

Towards an Eastern Philosophy of Religion: on the Contradictory Identity of Philosophy and Religion

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Abstract : The study of the relationship of philosophical reason with the religious domain has been very much a concern for many of the Western philosophical and theological traditions. In this essay, I will suggest a proposal for an Eastern philosophy of religion based on Nishida's contradictory identity of the two: philosophy soku hi (is, and yes is not) religion. This will pose a challenge to the traditional Western contents and methods of the discipline. This paper aims to serve three purposes. First, I will critically assess Charlesworth's typology of the relation between philosophy and religion in the West: philosophy as/for/against/about/after religion. I will also engage Harrison's call for a global philosophy of religion(s) and argue that, although it expands the scope and the range of the questions to address, it is still Western in its method. Second, I will present Nishida's logic of absolutely contradictory self-identity as the instrument to transcend the dichotomous pair of identity and contradiction: 'A is A' and 'A is not A'. I will then explain how this 'concrete' logic of the East, as opposed to the 'formal' logic of the West, exhibits at best the bilateral dynamic relation between philosophy and religion. Even as Nishida argues for the non-separability of the two, he is also aware and committed to their mutual non-reducibility. Finally, I will outline the resulting new relation between God and creatures. Nishida in his philosophy soku hi religion replaces the traditional Western dualistic concept of God with the Eastern non-dualistic understanding of God as "neither transcendent nor immanent, and at the same time both transcendent and immanent." God is therefore a self-identity of contradiction, nowhere and yet everywhere present in the world of creatures. God as absolute being is also absolute nothingness: the world of creatures is the expression of God's absolute self-negation. The overreaching goal of this essay is to offer an alternative to traditional Western approaches to philosophy of religion based on Nishida's logic of absolutely contradictory self-identity, as an example of philosophical and religious counter(influence). The resulting relationship between philosophy and religion calls for a revision of traditional concepts and methods. The outcome is not to reformulate the Eastern predilection to not sharply distinguish philosophical thought from religious enlightenment rather to bring together philosophy and religion in the place of identity and difference.

Keywords : basho, Nishida Kitaro, shukyotetsugaku, soku hi, zettai mujunteki jikodoitsu no ronri

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