (*ri*) as foundational. These are the various idealist positions which are also common to East and West (pg. 84).

The diagram on the next page is a graphical summary representation of this analysis.

Masao Abe continues his basic analysis as follows:

neither empiricism nor idealism can be said to provide a fundamental solution to the problem of man as long as either attempts, in a one-sided way, to grasp and comprehend the opposition between *ji* and *ri* by taking one pole of that opposition as its basic principle, thus remaining within the opposition and tension rather than transcending it. For the standpoint which will give a true solution to such an opposition and tension must be one which breaks through that opposition and tension. It must be a metaphysical standpoint in the best sense of the word. (pg. 85)

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65 Masao Abe has been counted by some as being a member of the Kyoto School of philosophy.
66 Masao Abe, *Zen and Western Thought*, o.c., fig. 4.1 on pg. 84
Several comments come to mind:

1. according to Masao Abe we must assume that neither empiricism nor idealism is an approach to reality that can potentially cover all phenomena of reality. They are one-sided abstractions from a reality which contains elements of both. However, both options are possible and it can be argued that they each provide a comprehensive view of reality. Philosophers who have taken standpoints on either side of the divide are for example John Locke and Hegel together with their predecessors. These philosophies can thus be said to be based on diverging pre-philosophical choices;

2. Kant’s contribution was to show that the abstractions of empiricism and of idealism are caused by the way in which human reason works. His concept of the “thing-in-itself” is the metaphysical expression of the fact that our mental perception of reality is mediated by the categories. His concept also implies that true reality is ultimately not accessible to human reason;

3. many philosophers, starting with Aristotle’s “pure activity” (Lat.: *actus purus*), have offered proposals that were designed to overcome the basic discrepancy which exists between the static and the dynamic aspects of reality. These proposals all have in common that they posit one of Masao Abe’s two options as basic which is then modified such that it can incorporate the other option into its structure. This needs further explanation;

4. western philosophy has in general tended to prefer a standpoint that is based on the concept of eternal, unchanging being. For example, while Hegel could successfully argue that the concept of being is abstract and has no properties at all, and by this token is formalistically identical with the void, i.e. the *nihil* of scholasticism and the the *vacuum* of Antiquity, neither he nor most other philosophers were prepared to radically investigate the full ramifications of this discovery, namely that ultimate Being and the ultimate *Nihil* are identical terms on formal grounds;

5. one reason for such a lack of readiness to investigate matters were objections raised by formal logic, more precisely the laws of non-contradiction and of the excluded middle which impose a very strict interpretation for the notion of the *nihil*. By way of an example this can best be explained with the notion of the “zero” in the mathematical theory of numbers. Roman and European medieval mathematicians understood “zero” to be a dead end. You had either one, or two or three apples, or none for that matter, and that was it. It did not make any sense to speak about “negative apples”. Things changed only after mathematicians came to realize that “zero” was just another number, similar to the natural numbers that would open a door to the realms of the negative numbers, which became accepted as “negative but real”. The “zero”, logically equivalent to the *nihil*, was thus converted from a dead end where thought had to stop, to a transit gate through which a whole new world could be entered;

6. historically, the *nihil* had to be discarded as an option, because logical deductions based on the laws of formal logic made it an absolute necessity to attribute substance or essence to the Being of beings. Over time philosophers have interpreted this conception of the Being of beings in vastly diverging ways: the One, nature, fate, matter, the atoms, the vacuum, form, idea, act, *dunamis*, God, the subject, objectivity, identity of subject and object, Spirit, the individual, the capital, will to live (: e.g. Bergson’s *élan vital*), Nietzsche’s *Wille zur Macht* (Ger.: *struggle for power and control*), etc. Suffice it to say that in spite of the massive differences that exist between these interpretations, none of these options would ever come close to the Eastern understanding of Being as transitory, fleeting, empty;
7. one specific reason why the notion of a static, unchanging substance or substrate was never really put into question had a root in Christianity. Over the centuries it had become accepted currency to identify the eternal Being with the eternal God of Christianity. Therefore, those philosophers who believed in the existence of God, could not justify why they should reject the idea of an eternal, unchanging Being. It did not matter to them that this Being could not be thought, because God himself also could not be conceptualized, and that He could only be approximated as Aquinas had shown. In other words, there was simply no suitable logical or metaphysical context in the West that would empower philosophers to follow through the idea of abandoning eternal static Being.

8. philosophers such as Whitehead have shown that a coherent and cohesive metaphysical theory can be developed which is based on the assumption that the notion of the dynamic “process” is more basic than that of the unchanging Being. This is an indication for the fact that a radically dynamic view of reality can reasonably be defended.

We are thus left with the following conclusions:

a) the particular and the universal are two complementary aspects of the same reality and are indications for the fact that on the one hand reality is forever subjected to a process of change, which is to say a process of becoming and perishing, while on the other hand there is the notional element of eternal and unchanging being. Both elements are irreducible in the sense that it has not been possible to explain one in terms of the other;

b) European philosophy has in its mainstream development defended the concept of eternal unchanging being, variously called essence, substance, substrate, etc. I have argued that this was a deliberate choice which was supported by formal logic and on religious grounds.

It may have been Friedrich Nietzsche who first seriously dealt with the question of “Non-Being” or “nothingness” (Ger.: Nichts) which cannot be categorized as “Being” or a Kantian “Ought”. Heidegger’s contribution was to propose a radically novel interpretation for the notion of the nihil. In this Heidegger himself may not have been aware of the fact that his fresh view on the problematic of the non-being had much in common with notions and ideas put forward for the first time by the Indian philosopher Nāgārjuna (c. 150 - 250 CE).

In order to avoid any possible confusion with the traditional European view that is encapsulated in the notion of the nihil I shall use the term “nothingness” to designate this novel, and as I must explain, greatly expanded understanding of the concept. I must also show that this notion of nothingness is a basic term in the analysis and subsequent understanding of Tanabe’s interpretation of the phenomena of faith and grace. This latter I must defer until such time when I explicitly study Tanabe’s philosophy. For now I continue to trace Masao Abe’s train of thought.

His thesis is that in the context of Western philosophy the two primary metaphysical principles are Aristotle’s “Being” and the Kantian “Ought”, each of which is absolute, transcends relative being and can potentially serve as the foundation for a metaphysical theory. To this

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67 Meister Eckhart (c. 1260 - 1328) developed the metaphysical view of the “Nichts” (Ger.: nothing), i.e. nihil.
70 This problematic has been studied by: May, Reinhard, *Heidegger’s hidden sources – Asian influences on his work*, Routledge, 1996. Also: Parkes, Graham (ed.), *Heidegger and Asian thought*, University of Hawai’i Press, Honolulu, 1987
Nāgārjuna added the notions of “nothingness” and “emptiness” (Skt.: śūnyatā) not merely as philosophical concepts but as an outgrowth of a profound religious experience that is rooted in the teachings of the historical Buddha Siddhārtha Gotama (ca. 563 - ca. 483 B.C.). More precisely, Nāgārjuna philosophically established the “Standpoint of Nothingness” which transscends both being and non-being, and which subsequently became the basic point of departure of Mahāyāna Buddhist thought. Masao Abe offers this as a commentary:

„Being“ (Sein, Jap. U), “Ought” (Sollen, Jap. Ri), and “Nothingness” (Nichts, Jap. Mu), as introduced by Aristotle, Kant, and Nāgārjuna all have an absolute and non-relative character and have all, respectively, in principle, transcended the above discussed opposition between ji and ri. The opposition between ji and ri can be surmounted only when u, ri, mu is absolutized: ri, or the universal in its relative sense as a pole of the opposition discussed above, when absolutized, naturally becomes Ri or the “Universal” (in Kant: Ought) in its absolute sense. On the other hand, ji or the particular as the other pole of the opposition is in itself a synthesis or mixture of relative being and non-being. Therefore, if the absolute is derived from ji, then ji will be reduced to U (being) or Mu (Nothingness) in their absolute sense. (pg. 86)

In this text Masao Abe proposes to make three important moves which he also illustrates with a diagram (pg. 86, fig. 4.2):

1) he identifies the universal with the Kantian “Ought” because this “Ought” is an eternal ideal and is not subjected to the process of becoming and perishing;
2) he associates the relative and particular with a compound which is composed of relative being and its associated non-being;
3) he transforms the relative and particular into absolute Being and absolute Nothingness.

The relative and empirical level

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{the particular} \\
\downarrow \\
\text{the universal}
\end{array}
\]

The absolute and metaphysical level

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{Being} \\
\leftarrow U \\
\text{Nothingness} \\
\rightarrow Mu
\end{array}
\]

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{The Universal (Ought)} \\
\downarrow \\
\text{Sein} \\
\text{Nichts} \\
\text{Sollen}
\end{array}
\]

The rationale behind this last step is as follows: The relative particular is subjected to the process of becoming and perishing in the sense that it has only a limited lifetime. This is an insight into the basic characteristic of reality as was already discussed. If this insight is logically elevated to absolute status then that move is of necessity equivalent to asserting that relative being becomes absolute Being, while similarly and in a parallel motion relative nothingness (non-being) becomes absolute Nothingness.

The real significance of what seems to be no more than a logical exercise is that we have ended up with identifying three fundamental categories for human thought, and conse-

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71 Cf. Waldenfels, H., Absolutes Nichts - Zur Grundlegung des Dialogs zwischen Buddhismus und Christentum, Herder, 1976, ch. 1.2
quently of human existence: two of these, *Being*\(^{72}\) and the Universal (*Ought*)\(^{73}\), are categories that have for long been firmly rooted in the western philosophical tradition, while the third one, *Nothingness*, is a basic category of metaphysics that originated in the East and which has not received much attention by western philosophers.

Contrary to how things developed in the west, Buddhist philosophers have exploited this notion of relative non-being and of Absolute Nothingness. Two philosophers who have been particularly important for Tanabe are the Indian philosopher Nāgārjuna and the Japanese monk Shinran Shōnin (1173 - 1262). Since I must come back to the contributions of these two thinkers in the context of Tanabe’s philosophy suffice it to say that Nāgārjuna is the originator of Mahāyāna Buddhism, while Shinran Shōnin founded the Pure Land sect of Mahāyāna Buddhism.

Philosophically of special relevance for the present contexts are these two contributions made by Nāgārjuna:

1) the doctrine of the emptiness of all things;
2) that of the two truths which exist side by side.

Apart from having specific religious implications, these doctrines may also be considered to be corollaries of the basic insight that all human perception of reality is always finite and limited in its scope such that it can cover only a part and never the whole of the picture, i.e. reality as it really is.

### 3.5 Reflections on the notion of “philosophical worldview”

Earlier in this chapter I have made reference to Whitehead’s doctrine of the “fallacy of misplaced concreteness”. In the light of the insights gained from Masao Abe’s analysis of the basic problematic of ultimate reality, which is of Absolute Being versus Absolute Nothingness, I see an opportunity to come back to what Whitehead has proposed. Clearly, philosophy does not possess the resources which would be necessary to bring that dispute about the nature of ultimate reality to a close, as the evolution of this matter from the times of the pre-Socratics to Hegel, Heidegger and beyond, has demonstrated. Fact is that despite of all attempts to modify the concepts and to add yet another twist by bending things slightly in one direction or other, philosophers have not been able to bring matters to a final close. Many reasons may probably be given for this apparent failure, but one of these should be that it is an instantiation of Whitehead’s doctrine of the “misplaced concreteness”: both standpoints can claim a range of good arguments to support their respective cause, but none of these can invalidate those of the other side. The situation is thus such that it can be compared to the well known riddle from quantum mechanics of whether the elementary particles are waves or corpuscles. The current view shared by physicists worldwide is that they are both - waves and corpuscles - and that any attempt to prefer one aspect over the other is a case of misplaced concreteness, or to use another set of words: which view is most appropriate depends on the specific context. Clearly, this context is of another and more basic order than that of the issue which of the two characteristics of the elementary particle

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\(^{72}\) Aristotle’s concept of Being as form has all the characteristics of being in motion and subjected to change; Ultimate Being is pure activity, *actus purus*.

\(^{73}\) Kant’s *Sollen* is the Universal Principle of the law of pure practical reason.
is the dominant one, wave or corpuscle. In other words, the context is the basis for finding the answer to the question of how reality can be represented in one of several possible specific settings, sets of conditions, while the answer to the question is dependent on the specific characteristics that can be observed in one given set of experimental conditions.

The reason why I insist so much on this issue is the fact that in this paper I defend the thesis that one way to bridge the conceptual gap which separates Eastern from Western philosophies is to chart a pathway down to the level of the basic pre-philosophical choices which each philosopher has made for himself. For it is these choices that ultimately constitute the foundation upon which the entire construct of the philosopher’s thought structure rests. In fact one can say that these pre-philosophical choices form the basic set of philosophical axioms which the philosopher uses as a foundation upon which he builds his analysis of reality as perceived by him. For the field of the natural sciences Thomas S. Kuhn\textsuperscript{74} has called such axiomatic foundation of the sciences a paradigm. In the above I have used the symbol of the clef to designate the key element that is necessary to understand what is written on a sheet of music.

In the area of philosophy the choices from which the paradigm, i.e. the clef, is formed are quite often not spelled out clearly, and this may be due to a range of different reasons, including:

- these choices are identical with the commonly accepted norms of the society in which the philosopher lives. For example, during the middle Ages there was no dispute in Europe that philosophy had to be in line with Christian theology. Any deviations or discrepancies, even if they were only marginal, had to be explained against the backdrop of Christianity, because otherwise the risk was high that the philosopher would not be understood by his contemporaries. There was thus no need to explain what was then commonly accepted truth or fact;
- the philosopher himself may not be fully aware of what shall ultimately be the implications of what he assumes, and by this token does not see any need to analyze his own position in any more detail, and this may then not suffice to draw the attention of his readers to the crucial points. One example for this would be Søren Kierkegaard. As Roger Poole\textsuperscript{75} so aptly explains, Kierkegaard’s work was not appreciated for years after his death because readers took him to be a somewhat queer religious activist. It needed thinkers like Jaspers, Heidegger, Sartre, and others to lay bare and open from what innovative basic conceptions this Danish thinker had developed his thoughts, and by this token to open the access road for non-specialists into the full depth of Kierkegaard’s contributions;
- another reason may be a change of paradigm. This is best explained if I refer to the revolution of 20th century astrophysics that resulted from the introduction by Albert Einstein of the non-Euclidian geometry into theoretical physics. The point here is that for more than two thousand years Euclid’s geometry had never been challenged. During the middle of the 19th century, however, mathematicians could show that one of the axioms was not necessary and could be changed. More specifically, if that particular axiom was dropped and replaced by another assumption, a novel type of geometry could be constructed that was mathematically sound. As I shall have to explain shortly, a similar situation results when independent philosophical traditions come into close encounter. More precisely, some basic assumptions in formal logic that can be traced back to Aristotle’s Metaphysics have been challenged in the context of the East-West encounter and that has led to new insights;
- implicit assumptions may also come to the fore in cases in which the assumptions made by a philosopher can be shown to be inconsistent with other facts while his conclusions are obviously valid. This would be the case, for example for the dialogues of Plato. There can be no doubt that none of the

\textsuperscript{74} Thomas S. Kuhn, \textit{The Structure of Scientific Revolutions}, 2\textsuperscript{nd} enl. ed., University of Chicago Press, 1970

details of his cosmology and of his ontology are in line with currently accepted cosmological theories while the interest in his works seems to be as intense as ever. What readers must do to overcome this inconsistency is to “translate” Plato’s words into a “modern” understanding such that they then can gain access to insights that continue to fascinate because they are still relevant. The problem for the modern reader is to identify and explain what Plato’s basic beliefs “really” are and how they will fit into the rest of our modern worldview.

With this in mind as a general guideline I must tackle two different but related tasks:

- identify and state the axiomatic foundations of the two philosophers whom I intend to compare, i.e. Tanabe and Kierkegaard, to the extent that these are deemed to be relevant for their respective views on religious faith and on divine grace;
- find means that will enable me to avoid introducing some hidden cultural or religious bias into this comparison.

The second of these tasks I can handle with the help of the analysis of the phenomena of faith and of grace that I have presented in section 3.1 of this chapter. There I have reduced both phenomena to the structure of a binary relationship which in its most basic form consists of three elements, a human subject, its opposite, variously called the object of faith or the seat of grace, and the intentional relationship by which both elements are related. This simple figure has then been modified in two respects: first there was the general context into which the specific act of having faith or of receiving grace is placed. This context is best described as consisting of two components: a basic human propensity or preparedness to have faith or to expect an act of grace, to which is added a complex structure of cultural and religious perceptions, doctrines and conventions. These religious and cultural inputs serve as the matrix that forms and modifies the anthropologically given of the basic propensity, and which by means of a complex process of individual adjustments and transformations ultimately brings it into a form that then becomes the paradigm for assessing individual acts of faith or of grace. This paradigm may lead to a reaction with respect to the object of faith or the seat of grace that can be either positive or negative, it may make us accept or reject, with all nuances in between which a human response can take. The point is that whatever position the human individual may assume in one specific instance of having faith or of receiving grace will be conditioned by this cultural and religious context.

Therefore, based on these cultural and religious inputs the human individual will assume a specific position in reaction to how he or she assesses the situation at hand, and this position which is a mental predisposition will then be projected onto the object of faith or the seat of grace either as a readiness to have faith and to gratefully receive the unmerited gift, or else it may become a position of disbelief and of refutation. Whatever the contents of this anticipation and predisposition may be, it will be projected onto the object that opposes the individual in the act and by this token will be instrumental in creating the context of the assurances by eliminating possible mistrust, which the human individual must have before it can engage in the act of having faith or of receiving divine grace. In other words, an individual will not place its trust and confidence in someone or something if he or she is not convinced that it is reasonable to do so; also, the same individual will not believe in acts of divine grace and in miracles if he or she is not prepared to believe in God or some kind of Celestial Power.

The other task to be addressed is to review the philosopher’s thought process with the aim to identify and state how he explains the nature of the three constituent elements of which
the binary relationships of having faith and of receiving an act of grace consists. This may not be an easy task since most philosophers have not made religious faith and divine grace a subject matter of primary importance for themselves. As I shall explain shortly, Kierkegaard has dwelled in great detail on explaining specific aspects of religious faith, but it was only toward the end of his life that he chose to address the subject matter of divine grace. In this his interest was focused almost exclusively on the specific aspect of human free will and its relationship to God’s omnipotence. Tanabe, by way of contrast, has made religious faith and divine grace the central topics of his mature philosophy. However, his approach has been such that both words are hardly mentioned in the English translations of his texts. This so because he encapsulates his thoughts into a set of Buddhist concepts, using Sino-Japanese terminology, such that the task of the reader becomes one of transposing the Sino-Japanese terms into phrases that fit into the terminological context of western philosophy. The task therefore is to decode his texts such that in the end what he has written can be related to how westerners would express themselves. This is necessary so that his thought may be appreciated and understood.
4. Philosophical positions on religious faith and divine grace: Kierkegaard and Tanabe

Despite the fact that Kierkegaard and Tanabe have contributed new and innovative ideas to the evolutionary process of philosophy, it would be wrong to assume that either one of them may have lived and worked in intellectual isolation. Instead, quite the opposite is true, and both have severely criticized their predecessors. Kierkegaard’s main concern was to explain to his fellow countrymen what he believed to be the true message of the Gospel, more precisely that of the New Testament, and to this end he had to attack Danish Hegelianism and the Danish Hegelians, whose philosophy had been widely accepted by the establishment of the Danish State Church. It would perhaps be too much to say that Hegel’s philosophy was the only one which Kierkegaard had really studied in detail, but fact is that his attention was primarily focused on defeating what he perceived to be the errors and misconceptions that Hegel and the Danish Hegelians had introduced and that in his view had obliterated the message of the Bible.

Tanabe for his part had a different goal. His aim was to combine the Eastern philosophical tradition with that of the West. To this end he assumed for himself a stance that his mentor and predecessor at the Imperial University of Kyoto, Nishida Kitarō (1870 - 1945), had formulated and which was constructed by taking the notion of Absolute Nothingness as its central pivoting point. Tanabe therefore ended up by severely criticizing many western philosophers, including Plato, Aristotle, Kant, Hegel, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, to name but a few. Of special interest in the present context, however, are Tanabe’s criticisms of Kant, who in his view had stopped short of completing his critical philosophy, of Hegel, whose Phenomenology and Logic he had studied over a period of more than 12 years and who in his view had not been able to grasp the true philosophical implications of the notion of the *Nichts* (Ger.: *nothing, void*, Lat.: *nihil*), and of Kierkegaard, to whose thought he felt much in debt but whom he nevertheless severely criticized for misrepresenting the social side of human existence.

Given that the thoughts of Tanabe and Kierkegaard can be read as reactions to what Kant and Hegel had written, it is reasonable to start with reviewing the salient characteristics of the religious philosophy of these two thinkers as a lead in to the philosophy of Kierkegaard and of Tanabe. Later I must also address the way in which Tanabe distances himself from Kierkegaard.

One further point must also be mentioned. Tanabe is hardly known in the west outside of specialist circles that consist of professional philosophers who master the Japanese language, and of linguists who work as translators. Only a few of Tanabe’s publications have been translated into western languages, and most of these translations are basically sections that have been lifted from much larger publications. Also, hardly any of the secondary literature written by Japanese scholars is available to readers who cannot read Japanese, and what has been published is mostly concerned with elucidating Tanabe’s involvements with Japanese politics in South East Asia before and during WW II. For this reason a short review of his life and work may provide some additional background for better understanding his philosophy.

Kierkegaard, on the other hand, is a well-known philosopher, and it appears that all of his publications, including his *Papers and Journals* have by now become translated into several western languages. Also, the number of publications that study different aspects of his
thought has been soaring since the end of WW II, and what has been published now fills several bookshelves in a philosophical library. Yet a basic concern prevails. Kierkegaard has published not only philosophical, but also psychological, theological, and strictly polemical books, essays, and newspaper articles, the majority of which have been put to print under a pseudonym. He called this technique “indirect communication” because it allowed him to address one and the same subject matter from different standpoints which would often be contradictory to one another. It is therefore not a straightforward undertaking to assume that he defended one specific stance with respect to a particular subject; what is to become Kierkegaard’s position has to be carefully stitched together from a variety of different places in his works, often including the several thousand pages that together make up his Papers and Journals, because much of his writing has at least some autobiographical significance. A review of his life and authorship may help to elucidate this problematic.

I shall begin with reviewing the contributions made by Kant and by Hegel as I deem these to be important background information for the positions on religious faith and on divine grace that later Tanabe and Kierkegaard have assumed.

4.1 The Western tradition: Kierkegaard

4.1.1 Kant (1724 - 1804) on faith and grace

Within the larger program of establishing the boundaries of reason that lies at the heart of his critical philosophy, Kant excluded theology from the realm of theoretical knowledge. His Critique of Pure Reason claims to establish mathematics and physical science on a sure foundation, but only at the price of restricting their scope to mere appearances (phenomena). Things as they are (or may be) in themselves (noumena) are inaccessible to theoretical knowledge.

A central argument of Kant’s critical philosophy is that human reason is limited (finite). Reason, however, constantly seeks to overstep its limits in the attempt to roam about in areas that exceed its intrinsic capabilities, and which it therefore cannot master. Some special discipline must be applied in order to make human reason stay within and not transgress the limits that are set for it. In Kant’s view the appropriate discipline to keep reason within its own limits is the one that reason imposes upon itself. “Critique” - i.e., critical philosophy - is thus the method that makes it possible for us to impose such self-discipline upon our human uses of reason. In his critique of, for example, the proofs of God’s existence Kant uses arguments against the adequacy of any such theoretical proof that exemplify “critique” by identifying those crucial limits that we must recognize and set upon our exercise of the power of reason.

Kant’s treatment of the concept of God and of religion, however, does not consist merely in the negative result that we must block reason from taking us along the theoretical paths that the rationalist metaphysics of Baumgarten (1714 - 1762) and of Wolff (1679 - 1754) had claimed will lead to a proof of God’s existence. Kant argues instead that once we have disciplined human reason to stay off that theoretical path, we are then in a position to make an affirmation of God on the basis of what he terms the practical, i.e., moral, use of reason. As he writes in the Preface to the second edition of the Critique of Pure Reason (1787):
He thus proposes what has come to be known as his “moral argument” for God and the immortality of the soul. In connection with this argument he also develops the concept of “moral faith.” Key elements of Kant's moral argument are first presented in the “Transcendental Doctrine of Method,” which is the final part of the _Critique of Pure Reason_, and that are then further developed in “The Dialectic of Pure Practical Reason” of the _Critique of Practical Reason_ (1788) and in §§ 86-91 of the _Critique of the Power of Judgment_ (1790).

One of the main principles about objects of experience according to Kant is that they are all subject to complete causal determinism. Morality, however, requires free will in such a way that its commands can be addressed only to wills whose choices are not causally determined. The demands of empirical knowledge must be reconciled with the demands of morality, because if we are subject to causal determinism as _phenomena_ (as we appear to ourselves and to each other) we are at the same time free from causal determination as _noumena_ (as we are in ourselves). In other words, as a _phenomenon_ the self is causally determined, but as a _noumenon_ the self of the same person can still be the free agent that morality requires. Kant’s theoretical analysis thus leaves open at least a formal possibility that we are deterministically free as we are in ourselves.

God is conceived by Kant as a thing-in-itself (a _noumenon_). In a way this is religiously unsurprising; one might think that a God who is merely an appearance would not be God at all. More controversial is another consequence which Kant draws from the noumenal status of the deity: that we cannot experience God at all, since our experience is necessarily structured by the forms of space and time, and hence is only of appearances. Kant does not draw the other conclusion, namely that if God can be, like human selves, a noumenon, that he is _also_ experienced as a phenomenon. This then defines the course to follow in Kant’s discussion of the topic of grace.

Kant has an uneasy relation to this central concept of Christian theology. On the one hand the concept of grace might potentially relax and thereby corrupt the stern demands of morality\(^{76}\), but at the other hand moral faith may have to acknowledge a need for certain types of grace.

There is no place in the Kantian scheme for things like _prevenient grace_, that is, divine assistance that precedes our first turning toward the good and indeed causes, or contributes causally to that turning without our previously having done anything to deserve it. Kant is quite explicit:

> Granted that some supernatural cooperation is also needed to this becoming good or better, whether this cooperation only consists in the diminution of obstacles or be also a positive assistance, the human being must nonetheless make himself antecedently worthy of receiving it.\(^{77}\)

Kant is thus open to what Christian theology has called _sanctifying grace_, that grace which provides divine assistance to the converted in actually becoming holy. Sanctifying grace, as

\(^{76}\) Immanuel Kant, _Religion within the boundaries of mere reason_, Allan Wood et al. (trans.), Cambridge University Press, 2003, 6:51 - 2.

\(^{77}\) o.c., 6:44
Kant seems to embrace it, is grace that will help the good principle in us to vanquish the evil principle if we have already done all we can do to accomplish that goal. Although we may not know that we cannot do absolutely all that is required, we nevertheless need to believe that if we believe that, if we do all that we can do, then God’s sanctifying grace will be there to help us. Kant’s main concern here is that whatever we do must be the work of freedom if it is to have moral worth.

The concept of a supernatural intervention into our moral though deficient faculty, and even our not totally purified or at least weak disposition, to satisfy our duty in full ... is very risky and hard to reconcile with reason; for what is to be accredited to us as morally good must take place not through foreign influence but only through the use of our own powers.\(^{78}\)

Kant goes on to offer an interesting solution to this problem:

Yet its impossibility (that the two may not occur side by side) cannot be proven either, since freedom itself, though not containing anything supernatural in its concept, remains just as incomprehensible to us according to its possibility as the supernatural we might want to assume as surrogate for the independent yet deficient determination of freedom.\(^{79}\)

In other words, we do not know how anything works at the noumenal level, and therefore we cannot say that both of these things cannot happen together.

There remains what Christian theology has called justifying grace that is the grace of God that consists in God’s justifying the sinner. In the view of Luther and Calvin, God accounts us as righteous when, strictly speaking, we are not yet righteous in our minds and deeds, because God is imputing to us the righteousness of Christ. Kant speaks of a “righteousness which is not our own”, and of “an appropriation (of that righteousness) for the sake of our own”, acknowledging that “rendering this appropriation comprehensible to us is still fraught with great difficulties”\(^{80}\). Although the basis in us for accepting the justifying grace is insufficient, Kant maintains that we ourselves are progressing towards the state of righteousness rather than that another person’s fully achieved righteousness is imputed to us, as Luther says.

Here then is that surplus over the merit from good works for which we felt the need earlier, one which is imputed to us by grace. For what in our earthly life (and perhaps even in all future times and in all worlds) is always only in mere becoming (namely, our being a human being well pleasing to God) is imputed to us as if we already possessed it here in full. And to this we indeed have no rightful claim.\(^{81}\)

If we do not have a claim of right to the imputation of the needed surplus of righteousness, this is, Kant adds, “according to the empirical cognition we have of ourselves”. “It is always ... only a degree of grace”, but it is “foully in accord with eternal justice (because it is based on a satisfaction that for us consists only in the idea of an improved disposition of which, however, God alone has cognition)”\(^{82}\). Apparently, what Kant seems to suggest is that it is only from the empirical, time-bound point of view that this appears as grace, while from the

\(^{78}\) o.c., 6:191  
\(^{79}\) o.c., 6:191  
\(^{80}\) o.c., 6:66  
\(^{81}\) o.c., 6:75  
\(^{82}\) o.c., 6:75 – 6
timeless point of view, God is only doing the right thing, only doing what we deserve, in counting moral progress as perfected holiness. To be sure, Luther did not agree to this.

Having clarified the nature of grace, and how it is to be accommodated in a religion that stays “within the boundaries of mere reason”, Kant in one general remark added to his first chapter treats of what he calls the “parerga” (fringe topics) to his conception of religion:

- the effects of grace,
- miracles,
- mysteries,
- the means of grace.

Kant is clear in saying that they do not belong within religion (read: religion within the boundaries of pure reason), but that they border on it. Reason does not contest the possibility of these objects; it just cannot incorporate them into its maxims of thought and action. Rejecting dogmatic faith as dishonest or impudent, Kant nevertheless allows for reflective thought to entertain the possibility that in the inscrutable field of the supernatural there may be something more than what reason can bring to its understanding.

Speaking more specifically of the effects of grace, which he considers to be “supposed inner experiences”, he writes:

The summoning of the effects of grace ... cannot be incorporated into the maxims of reason, if the latter keeps to its boundaries; nor, in general can anything supernatural, because all use of reason ceases precisely with it. - For it is impossible to make these effects theoretically cognizable (that they are effects of grace and not of immanent nature), because our use of the concept of cause and effect cannot be extended beyond the objects of experience and hence beyond nature; moreover, the presupposition of a practical employment of this idea is wholly self-contradictory. For the employment would presuppose a rule concerning what good we ourselves must do (with a particular aim in mind) in order to achieve something; to expect an effect of grace means, however, the very contrary, namely that the good (the morally good) is not of our doing but of another being - that we, therefore, can only come by it by doing nothing, and this contradicts itself. Hence we can admit an effect of grace as something incomprehensible, but cannot incorporate it into our maxims for either theoretical or practical use.83

Kantian religion is to be grounded in reason, not in theoretical but in practical reason. Nevertheless Kant allows a carefully circumscribed role to revelation in religious life. “Revelation” signifies for Kant empirical, historical sources of religious belief and practice. The essential religious doctrines that constitute for him “pure religious faith” do not depend on experience or history, but have their source a priori in pure practical reason.

4.1.2 G.W.F. Hegel (1770 - 1831)

In the present context I cannot bypass Hegel’s philosophy for the simple reason that it has been the cause of violent reactions by both Kierkegaard and Tanabe. To be clear about this, what has been contentious were not the specifics of Hegel’s position on either religious faith or divine grace. These positions were certainly neither mainstream Christian nor have they been relevant to Tanabe or Kierkegaard. Instead, what has caused violent reactions from these and other philosophers were Hegel’s attempts to construct a theory of reality that would be capable to totalize reality as a whole. Despite of their being at variance otherwise,
Tanabe and Kierkegaard both concurred that Hegel’s proposals to construct his philosophical system were bound to fail because he had missed out on some essential characteristics of reality, and that for this reason he was bound to fail in his attempt to capture reality in its totality. Therefore, before I can address Hegel’s positions on religious faith and on divine grace, and how Tanabe and Kierkegaard reacted to that philosophy, I must first provide for an overview over the most relevant elements of Hegel’s philosophical system.

Hegel was the last of the main representatives of a philosophical movement known as German Idealism, which was conceived as a reaction against the philosophy of Kant. Hegel was convinced that the Kant’s philosophy did not represent the final word in philosophical matters, because it was not possible to conceive of a unified theory of reality by means of Kantian principles alone. For Hegel a unified theory of reality is one which can systematically explain all forms of reality, starting from a single principle or a single subject. These forms of reality included not only solar systems, physical bodies and the various guises assumed by organic life, for example, plants, animals and human beings, but also psychic phenomena, social and political forms of organization as well as artistic creations and cultural achievements such as religion and philosophy. In Hegel’s view one of the essential tasks of philosophy was the systematic explanation of all these various forms starting from one single principle, in other words, in the establishment of a unified theory of reality, because only a theory of this nature could permit knowledge to take the place of faith. This goal, namely the conquest of faith, places Hegel’s philosophical program within the wider context of the philosophy of the Enlightenment.

For Hegel, the fundamental principle which explains all reality is reason. Reason is for Hegel not some quality which is attributed to some human subject; to the contrary, it is the sum of all reality. In accordance with this belief Hegel claims that reason and reality are strictly identical: only reason is real and only reality is reasonable. The considerations which moved Hegel to identify reason with reality are various. On the one hand, there are certain motives rooted in Hegel’s theological convictions according to which one must be able to give a philosophical interpretation of the whole of reality which can simultaneously acts as a justification of the basic assumptions of Christianity. On the other hand, epistemological convictions such as the following also play a role:

- knowledge of reality is only possible if reality is reasonable, because it would not otherwise be accessible to cognition;
- we can only know that which is real.

But before I can continue to explain Hegel’s system and also his conceptions of religious faith and of divine grace I must first provide a summary overview over his philosophical output.

The philosophical works attributed to “Hegel” can be divided into three groups:

(1) texts written by Hegel and published during his lifetime;
(2) texts written by him, but not published during his lifetime;
(3) texts neither written by him nor published during his lifetime.

Given the extreme complexity of Hegel’s philosophical authorship and the evolutionary turns which he has taken as his thoughts matured, it is not an easy task to identify beyond doubt what precisely his positions were. In the following I shall focus on three problem areas:
- his critique of religion as in *Faith and Knowledge* (1802);
- aspects of his philosophy of Spirit as in *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807);
- aspects of his philosophy of being as in *Science of Logic* (1812, 1813, and 1816) and in *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Outline* (1817, but thoroughly revised 1827 and again 1830).

The early years of Hegel’s intellectual career were characterized less by philosophical ambitions than by an interest in public enlightenment and public education. Hegel aimed in his early works to find ways “to influence men’s lives”. As starting point for these attempts he took the analysis of the role and consequences which must be attributed to religion, especially Christianity, for the individual and for the social context of a nation. Two different interests are at work. Hegel aims to show how religion had developed into a power hostile to life, which produces its effect through fear and demands submission. On the other hand, he tries to understand the conditions under which it can prosper as a productive element for the individual and for society. In this he was strongly influenced by the religious philosophy of Kant.

Hegel’s religious criticism centers on the notion of “positive religion”. For Hegel, a positive religion is one whose fundamental content and principles cannot be made comprehensible to human reason. They thus appear unnatural and supernatural, and are seen to be based on authority and to demand obedience. For Hegel, the Jewish religion represents the paradigm of a positive religion. Hegel also considers that the Christian religion has been transformed into a positive religion during the course of its history, in other words into a religion which alienates human beings from themselves, and from their fellow creatures. In direct opposition to positive religion, Hegel conceives what he calls “natural religion”, which he defines as one whose doctrines correspond with human nature: one which permits or even encourages people to live not only in harmony with their own needs, inclinations and well-considered convictions, but also without being alienated from other people. Hegel’s belief in the value for mankind of harmony with oneself (and others) is grounded in a quasi-metaphysical conception of love and life. According to this conception, there is a sort of moral emotion of love, which rises above all separations and conflicts, in which persons might be involved in relation to themselves and to others. It is this emotion of love which makes people aware of their unity with others and with themselves. It cannot be adequately made a subject matter for philosophy, because it is based on reflection and on conceptual distinction, but it demonstrates the true constitution of reality, which consists of a state of unity. This unity forms the basis for all separations and conflicts, and makes these possible. Such view of reality, which has to be thought of as unity, Hegel calls “Life” (Ger.: Leben) and also “Being” (Ger.: Sein). In the end Hegel’s efforts are directed towards conceiving of reality in these terms in a sufficiently differentiated manner. In doing so he pursues above all the goal of conceiving of life as a process which generates and also reconciles oppositions, a dynamic unity of generation and reconciliation:

- Life is the connection of connection and non-connection.

In *Faith and Knowledge* (1802) Hegel reveals himself as a critic of the positions of Kant, Jacobi and Fichte whom he accuses of practicing a “reflective philosophy of subjectivity”. For Hegel, reflective philosophy is initially an expression of an age or historical situation. Such an age is subject to the dichotomies of culture which are the products of the understanding and whose activities are regarded as divisive and isolationist. It is impossible for such an age to
overcome these dichotomies and restore the harmony which the understanding has
destroyed. A philosophy committed to such an age shares its fate, being also unable to
remove, at least in theory, the conflicts which appear as the concrete forms of dichotomy.
For even when philosophy strives to overcome these conflicts by making reference to a
particular idea of unity or harmony, it still remains committed to the conditions of its age
and will achieve nothing but newer and even more acute conflicts. Following Hegel, we
can characterize the general form underlying the various conflicts as the conflict between
subjectivity and objectivity. The attempts of reflective philosophy to overcome them fail
because they are largely abstract and thus fail to take into account either the subjective or
the objective component of the conflict, and declare it to be resolved by neglecting or
abstracting from either of these components. In abstracting from subjectivity, objectivity (in
Hegel’s terminology) is posited as absolute, which leads to the subordination of subjectivity.
This is characteristic of all religions that can be described as positive according to Hegel’s
definition. If, on the other hand, abstraction is made from objectivity, and subjectivity is thus
posited as absolute, then objectivity is regarded as being dependent on subjectivity. In
Hegel’s view the philosophies of Kant, Jacobi and Fichte have raised subjectivity one-sidedly
to the status of an absolute; this is why he calls their theories reflective philosophies of
subjectivity.

In contrast to the philosophical attitudes which he criticized, Hegel assumes along with
Schelling that the described conflict between subjectivity and objectivity can only be
overcome by a philosophy of identity. A philosophy of identity in this sense is characterized
by two assumptions:

- for each opposition there is a unity which must be regarded as a unity of the opposing factors;
- the opposing factors are nothing more than their unity under the description or in the form of the
  opposing factors.

These assumptions suggest that one should understand the overcoming of the opposition
between subjectivity and objectivity as a single process which reconstructs the unity under-
lying the opposing factors and makes them possible in the first place. Following these
conceptual assumptions, the unity to be reconstructed in a philosophy of identity is defined
as the “subject-object”, and the subject and object themselves are characterized as
“subjective subject-object” or “objective subject-object” respectively. The process of
reconstruction of the subject-object by means of the assumptions of the philosophy of
identity consists of recognizing the subjective and objective subject-object in their
specific one-sidedness or opposition to each other, and thus gaining an insight into the
internal structure of the subject-object as the unity which underlies the two conflicting
factors and makes them possible in the first place. Although Hegel did not persist in
using this terminology for long, he nevertheless remained faithful to the project of the
development of a unity which he considered being comprehensive and which consists of its
internal opposing elements. Hegel’s various attempts at a formal description of a process
which was aimed at a unity contained a discipline initially defined as “logic and metaphysics”
and a “real philosophy”, i.e., a “philosophy of nature” and what he later called “philosophy
of spirit”84.

84 Hegel, Phenomenology of Spirit
Initially the philosophy of spirit is called “philosophy of ethical life” (Ger.: Philosophie der Sittlichkeit). It underwent several major changes that were all linked to modifications of Hegel’s conception of spirit. Starting with a philosophy of spirit as a theory of ethical life, he transformed it into a theory of consciousness until he finally chose an approach which enabled him to liberate the philosophy of spirit away from its narrow systematic focus on a conception of ethical life and towards a formal structure of self-consciousness. This structure consists in its being a unity of generality and particularity, such that it can provide the framework within which the logical-metaphysical determinations, the natural world, and psycho-social phenomena unite to form a meaningful systematic context. Following this move the philosophy of spirit is now better equipped to implement its systematic task of reconstructing the processes of self-realization of what Hegel calls “reason”. Hegel would never abandon this insight into the formal structure of self-consciousness. He then turned towards attempts to comprehend reality in all its manifestations as a self-representation of reason (Ger.: Vernunft). This concept of “reason” combines various ontological and epistemological connotations that are specifically Hegelian: “reason” is not merely the name for a human faculty which contributes in a specific manner to our gaining knowledge; he uses “reason” also to describe that which is ultimately and eminently real. This is the ontological connotation. Reason is reality, and that alone is truly real which is reasonable. This programmatic credo, which has become famous from the foreword to Hegel’s Philosophy of Right, is the basic precept determining the entire approach to his system.

At least three different convictions make up this basic doctrine of the ontological dignity of reason.

1. the totality of that which in one sense or another is real must be considered as the differentiation and partial realization of a primary structure which forms the basis for all facts which are real in that specific sense. Hegel calls this primary structure “the absolute” or “reason”. He shares this conviction of the necessity of assuming a primary structure called “reason” (interpreted ontologically) with Fichte, Schelling and other members of the post-Kantian idealistic movement whose monistic approach is defined by this assumption. For Hegel, therefore, this conviction does not require detailed philosophical justification; it is justified because it alone offers a basis for systematic philosophical considerations, following the failure of all previous philosophical attempts to conceive of a unified and complete representation of the world.

This ontological conception of reason is still too imprecise to provide a clue as to why exactly the concept of “reason” can be used to characterize the primary structure. The second conviction provides more information in that it relates to the internal constitution of the structure which he characterizes as reason:

2. he understands this structure to be a complex unity of thinking and being which is motivated in the following way: the only philosophical approach which can organize the whole of reality into a unified and coherent picture accessible to knowledge is one which insists that everything taken to be real is only real inasmuch as it can be comprehended as the actualization of some specific structural elements of reason.

This assertion of the essential reasonableness of all being, together with the first conviction of the necessity of assuming a primary structure, leads directly to the concept of this primary structure as a unity of thinking and being, understood in the very radical sense that thinking and being are one and the same, or that only thinking has being. If we now call this unity of thinking and being “reason”, and if we are convinced that the requisite primary structure
must be thought of as this unity of thinking and being, then reason will be declared on the one hand to represent what in the final analysis is ultimately real, and on the other that which alone is real. This has rightly been called a “monism of reason”. Hegel thought that this was still not sufficiently detailed enough to support his claim that reason is the primary structure constituting reality and thus is ultimately and only real. He therefore added that

3. this structure constitutes reality and thus its own objectivity in a teleological process which must be understood as a process of knowledge. This leads to the characteristically Hegelian doctrine that there can be no adequate theory of reality without a dynamic or process-oriented ontology. Hegel describes this process as „self-knowledge of reason“ thereby indicating the dominant role which he assigns to what he defines as „reason“.

Hegel tries to integrate within this formula various aspects of his conception of reason. The first aspect is that it is necessary to take reason, understood as the primary structure, as something which is essentially dynamic. By this he means that the element of self-realization forms part of the moments which determine the primary structure. A rather oversimplified idea of the background for this claim is to refer metaphorically to the theory of organism: just as an organism can be described as an entity whose development is linked to the concept or the structural plan of itself in such a way that the realization of this concept or structural plan belongs to its being real, so we should think of Hegelian reason, understood as the ontologically relevant primary structure, as realizing in a quasi-organic developmental process the unity of thinking and being which characterizes its concept, thereby representing itself as real or as reality. The second aspect Hegel has in mind when he speaks of “self-knowledge of reason” is that this process represents a process of recognition for reason. It is apparently not sufficient for Hegel to embed his idea of reason as the ontological primary structure in a conception of realization based on the paradigm of the organism. Such grounding seems to be too unspecific because it does not show how to describe a process which is typical of all organisms in such a way that we understand more precisely and in detail what it means for the process to be one of self-realization of reason. The specific way in which reason realizes itself is to be characterized first of all as a process of recognition, because only this characterization takes into account the fact that that which is being realized must be thought of as nothing more than thinking qua recognition. But even this way of conceiving the realization of reason is still too imprecise, unless one includes in the concept of realization the thesis that reason is the ultimately and only real ontological primary structure. The inclusion of this thesis then leads directly to the teleologically conceived description of the process of the realization of reason as a process of self-recognition. For if only reason - by which is meant the unity of thinking and being - is real and if an integral part of this concept of reason is the conception of its realization in the form of a process of recognition, then this process can only be directed towards the recognition of reason itself, because nothing else exists. Since this process aims to make reason aware that it alone is real, the presentation of this process must take on the form of a system in which each manifestation of reality documents its reasonable nature. This is the essence of Hegel’s philosophical system.

Hegel’s *Science of Logic* (3 editions: 1812, 1813 and 1816) is more complex and comprehensive than the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Together with a much shorter version as part of the *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences* it explicates his doctrine of the categories. Starting point of the *Logic* is the insight, that:
Because Hegel only considers that to be real which can also be known, he concludes that only reason is real. He thinks of this reason as, internally, an extremely complex entity. Hegel now distinguishes between the “Concept” of reason and the process of its realization. The object of the Science of Logic is the conceptual, that is to say, for Hegel, the logical development of this Concept. Since this Concept is the Concept of that which alone is real, Hegel can maintain that his Science of Logic takes the place of traditional metaphysics, in that it is concerned with the elucidation of the basic ways in which we can think of reality. Since the object whose Concept is to be logically discussed is reason, understood to be the sum total of reality, the Concept of reason must include not only those aspects which account for reason’s character of reality or of being, but also those aspects which do justice to the peculiar character of reason as thinking. Hegel calls these aspects “Determinations of the Concept” (Ger.: Begriffsbestimmungen). In the section of “Objective Logic” Hegel develops those aspects of the Concept of reason which take into account its character of being, while those aspects which are intended to do justice to its thinking character are addressed in the section called “Subjective Logic”. He further subdivides “Objective Logic” into “Logic of Being” and “Logic of Essence”.

In his “Objective Logic” Hegel intends to show how it is possible to generate from some very simple “immediate” determinations such as “Being”, “Nothing”, and “Becoming” other categories of quality and quantity as well as relational and modal determinations, such as “Cause-Effect”, “Substance-Accidence” and “Existence”, “Necessity” and the like. The basic strategy here for the creation of categories or determinations of the Concept is to assume that

- for every category there is an opposing one which upon closer analysis reveals itself to be its true meaning;
- for every two categories opposing each other in this manner there is a third category whose meaning is determined by that which makes the opposing categories compatible.

Hegel considers these two assumptions justified because only they can lead to what in his view is a complete and non-contingent system of categories. Hegel himself, however, did very little to make their exact meaning clear, although he uses them with great skill. This has led to a confused and still ongoing discussion regarding the interpretation of the method and of what is precisely meant. Much of the antagonism to Hegel’s philosophy concerning the meaning, significance and value of his “dialectical method” hinges on this issue, i.e. his claims about the truth-generating function of contradiction. Hegel’s opponents claim that his doctrine of the nature and methodological merits of contradiction has proved to be inaccessible and obscure. Part of the difficulties associated with the comprehension of Hegel’s conception of contradiction may be caused by his unconventional concept of contradiction itself which distinguishes itself from the classical concept of contradiction of traditional logic in two respects:

- a contradiction between two propositions cannot be confirmed solely on the basis of their ascription to a single subject of two contradictory predicates; it is also necessary to take into account the meaning of the subject of these propositions. If the contradictory predicates cannot meaningfully be

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85 Hegel preferred the term “speculative method”.

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attributed to the subject, then no contradiction arises. „Legible“ and „illegible“ are predicates which will only lead to contradiction if attributed to texts, but not, for example, to bananas. For Hegel, this means among other things that the relation of contradiction is dependent on the context;

- Hegel thinks of contradictions as analogous to positive and negative determinations, which neutralize each other. They do not, however, create as a result that the thing whose neutralizing determinations they are, is itself turned into a contradictory concept which has absolutely no meaning. Rather, even though such neutralizing determinations can be attributed to the same thing at the same time this does not imply that the thing is of necessity a "nothing", a Kantian "nihil negativum". According to Hegel, the way in which positive and negative determinations neutralize each other tells us something informative about the object to which the neutralizing determinations apply. For example, possession of EUR 100 neutralizes a debt of EUR 100, without thereby making the concept of property a contradictory concept. To be precise, the way in which this neutralization takes place makes clear that the concept „property“ means something which must be thought of as of a quantifiable size. For Hegel this is a consequence of „the logical principle that what is self-contradictory does not dissolve itself into a nullity, into abstract nothingness, but essentially only into the negation of its particular content“.

Whether this is sufficient to justify Hegel’s thesis that contradictions play a „positive“ role in cognition procedures is and remains controversial to this day.

Hegel’s „Subjective Logic“, the second part of the Science of Logic, contains not only his doctrine of concepts, judgments and syllogisms, but above all his theory of the Concept. Starting point is the doctrine that only through thinking can one recognizes what something really is. Since in Hegel's view thinking is concerned not with intuitions or representations, but with concepts, he identifies that which something in truth or really is with its Concept. Because of this identification, talk of the Concept acquires an ontological connotation. Hegelian Concepts must not be confused with what are called concepts in traditional logic. Hegelian Concepts are characterized by the fact that they are

- non-sensible - this means that they are a particular type of thought-object;
- something objective as opposed to subjective.

Regarded as objective thoughts, Hegelian Concepts are determined in the sense that embedded in them are different relations of determinations of the Concept which in turn function as determinations of thinking or of thought. These determinations of thought can themselves be regarded as a kind of predicative characteristic. They make up the multitude of all those determinations on the basis of which the Concept of an object can be seen as completely fixed. Not everything which in one sense or another is ordinarily thought of as an object has a concept. A Hegelian Concept is only allotted to objects which can be thought of in terms of the model of an organism. Hegel thus maintains that one can only regard those objects as real or as existing in truth for which there is a concept which can be interpreted on the organic model. If, then, the “scientific recognition of truth” consists in recognizing the concept of something, and if a concept is always a concept of a organic-type object, then for Hegel it is clear that his definition of the concept of a concept must include everything that is needed to describe an organism. This includes what Hegel calls

- the subjective concept, which one can best regard as the sum of all characteristics whose realization represents an organic-type object. For Hegel, in the case of the concept of reason, these characteristics are exclusively logical data which can be presented in the form of determinations of concepts, judgments and syllogisms;
- the element of objectivity. “Objectivity” here means more or less the same as reality or the state of being an object and suggests the fact that it is part of the concept of an organism to realize itself. Since, however, Hegel holds that there is ultimately only one object which really exists, namely reason,
the concept of this object must include a characteristic which is exclusively applicable to itself. This characteristic must permit the justification of the claim that in reality there is only one concept and therefore also only one object. Hegel calls this characteristic "subjectivity".

Although it is easy to see that the term "subjectivity" describes a central element of Hegel's logical theory, it is no easy task to shed light upon its precise meaning and function therein. All that is relatively obvious is that Hegel attributes the characteristic of subjectivity not just to his concept, but also to entities such as "I", "self-consciousness" and "spirit". We are therefore on safe ground if we assume that the subjectivity which is to be attributed to the concept is precisely that which is also attributed to the I, to self-consciousness, or to spirit, and which distinguishes them from other types of organism. It becomes more difficult to state what subjectivity actually means. This is not merely because Hegel distinguishes between different types of subjectivity, but also because the notion of subjectivity which is constitutive of the concept is tied to conditions which are difficult to state with any precision. Broadly speaking it seems to be the case that subjectivity occurs when something recognizes itself as being identical with something else. This relationship of identity known as "subjectivity" can only be established between entities which themselves can be thought of as being particular complexes of relations of similar elements or moments. Hegel uses the term subjectivity thus to describe a certain form of self-reference or self-relationship. Following Hegel, there should be only one entity to which this understanding of the term "subjectivity" can be attributed as a characteristic, i.e. the Hegelian "Idea", of which he says "the unity of the idea is subjectivity". For Hegel this notion of the Idea completely explicates the concept of reason. To him it is the absolute method, because it is not only the result of the analysis of the Science of Logic, i.e. the concept which comprehends all his moments, but also the complete and systematically generated series of these moments.

Before I can turn to Hegel's understanding and interpretation of the notions of religious faith and of divine grace it will be helpful to just briefly summarize the main elements of his philosophy of religion, which is part of his philosophy of spirit. Hegel holds that only in Christianity are the conditions fulfilled which are characteristic of the representational self-knowledge of reason. Philosophy of religion has as its subject not only God, but also religion itself, and for Hegel that means the way in which God is present in the religious consciousness. By this characterization he aims to distinguish philosophy of religion from the traditional theologia naturalis. On the basis of the two components which make up its nature, the philosophy of religion attempts in the first instance to characterize more closely the concept of God and the various kinds of religious consciousness which Hegel takes to be feeling, intuition, and representation. This will be found in the first part of the philosophy of religion, which takes the "concept of religion" as its object. The second part of the philosophy of religion discusses what Hegel calls "determinate religion". Here, he is concerned with something resembling a phenomenology of religions, the exposition of their various forms of appearance and objectifications. This exposition starts with so-called natural religion, which according to Hegel assumes three forms: the religion of magic, the religion of substantiality and the religion of abstract subjectivity. The specific characteristic of natural religion is that it thinks of God in direct unity with nature. Natural religion finds its historical concept in the Oriental religions. Hegel regards the "religions of spiritual individuality" as a second stage; these assume the forms of the religion of sublimity, the religion of beauty and the religion of teleology. At this stage, God is regarded as the primary spiritual being, which is not only nature but which also rules over and determines nature. Hegel puts the Jewish, Greek and
Roman religions in this category. Finally, the third stage represents the „perfect religion“, to the discussion of which he devotes the third section of his philosophy of religion. In it, God is presented as He in reality is, namely the „infinite, absolute end in itself“. To the religious consciousness, the God of the perfect religion appears in the Trinitarian form as the unity of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost. According to Hegel, this idea of religion was first realized adequately in Christianity. Hegel’s critics maintain that his philosophy of religion represents a theory which contributes to the dissolution of the Godly in reason and of Piety in knowledge.

As this discussion shows, Hegel’s interest was focused on creating a logically cohesive and coherent account of being that could serve to explicate reality. For Hegel, the fundamental principle which explains all reality is reason which also is the sum of all reality. Hegel claims that reason and reality are strictly identical: only reason is real and only reality is reasonable. In such a context that is governed by the economy of logical causation faith must be conquered by knowledge, while grace must give way to necessity.

4.1.2.1 Hegel’s philosophical position on religious faith

In the context of Hegel’s systematic philosophy there simply was no room for genuine religious faith. He believed that one of the essential tasks of philosophy was the systematic explanation of all these various forms of reality starting from one single principle, in other words, in the establishment of a unified theory of reality. Such a theory could permit knowledge to take the place of faith, thereby making faith an obsolete concept. In the only essay that deals explicitly with the relationship between Faith and Knowledge he refutes the position taken by Kant (and others), accusing him as practicing a “reflective philosophy of subjectivity”. Such a philosophy is the expression of a specific age or historical situation; it is subjected to the dichotomies of culture, which are the products of the understanding, and whose activities he regards as divisive and isolationist.

Contrary to Kant, Hegel also cannot accommodate in his philosophy the phenomenon of divine revelation. To him the only conceivable process is that of the necessary unfolding of the Concept. In the Phenomenology this process is one by which God gradually unfolds, becomes self-conscious and develops the knowledge of Himself. This has nothing to do with a straightforward understanding of “having faith in …”, of placing one’s trust and confidence in God or a Celestial Power.

It is true, however, that Hegel’s philosophy is systematically built on metaphysical axioms and a doctrine which he can only posit but which he is unable to prove. These axioms and doctrine form the basis for a system of which he claims that it can serve to reconstruct the totality of all there is. In other words, if viewed from the standpoint of an uninterested observer Hegel’s metaphysical claims can be said to meet the requirements of what I have called the abstract definition of religion in section 3.3.1: his metaphysics is based on a doctrine, and the Hegelian must have faith in that doctrine in order to subscribe to that brand of philosophy. Having faith is for Hegel having faith in his metaphysical claims.

4.1.2.2 Divine Grace: Hegel on formal logic and infinity

Hegel’s systematic philosophy is wholly conditioned by the stringency of his deductive logical thought processes. The economy of cause and effect reigns supreme with dialectical
sublation (Ger.: Aufhebung) as the engine that drives the unfolding of the concept. The essence of this process is that the inputs to the dialectical process are negated or eliminated as participating, while they are preserved as a partial element in a synthesis. There is thus no room for any spontaneous or creative activity or interferences that would sidestep the coercive pressure of the dialectical evolution. Also, God is for Hegel not an individual person, but a conglomerate of persons. As such it is not clear whether Hegel’s God would ever desire to take initiatives that have not already been inherent in the general course of the dialectical process. It therefore does not come as a surprise that Hegel did not devote any time and effort to the problematic of divine grace, in the same way in which notions as sin and redemption have no place in his system.

This position finds its logical, metaphysical underpinning in Hegel’s particular interpretation of the notion of infinity. If it is true that the divine act of grace and its effects cannot be coerced, nor in any way be conditioned by the human individual, then this statement is tantamount to saying that the idea of the unlimited, i.e. the infinite, is an indispensable element of the concept of grace. This relationship can best be explained as follows: Hegel’s understanding of the dialectical process as an instantiation of the process of logical deduction implies that this process is strictly equivalent to a tautology in the sense that its outcome is fully determined by the inputs. Sublation does not create anything new; it only activates what is already present. If, therefore, the output can, at least in principle, be predicted on the basis of what went into the process, then in the words of Kant, what appears to be an effect of grace is in reality only an effect of immanent nature, of immanent cause and effect. For any given situation, the number of possible distinguishable outcomes may be extremely large, but it will still be finite, because other inputs would generate other solutions, etc. Later when I discuss the contribution of Alain Badiou to the problem of immanent grace I shall challenge this last statement on the basis of what is known as the continuum hypothesis.

The crucial term in this debate is that of the concept of “infinity” and its role in philosophy. First raised by Anaximander, infinity, to apeiron (Gr.: το ἀπειρόν), is contrasted by finitude, and indicates that which has no end or limit. In Greek philosophy it refers to the basic stuff of which everything consists and probably has the sense of “indefinite, indeterminate” rather than “endless in space or time”. It was seen as intellectually intractable and evaluatively disreputable. In Plato’s Philebus the limit (Gr.: peras, πέρας) and the unlimited are seen as two principles of being, presided over by a cosmic reason which mixes them together in everything. For Aristotle the apeiron is more definitely the “infinite”; he attempted to see the cosmos as finite in both time and space. When infinity seemed unavoidable, he argued that it was merely potential, not actual: a line can be divided indefinitely, but it does not

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86 I use the terms “unlimited” and “infinite” generically: unlimited means that there exists not limit, while infinite means that the number of options is too large to be counted. Interpreted in this manner, i.e. without any conceptual precision, both terms would roughly have a similar meaning.

87 Miller, Adam, Badiou, Marion and St. Paul - Immanent Grace, Continuum, 2008

88 The continuum hypothesis says that a geometrical straight line cannot be replaced by a series of points. Irrespectively of how large the number of points is made and of how much the distance between these points is reduced, the points will never melt together. An argument can be made that this hypothesis also has a bearing on the assumption in section 3.2 that the realms of reality are inexhaustible.

89 A good presentation of the subject: Paolo Zellini, A Brief History of Infinity, Adelphi Edizione, 1980; reprint by Penguin Books, 2005
consist of, and cannot be divided into, an actual infinity of parts. An ordered cosmos is felt to exclude unqualified infinity.

Hegel saw two central problems with infinity:\(^{90}\):

1. if the infinite is distinct from the finite, it is limited by the finite and is thus finite rather than infinite. In other words, the infinite is not distinct from the finite but involves the finite as an aspect or “moment” of itself;
2. an infinite regress or an infinite progress(ion) is vicious, intellectually incoherent and practically self-defeating. He thus objects to the idea that humanity has a goal which it ought to strive for, but which it will not attain in finite time\(^ {91}\).

Hegel distinguishes the bad infinite of the understanding, of unlimited imagination, from the true infinite of reason, which involves the finite, rather than contrasting with it, and does not go on forever. The bad infinite is represented by a straight line, infinitely extended on either side, while the true infinite can best be represented by a circle, which is finite but unbounded. He applies this idea to any relatively self-contained reciprocal or circular structure in contrast to an endless advance from one thing to another: e.g. three mutually supporting inferences contrary to a bad series of inferences; the reciprocal involvement of cause and effect counter to an infinite series of causes and effects; logic itself, in which thought has itself as its object and does not depend on a limiting other. True infinity is associated with the negation of the negation: the finite is the negative, which in turn is negated so as to produce an affirmative.

The central application of true infinity is to the universe as a whole: God cannot be distinct from the world, since that would amount to admitting two finite entities, which could not be self-sustaining or self-explanatory. By the same token, the world cannot go forward or backward forever: it must have a self-contained circular form, for then thought and being would each limit each other and would be two finite, non-self-supporting entities. Thought is identical to, but also different from the world, and it too is circular. The concept is infinite as the world is. True infinity thus serves as a foundational principle for Hegel’s system.

This system is a logical reconstruction of reality that is based on a rigorous application of the dialectical process working on the basic constituents of whom reality is made, categories, concepts, and the idea. In broad terms, Hegel’s dialectic involves three steps:

1. one or more concepts or categories are taken as fixed, sharply defined and distinct from each other. This is the stage of understanding;
2. when we reflect on such concepts or categories, one or more contradictions emerge in them. This is the stage dialectic proper, or of the dialectical or negative reason;
3. the result of this dialectic is a new, higher concept or category, which embraces the earlier concepts or categories and resolves the contradiction involved in them. This is the stage of speculation or positive reason.\(^ {92}\)

Hegel suggests that this new concept or category is a “unity of opposites” that fits some cases - being, nothing, and becoming - more readily than others (mechanism, chemism,


\(^{91}\) From a mathematical point of view Hegel does not, in general, distinguish between a series which tends to a precise limit, e.g. \(1 + \frac{1}{2} + \frac{1}{4} + \ldots\), and one that does not, e.g. \(1 + 1 + 1 + \ldots\) or also \(1, 0, 1, 0, 1, 0, 1, \ldots\)

\(^{92}\) Enc. I, §§ 79 - 82
teleology). He holds that opposites, both of thought and of things, change into each other when they are intensified: a being whose power is so great that he annihilates all resistance, lapses into impotence, since it has no longer an opponent that can help to test, reveal, and sustain its power.

Logically, Hegel’s dialectic\(^93\) can be described in terms of inferences, syllogisms, and the conclusions. Hegel held that despite of several stoic and medieval additions, formal logic had not made any significant progress since Aristotle. Aristotle had ascribed a specific significance to the term “syllogism”, which originally only meant “inference”: Aristotle only recognized syllogisms whose two premises and one conclusion had one of the six canonical forms which he had identified\(^94\). Aristotle further divides the syllogisms into three schemata or figures according to the positions held by the middle, major, and minor terms. Introducing what he called “moods”, Aristotle then carries the division further to arrive at a complete classification schema; eventually a list of valid and not valid syllogisms is produced.

Hegel’s account of the inference, in his Logic, considerably altered Aristotle’s logic and also the additions made to it since. Aristotle’s concern was to derive a valid proposition from two other propositions. Hegel, who had reinterpreted the judgment as an original division of the concept into the universal, particular, and individual, reinterprets the forms of inference as successively more adequate ways of restoring the unity of the concept. It is thus crucial for Hegel that an inference should contain a universal, a particular, and an individual term. Depending on the figure of the syllogism two of these three terms are combined by means of the mediation of the third. Hegel therefore rejects Aristotle’s moods as an unnecessary complication. He argues that the clarification of the concept proceeds in consecutive steps: starting with an inference in which the terms are “external” to each other and contingently connected, this is followed by an inference of reflection in which the terms are more closely connected, and leads to an inference of necessity in which the relation between the terms is even closer:

1. the categorical inference unites the individual with the universal by way of its particular: I-P-U;
2. the hypothetical inference unites the particular with the universal by way of the individual: P-I-U;
3. the disjunctive inference unites the individual with the particular by way of the universal: I-U-P.

In Hegel’s view both the categorical and the hypothetical inferences have defects which can only be resolved by moving to the next type of inference. For example, if we start with the categorical inference (I-P-U) and then introduce the other two figures (P-I-U) and (I-U-P) then these figures can demonstrate the premises of the first figure. However, what Hegel requires is not an infinite regress, in which the premises of any inference are demonstrated by two further inferences, but a circle of inferences, in which any two figures demonstrate the premises of the third.

The essential point is this: Aristotle had argued that inferences are a way of arguing from two propositions to a third one. This, according to Hegel is the “subjective form” of the inference, which however also has an “objective meaning”, i.e. the unification of universal-

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\(^93\) Michael Inwood, o.c., pg. 136 ff

ity, particularity and individuality. This objective meaning is not essentially or primarily propositional, nor is the inference, as Aristotle held, essentially or primarily a form in which our subjective thinking proceeds. On Hegel's account everything is an inference: everything is an individual that belongs to a particular species and which thus in turn is subordinate to a universal genus. But this is not enough: any self-contained totality such as the state, the solar system, or the universe as a whole is in Hegel's view a circular system of three mutually supporting inferences such that a universal, a particular, and an individual element each serve to unite the other two. The state, for example consists of individual persons (I), it has needs of its own (P), and is ruled by the government (U), while the universe involves the logical idea (U), nature (P) and spirit (I).

If we follow Hegel and put the three elements of the inference in the order of U-P-I, the characteristics of P are already contained in U, while those of I are contained in P, and thus also in U. In principle one might thus be tempted to conclude - as Tanabe later will - that in Hegel's scheme of things the universal U, taken together with all of the individuals I, would be sufficient input in order to arrive at a description of reality, while the particulars P only serve as nice-to-have things that come in conveniently to complete the formalism of the syllogisms. Tanabe called Hegel's logic a "logic of identity". He criticized Hegel because he failed to recognize the true role which the particular must play in the dialectical process.

In Hegel's logically rigid scheme of things in which causality and necessity rule supreme there is no room for creativity, spontaneity or the exercise of freedom and autonomy. There is also no room for "irrationality" - where by irrationality I refer to the occurrence of phenomena which escape the attempt of a rational analysis by an uninterested observer. Hegel thus cannot account for the irrational element that becomes active in such political or social activities as are artistic creativity, social unrest, and the commotion of the unconsciousness in the human mind that Sigmund Freud has discovered and described. More specifically and with reference to the topic of the present paper, Hegel's system also has no room for the phenomenon of divine grace if by grace we understand that a human individual receives an unmerited gift. What would be a miracle to the faithful is for Hegel nothing but the outcome of a necessary logical process. The only concession that Hegel would be prepared to make in such cases is to invoke the notion of the "trans-rational", because this is an explanation that allows for the fact that the process is intrinsically rational and logically necessary even though we cannot comprehend this rationality and necessity.

4.1.2.3 Reactions: Tanabe and Kierkegaard

Tanabe, and before him Kierkegaard, belonged to the group of those who admired Hegel's penetrating philosophical genius, yet who also did level some of the most far-reaching, at times even devastating criticism against some of Hegel's claims. Tanabe for one does not hesitate to express his admiration for Hegel's analyses, adding that his main objection was that Hegel did not carry through to its final end what he had started to do. In other words,

95 I do not deny that the originators of such irrationalities may themselves be convinced that their actions and behavior are logically coherent and cohesive and can be rationally explained. I call this an internal rationality, because it depends on assumptions which are not generally shared by the wider community. Thus even the person running amok may have his good reasons why he acts the way he does, while any outside observer will of course assume that some form of mental disorder prevails. The essence of irrationality is then that the authors of the irrational behavior violate commonly accepted norms and standards.
for Tanabe Hegel’s philosophy was but a halfway house in need of completion, and it is fair to say that the essence of Tanabe’s contribution to philosophy in general was that he confronted Hegel’s thought with elements that he took from the realm of Eastern Buddhist philosophical tradition. In other words, Tanabe’s philosophy can best be understood to be a reaction to and also a carrying-on of what Hegel had started. At the same time Tanabe repeatedly admits that he owed much to Kierkegaard, whom he not only admired but also severely criticized.

Kierkegaard, for his part, violently rejected Hegel’s claim that being and thinking were the same and that therefore reality could be captured in the form of a rational philosophical system of thought. His main contribution was to point to the role of human subjectivity as an independent realm that defied all attempts of rational abstraction. Kierkegaard claimed that, contrary to what Hegel had said, the philosopher could not assume a position that would allow him to regard his own existence in an unattached manner from the outside, from a “God’s Eye perspective” - to use a well-known expression. Instead, the philosopher always is an integral part of what he intends to capture in the manner of a detached uninterested observer. Historically speaking, Kierkegaard’s primary interest had originally not been to criticize Hegel but to explain what it means to be a Christian, and it was only because influential members of the Danish State Church would directly or indirectly refer to Hegel when expounding their theological positions that Kierkegaard saw a need to examine the latter’s claims. In the end Kierkegaard had established his position in such a conspicuous manner that thinkers like Heidegger, Sartre, Camus, Gabriel Marcel, and others would build on his achievements, thereby making him the “father of existentialism”.

4.1.3 Søren Kierkegaard (1813 - 1855)

A recent study by Jon Stewart has brought much needed clarification to a subject matter which for decades had been partially misconstrued and which is Kierkegaard’s relation to Hegel. Kierkegaard held Hegel’s philosophical genius in high respect, but he disagreed with him, and even more so with Hegel’s Danish followers, on the importance of the subjective side of individual human existence. The fact that he was at times a very polemical writer must not overshadow the genuine seriousness of his criticism of Hegel’s basic tenets. It must also not put into disrepute the fact that this criticism has triggered what later came to be called the “existentialist movement”.

A determining factor for Kierkegaard’s philosophical evolution was his disagreement with positions held by representatives of the Danish State Church. This divergence hinges on the importance given to individual inwardness as contrasted to outward appearances. Following a tradition of what in Kierkegaard’s view was seriously misunderstanding the uncompromising demands of the Gospel, the clergy of the Danish State Church considered the Christian faith to be nothing more than the observance of rites and public acts with no need for a personal involvement on the side of the believer. In an attempt to explain the core of the New Testament to his fellow countrymen, Kierkegaard focused their attention on the true nature of the act of faith as a categorical submission to belief in the absurd. For him faith is a personal commitment that cannot be theoretically explained but which can only be lived.

96 Jon Stewart, Kierkegaard’s Relations to Hegel Reconsidered, Cambridge University Press, 2003
Kierkegaard\textsuperscript{97} was born in 1813 in Copenhagen where he led an outwardly uneventful life until his death in 1855. Much of what he wrote drew upon crises and turning points in his personal life. Even his theoretical works often have an autobiographical flavor. Although his name has come to be associated mainly with philosophical themes, his various publications cover a wide range that include contributions to literary criticism, discourses on specifically religious topics, and forays into polemical journalism. Julia Watkins’s \textit{Historical Dictionary of Kierkegaard’s Philosophy}\textsuperscript{98} provides much detailed overview information on this subject. Facts of his life worth mentioning include: His father, a prosperous, and largely self-made Danish business man, himself deeply religious and guilt-ridden, communicated his feelings of melancholy and anxiety to other members of his family, leaving a lasting impression on Kierkegaard’s own character and development. In 1830 at the age of seventeen he enrolled at the University of Copenhagen from which he eventually graduated on 3\textsuperscript{rd} of July, 1840, with a degree in theology. On 25\textsuperscript{th} October of that year he became engaged with Regine Olsen, whom he had first met in 1837. In 1841 he successfully submits his doctoral dissertation, \textit{The concept of Irony}, to the faculty. On 11\textsuperscript{th} October of that same year he ends his marriage engagement with Regine Olsen, because he saw his future to be that of an author, not that of a family man. On 25\textsuperscript{th} October he leaves Denmark for Berlin where he spends the winter, only to return on March 6\textsuperscript{th} of the following year to begin a protracted period as an author. His most influential works on philosophical or psychological aspects of the ethical, and of religious belief are written and published between 1843 and 1850 under various pseudonyms, and include: \textit{Johannes Climacus or De Omnibus Dubitandum est} which Kierkegaard himself never published, \textit{Either/Or}, \textit{Fear and Trembling}, \textit{Repetition}, \textit{Philosophical Fragments}, \textit{The Concept of Anxiety}, \textit{Stages of Life’s Way}, \textit{Concluding Unscientific Postscript}\textsuperscript{99}, \textit{Sickness unto Death}, and \textit{Training in Christianity}. To this we must add the \textit{Papers and Journals} which contain a wealth of additional comments and details about the emergence of Kierkegaard’s thought processes.

Although these writings have attracted the attention of subsequent philosophers and commentators\textsuperscript{100} most, they by no means exhaust the total of Kierkegaard’s literary output. Apart from some critical pieces, he published under his own name several directly religious discourses in which he aimed to present the essentials of the Christian teaching, and which were expressly designed to communicate and illustrate the true nature of the Christian message, and of the demands which this imposed upon the individual. These works were uncompromising in their emphasis on the severity of the Biblical requirements, stigmatizing the complacency and “double-mindedness” that were in his view imputable to contemporary representatives of the faith they professed to serve. On the occasion of the death in 1854 of the Danish primate, Bishop Mynster, he launched a violent attack upon the establishment of the State Church of Denmark, denouncing the covert worldliness and hypocrisy that in his view permeated the clerical echelons of the Danish State Church. Kierkegaard died of a heart attack on 11\textsuperscript{th} of November, 1855.

\textsuperscript{97} One extensive and informative and well documented biography has been published in German translation: Joakim Garff, \textit{Kierkegaard, Biographie}, Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, München, 2005, no. 34238


\textsuperscript{100} Kierkegaard has made a definitive impact on the thought of Tanabe Hajime, and many 20\textsuperscript{th} century philosophers, including Karl Jaspers, Jean Paul Sartre, Karl Barth, Rudolf Bultmann, Martin Heidegger, and others.
Kierkegaard held that the philosophy of his time, largely owing to the influence of Hegelian idealism, tended to misconstrue the relation of thought to reality, wrongly associating the second to the first. It thereby reflected an age in which habits of abstract thought and passive response had blinded people to their true concerns as self-determining agents ultimately accountable for their own characters and destinies. He sought to counter such trends, exploring different approaches to life with a view to opening the eyes of his readers both to where they themselves stood and to possibilities of opting for radical change. He implied that decisions on the latter score lay beyond the scope of general rules, each being essentially a problem for the individual alone. Even so, his portrayal of the religious mode of existence presented it as transcending limitations experienced in alternative forms of life. Being himself an impassionate believer, Kierkegaard was crucially concerned to articulate the Christian standpoint in a fashion that salvaged it from recurrent misconceptions. Rejecting all attempts to provide objective justifications or proofs of religious claims, he endorsed a conception of faith that eschewed rational considerations and consisted instead of subjective self-commitment maintained in the face of intellectual uncertainty or paradox. His account was set within a psychological perspective that laid stress upon freedom as an inescapable condition for action and experience. His discussions of the complex implications which he thought these had for the interpretation of pervasive human emotions and attitudes have later proved influential, particularly for the development of twentieth century existentialist philosophy.

His works have been published in various formats, as single editions and as his collected works and papers. Customarily the Danish language edition is taken as the standard for reference. Recent foreign language editions are available in English, French, German, and Japanese. Julia Watkin’s Dictionary provides further details.

Kierkegaard’s works can be roughly divided into the main categories of being primarily philosophical, psychological, ethical or theological in scope. Among the philosophical works we must count The Concept of Irony; Johannes Climacus or De omnibus dubitandum est; Philosophical Fragments; and Concluding Unscientific Postscript. Kierkegaard’s doctoral thesis, The Concept of Irony, can be read as his attempt to critically distance himself from Hegelianism, although it is not quite clear whether he entirely renounces it; he says little about this book in his papers and journals but later regrets having assumed a Hegelian position in criticizing Socrates for his neglect of the concept of the state in favor of the individual. Part I deals with Socrates as the master of ironic ignorance in the three presentations by Xenophon, Plato, and Aristophanes, with something on Hegel and Hegelian categories. Part II looks at the concept of irony in Kierkegaard’s categories with examples

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101 Jon Stewart’s study, Kierkegaard’s Relations to Hegel Reconsidered, has made clear that Kierkegaard’s criticism was in the first instance directed against simplifications and distortions of Hegel’s philosophy that had arisen in Danish academic circles of his time. As for Hegel himself, Kierkegaard had considerable respect for his philosophical genius.

102 For a comprehensive account of the Kierkegaard reception: Roger Poole, o.c.

103 Søren Kierkegaard’s Samlede Værker, Gyldendalske Boghandel, Nordisk Forlag. Copenhagen, 1920 ff., 2nd ed. (1901 ff., 1st ed.)


107 O.c., pg. 280 – 8.
from other Philosophers. Part I follows the Hegelian pattern of possibility, actuality, and necessity. In Part II Kierkegaard presents his own pattern, showing the relation between possibility-actuality and the concept of necessity, where it is actuality that contains possibility and necessity. Emerging from the analysis is how Kierkegaard understands irony as the satisfactory tool only for the writer who has matured from the initial spontaneous pressure of genius and has worked out an understanding of self and the world. Basic themes of this book continue into his later authorship.

Kierkegaard chose the technique of indirect communication when he prepared three further books that were published under the pseudonym of Johannes Climacus. In his authorship these belong to the specifically philosophical line of examination of existential themes. The first of these is Kierkegaard’s unpublished manuscript *Johannes Climacus or De omnibus dubitandum est*. It is written as the biography of one Johannes Climacus, a university student who explores the implications of René Descartes’ method of doubt. Descartes attempted to mediate his way to truth via doubt in *The Meditations*, so Johannes Climacus attempts to follow Descartes’ injunction to pursue the same path. The manuscript ends with a short discussion of “interest”, the consciousness that doubt presupposes. Consciousness is viewed as the relation of opposition between actuality and ideality. There can be no authentic repetition in actuality divorced from consciousness; similarly, ideality remains abstract, divorced from existence. It is essential for ideality to be brought into contact with actuality through the existing self. Kierkegaard is critical of Descartes’ attempt to use doubt to establish the existence of the self, since it is already presupposed in the *cogito ergo sum*. G.W.F. Hegel is similarly criticized for using Cartesian doubt as a way of starting philosophy in a presupposition-less manner. Doubt is, as Judge William puts it in *Either/Or*, “despair of thought”. It cannot be overcome by thinking, since the only contribution of thought and knowledge is that they increase the number of possibilities. It requires an act of will, an act of faith to break away from doubt and to decide in favor of one particular option. Philosophy should begin with doubt Cartesian style, but must get over this stage.

In *Philosophical Fragments*, the investigation concerns reaching truth: it asks whether the truth can be learned or whether it is already within one. The book investigates in somewhat abstract language the Platonic-Socratic idea of recollection of truth before considering how truth is brought about by Christianity. The distinction made here is that with the former, the individual possesses truth and so the teacher like a midwife merely has to help it to come to the surface; any teacher would do. Where Christianity is concerned, the individual is like a blind person, needing the restoration of sight before she or he can see. Initially the individual had the condition for seeing but is to blame for the loss of sight. She or he in Christianity thus needs the God and Savior to provide the condition for learning truth, including the truth that the individual is in untruth, i.e. sin. Since God appears in the form of a lowly human and is not immediately recognizable, there is the element of paradox. The individual must set aside the objections of the understanding so that the paradoxical savior (who is the vitally important object of faith rather than the teaching) can give himself to the individual in the moment along with the condition of faith. *Philosophical Fragments* also deals with the status of those who were contemporary with Christ, as opposed to the status of the modern individual. Kierkegaard here takes his departure point in Gotthold Ephraim Lessing’s (1729 -

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108 The name Johannes Climacus came from the name of a monk (ca. 570 – 649), abbot of St. Catherine’s monastery on Mount Sinai and author of the *Scala Paradisi* or *klimax tou paradeisou* (usually translated as *The ladder of Divine Ascent*).
1781) problematic of the relation between the historical and contingent truth, and eternal truth, or the difference between the eyewitness and the one who hears a historical report. Climacus thus asks whether an eternal happiness can be built on historical knowledge. He concludes that it is just as difficult for the contemporary as for the later individual because of the possibility of offense. The faith condition always comes directly from the God and Savior and cannot be worked out from historical evidence. It is here that Kierkegaard produces the “world-historical *nota bene*” – namely, Climacus’ assertion that if the contemporaries of Jesus the Savior had left behind only the words “we have believed that in such and such a year the God appeared in the humble form of a servant, lived and taught among us, and then died”, this would be more than enough material for the modern contemporary.

In *Philosophical Fragments*, Johannes Climacus deals in abstract philosophical language with the question of how one arrives at truth in Greek thought and Christianity. The sequel to *Philosophical Fragments* is *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, in which the author Johannes Climacus is concerned with only one question - namely, that of Christianity promising people an eternal happiness - and Johannes’ interest is in how to become a Christian and be able to appropriate that highest good. Climacus raises that question in the introduction, rooting it in the thought that was inspired by Lessing and that was at the basis also of *Philosophical Fragments*: what is the relation between historical and eternal truth, and can one arrive at the latter via the former? Can, therefore, an eternal happiness be built on historical knowledge?

The book is divided into two main sections. Part I, which in comparison with the rest of the book is very short, deals with the objective problem of the truth of Christianity. Here, Climacus takes issue with those who view faith as less than knowledge and try to buttress their Christian faith with what they see as sure evidence. Those who seek this through history seek proof from the Bible, from the existence of the Church and the weight of evidence down the centuries. Climacus neatly refutes all the arguments. The one who tries to work out the position of religious belief using speculative philosophy fares no better. In Part II, Climacus, using Lessing, now investigates the question of Christianity from the point of view of the striving individual. Just as the historical and philosophical investigation could never be terminated, neither can a personal striving to become a Christian ever be concluded. Intellectually, the individual must make a leap, since there is no smooth transition from knowledge to a certainty about the intellectual aspect of religious belief. Intellectually, the believer has to contend with the objective uncertainty as to whether or not God exists, with the historical problems surrounding the claims of Jesus, including the offense of the paradox where the philosophical claim is implied that the eternal could undergo change. Climacus points to the impossibility of making a complete system of existence when humans must always be in the process of existing in the world and cannot view it comprehensively from a position outside it. This is Climacus/Kierkegaard’s refutation of the Hegelian System.

The emphasis is now on truth as subjectivity, what it means to “be involved existentially”, as opposed to simply “be” in the world. The existing individual, struggling with the intellectual obstacles to belief, must venture against the understanding that grasps the problems, while, at the same time, she or he discovers that the truth of the striving is paradoxically the un-truth of sin. Climacus discusses the distinction between universal religiosity with its continuous ethical demand that cannot be fulfilled (Religiousness A), and the radical situation implied by Religiousness B; he endorses the standpoint of humor which is intermediate between the ethical and the religious. Johannes Climacus does not pretend to be a Christian.
and presents his book in a humoristic fashion, with many witty jokes about Hegelianism, as he strives to fulfill his task of “creating difficulties” for his readers.

Kierkegaard’s assertion, that existence is not a property of being that could be captured by a system of existence, and his turn toward subjectivity, provided the inspiration for what are commonly considered to be his psychological investigations of ethical and religious belief. These books include *The Concept of Anxiety*, *The Sickness unto Death*, *Fear and Trembling*, *Either/Or*, and *Stages of Life’s Way*.

*The Concept of Anxiety* is a psychological discussion of the concept of sin. Kierkegaard’s pseudonym (: Vigilius Haufniensis) argues the inadequacy of traditional Christian definitions, not least with respect to the question of human freedom, before going on to a psychological analysis of the concept of anxiety as the presupposition for action. Although *The Concept of Anxiety* is presented as an impartial psychological analysis, Vigilius Haufniensis is not quite the impartial psychologist he appears to be, since his view of anxiety has deep roots in biblical concepts. Innocence is described in terms of anxiety because humans have the potentiality for spiritual existence. The object of anxiety defines itself for the individual in accordance with growing self-consciousness. The individual experiences anxiety as an ill-defined something that simultaneously attracts and repels them.

Haufniensis deals with anxiety, albeit with a Christian inclination, and with the problems of a culture in which objective freedom is subjectively lacking. For example, he sees the pagan Greeks as struggling in the situation of anxiety in relation to fate; he insists on freedom in Christianity, so that although people do inevitably sin, the weight of factors such as environment and heredity can never be heavy enough to remove all freedom and hence personal responsibility for action. But this freedom creates the possibility of the demonic. Yet, to Haufniensis man is a synthesis of body and soul, a synthesis constituted by spirit, and this assumption with its weight on the idea of transcendence ultimately underlies his writings. As an early commentator of *The Concept of Anxiety* pointed out, both Vigilius Haufniensis here and Anti-Climacus in *The Sickness unto Death* examine the scantiness in the relation of man to the divine (God), where Haufniensis maintains that innocence is ignorance, whereas for Anti-Climacus ignorance is sin as a fundamental human condition. In other words, one can say that *The Concept of Anxiety* analyzes an initial human condition, whereas *The Sickness unto Death* has to do with the deeper dimension of spiritual life and the experience of despair.

The link that unites *The Concept of Anxiety* and *The Sickness unto Death* thematically is Kierkegaard’s view of the self, more precisely the nature of the self with respect to the phenomena of anxiety and despair. While anxiety is being analyzed in *The Concept of Anxiety*, *The Sickness unto Death* focuses on the phenomenon of despair as a more advanced

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109 In *Either/Or* Judge William deals with the experience of anxiety when he discusses a destructive, immature Nero who refuses to face up to himself and grow up.

110 According to Julia Watkin, o. c., pg. 49, this comment was originally made by one Johannes Møllehave.

111 Kierkegaard is consistently unclear in his description of the self. He uses Hegelian terminology to describe the self as a body-psyche relation that through freedom can relate to ideality and thus actualize the true spiritual self. The ideality here is the Christian God who has created humans with the possibility of freedom and of developing an eternal, spiritual self, the self each individual is meant to be. For this reason, the self is both the self and not yet the self, since the ideal of being the true self which is properly related to God is not yet realized.
The book is introduced on the basis of the New Testament quote\textsuperscript{112} that Lazarus’ sickness is not mortal, thus initiating the theme that death is not the end because there is an eternal life. The real sickness to death is despair, since this is a condition that, left un-dealt with by the individual in this world, becomes an eternal condition, a permanent psychological hell continuing after death. The book falls into two main parts, the first treating of despair as the sickness to death and the second of despair as sin. At the outset, Anti-Climacus analyzes three forms of despair: lack of consciousness of being a self, and the forms of willing and not willing to be oneself, either through wanting to take on some other inappropriate identity to show one is a different kind of individual, or through refusing to accept basic aspects of one’s life that are an inextricable part of the self. There are different levels of despair, and a paradoxical element of this phenomenon is that the person least conscious of being in despair is in most danger through remaining ignorant of the danger, whereas the one in the most demonic and defiant despair possesses the requisite awareness of the eternal and the passion that still could take him or her in the opposite direction. Anti-Climacus analyzes in detail various forms of despair before entering on the discussion of Part II of despair defined as sin. Here the Socratic definition of sin as ignorance is contrasted with the Christian view of sin as culpability, where for sin to become real sin, a conception of God is a prerequisite. An authentic faith relation to God is the opposite of sin. Sin not only is lack of that faith relation but involves the possibility of offense as the believer grapples with the notions of paradox and the absurd. There is the danger of the individual despairing over his or her sin, of refusing to accept God’s forgiveness and grace, a rejection that can end with the sin against the Holy Spirit, defined as dismissing Christianity and declaring it to be untruth because one is not prepared to accept the truth it presents. The themes of offense and grace, of the nature of ideal Christianity, and of presenting Christianity as the ideality of truth, are further discussed in \textit{Practice in Christianity}, which Kierkegaard published in parallel to \textit{The Sickness unto Death}.

In \textit{Fear and Trembling}, Kierkegaard as Johannes de Silentio examines the Old Testament story of Abraham’s intended sacrifice of Isaac. There are two poles to the analysis: the objective angle concerns the implications of Hegel’s philosophy. If there is no actual transcendence of the world of temporality and everything is to be understood as the immanent \textit{absolute Geist} (Ger.: \textit{absolute Spirit}) unfolding itself in and as the historical, then Hegel cannot praise Abraham as the father of faith. Abraham is only a potential murderer. If there is such transcendence, then the individual has a problem, because where the transcendent God calls for something that apparently goes against the God-given ethical code, that individual is presented with the conflict between the demand of the ethical code and the other demand that comes directly from God. Johannes de Silentio finds Abraham’s unswerving faith inspiring but beyond comprehension. It is in \textit{Fear and Trembling} that Kierkegaard therefore raises the question of whether there can be a “teleological suspension of the ethical” and an absolute duty to God. Abraham unable to justify the sacrifice of his son Isaac on the basis of a higher claim within the rules of accepted ethics with an argument that can be understood by others. The work presents the suffering and the struggle which the resulting conflict entails, and Kierkegaard takes this as an incentive to discuss the question of religious faith. The individual may well find him- or herself able to make a great sacrifice for God and give up something permanently. This is resignation. Yet Abraham went a step further. He is a \textit{knight of faith} par excellence, because he believed he would get the

\textsuperscript{112} John 11, verse 4
sacrificed Isaac back such that Isaac could then become the father of the nation as God had promised. Thus, on the one hand, Abraham totally lets Isaac go; on the other, he totally believes that God will give him Isaac back again. He affirms possibility where the situation patently declares impossibility. The author explores the double movement of faith through the situation of the two knights of resignation and faith in which the former, detached from the world, has peace and rest, remaining with his sacrifice, and becoming conscious of his eternal validity. The latter knight, however, has the further belief that what is given up will be restored to him “by virtue of the absurd” which is also the claim that for God nothing is impossible and that all things are possible. Faith, in other words, is performing the act of uncompromisingly placing one’s trust and confidence in God.

Kierkegaard developed the problematic of the ethical further in Either/Or and Stages on Life’s Way, taking the subject of marriage as his focal point. Because of his broken engagement with Regine Olsen, both books undeniably have autobiographic relevance. Either/Or was published in 1842, after Kierkegaard’s return from Berlin, whereas Stages on Life’s Way was written after The Concept of Anxiety.

The two-part Either/Or consists allegedly of some mysterious papers discovered by the book’s editor and publisher, one Victor Eremita. Part I consists of the writings of an aesthete; Part II consists of two letters written by one Judge William on love and duty, and a sermon by a Jutland pastor. Part I begins with the Diapsalmata, or collection of poetic fragments expressing personal despair. This is followed by a sequence of essays on various subjects and ending with The Seducer’s Diary. This part is deliberately fragmented, reflecting the fragmented, meaningless nature of the aesthete’s life, but it is unified by the underlying theme that a life which only follows instincts and personal desires is a failure. Attempts to be happy based on things that must change with time cannot work, while the conscious attempt to live for oneself destroys others and ultimately also oneself. The question of personal responsibility is explored against the background of a Hegelian universe where there is no freedom and that cannot therefore be a source of advice for the individual concerning the making of choices in life. In Part II, in which the two letters and the sermon are presented as coherent pieces, Judge William represents happy ethical life in society. He argues that one does not need to throw out the aesthetic life of pleasures as long as this is anchored to ethics. The aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious are three allies. When love is made a lifelong task in marriage, the aesthetic is restrained and love is eternalized. Similarly, duty is no longer the destroyer of enjoyment but rather is what brings meaning and cohesion into one’s life. On the question of personal responsibility, instead of deliberating about the question of human freedom as a cosmic problem, the individual is advised (the pastor’s sermon) to choose the position that one is wrong in the sight of God, thus encouraging the individual to continue in his or her ethical striving. The individual who follows this path builds up the self and also the social whole. According to the views promoted by the Danish Protestant Church establishment, Judge William is an example of the ideal Christian in society. This view, however, omits what Kierkegaard comes to present as the essentially Christian attitude, namely the radical altruism of the New Testament.

A summing-up of Kierkegaard’s authorship would be incomplete without mentioning his theological papers, notably Practice in Christianity, Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses, which is a collection of essays on various theological subjects, and his various polemical writings. In this authorship Kierkegaard’s intentions are twofold. On one side he explains his view of
New Testament Christianity as being an uncompromising demand on the human individual to follow the path of a religious life in the spirit and example given by Jesus Christ. In this the human subject is subjectively challenged to decide for himself and to follow his decision irrespective of what decisions the other individuals may have taken. The emphasis and focus is thus on human individuality, subjectivity, freedom, and responsibility, which is contrasted to what Heidegger later has called the "man" (Ger.: they, people, the crowd), which is the individual who avoids taking any decisions for himself but instead follows the lead of the crowd. The other aspect of Kierkegaard’s theological authorship is therefore his intention to explicate what in his view are the shortcomings of the Danish Protestant State Church, more precisely those of the church establishment. Putting all polemical aspects to one side, we note that Kierkegaard makes a sharp distinction between Christianity and Christendom. Kierkegaard is hostile to the historical spread of Christianity as “Christendom” in which thousands have been, and still are, enrolled into the Church as an institution without proper reference to living as a Christian in accordance with the New Testament. In Concluding Unscientific Postscript, Kierkegaard makes particular fun of the tendency to identify nationality and Christianity in Denmark: the man who is suddenly worried that perhaps he is not after all a Christian is laughed at by his wife who points out that by law Denmark is a Christian country and that he therefore must be a Christian since he lives in Denmark. Although Kierkegaard attempts to hide his personal viewpoint behind his pseudonyms, it is clear in his authorship that Kierkegaard regards Christianity as the highest religion to which the Greek world, as representative of paganism, and Judaism as the forerunner of Christianity, point. In the light of Hegelianism, in which religion and Christianity are made to take a place subordinate to philosophy, it is particularly understandable that Kierkegaard emphasizes the Christian life as the highest. Kierkegaard urges the believer to look for the content of Christianity in the New Testament rather than in the institution of the Church, and the individual is urged to measure the Christianity of the church establishment by considering whether it measures up to what is called for by strict New Testament ideality. Christendom, on the other hand, is Christianity expressed as a historical and sociopolitical institution.

All in all Kierkegaard has been a prolific writer whose collected works fill thousands of pages of print. His major works are thematically directed toward discussing one central problem, the explication of Christianity, but it would not be correct to say that he has neatly put all his thoughts about a particular topic into one book only. Rather, he preferred to stick together philosophical with psychological reflections, enlarge these with abstract theological deliberations, and use quotations from the Gospel to underscore his point. What we have are highly complex pieces of literature. For this reason scholars have extensively investigated his journals and papers, as well as Kierkegaard’s other writings from the same period in search of additional information that would help clarify Kierkegaard’s thought processes. Despite of all of these efforts, there are still many details that need to be addressed. For this reason any attempt to condense the finely constructed web of Kierkegaard’s thoughts into a paragraph or two cannot be more than a rough approximation at most. Since in addition his thoughts have evolved over time, Kierkegaard has dealt with problems that were important to him at several occasions. Thus, in order to obtain a complete view of his position on such subjects as are religious faith and divine grace, we must look at different places for inputs and comments. This is the kind of work that requires special knowledge and which for this reason should not be undertaken without help from those who are specialists in the field. In the discussion of Kierkegaard’s conception of faith and grace I shall therefore follow the
guidance provided by several excellent scholars: J. Heywood Thomas\textsuperscript{113} and Louis P. Pojman\textsuperscript{114} for faith, and Timothy P. Jackson\textsuperscript{115} for divine grace. Suffice it to say that while religious faith was his basic concern, Kierkegaard hardly ever entered into a discussion of divine grace. But before I begin to review these positions I must first add some more information which is essential for comprehending what Kierkegaard was ultimately interested in. As I have stressed already, he was unremittingly engaged in battling that type of speculative philosophy that in the wake of Hegel had become popular with his Danish contemporaries. It will thus prove to be useful to address his disapproval of Hegel and the Danish Hegelians\textsuperscript{116}. In an attempt to summarize what was in fact a protracted argument we might say he was highly critical of Hegel’s detached speculation that led to the construction of metaphysical theories which sought to comprehend every aspect of human thought and experience within the disengaged perspective of objective contemplation. On this interpretation\textsuperscript{117} Hegel’s philosophy ultimately rested upon a central error, one that involved the illicit identification of essence and existence, thought and reality.

In Kierkegaard’s view, any attempt to explicate existence in a descriptive, logically necessary philosophical system Hegelian style must fail. Julia Watkin\textsuperscript{118} has summarized the salient points of this critique as follows:

1. thought and existence are totally different categories of experience and cannot be made identical;
2. it is presupposed that existence is a system, but it is not possible to prove this assumption since the history of the universe is not yet completed the way a system is;
3. a logically necessary system is one in which the outcomes are fixed, such that human freedom must in fact become illusionary, but the system, by contrast, is assumed to be morally good in its final outcome;
4. since the system is something described, and thus past oriented, it cannot have anything to say to the individual about how to live in ethical terms. Good and bad are both to be found in the system, but only in terms of the description of what happens. It is taken for granted that the idea of morality is realized in the state. Kierkegaard is critical of the place of the individual in the system as one subordinate to family, and family subordinate to the state;
5. God becomes a pantheistic God, in the form of the soul in the world-historical process, in which the life of the individual becomes only a dot in its stream. He is also critical that religion, including Christianity, becomes a passing stage in the world-historical process and is seen as inferior to the higher stage of philosophy;
6. Kierkegaard disagrees with Hegel’s general approach to philosophy, pointing at the difficulty of trying to make a completely new start in philosophy like that of René Descartes, seeing that the method of doubt is capable of leading to a skepticism that undermines everything;
7. Hegel and Kierkegaard do not share the same view of truth. For Hegel, truth is essentially a system, whereas for Kierkegaard truth chiefly has to do with how the individual lives his or her life.

In summary it must be stressed that Kierkegaard had great admiration for the philosophical genius of Hegel. His often severe criticisms were in the most part directed against the Danish

\textsuperscript{113} J. Heywood Thomas, \textit{Philosophy of religion in Kierkegaard’s Writings}, The Edwin Mellen Press, 1992
\textsuperscript{114} Louis P. Pojman, \textit{The Logic of Subjectivity}, o.c., pg. 129 - 130.
\textsuperscript{116} Julia Watkin, o.c., pg. 107 - 109
\textsuperscript{117} Hegel’s philosophy was first introduced to Denmark by Johan Ludvig Heiberg (1791 - 1860), followed by Hans Lassen Martensen (1808 - 1884) and Adolf Peter Adler (1812 - 1869). As Steward underlines in much detail, Kierkegaard’s attacks on philosophy Hegelian style were not so much directed against Hegel himself as against these and some other, less important Danish Hegelians.
\textsuperscript{118} o.c., pg. 253 - 4.
Hegelians of his time. It is the merit of Jon Stewart’s\textsuperscript{119} thoroughgoing analysis to have shed some light on this otherwise somewhat muddled subject matter. As Stewart explains, at least some of the difficulties arise from Kierkegaard’s writing style of using pseudonyms and of intertwining philosophical with either psychological or theological considerations. His arguments are often extended over several of his books. Given that he was a very prolific writer this only increases the difficulties. With this in mind I shall now focus on some selected aspects which seem to me to be particularly relevant to the current context, leaving more detailed discussions to those who are by far more specialists of Kierkegaard than I am.

Already as a young university student Kierkegaard seems to have been dissatisfied with the prospects of a life that was purely devoted to the dispassionate pursuit of knowledge and understanding, apparently asking himself what good it would do to him if truth stood before him, cold and naked, and not caring whether he recognized her or not. What was first articulated as an undifferentiated feeling was later to receive mature expression in much of his subsequent work, becoming particularly prominent in his criticism of detached speculation of the kind that was attributable to the “systematic and objective philosophers”. To be sure, notwithstanding to what has sometimes been supposed, Kierkegaard had no intention to be seen as seriously willing to deny the role played by impersonal or disinterested thinking in studies comprising scholarly research or the scientific investigations of nature: such an approach was quite in order when adopted within the limits set by determinate fields of inquiry. But matters are different when the enquiry is extended to address a subject matter that purports to transcend all particular viewpoints and interests, as is in Hegel’s view the case for philosophy. Hegel’s conception of the philosopher’s task was that it must lead to the construction of metaphysical theories which seek to comprehend every aspect of human thought within the disengaged perspective of objective contemplation. For Kierkegaard Hegel was the foremost contemporary representative of this ambition, and he saw Hegel’s system to which this ambition had given rise as being fundamentally misconceived.

Kierkegaard’s general reaction to what he found unacceptable in the Hegelian theory is in fact crucial to an understanding of his own philosophical position. In his interpretation Hegel’s philosophy ultimately rested upon a central error, one that involved the illicit identification of essence and existence, thought and reality. Hegel had endeavored to exhibit the world, and the place of humanity in the world, in terms of an evolving sequence of logical categories that rendered its overall structure fully intelligible from the impersonal standpoint of pure reason. Kierkegaard disclaimed any desire to dispute the considerable ingenuity of the Hegelian metaphysic when this was regarded simply as an “experiment in thought”. He insisted, however, that thought was not the same as reality, nor could anything real be validly deduced from it. In particular, it was altogether mistaken to suggest that changes and developments in the sphere of actual existence could be assimilated to dialectical transitions between timeless concepts: it was one thing to construct a self-contained logical or formal system, quite another to entertain the project of producing an existential one. In raising such objections he was especially concerned to stress their relevance with respect to Hegel’s dealing with specifically human existence. The Hegelian world-picture presupposed the possibility of adopting an absolute, God-like point of view from which everything was seen as contributing to an interlocking and rationally determined totality. As a result human nature tended to be reduced to a philosophical abstraction wherein the

\textsuperscript{119} O.c.
individual is nothing but a representative of the species, and wherein the significance of a particular person’s life and actions is reduced to the role of forwarding an all-encompassing historical process that overshadows and transcends it all. Keeping progressively in step with the refinement of his arguments, Kierkegaard suggested that the notion of an impersonal “knowing subject” of the type postulated by thinkers of the Hegelian school was symptomatic for a corresponding inclination to forget that the speculative thinker was himself an “existing human being” whose status and situation imposed necessary limits upon his outlook and cognitive credentials. Far from his viewpoint on the world which was nowhere within it, such a philosopher in person inescapably belongs to it in his capacity as a finite empirical individual who “eats, sleeps, blows his nose” and who has “to face the future”.

Although Kierkegaard’s attitude to Hegel is most extensively displayed in the polemical references that enliven the pages of the Concluding Unscientific Postscript, scattered allusions to the faults and weaknesses of “The System” also appear in many of his other writings. The number and variety of the contexts in which they occur indicate that he regarded the vogue of Hegelianism which was omnipresent at his time as having more than a purely academic significance: the popularity which it enjoyed was at once reflecting, and helping to promote, a contemporary ethos in which what he termed the “illusion of objectivity” exercised a pervasive and corrupting influence. Thus he conceived the age to be one wherein people had lost a clear sense of their identity as individuals who are ultimately responsible for their own characters, outlooks and modes of living. Instead it was customary for them to take refuge in the anonymity provided by membership of collective movements and trends and to envisage themselves as being inevitably circumscribed by the social roles which they occupied in a manner that absolved them from personal accountability for their pronouncements or actions. In Kierkegaard’s view, they had largely forgotten what “it means for you and me and him, each for himself, to be a human being”, succumbing to a “quantitative dialectic” in which a bemused preoccupation with large-scale historical events and a passive submission to the leveling influence of “the crowd” took precedence over the vital constituents of human life and experience - “the inner spirit, the ethical, freedom”.

Confronted with such tendencies, Kierkegaard considered it to be a primary part of his task as a writer to challenge such habits of thought that smothered spontaneous feeling and obstructed active commitment. He held that these had a particularly deleterious effect in the religious sphere: the widespread belief that the fundamental tenets of Christianity could be rationally interpreted and objectively justified within the framework of the Hegelian system was symptomatic of a more general disposition to treat both religion and morality alike in a blandly contemplative spirit that detached them from the contexts of inward conviction and practical engagement to which they essentially belonged. This being so it was, in his view, necessary to “make people aware”, bringing home to them the limitations of their present condition and awakening them to the possibility of subjective self-determination and change.

Kierkegaard deals with the problematic of the ethical in several places, the most prominent being Either/Or. Here two radically dissimilar modes of existence are portrayed, one being characterized as “the aesthetical”, the other being “the ethical”. Aestheticism is seen to take on a variety of forms and disguises. Amongst other things it is held to find expression in the legendary personalities of Don Juan and of Faust; it is also illustrated by an account of a step-by-step seduction which is cast into the form of a diary. By contrast, the position of the
From the text the aesthetic life emerges as one in which the individual is essentially concerned with exploring means to his own satisfaction and where there is a consequent absence of overall continuity in the course he follows. The picture drawn, however, is complex and multifaceted. In general outline it is suggestive of a person in pursuit of transient pleasures rather than following any long-term aim. There are passages in which the attention is focused on the aesthetic individual’s dependence upon unpredictable vicissitudes of mood or circumstance, and others where the emphasis is laid on his need to guard against the threats posed by ennui or melancholy. Not unexpectedly, the writer of the letters singles out for criticism and in a comprehensive survey of the aesthetic position what he sees to be the problematic possibilities inherent in the aesthete’s lifestyle. Whereas the aesthetic man typically allows himself to be swayed by what he conceives to be the unalterable constituents of his natural disposition, the ethically oriented individual is prone to look at himself in an altogether different light. His motivation and behavior are responsive to a self-image in likeness to which he has to form himself. His particular aptitudes and propensities are seen as being subject to the control of his will and as capable of being directed to the realization of demanding projects that reflect what he truly aspires to become. It is commitment to projects which endow the ethical life with a coherence and self-sufficiency that the aesthetic counterpart noticeably lacks.

Kierkegaard’s treatment of the aesthetic/ethical contrast is frequently thought to echo the Kantian distinction between inclination and duty, but although there seem to be discernible affinities, there are also significant differences. More specifically, Kant’s predominantly schematic account of sensuous motivation is devoid of both the psychological penetration and the literary sophistication that characterize Kierkegaard’s wide-ranging portrayals of the aesthetic stance. Similar divergences are also apparent in the case of the ethical. Judge William in Either/Or may be said to follow Kant in highlighting the role of the will, asserting its independence of contingent circumstances and stressing its capacity to manage the sphere of natural inclination in a way that is conformable to the paramount concerns of the ethical individual. But while he shares Kant’s belief in and respect for the autonomy of the individual, he differs in not presenting moral requirements in terms of purely formal descriptions of practical reason. The self that each individual must choose and develop is not an abstract self, but a concrete self, that stands in reciprocal relations with its actual social and cultural environment. Things like marriage, having a job, undertaking civic and institutional responsibilities are intrinsic to personal fulfillment in the requisite sense. It is implied, moreover, that the active participation in communal affairs which involve an unconstrained inward adherence to standards presupposed by a shared form of life, reinforces the contrast with the unreflective, wayward experimentalism typified by certain manifestations of the aesthetic outlook. The Judge insists upon the conceptual exclusion from the ethical of whatever savors of the arbitrary or the merely capricious. He insists however, that this should not be thought of as delimiting in any fundamental fashion the subjective freedom and independence of the individual, because moral requirements, even if they must of necessity be treated as authoritative, are not apprehended as deriving from a source that is foreign to the personality but are instead experienced as deriving from, as breaking forth from the individual’s essential nature.
In Kierkegaard’s writings, the ethical path is explained both in terms of how one sets about it and also in terms of what type of ethical code can be followed. Especially in *Either/Or*, Kierkegaard outlines what is meant to move from a life lived in the light of what one finds pleasurable or otherwise, and one lived in the light of what is right or wrong. The aesthete is urged to start on the ethical path by the initial act of deciding to choose between right or wrong, between good and bad action. He is shown to be in despair through the failure of the life of pleasure-seeking and receives the surprising advice to choose despair. By this Judge William means he should face up to and embrace his despair of mistakenly seeking the causes of his despair in the external world. This, in a sense, is already to make a distinction between good and bad, since it allows one to see that the condition of the self is not good as it is.

This choice is therefore also a choice of the self as guilty, or identical with “repenting oneself” or “absolute resignation”; that is, it is the abandonment of the self with respect to the validity of one’s previous life. This is also to choose oneself in one’s “eternal validity”, in the sense that one is about to replace a false sense of eternity (the idea that temporal pleasures can be eternalized) with a true one. Judge William sees the initial choice of the ethical life as something that purifies, matures and unifies the personality. It even brings the individual into contact with what the protestant catechism of the Danish state church calls the “Eternal Power” underlying all existence. Living in the light of what is right and wrong, the ethical person gains experience from the practice of living ethically. Judge William emphasizes the importance of good intention in the ethical life, and although he does not state explicitly the ethical code by which the individual is to live, it is clear that he lives by the ethics of the Bible, especially as presented in the Lutheran catechism, which all Danes learned as children and as members of the Danish state church.

Kierkegaard does, of course, realize that there are ethical codes other than those of the Bible and in particular of the New Testament Christianity. In his authorship a distinction emerges between types of ethical codes. The lowest form of ethics is that of “morality” in which the ethics of the community are based on customs or rules to enable society to function adequately. Since they are lacking any eternal element, or an element that transcends the community, Kierkegaard does not view them as genuine ethics. Genuine ethics need to contain some awareness of eternally obligatory norms. Kierkegaard sees this as occurring within the category of what he calls “first ethics”, in which the ethics of the godly pagan are found. Socrates specifically comes into this first category since he is trying to arrive at his moral norms through the recollection of eternal truth. In Judaism, the ethics of the law are received from the eternal, transcendent God, and the Christianity of Judge William fits into this category for the same reason, and also to the extent to which the Judge sees the ethical code as demand that can be met and fulfilled.

Kierkegaard, however, also has the category of “second ethics”, in which the mild altruism of Judge William is replaced by the acute New Testament altruism that calls on the individual to die to the world and forsake everything in the following of Christ. The individual also finds it impossible to fulfill the ethical demand and is referred to Christ in his capacity as Savior. Second ethics thus have to do with Christianity, or “Religiousness B”, as Kierkegaard calls it in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. The individual’s inability to fulfill the ethical demand...
requires God’s saving grace and forgiveness\textsuperscript{120}. Finally, Kierkegaard makes it clear that it is possible to relate to God only by way of ethics. Any attempt at religiosity divorced from ethics is, in Kierkegaard’s view, simply not religious but a form of aesthetic enterprise. There is also the paradox that one goes through the ethical yet remains in it; that is, one develops in the ethical life, and in so doing one’s standards can become higher, but throughout, one always remains faced with the ethical demand to do what is right.

While it is a mistake to see Kierkegaard separating the ethical from the religious, as if one somehow lost ethics when one entered upon the essentially religious life, in his writings he still speaks separately of the religious stage or sphere. An essential feature of ethics is its demand on the individual concerning his or her actions in a social context. The religious, on the other hand, concerns the individual’s personal spiritual relationship to God. Although even more is demanded in the religious life in service of the neighbor, the center of the religious person’s existence is God. One is required very specifically to have an absolute relation to the absolute, i.e. God, who is the goal of eternal happiness, and a relative relation to all else in temporality. Writing as Johannes Climacus in \textit{Concluding Unscientific Postscript}, Kierkegaard makes a distinction between Religiousness A, religiousness that can be found in any culture, and Religiousness B, which belongs to Christianity proper. Religiousness A is seen as a universal religiosity in which humans are aware of the divine and strive to fulfill its promptings. Thus, Religiousness A might even be found in the life of the godly pagan. One assumption of Religiousness A is that the individual can reach God within temporality and fulfill the ethical-religious demand through personal striving.

As with ethics, Kierkegaard does not view religiousness statically, since he assumes there is progress in the life of the religious individual. For the individual in a Christian context, the command to love the enemy as neighbor and die to the world, forsaking everything for the kingdom of God, provides an associated feature of the religious life - namely, suffering. The individual experiences a tension between the goals of temporal life and God as the ultimate goal; therefore there is a consequent suffering of the soul, as opposed to physical or psychological suffering of any kind. Suffering and guilt thus become decisive features of religiosity as the individual endeavors to live a life of self-denial in a temporal context. Furthermore, the more deeply the individual goes into the religious life, the more his or her insights into the religious demand and the nature of God are enlarged. This results in the paradox of religious life: that the closer a person comes to God, the greater become the sense of guilt or sinfulness and the apparent distance from God, and the individual acquires a deepened consciousness of sin. In Christianity, the individual thus discovers, unlike the Greek (cf.: \textit{recollection}), that the eternal truth is not to be found within. For Kierkegaard, Christianity as Religiousness B provides an amelioration in that the striving individual is referred to the grace of God through the work of Christ, though the individual now has to face the intellectual challenge presented by the Christian doctrine.

4.1.3.1 Kierkegaard on religious faith

Central to his account of religion is his treatment of the concept of faith, a treatment that throws into relief the most distinctive features of his philosophical standpoint. There are two

\textsuperscript{120} This is faintly reminiscent of Luther’s \textit{solo gratia}, and of St. Paul’s theology in \textit{Romans}.  
102
areas in which these become manifest and in which the crucial inadequacies of human reason, practical as theoretical, are emphasized.

The first concerns limitations in the outlook of acceptable morality that make themselves felt at certain levels or junctures of experience, and which are held to call for what is termed a “teleological suspension of the ethical”. The implications of this prima facie puzzling notion are explored in Fear and Trembling, an intricately wrought study in which Johannes de Silentio treats as his central theme the biblical story of Abraham and Isaac. Johannes portrays Abraham as being ostensibly called upon to set aside ethical concerns in deference to a higher telos or end that altogether transcends them. Such a situation is contrasted with the predicament of what he terms the “tragic hero”, the latter being someone who is forced to make a choice between conflicting moral requirements but who in doing so still remains within the bounds of the ethical domain. Thus, although the decisions to be taken may be at an agonizing cost, the fact that they can none the less be seen to conform to universally recognized norms, renders them rationally acceptable to others and capable of gaining their respect. This, however, is not so in the case of Abraham, who, as a solitary “knight of faith”, responds to the divine command supposedly addressed to himself alone and having a content - the killing of his own son - that must inevitably strike ordinary thought as being both outrageous and incomprehensible. No attempt is made to soften the paradoxical character of such points. To the contrary, Kierkegaard’s pseudonym sets out to underline, indeed dramatize, the disturbing nature of the demands which religious faith can impose on the life and conduct of an individual. At the same time he takes practicing churchmen severely to task for paying lip service to a phenomenon whose awesome significance they fail to appreciate, and he criticizes contemporary theorists of religion for construing an intrinsically transcendent category in terms drawn from social and essentially secular conceptions of ethics. This is not to suggest that, from a religious point of view, moral standards and principles can in general be abrogated or overruled; it does mean, however, that it is the individual’s own relation to God that ranks paramount, and that takes precedence over all other considerations. Within this perspective the moral standards and principles take on a radically different aspect, one where they now possess a relative rather than an absolute status.

The claim that faith in a religious sense pertains to what exceeds the limits of human rationality and understanding recurs in the two subsequent writings that Kierkegaard referred to as his “philosophical works”, Philosophical Fragments and Concluding Unscientific Postscript. Here, however, faith is discussed within a wider setting and in connection with theoretical questions concerning the proper interpretation of religious assertions. These two books by Johannes Climacus have to be taken as expressing views that are basically those of Kierkegaard. Thus in each book it is made apparent that the author totally rejects the feasibility of trying to provide religious tenets with an objective foundation. The belief that the existence and nature of God could be conclusively established from resources supplied by pure reason may have enjoyed a long history in philosophy. Nonetheless it is demonstrably unacceptable, Kierkegaard largely echoing - in summary form and without attribution - some of the objections that Kant had leveled against arguments traditionally advanced by theologians and metaphysicians. Nor was he any more receptive to the suggestion that religious claims of a specifically historical character, such as those relating to the doctrines of Christianity, were susceptible to justification on straightforwardly empirical grounds. It was impossible to regard them as representing ordinary historical facts of the sort to which
standard appeals to inductive inference and evidence would normally be considered appropriate. He acknowledges that Lessing and other thinkers had already underlined the problematic issues raised by the latter. But it was perhaps Hume’s contention in his *Enquiry* that only “a miracle in his own person”, subverting to all principles of his understanding, could bring a reasonable individual to embrace the Christian religion, which most strikingly foreshadowed Kierkegaard’s approach to the subject. No doubt, Hume himself had intended his words to be taken in a strictly ironical sense. Even so, Kierkegaard implied that it was open to believers to look at skeptical asides of the type cited in a different light. For by exposing the vanity of attempts to encompass within its grasp matters that lay beyond the scope of reason, such remarks could be said to provide salutary reminders of what was really at stake. It was not to the spheres of impersonal judgment and dispassionate assent that the religious consciousness rightfully belonged but to the contrary to those of individual choice and inner commitment.

In a study that dates back to around 1957, J. Heywood Thomas puts into relief two aspects that are specifically characteristic of Kierkegaard’s thought process concerning faith:

- that religion is of a different order than philosophy;
- that religion and religious faith are governed by the “principle of subjectivity”.

I shall follow Heywood Thomas’ presentation of the matter.

Kierkegaard’s main concern was to point out the error in the Hegelian treatment of faith. He did this by using concepts of which he gave greater clarification than anyone else before him, calling for a new way of looking at philosophy and of problems which before him had been neglected. Hermann Diem summarizes this when he writes:

Kierkegaard did not think now as a theologian and now as a philosopher but thinks always as a Christian. So far as he investigates the possibilities of immanent thought with the means of natural thought it might be said that he thinks as a philosopher. But … it is a Christian philosophy. For it is a philosophy after Christianity or after the man has become a Christian. And so the relationship for him is not that of philosophy to Christianity but one of Christianity to Christian knowledge or … if you will … to Christian philosophy.

Kierkegaard never worked on a strict principle of the division of labor; in the context of theology he makes philosophical assertions as well as purely theological ones. In a real sense the question for him was that of the relation of philosophy to Christianity, and so he sought to show that the claims of Christianity did not depend on philosophy. Heywood Thomas takes these quotes from Kierkegaard’s *Papers*:

Philosophy and Christianity tolerate each other yet never unite (cf. the Scholastic saying: that something can be true in Philosophy which is false in Theology) … I will suppose … a philosophy after Christianity … so Philosophy would … involve its total ruin.

I grew up, so to speak, in orthodoxy; but as soon as I began to think for myself the tremendous colossus began to totter … Rationalism … cuts rather a poor figure.

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121 J. Heywood Thomas, *Philosophy of religion in Kierkegaard’s Writings*, o.c.
122 Diem, *Philosophie und Christentum bei Soren Kierkegaard*, 1929, pg. 333, 345 - 7, as quoted by Heywood Thomas, o.c.
123 *Papierer I A 94*
After a period of doubt as a student at Copenhagen University Kierkegaard deliberately rejected Christianity for philosophy, but soon became less confident of finding satisfaction there. He read the works of Johan Georg Hamann (1730 - 1788), of J.L. Heiberg (1791 - 1860), and of the man who was to influence him most, Poul Martin Møller (1814 - 1865). Initially this doubtless produced a profound satisfaction with the Hegelian philosophy which probably was the only philosophy that he knew at that time. As he read Hegel, he also became familiar with the writings of Schelling, Fichte and Schleiermacher only to conclude that the synthesis offered by Hegelianism took too much for granted, and did not face up to the enormous qualitative difference between genuine faith and speculative philosophy. The aim of the Hegelian philosophy was a synthesis, and its method was the mediation of opposites. But Christianity has no interest in the mediation of opposites. On the contrary, the distinguishing feature of Christianity is that it asserts the infinite difference between God and man whilst maintaining that Jesus is both God and man. Having thus completely given up any Hegelian position, Kierkegaard is ready to mount a powerful polemic against Hegel, because Christianity will have no dealings with philosophies whose idea is mediation while that of Christianity is the paradox. This can best be explained on the basis of the dilemma of the choice offered in Either/Or between the opposites of the aesthetic and the ethical life. On the one hand the “either/or” is an expression of the principle of contradiction which is presupposed as ruling our thinking. If on the other hand the systematic metaphysician searches the unity that negates or eliminates the contradiction as an element in a dialectic process, but preserves it as a partial element in a synthesis then we must have “mediation”. Kierkegaard’s objection is that such mediation is logically possible only if what has been presented as an opposition is in fact a tautology, as can be shown by simple application of De Morgan’s law. Already David Hume has observed, that no individual proposition about a contingent matter can be established a priori because if we make a novel assertion then we assert something which is not true a priori while anything which is true a priori is not an empirical assertion and is therefore a tautology. Kierkegaard’s point is that Hegel’s system does away with this specific dilemma of contingency, more specifically with the dilemma of the contingent human situation.

In Fear and Trembling Kierkegaard shows that in religion it is the individual who is all important. He does so by pointing to the fact that in his endeavor to obey the command of God Abraham places himself above the general ethical law. The sacrifice of Isaac illustrates a “teleological suspension of the ethical”. In Philosophical Fragments Kierkegaard deals explicitly with the nature of religious faith. The discussion is started by considering the question whether eternal happiness can be founded on historical knowledge. Kierkegaard reminds us of the fact that in Christianity certain historical statements are given a non-historical significance which does not take away their historicity, e.g. that Jesus of Nazareth was the Christ. The sequel to the Fragments, the Concluding Unscientific Postscript, develops the problematic further by investigating into the truth of Christianity. He distinguishes two ways in which the question can be raised: subjectively and objectively. The speculative philosopher is primarily interested in the “objective” question, but this is of little importance to the existing religious man. What interests him is the “subjective” question, which is whether he himself believes or not. With this emphasis on the “subjective” Kierkegaard adds a fresh emphasis and directs the discussion into an “existentialist” approach to the question of religion. In this he keeps a delicate balance between autobiographical detail and public events.
description so as to give a comprehensive philosophical description of faith. This leads to the paradoxical insight that faith is like a personal statement because it is essentially something about me, and yet it is never reducible to just this. When Kierkegaard asserts that faith is not interested in proofs which the philosopher tries to find, this is not to say that faith has nothing to do with thinking. Rather, what he intends to imply is that there is no way to move from the system to faith without a leap. Kierkegaard was not lacking in respect for philosophy and for Hegel. Instead of being fanatically against all rational or objective thinking, Kierkegaard exerted his powers to show that the religious man does not depend on any false or artificial security. Faith is not a philosophical matter. Rather, faith begins when its certainty is inward. If this certainty resulted from some metaphysical scheme then it could be upheld only as long as the metaphysics is held, and this is obviously not true of faith. Faith is held irrespective of any metaphysical reasoning because it essentially goes above and beyond its reaches. The problem that faith raises for philosophy is that the religious position is something we know to be true when our polemic has been to distinguish faith from any metaphysical theory. Faith is not created by philosophy and cannot be destroyed by it.

But what is faith’s claim to know God? What is the philosopher of religion to say about the nature of faith? Is it as objective as the knowledge that external things are, or is it a subjective thing like knowing that I have a toothache? Now it is the Christian religion and the Christian faith that are of concern here. Kierkegaard saw it to be his task to explain to his age what Christianity is. This is where we move into the sphere of the paradox, for the message of the Gospel is more than a normal story, it is revelation by Jesus who is equally fully God and fully man, eternal and almighty and at the same time also subjected to the rule of time and history. In any logical description of Christian faith there are thus two issues involved:

- the epistemological problem of the nature of faith;
- the historical assertions that Christianity makes and which have religious significance.

The first of these issues is the problematic of in what sense and how far faith is knowledge. There is certainly a need for us to know what objective knowledge is and how it can be ascertained. Considering the dimensions that this problem can take it would already be sufficient to show that the assertion “there is a God” cannot be reduced to statements about our feelings, and that this proposition is a statement for which reasons can be given. The other issue is that the advent of Jesus Christ is at once a historical and a non-historical salvific assertion. While the first of these themes relates to the problem of subjectivity, we see that the second is a paradox which is specific to the Christian faith.

It has already been argued that for Kierkegaard subjectivity is truth; then the counterpart to this thesis is that the truth if it is objectively determined becomes a paradox. This thesis is most important for understanding his polemic against philosophical interpretations of Christianity. It is also of fundamental importance in what he has to say about the relation of faith and religion. As a problem area this had been of great concern for Martin Luther.

Although scholars on the whole have not been able to find any substantive reference to Martin Luther in Kierkegaard’s writings, including his Papers and Journals, R. Jolivet was nevertheless able to identify points of similarity between Luther and Kierkegaard. He starts

by observing that ideas such as the notion of sin as the opposite to faith, the understanding of faith as a “leap into the absurd”, etc. were common to both. From this he conjectures that as a student Kierkegaard absorbed Luther’s theology with his textbooks. For Luther, religion was something simple which did not depend upon external agents and intermediaries but which was in essence altogether spiritual, personal, inward, not a state of knowledge but a state of mind which the believer experiences as a serenity of conscience. It presupposes a knowledge which can only be gained by the individual through personal experience. To seek God and find Him, to fear, love and trust God above all things, to let the heart rest in God alone - this to Luther is the whole of religion. Kierkegaard may well have absorbed this idea of a spiritual religion in his development of the Principle of Subjectivity, but we have no hard facts to support this as a claim.

What seems likely to be the case, however, is that this Principle of Subjectivity was a deliberate choice in Kierkegaard’s struggle against Hegel. One point of criticism is that we cannot know God or know about Him without the help of God Himself. The radical error of rational theology is to assume the contrary. Another point is that Hegel was wrong to regard God as an object of our reason because He is Absolute Spirit. Speculative philosophy cannot escape from the possible and the abstract, while the relation to absolute reality of which religious belief lays hold can only be regarded as an act of will, which proceeds from aspiration and practical and personal need, which is to say from a leap. Further, there is an opposition of thought and existence such that it is impossible to progress in a continuous movement from the one to the other. Therefore, philosophy does not seek to prove the existence of God from the idea of God, but rather, setting out with the facts of existence it proves the divinity of the existent. Philosophy does not have God as its goal but as its principle. It must be a philosophy of revelation precisely because it is a philosophy of reality and hence of the religious reality. Thus the real relation between God and man is between the individual and God such that there is only an indirect, better a theoretical or abstract relation between God and humanity, which is also an abstraction (: there are only human individuals). Important is the possibility of choice and the need for philosophy to make room for freedom.

Hamann\textsuperscript{126} (1730 - 1788) was a firm opponent of eighteenth century Enlightenment. His standpoint was that faith is opposed to the rationalism of the Enlightenment and the philosophy of Kant, and he contends that belief is more important than knowledge and understanding. However, the term “belief” is ambiguous because it can imply acceptance of an assertion which is not backed by any supporting rationale. With respect to this reading Hamann claims that it is not necessary that truth needs to be demonstrated before I can accept it as such. Also, faith is different from reason and can best be thought of as an immediate awareness. If this is the case then faith and intellectual reflection are quite different because the certainty of the former is not the certainty of a demonstration. In other words, faith has nothing to do with philosophy. But if faith does not depend in any form on philosophy, then faith’s certainty can also not be destroyed by a philosophical attack because this certainty is not an operation of reason. In this way Hamann contributed to Kierkegaard’s development of the Principle of Subjectivity. To this Lessing added that contingent truths of history can never be made the proof that demonstrates necessary truths of reason.

\textsuperscript{126}German philosopher and mystical thinker nicknamed “Magnus of the North”, who advocated an irrationalistic theory of faith (inspired by Hume). Hamann had a significant influence on Jacobi, Hegel and Kierkegaard.
With this as a background we can see how Kierkegaard states his “Principle of Subjectivity”:

1) religion is not a doctrine but a way of life. It is a certain way of meeting life’s sorrow and joy;
2) religion is a personal matter, something which primarily concerns the individual man;
3) the very essence of faith is the absence of proof.

Kierkegaard emphasizes the need for a subjective appropriation of truth and regards this as more important than objective theories. As a living individual he cannot abstract from himself though he might abstract from something else. Belief is a living relation which in a real sense is a relation that I have with myself, and there is passion in it. When Kierkegaard posits as a question how abstract knowledge can ever be complete, then the answer must be that the Hegelian dialectic of mediate and immediate ultimately leads to nothing.

Kierkegaard has given several forms of the Principle of Subjectivity. At the end of Either/Or he writes “only the truth that edifies is the truth for you” while the Fragments deal not with the truth of Christianity but with the individual’s relation to Christianity and “the concern of the infinitely interested individual”. In other words, becoming a Christian involves the subjectivity of parting with one’s understanding and being crucified upon the paradox. The religious life is thus primarily subjectivity; not even the objective creed can escape from it altogether, for it begins with “I believe”, and unless this is meaningless it implies subjectivity. Kierkegaard thus distinguishes between an objective and a subjective way of dealing with the question of the truth of Christianity. Truth in the objective sense is the historical and also the philosophical truth and both truths must be determined through a critical examination of the various sources and supporting evidence. The object of philosophical truth is the relationship of the historically given and verified doctrine to the eternal truth. As for the relationship of the subject to objective truth, what is important is that the truth is brought to light. Its appropriation is a relatively unimportant matter. The Principle of Subjectivity is thus doubly used, religiously and philosophically.

Pressing his analysis further Kierkegaard reflects on the relation between historicity and faith. Suppose we were in a position to establish beyond all doubt the historical correctness of the biblical story. What impact would that have on the question of faith? Kierkegaard’s answer in the Postscript is that faith does not result from a scientific inquiry, that it does not come directly at all. On the contrary, in the objectivity of such an inquiry one tends to lose all personal interestedness that is a precondition of faith, because a historical inquiry aims at producing conclusive evidence such that its assertions can be made with reference to the logical coerciveness of the data. Faith, on the other hand is an assertion made in passion. But where there is conclusive evidence there can be not passion. Passion gives faith the confidence it needs, while any proof would be not only unnecessary, but would actually be harmful. The same applies to the objective method of speculation. It too makes the mistake of disregarding the person’s acceptance of Christianity; it regards Christianity as something merely historical of which it must abstract the essential idea. But this is nothing other than to make eternal what is in time. The religious individual is in passion infinitely interested in his eternal happiness, but as he philosophizes he must move in precisely the opposite direction. Thus the objective way, which is the philosophical way to understand Christianity, is erroneous. The philosopher is engaged in the analysis of Christianity, while according to Kierkegaard the religious individual is as a person infinitely concerned with it. In other words,
faith, and for that matter truth, is subjectivity. Using still another set of words, not God but infinite subjectivity is truth. But what does this mean?

To make his point, Kierkegaard offers the following parable:

If one who lives in the midst of Christianity goes into God's house - the true God's house - with the true idea of God in his mind and prays, but prays in untruth; and another who lives in a heathen country prays, but with a passion for infinity, although his eye rests upon an idol: where then is more truth? The one who prays in truth to God though he worships an idol; the other prays falsely to the true God, and hence worships in fact an idol.

In this parable the distinction is between an idol and the true God, and between a person who is subjectively infinitely concerned and one who only engages in an external rite. In the view of Kierkegaard it is not the "what" that is important, but it is the "how" that matters. Thus the message of the Gospel is a new "how" of an old "what". Used in this sense, the principle is a polemic against the indifference of the believer who does not realize that if he is to be a true believer, then he must be committed wholeheartedly his God. With a view to explain this indifference, Kierkegaard offers as possible reasons that he lives in a Christian country, or that faith must be supported by objective proof.

Philosophically the principle of subjectivity can be interpreted in two ways:

- a metaphysical scheme or a systematic Hegelian philosophy always faces the danger of becoming a tautology or a banality;
- no Hegelian system can do justice to the subtlety of religion because faith is bound up with precisely those things that the system ignores.

In Kierkegaard's understanding Hegelianism confused matters because it related the abstract concept of "existence" with propositions that are empirical assertions. I can only speak of existence in terms of existing things, whereas Hegelianism tries to make the empirical a matter of logic. Kierkegaard's criticism is that the metaphysical assertion of the identity of thought and being is a tautology because it is not concerned with a thing but with a concept. His assertion is that, if it is to be logically certain, it must be empty of contents, because it is true a priori. If on the other hand it is to partake in the fullness of meaning of the empirical, then it can never be more than an approximation and thereby it cannot be logically certain. In other words, the systematic Hegelian philosopher implicitly claims that he can view things sub specie aeternitati, whereas Kierkegaard's move is to shift the emphasis from the object to the subject, from the objective world of the ideas to the person who has these ideas:

- philosophy must be an activity of an existing person;
- philosophy always includes the person because its communication is an indirect process;
- philosophy is always concerned with the philosopher's own existence.

Philosophy is thus for Kierkegaard not a matter of making statements but rather that of a person asking and answering questions in actual existence. It does no good if a person accepts the conclusions of a philosophy if he has not undergone the process of assessing their truth for himself. Also, if philosophy is a person's own activity then the communication of philosophy must not become a one-sided indoctrination but must incite the listener to think for himself and to draw his own conclusions.
In a way Kierkegaard can be understood to be advocating philosophy as an approach to face the challenges of real life. Although philosophy is not a utilitarian enterprise it is true that it should not be divorced from life. But a philosophy Hegelian style tends to make faith a matter of public assertions and thereby fails to see that faith is a matter of passionate appropriation and expresses the infinite concern of the person involved. There is a difference between how we feel our own orientations and thoughts, and the manner in which we know about the tendencies of others. We pray passionately to God, but we are not concerned by the prayer of others. God is not a public concept, and He is also not a necessary being, because such an assertion would ignore something essential for the nature of God, namely that He is the Being whom saints adore and with whom they commune in prayer. God is not a distant object and the very core of faith is the I - Thou relation that I have with Him.

Kierkegaard never denies that the truth of Christianity is objectively given and can be dealt with objectively, but he contends that this approach is not adequate and that the subjective problem is the relation of the individual to the objectively given truth. Now if subjectivity is truth then this implies that in religion every assertion must be regarded as having some reference to me, or as Kierkegaard puts it, it must be subjectively appropriated by me. This appropriation has a certainty that is derived from passion that has nothing to do with the certainty of logic or science. Kierkegaard speaks of subjective truth as an “objective uncertainty held fast with infinite passion” such that for the skeptic the religious position is either inconclusive or uncertain. Kierkegaard invokes the notion of the paradox:

Inwardness in an existing subject culminates in passion; corresponding to passion in the subject the truth becomes a paradox; and the fact that the truth becomes a paradox is rooted precisely in its having a relationship to an existing subject. Thus the one corresponds to the other. By forgetting that one is an existing subject, passion goes by the board and the truth is no longer a paradox.

Kierkegaard explicates the meaning of this paradox: the God-Man, i.e. that God Almighty has become man and has subjected Himself to the finiteness of a human existence in time.

Christianity has declared itself to be the eternal essential truth which has come into being in time. It has proclaimed itself as the Paradox, and it has required of the individual the inwardness of faith in relation to that which stamps itself as an offence to the Jews and a folly to the Greeks – and an absurdity to the understanding. It is impossible more strongly to express the fact that subjectivity is truth and that objectivity is repellence, repellent even by virtue of its absurdity.

Comparing these two quotes we conclude that Kierkegaard uses two concepts of faith when he speaks of subjectivity:

- if some “experience” is to be called faith its object must not be known in the sense of being demonstrable since that would remove the element of risk which characterizes faith. This is what might be called “faith in God”;
- subjective religious faith has as its object a “paradox” and Christianity is the absurd that is asserted in infinite passion. This is called “faith in Christ”.

The first is to say that we know God by faith, while the second is to say that we have faith in Christ as God Incarnate. In both cases there is still the basic difference between the act of “having faith in ...”, and an assertion that is objectively certain. In epistemological terms, faith for Kierkegaard requires uncertainty and for this reason faith can never become a
matter of total objectivity as Hegel had claimed to be the case. Kierkegaard holds that in religion there is nothing that without applying violence can be converted into a logical impersonal statement, because any assertion of faith always concerns me. Religious faith is always a choice, and since it is a choice it can never be transformed into a demonstration. It is the choice of a way of life or a guiding principle of action. For the Christian faith this guiding principle is based on the assertion of the paradox.

By way of contrast Pojman distin-

By way of contrast Pojman distinguishes seven conceptions of faith in the writings of Kierkegaard:

- aesthetic faith;
- ethical faith;
- religious or existential faith;
- ordinary belief;
- faith as an organ for apprehending the past (history);
- salvific faith;
- faith as hope.

These distinctions are general and not dependent upon details of the Christian religious doctrine as is the case for Heywood Thomas’ reading. In fact Pojman does not hesitate to admit that his categories do not in all cases conform to Kierkegaard’s thinking, but this only supports my view that his divisions may serve as a taxonomy and a framework rather than as a tool that has been tailored to meet the specific needs of one author - Kierkegaard.

In Pojman’s reading, aesthetic faith is an instinct, a sixth sense with which we are born, the faith of small children and of animals. It is not faith proper, but a sort of embryonic trust which Pojman calls proto-faith. It is the stuff from which faith may develop. Compared to mature faith, aesthetic faith is whimsical, imaginatively rich, but frivolous, lacking in seriousness and in depth. It is the passionate, imaginative, subjective element in man. In Pojman’s view it is play in that it anticipates reality but lacks the necessary seriousness to really cope with its challenges. Aesthetic faith is potential faith. Belief based on this kind of faith is justified if there is good evidence to support it. For this reason it is ordinarily based on empirical evidence. According to Pojman Kierkegaard does not make much of this faith; he prefers intuition or synthetic a priori knowledge.

Related to aesthetic faith is what Pojman calls prudential faith. This is a calculating faith, a probabilistic type of believing which we find embedded in the spirit of science, but which has no place in either religion or morality. This type of faith is not interested in the consequences with the possible exception of those brought about by God’s power. Empirical evidence about the likely consequences of an act is of secondary importance.

Ethical faith is a commitment to ideals and, in particular, the rational order which is part of natural law. Faith is reasoned allegiance to the ideals which reason discovers. It develops within the stages of life to the ethical level of existence. It is based on accepting moral principles and rules that are binding for all persons because they come from God, or have a comparable foundation and justification. In Pojman’s reading this is a deontological under-

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128 Kierkegaard, Either/Or, II, pg. 204
standing of ethics. It is based on natural law and leads to a living that is governed by rules, a
life of reason in which actions are justified by principles which are either self-evident or else
justified by other reasons or principles that are more self-evident. In all of his writings
Kierkegaard never denied the validity or authority of a generally rational view of morality, he
simply recognized its inability to motivate: our duty is clearly laid out, but shall we really do
our duty? Clearly, it is not the duty that motivates, the will is decisive. Faith manifests itself
as a commitment to this rationalization or justificatory process that is centered on moral
law. In Kierkegaard’s own words:

The ethical thesis that every man has a calling is the expression for the fact that there is a rational order of
things in which every man, if he will, fills his place in such a way that he expresses at once the universal-
human and the individual.129

However, Kierkegaard also adds a qualification:

Man is to be the particularized universal, a combination of the accidental and the universal: the universal
(requirement) commands him abstractly, but it does not tell him how he is to fulfill these requirements.130

There will be conflicts of duty, but these are only apparent and readily resolvable in virtue of
the fact that these duties are arranged hierarchically an in a logical order. Kierkegaard here
follows Hegel’s deductive reasoning in accepting that any exception from the universal is an
unjustified anomaly that is outside the security, the protection and the benevolence that the
rational universe provides to those who respect it. Also, there can be no justification outside
the universal, because justification implies an appeal to the universal.

But there is a dilemma: a direct mandate from the source and author of the moral order
takes precedence over the moral order. The moral order is intuitively and rationally
ascertainable. Its edicts are self-evident truths. Faith is defined as obedience to these truths.
The religious moral truth is not known. It cannot be rationally deduced from other premises,
nor is its content a priori knowledge. There is no way to justify its content because the
process of justification appeals to the very universals which are rejected or suspended.
Processes of reason fail, but - as Kierkegaard discerns in Abraham who is ready to sacrifice
his son Isaac - the individual feels an intense conviction about what he ought to do. He
cannot do otherwise, and yet he questions the morality and sanity of his action. Faith in this
context is risking one’s whole being on the course of action without the slightest objective
warrant. It is a stance which is the very opposite of that of the prudent man, who tailors his
beliefs, including his beliefs about right actions, according to testable evidence. In dialectical
terms: aesthetic immediate faith is abrogated by both resignation and ethical faith, and then
restored in a higher form, a second immediacy, in the religious stage, by virtue of the
absurd131. In such a context faith is holding a conviction without sufficient evidence - even
against what would normally count as good evidence. It hopes for its object after - humanly
speaking - having resigned itself forever from obtaining it.

“Hope” is too weak as a concept to capture what “faith as hope” is to imply, for faith
conquers the indecision of doubt and has a positive attitude of expectancy. Faith as hope is

129 O.c., pg. 297
130 O.c., pg. 260
131 Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling, pg. 59 f
not merely immediate intuition or instinct, as is implied by aesthetic faith; it is reflected
second intuition. The thought process that takes place in the mind of the individual
concerned is as follows: first there is the naive immediate belief, for example, about the
future. Then one reflects on the possibility of the state of affairs occurring and one realizes
that the probability is very low or even zero. After hesitation one finally chooses that belief
in spite of the evidence. The belief has not changed: one believes in the same thing as
before, only now one has reflected and resigned oneself to never attaining one’s object. This
is the home ground of faith proper. This faith is a distinctly religious concept. It implies that
while humanly speaking, such-and-such may be improbable or impossible, that there is a
“God relationship” for which “with God all things are possible”\textsuperscript{132}. This God relationship is
unique, unlike any other relationship. It involves its own standards which if judged by human
standards must be considered irrational and even immoral.

Moral intuition is shared by everyone, is knowledge. Religious intuition is not shared because
there simply is no way at all to communicate in other forms than those of the normal affairs
of life. Faith thus becomes an infinite risk in which one exists in fear and trembling. It is
reflective and fully aware of the rejection of normal standards of rationality. The believer
believes by virtue of the absurd. He believes against reason through an act of will. The Chris-
tian religious faith has as its object the “Paradox”. Grace is necessary for the individual to
experience this sort of faith. Kierkegaard’s views on the subject as they are expressed
in the \textit{Climacus} writings have something of a Hegelian coloration. First there is immediacy which
however is annulled in ethical resignation; this dialectic is then synthesized in a second, post-
reflective immediacy, which thus becomes the expression of religious faith. However, this
analogy must not be carried too far. There is a tendency to treat concepts as things rather
than as abstract characterizations of types of functions and experiences. One might be
inclined to presume that faith and love almost become substances; however, in their
treatment we can also perceive something phenomenological. Kierkegaard is not quite clear
on this. We only feel that there is something deep within us that is transcendental. This
“essential self”\textsuperscript{133} cannot be reduced to physicalist descriptions without significant loss of
meaning. There seems to be something mysterious within us which both strives for some
obscure \textit{telos}, and which at the same time is also the basis for choices that would bring us
\textit{that} \textit{telos}. Faith is a composite of believing intuitively when there is sufficient evidence, and
of trusting in, and of committing the self to the conclusion or judgment. Religious or existen-
tial faith is thus of a second immediacy, an attitude of passionately holding onto an object
(proposition) in spite of apparent evidence. This type of faith is also immediate - i.e.
spontaneous - but it only appears after a certain sophistication in the ethical realm.

The Danish language, like other Indo-Germanic languages distinguishes between the notions
of faith and belief on one side, and opinion on the other. This leads to the question of how
existential faith relates to ordinary belief. Both have in common that the supporting
evidence is weak or missing. “Opinion” signifies a settled ordinary judgment about the truth
of a proposition or body of propositions, i.e. an ideology or a theory, while “belief”, in the
existential sense, means an unsettled, extraordinary judgment about propositions. The
difference must be sought in the importance which the proposition has for the subject. In a

\textsuperscript{132} Fear and Trembling, pg. 31 f, 46 f
\textsuperscript{133} It is not clear whether this is meant to be another word for soul.
faith situation, the subject regards the propositions as crucial for his life; in an opinion situation this is not the case.

Whereas a person may judge two propositions (p and q) equally probable, if one proposition (p) is life crucial and the other is not, then the uncertainty of p will be more important than the uncertainty attached to q. The uncertainty of p will arouse the passion in a way that the uncertainty of q will not. Belief in p will involve risk in a way that belief in q will not, namely as if one’s whole existence were put at risk. This life-crucial type of belief is called “existential faith” or “existential belief”, thereby leaving “belief” to cover “opinion”, which is ordinary, non-existential propositional belief. Existential belief is thus similar to religious belief, while ordinary belief is similar to prosaic common sense. Existential faith is not merely propositional belief, but neither is it Christian faith. Existential faith is passionate commitment to uncertain, action-guiding propositions, a persistent clinging to a proposition in spite of all hazards. It involves wrestling with evidence; it implicates the deepest structures of the self, both the passionate and the volitional. Ordinary belief, opinion, is taking-for-granted belief. It is common sense, propositional belief. It is “belief” in the sense of automatic judgment or assessment of evidence. It differs from animal faith in having evidence or being empirically based, but it is part of our animal heritage.

In order to explain how Kierkegaard views the functioning of belief as an organ for apprehending history I need to begin with a little detour. First I need to assert with Kierkegaard that the transition from possibility to actuality occurs not by necessity, i.e. logical necessity, but rather by non-necessity. Also, all natural becoming (coming into being) comes into being because of a cause. The first cause is the creator of all else, an agent who acts freely and autonomously. Thereafter all history is imitative of this creative causality in that free agents bring what is possible into existence.

Aristotle distinguished four kinds of change: quantitative, qualitative, change of place, and change of coming-into-being from non-being and ceasing-to-be. Hegel in his Logic distinguished actuality, possibility, and necessity. For him, necessity subsumes actuality and possibility within itself. Necessity is the continual process of the absolute, determining what shall be. For Kierkegaard this was confusing logical categories with movement and action. He defined necessity as “logical necessity” that is connected to a thing’s essence, its whatness, Duns Scotus’ haecceitas. Possibility and actuality are the two modes of being which any essence may have. Actuality is realized potential. Kierkegaard introduces two fundamental categories:

- the change from non-being to being: an agent creates reality - free change;
- all other changes: natural changes - necessary changes.

As he explains how potential being gets into existence, actuality, Kierkegaard rejects the notion of gradations of being, that is of a quantitative increment from non-being to being. He asserts that the change from non-being to being takes place as a leap and requires agency. The necessary is not affected by this change and remains unchangeable as possibility.

134 This is a summary of the Interlude in the Fragments.
135 Hegel, Wissenschaft der Logik, II: Das Notwendige ist, und das Seiende ist selbst das Notwendige ... So ist die Wirklichkeit in ihren Unterschieden, der Möglichkeit, identisch mit sich selbst. Als diese Identität ist sie notwendig.
becomes actuality. In other words, Kierkegaard holds that nothing ever happens by necessity, for necessity simply is; it is a logical category. Kierkegaard’s point is that logic and existence are separate realms. Logic, necessity, never brings into existence. Coming-into-existence is a contingent matter, because it could have happened otherwise, and he calls this could-have-happened character “freedom”. Thus all coming into existence takes place in freedom, not by necessity. Now from this it follows that everything which has come into existence is historical and has a history. Only God has no history because he never came into existence. By way of contrast “the past” is the historical in the broadest sense. It is brought about by freedom; its unchangeableness has been caused by an action, and not by any immanent logical necessity, because it could have been different.

If only immediate sensation and immediate knowledge are to be called “knowledge” which is beyond the possibility of deception, then how do we come to apprehend the past, the historical? Kierkegaard’s view is that we must have a faculty, an organ within us that has the appropriate structure for grasping this elusive thing. And since only like can know like, this structure must be analogous to the historical itself. And this faculty which annuls the uncertainty of the past and makes history immediately present is belief. This belief works in such a way that it makes the objectively uncertain subjectively certain. But this is to say that there is thus a radical difference between belief and knowledge. Knowledge is not the limiting case of belief, but a qualitatively different phenomenon: knowledge claims are “objectively certain” whereas belief claims are only “subjectively certain”. For example, we cannot know that the star which we see has come into existence as a product of divine agency. There is always the possibility that it is the result of natural processes, and not the result of a creatio ex nihilo. Belief, Kierkegaard tells us,

is an objective uncertainty held fast in an appropriation process of the most passionate inwardness.136

In short, belief involves risk, risk involves passion. Needless to say that mediation, which according to Hegel explains everything, is nothing but a chimera, something which Hegel has never explained to satisfaction. Also, belief and doubt are opposite acts. They are acts of the same quality, acts of the will, not instances of knowledge or of passive judgment. The “conclusions” of belief are really and in essence “resolutions”. In a situation of insufficient reason, it is the will that overthrows the equilibrium between two possible courses of action. It is thus the case that belief and doubt are opposite passions. But then there is an apparent contradiction between calling belief an act of the will, and calling belief a disposition, a passion. It would be more appropriate to call belief an “act of assenting”, because it is volitional but also dispositional, and a state of mind.

Turning back to the problem of “knowing” the historical, Kierkegaard raises the question of whether what has happened in the past is more necessary than what will happen in future. Does what is possible if it becomes actuality, also become more necessary than it was before? Kierkegaard’s answer is as follows: a contemporary witness to an event can take the data he receives as knowledge. For a person who lives later, even for a contemporary at a later time, the event becomes subject to doubt and uncertainty. The problem is basically the same for the immediate contemporary and for the later individual, but the non-contemporary has the added problem of not having been a witness to the event. The non-contempo-

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136 Postscript, pg. 182
rary needs a report from the contemporary in order to be able to apprehend the event which he has never witnessed. This report is a cause of uncertainty because the contemporary makes his personal interpretation of the event, and this interpretation is not necessarily the event itself but the product of freedom and judgment. The later person in turn takes the contemporary person’s account, together with any interpretation that the first person may want to add, and appropriates the event for himself by accepting, rejecting or modifying it in some way. In other words, for apprehending the past some kind of immediacy is necessary, be that as sensation or report, but willing must also be present. Will alone is not a sufficient condition, because one cannot believe in a vacuum - believe anything whatsoever. Only if both taken together can immediacy and will make up the necessary and sufficient condition for belief. Both must be subjectively credible. We can thus conclude that faith as an organ for apprehending the past is the function or process of making the past present, that is to say making the past “contemporary”. The believer, through a resolution of will, appropriates the testimony of others for his own purposes. He decides to believe. This is a volitional type of belief.

How does this analysis apply to Christian believing? The answer must follow from the fact that we can only know immediate sense data or a priori truths; everything else must be believed (or doubted). Included in immediate cognition or a priori truth are the laws of logic, especially the law of non-contradiction, for what is contradictory cannot be the case, i.e. a cat must be either black or white but it cannot be both. This leads to a problem with the concept of Incarnation in the historical Jesus: God cannot come into existence because He is, He eternally is. Coming into existence, becoming temporal, violates God’s necessary existence. Hence ordinary belief seems wholly inadequate to accept this proposition on logical grounds. Another type of faith is needed, which is not a natural faculty but a gift of God - divine Grace. This faith is a miracle. Yet it does not itself guarantee that a person will make use of the gift once it has been bestowed. There must also be willing. In the process of salvation there is a cooperative effort between God and man where human freedom is operative in the midst of grace. Kierkegaard thus makes believing in the Christian faith an impossibility for mere mortals, because a miracle must enable man to believe the central doctrine of Christian affirmation. However, Kierkegaard leaves this miracle a mystery. In this perspective “salvific faith”, that is faith in the eschatological promise of Christianity, is that form of faith or belief which is a combination of miraculous grace and the effort of the will. Grace must be present as the condition that enables the subject to believe. This type of faith is necessary to believe the “Paradox”, which is against all reason. Here, faith is both above and against all reason.

In his last Papers, Kierkegaard develops still another interpretation of faith as hope:

Faith hopes also in this life, but be it observed, not by virtue of human understanding, but by virtue of the absurd. Otherwise it is only common-sense wisdom, not faith.

137 Pojman is skeptical of Kierkegaard’s volitionism. Normally believing is an event rather than an act. Trying to get oneself to believe what the evidence doesn’t permit is generally considered to be immoral. Belief is a state of mind, a disposition. If reason is bankrupt, the passions become paramount. In the end the only justification for faith becomes “I believe it because I want to believe it”. But this is not mere volition; as Kierkegaard observes, only the truth that edifies you is truth for you (E/O, II, pg. 356).

138 Papers IVA, pg. 182
In essence this is a modified form of religious faith which suggests an attitude of living as if an important proposition, the truth of the Incarnation, were true.

In concluding his analysis, Pojman is critical about Kierkegaard’s analysis of existential faith and its application to Christianity. His main points are:

1. presupposes a volition which is untenable;
2. his premises seem to allow for any paradox as a suitable candidate for faith. This may also include claims that are based on some ideology;
3. by transforming believing in the absurd into the non-absurd, Christianity and its denial ultimately require each other, thereby leading to an infinite regress and a reduction ad absurdum;
4. passionate faith is not necessarily related to metaphysical paradoxes, such that his analysis involves some bad psychology;
5. hoping does not imply believing. Rather, it is an anticipation of a desired state of affairs for which the context may be religious or ideological.

We are thus left with the unexpected result that Pojman offers a general taxonomy for the phenomenon of faith of which he claims that Kierkegaard does not fully conform to it. But this only shows that Pojman’s scheme, which certainly has its own merits, and Kierkegaard’s philosophical approach, are not congruent in all details. This lack of a smooth and perfect fit creates a distance which lets me treat Pojman’s scheme as a general taxonomy that can also be applied to other philosophies and philosophers of faith, e.g. Tanabe.

Pojman’s critical attitude to Kierkegaard notwithstanding, it remains a fact that the Dane has laid the foundations for a new approach to one of the basic phenomena of human existence, faith - understood as the placing of trust and confidence in someone or something, which in his case is the salvific message of the Gospel. Kierkegaard never explains the reason why he takes this Book as the foundation for all of his belief. His entire religious philosophy is based on the assumption that the teaching of the Bible is irrefutably true, and that it is his task to explain it. In epistemological terms, Kierkegaard accepts the truth of the Gospel because he places his trust and confidence in the witness of his religious teachers, who in turn have faith in those who lived before them. This lineage of having-faith-in-the-witness-of-someone can eventually be traced down to the authors of the Scriptures who either themselves were eyewitneses or else had personal contact with the followers of Jesus, i.e. eyewitneses. The scope of Kierkegaard’s faith in the Bible is threefold: he believes that

1. the Bible has originally been revealed by God and reveals eternal truth;
2. its literal contents and form have not been fraudulently adulterated over time;
3. his own personal interpretation of the Biblical text is correct.

Similarly Kierkegaard’s philosophic-cultural background and inputs can be summarized as:

a) he is deeply rooted in the western philosophical tradition. His own thought is basically a reaction to Hegel and to the Danish State Church establishment;
b) his interest was focused on explicating the challenges of Christianity rather than on investigating basic issues of metaphysics, logic, ethics, or other branches of philosophy;
c) his scope was fixed on exploring the notion of existence as a human condition, using as a toolkit whatever insights western philosophy could offer.

These assessments have general significance. They can also be applied to Tanabe for whom his own interpretation of the writings of Shinran Shōnen and of other Buddhist religious
philosophers has a status which can be compared to that of Kierkegaard’s reading of the Bible. In addition Tanabe for his part is deeply rooted in the Eastern tradition, which he intends to explicate and to apply to Western philosophy, criticizing it from the vantage point his own positions as and when he sees that to be appropriate.

To conclude it will be useful to compare these findings with the succinct summary given by Julia Watkin\textsuperscript{139} on Kierkegaard’s conception of “faith”:

For Kierkegaard, faith (Dan.: Troen) preeminently has to do with religious belief and religious commitment, especially, of course, in the context of Christianity. In his authorship he never explores the concept from different angles, not least in the context of the popular assumption that faith is somehow inferior to knowledge. Kierkegaard aims to show that faith has two important elements: the subjective element of personal commitment to a particular path in life, that path is indicated by the intellectual content of the idea or philosophy in question, and the objective element presented by the content of the idea of philosophy. Kierkegaard shows that belief, in the former sense of following a path in life, does not necessarily follow from intellectual commitment to propositions about things, however wholehearted the commitment to their truth.

Yet while Kierkegaard therefore emphasizes the need for personal ethical-religious commitment as a necessary corollary of intellectual commitment to religious (dogmatic) propositions, he does not avoid facing the problem of how one can know that truths expressed in the dogmatic propositions are in fact true...

Where Christianity is concerned, there is the added burden of the fact that personal salvation is linked to claims made about a historical person, Jesus, of whom it is stated that he is the eternal God now become temporal in the human life of Jesus.

Thus the objective uncertainty extends to being also an uncertainty in historical terms, while from the point of view of philosophy, one appears to be claiming in a contradictory manner that God is both eternal (thus unchangeable) and temporal (thus subject to the changes of mortal life) ... faith is thus a “leap” in that finite human thinking cannot create a bridge of intellectual conviction of what is the eternal state of affairs.

4.1.3.2 Kierkegaard on divine grace

Contrary to faith, including religious faith which over the ages has attracted much attention of philosophers of all denominations, divine grace has been not a subject matter which since the beginning of modernity has been a subject of choice for many philosophers. One possible reason may be that divine grace is elusive to attempts of rational analysis. Leibniz (1646 – 1746) has famously summarized this view as follows\textsuperscript{140}: the Grace of God

... a ses degrés et ses mesures, elle est toujours efficace en elle-même ... Les grâces de Dieu sont des grâces tout pures, sur lesquelles les créatures n’ont rien à prétendre.

Affirming the harmony between the realm of nature and the realm of grace, Leibniz writes: man cannot achieve anything without the help of God’s grace, but

... Dieu veut que nous n’omettions rien du notre.\textsuperscript{141}

\textsuperscript{139} O.c., pg. 82 - 3


\textsuperscript{141} Leibniz, letter to Landgrave of Nov. 1686, quoted by: J.-L. Dumas, *Problème de la Grace*, o.c.
This stands in contrast to the position taken by Kant who in his *Religion within the Bounda-
ries of mere Reason* denounced the pretended internal experience of the effects of grace
under the heading of “mysticism” claiming:

> It is theoretically impossible to say through what means one can recognize the effects of grace (and
demonstrate that they are in fact the effects of grace and not of some internal movements of nature) ... We
may therefore admit of the effects of grace as something incomprehensible, but we cannot in our maxims
accord to them neither a theoretical nor a practical status.  

Grace, more specifically divine grace, has thus for many philosophers an ambiguous status
and cannot easily be reconciled with the principles of philosophical reflection based on rational
criticism. It therefore does not come as a surprise that Hegel, and after him Kierkegaard,
have not spent much time and effort to discuss grace philosophically as a subject in its own
right. Hegel was principally opposed to the concept and maintained that reason should
supersede everything religious, such that there was simply no room for grace in his thought.
Kierkegaard, who was a theologian by training, should have been interested in the subject,
but he explicitly addressed the subject matter only during the last years of his life. Given the
large output of his authorship we therefore must conclude that the topic of grace was of
only marginal interest to him. This presents me with the difficult tasks of

- identifying the material that can be used to explicate his views;
- constructing a coherent view from the scarce evidence at hand.

It therefore comes in handy that Julia Watkin offers this as a summary overview:

Grace, understood as the free, undeserved favor and love of God, and a central concept of Danish
Lutheranism, is important to Kierkegaard’s thought concerning the concept’s use and abuse. Kierkegaard,
like his fellow Lutheran Christians, understands people to be saved by faith through grace and not by the
number of good works they do. Yet he refuses to take grace as a once-and-for-all transaction on the part of
God, such that, if one is but baptized into the Christian community, the believer’s eternal welfare is dealt
with in the manner of some kind of insurance policy. Kierkegaard sees such an attitude as an abuse of
divine grace, only likely to cause a person to be casual toward what Christianity requires of the individual.
While he acknowledges that Martin Luther’s reaction at the time of the Reformation was needed as a
corrective to the abuse of the sale of indulgences, he considers that Luther’s reaction has in turn been
abused in the contemporary Danish state church where too many individuals are content with the bare
minimum of good works.
Kierkegaard therefore ties the idea of grace firmly to that of the need for the individual to strive to fulfill
the Christian demand. Grace and good works are inextricably linked, in that grace makes up for what the
individual cannot do for him- or herself to fulfill the demand, but it is not something that can be taken
unrelated to individual effort. Especially in the writings of his final years, Kierkegaard emphasizes that
grace is to be seen in connection not only to the ethical content of Christianity but also with the stronger
New Testament injunction to forsake everything in the following and imitation of Christ. In this connection,
Kierkegaard speaks of grace in the first place and grace in the second place; that is, he sees that not all will
be able to follow the stricter demands of New Testament Christianity. The individual thus does not abuse
the idea of grace by doing the best she or he can to follow the milder injunctions contained in the New
Testament, as long as the individual is aware of the stricter demand and humbly acknowledges his or her
inability to tread such a path. Grace in the second place is for those who are attempting to forsake
everything in the following of Christ, since even those are seen as in need of grace to perfect their work.

Apart from what is primarily of biographical interest Watkin raises as key issues:

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142 Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the boundaries of mere reason*
143 Julia Watkin, o.c., pg. 99 - 100
Kierkegaard basically held a Lutheran position on divine grace; his interest is on the relation between divine grace and good works; divine grace is necessary, but no reference is made to predestination.

The sources which for example Jackson\textsuperscript{144} quotes in his paper on Kierkegaardian grace include: \textit{Works of Love}\textsuperscript{145}, \textit{Philosophical Fragments}, the \textit{Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses}, Kierkegaard's \textit{Journals and Papers}, \textit{Fear and Trembling}, the \textit{Concept of Anxiety}, \textit{The Sickness unto Death}, and \textit{Either/Or}. In all of these books - with the exception of \textit{Works of Love} and the \textit{Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses} - we find that the subject of divine grace is covered only in passing. This observation together with the fact that the material is spread out over so many books in itself is an indication that Kierkegaard was not specifically interested in the subject, and that he did not see any reason to discuss in detail a topic which for him was a religious-theological given rather than a topic that had important philosophical implications. This lack of interest changes when at the occasion of the death of bishop Mynster (1854) his latent antagonism against the establishment of the Danish State Church begins to kindle and Kierkegaard starts to castigate in a bitter polemic what in his perception are abuses and aberrations from the Christian ideal.

Kierkegaard’s subject of choice concerns the relationship between divine grace and human freedom. Julia Watkin offers this commentary on the subject of freedom:

When Kierkegaard posits the individual as being a combination or synthesis of freedom and necessity, he insists that however much a person may be burdened by factors of heredity and environment that limit personal freedom, that person still does have freedom to act and is thus not a victim of \textit{pre-deterministic} forces. For Kierkegaard, the process of becoming an individual is closely connected with the idea of freedom, in that the person concerned who chooses to order his or her life under the category of doing right as opposed to wrong action causes his or her unique individuality to come into being in the process. Judge William in \textit{Either/Or} calls this the process of “choosing oneself” instead of “creating oneself”. Freedom is also equally linked with the concept of possibility, in that freedom implies the existence of what is possible. Hence, absence of possibility where a person can see none and prefers merely to follow what others do indicates failure to use the initial possibility of freedom that Kierkegaard sees as given to every self-conscious being.\textsuperscript{146}

It is not difficult to see that what Watkin describes is the forerunner of what later became known as the existentialist understanding of human existence, namely:

- that human freedom is intrinsically absolute;
- that the process of existing is what makes up the individual, essential nature of a person, rather than the person having a particular essence from which his or her life results;
- that the individual is seen as having no essential nature or self-identity apart from what is involved in the act of choice;
- that freedom means responsibility and burden, because the individual must make choices in life and that he or she carries the full responsible for these choices.

Theologically Kierkegaard was a traditional Western Christian and as such well aware of the thoughts of St. Augustine and of the Reformers on freedom and divine grace, and of their thoughts about predestination as a necessary entailment of God’s omniscience and omnipotence that ordains the events of life beforehand by fixing and settling inescapably

\textsuperscript{144} Timothy P. Jackson, \textit{o.c.}
\textsuperscript{146} O.c., pg. 92
each and every detail in advance. However, it cannot be denied that Kierkegaard not only read the writings of many philosophers, theologians, and other thinkers, but that his intellectual stance also owed much to his contact with his contemporaries in all walks of life as well as to his insightful psychological perceptions concerning those whom he encountered. Given such diversity of inputs, this raises the question of how Kierkegaard reconciles his views on freedom with what Christian Protestant theology seems to suggest.

The subject of Kierkegaard’s position on divine grace has been studied in detail by Timothy P. Jackson. As already the title of his paper suggests, the thrust of this essay is not on any aspects that are primarily of general theological interest; instead, the paper is directed very specifically on the problematic of how divine grace relates to human freedom, a topic that was first raised by Pelagius, then by St. Augustine, and which later was to become one of prime interest to the Reformers, Luther and Calvin. The two extreme positions which have emerged are that of predetermination (Calvin, to a lesser extent also Luther) on one side, and unrestricted human free will (Pelagius) on the other. The Dutch Protestant theologian Jacobus Arminius (1560 - 1609) had assumed a position in between these two extremes, holding that God willed that all people should be saved, and that it is only because God foresaw the belief or unbelief of individuals that he can be said to have predestined some to salvation, others to damnation. The Arminian position thus is: we can make no move whatsoever toward God by means of our own intrinsic resources, but we can say “Yes” or “No” when God turns to us and draws us.

Jackson tells us that Kierkegaard often insists on radical individual responsibility before God by suggesting that there can be little or no spiritual help or harm between human beings. At the same time Kierkegaard names God “Teacher, Savior, and Redeemer” and thus raises the question of how one can be personally responsible if God does it all. Jackson continues to conclude that in his account of Kierkegaard “it would seem that human beings are absolutely dependent upon and yet also equally accountable to God”. In other words, we cannot independently reach for the gift of salvation, much less claim it as a right, but we can either accept or refuse it. There is no merit in accepting God’s help, for we simply let Him do, but there is enough human freedom to refuse instead of accepting. Can Kierkegaard resolve this apparent contradiction?

The answer must come from his existentialist concept of faith: in order to have faith there must first be existence; then there must be a degree of preparedness and readiness on the part of the individual; such preparedness is brought about in an existential step: by dying to the world man creates the precondition for the theological virtues of faith, hope and love, but only in the limited sense that self-surrender opens one to receive the divine gifts. The human role with respect to God is thus voluntary but exclusively receptive: “man’s highest achievement is to let God be able to help him”. Self-righteousness and self-sufficiency are

147 Timothy P. Jackson, o.c.
148 Shortly after Arminius’ death in 1609 his followers composed a summary of their position under the name Remonstrance and called for a synod to adjudicate the central doctrinal disputes. Although it was judged heretical by the Synod of Dort in 1618, the theology of Arminius and the Remonstrants was highly influential on a host of Christian traditions.
149 O.c., pg. 235
150 O.c., pg. 236
151 Kierkegaard, Journals and Papers, o.c., vol. I, pg. 22; quoted by Jackson, o.c., pg. 237
ruled out, but we are equally not fated to salvation or damnation\textsuperscript{152}. According to Jackson then, the key point is the kenotic nature of divine grace, its self-emptying quality: “true omnipotence and omni-benevolence generate freedom in creatures, not necessity or servile dependency.” Kierkegaard’s position on divine grace can then be approximated with the following three statements\textsuperscript{153}:

1. a commitment to universal access to the highest things, over against a belief in double predestination or Christ’s limited atonement for the select;
2. a commitment to equal responsibility before the highest things, over against strong versions of sacerdotism or spiritual collaboration;
3. a commitment to human freedom of choice, and what might be called true freedom, over against fustic doctrines of irresistible grace or an overly rational account of moral and religious commitment.

With respect to universal access, it is certainly the case that the Bible itself is ambiguous, as Calvin and Luther, and before them St. Augustine, have argued. Yet, Kierkegaard reminds us that we must distinguish between:

i) the extent of God’s offer of salvation;
ii) the extent of humanity’s acceptance of it.

Given the possibility that some creatures might perversely reject God’s love for all eternity, it may then be questioned whether a commitment to equal access to the highest things would imply that each person, no matter what his or her personal conditions and circumstances may be, will equally be given faith, hope and love. The answer seems to be that even if faith is a gift of God which is the same for everyone, the personal history of the individual may still make it easier or harder to accept that gift. It would not be credible in the light of how human individuals are conditioned by their surroundings to deny any personal variability in accepting God’s pledge in favor of total spiritual egalitarianism, even though a degree of individual freedom of choice will always be present. The solution therefore seems to be that with God’s grace, all finite persons have a genuine chance at glory, though this is not an identical chance. Thus universality can be preserved without implausibly insisting on identity.

In the judgment of Jackson, Kierkegaard seems to waver between literal equality of access on one side, and individual differences on the other.\textsuperscript{154}

The matter of equal responsibility of all humans for their actions before God and before their neighbors can be discussed both from a theological and from an ethical point of view. Theologically what is at stake is the nature of the relationship of the human individual toward God. In Philosophical Fragments Kierkegaard writes that the individual, if he believes, owes nothing to any other human being but everything to God. This may not be interpreted as implying that in matters of faith we are free and independent and perhaps even invulnerable with respect to other humans, while we are utterly bound and dependent and perhaps even predestined with respect to God. For Kierkegaard it is not conceivable to deny all human subjectivity, thus predestination is not an option, and God’s grace is indispensable but not irresistible - a necessary but not a sufficient condition - for human faith, hope, and

\textsuperscript{152} Jackson o.c., pg. 237
\textsuperscript{153} O.c., pg. 238
\textsuperscript{154} O.c., pg. 240
love. Others can slay the body, but spiritual death is always the result of spiritual suicide\(^{155}\). Jackson then discusses whether we are in fact as invulnerable to human harm and as inaccessible to human help as Kierkegaard claims; Jackson concludes that in his assessment nothing would prevent Kierkegaard to endorse the following summary points:

a) someone may provide the necessary and/or sufficient conditions for profound (but not decisive) spiritual harm to pre-moral emergent selves (e.g. child abuse etc.);

b) no one, other than the agents themselves, may provide necessary and/or sufficient conditions for spiritual harm to mature selves (i.e. no harm, decisive or otherwise, can be decisively given; spiritual death is always suicide);

c) someone may provide the necessary and/or sufficient conditions for profound (but not decisive) spiritual help to pre-moral, emergent selves (e.g. our parents give us birth, crucial nurture, ethical education, etc.);

d) no one, other than the agents themselves, may provide sufficient conditions for spiritual help, decisive or otherwise, to mature selves (i.e. freedom is internal to virtue and not even divine grace is irresistible).

From this Jackson concludes that Kierkegaard can generate a plausible doctrine of social responsibility even as he preserves his strong egalitarian and individualistic views. The duty of love of neighbor can be translated into a duty to protect the freedom of love with respect to ethics and religion, a freedom which is always present but unexpressed. Vulnerable human beings, for example small children, must be helped to personhood, by the care of others, even if we assert that all are potential persons and that all persons are individually accountable.\(^{156}\)

Jackson develops his assessment of Kierkegaard’s position on human freedom of choice by contrasting it with that of St. Augustine. Both thinkers, even though they differ considerably on other issues, speak of two senses of freedom and two kinds of “freedom of choice”:

i) freedom for something, i.e. the impersonal ability to do otherwise;

ii) freedom from something, i.e. a bare non-necessitation prior to choosing.

To add more precision, St. Augustine introduces the term *liberum arbitrium* to designate the condition of non-necessitation to distinguish it from *libertas* which is the word for the moral concreteness which one acquires in and through selecting one specific alternative and subsequently binding oneself to it. Kierkegaard does not consider *liberum arbitrium* to be a viable option for the existing human being since it does not distinguish between good and evil and thus negates freedom itself, since in his view “good and evil exist nowhere outside freedom”\(^{157}\). Yet, while true freedom presupposes formal freedom we must not make the mistake to let abstract freedom take the place of true, personal freedom: *liberum arbitrium* may not replace *libertas*. To exist always means to be concrete, never abstract and out of context. True human freedom therefore is for Kierkegaard not an abstract possibility but a positive capacity and personal identity with real material content.

The challenge of historical existence is to realize true freedom by moving beyond mere freedom of choice, thereby binding oneself voluntarily to an integrated identity (*libertas*) such


\(^{156}\) O.c., pg. 240 - 5

\(^{157}\) Quoted by Jackson from: Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, o.c., vol. II, pg. 62
that there is no longer a question of raw choice (*liberum arbitrium*) and formal freedom of choice is transcended or transformed in time. Jackson quotes from *Sickness unto Death*\(^{158}\)

Freedom is the dialectical aspect of the categories of possibility and necessity.

*Libe*rum *arbitrium* correlates with possibility, *libertas* with necessity; both are inseparably intertwined. Neither one may be relinquished because freedom of choice is the ontological precondition for true freedom. Jackson concludes:

- no external power can compel a moral choice, decisively harm or help a human being, for the two senses of freedom (*liberum arbitrium* and *libertas*) are irreducibly present in finite moral agency;
- moral and religious choices are characterized chiefly by passionate commitment rather than rational assent;
- coming to faith is not a matter of Promethean self-creation (since grace is required), but neither is it mainly a matter of accurate cognition or preordained experience.

True freedom is for Kierkegaard a highly individualized *libertas* in which voluntary consent to grace takes the form of a passionate “leap”, a “Yes” to a gifted reality that, seen objectively, looks paradoxical.

With respect to grace and freedom, Kierkegaard affirms:

-universal access to the highest things and the rarity of individual faith before God;
- both equal accountability to God who is Love and gracious upbuilding by the same God;
- both freedom of choice (*liberum arbitrium*) and true personal freedom (*libertas*).\(^{159}\)

Kierkegaard’s existential dialectic is not a rejection of God’s omnipotence but an appreciation of its kenotic form.

These are undeniably conclusions whose philosophical relevance it is impossible to deny. Yet, in a certain way they are also quite unsatisfactory because they depend upon a set of specific theological assumptions that have not been explicated. Clearly, Kierkegaard’s overriding goal was to explain what the essence of the Christian faith is. But this is a summary statement which does not suffice to serve the purpose and provide the necessary explanatory details such that we can follow Kierkegaard in his train of thought through to his conclusions. What is needed is a linkage to his theological background and orientation. This is not just a rhetorical question because the general label of “Christianity” covers a very vast range of different denominations which over time have proposed many contradictory views and undergone many schismatic separations. However, this is also a topic that is primarily of concern to those whose interest is focused on the history of theology and religion while philosophers generally tend to disregard the purely theological sides of the problematic in favor of what is philosophically relevant. It therefore does not come as a surprise that Kierkegaard’s specific positions on individual problems are usually addressed in the margins only by philosophers and commentators alike. One notable exception that I was able to locate is Régis Jolivet’s *Introduction à Kierkegaard*\(^{160}\). More specifically, what interests me is

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\(^{158}\) *Kierkegaard’s Writings*, o.c., vol. 19, 1980, pg. 29

\(^{159}\) *O.c.*, pg. 251 - 2

\(^{160}\) Régis Jolivet, o.c., pg. 217 - 230. This study, even if it is somewhat dated can still provide a degree of insight which I shall need later when I somehow must try to reconcile Kierkegaard’s view of grace with that of Tanabe.
the theological matrix in which Kierkegaard’s conception of grace is rooted and from which its details emerged. The quick answer would be that Kierkegaard was a Protestant, and that his theology therefore must somehow be based on the theology of the Reformation. But this is a very broad statement, given that the individual Reformers held many diverging views; Julia Watkin’s Dictionary does not offer any help as it has no mention of Luther or of the other Reformers. Jolivet is more explicit in this respect:

Sans aucun doute, la pensée de Kierkegaard a subi profondément l’influence du luthéranisme. Mais Kierkegaard n’a pas laissé de faire des objections, allant parfois fort loin, aux thèses maîtresses de Luther. Même, vers la fin de sa vie, et à l’occasion de son conflit avec l’Eglise établie et après avoir voulu retourner du luthéranisme à Luther, il paraît concevoir un doute radical sur la qualité chrétienne de la religion luthérienne.

It is worth noting that Kierkegaard never defends any specific explicit theological doctrines, nor does he posit any doctrine on his own. Rather, his analysis of Luther’s thought on faith and grace is basically philosophical, and initially his Lutheranism seems to be but an undercurrent in his thought to which he gradually develops some strong objections. One such criticism is that of Luther’s position on the relation of grace and good works. He reproaches Luther that his theology is centered on the salvation of the individual and not on the advent of the Kingdom of God and on His glorification, which according to Kierkegaard is the only interest which God has. But he accepts that Luther’s historic task was to be a corrective to the Catholicism of the 16th century. It was only later that the weakness of the Lutheran positions began to surface, which Kierkegaard then criticized. One author, Haecker, is quoted by Jolivet as having surmised that Kierkegaard might have become a catholic if only he had lived longer and that it is possible to find some catholic inclinations in his thoughts. This, however, is only speculation which cannot substitute for the concrete existential reality of the Dane. For him the only way in which Christianity can manifest itself is through a personal relationship with God based on anxiety as the only means by which the personal communications with God is established. There can be no doubt that for Kierkegaard tremor, fear and trembling, despair, anxiety and doubt are the permanent urges of the religious soul. Kierkegaard never gave up this conviction. This is why he was convinced that Luther’s forceful contribution was to have stressed the importance of the category of the in-itself, of inwardness and subjectivity, of the individual and of his or her uniqueness.

Returning now to the subject of divine grace, I must restate that the material is limited and that Kierkegaard had no inclination to study the subject matter in detail. However, given his Lutheran engagements it seems reasonable to surmise that Kierkegaard’s theology was in general terms of a Lutheran inclination, and that his view on grace was not in contradiction

161 O.c.
162 According to Jolivet, Kierkegaard did not study Luther’s works in any detail before 1846. From then until 1848 the Journals do not contain many words of approval and of admiration for Luther. After 1848, however, the tone changes and the censures begin to abound and to become ever more critical.
163 O.c., pg. 217
164 O.c., pg. 220 - 1
165 O.c., pg. 228
166 O.c., pg. 255
167 O.c., pg. 257
168 O.c., pg. 228
with the views offered by Martin Luther in his comments on St. Paul’s *Letter to the Romans*. This is very tentative and speculative, but it is also true that there are no indications that this conclusion is false.

From the above I conclude that for Kierkegaard the main interest is to explicate the Christian religious demand, and to apply the insights so gained to the phenomena of religious faith and of divine grace. His religious views are based on the teachings of St. Paul and of Martin Luther; more explicitly:

- a prerequisite for religious faith and for divine grace is a personal relationship with God;
- this relationship is one of anxiety on the side of man, and of love and forgiveness on the side of God;
- sinful man directs himself in faith to God in the hope that His grace will purge all sin.

Man’s hope ultimately rests on the salvific promise of the Gospel. This provides the guidance that man needs in order to lead a good Christian life in accordance with the demands of the Old and - more importantly - the New Testament.

4.2 **Japanese Philosophy after 1864**\(^{169}\): Tanabe

When in 1854 Commander Perry forcefully opened Japan to westerners the country had been closed for about 250 years to all foreign contacts. This meant that Japan all of a sudden became exposed to 250 years of technological and scientific as well as intellectual progress on which it had missed out and which accordingly threatened to overwhelm the country and its people. Given that for some decades before that date in 1854 the Tokugawa Shogunate (a military dictatorship) had not been able to maintain political stability, it is no exaggeration to say that the political and cultural identity of the country was seriously threatened. It can only be considered a unique coincidence that a group of farsighted young political leaders adopted a strategy that would cause Japan to evolve within a period of only a few decades from the status of a backward medieval society to that of a geostrategic player\(^{170}\) on a par with some of the most advanced western powers. The basic idea behind this strategy was to adopt western knowledge and technology, but to keep the traditional Japanese values.

One way to effect the transfer of knowledge and technology from western countries to Japan was to have promising young men trained by western experts. This strategy was implemented by inviting foreign lecturers to teach at Japanese universities, and by sending students on government scholarships to European and American universities and government institutions. A third alternative was to translate western books into Japanese. As I shall explain shortly, all three options became important elements of the effort to introduce Japan to western philosophy.

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\(^{170}\) In the Russian-Japanese War of 1904 - 05 Japan defeated Tsarist Russia. During WW I the Japanese economy became a major supplier for non-military goods to western countries whose economies were tied up in the war.
It has been a subject of some debate whether or not Japan has been home to philosophy before the forceful opening of the country by Commander Perry. The answer to this question will of course depend on how one defines the word philosophy and on how one judges the efforts to make borrowed philosophical resources a part of one's own culture. There seems to be a broad consensus that from a global, worldwide perspective we can distinguish three original philosophical traditions: the European-Greek tradition, the Indian and the Chinese traditions, and there are certainly indications that we may speak of a Japanese philosophy which, however, is an indigenous Japanese offshoot based on Indian and Chinese inputs. Whatever the details may be, fact is that when Japan was opened, western philosophical concepts and western philosophical terminology were practically unknown to Japanese intellectuals. It is the merit of scholars such as Nishi Amane (1829 - 1897) and Tsuda Masamichi (1821 - 1903) to have developed an early interest in western philosophy and to have brought it to the attention of an interested Japanese public. At first British and American philosophies predominated, but later leading Japanese philosophers were especially influenced by recent German Idealism, Phenomenology, and Existentialism. Today, philosophy in the western sense of the word is taught as a compulsory subject in most Japanese colleges and universities, while Indian and Chinese philosophy is relegated to specialized courses. Among the names of early Japanese pioneers of western philosophy Robert J.J. Wargo singles out two individuals whose work has had an undeniable influence on the thought of Nishida Kitarō (1870 - 1945), one of the founders of the renowned Kyoto School of philosophy: Inoue Enryō (1858 - 1919) attempted to reform Buddhism and combine it with western ideas by showing that the stress on pure reason in Mahāyāna Buddhism was close to Hegel’s panlogism or pan-rationalism, while Inoue Tetsujirō (1855 - 1944) was instrumental in introducing German philosophy to Japan.

The most outstanding contribution which a foreign teacher has made to the evolution of philosophy in Japan during the early period was that of one Raphael von Körber who visited Japan in 1893 to introduce the philosophies of Arthur Schopenhauer (1788 - 1860) and of Paul Deussen (1845 - 1919) to the country. In the Taishō Period (1912 - 1926) the neo-Kantianism of Paul Natorp (1854 - 1924) and of Heinrich Rickert (1863 - 1936) was prominent among Japanese intellectuals, while interest in Edmund Husserl’s Phenomenology, Heidegger’s Existentialism, and Hegel’s dialectic became increasingly important. This was about the time when four creative Japanese philosophers began to attract the attention:

- Nishida Kitarō (1870 - 1945), who is generally regarded as the greatest Japanese philosopher since the introduction of western philosophy to Japan. His essential contribution was the Logic of Place;
- Tanabe Hajime (1885 - 1962) who was a student of Nishida’s and who developed a Logic of the Specific;
- Watsuji Tetsurō (1889 - 1960), who was one of the small group of twentieth century philosophers in Japan who brought Japanese philosophy to the world, and whose works on Japanese ethics are still regarded as definitive studies;
- Nishitani Keiji (1900 - 1990) who was noted in the west for his religious philosophy and for his effort to overcome philosophical nihilism.

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171 Wargo, Robert J.J., *The Logic of Nothingness - A Study of Nishida Kitarō*, University of Hawai‘i Press, 2005
Somewhat less known, but also important are Daisetz Teitarō Suzuki (1870 - 1966), Nishida’s friend from childhood, who like Masao Abe (1915 - 2006), was actively engaged in introducing Japanese thought and culture to the west, and Takahashi Satomi (1886 - 1964), who was an important systematic philosopher and a sharp critic of both Nishida and Tanabe.

This list could of course be continued and enlarged although there seems to be little doubt that the contributions made by those mentioned are of particular importance. Nishida Kitarō, Tanabe Hajime, and Nishitani Keiji together are generally considered to be the co-founding members of what has come to be known in the west as the Kyoto School of Japanese Philosophy. As the name suggests, all three men were associated with Kyoto University, the second most prestigious university in Japan after Tokyo University - with Kyoto being the ancient capital and a center of traditional Japanese culture, whereas Tokyo, the former Edo, is the new capital and a center of modernization, which is to say westernization. The Kyoto School philosophers studied Western philosophy with the aim to facilitate its encounter with the Japanese traditions of thought. Minamoto has this comment:

The keynote of the Kyoto school, as persons educated in the traditions of the East despite all they have learned from the West, has been the attempt to bring the possibilities latent in traditional culture into encounter with Western culture.

This must not be misunderstood as implying that the members of the Kyoto School were merely putting a western rational mask over Eastern intuitive wisdom, or else that they were using western philosophical idioms and modes of thought to give expression to East Asian Buddhist thought. Rather, while it may be said that the members of the Kyoto School can be identified as East Asian or Mahāyāna Buddhist thinkers, their uniqueness derives from a primary commitment not to cultural self-expression or to a dialogue between world religions, but to a genuinely philosophical search for truth.

In the west the Kyoto School has become known for its philosophies of religion which have frequently been viewed as being representative of Mahāyāna Buddhism, specifically of its Zen and True Pure Land forms. While exchanges on such terms can be fruitful, such an assessment can also be misleading. For even if a philosophy of religion is for most Kyoto School thinkers the ultimate axis on which their thoughts are centered, it can hardly be

174 Stevens, Bernard, *Invitation à la philosophie japonaise - Autour de Nishida*. o.c., pg. 153 ff; Heisig, James W., *Philosophers of Nothingness - An Essay on the Kyoto School*, University of Hawai’i Press, 2001; Davis, Bret W., *Introducing the Kyoto School as World Philosophy - Reflections on James W. Heisig’s ‘Philosophers of Nothingness’*, The Eastern Buddhist, vol. 3 3/4, 2002; same author: *The Kyoto School*, in: *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, online edition, 2006. Apart from Nishida who is often called the father of the Kyoto School, the persons best known outside Japan are his student and later sharp critic, Tanabe Hajime, frequently considered the School’s co-founder, and Nishitani Keiji. As a “school” the group comprises a rather fuzzy set of individuals that includes Marxist-leaning former students such as Miki Kiyoshi and Tosaka Jun, more nationalistic students like Kōyama Iwao and Kōsaka Masaaki, and lesser known but close disciples like Mutai Risaku and Shimomura Toratarō. Outside the School proper colleagues, students and friends also witness to the impact of Nishida’s ideas including: the Zen Buddhist scholar Hisamatsu Shin'ichi, and Kuki Shūzō, the interpreter of Japanese aesthetics and culture. A third generation of the School includes Tanabe’s student Takeuchi Yoshinori, Nishitani’s student Ueda Shizuteru, and Hisamatsu's student Abe Masao, who have been especially effective in introducing Nishida's philosophy in Europe and North America, and in applying Nishida's thought to inter-religious Buddhist-Christian dialogue.

called their sole concern, because they address a full array of philosophical issues: metaphysics, ontology, epistemology, logic, philosophical anthropology, philosophy of history, philosophy of culture, ethics, political theory, philosophy of art, etc. When their focus is on the philosophy of religion, they approach this topic in a non-dogmatic and often surprisingly non-sectarian manner, drawing on and reinterpreting, for example, Christian sources along with Buddhist ones\(^\text{176}\). In this they always try to keep equal distances to any one of these religions. It is therefore fair to say that the legacy of the Kyoto School should be understood neither as Buddhist thought forced into western philosophical expression, nor western universal discourse dressed up in traditional Japanese apparel. Rather, the output from this school may best be understood as a set of unique contributions from a distinctly Japanese perspective to a nascent worldwide dialogue of cross-cultural philosophy, that is to say from a perspective that is fundamentally determined by its historical layers of traditional culture while at the same time and in actual fact it is also conditioned by a recent layer of contact with the West. In this way the Kyoto School may be regarded as a group of thinkers that stood between - or as some authors claim - moved beyond East and West.

Although the philosophy of Tanabe Hajime is highly original in how it stressed the dialectical aspects of reality, it is usually viewed as being firmly rooted in, and also a reaction to the legacy of Nishida Kitarō\(^\text{177}\), who invited the young Tanabe to work as a lecturer at Kyoto University. Later when Nishida retired from university in 1929 Tanabe became his successor in the chair of philosophy at Kyoto University. An undisputable fact is that by that time the relationship between the two men had already declined for a number of years. In 1930 their differences became manifest when Tanabe published a paper in which he severely criticized Nishida’s thought. This move was a harsh breach of etiquette and against all tradition. Thereafter the personal relationship between Nishida and Tanabe deteriorated ever more; Tanabe continued to criticize Nishida, to which criticism Nishida responded by adapting his thought without changing his basic position.

Neither Nishida nor Tanabe have worked in total isolation. I have already mentioned that some important groundwork for introducing western philosophy to Japan had been laid by others before Nishida’s time had come. In addition, and although there seems to exist no concrete evidence to prove this, scholars unanimously point to the fact that both men when they were young must have been thoroughly trained in and therefore familiar with traditional Japanese philosophical and religious thought. It will therefore be useful to briefly address some tendencies from traditional Japanese philosophy\(^\text{178}\) that probably have been essential in shaping the thinking of these and other Kyoto School philosophers:

- Japanese thought has tended to emphasize internal rather than external relationships. This is to say that in a relationship the two related objects, \(\alpha\) and \(\beta\), are generally not understood to be two separate entities that have been connected by a relating principle, but instead that they have some overlap: part of \(\alpha\) is \(\beta\), and part of \(\beta\) is \(\alpha\). Traditional Buddhist philosophy holds that no entities ever

\(^{176}\) One concern that has been raised and which must not go unnoted is that the philosophers of the Kyoto School have used their western sources, philosophical and religious, as they understood it. It therefore should not come as a surprise to find that their interpretations of western sources may at times be rather lopsided and not in total harmony with a majority view shared between western specialists in the field.


\(^{178}\) Blocker, H. Gene, o.c., provides an extensive investigation into traditional Japanese philosophical thought.
exist independently of all others as a discrete substance. Rather they are always in flux and depend for their existence on other entities. This is called the principle of dependent origination;
- the part/whole model is conceived in terms of internal relations. The whole is typically not understood to be simply the sum of the parts. Because in this view the whole and the part are internally related, the part always in some way reflects the whole;
- typically even the opposites are thought to be internally related. If, by way of an example, \( \alpha \) and the opposite, \( \text{not-} \alpha \), overlap, this is interpreted as implying that \( \alpha \) can only be fully \( \alpha \) insofar as it contains something of not-\( \alpha \). Therefore an entity is defined by distinguishing it from, and thereby relating it to its opposite. To express this identity within difference the Sino-Japanese term soku is used: \( \alpha \) soku not-\( \alpha \).

When western philosophy entered Japan, Japanese philosophers became aware that the new modes of thought that had entered their country could not adequately accommodate any of the traditional tendencies. Among western systems, Hegel's dialectical logic seemed to be most in line with the soku way of relating opposites. In the end, however, Japanese philosophers found Hegel's thought to be unacceptable, because

- Hegelian logic is grounded in being whereas traditional Japanese Buddhist philosophy gave primacy to non-being or nothingness;
- Hegelian dialectic expresses how static beings are transformed into events of becoming, whereas in Japanese thought events are the starting point, and a process of logical abstraction is used to isolate discrete beings within the process of becoming;
- Hegelian dialectic is progressive, showing the development of thought through time into what it is becoming. In Japanese thought the dialectical process is more commonly used regressively to understand how thought comes about and out of what it is formed. With the exception of Marxist and certain neo-Hegelian contexts, the term “dialectic” thus usually refers to a specifically Japanese conception.

For these and other reasons Nishida and Tanabe have therefore been critical of Hegel, as they also were critical of neo-Kantianism. They became important philosophers because they could turn their criticism into original philosophical thought.

4.2.1 Nishida Kitarō\(^{179}\) (1870 - 1945)

Nishida Kitarō’s importance stems from the fact that he was the first and also the most prominent philosopher to have used his knowledge of western philosophy to address a full array of philosophical issues: metaphysics, ontology, epistemology, logic, philosophical anthropology, philosophy of history, philosophy of culture, ethics, political theory, philosophy of religion, and more. His contributions were highly original. As head of the department of philosophy at the renowned Imperial University of Kyoto he was in a position where he could exert great influence on his assistants and students. It is therefore justified to claim that the thought of those who followed him in time had been formed by his philosophical achievements. This is the reason why his work needs to be mentioned in the present context, even though Nishida - when he addressed the matter of “the religious” in his Last Writings - did not expressly undertake to offer an explicit theory of religious faith based on the concept of “pure experience”; he also did not address the subject matter of divine grace.

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Nishida’s work spans the years from 1911 when he published An Enquiry into the Good\textsuperscript{180} until his death in 1945, year in which he published The Logic of the Place of Nothingness and the Religious Worldview\textsuperscript{181}. Viewed as a whole his authorship manifests a sustained and unified intellectual development which can be divided without artificiality into three fairly distinct periods\textsuperscript{182}. The first period (1911 - 27) includes the years spent as a professor at Kyoto Imperial University. Nishida began this early period by introducing his notion of “pure experience” as part of a voluntarist theory of subjectivity and eventually was led from this initial starting point to his central (and problematic) position regarding the “place” (Grk.: τόπος, topos) of absolute nothingness. This established what is called the Nishida Tetsugaku (the philosophy of Nishida) as the theoretical point of departure for much of the thought of the Kyoto School. In the second period (1927 - 33), the theory of “place” was consolidated and purified of its idealist tendencies by a subtle, although usually unacknowledged, use of Buddhist doctrine. The third period (1933 - 45) represents the maturity of Nishida’s philosophical contribution and its explicit application to the problem of “the religious”. The epistemological orientation of the preceding period was corrected by a position fully informed by a Mahāyāna Buddhist view of reality.

Starting with An Inquiry Into the Good, Nishida’s early work calls into question two basic presuppositions of most modern epistemology: the assumptions that experience is individual and subjective, and that it leads to knowledge only via a corrective process with input from the mind or from other individuals. For Nishida, experience in its original form is not the exercise of individuals equipped with sensory and mental abilities who contact an exterior world; rather it precedes the differentiation into the experiencing subject and the experienced object, and of the individual that is formed in this process. Nishida offers this as an explanation of “pure experience”:

To experience means to know facts just as they are, to know in accordance with facts by completely relinquishing one’s own fabrications. What we usually refer to as experience is adulterated by some sort of thought, so by pure I am referring to the state of experience just as it is without the least addition of deliberate discrimination. The moment of seeing a color or hearing a sound, for example, is prior not only to the thought that the color or sound is the activity of an external object or that one is sensing it, but also to the judgment of what the color or the sound might be. In this regard, pure experience is identical with direct experience. When one directly experiences one’s own state of consciousness, there is not yet a subject or an object, and knowing and its object are completely unified. This is the most refined type of experience.\textsuperscript{183}

According to Nishida, “the moment of seeing a color or hearing a sound” is prior not only to the thought that the color or sound is the activity of an external object or that one is sensing it, but also to the judgment of what the color or the sound might be. “Pure experience” thus names not only the basic form of every sensuous and every intellectual experience but also the fundamental form of reality, indeed the “one and only reality” from which all differentiated phenomena are to be understood. Cognitive activities such as thinking or judging, willing, and intellectual intuition are all derivative forms of pure experience but identical to it insofar as they are active, that is when thinking, willing, etc. are going on. The experience of a moving car, for example, underlies the judgment that the car is moving, and the activity of

\textsuperscript{180} Nishida Kitarō, An Inquiry into the Good, Yale University Press, 1990
\textsuperscript{181} Nishida Kitarō, Last Writings - Nothingness and the Religious Worldview, David A. Dilworth (transl.), University of Hawai’i Press, 1987, pg. 47 - 123
\textsuperscript{182} I follow a proposal made by James L. Fredericks, o.c., pg. 124 f
\textsuperscript{183} Nishida Kitarō, An Inquiry into the Good, pg. 3 - 4
judging is an exercise of pure experience prior to a subsequent judgment that “I am now judging”. Objective phenomena likewise derive from pure experience; when unified they are called “nature,” while “spirit” names the activity of unifying. Pure experience launches the dynamic process of reality that differentiates into subjective and objective phenomena on their way to a higher unity, and the recapture of our unitary foundation is what Nishida means by the Good.

Nishida would deny that his position is a kind of idealism, either subjective or transcendental, because no subjective mind, human or divine, is the origin of what is taken as reality, and no personified or ego-aware spirit is its beginning or end. His notion of pure experience clearly shows the influence of William James (1842 - 1910), but it differs by the emphasis which Nishida places on the non-individuated character and the seamless development of such experience. It is the pre-individual basis of a systematic and all-comprehensive process. If we call his view a “theory” of experience, we should be aware that from his standpoint the theory is a natural outgrowth of unitary experience and not a reflection on it that proceeds from a different source. The question of how pure experience grounds reflective knowledge has been Nishida’s concern in works composed after An Inquiry Into the Good.

In his later philosophy Nishida will hold that pure experience is the most concrete, that it enfolds all reality, and that it indicates reality’s undifferentiated ground.

The next issue which Nishida has addressed is that of how reflective thought is grounded in pure experience. How can pure experience develop into reflective thought that would seem to interrupt and interpret it from an external vantage point? According to Nishida the answer must come from the phenomenon of self-reflection, which is self-consciousness or self-awareness. He observes that there is a form of consciousness that inherently reflects or mirrors itself within itself, so that there is no difference between that which reflects and what is reflected. Thus in self-awareness, immediate experiencing and reflection are unified, knower and known are the same. Knowledge of things in the world begins with the differentiation of unitary consciousness into knower and known, and it ends with self and things becoming one again. This does not imply the pre-given existence of some personal self. Rather, self-awareness or self-consciousness means that which makes manifest or that which illuminates.

Nishida’s key concept is to empty consciousness of any “content” such that events are known “just as they are”, which is to say prior to any thought or conceptualization, and prior to the opposition of subject and object. Experiential immediacy is thus realized in the “emptying” of experience of all imposed intellectual meanings. This is possible since according to Nishida experience is originally “pure”, that is to say “empty”, a primordial unity of subject and object, free of all superimposed intellectual discriminations. In other words, the purity of experience lies not in it being simple and un-analyzable, but in a strict unity of concrete consciousness.

Although Nishida shows certain affinities with Hegel and German Idealism, this must not obscure Nishida’s fundamentally Buddhist orientation. A major difference lies, for instance, in Nishida’s insistence on the priority of the concrete and experiential in contrast to Hegel’s
predication of an abstract universal, while another such difference is associated with Nishida’s leanings towards Zen. Two strands of thought stand out:

- words and concepts are empty, and cannot provide a trustworthy access to the real;
- enlightenment lies in a return to the source of all experience through non-discrimination.

Zen thought holds that language is a distortion of reality; judgment is a mental construction; words form a cognitive filter; concepts act like a lens distorting the original image of reality. These positions assume a dualistic reconstruction of reality based on the opposition of subject and predicate, in which case the unity of the pure experience is lost in a dualism of subject and object. Zen meditation seeks to restore this original experience of immediacy not by seeking the end of thought, but rather by encouraging a proficiency in cognitive immediacy. Nishida argued that all thought is pure experience. Pure experience, the non-objectifiable, non-categorical foundation of subject-object consciousness, is unavoidable because all judgments arise from it as “traces” of “the great system of consciousness”.

Nishida’s early philosophical interests included problems of religious experience as well. His early religious thought can be summarized as follows:

- as is the case in An Inquiry into the Good, “the religious” is spoken of in terms of an intuition into the totality of immediacy of the concrete experience of the non-duality which exists prior to the subject-object relation of judgment;
- as is the case in An Inquiry into the Good, “the religious” is spoken of in terms of an intuition into the totality of immediacy of the concrete experience of the non-duality which exists prior to the subject-object relation of judgment;
- Nishida’s tendency to fuse art and religion into an aesthetic religiositas of intuition is noteworthy. Religious experience encompasses subject-object relations by transcending them. In this respect it resembles aesthetic experience since both “the religious” and “the aesthetic” constitute forms of concrete and irreducible subjectivity. The primary world of experience is that of art and religion, experiences that cannot be fully objectified in judgment since each phenomenon stands as a symbol of the concrete unity of the whole. Although this hierarchy of experiential priority and concreteness culminates in the aesthetic - religious, it needs to be noted that, in Nishida’s view, the direction of this culmination lies not in a “transcendence” of concrete experience and historical existence, but rather in a return (emptying) to the immediacy of the experiencing self at the center of all experience and the ground of experiential hierarchies;
- the problem of “the religious” arises existentially from the ego’s experience of relativity and finitude, and the corresponding need for an all embracing unity which acts as ground not only of the unity of knowledge and will (the self) but also the unity of individual consciousness and the universe. Nishida states flatly that this encompassing ground of all is God;
- it should be noted that Nishida’s notion of “ground” betrays certain pantheistic tendencies.

More specifically, Nishida held that

- God and human beings have the same nature;
- the foundation of individual self-consciousness is also the foundation of the universe;
- God is not a transcendent creator outside the universe, but the ground of reality.

True relationship between God and creation is not therefore like that of an artist, but rather like that of an essence to its phenomenon. The universe, in this assessment, is the manifestation of God.

184 Nishida practiced Zen for about ten years.
185 Fredericks, James L., Alterity in the Thought of Tanabe Hajime and Karl Barth, PhD Thesis, University of Chicago, June 1988, pg. 130 - 1
186 The second part of the fourth chapter of Nishida’s maiden work An Inquiry into the Good, is entitled The Essence of Religion
After 1927 Nishida began to move increasingly away from his reliance on categories drawn from the Western philosophical tradition and toward the use of more explicitly Buddhist categories. In his attempt to move beyond the limitations imposed by Kant’s epistemological framework, Nishida came to realize that in order to advance his philosophy of experiential immediacy he would have to break out of the framework imposed by German idealism in the direction of the Buddhist notion of “non-self” and of the Buddhist notion of “nothingness.” With this in mind Nishida introduced the notion of the “place of absolute nothingness” into his philosophy. The emergence of this theme signals a major factor in Nishida’s claim to attention. The notion of basho187 (Jap.: place) was used by Nishida as the basis for articulating a coherent logic with which to express his philosophical creativity, a logic, furthermore, that was suitable for expressing the Buddhist aesthetic, moral and religious experience of the East.

The topos of absolute nothingness is the ultimate “within which” all reality takes place. It can be understood as an alternative to a transcendent determiner of the world as conceptualized, for example, in medieval philosophical notions of God, or Husserl’s transcendental subjectivity. Nishida did use the language of transcendence to explain absolute nothingness, saying it transcended the opposition between being and non-being for example; however, such wording did not indicate any “thing”, “power”, or “consciousness” beyond the world. Absolute nothingness is infinitely determinable; its determinants form the actual world; this “self-determination” occurs “without anything that does the determining”, like an agency without an agent. Rather than a mere absence of being, meaning, or function, absolute nothingness is active and creative in forming the actual world; it awakens to itself through self-awareness. It is the foundation of the world and of the self which is a focal point of the world; it functions through self-negation. It cannot be called “absolute” unless it negates any particular determination of it and simultaneously enfolds them all. It is the universal of universals. Nishida was not able to offer a coherent notion of basho, but these descriptions partially converge to form an undifferentiated whole that includes all its differentiations.

Nishida intended his theory of place or topos to provide a logical foundation for his previous philosophy of experience and self-awareness. To make sense of this theory Nishida drew upon some models, explicitly, for example, Plato’s notion of the receptacle (chora) of ideas in the Timaeus, and Aristotle’s adaptation in his notion of topos in On the Soul, or the notion of fields in quantum electrodynamics and relativity theory. For Nishida, all perceived and conceptualized objects are “in the field of consciousness”. This relates to the logic of universals that serve as predicates: particulars or individuals are placed within universals to specify their difference from other particulars or individuals, and less extensive universals are placed within more extensive ones, until one reaches the ultimate, boundless universal called nothingness. This “transcendental predicate” cannot become the subject matter of any description or proposition in positive terms, but it is ultimately entailed by every specification. Nishida’s absolute nothingness is the place beyond discursive determination.

With the aim of being able to better articulate his logic, Nishida looked to the Buddhist doctrine of absolute nothingness (Jap.: zettai mu), drawing an analogy for Buddhist nothingness from the notion of topos put forward by Plato in the Timaeus. Nishida’s basho takes as its inspiration Plato’s view regarding the emptiness of a relational field within which objects

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187 Rolf Elberfeld, Kitārō Nishida (1870 – 1945), o.c., Ort, pg. 103 - 118
present themselves to consciousness. Nishida, however, did not seek to base his logic on the topos out of which objects appear to the knowing subject, but rather the “place” out of which both the knowing subject and the object arise. Nishida’s basho is neither subjective nor objective but rather the “wherein”\(^\text{188}\) of both subject and object, i.e. the place within which the relation \(S = P\) arises.

The concept of basho represents a significant departure from Kantianism. The logic of place is not a variation of the Kantian notion of the transcendental ego; it is rather a step towards a fundamentally Buddhist understanding of subjectivity. Kant clings to the Greek logic and the notion of the substantial transcendental ego which it implies; Nishida, on the other hand, looks to metaphors drawn from his Buddhist heritage, e.g. the “self-reflecting mirror” of consciousness.

The Buddhist logic of the Mahāyāna tradition is that of the “neither - nor” of the “Middle Path” of the Indian philosopher Nāgārjuna (c. 150 - 250 CE). The Buddhist “true self” is nothingness: neither being nor non-being, neither sameness nor difference. This is a break with Kant because the “true self” is not to be equated with the “non-being” of consciousness (Kant’s Bewußtein überhaupt), but rather with “true nothingness” which is neither a being (that which appears within the field of consciousness) nor non-being (the field of consciousness itself). Kant’s transcendental apperception as the unity of the subject is replaced by the basho that is neither subject nor object.

Nishida’s logic of basho therefore is powered by a dialectic of three moments:

- being;
- non-being;
- absolute nothingness.

Being is determined by the non-being of consciousness in the dualism of subject and object. This dualism, in turn, posits the fundamental self-contradiction of finite consciousness. Absolute nothingness includes both moments in the prior concrete unity of the “place” where the contradictory relation arises. In other words, absolute nothingness is able to encompass both being and non-being in a coincidencia oppositorum - that is to say in an “absolutely contradictory self-identity” in which the standpoint of relative non-being is overcome in favor of absolute nothingness. Absolute nothingness is, in other words, the “place” in which things exist as they themselves are. This absolute nothingness is not opposable to relative nothingness. Instead, true nothingness must be the negation even of negation itself; only in this sense is it absolute nothingness. Similarly, a consciousness emptied of itself such that it can arise unhindered from the basho of absolute nothingness, can reflect objects as they are in themselves.

Nishida’s logic of place is perhaps the most important philosophical contribution to Japanese thought in the modern period. In the final stage of Nishida’s intellectual development this logic serves as a basis for articulating a modern Japanese philosophical interpretation of history, ethics, political life and culture. As a model for the Buddhist doctrine of nothingness the logic of place signals the mature development of the Nishida Tetsugaku (Jap.: Nishida philosophy).

\(^{188}\) Hans Waldenfels, Absolutes Nichts, o.c., pg. 55 - 65
The final stage of Nishida’s career (roughly 1930 to his death in 1945) was devoted to applying the logic to the historical world. Specifically, given the Buddhist doctrine of the “non-self” that underlies the idea of basho for absolute nothingness, it remained for Nishida to account for not only the experience of individual subjectivity, but also to account for creativity and free will. Based on his logic of basho, Nishida developed a thoroughly Buddhist understanding of subjectivity, creativity and free will using the concept of “action-intuition”. Guided first by Buddhism’s misgiving of any understanding of the self as substance, but also by the Buddhist doctrine of dependent co-arising\(^{189}\) (Skt.: pratītya-samutpāda), Nishida argued that individual self-consciousness should be understood as an “action” not an entity.

Nishida observed that “there must be something irrational at the root of reality”. This is not to equate the irrational with the real in an unqualified manner, but rather to claim that while the real is unattainable by reason alone, it remains knowable all the same. As a Western example, Nishida cites Aristotle’s views regarding the irreducible quality of subjectivity, which is to say the logical subject that cannot become a predicate. Guided by his Buddhist interpretation of subjectivity, Nishida speaks of this irrationality at the root of all reality as the immediacy of creative subjectivity itself which transcends the opposition of being and non-being, subject and object, logical subject and predicate. But this exposition is tainted with the traces of a substantial interpretation of the ego, and Nishida prefers to speak of the irrationality at the foundation of reality as the concrete universal (absolute nothingness) which determines itself as the relative. In effect, Nishida’s concrete universal is the logical subject that cannot be a predicate while at the same time it is the logical predicate that includes the subject. Since the foundational structure of reality is not distinguishable from that of the real, true subjectivity is the basho of absolute nothingness.

Nishida’s Mahāyāna dialectic leads to a concrete notion of subjectivity that rejects the “fallacy of misplaced concreteness” of all essentialist interpretations of subjectivity by utterly overcoming the psychological self, i.e. the ego as substance, in favor of the basho out of which both subject and predicate arise in their opposition. Classical Aristotelian logic is reversed: the logical subject is redefined as the concrete immediacy of (pure) experience understood as the self-determining “place” out of which the subject and the object arise. In other words, the subject-object dualism is deconstructed with the logic of the self-identity of absolute contradictories into the “action” of absolute nothingness which is known in an intuition into the ultimate apriority of the concrete universal. This is the metaphysical foundation on which the concept of “action-intuition” rests. Subjectivity is the “action” in which the concrete universal expresses itself in creative, self-determining spontaneity as a particular event of history. The event itself is the self-concentration of the field of absolute nothingness where reality as creative immediacy, that is to say pure experience, reflects and determines itself.

Subjectivity is not only the “action” of the self-determination of the concrete universal, but also an intuition into this creative immediacy, a “seeing” in the topos of true nothingness. This “seeing” is experientially prior to the discriminations of subject-object dualism. It is the “seeing” of the “purely self-reflecting mirror” of the non-discriminating consciousness that arises from the basho of absolute nothingness. It is a “seeing” of the “form of the formless”.

It is simultaneously the subject’s “intuition” into the non-dualistic source of the real, and the “action” of absolute nothingness.

Shifting the focus to the interaction between distinct individuals we find Nishida maintains that the individual as distinct entails a plurality of interrelated individuals. Considering the relation between “I and Thou”\(^{190}\) he tended to intertwine that relation with an internal relation in self-awareness. In his previous analysis of individual self-awareness he described it as a self-reflection of a universal of self-awareness; now he introduces the dimension of recognition. My recognition of you as not me makes me who I am, and your recognition of me as not-you makes you who you are. Each is a relative other to the self. Without the recognition of the absolute other in the self's interior this Hegelian analysis is, however, incomplete. This other does not exclude the self; rather it constitutes self-identity as continually negating what it has been. My personal self-awareness arises not when I recognize my identity through memory, for example, nor simply when I encounter another I; rather it arises in experiencing the groundlessness of my own existence, in recognizing what is absolutely other to a substantial self-same self. Recognizing the absolute other within constitutes not simply a reflexive self-awareness but a self-awakening, a realizing of the “true self.” Nishida allows for the Buddhist view that there is actually no self to awaken by referring to the self-awakening of absolute nothingness; its awakening is the awakening of the “true self.” Absolute nothingness in action, as it were, entails a negation (of a substantial, self-same self) and an affirmation (of the true self). In the manner of self-negation, I am one with you while not being the same as you. Not only between us does a “continuity of absolute discontinuities” obtain, but also within each of us, insofar as our identity is in continual formation. In the end, then, Nishida denies the substantiality of the self and rejects both the radical otherness of other persons and the transcendence of an absolute other, in the guise of God for example.

Eventually Nishida saw that the “I-Thou” relation does not exhaust the discontinuous continuity of our being. We must also take into account the third party, the “He” or relative other who forms at least an implicit reference to every “I-Thou” interaction. Nishida seems intent not so much on explaining otherness, however, as preserving interdependent individuality, which of course still requires difference. He has in mind the individuation of all phenomena but begins with the prototype of individuality, the self-aware human person, who is more concretely an individual than other single living beings, not to speak of individuated atoms or particles at the most abstract level. What determines individuality at the most concrete level is the one historical world that functions dialectically as the place or medium of interaction among innumerable individuals. The world is one - *soku*\(^{191}\) - many, while individuals are many - *soku* - one in their mutual determination. Although he preferred spatial to temporal conceptions, referring to the world as a topos, it is not too far a stretch of Nishida’s language to think of world in a verbal sense as the activity of individuals interacting and mutually determining one another. His wording makes use of the pattern of an undifferentiated whole differentiating or determining itself, in this case as distinct individuals. He tries to reconcile the non-temporal notion of topos or place with the dialectical activity of the world by recalling the structure of self-reflecting or self-mirroring: the world as topos is a kind of

\(^{190}\) Rolf Elberfeld, *Kitarō Nishida, o.c.*, *Ich und Du*, pg. 118 - 131

\(^{191}\) Nishida uses the Buddhist connective *soku* to indicate the relation between one and many and to emphasize an inherent reversibility of that relation: one - *soku* – many; many - *soku* - one.
contradictory self-identity wherein individuals coexist as different and yet equivalent, just as a self-reflecting system mirrors itself within itself in its equivalent but different images.

Toward the end of his life, perhaps thinking of the significance of death for understanding individuality, perhaps re-considering the theme of self-awakening as a kind of death and rebirth, Nishida delved deeper into the relation between the individual finite human self and the absolute or God. In his view, this relation logically defines the place of religion. Experientially it comes to the fore in death. Two aspects are important:

- the meaning of death;
- the nature of God or the absolute in relation to the finite self.

The theme of personal death is absent in Nishida's early work on pure experience and self-awareness. In the last completed essay, “The Logic of the Place of Nothingness and the Religious Worldview” (1945), Nishida is more experiential. Death is not an event at the end of one's life but penetrates life at each and every moment. It is the ever-present opening, so to speak, where one's utter finitude can come to light. Insofar as this is the finitude of the individual self, it also implies a logic of individuation where the role of other relative selves is diminished. “I am myself by knowing my own death” is both a declaration of existential self-awareness and a statement of what makes me uniquely me. What makes me an individual is not merely my differences from others nor my sameness with some essential core; it is precisely what most makes me not me, what negates me, in any moment of action. In this context, death signifies the self-negation of the finite self.

If death is an ever-present opening, the other side of that opening so to speak is the absolute. To die is to stand vis-à-vis the absolute. In the discussion of the “I-Thou” relation, this term appeared as the absolute other in one's interior; here it shifts to the absolute in contra-distinction to finite beings. Nishida calls it God as well, but makes clear that he is not referring to a personal, transcendent being. If transcendence is involved, it is a going beyond by going within. He also implies that it is not synonymous with absolute nothingness. If nothingness as opposed to being is implied, it is in the verbal sense of self-negating. The absolute arises through its own self-negation and inclusion of the relative self. It does not die in the sense that relative beings do, for it embraces all others whereas they by being individual exclude others. God cannot be wholly transcendent to or exclusive of the self or the world. Even Nishida's early work, An Inquiry Into the Good, had spoken of God in a way that undermined the notion of a transcendent being outside the world; it conceived of God as the infinite activity of unification at work behind the articulations of spirit and nature out of pure experience. In the final essay, Nishida admits that his notion of an absolute totally embracing the relative, even in its diabolical forms, is more in tune with a Mahāyāna Buddhist tradition than with the Christian sources that inspired him. To express the relation between a God and the relative finite self, Nishida introduces a new term, “inverse correspondence”. This relation is another instance of opposites held together in a unity, a kind of “self-identity of contradictories,” but this time not a symmetrical one. The more one faces one's death, the negation of one's life as an individual, the more acutely one is self-aware as an individual. The closer the finite self approaches God the stronger the difference between them becomes. This peculiar kind of relation implies that God and the relative self

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192 Nishida Kitarō, Last Writings, o.c., pg. 47 - 123
are inseparable but never dissolve into one another. If their distinction entails an undiffer-
entiorted source of their difference, an absolute nothingness, then the more that source is
emphasized the stronger the distinction holds.

Nishida’s discussion of the absolute and the finite self does not neglect the notion of religion
and its relation to culture and the nation-state. These themes already formed an integral
part of his theory of the historical world but became all the more pressing during WW II. The
concern with death was perhaps as much a political as a personal matter for Nishida, whose
health was quickly failing. In one respect, he distanced himself from his milieu where every-
day life was dominated by an authoritarian state. He focuses on the individual in relation to
an absolute that in no way is subject to an absolutist state. His notion of the essentiality of
religion is remarkably individualistic, removed from all social contingencies. He locates the
core of religion in the heart of the individual: religious awareness arises in one's knowing
one's own death.

On the other hand, Nishida recognizes that religion is a social and cultural phenomenon, and
that the contemporary individual is a subject of a state. He seems however to reverse any
implied priority of culture over religion and state over individual: it is because culture is
religious in its core that we find religion in every culture; and obedience to the nation must
be based on true religious awareness. To be sure, writing under a totalitarian government in
1945, Nishida couches his statements carefully in language that would deter his imprison-
ment on grounds of lèse majesté. He also says, for example, that insofar as the individual self
is historically formed it must be understood as a nationally identified self; and further that it
is selfish merely to seek one's own peace of mind. In the end, Nishida remains ambiguous
about the extent to which individuals are, or should be, formed by the will of the state, and
whether religion can or should criticize the state or society.

Nishida’s paradoxical philosophy of time takes as its starting point that the being of every-
thing in reality has its “presence in time”, in the present, in contrast with the past or the
future. In the present, one is aware of oneself as an individual. This way of being present in
time, where one’s entire being as well as the being of other things is involved, is a fact of
immediacy, from which one begins the search for truth. But this kind of presence is moment-
ary and transitory:

  It appears to be, only to disappear, and disappears, only to let a new present appear.

Being and non-beings are mixed in their very structure. The present, therefore, is a unity of
contradictory moments. Although it is momentary, the present envelops the whole of the
temporal order, because past, present, and future all belong to the present:

  The past is the present of the past, the present is the present of the present, and the future is the present
  of the future.193

All of them are measured from the standard of the present, without which we could never
understand their meaning. So the infinite series of moments in the temporal order, from the
incalculable past to the incalculable future, depends on the momentary present of “here and

193 St. Augustine, Confessions, quoted by Takeuchi Yoshinori, Modern Japanese Philosophy, in: Encyclopedia
Britannica, 1971 ed., vol. 12, pg. 961
now”. The present is the monad of time which represents in itself the infinite span of past-present-future, although it itself belongs to this series as an infinitesimal part of the whole. It follows that the present determines itself. It is the present of the present. From this centre of “self-determination of the present” time flows - flows as it were from the present to the present. It is this quality of time that explains man’s immediate self-consciousness. It is a fact of man’s being and sense of freedom. But this consciousness of being and freedom is closely bound up with the sense of his transiency.

How is it possible that the transient moment, the infinitesimal atom of time, should include in itself the infinite time series? Nishida’s answer is that the present is rooted in the eternal. The eternal reflects itself, and the focus of this self-reflection is the present of the present. In other words, the eternal reflects itself into the present as well as into the past-present-future series.

This clarification of the character of the present as the centre of the “topological” self-determination is Nishida’s contribution to our understanding of time. That the present is eternity is not to be understood as simple identity in an ordinary, albeit mysterious sense. Nishida’s conception of time is more dialectical. To him, the present and eternity are in contradictory opposition to each other, while also the one may be regarded as the other, seeing that they are related to each other through their ultimate self-identity.

While the independent, self-determining individuals relate to each other in the self-determination of the topos of Nothingness, linear time is also made up of the instants in their “identity of contradictories”. Time is thus continuity in discontinuity. Each instant leaping into the next is woven into the creative synthesis of the Eternal Now, and the past-present-future time is a trace left by the creative now.

4.2.2 Influence: The Kyoto School of philosophy

The name “Kyoto School” was apparently used for the first time in 1932 by Tosaka Jun (1900 - 1945), one of Nishida’s students, whose intention it was to denounce a group of philosophers for their, in his view, politically rightist inclinations; it has since become a neutral designation for a loosely defined group of philosophers. In fact, since the Kyoto School members have never founded an officially recognized institution, it has remained a somewhat controversial task to delineate the group. Among Western scholars, John Maraldo’s intention is to show how these criteria have been used in various ways, consciously or unconsciously, since the 1930s to either promote the philosophical significance or disparage the political ideology of the Kyoto School:

- connection with Nishida;
- association with Kyoto University;
- interest in Japanese and Eastern intellectual traditions;
- interest in the interrelated matters of Marxism, the nation state, and the Pacific War;
- interest in Buddhism and the religious in general;
- interest in the notion of Absolute Nothingness.

Quoted in: Davis, Bret W., The Kyoto School, o.c. Maraldo’s intention is to show how these criteria have been used in various ways, consciously or unconsciously, since the 1930s to either promote the philosophical significance or disparage the political ideology of the Kyoto School.
Davis (o.c.) adds two more criteria for membership:

- an essentially *ambivalent* position (i.e., neither simple rejection nor simple acceptance) with respect to Western philosophy and the West in general. For example, Nishida and others undertake a critical reception of Western ontology in order to develop an Eastern *me*-ontology or “logic of Nothingness,” and attempt to combine a Western “logic of things” with an Eastern “logic of heart-mind”;
- an essentially *ambivalent* attitude toward Western modernity, or toward modernization as Westernization. A critical stance toward a unilateral globalization of Western modernity, a stance which at the same time accepts in part its unavoidability and in some respects even affirms its necessity, gave rise to the idea of “overcoming modernity” – an overcoming that would take place not by retreating from Western modernity, but by going through and beyond it.

This *going through and beyond*, moreover, would not simply be a matter of going further down the road of linear progress; it would entail a hermeneutical as well as ultimately a met-ontological and existential regress, a radical “step back.” For the Kyoto School, a critical and creative retrieval of the traditions of the East, those of East Asian Mahāyāna Buddhism in particular, is thought necessary to enable the members of the school to recuperate in a radical way the religious and philosophical resources which they think necessary to move through and beyond the limits and problems of Western modernity. This idea of “overcoming modernity”\(^{196}\) has proven to be both one of the more stimulating and also one of the more controversial aspects of their thought. Because the ideas of “overcoming modernity” developed in conjunction with the wartime political theories of the school’s members, theories which typically saw the nation of Japan as playing a key role in the historical movement through and beyond Western modernity, this has also proven to be one of the more often criticized aspects of their thought. This is true in particular of Tanabe Hajime whose *Logic of the Specific* has been the cause of much criticism both when this theory was published, and after the war when Tanabe modified its metaphysical foundations, thereby raising the degree of abstraction to a higher, safer level.

### 4.2.3 The Nishida - Tanabe debate

Much of Nishida’s - and more so Tanabe Hajime’s - life as an individual and as a philosopher was characterized by a bitter dispute between these two men, one of whom (Nishida) held the chair of philosophy at Kyoto University, while the other (Tanabe) was his subordinate in that same institution - and as it were with nowhere else to go. Whatever the details of this dispute may have been, fact is that two thinkers of extraordinary philosophical quality, and presumably also both having a very strong personality, were dead-locked in an exchange from which they were unable to free themselves, but from which both would ultimately also gain. Their rivalry became public in 1930, the year in which Tanabe published a critical review of Nishida’s philosophy; it lasted until Nishida’s death in 1945 and beyond.

Since the philosophies of both men evolved over time it is not an easy task to define a baseline from which to compare positions. However, Nishida’s last paper, *The Logic of the Place of Nothingness and the Religious Worldview*, can be read as a summary response to the criticism that Tanabe levied against Nishida, while Tanabe’s *Philosophy as Metanoetics*\(^{197}\)

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\(^{196}\) Much ink has been spilled on this subject matter. For a good summary: Minamoto Ryōen, *The Symposium on ‘Overcoming Modernity’*, in: Heisig, James W., John C. Maraldo (ed.), *Rude Awakenings*, University of Hawai’i Press, 1994, pg. 197 – 229, passim

\(^{197}\) Tanabe Hajime, *Philosophy as Metanoetics*, o.c.
and his other postwar publications (1945 - 48) which together make up Tanabe’s mature philosophy, can serve as the reference points for the comparison. Tanabe’s student Takeuchi Yoshinori, who has extensively studied the relationship with Nishida, Nishida’s student Nishitani Keiji, and Heisig who is counted among the most renowned experts on the Kyoto School, think that Tanabe greatly overemphasized his differences with Nishida. In fact, although Tanabe never mentions Nishida by name in Philosophy as Metanoetics there can be no doubt of his lack of respect for his mentor: in this magnum opus Tanabe is less than generous with finding approving words for what can only be references to Nishida’s philosophical positions. I shall come back to this later when I discuss the implications of the notion of zange (Jap.: penitence, repentance, confession) and the distinction which Tanabe makes between “the sages and the saints” on one side, and “the sinners and fools” on the other, the first expression being attributed by Tanabe to Nishida, the latter to himself. Suffice it to say that this distinction is more than just a particular choice of words, and that it refers to a basic difference in the attitude to what is the ultimate, absolute.

According to the summary assessment by Takeuchi Yoshinori the principal positions in which Nishida and Tanabe differ are:

1. Nishida emphasizes action-intuition (self-power, Jap.: jiriki), while Tanabe stresses the significance of action-faith (Other-power, Jap.: tariki) in religious existence;
2. action-intuition presupposes our existence as a creative element in the creative (historical) world. Tanabe thinks of the problem of dialectic only in connection with the historical world. But Nishida’s creative element in the creative world tries to take a vantage point in the historical world, where, in every moment anew, the perspective of the whole can be seen from a different angle. For Tanabe, the road in the historical world is like a blind alley, which with decision and courage one must break through. In a word, against the integrative aspect stressed by Nishida, Tanabe stresses the differential or infinitesimal;
3. for Tanabe, the ethical viewpoint is predominant, and from his ethico-social viewpoint he devoted himself to the study of many religions, seeking to unify the truth of the Buddhist Pure Land and Zen sects as well as the truth of Christianity. The fundamental experience of all of Nishida’s thought, from the beginning to the end, is the immediate realization of Absolute Nothingness, derived from Zen Buddhism.

But these differences must not blind us to the fact that Nishida and Tanabe also share these common standpoints in philosophy:

a) the philosophy of Absolute Nothingness is their common concern in the sense that the absolute must be considered first as absolute nothingness;
b) the essence of philosophy consists in religious action. Their philosophies differ only in how to interpret this action in the realm of philosophical reflection;
c) the paradoxical idea of the Eternal Now, and Nothingness in its function of disjunction-conjunction, are summit points of their philosophies at which both men can agree with one another.

The core of the “disjunction-conjunction” of Tanabe’s dialectic of Absolute Nothingness is a paradox, which he explains with the metaphor of the Bodhisattva’s motions of ōsō (: going up to Amida’s Pure Land) and of gensō (: returning from the Pure Land to this world). In Buddhist Pure Land interpretation, this is to signify that the Bodhisattva, when he is about to become a Buddha himself, finds that the Buddha is absent from his residence, i.e. that the

198 Takeuchi Yoshinori, Modern Japanese Philosophy, o.c., pg. 961
200 Heisig, James W., Philosophers of Nothingness, o.c., pg. 107 ff
room is void. Then the Bodhisattva realizes that the Buddha is now in the world to redeem it, so he returns to the world to cooperate with him. But precisely in this return to the world he finishes in reverse his journey toward the level of becoming a Buddha. Therefore, while on one hand the desideratum of Buddhist eschatology is to reach Buddhahood, on the other hand this is in fact an unattainable goal in the ordinary sense, since Buddhahood is the state in which all our clinging to things is overcome, and there must be an indifference to, or detachment from, even the ideal of becoming a Buddha.

In a similar move, the notion of the eternal now joins the fixed past, the uncertain future, and the present action into a paradoxical web in which the present and eternity are in contradictory opposition to each other, while also the one may be regarded as the other; they are related to each other through their ultimate self-identity, while as independent, self-determining individuals they relate to each other in the self-determination of the topos of Nothingness.

4.2.4 Tanabe Hajime (1885 – 1962)

Tanabe’s mature philosophy is expressed using a language which is shot through with Sino-Japanese terms and Buddhist religious concepts and which therefore is not easily accessible to readers who are not familiar either with Tanabe’s literary output, or with Buddhist philosophy and religious literature in general. As a rule therefore, Tanabe’s texts must be decoded and transposed into a terminology with which western readers are already familiar before their philosophical contents becomes accessible and can be appreciated.

These difficulties result in part from the fact that this Japanese philosopher is hardly known to a non-specialist public in the west. The reasons why this is so include that to date only some selected texts have been translated into one of the western languages201. Another reason would be that his name has been associated with the ultra-nationalistic militarist politics of his country before and during WW II, and this has tarnished his reputation as a philosopher. Despite of all this, it can however not be denied that Tanabe is one of the founding members of the renowned Kyoto School of Philosophy202. The other two most prominent members of this School are Nishida Kitarō (1870 - 1945) and Nishitani Keiji (1900 - 1990). Together these three thinkers have initiated an active dialogue between Eastern and Western philosophical traditions. There may be room for discussion about what the ultimate reason for this initiative may have been; opinions in the west seem to float between mere curiosity on one side and a hidden political agenda on the other203. These men, and also the other members of the School - individually and as a group - have in Heisig’s assessment offered contributions to world philosophy that broaden the scope from what traditionally was a Eurocentric204 enterprise. In an attempt to crystallize the essence of their contribut-

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201 A list of translations is included at the end in the list of the consulted literature.
202 For a definition of the Kyoto School of Philosophy: James W. Heisig, Philosophers of Nothingness, o.c.. Heisig’s interest is focused on Nishida, Tanabe, and Nishitani. Bret W. Davis, Introducing the Kyoto School as World Philosophy - Reflections on James W. Heisig’s 'Philosophers of Nothingness’, The Eastern Buddhist, vol. 3 4/2, 2002, pg. 142 – 170. Here: pg. 144 – 5, provides some more detail on what might be called the extent and the fringes of this group of philosophers.
203 Nishitani and Tanabe have both actively contributed to the notorious symposium on “Overcoming Modernity”. Cf.: Minamoto Ryōen, o.c.
204 Rolf Elberfeld, o.c., pg. 21 – 52, passim
ions and to condense it into one term, Heisig has introduced the notion of Absolute Nothingness as the key concept to understanding the basic concern of the Kyoto School. Suffice it to say that as a philosophical concept this Absolute Nothingness is radically different from mainstream metaphysical conceptions in the West. Used as a starting-point for analyzing reality it offers fundamentally new perspectives on some of the perennial metaphysical problems which have been of concern to Eastern and Western philosophers alike. Clearly, this notion of Absolute Nothingness represents a radical change of paradigm and for this reason requires that many of the basic philosophical thought processes need to be scrutinized and also revised in the light of this new notion. Tanabe’s philosophy is no exception to this challenge. It is his merit that in confronting many well established western philosophers, starting with Plato and Aristotle and through to Kant, Hegel, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and many more, he not only levies severe criticism but also offers new insights from a vantage point that had hitherto been neglected in the west.

This paper is not and cannot be the place to address the significance of the Kyoto School and its contribution to the evolution of world philosophy; but even as I restrict myself to Tanabe alone I am still confronted with the problematic of his life and career. Leaving all concerns related to his political entanglements to one side, biographers stress that two factors have influenced his professional life more than any other:

- his strained personal relation with Nishida Kitarō;
- the politically unwise presentation of his Logic of the Specific.

As a young student Tanabe entered the department of natural sciences of Tokyo Imperial University, specializing in mathematics, but after one year he switched to philosophy, graduating in 1908. Five years later he was appointed lecturer in the department of natural sciences at Tōhoku Imperial University where he concentrated on the fundamental problems of science. His publications from that time show that he had kept an interest in mathematics and logic. Philosophically he was attracted by the German neo-Kantianism of Paul Natorp (1854 - 1924) and of Hermann Cohen (1842 - 1918) in Marburg, but at the same time he also valued the work of Heinrich Rickert (1863 - 1936) in Freiburg. His project was to rethink Kant’s transcendental logic in the light of Husserl’s phenomenology, Bergson’s vitalism, and the ideas of Nishida Kitarō. In 1919 Nishida invited Tanabe to take up the post of assistant professor of philosophy at Kyoto Imperial University. In 1922 Tanabe received a grant from Japan’s Ministry of Education to study in Germany. After he had spent a year working

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205 Heisig, Philosophers of Nothingness, passim
206 In section 3.4.2 I have already introduced this notion as a counter concept to Being, i.e. the Being of beings. For an analysis of the relevance of this concept for the Kyoto School: Hans Waldensfels, Nothingness - Preliminary Considerations on a Central Notion in the Philosophy of Nishida Kitarō and the Kyoto School, Monumenta Nipponica, vol. 21, no. 3 & 4, pg. 354 - 391
207 Cf. Heisig, o.c., pg. 107 ff. A list of additional references that provide details on Tanabe’s life and career is available at the end of this paper.
208 Nishida was Tanabe’s predecessor in the chair of philosophy of Kyoto University. Probably dating back to the time after Tanabe returned to Japan from a two-year stay in Germany (1922 - 1924), Tanabe and Nishida developed an increasingly strained personal relationship which shortly after Nishida had retired from his duties culminated in an open critique of the latter’s philosophy, something which in the traditions of Japan was most extraordinary: a disciple would under no circumstances ever criticize his superior or master (Jap.: sensei).
209 Michiko Yusa, Philosophy and Inflation - Miki Kiyoshi in Weimar Germany, 1922 - 1924, Monumenta Nipponica, vol. 53, 1998, pg. 45 - 71. This paper mentions Tanabe and also gives a good account of the conditions prevailing in Germany while Tanabe stayed there.
under Alois Riehl (1844 - 1924) in Berlin, he left for Freiburg to work close to Husserl (1859 - 1938) whose phenomenology seemed to him to hold much promise. However, it soon became clear to him that Husserl would not respond to his high expectations; disenchanted Tanabe turned his attention to the young Heidegger210 (1889 - 1976) who had just been appointed professor in Marburg. Heidegger tutored Tanabe privately in German philosophy. This was the beginning of a lifelong friendship. When Tanabe returned to Japan in 1924, anxious to continue his own work, he became immediately saddled by Nishida with the request to prepare a memorial lecture to mark Kant’s two-hundredth birthday. In the course of this work he made a clean break with the epistemological muddle of neo-Kantianism and with the dogmatism of German Idealism. Thereafter Nishida made Tanabe lecture for two years on Hegel’s Encyclopaedia, and for another thirteen years on the Phenomenology of Spirit. During that time Tanabe came to recognize the importance of the element of dialectic in the thought of Hegel and for his own thought process. From this grew what was to become an original contribution to the Kyoto School philosophy, the Logic of the Specific. In 1927 Tanabe was named full professor, following Nishida in the chair when he retired from his duties at the university in the following year. By that time the lingering presence of his predecessor was weighing heavily on Tanabe. When in 1930 Nishida published his System of the Self-awareness of the Universal, Tanabe took that as an occasion to put an essay to press fitted with the ambiguous title Looking Up to Nishida’s Teaching. Nishida was disappointed and offended, and as time went by his relationship with Tanabe deteriorated until almost all personal contact was broken. This is not to say that they did not continue to learn from their differences, and as a result both went on to sharpen their respective views. When after Nishida’s death in 1945 his Complete Works were published, Nishida’s correspondence with Tanabe was omitted; it took specific pressures from the academic community to have these letters, over one hundred in total, included in a later edition. Tanabe retired from Kyoto University in 1945 because of bad health and moved to Kita-Karuizawa into a small cottage where he had been accustomed to spending his summer vacations. It was from there that he would put the finishing touches on a philosophy which he had worked out during the war years and which culminated in issuing a call for a metanoesis of the Japanese people. He also worked out his final thoughts on a philosophy of death. In 1952 Tanabe received the cultural order of merit from the Japanese government, being the only philosopher since Nishida to receive it. In 1957 he was recommended by Heidegger to the University of Freiburg for an honorary doctorate, which he received in absence due to his failing health. In the spring of 1962 Tanabe died at the age of seventy seven.

Tanabe’s Collected Works211 have been published in 1963. Johannes Laube212 identifies phases of the intellectual evolution of Tanabe’s thought as follows:

210 Cf.: Japan und Heidegger - Gedenkschrift der Stadt Meßkirch zum hundertsten Geburtstag Martin Heideggers, Hartmut Buchner (ed.), Jan Thorbecke Verlag, 1989. Included in this commemorative volume that was published at the occasion of Heidegger’s one hundredth birthday, we have a range of documents that explicate the multifaceted relationship which Tanabe and Heidegger had. Noteworthy are: Tanabe Hajime, Die neue Wende in der Phänomenologie - Heideggers Phänomenologie des Lebens (1924), Tanabe Hajime, Philosophie der Krise oder Krise der Philosophie? Zu Heideggers Rektoratsrede (1933), and: Freiburger Ehrendoktor für Tanabe Hajime (1957) by another author. The first of Tanabe’s two essays had been written with the intention of introducing Heidegger’s philosophy to Japan. After Tanabe returned from Germany Nishida did not help him to follow this initiative, but instead directed him to do other work. The second essay is a critical assessment of what is one of Heidegger’s most controversial publications. A paper by Elmar Weinmayr, Denken im Übergang - Kitarō Nishida und Martin Heidegger, also included in the volume, shows that Heidegger must have been aware of the work of Nishida and of Eastern nothingness, even though he himself never openly admitted this.

- 1915: publication of a book on the philosophy of the natural sciences based on neo-Kantianism;
- 1924: a study of Kant’s teleology marking his nascent dissatisfaction with neo-Kantianism;
- 1932: a commemorative paper on the occasion of the one hundredths anniversary of Hegel’s death;
- 1934-46: publication of a series of 8 paper in which Tanabe exposes his “Logic of the Specific”;
- 1946-48: publication of Tanabe’s mature philosophy, including Philosophy as Metanoetics;
- 1949-52: publication of Introduction to Philosophy (Jap.: tetsugaku nyūmon). Laube uses this work as the basis for his exposition of Tanabe’s philosophy;
- about 1960-2: two papers concerning a philosophy of death.

There seems to be a consensus amongst biographers that Tanabe’s single most important contribution to philosophy and to the building of the Kyoto School has been his Logic of the Specific, albeit in its final form as published 1947 under the title of The Dialectics of the Logic of the Specific. Unfortunately however, to date only one of Tanabe’s many publications, i.e. Philosophy as Metanoetics\(^{213}\), has been translated in full, while we merely have some sparse partial translations of the rest of Tanabe’s other authorship. A list of what is available in western languages has been compiled as part of the bibliography at the end of this paper and can also be found in the internet\(^{214}\). In what is to follow I shall restrict myself to these aspects of Tanabe’s literary output:

- the Logic of the Specific of which Tanabe claims that it is the philosophical basis of his religious philosophy;
- Philosophy as Metanoetics;
- his criticism of the philosophies of Hegel and of Kierkegaard\(^{215}\).

The material for this study can be found in a series of five books that were printed between 1946 and ‘48 and in which Tanabe published the results of his wartime philosophical thoughts. As Valdo Viglielmo\(^{216}\) notes there is some confusion about the chronology of when these works went to press because the order in which Tanabe wrote them does not coincide with the order in which they were published:

- Philosophy as Metanoetics, published April 1946
- The Dialectic of the Logic of the Specific, published November 1947;
- The Dialectics of Christianity, published June 1948;
- Christianity, Marxism, and Japanese Buddhism, published June 1948 as an appendix to The Dialectics of Christianity.

As this listing indicates, Tanabe’s interests covered a broad range of social and religious issues which in his view were all somehow connected and interwoven. This has to do with how he understood the role of philosophy to be, which is to function as

\(^{212}\) Laube, Johannes, Dialektik der absoluten Vermittlung - Hajime Tanabes Religionsphilosophie als Beitrag zum ‘Wettstreit der Liebe’ zwischen Buddhismus und Christentum, Herder, 1984, pg. 19

\(^{213}\) Tanabe Hajime, Philosophy as Metanoetics, translated by Takeuchi Yoshinori, University of California Press, 1986

\(^{214}\) Cumulative list of writings of major Kyoto-school thinkers available in western languages: http://www.nanzan-u.ac.jp/SHUBUNKEN/projects/Sourcebook/KS_texts.pdf

\(^{215}\) I thank Prof. Viglielmo of the University of Hawai’i at Manoa for making a partial translation of Tanabe’s Existence, Love, and Praxis available to me by way of a private communication.

... a reflection on what is ultimate and as a radical self-awareness\textsuperscript{217}.

But this is not all. Traditionally Japanese philosophy has been used politically as a tool to support what best suited the perceived needs of Japanese government leaders and advisers. One instantiation of such an attempt to use philosophy as a support instrument for government policy has been the institution of the notorious \textit{Chūōkōron Discussions}\textsuperscript{218} in which Tanabe and other well known philosophers were tasked to justify the wartime politics of Japan. Part of the background to this demand by the authorities is that Tanabe had for a number of years been concerned about the way in which Japanese intellectuals had been attracted by leftist and Marxist political theory. Tanabe’s assessment was that none of the imported western political theories, Marxism and Democracy, would serve the needs of the Japanese people, and that it was his duty as a philosopher to develop a specifically Japanese alternative that would retain what was good in western thought while avoiding what was of no use\textsuperscript{219}. In Tanabe’s view there was no other way to achieve this aspiration than to form an amalgamation of inputs taken from Christianity, Marxist theory, and from Japanese Buddhism, using the \textit{Logic of the Specific} as the method of choice for this analysis.

As he gradually developed his logic Tanabe criticized Nishida’s Logic of \textit{basho}, proposing two basic modifications:

- he questioned the implicit assumption that a totally unmediated experience, the acting-intuition, is possible;
- he held Nishida’s system to be too simplistic in postulating a direct relationship between the individual and the universal without the mediation of culture or society.

We now know that Tanabe’s \textit{Logic of the Specific} has been worked out in two different forms, one which he published in a series of 7 papers between 1936 and 1942, and another revised version which he published 1947. Starting point was Tanabe’s belief that we cannot truly understand the dialectical development of thought and value through history if we do not take ethnicity and nationality into account. The area of human activity is the social realm - not the unmediated realm of the acting-intuiting, and also not the abstracted realms of intellectual philosophical positions like idealism or empiricism.

Tanabe referred to the level of the transcendent universal, which has not been conceptually particularized, as the level of \textit{genus}. Below this \textit{genus} is the level of \textit{species}, and below that the level of \textit{individual}. In social terms, the level of \textit{genus} applies to humankind as a whole, the source of absolute values for ethics, and the spiritual basis for the state. The logic of the individual, on the other hand, applies to epistemological judgment and to the basis of individual creativity. The \textit{Logic of the Specific} lies sandwiched between these two layers. It applies to particularized ethnic, cultural, and national values. Tanabe’s thesis is that the actual lived experience of human action cannot be explained without mediation of that middle realm.

As Tanabe observed the developments in Japan during the ultra-nationalist and militarist period, he began to include into his logic an explicit system of self-criticism which, however, he did not dare publishing until after the war. The central notion of the ensuing modificat-

\textsuperscript{217} Tanabe Hajime, \textit{Philosophy as Metanoetics}, pg. I
\textsuperscript{218} Horio Tsutomu, \textit{The Chūōkōron Discussions, Their Background and Meaning}, in: James W. Heisig, John C. Maraldo (ed.), \textit{Rude Awakenings}, o.c., pg. 289 - 315
\textsuperscript{219} Tanabe Hajime, \textit{Philosophy as Metanoetics}, pg. xlix
ions was the philosophical concept of *zange* (Jap.: *penitence, repentance, confession*) that Tanabe himself translated as *metanoia*, and which is a philosophical and personal sense of repentance and conversion that leads one to question the absoluteness of any philosophical system that one has devised. Essentially the dynamic of the *Logic of the Specific* is to serve as the dialectical mediation between the totalitarianism of the genus and the liberalism of the individual. From the genus the species derives a sense of absolute transcendent values applicable to all mankind; from the individual, the species derives the pragmatic concerns of working toward the particular benefit of one’s fellow individuals. The nation, indeed the collective or personal activity of any human endeavor, can therefore never speak with the authority of the absolute; on the other hand, no such endeavor can ever be truly individual either, because all expression is enmeshed in the social. Once again, the realm of human activity is not that of fixed being, but that of Buddhist mediation, interdependence and a dialectical tension that deconstructs any system as soon as it makes its claim to be either absolute or individualistic.

What can only be called a politically unwise because equivocal and ambiguous presentation of what many consider to be his most important contribution to philosophy, the “*Logic of the Specific*”, had serious consequences for the post-war reception of Tanabe’s oeuvre in Japan and in the US. Johannes Laube provides a summary\(^{220}\) of how this theory was presented over time. In essence the *Logic of the Specific* is a criticism of the role accorded by Aristotle to the category of the species in the triplet of

- individual;
- species (particular);
- genus (universal).

For Aristotle the species was an intermediate term with no function of its own other than to bridge the distance between the individual and the genus, since all what makes an individual is already somehow contained in the genus. Tanabe rescinded this view and accorded the species a new role of its own. The background is this: already as a young professor he had devoted himself to the problems of society. This activity had resulted in the insight that from a formalistic point of view only the specific as a mediating term could explain the irrational elements in history while at the same time serving the purpose of maintaining a clear focus on the ethnical uniqueness of the Japanese people. Since the end of the war much ink has been spilled in the US and elsewhere to discuss what Tanabe’s political intentions may have been at the time when he first published this Logic. What seems to be certain is that he on the one hand had been very abstract in his wording, giving too much room to interpretation and also misunderstandings, while on the other he would not react to such abuse in public, possibly because he was afraid of the political terror that was ubiquitous and which he feared. After the war he was still convinced that his Logic was essentially correct and that it was a means, his means, to reconstruct reality. In an effort to avoid his earlier mistakes Tanabe gave his logic a new, now purely metaphysical interpretation, leaving all reference to Japan to one side. This revised version of the *Logic of the Specific* is basic to Tanabe’s post-war philosophy.

With these qualifications in mind I can now turn to what is considered to be Tanabe’s mature metanoetic philosophy. I shall start with a summary of Philosophy as Metanoetics. According to Odin\textsuperscript{221}, this book is

one of the most original, creative, and important philosophical texts to have emerged from the “Kyoto School” of philosophy.

It is one book in that series of five publications\textsuperscript{222} which together summarize and explicate Tanabe’s thoughts as they have ripened during the time of the Great Pacific War (1941 - 1945). According to Viglielmo\textsuperscript{223} this book and *The Dialectic of the Logic of the Specific*\textsuperscript{224} are the two most important ones from that period. The topic and intention of Philosophy as Metanoetics are twofold. On the one hand Tanabe investigates the reasons why his philosophy has failed him when he was most in need of it. To this end he searches the writings of a range of western philosophers with a view to identify to what extent his adopting their positions may have been the root cause for his own dilemma. In a profound analysis he criticizes not only Kant, but also Hegel, whose philosophical genius he much admired, and Kierkegaard who had influenced him most. Not surprisingly Tanabe finds his starting point in the Kantian antinomies of pure reason. This leads him into a sustained analysis and criticism of not only Kant, but also of Hegel, whose philosophical genius he much admired, and of Kierkegaard who had influenced him most, but whom he nevertheless severely criticized, and of many other western philosophers. The other one of Tanabe’s intentions was to help his fellow citizens to overcome the national tragedy into which they individually and collectively as a people had fallen. His proposal was to build an existential community of individuals who had undergone a process of inward repentance, awakening, conversion and transformation and who by virtue of this process could fend off the errors of the past. He called this utopian society an existentialist *communio sanctorum*.

The philosophy of the work can briefly be summarized as follows. Throughout the text Tanabe elaborates a thought process which straddles the borderline between metaphysics and religion. Starting from an existential basis it combines the Pure Land Buddhist teachings of Shinran Shōnin\textsuperscript{225} with a critical analysis of the thought of Eckhart, Kant, Schelling, Hegel, Pascal, Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and Nishida Kitarō, who seems to be always present although he is never mentioned. Tanabe’s discussion of these various thinkers, elaborated in the course of formulating his own highly original thought matrix, is so rich and multi-nuanced that there can simply be no way to do other than to highlight some of the salient moments.

At the outset of the book, Tanabe introduces “metanoesis” (zange, Jap.: penitence, repentance, confession), or “metanoetics” (zangedō\textsuperscript{226}), as the master concept of his philosophical system. By the term “metanoesis” Tanabe essentially means the salvific experience of

\textsuperscript{221} In what follows I shall be indebted to Steve Odin, *Tanabe Hajime. Philosophysas as Metanoetics, Book Review*, in: *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, 14/4, pg. 337 – 343. Odin is professor of philosophy at the University of Hawai‘i. His essay is the most comprehensive and in-depth review of Tanabe’s work that I could find.

\textsuperscript{222} See list of translations at the end of this paper.

\textsuperscript{223} Viglielmo, Valdo H., *An Introduction to...*, o.c., pg. 781– 2

\textsuperscript{224} Note 22. Of this book only isolated sections have been translated.

\textsuperscript{225} Note 7.

\textsuperscript{226} Japanese word for: the way of zange
repentance, conversion, awakening, and transformation through the grace of absolute "Other-power" (Jap.: tariki). Influenced by the teachings of Jesus on the one side, and Shinran on the other, Tanabe underscores the literal meaning of metanoësis as an act of “repentance” whereby a full confession of one’s prior sins is accompanied by an attitude of sincere penitence. He writes:

Metanoësis (zange) signifies repentance for the wrongs I had done, with the accompanying torment of knowing that there is no way to expiate my sins (pg. li)

However, for Tanabe, “repentance” as the painful recollection of one’s past sins accompanied by a feeling of deep remorse itself signifies only the negative aspect of zange or metanoësis, in that the experience of metanoia also involves a positive aspect, namely, that of conversion and transformation:

This affirmative aspect of zange, as opposed to its negative aspect, is conversion (transformation). Hence the term “metanoia” (Gr.: μετάνοια) can, as I have stated before, imply both conversion and repentance. (pg. 6)

By the act of metanoësis one therefore undergoes at once both negation and affirmation through absolute transformation, such that the two aspects of pain, of zange in its negative aspect as repentance, and the joy, of zange in its positive aspect as conversion or awakening, mutually interpenetrate each other (pg. 5 - 7). In this way repentance is the negative aspect of zange which signifies the moment of death or self-negation while conversion is the positive aspect of zange which designates the moment of resurrection or self-affirmation. In other words, the repentance of zange involves an existential encounter with the radical evil and sin which negates the ego’s right to exist at its very core, leading to metanoia as a discipline of death that lets go of the self. Yet, this experience of complete self-negation or self-abandonment which arises in the negative aspect of zange as repentance is itself followed by its positive aspect as conversion or awakening, wherein the ego is brought by the transformative grace of absolute Other-power to undergo total death-and-resurrection in order to be restored to its real yet non-substantial existence as “being-qua”-nothingness” or “empty being”. This is a reference to Nāgārjuna’s concepts of “nothingness” and “emptiness” (Skt.: śūnyatā).

Tanabe continuously emphasizes the moral dimension of metanoëtics as underscored by his use of the two Pure Land Buddhist categories of “ōsō”, or “going toward” the Pure Land, and “gensō”, or “returning to” this world from the Pure Land. While Zen, Nishida-tetsugaku228, and other forms of “ordinary mysticism” based on contemplation or intellectual intuition emphasize the aspect of “going toward” the Pure Land, Tanabe’s philosophy of metanoëtics follows the Pure Land Buddhism of Shinran in focusing on the aspect of gensō, “returning to” this world from the Pure Land. In Tanabe’s words:

If I may introduce at this point two key concepts characteristic of the teachings of the Pure Land sect of Shin Buddhism - ōsō or “going toward” the Pure Land, and gensō or “returning to” this world from the Pure

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227 Qua is one of the several translations for the Japanese copula soku, which literally means namely, that is to say, or immediately, instantly, at once. In Buddhist philosophy soku is used to express a connection between two attributes which ordinarily could not be linked because they are logical contradictions.

228 Nishida-tetsugaku is the word used by Tanabe to designate the philosophy of Nishida Kitarō. Here tetsugaku is the Japanese word for philosophy.
Land - metanoetics may be described as a philosophy of action following the path of gensō, while ordinary mysticism may be described as contemplative speculation following the path of ōsō. The doctrine of gensō is thus of special significance in enabling metanoetics to bring about a revival of philosophy. (pg. 3)

It is precisely this doctrine of gensō which establishes the profound social and historical directions of ethical transformation in Tanabe’s philosophy of metanoetics. This moral dimension is further highlighted when Tanabe speaks of a

self-consciousness of the Great Nay-qua-Great Compassion, or nothingness-qua-love, as the core of metanoetics. (pg. 256)

While many thinkers in the “Kyoto School” of philosophy such as Nishida Kitarō, Hisamatsu Shin’ichi (1889 – 1980), Ueda Shizuteru (1926 - ), and Abe Masao are essentially based in the “self-power” (Jap.: jiriki) tradition of Zen Buddhism, Tanabe and his disciple Takeuchi Yoshinori (1913 – 2002) are based more in the “Other-power” (Jap.: tariki) tradition of Shinran’s True Pure Land sect of Buddhism. In particular, Tanabe states that central to the development of Philosophy as Metanoetics was his encounter with Shinran’s Kyō-gyō-shin-shō (pg. lviii). This Japanese sequence literally translates as: doctrine-action-faith-witness. Tanabe never explains what these words actually stand for; however, given the context in which this compound is used one can construe that what Shinran may have had in mind was a process such as this: Initially the faithful hears and accepts for himself the metaphysical doctrine about reality which the teacher gives to him. This acceptance enables him to avoid the sin of clinging to being and to experience reality immediately and as it ultimately is. Accepting this experience in good faith and interpreting it according to the doctrine, he understands the truth of the doctrine and can now witness to this experience in the front of others, thereby helping them to acquire the doctrine for themselves.

Tanabe follows traditional Japanese Buddhism as well as the modern Japanese philosophy of Nishida Kitarō in articulating ultimate reality as “absolute nothingness”. However, against Zen Buddhism and Nishida-tetsugaku, Tanabe argues that absolute nothingness can never immediately be grasped through the self-power activity of intellectual intuition based on reason, and instead asserts that true absolute nothingness is the transcendent ground of a transformative grace that breaks in upon the self from without as “Other-power”. Tanabe’s polemic here is that the self-power activity of intellectual intuition grasps only absolute being, whereas true absolute nothingness only appears in the act of metanoesis through the mediation of Other-power. Accordingly for Tanabe, a primary meaning of metanoetics is precisely that it transcends the self-power activity of contemplation or intellectual intuition that characterizes “ordinary mysticism” and that metanoetics is instead based on the transformative grace of absolute Other-power. In Tanabe’s words:

“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 ... Here we have a very important characteristic by which metanoetics is distinguished from ordinary mysticism or philosophies of intellectual intuition: it is not a philosophy founded on the intuitive reason of jiriki (self-power), but rather a philosophy founded on action-faith-witness (gyō-shin-shō) mediated by the transformative power of tariki (Other-power). (pg. 2 – 3)

Hence, metanoetics in its sense as meta-noetics represents a transition from the standpoint of self-power, in Zen Buddhism and other forms of ordinary mysticism based on intellectual intuition, to that of Other-power as espoused by Shinran’s Pure Land sect of Buddhism.
In short, my metanoesis - my conversion - consists in a shift from *jiriki* to *tariki*. Put in positive terms, metanoetics represents the philosophy of Other-power. (pg. 11)

Yet, at the same time Tanabe’s position is far more subtle than this, insofar as metanoetics represents a dialectic of “absolute mediation” which functions to correlate both self-power and Other-power, or relative being and absolute nothingness, in each and every act of *zange*. He describes this convergence of self-power and Other-power in the act of *zange* or metanoesis as follows:

Metanoesis is action performed by the self, but at the same time it is the practice of abandoning self. Hence it originates in the Great Compassion of Other-power. Nevertheless, it is actually the self that submits itself voluntarily to Other-power and performs this action. Paradoxically, metanoesis both is and is not an action of the self. As mediated by absolute nothingness, it is action without an acting self. (pg. 170 - 1)

It is precisely this correlation of self-power and Other-power in the act of metanoesis which Tanabe refers to as *jiriki* - *qua* - *tariki* (: self-power - *qua* - Other-power) and *tariki* – *qua* – *jiriki*. In his own words:

Only the dialectic of reciprocal mediation can bring about self-consciousness of the fact that the real grace of Other-power is activated through the spontaneous freedom of self-power, and conversely, that the realization of human freedom in self-power becomes possible only through the assistance of Other-power. By means of this dialectic we are able to understand *jiriki* – *qua* – *tariki* and *tariki* – *qua* – *jiriki*. (pg. 184)

According to Tanabe, then, the radical self-negation of metanoesis is prompted from without by the Other-power of absolute nothingness which transcends the self: the self thereby acts while being acted upon. On the one side the grace of Other-power is manifest only in and through a free act of self-power, while on the other side a free act of self-power brings forth, as well as depends upon, the inflowing grace of absolute Other-power.

In his effort to uncover the limitations inherent in the self-power function of intellectual intuition achieved by the use of reason, Tanabe develops a logic of metanoetics, in terms of what he calls “absolute critique”, which is based on Kant’s critique of pure reason together with the Hegelian counter critique (pg. 36 – 57). According to Tanabe, the Kantian critique of pure reason is incomplete, insofar as it endeavors to expose the self-contradictions or antinomies of pure reason, while at the same time trying to justify reason by establishing its relative competence through critique (pg. 43). Although Hegel agreed with Kant that pure reason generates self-contradictions, he went on to try and overcome these antinomies of pure reason through a dialectic of synthesis based on the self-identity of contradictions. However, in refutation of Kant’s position, Tanabe argues that pure reason is not qualified to criticize itself, such that the reason which performs the critique must itself be subjected to a thoroughgoing criticism. Moreover, against Hegel, he argues that pure reason cannot overcome antinomies through the sublation (Ger.: *Aufhebung*) of opposites using a dialectic of synthesis based on the self-identity of contradictions. Tanabe demonstrates that both

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229 The double sequence of *jiriki* - *qua* - *tariki* and of *tariki* - *qua* - *jiriki* is to indicate that the two terms in this relation, *jiriki* or self-power, and *tariki* or Other-power, are logically equivalent in the sense that *jiriki* is at the same time also *tariki*, and vice versa. Since by definition *jiriki* is the exact opposite of *tariki*, these expressions must be understood to imply that both are equivalent because both are empty, without substance, and only fleeting phenomena, while ultimate reality is absolute nothingness, emptiness, śūnyatā.

230 This seems to invoke a problematic of human free will and its relationship with transcendent grace, which, however, Tanabe does not work out in detail and in parallel to a Christian/Western perception of the problem.
Kantian criticism and Hegelian dialectic are based on the self-power function of pure reason. Through an absolute critique, however, pure reason based on self-power must “die” by yielding to its self-contradiction, so that it can be reborn as a new philosophy of metanoetics realized through the transformative grace of absolute nothingness or Other-power. Through the death or self-negation of pure reason achieved by means of an absolute critique, philosophy as metanoetics discovers a transcendent ground beyond itself in the Other-power of absolute nothingness. The self-power of pure reason can thus find itself only in and through Other-power. That is to say, only through the grace of Other-power can pure reason criticize itself and understand its true nature. The death-and-resurrection of pure reason results in the realization of jiriki - qua - tariki (self-power - qua - Other-power) and tariki - qua - jiriki as expressed by the dialectic of absolute mediation:

Viewed as the capacity for death-and-resurrection, reason is a function of jiriki - qua - tariki, established in the transformation and mediation of obedience to Other-power and arriving at a manifestation of absolute nothingness. (pg. 107)

Throughout Philosophy as Metanoetics it is evident that Tanabe’s dialectic of absolute mediation has been profoundly influenced by Hegel’s dialectic, insofar as it repudiates any idea of an “unmediated” absolute which is thought to exist independently of or transcendently to the relative events of history. Yet, at the same time, Tanabe’s work represents a sustained critique of Hegel’s abstract logic of “self-identity” based on the principle of “both - and” 231 from the standpoint of Kierkegaard’s existential logic of “absolute paradox” based on the principle of “neither - nor”. Moreover, it is clear from Tanabe’s writings that he associates Zen Buddhism, Nishida-tetsugaku, and other forms of ordinary mysticism relying on the self-power of intellectual intuition, with the abstract Hegelian logic of self-identity based on the principle of both - and. In contrast to this, Tanabe asserts that the logic of absolute critique governing his own philosophy of metanoetics is essentially related to Kierkegaard’s dialectic of absolute paradox based on the principle of neither - nor. According to Tanabe, while the Hegelian logic of self-identity attempts to reconcile all contradictions in what he calls sublation, and thereby to eliminate the paradoxical nature of reality, in his own logic of absolute paradox as influenced by Kierkegaard, contradictory opposites are never abrogated or sublated, but are left just as they are. Moreover, while the Hegelian logic of self-identity endeavors to synthesize all contradictions with pure speculative reason, Tanabe follows Kierkegaard’s dialectic of absolute paradox which is based on the standpoint of faith. He therefore writes:

This is why Kierkegaard sets up his own practical and paradoxical dialectic in opposition to Hegel’s speculative and intellectual one. As the logic of my metanoetics, absolute critique follows precisely the same course as that of Kierkegaard’s practical and paradoxical dialectic; and as a self-consciousness in action-faith, it is similar to his standpoint of faith. (pg. 57)

Tanabe argues that it is ultimately this logic of absolute paradox, based on the principle of neither - nor, which alone can express the dynamics of inwardly subjective faith operative in Christianity as well as in Shinran’s Pure Land sect of Buddhism. However, Tanabe elsewhere argues that his logic of absolute paradox expresses more than the dynamics of faith in Pure Land Buddhism; it also articulates the structure of true Zen Buddhism. His polemic here is

231 Tanabe also uses the Latin expression of „et - et“. He compares this to the Marxist form of an “aut - aut” (either this or that), and the Kierkegaardian form of a “nec - nec” (neither this nor that) dialectic.
that only a logic of absolute paradox can grasp the contradictory nature of reality expressed by the Zen Buddhist kōans, including both the paradoxical, that is unsolvable antinomies, studied by Rinzai Zen, and Dōgen’s idea of the Sōtō Zen that we can “realize reality as a kōan” (pg. 126 – 128). Metanoetics is therefore a “total kōan” rooted in the paradoxical nature of ultimate reality itself (pg. 128). Insofar as Tanabe’s logic of absolute paradox expresses the contradictory structure of reality as realized through both Zen and Pure Land Buddhism, he characterizes his philosophy of metanoetics as “Nembutsu Zen”. He writes:

In essence, metanoetics is a synthesis of the standpoints of nembutsu and Zen Buddhism, a sort of “Nembutsu-Zen”. (pg. 222)

An outstanding aspect of Philosophy as Metanoetics is Tanabe’s sustained critique of the philosophy of Nishida Kitarō. Although he never mentions Nishida by name, it is clear from the distinct technical vocabulary used in the text that Tanabe undoubtedly refers to Nishida’s key philosophical notions. At the deepest level, Tanabe opposes Nishida’s logic of the “self-identity of absolute contradictories” with his own “Logic of the Specific” as based on a dialectic of “absolute mediation”. Tanabe insists that his own philosophy of metanoetics follows Kierkegaard’s logic of paradox based on the principle of “neither - nor”, while Nishida-tetsugaku follows Hegel’s logic of self-identity based on the principle of both - and.

From this standpoint, Tanabe argues that what Nishida regards as “Zen” logic is actually not Zen logic at all, since a true Zen logic has the form of neither - nor as founded in the notion of absolute paradox:

In an attempt to clarify the logic of Zen, one authority of Zen Buddhism has characterized it as the “discrimination of nondiscrimination” ... What at first seems close to the logic of Zen in fact deviates greatly from it. For the “discrimination of nondiscrimination” characteristic of Zen is neither - nor ... In contrast, the sense of self-identity spoken of in the “self-identity of absolute contradictories” sets up a “nondiscrimination of discrimination” in the form of both - and. Were this not the case, the self-identity could not be stated in positive terms. Even though the term “absolute contradiction” is used, insofar as it is also considered self-identical, it is the latter that is meant, however vaguely it is hinted at, and the absolute contradiction in question ceases to be a neither - nor. (pg. 56)

According to Tanabe then, even though Nishida’s logic is referred to as the “self-identity of absolute contradictories”, it is in fact closer to a Hegelian logic of “self-identity” which endeavors to sublate or reconcile contradictions and to let them stand just as they are, as is expounded in the philosophy of metanoetics. Consequently, insofar as Nishida-tetsugaku is founded on a logic of self-identity, it is incapable of articulating the paradoxical structure of reality grasped by Zen as well as Pure Land Buddhism.

Tanabe also criticizes Nishida’s celebrated notion of basho (Jap.: place, Lat.: locus) which is comprehended as the “place” of absolute nothingness in its sense as the topos of the self-identity of absolute contradictories:

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232 Dōgen Zenji (1200 – 1253) was the founder of the Sōtō School of Zen Buddhism. Rinzai and Sōtō are still the two most influential and important schools of Zen in Japan today.

233 Nembutsu is an abbreviation of „Namu Amida Butsu“ (Jap.: worship to the name of Buddha Amitābha). The recitation of this formula is an exercise of meditation in Pure Land Buddhism. If this recitation is made with utmost devotion, then the faithful may be reborn in the Pure Land of Amida (Skt.: Amitābha), which is the salvific promise and the ultimate goal of Pure Land Buddhism.

234 Japanese word for: a place, a spot, a locality
It is not as if there were some “locus” capable of comprehending contradictories in a greater synthesis. (pg. 133)

Moreover, Tanabe makes critical references to Nishida’s idea of the “eternal now” or absolute present as a “locus” which can somehow be directly comprehended by an act of intuition:

... the “eternal now” is not an integral locus to be grasped by intuition but something infinite to be realized only through one’s actions. (pg. 132)

Tanabe continuously attacks Nishida’s idea of “intuition”, or “action-intuition”, regarding it as a form of “ordinary mysticism” based on self-power, as opposed to the “action-faith” of metanoesis which relies upon the transformative grace of absolute Other-power. Correlate with this is also Tanabe’s critique of Nishida’s doctrine of “immediacy” or “immediate experience” in its sense of a “direct” apprehension of absolute nothingness prior to the bifurcation of subject and object:

Not even the topos of absolute nothingness exists immediately. (pg. 19)

Nothingness is not something to which immediate experience can attest; whatever can be experienced immediately, or intuited in objective terms, belongs to being, not to nothingness. (pg 158)

For Tanabe, the immediate experience of reality as a “locus” through the self-power activity of intellectual intuition can only grasp absolute being, not absolute nothingness. He argues that the direct intuition accorded to immediate experience is analogous to the aesthetic contemplation of a self-identical One as is the case in the mysticism of Plotinus. It is not the realization of true nothingness through the radical death - and - resurrection experience of zange. Accordingly, the self-power functioning of intellectual intuition which operates at the level of immediate experience always has self-identical Being as its content, whereas the ultimate paradox of Absolute Nothingness becomes accessible only in an act of metanoesis, and in the act of faith in Other-power.

Another important aspect of Philosophy as Metanoetics is Tanabe’s almost prophetic desire to help not only his fellow-countrymen to overcome the aftermath of the war, but to help all human beings, including the inhabitants of those countries that have defeated Japan. For him the solution to all problems must lie with the conversion and transformation of the minds of all human beings. His concern is to incite as many individuals as possible to undergo the process of zange and to come together to form communities that unite those who had successfully undergone the metanoetic change. His vision is that as these existential communities spread they will develop the moral power and the societal impact to counter the emergence of ideas similar to those that have led to the catastrophe of WW II. The phrase communio sanctorum which he uses to designate the existential character of these communities may have been borrowed from Christian theology.

By way of a summary, these observations come to mind:

1) Tanabe argues his case within the limits of a closed system of Sino-Japanese terms and concepts which are taken from Buddhist Pure Land and from Zen doctrine. To the uninitiated this is annoying and an obstacle because what is philosophically essential is covered under a surface layer of unfamiliar words, concepts, and ideas.
2) throughout the text, the English words faith and grace are barely used. Yet there can be no doubt that both are concepts that are of basic importance for the thought process of this book.

3) Tanabe proposes to lay the foundations for a “philosophy which is not a philosophy” (pg. 1) designed to avoid the errors and mistakes that have brought traditional philosophy to the point of breaking down.

4) the key concepts for Tanabe’s new approach are metanoesis and zange. Both imply a renunciation of all intellectual arrogance, reliance on self-power (Jap.: jiriki), and a submission to what is greater than man, Other-power (Jap.: tariki). Both are concepts taken from Shinran’s Pure Land Buddhism, more specifically from Shinran’s Kyō-kyō-shin-shō.

5) basic key notions of Tanabe’s metaphysics are: critique, dialectics, mediation, and nothingness, all of which are taken to be absolutes.

4.2.4.1 Decoding Tanabe

In order to make Tanabe’s metaphysics more accessible it is necessary to decode the text of his Philosophy as Metanoetics. This is best done by identifying three successive layers:

- philosophy of a personal crisis;
- a religious component;
- its metaphysical expansion.

In his Preface to Philosophy as Metanoetics, Tanabe gives an account of the personal crisis that led him to conceive of the book.

Last summer the fortunes of war had turned against Japan and the nation was under the increasing threat of direct raids and attacks, the government showed itself completely incapable of undertaking the reforms necessary to stem the raging tide of history ... I myself shared the sufferings of my fellow Japanese, but as a philosopher I experienced yet another kind of distress. On the one hand, I was haunted by the thought that as a student of philosophy I ought to bring the best of my thought to the service of the nation, to be addressing the government frankly with regard to its policies ... even if this should incur the displeasure of those currently in power ... Caught between these alternatives, I was unable to make up my mind and was tormented by my own indecision ... I even wondered if I should go on teaching philosophy or give it up altogether ... I spent my days wrestling with questions and doubts like this from within and without, until I had been quite driven to the point of exhaustion and in my despair concluded that that I was not able to engage in the sublime task of philosophy.

At that moment something astonishing happened. In the midst of my distress I let go and surrendered myself humbly to my own inability. I was suddenly brought to new insight! My penitent confession - metanoesis (zange) unexpectedly threw me back on my own interiority and away from things external. There was no longer any question of my teaching and correcting others under the circumstances - I who could not deliver myself to do the correct thing. The only thing for me to do in the situation was to resign myself honestly to my weakness, to examine my own inner self with humility, and to explore the depths of my powerlessness and lack of freedom. Would not this mean a new task to take the place of the philosophical task that had previously engaged me? Little matter whether it be called “philosophy” or not: I had already come to realize my own incompetence as a philosopher. What mattered was that I was being confronted at the moment with an intellectual task and ought to do my best to pursue it. (pg. xlix - l)

Confronted with a situation which he is unable to master, Tanabe sees himself driven into a situation from which there is no exit. On one side he has a clear perception of what he ought to be doing, which is to provide guidance to the Japanese people who are suffering from the hardships of war, yet on the other side he is not able meet this demand. As a consequence

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235 This must be the summer of 1945
236 Jap.: penitence, repentance, confession.
he falls into depression and despair and ponders whether he should renounce his position as a professional philosopher and university professor. It is worth noting that at that time Tanabe was very popular and that his lectures always attracted a large audience.

Tanabe then suddenly undergoes an extraordinary experience. As he lets go completely of all pretentions to master the situation in which he finds himself driven to the point of potential self-destruction, his own assessment of his situation changes completely and the burden on his mind is suddenly released. He realizes that his task as a philosopher is not to have pity with himself and to deplore his own situation but that he instead should use his ability and mental acumen to analyze what were the causes for his arriving at that mental deadlock situation in which he found himself to be. The key movement for him was to change his perspective and to let go of his previous pretensions.

A quite general commentary to what Tanabe describes would be that our human view of reality is always limited by our human finiteness because we can never take all factors into account. Therefore and depending on what we consider to be the relevant characteristics and features of reality, there are always several possibilities to assess a particular situation such that these different assessments take different aspects into account and also apply different valuations to the individual factors. In the present case Tanabe’s attention shifted from deploiring his own situation towards taking it as a given and analyzing how this situation was caused. This is a movement that is parallel to what Thomas S. Kuhn has called a change of paradigm in the natural sciences.237

As a result of his having changed perspective Tanabe experiences a new vigor and a desire to act. He describes his new paradigmatic state as follows:

The decision was reached, as I have said, through metanoia, or the way of zange, and led to a philosophy that is not a philosophy: philosophy seen as the self-realization of metanoetic consciousness. It is no longer I that think, but rather zange that thinks through me. In my practice of metanoesis, it is metanoesis itself that is seeking its own realization. Such is the non-philosophical philosophy that is reborn out of the denial of philosophy as I had previously understood it. I call it philosophy that is not a philosophy, because on the one hand, it has arisen from the vestiges of a philosophy I had cast away in despair, and on the other, it maintains the purpose of functioning as a reflection on what is ultimate and as a radical self-awareness which are the goals proper to philosophy. (pg. l)

There is an astonishing aspect hidden in this passage: After having let go of himself, Tanabe experiences some impetus for which he has neither cause nor name. He claims that it is zange, metanoesis, which “thinks through him”. But zange, metanoesis are abstract concepts of which it is not clear that they should have the power to bring about the change of heart which he did experience. Logically speaking there must be something else that is active, but Tanabe does not tell what it is, and it seems that he is fully aware of this. In an attempt to solve this riddle he out of nothing produces a set of terms, lifted from Buddhist literature, of which he claims that they most cogently can serve to explain his experiences.

One of my students, Takeuchi Yoshinori, had published a book under the title The Philosophy of the “Kyō-gyō-shin-shō”238 (1941) ... an outstanding interpretation of this work. While I learned much from reading this study, it was impossible for me at the time to develop a philosophy of my own based on the thought of the kyō-gyō-shin-shō. It was only when I set out to develop a new philosophy, a philosophy based on

237 Thomas S. Kuhn, o.c.
238 Jap.: doctrine-action-faith-witness. The Japanese compound is the title of Shinran’s magnum opus
Other-power, that I returned to reread the kyō-gyō-shin-shō carefully and was able to find a way to understand it. I regard Shinran with gratitude, love, and respect as a great teacher from the past. (pg. liii)

My experience of conversion ... in metanoesis corresponds to the experience that led Shinran to establish the doctrine of the Pure Land Shin sect (Jap.: Jōdo Shinshū). Quite by accident I was led along the same path that Shinran followed in Buddhist discipline, although in my case it occurred in the philosophical realm. Reflection on this parallel led me to an interpretation of Shinran’s kyō-gyō-shin-shō from a metanoetical point of view. I had of course been interested in Shinran before that time. (pg. lii)

There may be other ways to interpret these lines, but I read this: Following a phase of intensive despair, Tanabe had gone through a unique experience of empowerment and renewed vigor that would result in a complete reorientation of his philosophical enterprise. It was clear to him that this experience was somehow caused by an agency that was not under his control and that he could not identify in any way. There was no doubting that his experience was real, but Tanabe was at a loss when he tried to explain it in philosophical terms. The only option available to him to resolve this impasse was to revert to inputs that had the form of pre-philosophical concepts and ideas. Shinran’s metaphysical doctrine served the purpose.

By pre-philosophical concepts and ideas I mean the following. Philosophy has basically the task of “functioning as a reflection on what is ultimate and as a radical self-awareness” which Tanabe defines to be “the goals proper to philosophy” (pg. l). As such, it must be based on some basic concepts and terminology which serve as an intellectual framework and reference for the subsequent analysis work. For any one phase of philosophical reflection these terms and concepts serve as a given that is not subjected to rational scrutiny. Of course, this framework may itself also be subjected to criticism, but in that case some other intellectual framework must first be established, which then serves as the context for the critical investigation. The thesis which I defend is that Tanabe was in need of an intellectual framework within which he could place and analyze what he had experienced. Shinran’s kyō-gyō-shin-shō offered such a framework. This framework is expressed with the help of Buddhist concepts and ideas. For lack of any other pertinent information I take this to be the reason why Tanabe chooses to express himself in this language. As to philosophical relevance and contents, Tanabe is fully convinced that his exposition is logically coherent and cohesive, and that therefore there is no need of further justification. Tanabe, in other words, is convinced that the metaphysical framework of the kyō-gyō-shin-shō provides for a toolkit that can be used to reconstruct and explicate reality, and that has the potential to cover all aspects of that reality which are relevant for him as a professional philosopher and as a living human being.

After having stated that the goal proper to philosophy is to “function as a reflection on what is ultimate and as a radical self-awareness” (pg. l), Tanabe continues with a description of his new philosophical paradigm:

To be sure, this is not a philosophy to be undertaken on my own power (jiriki). That power had already been abandoned in despair. It is rather a philosophy to be practiced by Other-power (tariki), which has turned me in a completely new direction through metanoesis, and has induced me to make a fresh start from the realization of my utter helplessness. Metanoesis (zange) signifies repentance ... entails an act of self-denial ... prompted by a Power outside of myself. This Other-power brings about a conversion in me that leads me in a new direction along a path hitherto unknown to me ... I entrust my entire being to Other-power (tariki), and by practicing zange and maintaining faith in this power I confirm the truth of my own conversion-and-resurrection experience. In this way the practice-faith-witness (gyō-shin-shō) of my
zange becomes the philosophy of my regenerated existence ... It is not a question of simply carrying on the same philosophy I had abandoned in despair, as if resuming a journey after a temporary interruption. (pg. li)

There can be no doubt that Tanabe’s standpoint has undergone a dramatic change which is encapsulated in the terms that give this text its specific flavor: repentance, self-denial, abandonment of self-power, conversion-and-resurrection. This change is one from relying on one’s own resources to an unconditional submission to what is greater than the individual. In Philosophy as Metanoetics Tanabe uses the terms “sages and saints” to signify the former, he refers to the “sinners and fools” to refer to the latter. In his view this change of paradigm

... cannot be a mere repetition without negation and change. In the life of the spirit, “repetition” must mean self-transcendence; “resurrection” must mean regeneration to a new life. I no longer live on myself, but live because life has been granted to me from the transcendent realm of the absolute which is neither life nor death. Since the absolute is the negation and transformation ... of everything relative, it may be defined as absolute nothingness. I experience this absolute nothingness through which I am reborn to a new life as nothingness - qua - love. One might say that it is an experience of the absolute negation: the confirmation of the Great Nay as the Great Compassion. The truth of my conversion and resurrection in dependence on tariki (Other-power) is confirmed in the practice and faith (gyō-shin) of zange. (pg. li)

To note is the abundance of Buddhist terminology with which this paragraph is shot through, part of which is to be attributed to Shinran while other elements are taken from the general Buddhist literature. I highlight two specific elements:

- the basically “Buddhist” layout of the metanoetic philosophy;
- the epistemic aspect hidden in the compound gyō-shin-shō (practice-faith-witness).

Tanabe stresses the importance of the sequence of practice-faith-witness for his philosophy. His is not a philosophy based on concepts and abstractions, but on practice and experience, that is on concrete action. His position is that we do not exist in this world because we reflect about it, but because we take concrete action within it. This is one of the reasons why Tanabe criticized the philosophy of Hegel, and why he had much sympathy for Kierkegaard. The specifically epistemic aspect is that we act in good faith, and that we witness to the truth of our actions. There is no such thing as the absolute truth of the kind that, for example, the ancient Greek philosophers were searching. Truth is something totally subjective and which cannot be objectified. If I am convinced of the truth of someone or something, then I am convinced at a purely personal level. There is no necessity that anybody else should share my conviction. All I can do to convince other human individuals is to give witness to the fact that I am personally convinced of the truthfulness of my truth.

There is another aspect in the above text fragment which I find important. This is the way in which Tanabe combines two distinct thought processes into one complete movement. On the one hand, there is the need to explain what the quintessence of his metanoetic experience is. This task he accomplishes by means of a copious use of terms and concepts which his Japanese readers will readily understand. On the other hand, Tanabe has realized that his mission as a philosopher has not ended, and that he must continue with the development of his new “philosophy that is not a philosophy”. He accomplishes this task by going beyond a mere verbalization of what he has experienced, building on the insights that he gained and adding new extensions to this insight. One good example for this process is his use of the concept of “absolute nothingness” which is basic to Japanese Buddhism, and which is used
to express that all phenomena in the empirical world are transitory, that they have no essence or substance of their own. It would therefore be mistaken to cling to them. Tanabe accepts this concept and uses it to explain to us the significance of his spiritual “resurrection”, that is his “regeneration to a new life”. But then he continues to say that the “transcendent realm of the absolute” is “neither life nor death”, and that he experiences absolute nothingness as “nothingness – qua – love”, that is as something which is at the same time Buddhist nothingness and also love. He adds, that the experience of absolute nothingness, which somehow implies absolute negation, is a confirmation of another Buddhist concept, that of “the Great Nay”239 as the Great Compassion240. In a nutshell, Tanabe’s metanoetic philosophy is constructed around such combinations of Buddhist concepts.

A word of explanation may be helpful at this point. Tanabe, who mastered several western European languages, has written and published almost exclusively in the Japanese language. This may have different reasons, but the one that comes to mind is that he was not specifically interested in addressing any readers outside of Japan, and that his primary goal was to understand and criticize western philosophy from his own distinctly Japanese philosophical background. This may be an explanation of the fact that he hardly ever provides any specific reason and background that would explain to someone who is not familiar with Japanese Buddhist literature what is implied by the use of the Buddhist technical language which he so copiously employs.

The specifically “Buddhist” tinge of Tanabe’s technical language should not be misconstrued as being an indication of the fact that Tanabe is basically concerned with explaining Buddhist religious tenets. Suffice it to state that Buddhism does have its foundational elements241, but these have never been raised a status which would be equivalent to that of the Christian revelation. Given that Japanese and Chinese thinkers are known to be very rational and not inclined to mystical speculation, we may construe that Buddhist thought is very rational, both in its assumptions and in its conclusions. In other words, the specifically Buddhist language of Tanabe is nothing more than an convenient and efficient means to express what is in essence rational philosophical thought and criticism.

To advance the exposition of Tanabe’s philosophy:

If I may introduce at this point two key concepts characteristic of the teachings of the Pure Land sect of Shin Buddhism - ōsō or “going toward” the Pure Land, and gensō or “returning to” this world from the Pure Land - metanoetics may be described as a philosophy of action following the path of gensō. (pg. 3)

There is one additional concept, ekō or “merit-transference of the Great Compassion” (pg. 188), that is parallel to the concept of gensō and that also should be mentioned at this point because both concepts always function together.

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239 In the context of Mahāyāna Buddhism the „Great Nay“ signifies the vow of the Bodhisattva not to enter into the nirvāna before not all sentient beings have been saved.

240 The „Great Compassion“ signifies the readiness of the Bodhisattva to save all sentient beings from the bondage of samsāra and to help them such that they may enter nirvāna.

241 A good summary of basic Buddhist tenets can be found in: Takeuchi Yoshinori, The Heart of Buddhism, Crossroad, New York, 1991
These three concepts, ōsō, gensō, and ekō, are intrinsic to the salvific promise of Pure Land Buddhism, which is that all faithful shall be helped to enter nirvāṇa. The key terms here are those of the Bodhisattva and of the Bodhisattva's Original Vow. Bodhisattva (Skt.: illuminated being) designates in Mahāyāna Buddhism a being who by relentlessly following the path of Buddhist virtue is striving to become a Buddha, but who disclaims to enter nirvāṇa until all sentient beings have eventually been redeemed from being entangled in samsāra. In this the Bodhisattva is guided by the Great Compassion, which is compassion based on an ultimate discernment of samsāra and the wisdom of Buddhist illumination. In Mahāyāna Buddhism there are both immanent and transcendent Bodhisattvas. Transcendent Bodhisattvas have realized the final stages of Buddhist virtue and have reached the state of becoming a Buddha, but who in the act of the Great Nay have delayed entering into nirvāṇa. All Bodhisattvas have pledged to fulfill the “Original Vow”.

The Original Vow is the promise made by the Bodhisattva to transfer part of his merits to others who have not been able to accumulate sufficient good karma, until all sentient beings have entered into nirvāṇa. It is called “original” because this concept can be traced back to early forms of Buddhism. A specific form of the general concept is realized in Amidism, i.e. Amida’s Pure Land sect of Buddhism. Amida (Jap.; Skt: Amitābha; literally: light without bounds) governs the Western Paradise which must not be understood as being a place but as a state of mind. Amida incorporates the Original Vow and is ready to extend his helpful hand to those suffering in samsāra. The role specifically accorded to the Bodhisattvas is that they should serve as messengers between the faithful suffering in bondage to samsāra and Amida Buddha. The Bodhisattva listens to their plight and brings it before Amida Buddha. This is the meaning of ōsō. In an act of infinitely Great Compassion Amida opens his Pure Land as the place where those who do not have sufficient resources of their own can be helped to enter nirvāṇa. In the act of gensō that is accompanied by an act of ekō the Bodhisattva conveys this good news back to the faithful. In some interpretations of Pure Land doctrine all the faithful must do is to meditate the Nembutsu continuously or at least when they die, and Amida will reach out to lend them a helping hand so that they can escape from samsāra.

Tanabe does not hesitate to tell us that the story of Pure Land Buddhism, of Amida Buddha and the Bodhisattvas, is nothing more than a religiously motivated myth that in itself seems to be of little interest to philosophical analysis and contemplation. There are, however, several aspects that merit further attention:

- the motion of ōsō is an instantiation of the binary relationship, mediated by the Bodhisattva, which bridges the gap separating the human individual and the transcendent realm of the Pure Land. It comes into being only if the faithful practices nembutsu from all his heart. The Bodhisattva carries the trust and confidence of the faithful in the salvific promise to Amida and thereby prepares his entry into the Pure Land;
- in the act of ekō the Bodhisattva transfers some of his accumulated merit to the faithful and through this act reduces the bad karma of the being that is to be helped. This is an act of conversion and transformation that changes the metaphysical nature of the faithful;

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243 Note 233

244 Karma (Skt.: action) is in Buddhism the universal law of cause and effect. Each action, be that a corporeal, spiritual, or linguistic act, is performed with a certain intention and produces a result. It is this intention which determines for the actor the positive or negative value of the result of his deed. These values are accumulated
through the return of the Bodhisattva in the motion of gensō Amida extends his helpful hand to the faithful such that he or she can enter into the Pure Land. Because of the preceding act of ekō this is an unmerited gift and an instantiation of divine grace;
- all acts, that is ōsō, ekō, and gensō are caused by the Great Nay and the Great Compassion of the Bodhisattva and of Amida Buddha who in an act of autonomous and free decision have pledged themselves to the Original Vow of the Bodhisattva;
- the human individual has no means other than his relentless unconditional faith to invoke the help of the Celestial Beings, whom he can neither cause nor coerce to act on his behalf.

The essence of the Pure Land doctrine of salvation is thus that religious faith and divine grace are considered to be binary relationships, mediated by the Bodhisattva, between the faithful and a transcendent opposite, Amida Buddha. In this process all parties must relinquish their ambitions and must surrender to the Original Vow that transcends them: the faithful who in reciting the nembutsu renounces all ambitions to enter nirvāna out of his own resources. He places his hope for salvation from the bondage to samsāra in the Original Vow of the Bodhisattva. Amida Buddha and the Bodhisattva have pledged themselves to the Original Vow. In an act of instantiation of the Great Nay and of Great Compassion they give away some of their own accumulated merit (ekō) with the aim to help the faithful to enter the Pure Land. In other words:

- in Pure Land Buddhism religious faith and divine grace involve the binary relationships of ōsō, gensō, and ekō;
- in these relationships of ōsō, gensō, and ekō all parties involved, the faithful individual, the Bodhisattva, and Amida Buddha, undergo a process of self-denial in which they give up their ambitions by surrendering to what transcends them.

Tanabe, who is a thoroughly dialectical thinker, will analyze these relationships in much detail. His goal is to explore the nature of the processes by which the constituent elements, i.e. the faithful and the Celestial beings, are linked to one another, and how they themselves are affected in the process. For a professional philosopher, Tanabe, this analysis cannot be a stand-alone activity but must be part of a larger, more encompassing scheme, and this scheme is Tanabe’s metaphysics, his religious philosophy as Metanoetics. In general terms, the problem Tanabe faces is this: On one side there is the religious construct of the Bodhisattva as the mechanism that spans the gap between the human individual and the metaphysical realm of Amida’s Pure Land. On the other side Tanabe must discard what is purely religious myth and extract from it only what is amenable to philosophical investigation and rational critique. In his attempt to untangle the logical from the mythological elements he lets himself be guided by a proposal of Rudolf Bultmann (1884 - 1976) to “de-mythologize” the New Testament. Bultmann claimed that the Bible contained a core of Christian theology that was cast into a language which was typical for a specific society, a specific social context, and for a specific time. In Bultmann’s view the task of the theologian was to abstract from the text what were simply embellishment which had to be attributed to the prevailing cultural and other conditions of the time when the stories

and in their totality determine the good or bad karma. The individual can enter into nirvāna only if his karma is good. Since it is not easy to accumulate good karma special sustained effort is required.

245 The Original Vow of the Bodhisattva is the vow not to enter nirvāna before not all sentient beings have been helped to enter first.
were composed. Bultmann’s claim was that by following this process he would be able to unearth what he considered to be the perennial Christian theological contents of the Gospel. Tanabe adopted for himself Bultmann’s general idea with a view to develop his own method for demythologizing the religious story of Amida Buddha and of the Bodhisattvas.

Tanabe’s philosophical program thus is:

- develop a general metaphysical framework;
- apply this framework to the dialectics of Pure Land Buddhism.

This he hoped would allow him to capture the phenomena of religious faith and of divine grace.

There is one addition to make. Taken as a vantage point to understand reality, the religious worldview offered by Tanabe’s reading of Shinran is completely rational and based on assumptions which do not contradict empirical findings. In this way Pure Land Buddhism is to its faithful a “system” that unlike Hegel’s system can encompass and explicate reality as a whole. It thus has the quality to serve as a religious-philosophical paradigm because it provides the function of the “clef” which the human individual needs to put his or her experiences into a coherent and cohesive order and make sense of it. Clearly, Pure Land Buddhism is but one of several such systems that provide a worldview and it does not need to be stressed that the outlook that any one of these various systems offers for some specific aspect of reality will be different between systems. Tanabe was aware of this fact. He also saw no specific reason why he should prefer one specific such system over the others. It was probably for this reason that he has opted for a way to broaden his religious scope such that besides Pure Land he would also consider Zen and Christianity as he

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248 Contrary to the Christian religion, Shinran’s True Pure Land Buddhism has no foundation in any kind of revelatory givens in the western sense of this phrase. Rather and in broad terms it is the result of a rational scrutiny of real human existence, and of the salvific aspirations of the finite human individual in view of the eschatological promise of Mahāyāna Buddhism. In an attempt to answer to the perceived needs of man suffering in samsāra Shinran offers a loving and compassionate but also reasonable way to salvation which is expressed in simple but comprehensive words such that the faithful individual can readily comprehend the message. It is in this way that Shinran’s doctrine becomes the rational exposition of a religious worldview. Tanabe used Shinran’s doctrine as a religious input for the development of his own metanoetic philosophy. From the sparse information which he himself provides we can construe that (1) Tanabe was very much concerned with his own personal crisis when he became aware of Shinran through a paper which Takeuchi Yoshinori had written in 1941 (Philosophy as Metanoetics, pg. liii); (2) Tanabe, therefore, probably had no real interest in a detailed study of all possible ramifications of interpreting Shinran. Laube (Johannes Laube, Das Kyōgyōshinshō Shinrans in der Interpretation durch Hajime Tanabe, Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft, vol. 65, 1971, pg. 227 - 293), and others after him (Taitetsu Unno, James W. Heisig (ed.), The religious Philosophy of Tanabe Hajime, Asian Humanities Press, 1990, pg. 89 - 160, passim.) have addressed the problematic of whether Tanabe’s reading of Shinran was in agreement with a majority view held by experts in the field of Eastern religions. From what has been published one may safely construe that Tanabe was not primarily concerned with literarily reproducing what Shinran had written. Rather, he seems to have held the view that the best method to handle matters religious was to demystify Shinran in a process similar to that first proposed by Rudolf Bultmann (Rudolf Bultmann, New Testament and Mythology, o.c.) for the New Testament, and to extract what was philosophically relevant, discarding the rest as a religious myth.

With this as a basis it must be left to those who are far more familiar than I am with Shinran and Pure Land Buddhism to pursue this subject further. May it suffice here to state that Tanabe offers an original approach to philosophy that should be assessed in its own right, irrespective of whether there may be any intellectual lineage connecting him with for example Shinran. What counts in the end is that what Tanabe presents can stand the test of rational scrutiny, while it is of secondary importance how much he may have deviated from those before him.
understood it. By keeping an equal distance to all three religious orientations he was able to take advantage of whatever suited him best from his philosophical perspective. His intention was to develop an approach to the perennial problems that man has identified for himself and thereby to find a way that would enable him to reconstruct reality and to reflect on what is ultimate such that he would avoid the mistakes that had led him into his personal crisis.

I do not know of any way that would allow me to pinpoint down with total precision the exact rationale which Tanabe might choose for himself as a starting point to develop his metaphysics from one first principle. With a view to present the main elements of his philosophy I shall therefore take a different approach. There is first of all the fact that he was a founding member of the Kyoto School of philosophy. This school has been defined by Heisig\textsuperscript{249} and Waldenfels\textsuperscript{250} as being a group of “philosophers of nothingness”. One distinctive element for Tanabe is then his doctrine of “Absolute Nothingness”. To this we must add his post-war version of the “Logic of the Specific” of which he writes that it forms the backbone of his metanoetic enterprise. Being a dialectical thinker we also have his “Absolute Dialectics” and “Absolute Mediation”. The last element to mention is his “absolute Critique” as the means to criticize the philosophy of those who came before him. For reasons of convenience I shall start with the “Logic of the Specific”.

For Tanabe, Hegel was right to posit that reality was not static but was instead subjected to continual change, but he criticized Hegel for not having followed that path to its final conclusion. He admired Hegel’s philosophical genius and in particular his lucid analysis of being and of its opposite, non-being, but he noticed that Hegel could not free himself from the boundaries to his thought that classical logic had erected. Faced with the problematic of how to reconcile eternal being with eternal becoming and perishing, Hegel had opted for a philosophy of being, that is based on the notion of the Being of beings. The result of this choice was that Hegel’s dialectic could not incorporate the substrate of being itself and which led, in Tanabe’s view, to self-defeating consequences.

Having to accept an unchanging substrate, Being (Ger.: \textit{Sein}), Hegel’s philosophy became a “\textit{philosophy of identity}” in which this Being is an abstraction that according to Aristotle is formed by abstracting from the individual to the specific (particular), and from the specific to the universal (genus). In this process of abstraction all the differentiating characteristics that distinguish one individual from the other are subsumed into the specific such that by reversing the process the individuals can emerge from the specific by a process of deductive differentiation. In other words, the specific embraces all of the differentiations by which the individuals differ. The same is true when we abstract from the specific to the universal. Embedded within the universal are thus all the differentiations by which one specific is distinguished from all others. Therefore, if this process of subsuming the specifics under the universal is carried to its final end, which is to the level of the Being of beings, this Being contains within itself the whole of reality. In other words, the dialectical process by which Hegel’s Being differentiates with a view to generate the specific and the individual is totally deterministic, a logical tautology. There is no room for spontaneity or for creativity; nothing original and new can ever be instantiated.

\textsuperscript{249} Heisig, James W., \textit{Philosophers of Nothingness}, o.c.
\textsuperscript{250} Hans Waldenfels, \textit{Nothingness}, o.c.
Tanabe does not agree with this conclusion. In his view, reality is so rich that the human mind can at no time ever have a total view of it. Instead the constituent realms of reality, i.e. subjectivity, inter-subjectivity, and the transcendent realm, are each inexhaustible so that the human endeavor to capture the totality of their contents must forever be frustrated. This is but another way to affirm human finiteness as a fundamental characteristic of reality. Thus human finiteness on one side, taken together with the inexhaustible richness of reality on the other, manifest themselves to the human being as an ever-present alterity that is inherent in all aspects of reality such that reality is shot through with otherness. This otherness expresses itself in the lifecycle of all things, i.e. the process of becoming and perishing.

Postulating alterity as an inherent characteristic of all being and of the Being of beings is just another way of asserting that any attempt by the human mind to capture Being must fail because Being is always different, always other, such that it is not possible to abstract and totalize a Being of beings from beings. In the same way the view that beings differentiate from Being in a process of rigorous logical deduction cannot be a correct description of reality. Tanabe thus posits that beings which somehow depend on the Being of beings are inherently gifted with an intrinsic alterity, which is to say otherness. In this way the basic elements of spontaneity and creativity are saved and reaffirmed. Human reason is intrinsically finite. Any attempt to construct a system in the style of Hegel must of necessity fail.

Tanabe has visualized his analysis in a diagram\textsuperscript{251} similar to this one.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{tanabe_diagram.png}
\caption{Philosophy of Identity and Tanabe}
\end{figure}

For Hegel, the universal is one and differentiates into the manifold of the individuals while for Tanabe the individual is one and is subsumed in the manifold of the universal. From a purely formalistic perspective both views seem to coincide at the level of the specific, but they differ fundamentally in the way in which the specific is construed to function. For Hegel the specific is a product of logical deduction and differentiation of what is already contained in the universal. For Tanabe, on the other hand, the specific is the produce of a process of induction which is never a logically rigorous procedure. While for Hegel the relationship between specific and particular is one of necessity, this is not the case for Tanabe for whom this relationship embodies a degree of contingency. This contingency manifests itself in turn

\textsuperscript{251} Johannes Laube, \textit{Dialektik der absoluten Vermittlung}, o.c., pg. 43 - 44
as creativity and spontaneity. While in Hegel’s philosophy of identity the specific is reduced to serve as an auxiliary device whose only function it is serve as a subservient element in the deductive process of logical differentiation, Tanabe refutes this view as not representing an adequate description of reality as it is. In his assessment the specific has the role of actively reducing the manifold possibilities of the universal such that the differences between individuals are governed by the creativity and the spontaneity of the specific. This is the basal thesis from which Tanabe unfolds his “Logic of the Specific”. In its postwar version he later associated the universal and the specific, which before the war had an ambiguous and politically highly controversial status, with “absolute nothingness”. By this move he ended transforming what had been a philosophy of society and culture into pure metaphysics.

Pushing the problem of how the dialectical oppositions are generated to one side, there are some conclusions which can already be drawn. The reversal of the role of the specific has direct consequences for the interpretation of the dialectical process. According to Tanabe Hegel’s dialectic is of the et - et type. Here both A and its opposite, not-A, are dialectically combined such that both are “sublated” (Ger.: aufgehoben) in B.

Hegel’s position is that as the internal contradictions break out and become apparent within the concept, the resulting opposition is sublated in the form of a higher synthesis such that it contains within itself both the original concept and its internal contradictions. From this nothing ever results that is original and new. The essence of the dialectical process is that it reorders what has always already been present. Critics of Hegel have always maintained that he never gave a satisfactory explanation for this process of sublation.

In his attempt to overcome the weakness of Hegel’s approach Tanabe invokes the notion of alterity as an agency that actively takes part in the dialectic process and configures it. As the contradictions become apparent, the interaction between opposites is controlled and overcome by the force of the ubiquitous, ever-present alterity in a process in which neither one of the inputs is preserved, and instead something original and new is created. This idea is encapsulated in the formula of nec - nec, that is to say: neither this nor that. The following diagram depicts this. Here the circles at the juncture points of A and not-A, etc., indicate that a transformation of the inputs takes place such that something new, B, etc., results.

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252 The graphical representations of Hegel’s and Tanabe’s dialectics: J. Laube, o.c., pg. 250 – 251. Tanabe also discusses Karl Marx’s interpretation of the dialectical process which he characterizes as being of the type aut-aut, either this or that, but not both.
Up to here I have limited the discussion to providing a formalistic description of the dialectic process. This must now be supplemented by a description of details of what the mechanism of the internal working is. Taken at face value, there does not seem to be much difference between how Hegel and Tanabe construe their dialectics. Both would agree that there is no such thing as eternal, unchanging Being, and that reality must be considered to be subjected to a process of change, of becoming and perishing that has never started and that also will never end.

However, the point at which both philosophers fundamentally differ is how they conceive of the nature of this process. Hegel’s position is that there can be no process if there is no substrate on which the process can be active and unfold, because a process as such cannot have any substance or essence of its own and there must be a passive object on which it takes place, whereby it is not of primary concern what the nature of this object may be. All that is important is the fact that it “is”, that is to say that it can somehow be subsumed under the totality of all that is, which the Being of beings. Thus although Hegel claims in his Logic that Being and its associated not-Being, the Nihil, are equally void and hence logically identical, Nishitani and others will later maintain that this Being contains a trace of substantiality in it and that for this reason it cannot be “empty”.

The notion of emptiness can be traced back to the work of the Indian philosopher Nāgārjuna who was first to introduce the concept of “emptiness” (Skt.: śūnyatā) into the Eastern metaphysical debate. Masao Abe offers the following as an explanation:

Nāgārjuna unfolded the basic notions of “nothingness” and of “emptiness” out of the religious Buddhist experience of the inherent transitoriness of all relative beings. In this process he was guided by the doctrine of dependent origination (Skt.: paticca-samuppāda) which in Buddhist analysis is the causal nexus that brings all appearances into being. The doctrine states that all physical and mental manifestations, while they constitute individual appearances, condition or affect each other and thereby inter-depend on each other in a constant process of arising and ceasing-to-be. In Buddhist reasoning, if everything depends on every-

Note 42
Masao Abe, Non-Being and Mu - the Metaphysical Nature of Negativity in the East and the West, in: Masao Abe, Zen and Western Thought, o.c., pg. 121 - 134
Takeuchi Yoshinori, The Heart of Buddhism, Crossroad, 1991, pg. 61 - 143. The Sanskrit term is variously translated as dependent origination, conditioned genesis, interconnected arising, causal nexus, co-dependency, etc.
thing else and thereby is entangled in a never-ending movement of becoming and perishing, then there can be neither substance nor essence for individual beings. This is the doctrine of “no-self” or “empty self”, which states that beings have no true selfhood. To this the concept of emptiness has later been added. This is not based on any mystical intuition but is solely the result of rational analysis of reality, and is for this reason called an “analytic view of emptiness”, which subsequently became the “view of substantial emptiness”. It asserts that all phenomena were themselves empty in principle, and that existence itself is empty. True emptiness is thus not simply the denial of being, but instead it is the view which denies being and non-being, and which also denies the negation of non-being. In other words, “emptiness” is disclosed as being free of both being and non-being, and as being the position that “negates the negation”. Nāgārjuna’s contribution was that he provided a rigorous logical underpinning by drawing out the philosophical implications of what is initially not more than an intuition. The core of his “Philosophy of the Middle Way” (Skt. Mādyamika) is a standpoint which has liberated itself from every illusory point of view that is connected to the affirmation and the negation of being and non-being. Nāgārjuna argues that the following tetralemma (Skt.: catuskoti) can be and must be accepted as being a true representation of reality:

1. being is affirmed, non-being denied;
2. non-being is affirmed, being is denied;
3. both being and non-being are simultaneously affirmed and denied;
4. both being and non-being simultaneously neither affirmed nor denied.

Nāgārjuna thus defends the position that none of these statements is a complete and true description of reality, and that the process of negation is itself empty. In other words: being is empty, non-being is empty, and moreover the negation of the negation of being is also empty. In this way the standpoint of the Buddhist Middle Way is liberated from every illusionary point of view that is connected to affirmation or negation, being or non-being. Masao Abe comments in Zen and Western Thought:

For Nāgārjuna, emptiness was not non-being but “wondrous Being”. Precisely because it is Emptiness which “empties” even emptiness, true Emptiness (absolute nothingness) is absolute Reality which makes all phenomena, all existents, truly be. The opposition and tension between ji and ri which runs through human existence and ever makes human life problematic was for Nāgārjuna to be resolved by “Nothingness” (Mu) which transcends the opposition between being and non-being, that is, by “Emptiness”. “Nothingness” thus made absolute by Nāgārjuna as the basic principle which truly discloses reality as such is here affirmed to be the third fundamental category, differing from both Aristotelian “Being” and the Kantian “Ought”. (pg. 94)

To a westerner it seems to be a strange decision that “Nothingness” should be taken as one of the fundamental categories by which to explain reality, and to raise it to the status of an absolute. In the West “nothingness” invariably has a negative connotation since it is always thought to be derived by way of the negation of “being” which in turn is thought to be the positive principle. Terms like me on, non-being, non-être, Nichtsein, etc. clearly express this view.

This is crucial. Following Parmenides, Western thinkers have traditionally been rigorously attached to the idea that non-Being, taken to be the totality of all non-beings, cannot be thought, because in that case it would of necessity have to be subsumed under the umbrella of Being, which is to say that non-Being would become Being. By way of contrast, Eastern
thinkers have approached this problematic in a different manner. The key to their mode of thinking is that they never saw any need to totalize beings into absolute total Being. They were satisfied to think only beings and their associated non-being without making any attempt to totalize. If one now accords to non-being a status equivalent to that of being, then both notions can be thought together using as a tool the combination of logical abstraction and logical elevation to a “higher” level or, better still, into a medium of an as yet non-descript nature. At this new level being and non-being are negated or eliminated, while at the same time they are preserved as inputs to a synthesis. If this whole process is considered to be nothing more than a formal logical operation in the course of which the problematic of substance and essence has been bracketed, then there is room to rethink the problematic of the tangle of being, non-being, substance and essence constructively in a novel way. In the East this was regarded as an opportunity while in the West the prevalence of being over non-being generally was not challenged and hence prevailed largely uncontested. In terms of formal logic, what is essential is the way in which the laws of non-contradiction and of the excluded middle are interpreted and applied. In the West their linear and uncompromising application intercepted any evolution of thought beyond the point of affirming being and denying non-being, such that with this assertion the limits of what is logically conceivable had been reached. In the East, however, a distinction was made between things to which both laws were applicable, and things that because of their special nature do not fall under the jurisdiction of these two laws. Nāgārjuna, and the Mahāyāna Buddhism thinkers who followed his guidance, have not seen the need to totalize beings into absolute Being. They were free to focus their attention on the question of finding a concept that would allow them to deal with being and non-being on an equitable basis and without the bias of necessary absolute Being. Their answer was emptiness, śūnyatā. Masao Abe offers this comment:

Being the complete counter-concept to being (u), nothingness (mu) is a more powerful form of negation than “non-being”. In other words, mu is on equal footing with and reciprocal to u. Accordingly, it can both be said that mu is the negation of u, and also that u is the negation of mu. But if mu is absolutized in principle, it can transcend and embrace within itself both u and mu in their relative senses. (pg. 94)

This is the metaphysical standpoint of Mahāyāna Buddhism and of the Pure Land sect. While Tanabe does not explicitly make emptiness a problematic of his philosophy he nevertheless uses the notion as one input to the unfolding of his thoughts. In more specific terms, Tanabe invokes nothingness and its corollary, Absolute Nothingness, as concepts that impact on his thought process. Stated in broad terms, Nāgārjuna and the Mahāyāna Buddhists are primarily interested in the static nature of the transcendent, whereas the dialectical thinker Tanabe focuses his attention on the dynamic characteristics and agency of this same realm. In this way the views of Tanabe and of Nāgārjuna are not divergent but complementary: they argued over something to which they both would agree, but that they each think from a different perspective.

In summary then we can conclude with Masao Abe that

Nāgārjuna’s idea of “Emptiness” was firmly established through the idea of dependent origination as the fundamental and creative principle which transcends both being (or Being) and non-being or (non-Being) (pg. 95)

Eckhart (ca. 1260 - 1327) is one of the few western philosophers who thought the not-being of things.
In Non-Being and Mu - the Metaphysical Nature of Negativity in the East and the West, o.c., pg. 124 - 129, Masao Abe also offers the following series of graphical representations. The western understanding of reality is best depicted as an ontological priority of being over non-being:

![Graphical representation of being and non-being]

In the Eastern understanding it is not appropriate to equate being with the ideas of life and the good, while non-being is considered a synonym for death and evil. Instead, and using for reasons of connotations the distinctly Eastern terms of u and mu in place of the Western concepts of being and non-being, the essence of the Eastern approach is that both u and mu as equivalents are elevated to a higher level of abstraction, śūnyatā, emptiness:

![Graphical representation of śūnyatā]

For Nāgārjuna this was not yet sufficient because the status of śūnyatā was still unclear. He therefore saw the need to empty śūnyatā itself of all contents. Masao Abe offers the next diagram as an aid to visualize the process. The broken contour around u, mu, and śūnyatā indicates that all phenomena are empty of essence or substance.

![Graphical representation of śūnyatā (Mu)]

u, mu, and śūnyatā (Mu) form one whole unit which exceeds their individual oppositions, which does not differentiate, and which is not bounded, i.e. not limited. This is the nature of ultimate reality within which u and mu continue to exist as they are, that is to say, they have been emptied of all contents. Clearly, this is a view that is contrary to how we ordinarily experience reality. In the ordinary view reality, things, have substance, are eternal such that we can rely existentially on them. They are real and manifest reality. Tanabe knows about this human condition and will argue that the essence of sin, more specifically the original sin that infests all of human existence, is this tendency to cling to relative being, u, and in this process to assume that relative being has the status of the absolute. Considering the essentials of our human existence Tanabe comments:

... the independence of our being itself is infected with radical evil. The essence of relative self ... is emptiness, void (Jap. kū, Skt. śūnyatā). This self deceives itself, grows forgetful of its own finiteness and
relativity, and comes to mistake itself for absolute existence by absolutizing the finiteness of its existence. What is more, it shows an innate tendency to cling to this delusion. This is what we are calling radical evil: the self-assertion and rebellion of the relative vis-à-vis the absolute.  

Emptiness, śūnyatā so explained are the terms that best summarize the difference between how Hegel and Tanabe understand ultimate reality. I now must explain why this difference is crucial for the severe criticism that Tanabe has leveled against Hegel’s et- et dialectic.

Tanabe agreed with Hegel that ultimate reality is subjected to a process of becoming and perishing; he disagreed with Hegel in the purpose and scope of this process. Hegel posited that the purpose of the process was to unfold “The Idea” and that the process would end when this goal was reached. Tanabe, on the other hand, believed that reality and this process were identical and that the process therefore had never begun and would also never end. In Tanabe’s view reality is one great dialectical maelstrom that does not spare anything. It is in fact the most fundamental characteristic of reality. This is why for Tanabe this is the process of “absolute dialectics” to which every part of reality is subjected, including the dialectical process itself. Nothing remains unchanged, everything is forever subjected to becoming and perishing; all of reality is ultimately one tangle of motions of which all we can say is that they occur. It is thus left open whether there is any order and teleology, or whether it is just basically chaos. Independent of how this question may be answered, what cannot be discussed is that reality in its totality is incessantly subjected to dialectical change. Laube invokes the notion of a primordial process of change that initiated absolute dialectics.

Hegel, as I have stated, was never able to explain his understanding of the dialectical process and more specifically how the contradictions arise in the concepts. This is considered to be one of the great weaknesses of his system that still is in need of clarification. This raises the question of how Tanabe deals with this problematic. Assuming that the answers he will provide are of basic importance, several questions come to mind:

- what are the elements of this process?
- how is it organized?
- what mechanism keeps it running forever?

Hegel had explained that as the concepts evolve they give rise to contradictions which originate within the concepts themselves. The dialectical process was therefore intimately coupled to the evolutionary activity by which the concepts become successively more differentiated. In other words, Hegel’s dialectic is a linear process in which what has started as a nucleus or a seed becomes more and more refined and differentiated. It produces successively more detail, but it never occurs that fundamental leaps into unbroken territory are made, and freedom, spontaneity, and original creativity are intrinsically rejected or suppressed.

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257 Tanabe, Philosophy as Metanoetics, pg. 23, passim
258 Tanabe is here in line with Aristotle who promoted the view that Being is pure activity. He differs from Aristotle in that to the latter this pure activity was substance.
259 There is some resemblance here with the concept of the “field” in modern particle physics. Such a field can be compared to a pot full of boiling water. Its surface is in constant motion with droplets of water and steam rising up into the air and falling back down again.
260 Laube, o.c., pg. 25 f
In Tanabe’s view, the engine that eventually fuels the dialectic process is ubiquitous alterity. The mechanism that makes alterity come to the forefront and manifest itself is mediation. Mediation is instantiated through negation. The essence of mediation is that in the act of mediated negation the term alterity, otherness, implies that what was before is now replaced by something other of which all we can say is that it is different from what was before. The intercession of alterity introduces freedom, spontaneity, and original creativity. Therefore, Tanabe’s dialectical negation must be understood to be a process in which what was is replaced by something new, other.

In a binary relation\textsuperscript{261} of the type that had been studied in section 3.1 and comprising two poles each, three instantiations of a negation are possible:

1. each one of the two poles negates itself;
2. the two poles mutually negate each other;
3. all negations negate themselves.

When a negation is itself negated, then what originally has been negated is now affirmed. However, negation of the negation does not necessarily imply that what was negated is now affirmed again. Rather, under the regime of alterity prevailing negation of the negation may produce something other, something new if compared to what was before. This is possible logically because two levels of negations overlap each other: at the first level we have the self-negation of the individual pole and its negation by what opposes it, while at the second level there is the negation of the negations. This complex of overlapping intertwined negations is thus the logical reason why negation of the negation does not mean simple affirmation of what was in place before. In other words, negation of the negations means that what is affirmed is different from what had originally been negated. In this way absolutely mediated absolute dialectics is spontaneous and creative. However there are no indications to decide whether or not this is a purely random process.

The process can be visualized with the help of the diagram on the next page. The double circle surrounding universal, specific, and individual is to indicate that the entire process is subject to self-negation. It also indicates that other elements which are not included in the diagram are also involved in the process so that in the end everything is connected to everything else in one great maelstrom of negations and negation of negations. Tanabe visualizes this process by comparing it to the aspect of the flowers of a peony. In Tanabe’s thought, therefore, all three kinds of negation are present in the dialectical process. Also, they occur simultaneously such that the entire dialectical process is engaged in a continuous movement that never stops. To be more explicit, if in the above I have individualized the three forms of negation, then this was only for reasons of logical analysis and convenience of presentation. In reality, they are instantaneous and concurrent. This is another way of affirming the Buddhist idea that all reality is transitory, that everything is dependent on everything else, and that the phenomena have no substance of their own. The diagram expresses this by showing on the one hand the mutual negating relations of the universal, the specific, and the individual, while the enclosing circle is to indicate that the whole of reality is engulfed in mutual dialectical negations. This is the essence of absolute mediation.

\textsuperscript{261} Strictly speaking the binary relationship is an approximation. According to the doctrine of dependent origination, reality must be construed such that everything is in a never-ending dialectical relation with everything else.
There is another way to read the diagram. The absolutely mediated absolute dialectic consists in principle of four distinct relations which each have a different significance:

a) the universal dialectically negates the specific, and vice versa. This relationship determines the specificity of the specific and maintains it. This is a purely transcendental relationship and as such not directly accessible to experience by the human individual;

b) the universal dialectically negates the individual, and vice versa. If the universal is thought to be the metaphysically transcendent, then this relationship becomes the matrix for connecting the individual through faith and grace with the transcendent. Grace has the connotation of receiving a gift from the transcendent.

c) the specific dialectically negates the individual, and vice versa. Tanabe’s pre-war Logic of the Specific was designed to exploit this relationship in an attempt to explain the irrational in the evolution of history. This attempt failed because Tanabe was misinterpreted as having equated the abstract notion of the specific with the concrete notion of the spirit of the Japanese people. Tanabe later corrected this by according a metaphysical significance to the specific;

d) the individual dialectically negates other individuals and in turn is negated by them. This is how the alterity that is inherent in each human individual manifests itself to other individuals. It is also the way by which the human subject can experience transcendent grace.

The transcendent realm is forever beyond the reach of the human being. For this reason the only way in which the human individual can experience the transcendent is through the effects of transcendent grace, which is always a private subjective experience, not of the transcendent itself but of the effects which it produces. This can be as a personal assessment of the individual, or it can be in the form of a communication to the public realm of intersubjectivity by another individual. In both cases the exposure to the transcendent occurs in the form of an exposure to the effects which its activity produces.
This last point is important in that it affirms the intrinsically transcendent nature of divine grace. There can be no doubt that the divine can never be experienced by the human individual by way of immediate exposure and interaction. All that is possible for the human being is to experience changes to which it or on other beings have become subjected. Therefore, if an act of divine grace occurs, this can only be experienced under the guise of changes of relative beings. In western parlance this is nothing other than the affirmation that “miracles” occurs in the event of divine grace. In other words, miracles are caused by the dialectical interaction of relative beings with the transcendent. They occur as changes of relative beings and are assessed to be an act of divine grace by the human experiencing a change of itself or of another relative being.

It will be convenient to review what has been discussed so far:

- absolute dialectic is the term used by Tanabe to signify that all of reality is subjected to a dialectical process in which all beings continually interact with all other beings;
- the dialectical process is mediated by negation which can take three forms: self-negation, the mutual negation of elements that interact with each other, the negation of the negations;
- absolute mediation is the term used by Tanabe to indicate that in the process of dialectical interaction all beings are negated, and that these negations are also negated.

What is the function and role of Absolute Nothingness in this process? In ordinary language, if a being is negated something other takes its place. This “other” must somehow have been there before because otherwise it would have to arise by what medieval philosophy has called a *creatio ex nihilo*, and about which it has been affirmed that it could lead to any result whatsoever: *ex nihilo quodlibet*. This conclusion is based on a specific reading of the term “*nihil*”, “no-thing”, and the chain of reasoning is as follows. If I negate a thing I take it away and replace it by *no-thing*, a void. If then the negation is negated, a thing will take the place of the void. The point is that the void has no determinations, hence the thing that replaces it is no determined and therefore can be *any-thing*.

Nāgārjuna has offered a different interpretation for the notion of the *nihil*. He views the negation of a being not as an isolated act but rather as an event that is an element of the total life cycle of the being, i.e. of the process of becoming and perishing. But then it cannot any longer be maintained that the *nihil* is void and undetermined. Also, what arises when the negation is negated must also be determined, although Nāgārjuna does not tell us what the details of this determination are. All he can say is that the entire process of becoming and perishing is part of a whole that encompasses both. This “encompassing” medium he calls *nothingness*262 to distinguish it from the western notion of *nihil*. If now we take this nothingness to be but a formal construct we can say that it is neither being nor not-being but “wondrous being” which is a matrix from which beings arise and into which they fall back again in a process that in broad and sweeping terms can be formalistically compared with how modern theoretical physics interprets the field of the physical vacuum from which particles and anti-particles continually emerge and to which they return again. The essence of the lifecycle of things is then that in the act of becoming things emerge from the matrix of nothingness, while in the act of perishing they once again are hidden. Nāgārjuna’s specific

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262 There is cause for pause: this “nothingness” is not some kind of a super-container because that would make it a being of some description. Rather, what is introduced is a generic construct that still must be defined and interpreted. This is crucial: philosophers of the Eastern and Western traditions do not disagree that it is possible to think a notion similar to that of nothingness. They disagree on how this notion is to be defined and interpreted.
contribution was to assert that both beings and their associated non-being are empty. In this reading absolute nothingness is what reality is ultimately made of. In other words:

- **absolute nothingness** is the term used by Tanabe to designate ultimate reality. It is "wondrous being" which encompasses all beings and their associated non-being.

What still needs to be done is to analyze and interpret the notions of nothingness and also absolute nothingness under the perspective that they are metaphysical entities. What can we say about the principles that govern the process by which as part of an overall lifecycle beings emerge from the matrix of nothingness only to return to it at a later point in time. A question that could be asked but which philosophy cannot answer out of its own resources that of the nature of ultimate reality, because philosophical analysis cannot decide whether this process is one of random events governed by pure chance, or whether instead there is some order and perhaps a degree of teleology which is active. Therefore, if the discussion is not to stall, some pre-philosophical inputs are needed. Religion can provide such inputs.

This has also been an observation which Tanabe had to make. In his attempt to analyze and explain the experiences that helped him to overcome his personal crisis Tanabe had invoked the Buddhist notion of Other-power as an agency that exceeded him and which acted on his behalf. If he renounced any reliance on his own resources and instead was ready and prepared to subdue himself in an act of repentance for his past sins, Other-power would take control over him: his depression and professional disability would be relieved and he could once again continue his professional activities - if with a new orientation. The key notion here is that of "sin". Tanabe argues that the essence of sin which infests all of human existence is the human tendency to cling to relative being and to raise it to the status of an absolute. There can be no discussion that such a tendency is in violation with how the nature of ultimate reality is construed to be. If the effect of sin so conceived is disarray, depression and lack of orientation, then the opposite of sin must be the positive effects of order, happiness and direction which Tanabe attributes to the intercession of Other-power. In other words, Other-power becomes active if and only if Tanabe renounces his intellectual arrogance of relying self sufficiently on his own resources (jiriki, self power), which is to insist on his perception of what he should do and how that should be accomplished, and if instead he in the act of repentance acknowledges and accepts reality as it really is. Tanabe’s religious belief thus provides for a linkage between the religiously motivated concept of Other-power (tariki) and an ultimate reality for which we cannot identify any defining characteristics that could help to clarify its nature.

In his *Foreword* to *Philosophy as Metanoetics* Heisig makes this comment:

> Tanabe returned to the notion of absolute nothingness in *Philosophy as Metanoetics*, where it is said to become manifest in the absolute mediation of Other-power to the subject of metanoesis. (This Other-power has the curious logical quality of having been deduced a posteriori from the personal experience of a transcendent force, and at the same time of having been postulated a priori after the manner of the Hegelian Absolute Spirit). Thus ... Tanabe ultimately came to understand (absolute nothingness) as the ground of a transcendent force that breaks in upon the self from without. (pg. xix - xx)

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263 Not-being is the term used to express that a being has been annihilated, ceased to be. Non-being designates the concept that specific being is but one aspect of “wondrous being”, and that to this must be added that which makes the “otherness” of the being, which is more than its annihilation.

264 Tanabe, *Philosophy as Metanoetics*, o.c., pg. 117, 135 - 136
Tanabe himself offers this description of the interdependence of philosophical and religious concepts:

The original vow of Amida Buddha, it is believed by those who profess Pure Land Buddhism, symbolizes this power of absolute transformation or conversion. The compassion of the original vow manifests itself as the Great Nay (daihi). It is the quintessence of pure faith in Other-power (tariki), one may legitimately maintain, that the Great Nay, performed in an act of absolute negation or in the activity of absolute nothingness, becomes the Great Compassion (daihi) of salvation through the realization of faith and witness in mature religious consciousness. That “Great Compassion - qua - Great Nay”, or, in other words, “love - qua - absolute nothingness” is realized by one’s action-faith-witness (gyō-shin-shō) is the very essence of this religious consciousness. It is clear that the Great Compassion should be the Great Nay, or that true love in a religious sense should be grounded in nothingness, since both the Great Compassion and true love must come from the heart of the no-self. But this is only an ontological consideration. Religious consciousness consists in its genuine experience, or precisely in the self-consciousness realized through this experience. (pg. 8)

By way of a summary Tanabe has this interpretation for nothingness:

- love - qua - absolute nothingness (pg. 8);
- nothingness - qua - love (pg. li, 255).

Here as elsewhere the copula qua has as meaning265: namely, that is to say, or immediately, instantly, at once. With this as background we may read the above expressions as follows: love - qua - absolute nothingness means that transcendent religious love must be identified with absolute nothingness, while nothingness - qua - love implies that nothingness is the same as religious transcendent love. The two expressions differ in that absolute nothingness has a broader significance than love while nothingness is the same as love. Tanabe does not explicate any further and in more detail how love and nothingness become associated.

The last notion to explain is that of absolute critique. Tanabe in his basic review of western philosophy is dissatisfied with Kant because Kant’s critical program did not include a critique of the human reason:

Contrary to what Kant thought in his critical philosophy, it is impossible for the autonomy of reason to provide its own foundations. Reason endowed with the capacity of self-criticism cannot evade the ultimate predicament of the antinomies of practical reason, since it is caught up in original sin stemming from basic human finitude. The critique of human reason needs to be pressed to the point of an absolute critique through “absolute disruption” and absolute crisis, which constitute the self-abandonment of reason. (pg. 29 – 30)

Tanabe’s logic of absolute critique has never reached the status of a consistent philosophical method266 similar to that of absolute mediation or the Logic of the Specific. What emerges instead is that Tanabe’s arguments which he uses to explicate his absolute critique have some religious tinge. Throughout the book he refers to his philosophical opponents as “sages and saints” who have understood philosophy in the normal sense of an awakening to the autonomy and power of reason, and against whom he postures as one of the “sinful and ignorant” who are unable to walk this way:

265 Qua is used here as a translation of the Japanese copula soku which is notoriously difficult to translate. We find: namely, that is to say, or immediately, instantly, at once. This term has been discussed and explained on pg. 125 - 126.

266 In section 5.1 I shall explicate that one aspect of the application the method of absolute critique is to criticize the indiscriminate use of the “laws of thought”, i.e. the laws of non-contradiction and of the excluded middle.

176
The experience of my past philosophical life has brought me to realize my own inability and the impotence of any philosophy based on self-power. I have no philosophy whatsoever on which to rely. I now find that the rational philosophy from which I had always been able to extract an understanding of the rational forces permeating history, and through which I could deal rigorously with reality without going astray, has left me. (pg. 25 - 26)

Tanabe’s logic of absolute critique is based on the insight that an element of irrationality reigns at the core of all philosophical thought, including that which criticizes the irrationality of social existence. In the same way in which the absoluteness of nothingness has to lie outside of the world of being, the absoluteness of the critique of reason cannot come from within reason itself, but must come from without. This “without” can only be absolute nothingness driven to the point where pure thought reaches its limits.

What the absolute critique of reason aims to do is not to provide a safety preserve for the criticizing subject by assuming a criticism to lie beyond all criticism, but rather to expose the entirety of reason to rigorous criticism and thus to a self-shattering. The critique of reason cannot avoid leading reason to absolute critique ... Pure self-identity is possible only for the absolute. Insofar as reason forgets its standpoint of finitude and relativity and erroneously presumes itself to be absolute, it is destined to fall into absolute contradiction and disruption. (pg. 43 - 44)

The model for the critique is Hegel’s critique of Kant, and Kierkegaard’s critique of Hegel, to which Tanabe adds his own critical thought. For Kant to question reason would be to question the whole purpose of the philosophical enterprise itself. Hegel observed that Kant’s trust in the autonomy of reason and his attempt to apply it universally fails because it did not criticize its own critical standpoint. It can land only in antinomies, since we do not have any means to step outside the confines of human reason itself. For Tanabe the purpose of philosophy is not criticism but awakening, and critique is one of the means to reach this end.

Tanabe follows Hegel in introducing dialectics into logic and religion into dialectics. His idea of the radical imperfection of the human condition and its need for transformation by something transcendent becomes the touchstone of Tanabe’s metanoetics. This step needs the corrective of what Kierkegaard calls the conversion of the individual to religious existence that cannot be accounted for by the working of the universal. Tanabe criticizes Kierkegaard because he misses in his ascent from the aesthetic to the ethical to religion the return to care for the world of other selves. The individual’s love of God, and God’s love of the individual, must be completed in our love of neighbor.

There is the crucial ingredient of entrusting the will to absolute nothingness, without which the demands of absolute critique cannot be satisfied. According to Tanabe, free will is “will to nothingness”. Just as reason cannot grasp nothingness without turning it into being, neither can it grasp the freedom of will if it deduces it from the intuition of a moral law. Kant noted that belief in God is inferred from free will and not the other way around. Similarly Tanabe cannot ground freedom in an absolute being. He instead locates freedom in an absolute nothingness that is experienced in metanoesis:

It is not being, then, but nothingness that provides a foundation in the human for freedom ... Nothingness is not something to which immediate experience can attest; whatever can be experienced immediately, or intuited in objective terms, belongs to being, not to nothingness. To suppose therefore that freedom is capable of being grasped in an act of comprehensive intuition is tantamount to turning it into being and thus depriving it of its essential nature as nothingness. (pg. 118)
The idea of absolute nothingness thus comes into its own here not simply as a deduction but as something that is like a force beyond. Although this is the axiomatic starting point of *Philosophy as Metanoetics*, the method of argument is properly philosophical. Beginning with a fresh look at Hegel, and an appreciation of Kierkegaard’s criticism of its rationalism, Tanabe revisits Heidegger, Kant, and others. One by one he drives the use of reason of these thinkers to the point of despair at which it must let go of itself thereby bringing each philosophical argument back to the theme of metanoesis.

At this point Heisig observes “a certain ambivalence in Tanabe’s own state of mind”. On one side Tanabe thinks it to be his duty to “participate in the task of leading … our people as a whole to engage in repentance”, while on the other he must admit that his own failure was in a sense his own fault and not that of philosophy. Consequently, rather than addressing abstract philosophical positions his argument tends to focus more on actual philosophers as individuals in an attempt to assess their level of self-awareness from their writings “as if he was looking at them through a mirror, trying to detect something deep in himself that went wrong, some potential that had gone untapped”.

To summarize:

- Tanabe’s **absolute critique** is aimed at the hubris of reason, not at reasonable people, born by the pursuit of virtue in the philosophical act itself.

One implementation of the idea of absolute critique of human reason shall be to review and criticize the “laws of thought”.

4.2.4.2 Tanabe on religious faith

From the above it must be clear that Tanabe entertains a notion of faith, specifically religious faith, that is as diversified and multilayered as that of for example Kierkegaard. This can best be verified with the help of Pojman’s taxonomy and schema267. Instantiations of faith in the text of *Philosophy as Metanoetics* worth noting include but are not limited to the following:

- faith in the doctrine of Pure Land Buddhism, Christianity, and Zen, which he uses as an input;
- faith in the conversion and transformation by Other-power that results if he undertakes *zange*;
- faith in the grace of Other-power;
- faith in the sincerity and authenticity of Shinran Shōnin’s religious philosophy;
- faith in his metanoetic philosophy “which is not philosophy” but which at the same time lays the basis for a new philosophy.

All of these items must be subjected to comment and criticism, but what all have in common is that Tanabe deals with them as a basic given which he then scrutinizes. In a general sense it is thus correct to say that Tanabe professes religious faith - if by this we understand that he accepts a set of - metaphysical - doctrines which he does not deduce by way of analysis of the empirical reality, and which by this token he must accept as pre-philosophical axioms in the style that was discussed in sections 3.3.1 for the notion of religion, and in sections 3.3.2.1 and 3.3.2.2 for philosophy and for theology.

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267 Note 16
However, comprehensive as it may appear to be at first sight as an attempt to establish the basic principle, this argument does not suffice to explore the full depth of Tanabe’s view of faith, more specifically religious faith. For this we must dig deeper into the layers of his Sino-Japanese terminology. Tanabe offers this as a lead-in:

There is no other way of providing philosophy in the future with a sufficient transcendent ground for its absolute independence than to take the experience of action-faith-witness (gyō-shin-shō) as the starting point of our philosophy. (pg. 12)

In this passage three terms are intimately linked together:

- action, which is opposed by contemplation, mediation, intellectual intuition, and which stands for immediate experience;
- faith in what has been immediately experienced;
- witness to others as the means to communicate one’s experience and faith such that others may participate and share in what originally has been a private experience.

This however does not seem to be a complete description unless the process of action-faith-witness is considered to be a stand-alone event that takes place in isolation. One of the results of section 3.1.3 has been to point at the necessity to consider the importance which the religious and cultural context has for the process of evaluation of the object of the quality of the faith. More specifically, the human being must possess a mental framework that enables him or her to “make sense” of all the impressions, i.e. the empirical inputs, which he or she receives and to which the individual is continuously exposed. I have introduced the notion of the “clef” that helps to unravel the meaning of a sheet of music, and that of the paradigm that provides for the intellectual framework and background structure which help the human individual to place isolated facts into a greater context and to establish links of which he or she would probably never think without the help of such a framework.

Given that this is what we were looking for, the element missing is the Japanese word kyō, doctrine. We must thus correct the above list by incorporating this addition:

- doctrine, which is general mental framework that enables us to make sense of our exposure to reality.

With this addition the complete Sino-Japanese sequence becomes kyō- gyō-shin-shō, which is also the title of Shinran’s magnum opus. With this addition the material contents of religious faith must then be understood like this:

- the religious doctrine (kyō) offers the means to interpret reality and my personal experience of it;
- with the help of kyō I analyze and assess the specific experience (gyō) and place it into the web of relationships that together define my being-in-the-world;
- in assessing my individual experiences of reality, gyō, with the help offered by the framework of kyō I conclude that kyō makes sense in that it provides a reasonable explanation of gyō. This serves to strengthen and confirm my faith, shin, in kyō.
- in the act of shō I communicate my private thoughts to others such that they shall be convinced of the veracity of my kyō.

Faith, shin, is never a stand-alone thing but is always related to some doctrine, kyō, which is generally endorsed and confirmed by the experience of gyō and which is only rarely put into question by adverse experiences.
The doctrine, kyō, can in principle be of any kind and is thus not restricted to that of Pure Land Buddhism. As long as it is not contested by empirical findings which kyō cannot properly handle, or by arguments that disclose its inconsistency and inadequacy, there is no need to take action and to reconsider its use. Kyō thus has the quality of relative stability while the other elements of the sequence, gyō, shin, shō are in constant motion, forming a tangle of interactions in which they continuously react with one another, with the doctrinal basis kyō and with the kyō-kyō-kyō-kyō of other human individuals. Faith, in other words, is not a static concept but a dynamic phenomenon which is placed into the volatility of fleeting empirical reality. Christian conceptions of religious faith do not take this characteristic into account. Abraham may internally be torn into pieces by his grief of having to sacrifice his only beloved son Isaac, but his faith in God’s promise is stolid and does not falter.

If we take the sequence of the kyō-kyō-kyō-kyō as being the overall schema that describes Tanabe’s view of the phenomenon of religious faith we may then ask how Tanabe uses the framework of his metaphysics to explicate faith.

In section 3.1.3 I had concluded with a formal description of the phenomenon of “having faith in ... ” that consisted of two concomitant elements:

- a general religious and cultural context which in a specific situation will help the human subject to generate expectations and to provide assurances without which the human subject would not be prepared and ready to perform an act of faith;
- a specific binary relationship by which the human subject and its opposing object of faith are connected in an act by which the human subject places his or her trust and confidence in the object of faith.

In the setup of Tanabe’s philosophy the first element is instantiated by what he calls kyō, doctrine. This kyō is, in the present case, constituted of contributions originating from the religious tenets of the Buddhist Pure Land sect with additions and modifications taken from Christianity and Zen, and from Tanabe’s metanoetic philosophy. It comprises of the religious principles of dependent origination268, Eastern nothingness, and the emptiness of all things (śūnyatā); it also includes Tanabe’s axioms of absolute dialectics, absolute mediation, and absolute nothingness. In addition there are also past experiences. These taken together are amalgamated by the human individual and become a web of thought relationships which help him or her to make sense of reality. In other words, kyō is a personal and subjective framework and a tangle of psychological and philosophical data and givens that together determine how the individual human subject consciously and unconsciously views and assesses reality, and how he or she reacts to reality in detail.

Pushing that what is individually specific and subjective to one side what we are left with this: if the human subject is on the verge of performing an act of faith, he or she will first of all be guided by what the kyō tells him or her about the prospective object of faith: that the religious doctrine of Pure Land Buddhism can be trusted, that Other-power will support those who believe in it, that Amida Buddha will extend his helpful hand, etc. These are just a few examples, and many more could be added. In all cases kyō provides for a context of expectations and assurance such that the human individual is prepared and ready to perform the act of faith in the specific situation.

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268 Takeuchi Yoshinori, The Heart of Buddhism, o.c., pg. 61 - 143. The Sanskrit term is variously translated as dependent origination, conditioned genesis, interconnected arising, causal nexus, co-dependency, etc.
This is the point at which the second element becomes active, i.e. Tanabe’s metaphysical doctrine of absolutely mediated absolute dialectic. According to Tanabe all beings are forever subjected to a dialectical process of becoming and perishing which, according to the doctrine of dependent origination, not only affects the individual being but instead relates this one being to all other beings, to the specific and to the universal. By way of simple extension, the act of a human individual having faith in some object must be a dialectical process in which the two elements are related to one another. This process is absolutely mediated by absolute negation in which the human subject and the object of faith

- negate themselves;
- negate each other;
- negate all negations;

such that the processes of negation is itself negated.

Here self-negation of the human subject and of the object means that each is prepared and ready to become involved in the act of faith. Mutual negation of the human subject and its object of faith makes that both become open to engage in the act of faith with the opposite. Since in Tanabe’s reading negation does not imply that A is replaced by its logical opposite, i.e. not-A, but rather by its other, that is by non-A which is different from not-A, negation of the negations does not imply that A is simply restored but instead that something novel is affirmed which I shall designate by A’. In the end, what is affirmed is that as the act of “having faith in ... “ is performed such that both the human subject and its “object of faith” are transformed and thereby become something other than what they were before, which is that they mutually affirm themselves and each other. These various affirmations and transformations do not contravene the boundaries set by kyō but instead strengthen it such that eventually the faith (shin) in this kyō is confirmed and sustained in the act, with as result that the general worldview kyō and the specific act of faith shin uphold and endorse each other. It then becomes incumbent on the faithful (shin) human individual to witness (shō) to this experience (gyō) and thereby to help others to develop for themselves a faith in kyō.

Since the act of “having faith in ... “ is a strictly private matter that takes place in the realm of subjective inwardness there can be no other way in which the experience of this - and what corroborates it - can be shared between human individuals but by witnessing (shō), which is the act of putting what is ultimately private into the public domain of inter-subjective communication for rational scrutiny by others. Witnessing makes other human individuals aware of the fact that an act of faith (shin) has taken place. There is no other way than this one by which for example religious belief can be spread between individuals, and from one generation to the other. Also, witnessing is the only manner by which political or social ideas can be communicated between human individuals.

The fact of being exposed to the challenge of having to either accept or else to refute a religious doctrine, or of approving or disapproving political and social ideas, is always a state of affairs that exerts some influence on my religious or socio-political views and convictions. As I take note of what is being offered as an option for potentially confirming or changing my religious, political, or social worldview I must at some point negate one or more thoughts that up until this time I had entertained, possibly without having reflected on them in any great length. Also, I shall not be ready to accept at face value what is being offered to me but
instead I will be inclined to interrogate the novel thoughts, putting them into question and subjecting them to rational scrutiny. This is precisely what Tanabe calls negating the object of faith and negating myself as well in the act. As this process of appropriation continues, my initial position will change from one of doubt and uncertainty to one in which I assume a specific stance of either approval or of refutation. Tanabe calls this negating the initial negation, of myself and of the object. The act of appropriation is terminated when I conclude the examination in an act that negates what initially was a negative attitude and converts it into the positive act of asserting my acceptance or refutation. Viewed in this way, Tanabe’s analysis of the phenomenon of faith combines psychological and philosophical elements with the aim to capture a process that takes place exclusively in the private realm of subjectivity and which in the act of witnessing (shō) is being brought into the public arena of inter-subjectivity.

In the context of Buddhist Pure Land doctrine, the act of “having faith in Amida Buddha’s promise” is instantiated in the motion of the ōsō in which the Bodhisattva carries the plight of the faithful up to Amida Buddha. One instantiation of such faith is the practice of the nembutsu, which takes the form of an ascent towards the Pure Land. Such motions are being paralleled by that of the gensō in which Amida’s graceful response and helping hand are extended to the faithful who is thus helped to enter nirvāna by means of the merit-transference of ekō. Together gensō and ekō make the Pure Land concept of transcendent grace.

4.2.4.3 Tanabe on divine grace

One of the defining characteristics of grace is that only a freely acting, autonomous subject can be the author of an act of grace, because such an act is always performed spontaneously such that it can neither be necessitated, nor coerced, nor caused. Therefore, what I have called the “seat of grace” in section 3.1.2.3 must of necessity be a subject; it can never be a lifeless thing. Christian theologians have taken this assertion as their basis for maintaining that “grace”, better still “divine grace” is a strictly Christian concept that can have no equivalent in any other religion which is not as a minimum a monotheistic religion. Buddhism, on the other hand, does not recognize any Celestial Being that would in any conceivable way conform to the essence of what is implied by the concept of “theism”. The ultimate goal of Buddhist eschatology is the notion of the “nirvāna” in which all sentient beings become extinct. Tanabe, who in Philosophy as Metanoetics embraces Pure Land Buddhism, clearly must face this problem.

The key notion to solve this challenge is the concept of absolute nothingness. But before I can address this issue I must first prepare the ground.

Instantiations of transcendent “divine grace” abound in Philosophy as Metanoetics. They include but are not limited to the following examples:

- the incidence of Other-power when self-power fails.

269 Heinrich Dumoulin, Understanding Buddhism, o.c., acknowledges that of all forms of Buddhism, Pure Land School Buddhism shows the highest degree of similarity with Christian theology. However, Dumoulin cautions us that although the figures of Amida Buddha and of the Christian notions of God and of the angels seem to be parallel ones, we must not forget that the Buddhist concepts are only convenient means, upāya, designed to make ultimate truth more palatable; the ultimate aim that all sentient beings should strive for is extinction in nirvāna.
- the resolution of Tanabe’s personal crisis;
- the conversion and transformation when an act of zange is performed;
- the Original Vow of the Bodhisattva;
- the Great Nay and the Great Compassion of Amida Buddha;
- the conception of the Pure Land as a safe-haven for the “sinners and fools”;
- the notions of gensō and of ekō.

Common to all of these examples is that they fit the same schema: on one side is the human subject who is in need of help because he or she can no longer face the problems of life out of his or her own resources. On the other side there is some agency that is prepared to offer transcendent help to “all sentient beings”. Some reflection on basic terminology may help to clarify issues.

While in Tanabe’s view Zen, Nishida-tetsugaku\(^2\), and other forms of “ordinary mysticism” based on contemplation or intellectual intuition emphasize the aspect of ōsō “going toward” the Pure Land, Tanabe’s metanoetic philosophy follows the Pure Land Buddhism of Shinran in focusing on the aspect of gensō, “returning to” this world from the Pure Land, and on ekō, merit-transference. Tanabe writes:

If I may introduce … two key concepts - ōsō or “going toward” the Pure Land, and gensō or “returning to” this world from the Pure Land - metanoetics may be described as a philosophy of action following the path of gensō, while ordinary mysticism may be described as contemplative speculation following the path of ōsō. The doctrine of gensō is thus of special significance in enabling metanoetics to bring about a revival of philosophy. (pg. 3)

The doctrine of gensō establishes the profound social and historical directions of ethical transformation in Tanabe’s philosophy of metanoetics as is further highlighted when Tanabe speaks of a

self-consciousness of the Great Nay - qua - Great Compassion, or nothingness - qua - love, as the core of metanoetics. (pg. 256)

Contrary to other thinkers in the “Kyoto School” who are essentially based in the “self-power” tradition of Zen Buddhism, Tanabe is based more in the “Other-power” tradition of Shinran’s Pure Land Buddhism. Against Zen Buddhism and Nishida-tetsugaku he argues that absolute nothingness can never immediately be grasped through the self-power activity of intellectual intuition based on reason, and instead asserts that true absolute nothingness is the transcendent ground of a transformative grace that breaks in upon the self from without as “Other-power”. Tanabe’s polemic here is that the self-power activity of intellectual intuition grasps only absolute being, whereas true absolute nothingness only appears in the act of metanoeisis through the mediation of Other-power. Accordingly, metanoetics transcends the self-power activity of contemplation and of intellectual intuition characteristic of “ordinary mysticism”, and instead is based on the transformative grace of absolute Other-power.

“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 ... Here we have a very important characteristic by which metanoetics is

\(^{2}\) Nishida-tetsugaku is the word used by Tanabe to designate the philosophy of Nishida Kitarō. Here tetsugaku is the Japanese word for philosophy.
distinguished from ordinary mysticism or philosophies of intellectual intuition: it is not a philosophy founded on the intuitive reason of *jiriki* (self-power), but rather a philosophy founded on action-faith-witness mediated by the transformative power of *tariki* (Other-power). (pg. 2 – 3)

Hence, metanoetics in its sense as meta-noetics represents a transition from the standpoint of self-power in Zen Buddhism and other forms of ordinary mysticism based on intellectual intuition, to that of Other-power as espoused by Shinran’s Pure Land sect of Buddhism. Tanabe clarifies:

In short, my metanoesis - my conversion - consists in a shift from *jiriki* to *tariki*. Put in positive terms, metanoetics represents the philosophy of Other-power. (pg. 11)

At the same time Tanabe’s position is more subtle than this, insofar as metanoetics represents a dialectic of “absolute mediation” which functions to correlate both self-power and Other-power, relative being and absolute nothingness, in each and every act of *zange*. He describes this convergence as follows:

Metanoesis is action performed by the self, but at the same time it is the practice of abandoning self. Hence it originates in the Great Compassion of Other-power. Nevertheless, it is actually the self that submits itself voluntarily to Other-power and performs this action. Paradoxically, metanoesis both is and is not an action of the self. As mediated by absolute nothingness, it is action without an acting self. (pg. 170 – 171)

Tanabe refers to this correlation of self-power and Other-power in the act of metanoesis as *jiriki* - *qua* - *tariki* (: self-power - *qua* - Other-power) and *tariki* – *qua* – *jiriki*. Only the dialectic of reciprocal mediation can bring about self-consciousness of the fact that the real grace of Other-power is activated through the spontaneous freedom of self-power, and conversely, that the realization of human freedom in self-power becomes possible only through the assistance of Other-power. By means of this dialectic we are able to understand *jiriki* - *qua* - *tariki* and *tariki* - *qua* - *jiriki*. (pg. 184)

According to Tanabe, then, the radical self-negation of metanoesis is prompted from without by the Other-power of absolute nothingness which transcends the self: the self thereby acts while being acted upon. On the one side the grace of Other-power is manifest only in and through a free act of self-power, while on the other side a free act of self-power brings forth, as well as depends upon, the grace of absolute Other-power.

In his effort to uncover the limitations inherent in the self-power function of intellectual intuition achieved by the use of reason, Tanabe develops a logic of metanoetics, in terms of an “absolute critique”, which is based on Kant’s critique of pure reason together with the Hegelian counter critique (pg. 36 – 57). In a protracted argument Tanabe demonstrates that both Kantian criticism and Hegelian dialectic are based on the self-power function of pure reason. Through an absolute critique, however, pure reason based on self-power must “die” by yielding to its self-contradiction, so that it can be reborn as a new philosophy of metanoetics realized through the transformative grace of absolute nothingness or Other-power.

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271 The double sequence of *jiriki* - *qua* - *tariki*; *tariki* - *qua* - *jiriki* is to indicate that the two terms in this relation, *jiriki* or self-power, and *tariki* or Other-power are logically equivalent and that *jiriki* is at the same time also *tariki*, and vice versa. Since by definition *jiriki* is the exact opposite of *tariki*, these expressions must be understood to imply that both are equivalent because both are empty, without substance, fleeting phenomena, while ultimate reality is absolute nothingness, emptiness, *śānyatā*. 184
Through the death or self-negation of pure reason achieved by means of an absolute critique, philosophy as metanoetics discovers a transcendent ground beyond itself in the Other-power of absolute nothingness. The self-power of pure reason can thus find itself only in and through Other-power. That is to say, only through the grace of Other-power can pure reason criticize itself and understand its true nature. The death-and-resurrection of pure reason results in the realization of jiriki - qua - tariki (self-power - qua - Other-power) and tariki - qua - jiriki as expressed by the dialectic of absolute mediation.

Viewed as the capacity for death-and-resurrection, reason is a function of jiriki - qua - tariki, established in the transformation and mediation of obedience to Other-power and arriving at a manifestation of absolute nothingness. (pg. 107)

There is thus in Tanabe’s thought no room for passing over the confines of his terminology and the complex dialectical interplay of key terms: jiriki, tariki, and absolute nothingness. Transcendent grace, that at least is clear, is associated with Other-power which acts in function of absolute nothingness. But beyond this there is nothing to be said.

There is, however, a hidden dimension upon which Tanabe touches only in passing, but upon which he does not expand, and which may help to shed some more light on the problematic of grace. This is a cluster of relationships surrounding the notion of absolute nothingness:

- nothingness - qua - love, love - qua - absolute nothingness;
- Great Nay - qua - Great Compassion;
- Great Compassion - qua - nothingness.

In these compounds the terms of love, the Great Nay, and of the Great Compassion are linked to the notion of nothingness, better absolute nothingness. In one way these terms are foundational because they fill a gap in offering a description for a process which otherwise would appear to be governed by blind coincidence and pure randomness. Tanabe cannot out of his own resources supply any explanations because such an explication would have to be based on assumptions about the internal nature of Eastern nothingness and also of absolute nothingness.

On the other hand it cannot be denied that the choice of these words, i.e. compassion and love, and of the concepts for which they stand function as a response to questions that are of basic importance to human existence and which therefore meet a basic need of human existence, i.e. the wish to be understood and the urge to find guidance when in dire needs, as was the case with Tanabe.

It may be useful at this point to clarify the meaning of the two key words, compassion and love. *Webster’s Encyclopedic Dictionary*, o.c., offers the following clarifications:

- **COMPASSION**: a feeling of deep sympathy and sorrow for another who is stricken by suffering or misfortune, accompanied by a strong desire to alleviate the pain or remove its cause.

- **LOVE**: tenderness, fondness, predilection, warmth, passion, adoration;

- **LOVE**, affection devotion: all mean a deep and enduring emotional regard, usually for another person;

- **LOVE** may apply to various kinds of regard: the charity of the Creator, reverent adoration toward God and toward a person, the relation of parent and child, the regard of friends for each other, romantic feelings for one of the opposite sex, etc;
- AFFECTION is a fondness for a person of either sex, that is enduring and tender, but calm;
- DEVOTION is and intense love and steadfast, enduring loyalty to a person; it may also imply consecration to a cause.

From inspecting these precisions of the meanings of the English words “compassion” and “love” I conclude that both clearly and unambiguously refer to a human or humanlike subject who has compassion or feels love. In other words, it does not make sense and would clearly not be in agreement with the accepted uses of the words if one was to assume that some lifeless thing, a stone for example, was to be the seat of either one of these two feelings. This corroborates the earlier statement that Tanabe must explicate the nature of absolute nothingness, and also that of ultimate reality.

Traditionally it has been the task of religion, both in the East and in the West, to fill the gap and to provide the necessary answers. For Pure Land Buddhism these answers took the form of the conceptions of the Original Vow of the Bodhisattva and of Amida Buddha’s Pure Land. These religious myths served the purpose of individualizing and of personalizing an activity which without such a construction would have remained impersonal and mechanistic. Clearly Tanabe cannot accept any such myth as a foundational element for his philosophy. To him such constructs are only skilful means (Skt.: upāya) that make the truth more palatable. They are embellishments which over time have been added because without these the ordinary “sinner and fool” would not be able to grasp the truth.

We are thus at a point that is recurrent in both Eastern and Western philosophy, and which can be phrased as that of the problematic of the nature of ultimate reality. For the context of Christianity this gap has been filled in by the revelations of the Bible. Buddhism, on the other hand, has always upheld the stance of “The Silence of the Buddha”272. The essence of this stance is the assertion that speculating about metaphysical things such as the nature of ultimate reality does not help to achieve the goal and that it only diverts from what is of the essence, namely to attain enlightenment. With the aim to unravel things somewhat Tanabe has the following comment to offer on the relationship between religion and ethics:

one may argue that religion in its essence lies beyond ethics, and therefore that religion is free from the discrimination that characterizes ethics. One may argue further that Buddhism is a good example of this, and that the mediation of religion by ethics in Western religions is due to a tradition peculiar to Judaism and Christianity but incidental to the essence of religion, namely the inextricable bond between the “love of God” and the “wrath of God.” And yet even when it comes to deliverance from the source of samsāra (the cycle of life and death), which is generally regarded as the chief impulse of Buddhism, there is a difference between life after attaining the truth in enlightenment and simply continuing an illusory life without enlightenment. The difference between awakening to truth and staying caught in illusions constitutes the opposition between good and evil. Insofar as the former is taken as a goal to be sought after and the latter as an obstacle to be avoided, far from lacking a distinction between good and evil, Buddhism requires ethics as a mediating element. Indeed, it takes rational discrimination as its medium. (pg. 155)

In this passage, the topics of ethics and that of religion are coupled and linked to what for Tanabe is “the inextricable bond between the ‘love of God’ and the ‘wrath of God’” which is characteristic of Judaism and of Christianity. In Buddhism any such bond does not exist, and the difference between good and evil in Judaism and Christianity becomes in Buddhism “the difference between awakening to truth and staying caught in illusions” which is a difference

272 Takeuchi Yoshinori, The Heart of Buddhism, o.c., pg. 3 ff
between a goal to be sought and an obstacle to be avoided, and which consequently is far from being equivalent to the distinction between good and evil that prevails in Judaism and in Christianity. It is thus consistent to argue that there is no need to explain the nature of ultimate reality because in Tanabe’s estimation rational discrimination is sufficient to distinguish what is good from what is bad. This reflects Kant’s claim that ethics is rationally founded and that his categorical imperative is independent of religious dogma.

This is, however, not yet the end of the debate. The above quotation also shows that for Tanabe ethics cannot be totally dissolved from religion, for it cannot be denied that the interpretation of what is ethically desirable and what is not depends on the view of ultimate reality which only religion can provide. Judaism and Christianity must choose between the ‘love of God’ and the ‘wrath of God’ and by this token have developed a concept of ethics that is based on categories that differ from those which Buddhism provides. The chief goal for the Buddhist believer is to be delivered from the bondage of samsāra. As a consequence, the categories of “love” and of “compassion” must be given an interpretation that corresponds to this goal. If there is no personal God whom I must adore and fear, then love and compassion can only be understood as virtues that are highly valued when human individuals interact.

One example of how religion shapes ethics is the justification given to the ethical precept of “love of neighbor”. For Tanabe, love of neighbor is a logical correlative of his doctrine of absolute dialectics. In his view all beings, that is all human individuals, continually interact dialectically with one another in a process governed by absolute mediation. Absolute mediation, in turn, is instantiated in the form of absolute negation, and as such it is fuelled by absolute nothingness. This is where “love” as a constitutive element comes into play through the assertion that nothingness, absolute nothingness, have the quality of love:

- love - qua - absolute nothingness (pg. 8);
- nothingness - qua - love (pg. li, 255).

The abstract logical constructs of nothingness and of Tanabe’s absolute nothingness take on a human face as if they were controlled by a human being that feels love and which has compassion. Clearly these are interpretations which serve no other purpose than that of making comprehensible what otherwise could not be explained. In other words the problem of Tanabe’s association of nothingness with love and compassion can only be solved with the help of a metaphysical speculation. This speculation is motivated by the Buddhist religious worldview and eschatological promise, more specifically by the religious goal of seeking deliverance from the bondage of samsāra.

For Tanabe “love of neighbor” thus becomes a process which is ubiquitous, and which is governed by a conception of “love” that can only be clarified in Buddhist religious terms as the virtues of Amida Buddha and of the Bodhisattvas. By way of comparison, Kierkegaard’s understanding of “love of neighbor” is that of a divine command which is defined in the Decalogue: the Christian must love God because God loves him, and he must love his neighbor as he loves himself.

The abstract notion of love, and with it that of compassion is thus filled in with a content that only religion can provide, and without which rational philosophical analysis cannot lay
the foundations for any ethics that is coherent and cohesive. In other words, rational analysis cannot establish a system of values that can serve as a basis for counting something as either “good” or “bad”\textsuperscript{273}. Tanabe explains the nature of ultimate reality with the help of the notions of “love” and of “compassion” which can only be filled with content if reference is made to inputs that must come from sources that lie outside the confines of philosophy proper. Philosophy can only assert that there is a transcendent entity which it calls nothingness or absolute nothingness; philosophy cannot, however, solve the problem of whether this entity is real, i.e. is an integral part of reality, or whether it is instead only a construct of the human mind, a phantasm as are unicorns and golden mountains. In the latter case the “seat of grace” would be a void onto which the human mind has projected something that helps it to make sense of what does not make sense out of its own.

The philosophical explanation that Tanabe gives to the phenomenon of grace follows a pattern that is similar to that used to explain faith. To begin with there is the encompassing cultural and religious context which serves to generate the setting and without which there would not be any reason to assume that the human individual receives an unmerited gift; all there would be is the objective datum of an event that happens either in the public space of inter-subjectivity, or else in the private domain of human inwardness, and this event would in both cases be open to interpretation in divergent directions. The fact that a gift is unmerited or that it is a miracle is always a subjective assessment that the human individual must take in isolation as a private decision. Tanabe does not deny this. What is left open is the answer to the question of the inherent nature of the “seat of grace”.

The act of grace is instantiated dialectically by absolute mediation in which both the human being and its opposite enter in a sequence of successive negations and in which the negations are also negated. Self-negation here means that the human being is prepared and ready to subject itself to what is greater than itself, while the seat of grace is prepared and ready to enter into a relationship with the human being. Mutual negation means that the two elements open themselves up to enter into an active relationship in which they must change their attitude against one another. The seat of grace must instantiate the act of grace, the human individual must receive it. Negating the negations means that after both have changed their attitudes they assert themselves again, the seat of grace is ready for the next act of grace, while the human individual must accommodate itself to the fact that he or she has received the unmerited gift. It remains to be stated that all of this does not add up to a coherent and cohesive logic if the “seat of grace” is only an empty void that is unable to act autonomously and freely, and which like a brick cannot have love or feel compassion.

The problem can be summarized as follows:

\begin{quote}
have the words used to translate Philosophy as Metanoetics been well chosen - or else - are the Japanese concepts for grace, love, compassion such that they cannot be adequately translated into English?
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{273} I do not know of any instance where a purely philosophical argument would allow me to choose on rational grounds between two alternatives such as the New Testament altruism of Christianity, as propagated by Søren Kierkegaard on one side, and extreme social Darwinism on the other. I do not at all deny that there are good arguments upon which to base a choice, but I maintain that these arguments all depend on assumptions that have the characteristic of being pre-philosophical choices or extra-philosophical inputs from for example religiously based value systems. I thus maintain that philosophy understood to be the place of rational analysis cannot of its own resources and as a matter of general principle, solve the problematic of founding a value system. Values can only be based on assumptions that lie outside the realm of philosophy or else which precede it.
5. **In lieu of a synthesis**

The present study has shown that for both Tanabe and for Kierkegaard the philosophies of religious faith and divine grace can be analyzed as comprising two constituent parts, a propensity that is part of our animal baggage, and an accompanying intellectual component which for the individual human being has evolved over time from the religious and cultural inputs that society and tradition offer as social or religious conventions and doctrines.

As for religious faith, both authors agree that there is a need for readiness and preparedness of the human being to place its trust and confidence in someone or something, but they differ in what the precise object of religious faith should be. The basis of Kierkegaard’s religious faith is the divine revelation of the Gospel in which he believes in a “leap of faith” and “with infinite passion”. His faith may perhaps be troubled by human emotions such as those which Abraham probably had when God told him to sacrifice his only son, but such doubts and uncertainties never bring him to the point of not complying with God’s demand through to the bitter end. Things are different for Tanabe. To him a rational analysis of reality has resulted in a body of metaphysical and other doctrines that, if taken together, function as his specific worldview in the sense that they provide a coherent and cohesive explanation for the phenomena that make up reality. Therefore, as he lives through his experiences of reality he finds that his philosophical paradigm does not fail on him, but that instead it provides his life with coherent and cohesive sense. This in turn corroborates and confirms his trust and his confidence in this paradigm, fact which he makes known to others in his personal witness. By comparison, Kierkegaard’s faith is a strictly personal matter for which there is no need not make it public. Rather, Abraham cannot explain his unconditional trust and confidence in God in terms that others would be able to understand.

The same observations are true for the phenomenon of divine grace. The basis for Kierkegaard’s understanding of the essence of human existence is to be found in the Genesis, which is the Biblical account of the creation of this world. Man, in other words, is created by God, and he lives by the grace of God. This grace may take on several forms, individual for just one individual or collective for all humankind and all of creation. The only aspect of philosophical interest to Kierkegaard is the problematic interplay of God’s grace and human freedom. Clearly, the answer which Kierkegaard has to offer is nothing more than wishful thinking, because there is no way whatsoever to demonstrate that he is right: God cannot be interrogated on this point, so that whatever conclusions Kierkegaard may draw from his analysis, these will always be speculations and not demonstrations of absolute truth - as the history of philosophy has shown. Tanabe, on the other hand, has a very different understanding of “divine grace”. For him the essence of this phenomenon is the salvific promise as is contained in the Original Vow and subsequently in the acts of the Great Nay and the Great Compassion of Amida Buddha and the Bodhisattva. But Buddhism differs fundamentally from Christianity in that it does not uphold the idea of a personal God, or of any kind of Celestial Beings, personal or not. Therefore the “seat of grace” for Tanabe is to be found in the abstract notion of Other-power, a concept which Tanabe never investigates. This raises the basic question of how the Buddhist conception of divine grace is to be reconciled with the western notion of grace being an underserved gift that is made by an autonomous and freely acting subject.
This all too short summary already shows that the basic tenets of Kierkegaard and of Tanabe in matters of religious faith and of divine grace are literally diverging and that any attempt to reconcile one view with the other must inevitably meet with horrendous obstacles that will be raised by religious orthodoxy on both sides. Are we therefore reduced to “agreeing that we disagree” and for the rest to leave things at that, as Russell H. Bowers, Jr. suggests, or is there a way ahead that can somehow lead out of this stalemate? Obviously, the objective cannot be to simply negate any religious and other doctrinal differences that separate Christianity from Buddhism, and thereby Kierkegaard from Tanabe. Rather, any such analysis would require a very careful and circumspect approach and would depend on resources which I neither have nor pretend to have. There is no need to stress that the subject matter of the Buddhist Christian dialogue has already attracted much attention. Yet to date no solution seems to have emerged that could find universal acceptance. In fact, this dialogue seems to have barely started.

If the basic problematic of a potential reconciliation of the Christian and the Buddhist world views is out of reach for me, what are the prospects that can be offered to those who want to further the evolution of a “world philosophy” as Heisig has proclaimed? Fortunately there have been some recent developments in the fields of formal logic and of metaphysics that hold the promise of offering a new angle on old problems. In what follows I shall propose to use these results as tools to address some of the logical and material problems that become apparent when the thoughts of Kierkegaard and Tanabe are compared. This needs to be explained in more detail. At the beginning of this study I have held that divergences of philosophical positions can be better understood if they are reduced to the level of basic choices that occur either before the philosophical enterprise starts, or which are motivated by inputs that have their origin outside and beyond the boundaries of philosophy proper, for example religious belief. In the course of this study I have been able to identify instances of such choices, for example the distinctions between

- Eastern Nothingness and western Being of beings;
- Kierkegaard’s belief in Biblical revelation, and Tanabe’s rational Buddhist metaphysics.

How to choose between these alternatives is an issue that cannot be argued rationally but which instead takes the status of adopting philosophical first principles or axioms, which when accepted inevitably must lead to diverging results. As Aristotle has it, any attempt to prove “first principles” must of necessity lead to infinite regress. Axioms therefore can only be accepted or rejected; there is nothing to be added.

But this is not the end of it. One of the results of the above analysis was that both Tanabe and Kierkegaard share similar difficulties in carrying their philosophies through to the final conclusions. Kierkegaard, for example, must admit that his Biblical faith is based on the “absurd” fact that eternal infinite God has subjected Himself, in the incarnation of Jesus Christ, to the regime of the temporal and finite. A similar kind of logical problem is the relationship between God’s omniscient grace and the human ability to reject it. Kierkegaard cannot offer any explanation. Traditional logic breaks down completely, and an abyss opens up that can only be bridged by a “leap of faith”. Tanabe faces a similar problem. He cannot explain the duality of being and not-being that is contained in the notions of nothingness,
and of emptiness, śūnyatā; this duality is counterintuitive. Also, Tanabe consistently uses the copula qua to connect terms which by the standards of traditional logic never should be connected because such a connection is logically contradictory. These observations suggest that a closer look at this kind of logical problems is warranted, and that Kierkegaard and Tanabe seem to face the same kind of difficulties.

There is another kind of problematic which is directly related to the concept of grace. This is the problem of obscurantism. By distinguishing obscurantism from its opposite, rationality, I mean that the effect of grace must be a phenomenon which

- occurs in the realm of immanent reality;
- cannot be explained because it breaks “the laws of nature”;
- therefore is ascribed to some obscure, unexplained supra-natural power.

Kierkegaard takes divine grace as a given and insofar is ready to follow the medieval distinctions quoted in section 3.1.2.2. This is the theological side. Philosophically Kierkegaard never addresses the issue of how to elucidate the mechanism by which God interacts with nature and how he interferes with nature’s course. There is thus an element of obscurity in his philosophy because divine grace has the appearance of an unexplained and unexplainable deus ex machina. Tanabe faces a similar problem. On one side he strongly affirms the phenomenon of “grace as Other-power” while on the other he rejects the notion of a personal “seat of grace”. Tanabe does, however, offer some precisions, i.e.

- love - qua - absolute nothingness (pg. 8);
- nothingness - qua - love (pg. li, 255);
- Great Compassion - qua – nothingness (pg. 141);
- ... love and compassion of Other-power (pg. 170).

These precisions serve to establish a conceptual link between nothingness and Other-power. However, closer inspection shows that these wordings are evasive and not sufficient to shed some light on the nature of the “seat of grace”. More specifically: it is possible to interpret the above quotations in different and contradictory ways. On one hand we may assume that nothingness acts as a dialectical veil behind which some supra-natural entity is active such that its actions and activities can be qualified by the human observer as expressing “love” and “compassion”. In this reading, “Other-power” is the name given to the effects of this transcendent entity. Another reading is to renounce any idea of a transcendent Entity and to invoke blind randomness and pure chance. In this case the notions of “love” and of “compassion” become problematic and must be explained in terms that are compatible with chance and randomness. Tanabe does not raise this as a problem and consequently also does not discuss the issue. Therefore, what we can conclude is that for him the notion of the seat of grace as the origin for an unmerited gift must remain obscure.

If I assume, as most people should be ready to agree, that there is only one world in which we all live together, and that therefore the aim of philosophy should be to explain this world as it is, then the question that comes to mind is whether philosophical divergences such as those between Kierkegaard and Tanabe have any real significance, or whether any such...

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276 In Philosophy as Metanoetics Tanabe sometimes ventures to use the terms (absolute) nothingness and God interchangeably, although this “God” cannot be understood to be a Christian God.
differences should simply be treated as artifacts of finite philosophical reflection. Should they be corrected and compensated as unwarranted deviations from ultimate reality as it really is, or do they have the potential to make us aware of aspects of reality about which we did not yet think? Taken at face value these broad and sweeping questions represent a horrendous tasking which to address I have neither the time nor the space. If, however, we go back to what came up as a problem, then we can define two tasks which hopefully are much less demanding in their scope:

- perform a critical review of the "laws of thought";
- clarify the "immanent" aspects of "divine" grace.

The first tasking has as background the emergence of some recent developments of formal logic, especially the upcoming of "paraconsistent logic" and of "dialetheism". The essence of these developments is to show that the axiomatic basis of classical formal logic, more precisely the

- Law of Non-Contradiction (LNC);

is not as firmly established as logicians in the wake of Aristotle had a tendency to assume, and that therefore new alleys of thought are now opened that had been closed before by invoking of the killer argument that certain conclusions would contradict the "laws of thought", and that philosophers had to avoid at all cost the logical Armageddon following from the adage *ex contradictione quodlibet*.

The essence of the second tasking is to draw on the implications of what has been said above about divine grace, namely that it occurs in the realm of immanent reality. In the attempt to come to terms with the reproach, shared by most philosophers, namely that divine grace is a tangle of plain mysticism and obscurantism, two philosophers, Alain Badiou and Adam Miller277, have exploited the contributions which the German mathematician Georg Cantor (1845 - 1918) has made to the theory of infinite sets. The key idea is that the concept of infinity which traditionally is used to characterize the creativity and spontaneity that portray the effects of grace has an internal structure such that immanence and grace may become compatible concepts under the assumption that an unexplained residue remains which Badiou calls "the event". This result then reduces somewhat the complexity of Tanabe’s undefined terms, and it offers a new view on Kierkegaard’s problem of human freedom of action.

5.1 A critical review of some “laws of thought”

The Law of Non-Contradiction (LNC) is defined in Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* Book Gamma as

> it is impossible that the same thing can at the same time both belong and not belong to the same object and in the same respect, and all other specifications that might be made, let them be added to meet local objections (*Metaphysics* 1005b19-23)

while the Law of the Excluded Midterm (LEM) reads like this:

277 Note 26
of any one subject, one thing must be either asserted or denied *(Metaphysics 1011b24)*

Since the times of Aristotle and perhaps up to the middle of the 20th century, both laws have been considered to be basic truths and thus beyond all criticism. Aristotle held that the LNC was a “first principle”, an axiom, and as such could not be demonstrated; such principles must be taken as primitive rather than derived from other propositions. The LNC was held to be one of these axioms. Without the LNC the assertions

- a is F;
- a is not F

cannot be distinguished and no argumentation is possible: *ex contradictione quodlibet.*

Leibniz for one affirmed the role of the LNC as a basic, indemonstrable “first principle”. For him this law was inter-definable with another of Aristotle’s *axiomata*, the Law of Identity:

nothing should be taken as first principles but experiences and the axiom of identity or (what is the same thing) contradiction, which is primitive, since otherwise there would be no difference between truth and falsehood, and all investigation would cease at once, if to say yes or no were a matter of indifference.\(^\text{279}\)

Hegel has often been depicted as a leading LNC-skeptic, but in fact for Hegel an unresolved contradiction is a sign of error. The contradiction between thesis and antithesis results in *Aufhebung* (Engl.: *sublation*) which is the name given to the dialectical resolution or superseding of the contradiction between opposites in a higher-level synthesis that eventually generates its own antithesis. Rather than repudiating LNC, Hegel’s dialectic rests upon it.

In accounting for the incompatibility of truth and falsity, LNC lies at the heart of the “theory of opposition” that governs both contradictories and contraries. Contradictory opposites divide the true and the false between them, while contrary opposites are mutually inconsistent but not necessarily exhaustive; they may be simultaneously false, though not simultaneously true. An example for the first would be the pair of contradictory assertions “he is laughing - he is not laughing” of which one must necessarily be true while the other must be false, while of the pair of mutually inconsistent assertions “he is happy - he is sad” may both be simultaneously false, though they may not be simultaneously true. The LNC applies to both forms of opposition in that neither contradictories nor contraries may belong to the same object at the same time and in the same respect. The two forms of opposition are distinguished by the LEM, which is also a first principle and which by this token also cannot be demonstrated. Both laws pertain to contradictories, as in a paired affirmation (“S is P”) and denial (“S is not P”): the negation is true whenever the affirmation is false, and the affirmation is true whenever the negation is false. Thus, by LNC, affirmation and negation cannot both be *true*, but neither can they both be *false* (by LEM). Now while the LNC applies both to contradictory and contrary oppositions, the LEM holds only for contradictories: a dog cannot be both black and white, but it may be neither.

\(^{278}\) Axioms are propositions which are both indemonstrable and indispensable. They serve in mathematics and in formal logic as the starting points for logical deductions.

Despite its apparent coherence and cohesiveness, there are examples which show that this sort of logic breaks down. One is that of future events:

- tomorrow he shall have a car accident;
- tomorrow he shall not have a car accident.

Clearly, only one of these two statements can be true (LNC), and only the future will tell which one it is going to be. If the LNC applies to future events, what about the LEM? Here is where the difficulties begin. The analysis can be summarized as follows: on one hand it is necessary that he either has a car accident or that he does not have one. However it is not necessary that he has a car accident, nor that he does not have a car accident, although it is necessary that he has a car accident or that he does not have one. Therefore, since future statements are true according to how the actual things develop, it is clear that wherever these are such as to allow of contraries as chance has it, the same necessarily holds for the contradictories also. This happens with things that are not always so or are not always not so. It is necessary for one or the other of the contradictories to be true or false - although it is not necessarily this one or that one, but as chance has it. It is also necessary for one to be true rather than the other, yet not the case that one is already true and that the other is false. It is thus not necessary that of every affirmation and opposite negation one should be true and the other false. For what holds for things that are does not hold for things that are not but may possibly be or not be. On this basis it is fair to conclude that the LEM does not apply to future events for no proposition of future contingency can be determinately true or determinately false, but this is not to say that no such proposition can be true or false. On the contrary, any such proposition is true if the outcome is to be true as it states, even though this is unknown to us.

Skipping much technical detail I may conclude that for future contingent statements

- no proposition may be simultaneously true and false (LNC);
- every proposition must be either true or false (LEM).

In addition vacuous subjects have sometimes been taken to yield a violation of LEM through the emergence of a truth-value gap:

- the king of France is bald;
- the king of France is not bald.

While a classical reading would see a republican France as rendering the first statement as false and the second as automatically true, some logicians reject the idea that either of these sentences can be used to make a true or false assertion: both statements presuppose the existence of a referent for the singular term *king of France*; if this presupposition fails, so does the possibility of a classical truth assignment. However, such an analysis presents a challenge to LEM only if the first statement is taken as the true contradictory of the second, an assumption which is not shared by those who allow a reading of the second term on which it is, like the first, false in the absence of a referent for the subject term.

Some such interpretations allow for truth value *gaps* in which some sentences or statements are not assigned a (classical) truth value: in a world in which France is a republic the question of the truth value of *the king of France is bald* simply fails to arise, and similarly is the
negative form *the king of France is not bald* also neither true nor false. This amounts to a rejection of LEM in this case. In addition to vacuous singular expressions, gap-based analyses have been proposed for future contingents and category mistakes:

- the number 7 likes to drink coffee;
- the number 7 doesn’t like to drink coffee.

Another incursion on the universal acceptance of the laws of thought has been leveled against the LNC by allowing not for truth value gaps but for truth value *gluts*: cases in which a given sentence and its negation are taken to be both true, or alternatively cases in which a sentence may be assigned more than one (classical) truth value, i.e. both True and False.

Aristotle himself anticipated many of these criticisms that have been raised against the LNC. The ambivalent exchange

- were you pleased?
- well, I was and I was not.

and the observation

- S is P
- S is not P

can both be true from different standpoints. Aristotle noted that

“S is P” and “S is not P” cannot both hold *in the same sense, at the same time, and in the same respect.*

The Indian philosopher Nāgārjuna\(^{280}\) has been the most prominent critic of the LNC in the East in the exposition of the tetralemma:

- S is P;
- S is not-P;
- S is both P and not-P;
- S is neither P nor not-P.

These expressions can variously be reworded in positive and negative form, such that all four statements must be either accepted (positive form) or rejected (negative form). It is important to note that cases like these only arise when we are beyond the realm to which ordinary logic applies, when “the sphere of thought has ceased.” Is this tantamount, as it appears, to the renunciation of LEM and LNC, the countenancing of both gaps and gluts, and thus - in the view of Aristotle - the overthrow of all bounds of rational argument?

To answer this question it must first be noted that the axiomatic status of LNC and LEM is as well-established within the logical traditions of India as it is for the ancient Greek and the western tradition. There would be no basis to claim that Nāgārjuna was an “irrationalist”, for if it was the case that Nāgārjuna simply rejected LNC, then it would not have been possible for him to develop his many *reductio ad absurum* arguments which are standard in his logic and which hinge on the establishment of untenable contradictions. Crucially, it is only in the

\(^{280}\) Note 42; also : Hans Waldenfels, *Absolutes Nichts*, o.c., ch. 1.2.
realm of the Absolute or Transcendent, where we are contemplating the nature of the ultimate, that contradictions are embraced; in the realm of ordinary reality, LNC operates and classical logic holds. More specifically, the apparent paradoxes of Nāgārjuna are parallel to potential counterexamples to the LNC as have been discussed in Western thought. For example, the apparent endorsement of

\[ S \text{ is } P \& S \text{ is not-}P \]

is upon closer examination defined in precisely the way that Aristotle's statement of the law foresees

- from a certain viewpoint, S is P (e.g. nirvāna exists);
- from a certain viewpoint, S is not-P (e.g. nirvāna does not exist).

In this sense, the logic of Nāgārjuna and of the Buddhist tradition more generally, can be seen not as inconsistent but as paraconsistent²⁸¹.

One reason for embracing paraconsistent logic is the fact that there are theories which are inconsistent but non-trivial. Clearly, once we admit the existence of such theories, their underlying logics must be paraconsistent. One example of an inconsistent but non-trivial theory is Bohr's model of the atom: an electron orbits the nucleus of the atom without radiating energy. However, according to Maxwell's equations, which form an integral part of the theory, an electron which is accelerating in orbit must radiate energy. Hence Bohr's account of the behavior of the atom is inconsistent, and the inference mechanism used to derive this result is logically paraconsistent because it embraces a true contradiction, that between Maxwell's equations and Bohr's hypothesis. Another plausible example of a true contradiction, a di-aletheia, is the liar paradox²⁸², i.e. the statement

this sentence is not true.

There are two options for assessing the truth of this sentence: either the sentence is true or it is not. Suppose it is true. Then what it says is the case. Hence the sentence is not true.

²⁸¹ Paraconsistent logic has important philosophical ramifications. One example concerns Gödel's theorem. One version of the first incompleteness theorem states that for any consistent axiomatic theory of arithmetic, which can be recognized to be sound, there will be an arithmetic truth - its Gödel sentence – that is not provable in it, but which can be established as true by intuitively correct reasoning. The heart of Gödel's theorem is, in fact, a paradox that concerns the sentence, \( G \), 'This sentence is not provable'. If \( G \) is provable, then it is true and so not provable. Thus \( G \) is proved. Hence \( G \) is true and also improvable. If an underlying paraconsistent logic is used to formalize the arithmetic, and the theory therefore allowed to be inconsistent, the Gödel sentence may well be provable in the theory (essentially by the above reasoning). So a paraconsistent approach to arithmetic overcomes the limitations of arithmetic that are supposed (by many) to follow from Gödel's theorem.

²⁸² Paradoxes of self-reference, such as the liar paradox, are not the only examples of a dialetheia. Others include: transition states: when I leave the room, for an instant I am both in it and not in it; some of Zeno's paradoxes: the moving arrow is both where it is, and where it is not; certain legal situations: there are laws to the effect that persons in category A must do something, and persons in category B may not do it. Someone in both categories then turns up; borderline cases of vague predicates: an adolescent is both an adult and not an adult; certain quantum mechanical states: a particle may go through two slits simultaneously, even though this is not possible; multi-criterial terms: where a term has more than one necessary and sufficient empirical criterion for application, and these fall apart in novel circumstances. The viability of these examples depends in all cases upon the details of the case made.
Suppose, on the other hand, it is not true. This is what it says. Hence the sentence is true. In either case it is both true and not true.

Kierkegaard’s paradox of the “absurd” is another example. His notion of faith hinges critically on the logical paradox that infinite and eternal God has subjected himself to human finiteness and temporality. At face value there is no logically acceptable way to explain this contradiction without giving up consistency, while the paradox can be explained if we are ready to accept a paraconsistent solution. First we must reduce the scope of the problem to God’s omnipotence. Then a paraconsistent solution might be found along the following lines. One begins by granting the basic dilemma as an evident instance of the LEM: either God is omnipotent, or God is not omnipotent. With omnipotence He can do anything, and, in particular, He can subject Himself to the bonds of becoming fully human and renounce His omnipotence. But then ex hypothesi that would be something which His omnipotence would not allow Him to do, i.e. renounce His omnipotence. This in turn is an instance of LNC: God is omnipotent and He is not omnipotent, or using a different set of words, God can become man and He cannot become man.

I have already extensively discussed the notions of absolute nothingness and of emptiness, śūnyatā. Suffice it to say that from a logical point of view absolute nothingness serves as a common medium that absorbs both beings and their associated not-being. Strict application of the LNC tells that this nothingness cannot be thought, because it would become being, which is a logical contradiction. The LEM tells that it is logically precluded to introduce a midterm that is neither being nor not-being but which encompasses both. Both conclusions depend upon the same assumption that beings can be totalized into a Being of beings. If however we follow Nāgārjuna who claimed that both beings and their not-being are part of a higher reality, whose defining characteristic is emptiness, śūnyatā, then this higher reality becomes the common medium for beings and their not-being. Neither the straightforward application of the LNC nor that of the LEM did allow for the possibility of this higher reality. Logicians invoke at this point the notion of dialetheism, i.e. the view that there are true contradictions. The logical challenge is to ensure that the conditions for true dialetheism are met: that beings are beings, not-being is not-being, and that the totalizing notion of the Being of beings together with its associated notion of not-Being is avoided. If the killing effect of reifying nothingness is not allowed, Eastern nothingness can be thought as a logical entity. Hegel, as I have already mentioned, did not adopt such a position. For this reason he was criticized by Tanabe for not solving the problematic of the Nichts in his Logic.

Dialetheism should be clearly distinguished from trivialism, the view that all contradictions are true (and hence, assuming that a conjunction entails its conjuncts, that everything is true). Though a trivialist must be a dialetheist, the converse is not the case. Dialetheism

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283 In his Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics, Wittgenstein describes the liar paradox as a Janus-headed figure facing both truth and falsity. It is a two-way truth, a di-aletheia. By extension and transformation the word dialetheia was formed to describe a statement of a true contradiction. Dialetheism is the view that there are true contradictions. It opposes the LNC which since Aristotle’s defense has been orthodoxy in Western philosophy.

284 Dialetheism is designed to accommodate true contradictions. In this aspect it has been characterized as standing to the classical idea of negation like special relativity to Newtonian mechanics: they agree in the familiar areas but diverge at the margins, notably the paradoxes.

must also be clearly distinguished from \textit{paraconsistency}. An inference relation \( \rightarrow \) is \textit{explosive} if, according to it, a contradiction entails everything

for all \( A \) and \( B \) \((A \& \text{not-}A) \rightarrow B\)

This inference is \textit{paraconsistent} \( \text{iff} \)\textsuperscript{286} it is not \textit{explosive}. The property of being \textit{explosive} means that the adage \textit{ex contradictione quodlibet} holds true. Explosiveness is avoided if the terms of the paraconsistent assertion are accordingly defined, and that their intension and extension are controlled. Dialetheists, unless they are also trivialists, must subscribe to the view that entailment, i.e. deductively valid inference, is \textit{paraconsistent}\textsuperscript{287}.

Tanabe’s logic of the copula \textit{qua}\textsuperscript{288} is an instantiation of dialetheism. Tanabe\textsuperscript{289} uses \textit{qua} to joint two items or attributes such that the second is attached to the first as a matter of course. The order in which things are connected is important, and Tanabe recognizes this when he uses expressions like the following:

Great Compassion - \textit{qua} - Great Nay ; Great Nay - \textit{qua} - Great Compassion

This is his way to express that both terms, i.e. the Great Nay and Great Compassion, have the same intension and extension. However, the copulas \textit{qua} does not by itself imply “is” in the sense of the opposite of “is not”, and therefore cannot be said to engage the LNC as such. From the linguistic perspective, therefore, there is nothing to prevent Tanabe from joining elements, like

\begin{align*}
A - \textit{qua} - \text{not-A}
\end{align*}

which in ordinary logical language would be a contradiction, and which conventional logic has no choice but to read as “A is not not-A”.

Tanabe has no intention to dispense with the rules of grammar and with the distinctions that are implied by differentiating “is” from “is not”, for if he did he would have to give up arguing sensibly altogether. What he intends to say is something like:

\begin{align*}
A \text{ is not just } A \text{, and not-A is not just not-A, neither are the two simply different aspects of one and the same thing. A is } A \text{ and not-A is not-A, but neither of them is real unless each belongs to the other just as it is.}\textsuperscript{290}
\end{align*}

This allows him to posit that

\begin{align*}
A \text{ transforms } B \text{ and } B \text{ transforms } A
\end{align*}

in virtue of something common to both. For example, in Christian parlance, the statement

\textsuperscript{286} \textit{iff}: if and only if
\textsuperscript{287} One may subscribe to this view for other reasons; for example, the view that - though the actual truth is consistent - entailment must preserve what holds in non-actual situations, some of which may be inconsistent; or the view that entailment must preserve more than just truth, for example information content.
\textsuperscript{288} Note 227. \textit{Qua} stands for the Japanese word \textit{soku}, translated as for example, \textit{at the same time, and also, or, forthwith, as such}. The Chinese character used to write \textit{soku} is of notorious ambiguity.
\textsuperscript{289} Tanabe does not explicitly draw attention to the logic of \textit{qua}.
\textsuperscript{290} James W. Heisig, \textit{Philosophers of Nothingness}, o.c., pg. 66
is nothing other than the expression of the belief that there is life after death, that life and
death are not mutually exclusive, but instead that death is life in a different form.

In reviewing the whole range of uses of the copula *qua* a basic distinction seems to be
necessary. On one hand there are cases in which contraries are connected, items which
cannot both hold true *in the same sense, at the same time, and in the same respect* without
offending the rules of logical discourse. Examples include:

- affirmation *qua* – negation;
- continuity *qua* – discontinuity;
- being *qua* – nothingness;

There is another group of applications for which the items joined are not so obviously
contradictory since they are readily understood to share a common basis. Examples include:

- self *qua* – other;
- death *qua* – life;
- one *qua* – many;

To say that there is an affirmation which is at the same time and just as it is a negation, or
that there is a connection that is at the same time and just as it is a disconnection, is to talk
plain nonsense. But to speak of the identity of the self as entailing the other, of life entailing
death, is to see these terms as correlatives, requiring one another and a common medium, a
universal to be understood. There is nothing logically contradictory about it.

To summarize, in using the copula *qua, soku* Tanabe must not only avoid the charge of
triviality, namely that all contradictions are true, but also that of logical incoherence,
because that will lead to the explosiveness of *ex contradictione quodlibet*.

5.2 The concept of immanent divine grace

One of the disturbing results of the present analysis has been the manifest inconsistency in
the understanding of divine grace that results from Tanabe’s treatment of the concept. On
one hand he associates grace with the working of Other-power and with the Great Compassion
of the Original Vow, while on the other he is not ready to accept the idea of a personal Celestial Being that could be thought to act autonomously and freely when it grants an act of
grace. All Tanabe will allow for is to let Absolute Nothingness act in the dialectical processes
by means of which the act of grace happens.

In *Philosophy as Metanoetics* Tanabe does not explain nothingness, love and compassion but
instead he uses these terms as primitives which, in his view, do not need to be defined. Of
nothingness we know, however, that it manifests itself only in the dialectical interactions
with or between relative beings, since only these beings can lead to experiential action (*gyō*).
Putting the question of the true nature of reality to one side we may say in purely logical or
functional terms that nothingness acts as an interface between the realm of relative beings
and what is supposed to be behind it, reality as it really is, that is absolute nothingness.
Tanabe and others have tentatively identified this absolute nothingness with God, well
aware of the fact that this move does in no way imply that such understanding of “God” bears any resemblance with the God of Christianity, or with any other accepted notion of God.

Fact is that Tanabe repeatedly uses the word “God” to designate that which transgresses the boundary set for human experience, which is to say between the empirical and the transcendent world. If we accept this as a possible move, then the qualities of “love” and of “compassion” could be associated with God so defined. The question now is what this would signify from an analytical point of view.

I shall start the discussion by taking a detour first. On one side Nishitani and others have introduced the distinction of

- personal;
- impersonal

when they speak about the nature of God. Here “personal” clearly designates that side of God which according to the Christian faith is the doctrine of the Trinitarian God, three persons in one Substance, God. This is the God with whom we communicate in prayer and in faith. By “impersonal” Nishitani points at the other side of God, namely that He is for us the Deus absconditus, the hidden God, whom nobody has ever seen and who manifests Himself only in the privacy of human subjectivity and inwardness. Only very few, those which Tanabe probably would count as “sages and saints”, have ever had such a personal encounter with God. All the rest of us, Tanabe’s “sinners and fools”, must be content that God’s existence is witnessed in the Holy Scriptures and in the personal witnessing accounts of a selected few.

The distinction between a personal and an impersonal side of God has thus the potential to open one way by which to address in a consistent if contradictory manner the problematic of the autonomous and freely acting subject in Tanabe’s concept of divine grace. The explanation would be consistent in that there is no need to ascribe any hitherto un-discussed faculties to absolute nothingness with the intention to solve the problem such that nothingness could continue to appear as that impersonal and abstract logical construct which it has always been. In such case the problem of the subject acting would be solved under the assumption that some impersonal deus absconditus was hidden behind the dialectical veil of nothingness. Such a move would however be inconsistent because it would break with the basic tenet of Buddhist philosophy that the eschatological goal for all sentient beings is extinction in nirvāna, and that religious philosophy must be rational in what it assumes and what it concludes.

There is, however, no stringent need to assume any form of godly intervention in the notion of grace because what appears to some as an act which is caused by some Celestial Being may by others be interpreted as being the result of pure randomness and chance. In this reading the only way to solve the riddle of Buddhist grace is to review the basic concept of grace as a freely given underserved gift with a view to revisit the definition of “grace” and that of what the words “love” and “compassion” actually mean.

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291 Heinrich Dumoulin SJ has modified this distinction from a Christian Catholic point of view by asserting that God is not impersonal but transpersonal.
The best way to achieve the goal so defined is to go back to first principles. As became clear from the analysis of the acceptances for the English word “grace”, this notion is always associated with freedom, autonomy, creativity, spontaneity. It is thus distinct from all causation and not subjected to the limitations posed by it. Grace is said to transcend the limits set by the economy of cause and effect of the “laws of nature”. Therefore, if grace is not limited it must have the dimension of infinity because it breaks up the limits set by strict causation and replaces these by a potentially unlimited, i.e. infinite, number of options.

In this way and in a first move the phenomenon of “divine grace” can be, and in fact has been associated with and at the same time reduced to its aspect of infinity.

The notion of the infinite has a long and varying history and has over the course of the history of philosophy received much attention. Hegel for example agreed with Kant that the truly infinite is to be found in the free exercise of reason. He argued that reason is the infinite ground of everything. In his view, everything that happens can be understood as the activity of a kind of world-spirit, and this spirit is reason. This led him to a unique conception of the infinite: for Hegel the infinite was complete, the whole, the unified. Hegel held that Aristotle’s conception of the infinite as the never-ending was quite wrong: Aristotle’s infinity was “spurious” or “bad”, a mere succession of finite elements, each bounded by the next, and never held together in unity. An example of what Hegel considered “good infinity” is the periphery of a circle: I can turn around on it without ever reaching an end. Infinite regress was bad, infinite repetition of the same was not. Since Descartes the concept of infinity is considered to be an attribute of God, the ultimate, the absolute. Georg Cantor has shown that in the field of mathematics the conception of un-reflected, naïve infinity must be replaced by an infinite hierarchy of distinct infinities, and that in this sense infinity is not unlimited but intrinsically bounded, limited. Therefore, if Cantor’s work can be shown to be of general philosophical significance, then no linkage between infinity and God, the ultimate, the absolute does exist, and infinity becomes an intrinsically immanent concept.

Cantor’s result has spawned the development of the mathematical theory of infinite sets. The French philosopher Alain Badiou has interpreted infinite set theory by ascribing specific meanings to its variables and operators. He proposed a meta-ontology as a general framework model that can be used to analyze reality. If ontology is commonly understood to be a presentation of reality, then Badiou proposes a “presentation of presentation”. It need not be stressed that this is a very abstract, algebraic theory. However, Badiou demonstrated the inherent power of his theory when he analyzed the introductory chapters of St. Paul’s Letter to the Romans with a view to show that one of the basic theological texts of Christianity on Grace can be interpreted in a coherent and cohesive way without there being any need to take recourse to metaphysical or theological concepts, such as the existence of God. This is possible inter alia because Badiou limits his analysis to the interpretation of the initial chapters 1 to 8 of Romans, neglecting the rest, but that in itself is not a sufficient reason to refute his initiative on principal grounds. Thus Badiou’s main achievement is that he can establish an immanent context for Saint Paul’s theology of grace such that the

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292 Zellini, Paolo, A Brief History of Infinity, Adelphi Edizione, 1980; reprint by Penguin Books, 2005
293 Alain Badiou, Being and Event, o.c.
294 Alain Badiou, Saint Paul: La Fondation de l’Universalisme, o.c.
295 Badiou states that he does not deny the possible theological relevance of the other chapters, but that for him as a self-declared atheist these chapters do not add anything of relevance.
theological transcendent dimension is not denied: rather, he simply is not needed it for what he has to say.

Adam Miller has followed the lead that Badiou has offered. Starting with a set of criteria which Badiou had developed for his analysis of Romans, Miller sets out to present the notion of immanent grace in the light of what Badiou and also Jean-Luc Marion have contributed on the subject. Miller concludes that the conception of immanent grace can be supported both from a phenomenological (Marion) and from a meta-ontological standpoint (Badiou). Personally I consider the approach offered by Badiou to be more akin to my own thinking, and I shall therefore follow Miller’s adoption of Badiou’s theory when comparing the notions of grace that Kierkegaard and Tanabe individually hold.

Kierkegaard does not develop any explicit conceptual view of divine grace; his comments are scarce and basically directed at the problematic of the relationship between divine grace and human free will. We must therefore assume that his thoughts are in basic agreement with the tenets of St. Paul’s theology of the cross, and with the views of Martin Luther. In this sense it can be assumed that Romans is foundational, and that Badiou’s analysis thereof is of concern. Tanabe’s understanding of the phenomenon of grace is different. He views grace as an outflow of the Original Vow and of the Great Compassion of Absolute Nothingness qua Love. His grace becomes effective in Other-power. Amida Buddha and the Bodhisattvas are only myths, *upāya*, and must be discarded; there is thus no room for any personal God or other source of autonomy and freedom of action. Grace, for Tanabe, is not a transcendent phenomenon: grace is utterly immanent. Given this antagonistic constellation, the significance of Miller’s book is that he provides for a rational framework that allows me to bring these two divergent conceptions of grace together into one coherent and cohesive context. In developing the argument I shall defend the thesis that whatever the theological or metaphysical implications of divine grace may be, there must always be a parallel immanent process by which the effects of grace become apparent as implemented in this reality. In other words, grace understood as freedom, autonomy, creativity, spontaneity, distinct from all causation, and not subjected to the economy of cause and effect must of necessity have an immanent side, represented by a change of state in nature, which may or may not be accompanied by something transcendent or metaphysical.

Badiou’s basic tenet is

> Reality is multiple. There is oneness, but the One is not.

This statement can best be explained with the help of an example: assume a country such as Belgium. Its borders are well defined. Its inhabitants are multi-nationally and multi-culturally subdivided and associated to many different religious, social, political, benevolent, linguistic, ethnic, economic and other groupings, most of which are small and only of local concern, while others have provincial, national or even international rank and standing. The Belgian

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296 Adam Miller, *Badiou, Marion and St. Paul - Immanent Grace*, o.c.

297 These criteria are: *grace is neither banal nor obscure; grace is actual and not potential; grace is universal; grace is not limited.*

298 This includes recognition of Miller’s comment that Marion’s argument introduces a degree of inconclusiveness when he postulates that finite man can partake in saturated infinite phenomena.

299 Skt. for *convenient means*
state, as a political and administrative entity, has no other interests in those individuals who live within the country than that they obey the laws, pay their taxes and generally conduct their lives according to the accepted rules and regulations. It is therefore normal that for this reason alone many of the social and other groupings to which the inhabitants of the country may belong are not noted by the state other than by way of exception, for example if the public order is affected. Organizations like political parties, churches, sports clubs, theaters and concert halls, etc. each address one sector of Belgian society which is specific to their needs, and which other organizations may not share, or which may even go unnoticed. The individual, on the other hand, can simultaneously be a member of several or even many such groupings, and as such the individual will take a keen interest in the details of the groupings to which he may or may not belong. Some individuals, who have been given special functions or responsibilities or a specific tasking, will take some specific interest, e.g. legal or financial, which other individuals do not share. In summary thus,

1) the inhabitants of Belgium are grouped into a vast number of social and other entities, some of which are of only local relevance while others may be of national or even international importance;
2) which individual or entity takes an interest in other individuals or other entities depends upon what interests the individual or entity in question has;
3) there is no unified global view of Belgium as a whole that satisfies each and every aspect other than its borders and the global characteristics of its inhabitants (number of inhabitants, age distribution, etc.). In this as in all other representation many details, i.e. groupings, are lost and go unnoticed.

The significance of this last point is that there are for example diplomats who have extraterritorial status and who by this token are beyond the reach of Belgian national laws, but who are recognized by the government and its institutions as legal inhabitants of the country, albeit with special privileges. This is not the case for those who are known as “sans-papiers” and who reside illegally in the country. They are not part of any of the officially recognized social groupings; they also are not counted in any of the official statistics of the country - although they are in fact inhabitants of the country, and although special laws are in force that define or restrict their civil rights. To use Alain Badiou’s terminology,

contrary to the diplomats who are both presented and represented in the official statistics as inhabitants of the country, the “sans-papiers” are presented but radically not represented by the state of Belgium.

This special status of being present but not being recognized as being present, changes when either the state or the members of this group take some action which becomes an event of national importance. Only if such an event takes place will the existence of these people be officially recognized. Whereas before they only inhabited Belgium, their status may change and they may now be included into the list of residents, albeit with possible reservations.

In Badiou’s view this state of affairs can best be described with the help of the mathematical theory of infinite sets under the provision that allowances are made for the occurrence of dynamic processes, because set theory is at most a quasi-static theory, which is to say that it can only describe static situations, and that dynamic changes must be approximated by a series or sequence of static views or “shots”. From a theoretical point of view, such an adaptation of the theory is not a critical issue, provided the changes occur sufficiently “slowly”.

300 The status of members of the diplomatic corps is governed by international conventions.
To return to the example of the state of Belgium: the total number of individuals who are present within the geographic borders of the country are the “elements” of the set, some of which are counted while others are not counted, such as “sans-papiers”, tourists, temporary visitors, and the like. These elements are “presented” and form the “situation” which is then decomposed into “sets” comprising of individual elements, some of which are presented and represented by the state, while others are not. An “event” occurs if the status of some grouping, a set, is suddenly changed e.g. that it is now represented while before the change happened it was not. This is Badiou’s basic idea which he underpins with some rigorous mathematics.

This is also where Cantor’s contribution comes into play. Between the years 1874 and 1897 he created the theory of abstract infinite sets. This theory grew out of his investigations of some concrete problems regarding certain types of infinite sets of real numbers. His idea was to treat infinite sets, i.e. sets consisting of an infinite number of elements, as mathematical objects that are on an equal footing with those that can be constructed in a finite number of steps. From a methodological point of view this was a revolutionary step which opened the way for introducing new concepts into the mathematical debate. In the main, Cantor’s results concerned the definition and interpretation of the notion of the infinite. The novel insights resulting from this work became the subject of much criticism. This hostile attitude only changed when contradictions in so-called naïve set theory were discovered and had to be tackled on an axiomatic basis.

Essential features and definitions of Cantor’s set theory include:

1) a set is a grouping into a single entity of objects of any kind;
2) given an object $x$ and a set $\alpha$, exactly one of the statements is true: $x$ is a member of $\alpha$ or else $x$ is not a member of $\alpha$. This is the membership relation that may or may not exist between an object and a set;
3) the cardinal number, or cardinality of a set is the number of elements in the set. This applies not only to finite sets whose elements can be counted, but also to infinite sets whose members cannot be counted;
4) two sets $\alpha$ and $\beta$ are equivalent if a one-to-one correspondence of all elements in the set exists from set $\alpha$ to set $\beta$ and vice versa. For example, Galileo noted in 1638 that the set of the natural numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, … is equivalent to the set of their squares 1, 4, 9, 16, …

The application of the notion of equivalence of infinite sets was first systematically explored by Cantor. With $N$ defined as the set of natural numbers, Cantor’s initial significant finding was that the set of all rational numbers is equivalent to $N$ but that the set of all real numbers is not equivalent to $N$. The existence of nonequivalent sets justified Cantor’s introduction of “transfinite” cardinal numbers as measures of size for such sets. Defining the cardinal number of a set $\alpha$ somewhat more explicitly as the set of all sets that are equivalent to $\alpha$, this definition provides a place for cardinal numbers as objects of a universe whose only members are sets. In a next step Cantor then showed that an infinite hierarchy of transfinite cardinal numbers exists. This is known as Cantor’s theorem. He also suggested that there exists no cardinal number of a magnitude between that of the set of the rational numbers, $N$, and that of the real numbers. This is known as the continuum hypothesis which in turn has important theoretical implications. For example, it becomes the theoretical basis for

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301 A set is a collection of definite, distinguishable objects of perception or thought conceived as a whole. The objects are called elements or members of the set.
302 Note 88. The continuum hypothesis is defined in purely mathematical terms.
treat the effects that an act of grace can potentially produce as elements of an infinite set.

Up to here the discussion of infinite set theory has been in purely mathematical terms. I must now explain why this theory is relevant for the problem of grace. The answer is to be found in Badiou’s proposal that mathematical concepts can be applied to problems of philosophical ontology. In other words, Badiou defends the view that mathematical methods may be used in the context of formal logic to address ontological problems. This is the meaning of the notion of the “mathematization” of philosophy.

Badiou’s basic epistemological thesis is that ordinary language is not precise enough to express accurately some of the complex characteristics of reality. Quantum mechanics with its paradoxes of the dual character of the electron, and that of Schrödinger’s cat which is neither alive nor dead, are examples in point. Such problems can only be adequately handled if some very precise mathematical language with strictly defined terms and relationships is used. This is the task of models and of model theory which is that branch of formal logic that studies the relations between sentences of a formal language and the interpretations that make these sentences true or false. This is also the theoretical basis of Badiou’s interest in the theory of infinite sets. Starting from the observation that our apperception of empirical reality is essentially based on a continuous string of sense data which we arrange in our minds into meaningful patterns, he concluded that not only the empirical world, but that all of reality is perceived in the form of an interpretation of a stream of data, and that these data may be arranged into different patterns depending on the mental context and predisposition of the human individual. This is in itself not a novel insight. Badiou, however, draws two basic doctrinal conclusions:

1) reality is multiple;
2) there is oneness, but the One is not.

The first statement is an expression of what was already noted, namely that the basic elements from which we form our apperception of reality can be arranged in different ways as different interpretations, such that the same set of elements can be used to compose different pictures in which the same individual elements are differently grouped and have a different relevance. In the end all of these interpretations are equally possible, and therefore all of these must be said to be simultaneously real. If this is taken as a premise, then it is no big step to follow Badiou to the conclusion that the so defined overlay of simultaneously possible interpretations of the basic data can formalistically be considered as an overlay of infinite sets whose elements are the basic data. About the total number of the elements, and of the sets formed from these elements nothing is said, but we may assume that in principle their number is not limited by some readily identifiable condition but that instead any combination of the raw data is possible. In other words, what is not limited is un-limited, which in imprecise language is equivalent to “infinite”.

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303 The application of the continuum hypothesis to real phenomena is the subject of an ongoing controversial debate. The essence of this debate is the controversial view that mathematical entities are formed as theoretical abstractions which have no relevance for and application to real phenomena.

304 Speaking in more technical terms: The theory of infinite sets is a mathematical theory which Badiou has interpreted such that its formalism can be used to describe ontological concepts. By this move it becomes a model that can be used to describe reality.

305 The sets are infinite because the data form a continuous stream.
The second statement reflects the insight that reality is inexhaustible and infinite. It is always possible to have a coherent and cohesive view of a section of reality, even if this view may be that of total chaos, but it is not possible as a matter of principle to come up with one complete and total view of reality - as for example Hegel claimed. In set theoretical terms, the sets of which reality is formed are subsets of a larger entity, but this entity is not the power set of reality. There are always aspects of reality which are there but which we do not notice. In this case we must say that such aspects are dormant, waiting to be brought up to conscience. This bringing up to conscience happens in what Badiou calls an “event”.

The defining characteristics of Badiou’s theory are then:

1) the sets of which reality is composed are defined as abstract entities;
2) individual sets are subsets of some greater entity which is however not the power set of reality;
3) Badiou’s model of reality is a static model. Changes are introduced by events.

This last item must be explained. With as objective to clarify his theory as being a “presentation of presentation” Badiou introduces two pairs of opposing terms that each is used to describe the status of individual elements in the set

i) presentation and representation;
ii) belonging and inclusion.

Presentation is a primitive word of meta-ontology. It is multiple-being such as it is effectively deployed. It is reciprocal with pure presentation which is retrospectively understood as non-one since being is solely the result of an operation, of counting. Presented elements are there, but they are not included when the elements of a set are counted as one and are by this operation brought to being in set theoretical terms. A term is said to be represented (in

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306 The cardinal number of the powerset of reality is larger than any conceivable other cardinal number (Cantor’s theorem).
a situation) if it is counted as one by the state of the situation. A represented term is thus included in the situation, that is to say it is a part of the situation.

Belonging is a unique foundational concept of set theory. It indicates that a multiple $\beta$ enters into the multiple-composition of a multiple $\alpha$. This is said as “$\beta$ belongs to $\alpha$” or “$\beta$ is an element of $\alpha$”. Philosophically it would be said that a term (an element) belongs to a situation if it is presented and counted as one by that situation. Belonging refers to presentation, whilst inclusion refers to representation. A set $\beta$ is included in a set $\alpha$ if all the elements of $\beta$ are elements of $\alpha$. This relation reads as “$\beta$ is included in $\alpha$”. We also say that $\beta$ is a subset (English terminology) or a part (French terminology) of $\alpha$. A term will be said to be included in a situation if it is a sub-multiple or a part of the latter. It is thus counted as one by the state of the situation. Inclusion refers to (state) representation.

Earlier in this section I have already used two terms, “situation” and “state of the situation”, which I must now explain. A situation is any consistent presented multiplicity, which is to say a multiple and a regime of the count-as-one, or structure. Here count-as-one means: given the non-being of the One, any one-effect is the result of an operation, the count-as-one of the elements of the situation, i.e. the set. Every situation is structured by such a count. If we call the structure of a situation that what prescribes, for a presentation, the regime of the count-as-one, then a structured presentation is a situation, and the state of the situation is that by means of which the structure of the situation is, in turn, counted as one. We therefore also speak of the count-of-the-count, or of a meta-structure. It can be shown that the necessity of the state results from the need to exclude the presentation of the void. The state thus secures and brings to perfection the completeness, its quality of being full, of the situation.

With these distinctions in mind Badiou now can tackle the problematic of grace. He does not do this directly, because as a self-proclaimed atheist there is no place for divine grace in his universe. Badiou does recognize, however, that static, stationary set theory is insufficient to cover any dynamic aspects of reality. His conclusion is that set theory needs to be expanded by the introduction of the notion of the “event”. Initially event is a primitive term to signify that something has happened, or a subset of the possible outcomes of an occurrence. Badiou sharpens this understanding in two ways:

1) in a set-theoretical framework an event needs a context, the evental site, as the place of its occurrence. This evental site has some specific properties. It is a multiple in a situation that itself is
Events are intrinsically unpredictable, for if they were predictable, they would be subject to the regime of causation, i.e. ruled by the “laws of nature”. Rather, the event ruptures the state of the situation and thereby opens the possibility for one of an unlimited number of potential options to become actualized. Clearly, set theory is totally abstracted from the material details of what it describes, and for this reason can neither qualify what causes the event to occur, nor which one of the potential options of arranging the elements of the set will be realized.

Badiou does not evade the problematic but instead offers an analysis and a conceptual solution with the help of the following example: the “event” of the French revolution was historically a series of happenings that initially were at most loosely connected but which started with the assault of the Bastille in Paris and which ended with the crowning of Napoleon I. as king of France. It is only in retrospection that historians have selected some happenings as being significant, while discarding others for the same reason. In this way a historical entity has been constructed which later was called “the French Revolution”. In other words, what we now consider to be a unique historical event had at the time when things started to move neither an official “beginning” nor was it officially “ended”, and nobody would recognize what historical significance would later be accorded to individual events while they happened to happen. Instead things just happened without reference to the fact that later they would be called the French revolution. Badiou adds this as a background: a human individual generates names whose referent is suspended from the infinite becoming of an always incomplete truth. As such the subject-language unfolds in the future anterior, as its referent and thus the veracity of its statements depends on the completion of a “procedure of fidelity”. This is a procedure by which an individual discerns - in a situation - the multiples whose existence is linked to the name of the event that has been put into

307 The void, the empty set, is an element of all sets. It is foundational because it can be shown that any set can be constructed beginning with the empty set. To be on the edge of the void is saying that through the inclusion of the void both in the evental site and in all other multiples of the situation the multiple is connected.
circulation by another individual. The recognition of the event and of its effects occurs thus always in hindsight.

This is still very abstract and some further expansion is needed that will relate it to the problematic of divine grace. This material we find in Badiou’s analysis of St. Paul’s Letter to the Romans 308. By selecting only the introductory chapters 1 to 8 Badiou makes a distinction between what can be associated with reality and what belongs exclusively to the transcendent realm. This latter he puts aside because his plan is to establish grace as an immanent concept. Clearly, if an event of grace takes place something within the realm of immanent reality is changed: an incurable sickness is cured; an adverse condition does not continue to threaten; a hope is fulfilled; etc. Banality, for Badiou, means that the event of grace is subjected to the economy of natural causation. The curing of a serious illness with the help of a novel medication is in a way quite predictable for members of the medical profession and can for that reason not be exempted from the economy of the laws of nature. However, if the perspective is changed from the point of view of the doctor to the vantage point of the sick person who by pure chance comes to know about that specific treatment, things all of a sudden look very different: to this sick person the fact that he or she has been cured certainly does not fall under the economy of cause and effect; what counts instead is the fact that he or she by chance heard about the possibility of this special treatment. Being actually treated in this way is only a second step that would not have been possible without the first. The notion of banality thus must be replaced by another concept which takes that change of perspective better into account.

In general terms, it is commonly accepted that in the event of genuine divine grace the “laws of nature” 309 are somehow overruled since otherwise the effected change would fall under the sway of the economy of causation and could be explained as something immanent, and not as transcendent. For Badiou this leads to a set of criteria that must be met:

1) grace is neither banal nor obscure;
2) grace is actual and not potential;
3) grace is universal;
4) grace is not limited.

This is commented and expanded as follows:

1) The event of grace must be neither banal, in other words it may not be the result of ordinary causation, nor may the explanation be obscure in the sense that some undefined supernatural agency is necessarily involved. This condition does not of necessity refute the assumption that some kind of a supernatural agency may have been involved, but as long as the event of grace is not made dependent on the intervention of that agency, the existence and interception of the agency is not a question of philosophical reasoning but rather of religious faith;
2) Badiou claims that the effect of grace must be actual and present, not potential and future. Actual grace is already there, here and now, and must not be actualized by means of any specific process. If it is the case that an incurable sickness has been cured, a threatening condition has disappeared, a hope has been fulfilled, then we may say that the effect of grace is already in place here and now because that person could already at some earlier time have benefited from the treatment. By way of contrast, an example of potential grace would be that of the head of state, who has the authority to

308 Alain Badiou, Saint Paul: La fondation de l’Universalisme. PUF, 1997
309 The concept of the „laws of nature“ is not well defined. What is implied by this term is that in the event of grace no stringent natural explanation can be found for the observed effects.
 convert a death penalty into lifelong imprisonment, but who has no case to decide because there is no case pending waiting for his decision. For Christians the Grace of God is actual and already present in the world because Jesus Christ has died on the cross, while man is free to cooperate with this Grace of God or to reject it;

3) Grace must be universal, that is it must without limit or exception include all human beings collectively or distributively. In other words, grace must be equitably available to all. St. Paul’s position was that the Grace of God is not limited to the Jews alone but that is offered to all humankind. Similarly, the cure of the sickness, the relief from threat, and a fulfilled hope must be events that in principle would be open to all human beings, not just some select group of individuals. Universal grace is given to all of mankind. Medieval philosophers have called this gratia gratis data\textsuperscript{310}. This does not preclude that some instantiations of divine grace are directed to meet the exigencies of some specific person or situation, in medieval terms gratia actualiter gratum faciens, but again this kind of grace is in principle available to all humankind if only there is a need. Divine grace is a priori universal;

4) The options that are available for instantiation by grace as its effect are not limited by any laws of causation. Grace thus has the dimension of infinity in the sense of being without limits.

Given these expansions it should be clear that what conventionally is called grace is in the terminology of Badiou’s set theory the event.

The event is not banal because it is not caused and therefore cannot be predicted. At the same time it is not obscure in that no reference to anything mystical or transcendent is made. Via the concept of the evental site it is incorporated into the situation as a dormant entity that somehow must be awakened. Clearly, set theory cannot specify the mechanisms that are needed to put this awakening into place, but that is another issue whose resolution is related to the pre-philosophical choices of the philosopher. Some, as Badiou, will invoke contingency or coincidence, while others, e.g. Kierkegaard or Luther, will call upon God for an explanation. Whatever the case may be, Badiou’s event is that what instantiates the immanent changes which inevitably must occur if grace is to become effective as something that happens in reality. Since set theory is fully abstract, nothing is said about the nature of these changes. They may thus be either physical or mental or both. The event may be something that is part of the realm of inter-subjectivity, it may be restricted to the privacy of the subjective realm, or it may be a combination of both.

Whatever the nature of the phenomenon may be that occurs in the event, it is never potential and always actual. This is a distinction that Aristotle has introduced. The event is some specific happening that takes place in the here and now. It is not important if it is spread out in time as was the case for the French revolution. There is also no necessity that the event be attributed to a specific place.

A necessary precondition for the event to take place is that an evental site belongs to a situation. Set theory does not spell out any specific conditions that must be met by such a site. All that can be said is that it radically does not belong to the situation and that it is in no way a part of it. Therefore, since there is no possibility to tell whether or not such a site belongs to the situation until such time that the event actually happens, there is also no reason to assume that it is not included. In other words, the evental site is always potential, but the event is actual.

The tradition has invoked the dimension of infinity to express that grace is not limited. At face value this equivalence of unlimited and being infinite is still true, but in the wake of

\textsuperscript{310} Cf. section 3.1.2.2
Cantor’s work the philosophical interpretation of “infinity” as a notion has dramatically changed. There is no longer one single infinity, but instead there are many, such that an unending hierarchy of levels of infinities can be constructed. Given one level of infinity, we can say that it bounded by the next higher one. If it is not possible to specify the magnitude of the level of infinity, it is still true that it is not without limits and that it is immanent as Cantor has demonstrated for the sets of the rational and the real numbers. This is why grace is said to be immanent.

In concluding we may say that the concept of immanent grace as promoted by Badiou and Miller leaves room for theological or religious additions and interpretations, and that for this reason it is not in contradiction with the Christian understanding of divine grace. Kierkegaard should therefore not take exception on principal grounds. His interest is focused on aspects that are of primarily theological and metaphysical relevance, areas which Badiou has bracketed. For himself Kierkegaard had also subscribed to the idea that theology and religion must be kept apart from philosophy because they are not of the same order as philosophy. Kierkegaard would therefore agree with Badiou that the event of divine grace must be instantiated as an immanent change of state, either physical or mental, that can best be described in terms of Badiou’s theory. Kierkegaard will not agree with Badiou on the latter’s view of what causes the happening of the event. For Kierkegaard there cannot be any question that God is the only conceivable cause and that God chooses the means to instantiate the effect of his grace according to His will. Kierkegaard, therefore, will fill the gap that Badiou’s approach to the problem necessarily had to leave open.

Tanabe will also be ready to agree with Badiou on the question of immanence because his own thought process is quite similar to that of Badiou. In his analysis of grace Tanabe starts with the notions of Amida Buddha’s Great Compassion and the work of the Bodhisattvas as the essential mediators in the process of merit transference. Following the initiative of Rudolf Bultmann Tanabe then characterizes these notions as religious myths that do not contribute to the philosophical understanding and which therefore must be eliminated such the nucleus of what is philosophically relevant can be extracted. In the end Tanabe must associate grace with the activity of Absolute Nothingness as the agency that rules over the becoming and perishing of relative beings. Although Tanabe does at times equate Absolute Nothingness with the notion of “God”, this must not be interpreted as implying that he has any concept similar to that of the personal God of Christianity in mind. God and Absolute Nothingness are two words which he at times uses interchangeably, and there is nothing more to it. There can be no doubt that Tanabe subscribes fully to the Buddhist precept of the nirvāṇa as the ultimate destination of man. This nirvāṇa is the place of final deliverance from suffering in the bonds of samsāra. It is the place of extinction of desire and individual consciousness. On the way to this final goal the human individual is supported by the Original Vow of the Bodhisattva, but this is not any personal agency. Rather, the true nature of this agency is not specified and may therefore be read as impersonal or otherwise. Tanabe will therefore agree with Badiou that the notion of the event is suited to capture the effect of grace because it does not depend on any transcendent agency but instead leaves room that can be filled in by the human individual according to his or her religious views. Therefore it makes sense to speak of the grace of Other-power even though this Other-power has not been defined provided that we are willing to accept the idea - as Tanabe did - that something greater than he did relieve him from his depression.
6. **Summary Conclusions**

The approach which I have chosen in this essay for the discussion and analysis of the notions of religious faith and of divine grace in the thoughts of the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard and of the Japanese Tanabe Hajime did not coincide with what the uninitiated reader might have expected to find. This reader may well ask the question:

has it really been necessary to take this route, or would another approach perhaps have been more effective?

The answer that will ultimately be given to this question must of course be based on what are the results that have been achieved and what are the insights that have been gained. It will therefore be useful if I summarize briefly some of the salient points of the analysis.

Starting point has been the concern that it is not an easy task to enter into a cross-cultural and inter-religious dialogue, as for example the book by Russell H. Bowers, Jr., *Someone or Nothing - Nishitani’s Religion and Nothingness as a foundation for Christian-Buddhist Dialogue* has shown. There can be no doubt that Bower’s book has been written as a serious attempt to capture the gist of Nishitani Keiji’s religious philosophy, albeit from an admittedly evangelical perspective. Needless to say, that this book somehow leaves the reader in disarray, because it takes the evangelical perspective as its basis for any subsequent comparison and analysis. In other words, the position conveyed by the author to his readership is one of an uncompromising religious orthodoxy, and such a position has no room for diverging views on matters religious. Similarly, Rolf Elberfeld’s analysis of the spread of European culture and civilization since Columbus’ discovery of the Americas is one literary example that puts the mechanisms governing cross-cultural encounters into relief. Irrespective of whether this may have been the ultimate intention of the author, fact is that the reader becomes aware that cultural refinement is not concomitant with cultural robustness. Recent history is abundant with examples which underscore that factors other than religious convictions and cultural excellence are vastly more important in the competition for supremacy. In other words, there seems to be a latent tendency to consider cross-cultural and interreligious dialogue not so much as attempts to improve the understanding than as possibilities to overcome and subdue what is different and other. It was with this as a background that I have identified the following three options as potential strategies for the study at hand:

- write two independent papers without any attempt to relate one to the other. This gives both sides the possibility to make their points, while any interaction or cross-correlation is deliberately inhibited (two separate books placed on the same or different bookshelves);
- assume one of the two positions as the unshakable basis from which to undertake the comparison. This would be the approach chosen for Bowers’ study (deliberate cultural and religious bias);
- avoid taking sides such that each option may be exposed in all necessary detail. In this case every attempt must be made to explicate not only the conclusions but also the ways by which the conclusions have been reached (application of the Principle of Charity).

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311 O.c.
312 Nishitani Keiji, *Religion and Nothingness*, University of California Press, 1983; German translation: *Was ist Religion?*, Insel Verlag, 1982
313 Note 8
The last of these three options is without doubt the most cumbersome because it involves the most effort on the side of the person engaged in making the comparison. At the same time it is also the only one which pays equal respect to both sides. It became therefore the option of choice for the study. What then had to be tackled next was the question of how to best realize and implement this option.

In pondering this problem, the following thoughts immediately come to mind:

- it would be an illusion to assume that I can abstract myself from my own cultural and religious background and heritage as a European and thereby assume a “God’s Eye” perspective. In arguing against Hegel Kierkegaard had conclusively shown that assuming such a perspective is not possible;
- as human beings we all live in the same world. Therefore, what we have in common is the experience of reality in all its different forms, while we differ in how we interpret this experience;
- there is only one human kind. Archeologists have been able to argue conclusively that the human race, which today is varied and diversified, originally stems from one common root\textsuperscript{314}. It therefore seems to be reasonable to assume that we all share a common anthropological base and that this base is the matrix from which all diversifications somehow have evolved over time. This common anthropological base should - if possible - become the baseline for the comparison.

These ideas taken together have led me to conclude that the best strategy to adopt is to put these thoughts at once to work.

As self-conscious human beings we act in two ways, instinctively and according to our understanding. Our instincts guide us in setting priorities and in defining goals, while our understanding provides a rational underpinning which in turn moderates and tempers our instincts. The instincts are a natural given; they are not subject to rational analysis but instead follow a logic of their own. They are part and parcel of our anthropological base. They are shared by others but can only be communicated by way of abstraction and verbalization. For example: “I am hungry” is a feeling everybody knows in principle but which cannot be shared, only be referred to indirectly, when communicating with others.

Rational decisions, on the other hand, are based on the understanding and can be argued in great detail. Philosophers, who are engaged in the enterprise of analyzing and discussing rational discourse, have consistently concluded that with very few exceptions if any at all such decisions are never simple in the sense that they are the immediate result of some elementary state of affairs. Rather, if an effort is made to make clear and thus to lay open the reasons why some specific conscious decision has been taken, what we will find is that such decisions are based on a web interrelated influences, and that they therefore are the result of complex mental operations involving rational and other assessments, and logical judgments. Philosophical analysis has been able to demonstrate that these operations can be reduced to formal structures, syllogisms and algorithms that depend not only on our instincts, but also on the application of axioms and pre-philosophical choices, and which, taken together, define the worldview of the human individual.

Taking these thoughts as inputs I have concluded that one strategy to compare philosophical positions that otherwise would have to be classified as being incompatible would be to try to identify and state what are in a philosopher’s discourse:

\textsuperscript{314} This root is notoriously referred to as „Eve“. It has been located in Eastern Africa.
elements which touch at the anthropological root that is common to all human beings;
- openly stated and tacitly assumed philosophical axioms and pre-philosophical choices.

Taken in such abstract and general form, these words define a huge tasking which I could not hope to address within the context of this study. If, however, an effort is made to clearly define the objective of the study and reduce its scope accordingly, there may be a chance that the tasking becomes more manageable. This is not to say that a positive outcome will be guaranteed, but the chance is there and an attempt should be made. Much will depend on how the problem is structured and on how the goals so defined are implemented.

There is one more question that somehow will need to be addressed. Let me for the sake of the argument assume that for the subject matter of religious faith and for divine grace an anthropological baseline has been established, and that for the two philosophers the axioms and pre-philosophical choices can be and subsequently have been identified. Simply put, the question then is that of what to do with the results so accumulated. Once again, if the problem is stated in such general terms it becomes an issue which is much too complex in order for it to be reasonably answered in total generality. However, if we compare the data for the philosophers at hand then this should help to identify and explain not only what common ground they both have in common and in what respect their views differ, but the comparison should also provide indications of the reasons why the observed differences have arisen, and how these relate to the axiomatic basis and to the pre-philosophical choices that each of philosopher has adopted for himself.

This defines three aspects which the study must cover:

- the abstract notions of religious faith and of divine grace must be analyzed such that their anthropological basis and contents can be identified and stated. Once this has been done the next step must be to relate what is anthropological, animal, to what is conditioned by religion and culture;
- for each one of the two philosophers I must define and state how he understands the concepts of religious faith and of divine grace using his own words and also relating his position to that of his predecessors. The results so obtained must then be analyzed in terms of what is anthropological / animal, and what is conditioned by religion and culture. In the end it should be possible to understand what are for each philosopher his axiomatic basis and his pre-philosophical choices;
- given that the axioms and choices define the worldview, it cannot be my task to attempt making a full assessment of both aspects. Rather, the primary objective must be to explicate what common ground both philosophers share, but also why and how their worldviews differ. In the end some selected examples may suffice to make the point.

These are general considerations which can only help to structure the problematic and to put some order into the thought process, but it does not serve to address and solve the problem at hand, which is to compare the positions which Kierkegaard and Tanabe have assumed with respect to religious faith and divine grace. I must therefore summarize the main points as follows:

- starting point was the general concern not to introduce any open or hidden bias when comparing the thought of two philosophers who belong to two different cultures, each of which has a long tradition of its own. More specifically, a major element of the analysis was how to specify the precise meanings the notions of “faith” and “grace”. It is not difficult to find definitions of these terms, but it is by no means clear whether any such definition would be applicable to Christians and to Buddhists alike;
- to solve this problematic, albeit heuristically, I had to introduce a basic assumption as follows: on one side there is the task of the translators who have rendered the texts of Tanabe and of Kierkegaard into
English. It is thus their responsibility to ensure that what they deliver is semantically correct, and that their work can be taken as an undisputed baseline for the analysis work to follow; because the terminology and the thought processes of the two philosophers are conditioned by their religious and cultural backgrounds, I have introduced a general metaphysical framework as a means to define a conceptual frame of reference to which both philosophers should be ready to agree. This framework offers a logical structure onto which the theories of the philosophers can be mapped, and this in turn allows me to identify some of their open and tacitly hidden metaphysical axioms.

At this point further guidance is needed and this must be provided by philosophical intuition, based on inputs from work previously done by others.

An important philosophical axiom concerns the nature of Ultimate Reality. Waldenfels and others have shown that this subject matter is closely linked with the philosophical tradition of the philosopher. Kierkegaard for one is firmly rooted in the western tradition which for the most part is locked on the assumption that Ultimate Reality is the Being of all beings, an assumption which is concomitant with his belief in the Christian God as the highest Being. Tanabe, on the other hand, has subscribed to the tradition of Mahāyāna Buddhism for which the nature of Ultimate Reality is best captured in the paradoxical concept of Absolute Nothingness. Contrary to the Being of beings, Absolute Nothingness cannot be logically analyzed; also, this notion is incompatible with the concept of totalizing the being of beings into global Being. Traditional logic tells that it is either one or the other, while both together cannot be thought.

More precisely, the statement that the Being of beings and Absolute Nothingness are mutually exclusive concepts is based on the following train of thought: the totalizing concept of the Being of all beings must by definition include everything, which is to say that it must also include Absolute Nothingness. But this is equivalent to saying that Absolute Nothingness has the quality of being, and that in turn is a conclusion which is clearly a *contradictio in terminis*. In technical language, the law of non-contradiction (LNC), and also that of the excluded middle (LEM) leave no choice but to affirm that we are confronted with the hard question of whether Tanabe and Kierkegaard can be and should be confronted at all to one another, or whether we must not reject one of the two philosophers as being illogical, enigmatic and mysterious. Needless to say that from a western perspective one may easily regard Tanabe Hajime in this way, with as a “logical” consequence that he is refuted and ignored. Such a judgment would provide a fatal but possibly also premature blow to what Heisig and others have considered to be a promising input to the western metaphysical debate.

With this in mind one may ask what the precise rationale for such a wholesale rejection of the notion of Absolute Nothingness would be, and whether that rationale is sustainable in the light of a rational scrutiny. Is it possible to break the deadlock and to resolve the problem such that both the notion of the Being of beings and the concept of Absolute Nothingness can be maintained side by side? This is a problem that has caught the interest of western scholars since they began to study Eastern logic and philosophy. It might certainly become a fascinating subject to reconstruct the manner in which knowledge of the concept of Eastern Nothingness has been received in the west over time. Unfortunately I have neither the

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316 Note 1
resources nor the space to follow this up. Suffice it to say that some recent developments in the field of formal logic offer options which enable us to restructure the logical problem such that the Eastern and Western positions can be made compatible with one another in the form of a higher level of abstraction and analysis. The key idea here is to maintain the laws of formal logic, but to revisit their application to individual problem areas, and to put this application into perspective.

In order to understand that this step is in fact possible it is first necessary to realize that the laws of formal logic are based on abstractions which reduce the manifolds of reality to one single characteristic or feature, and that these same abstract laws are then used to judge over the multifarious characteristics and features of real unrestricted manifolds. The essence of the new developments consist in demonstrating that such indiscriminate application of the abstract laws of thought is infested by the danger that some serious misunderstandings may result which in turn lead to a miscarriage of what at face value appears to be a well founded judgment. In other words, the essence of the problem is that it does not suffice to rule indiscriminately over the many-faceted characteristics of reality. Rather and as a general rule, a correct assessment of fact will be possible only if each instantiation of a specific phenomenon is considered carefully and in as much detail as is possible.

This general result has been corroborated by additional analysis indicating that the western and the Eastern perceptions of the nature of Ultimate Reality can coexist side by side if the assumption is dropped that the being of beings can be totalized into Absolute Being. This is a move which has already been anticipated by Kierkegaard’s criticism of Hegel’s attempt to build a comprehensive system of reality. More precisely, Kierkegaard held that reality is inexhaustible and that human finiteness cannot encompass it in its totality. For example Kierkegaard famously claimed: “there is no system of - human - existence”.

Based on these results I am thus in a position to settle the issue of the “reasonableness” of at least one of the two philosophers (Tanabe) and continue with the task, which is to analyze the way in which the two philosophers have handled the notions of faith and of grace:

- the notion of “faith”, more specifically that of “religious faith”, can be decomposed into two constituent elements, (a) a readiness and a preparedness to place my trust and confidence in a person or a thing, e.g. the salvific promises of Christianity and of Buddhism; (b) a rationale that makes me assume that the object of my faith is in fact trustworthy. For Kierkegaard this rationale is provided by the revelations of the Christian Holy Scriptures; for Tanabe it is the all-inclusive scope and the conclusive character of the worldview that Shinran Shōnin’s religious philosophy offers. For Kierkegaard the act of faith is the “leap” to accept the revealed truth of the Gospel, while for Tanabe it is the act of witnessing to others that Shinran’s worldview is not only comprehensive, but also coherent and cohesive, and, by this token, that this worldview enables him to cope with the challenges which reality puts before him;

- a detailed analysis of the phenomenon of “divine grace” showed that the concept as such is inherently problematic. On one side there is a basic human propensity to hope for an unmerited gift, especially if that gift would alleviate some painful condition; on the other hand, it is a known fact that what to one

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Aristotle noted that “S is P” and “S is not P” cannot both hold in the same sense, at the same time, and in the same respect (pg. 187).
person appears to be an undeserved gift is regarded by others as having been caused by blind chance or pure coincidence. In other words, how the human individual understands the nature of “grace” depends upon his or her worldview. For those who believe in God, the observable phenomena are divine acts, while for those who do not believe in God the same phenomena are random events that have no intrinsic significance of their own;

- Tanabe’s notion of “grace” is problematic from yet another perspective. For him it is the result of the Love and Great Compassion of the Other-power of Absolute Nothingness. But Tanabe’s Absolute Nothingness is an abstract entity which can by no means be identified with for example the Christian God. This is in opposition to the fact that the accepted usages of the English word “grace” undeniably require the existence of an autonomous, freely acting - human or divine - subject that has “love” and that feels “compassion” and which by virtue of these characteristics causes the effects of grace. This leads to the observation that for Tanabe no such subject is posited and that therefore there is a void in his concept which somehow must be filled.

There are thus two problem areas connected to the concept of grace which require further study. With a view toward solving these problems it may be helpful to consider briefly how medieval Scholastic philosophers have construed the nature of “divine grace” to be. They identified three characteristics:

1. the effects of grace take place in the empirical world;
2. these effects cannot be explained with the help of the “laws of nature”;
3. God gives himself to man in the act of His grace.

Of these three elements, the first is not at all problematic for both Christians and Buddhists, while the third one is purely a matter of religious faith and as such does not belong to the realm of rational philosophy. The second feature, however, is fundamentally unclear and needs to be discussed further.

One approach to clarifying the issue is to analyze the term “laws of nature”. A majority of authors would be ready to agree that this notion is ill-conceived and that the statement made is inconclusive: since we do not know what the “laws of nature” ultimately are, we have no basis to claim that these laws cannot explain what allegedly has happened. The second feature is thus a vacuous statement, with as consequence that the problem of how to explain the effects of divine grace has not been addressed successfully and must rest in abeyance. Critics will conclude that the origin of the acts of grace, if they exist, is “obscure” and that discussing it positively is a matter of “obscurantism”.

Adam Miller\textsuperscript{318}, with the help of Alain Badiou’s theory, has offered a different approach to the problem of how to explain the effects of acts of divine grace. His starting point is that in the classical perception - which dates back to the times of Ancient Greek philosophy - the notion of “divine grace” has been closely associated with the notion of “infinity”, conceived as \(\acute{\alpha}πειρον\), “unlimited”: since allegedly the acts of grace break the economy of causation, they are not subjected to any of the restrictions to which govern the “normal” course of affairs. Therefore, if the range of available possibilities is not restricted it seems to be an obvious choice to conclude that under the guise of “divine grace” anything is possible. Another way to express this is to say that the number of possible options is in principle infinitely great. This creates a conceptual proximity between divine grace and infinity. Alain

\textsuperscript{318} Note 26
Badiou’s, and with him Adam Miller’s, basic idea is to exploit Georg Cantor’s insight into the nature of the concept of infinity. This insight, known as “Cantor’s law”, is that there exists an unlimited hierarchy of infinities such that the “infinity” at each one of these levels is bounded by that of the next higher level. Based on this law Badiou makes two important statements:

- the notion of infinity is an immanent notion. The traditional understanding that infinity must be a quality of the transcendent or of the Deity is not tenable;
- reality is composed of infinitely many individual elements which can be combined in infinitely many different combinations.

The second statement is a form of the “continuum hypothesis” which has a long history in mathematics. Miller and Badiou carry on with their thought process like is: taken together these two statements lead to the conclusion that reality holds an infinite number of options in store for the manner in which the elements of reality can be combined into more complex units. It is these composite units which we have in mind when we speak of reality being such and such. In other words, the effect of divine grace is basically nothing more than that the elements of which reality is composed are rearranged into some new combination that before and up to this point in time had been “dormant”, which is to say that it had been in place but had not yet been noticed. Miller claims with Badiou that we always only have a finite perception of reality in the sense that we are aware of only a - small - selection of the infinite number of ways in which the constituent elements can be combined. In other words, reality can always be structured in other ways which, however, we do not presently perceive as being real. The essence of this theory of grace is:

an event of grace happens if we suddenly become aware of a novel combination of elements of reality that have already been in place but which we have not noticed before.

This explains two important characteristics of “divine grace”:

(1) divine grace is a matter if individual perception;
(2) the effects of grace do not contravene “the laws of nature”.

This second statement is true because Badiou’s theory is not based on relationships of cause and effect but instead is based on an interpretation of the theory of infinite sets. This theory is by definition static and descriptive; for this reason it does not cover the evolution of dynamic processes which in turn are governed by “laws of nature”. This must not blind us to the fact that Badiou and Miller must introduce the notion of the “event” of grace. In their reading this “event” is a change in the state of things, i.e. in the way in which the elements of reality are grouped into sets. Neither Badiou nor Miller offer an explanation of what causes an “event of grace” to happen. Rather, they assume that events happen and ask no more questions.

Badiou’s interpretation of the theory of infinite sets therefore is a convenient way to explain that the notions which Kierkegaard and Tanabe each hold of divine grace are compatible at the level of real phenomena. There is no need to posit at this level a necessary subject that is autonomous and freely acting. On the other hand, Badiou’s theory does not contradict the

319 Notes 88, 302
thesis that such a subject may exist. This is the case because Badiou does not address, and also has no means to address the problematic of the mechanism that causes the potential event of grace to become a real event. Badiou and Miller are satisfied to note that the event has happened, is happening now, or may occur at some time in the future. For Kierkegaard the causing mechanism is the volition of God, while Tanabe has not addressed this issue and, for that reason, also has not seen the need to provide an answer.
7. Suggestions for further investigations

Tanabe, like Nishida and other members of the Kyoto School, has addressed a full array of philosophical issues that include metaphysics, ontology, epistemology, logic, and philosophical anthropology, philosophy of history, philosophy of culture, ethics, political theory, philosophy of art, philosophy of mathematics and science, and others. And although only a small part of his authorship has been translated into a western language, what is available could well serve as inputs to a full range of investigations and comparisons with the views held by philosophers in the west.

Throughout the course of this essay I have maintained that the core of Tanabe’s mature thought is built around what Taitetsu Unno and James W. Heisig have called his “religious philosophy”\(^{320}\). I have also maintained that there can be no doubt that much of Tanabe’s thought is rooted in and shaped by Shinran’s Pure Land Buddhist philosophy. Since this philosophy is part of a tradition which has evolved independently of that in the west, any encounter with Tanabe’s thought must of necessity incorporate a degree of inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue.

Any attempt to enter into such dialogue must of necessity be prepared to face some stiff opposition that has its origin in

- religious orthodoxy;
- cultural supremacy;

both of which are mental attitudes that try to convince the other side of their own superiority rather than to understand and to respect what the other may have to say. From a philosophical point of view those are standpoints which cannot and should not be tolerated because ultimately they deny the opportunity for rational analysis and critique. Respect and understanding will only be achieved if any form of dogmatism is relinquished and replaced by the principle of charity\(^{321}\).

With this in mind I have defended the view that we must try and understand the axiomatic basis of a philosopher, i.e. his stated and tacit assumptions about reality and also his method of reasoning, in order to be able to initiate a fair and hopefully unbiased interaction and comparison with the thought of others philosophers and thinkers who perhaps are more familiar to us than the one whom we are studying.

There is yet another element to consider. To date the works of Tanabe Hajime have not yet received much attention. Much ground work still needs to be done before his work will have been received in full by western philosophical circles, and this may include investigations of some of his basic concepts and assumptions. Given that Tanabe himself readily admits that he owes much to the thought of Kierkegaard, it would seem natural to initiate some of these studies as direct comparisons with that Danish author. However, Tanabe has criticized a broad range of western philosophers, and that criticism might also serve as a stepping stone for a better understanding of the contents and of the ramifications of Tanabe’s thought.

\(^{320}\) Note 3
\(^{321}\) Note 46
A tentative list of possible subjects for such studies could include:

- the notion of „the religious“. On one hand Tanabe and Kierkegaard both seem ready to admit that there is something akin to Otto’s “The Holy”, while on the other hand they would diverge on what the nature of this “The Holy” is. Are we in final analysis dealing with two incompatible concepts, or is there a common root from which the different conceptions have evolved? What is this root and how do the conceptions differ?

- the notion of human “freedom”. Kierkegaard and the members of the existentialist movement have notoriously stressed the importance of this notion for understanding the nature of human existence. Tanabe does agree with Kierkegaard, for example when he criticizes the German Idealist philosophy of freedom, but he does not seem ready to follow Kierkegaard in his radical interpretation of the nature of human “existence”. How does Tanabe’s conception of freedom and his interpretation of “Existenz” compare with that of western existentialist philosophers: Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and others?

- the notion of “the ethical”. While for Kierkegaard “the ethical” is basically an outcrop of social conventions that are subordinate to the direct demands from God, Tanabe holds that “the ethical” in the form of “love of neighbor” is a fundamental characteristic of the absolute dialectic governing all forms of human interaction. This makes it difficult for Tanabe to define explicit ethical values while for Kierkegaard establishing a hierarchy of values does not seem to be a problem. What are the foundations of Tanabe’s “the ethical” and why is this concept linked with the notion of “love” as in “love of neighbor”?

- the distinction of the “differential” and of the “integral” views of absolute reality. Tanabe uses these adjectives to discriminate between the self-power philosophy of the “sages and saints” and the Other-power philosophy of the “sinners and fools”. Yet while there seems to be more to this distinction than this, Tanabe never explains in detail what his views are. Hans Waldenfels, in one of his theological publications, and other authors with him, have criticized Tanabe for this lack of clarity and have suggested that the above distinction is basically vacuous. Is this true or does Tanabe refer to some characteristic of the view of absolute reality which is not trivial, and which for this reason should not be overlooked?

- the concept of “Logic of the Specific”. In developing this logic Tanabe was guided by a desire to explain the irrationalities of the political decisions taken by the Japanese Government before and during WW II. In conceiving a detailed understanding of the concept of “the specific” Tanabe is guided by the Hegelian notion of Sittlichkeit (Ger.: ethical life and custom of a society). Recent Japanese authors have offered sociological interpretations for this term, but the fact remains that the notion of “species” is notoriously difficult to capture. This is so because the concept is based on a logical abstraction from reality. Given that in the philosophy of science the term “species” is regarded as being problematic, what impact does this have on the applicability of Tanabe’s Logic of the Specific to philosophical discussion and analysis, and what limitations for the application this logic should be respected?

Other subjects that have already been studied but which might perhaps need some more attention and effort include:

- Tanabe’s relationship with the philosophy of Nietzsche, and more specifically Nietzsche’s notions of “amor fati” and of nihilism;
- Tanabe’s concept of sin and radical evil.

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324 Koch, Hans-Joachim, Amor Fati bei Friedrich Nietzsche and Hajime Tanabe, Verlag Hinder + Deelmann, Gladbach, 1990
325 Note 5
8. Consulted literature

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326 For a correlation of these translations against the Japanese edition of Tanabe’s Collected Works see for example: http://www.nanzan-u.ac.jp/SHUBUNKEN/projects/Sourcebook/KS_texts.pdf
The Local and the Microscopic: The Distinguishing Characteristics of Modern Japan, in: Makoto Ozaki, Individuum, o.c. pg. 177 – 239

8.1.2 Translations of other publications by Tanabe

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