Toward a Transcultural Philosophy

by J. Eduardo Pérez Valera

‘He who knows himself and others, will also recognize that East and West cannot be set apart.’

Goethe

While waiting for a plane at Kennedy Airport an old lady, a chemist by profession, thus commented on my interest in the transcultural problem. ‘Chemists all over the world can understand one another wonderfully. Why do you not apply to philosophy the clarity and precision of our methods?’ The implications of her remark underline the importance of the transcultural problem.

First of all, the nature of the data in the natural sciences differs from that of the data in the human sciences, and this difference appears to be based on the distinction between nature and spirit. In nature those things that seem to us quite obvious and well known possess a certain immutability, while human matters appear to be subject to a continuous flux. Colors and sounds, heavy things and light ones, things cold and things hot, the rough and the smooth, the hard and the soft, and everything else that can be known through the senses, seem to participate in the specific immutability of the body. So we find in the natural sciences a practically univocal category that includes what is obvious and manifest to us.

But because the laws of the spirit differ from those of nature, languages and customs, domestic, economic and political structures, mechanical and liberal arts, religions and sciences, not only are multiplied in extra-
ordinary diversity, but in virtue of a certain immanent law they also develop, flower, decay and die. Moreover, men are accustomed to consider as more obvious the things they used to see and do when they were children or young adults. It is therefore because of the variety and mutability of human things as compared to natural things that the category of 'that which is obviously manifest' is so vague. Human beings are not fixed and immutable entities. In each age, culture, nation, social class, almost even in each individual, we find in human affairs great and profound differences in matters which people regard as obvious.

Because of these differences there emerges the so-called transcultural problem, for the solution of which it is necessary to find a transcultural principle that can serve as the basis for passing methodically from that which is obvious for some people to that which is equally obvious for others.

One element of the solution is to be found in depth psychology. In addition to affections and senses man also possesses a patrimony common to all cultures, a series of spontaneous symbols that are the bridge between sensibility and spirit. Depth psychology has investigated these symbols and has proved their utility, especially for the study of the history of religions.

A second element of the solution is to be found in the slow and difficult process through which scholars come to understand the nature of another age and culture. Anybody today can emigrate to a foreign country, learn its language, assimilate its customs, steep himself in its literature, and feel at home in its institutions. In a similar way scholars can assimilate the elements of a foreign and very ancient culture if they master the wealth of signs found in its historical monuments and documents.

Yet another element of the solution may be found in the possible use of other sciences so that we may come to understand the vitality of another culture from its artistic, economic, social, scientific, philosophical and/or religious aspects.

But these three methods, even taken together, cannot lead to a complete solution to the problem. Scholars utilizing these methods can pass from one culture to another and can transpose into their own milieu nearly all the aspects of the culture under investigation. Again, several scholars belonging to the same culture, age and school of thought may agree on the description of the facts, but this still does not solve the grave problem rooted in human affairs, for the description of facts and the interpretation of documents usually differ depending on the different cultures and schools of thought. In other words, although the transcultural problem
has to some extent been solved in relation to the object, the problem of the subject has so far evaded a solution. This is why it has been said that material things can be determined with scientific precision, while those that have to do with human principles, judgments and decisions inevitably lie under the shadow of relativism.

This view seems to be based, firstly, on the above-mentioned fact that, in natural things, the category that includes what is manifest is practically univocal, while in human affairs the same category is very vague. This opinion also appears to express implicit and, perhaps, insufficient philosophical and methodological principles. In any case, scholars can certainly pass, through painstaking study, from things as related to themselves to things as related to others, and vice versa. But if we ask them why they do not strive to discover the principle which makes such an ability possible, they usually answer that it is safer to avoid philosophical discussions, or that their own relativistic philosophy is correct. But the investigator should not be content with brushing aside these legitimate questions, for one may be sure that, if they are allowed to rise, they will sooner or later reveal the inadequacy of any relativistic philosophy.

This study falls into two parts. In the first, in order to offer the solution to the transcultural problem from the side of the subject, I use almost exclusively for my data the material on Japanese thought presented by Professor Nakamura Hajime in his Ways of Thinking of Eastern Peoples. I shall propose various categories; each of them asks of the reader, first of all, an introspective analysis of his own experience and, secondly, a grasp of the relations that justify our including Nakamura’s data in a particular category. As a result we shall have, on the part of the subject, those categories that, functionally related among themselves, form the transcultural principle, the dynamic structure of human knowledge; and on the part of the object, the structural elucidation of the data, inasmuch as series of them are included in specified categories. This investigation will reveal the tools for the methodical work done in the second part, where I shall briefly test the method by attempting to interpret in transcultural categories the satori, or enlightenment, of Zen Buddhism. Essays in Zen Buddhism by D. T. Suzuki will be the principal source of the data employed in this part.

TRANSCULTURAL CATEGORIES

I would like to present appropriate examples from Nakamura's exposition, and I imagine that everyone will be able to find, by introspective analysis of his own experience, categories that will explain these examples satisfactorily.

THI-S-WORLDLINESS

According to Nakamura the Japanese, even in their myths and pre-philosophic attitudes, restrict themselves to this world. While other philosophies and religions tend to consider the world as a place of impurities, as a place of pilgrimage leading toward a better life, primitive Shinto emphasizes the intrinsic values of life in this world. It preaches the Japanese people's nobility, a nobility deriving from the gods. The existence of the soul and its permanence in the world after death is simply assumed; any ideas about the soul are limited to matters of utility in enterprises undertaken within this world. Consistency in this primitive faith is not to be expected. The existence of hell, a country of ceaseless night to which men go after death, is mentioned; but although death is the universally dreaded enemy, the ancient Japanese do not seem to have been greatly preoccupied by it. Japanese mythology in its entirety is concerned with this world; death is an impurity that stains the plenitude of life. Hence there is no trace of a metaphysical concept such as karma or a moral law preaching the reward of virtue and the punishment of evil after death.

Eventually, however, the question of the after-life was raised when Buddhism flooded the Japanese islands with its moral laws and its doctrine of the transmigration of souls. On the one hand the problem of death began to impress itself on the minds of many people, while, on the other, the basic teachings of Buddhism were transformed.

According to the popular faith of the Hindu-Buddhists, living beings go through countless life-cycles; the transmigration of souls constitutes an eternal process. Śākyamuni himself only attained enlightenment in this world—an impossible achievement for the common man—as a reward for the good deeds of his previous lives. Hinayāna Buddhism and several sects of the Mahāyāna, according to the interpretation of the priest

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3 Introspective analysis for the self-appropriation of one's own rational self-consciousness is the activity advocated by Bernard Lonergan in his Insight, Philosophical Library, New York, 1963.

4 For his full account, see Nakamura, op. cit., pp. 345-406.
Saichō, also taught the need of religious practice undertaken throughout many successive lives. These were unacceptable doctrines for the Japanese of the ninth century. The Mahāyāna Buddhism of Japan teaches in the Lotus Sutra that it is impossible for an ordinary man to become a Buddha within a limited time. The expression *sokushin jōbutsu* (to become a Buddha while still alive in the human body) appears to have been coined by Saichō. Once this interpretation was made, enlightenment was seen to be a concrete possibility in this world—a belief expressed by Kūkai, the founder of the Shingon sect, in the ninth century, by Nichiren in the thirteenth century, by the Zen sect from the time of Dōgen until the present.

This statement of Suzuki Shōsan, a Zen monk, is typical:

To pray for a happy future does not mean to pray for a happy world after death. It means to be delivered from afflictions here and now, and thus to attain a great comfort. Then, where do you think these afflictions come from? They spring solely from the love of your own body. Had it not been for this body of yours, from what should you suffer? To be delivered, therefore, from this body of yours, from what should you suffer? To be delivered, therefore, from this body of yours is to become a Buddha.

These examples serve to characterize a Japanese thought-pattern. Before the Japanese think about death they contemplate and love the scene in which they have to live, and they adhere to it with devotion. The humid and warm soil grants them enough rice each year; though she may send occasional catastrophes, nature offers them a dwelling place for the foreseeable future. If Buddhism makes them think about death, they refuse to diminish man or nature with ideas about evil or impurity; they accept the idea of a human transformation, of a certain rebirth, as long as it is verified in this world.

We shall see the significance of Nakamura’s analysis if we try to bring to light the natural, human categories implicit in its data. If the categories are natural and human they are also transcultural, that is to say, they belong primarily to man as such and are found where he is found, at the root of all cultures. Since this fact helps to explain the categories, a simple

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5 聖徳太子, 767–822.
6 即身成佛
7 天台, 774–835.
8 日蓮, 1222–82.
9 道元, 1200–53.
10 稲木正三, 1579–1655.
11 Nakamura, p. 367.
rule of hermeneutics can be presented at this point: the correct interpretation supposes the attainment in the interpreter of a determined category that corresponds and does justice to the data. Thus I may hear somebody say to his friend, 'Because I do not have time', but I am unable to interpret this comment if I do not possess the category that corresponds to it, which in this case may be the question, 'Why don’t you come for a walk with me this afternoon?'

Therefore, in order to interpret the data and to examine the path of self-knowledge, we must first of all attend to that human category through which the sensible data are penetrated and something is apprehended that cannot be heard or seen. It is not audible or visible, but nevertheless it is intelligible.

Every schoolboy says that a circle is a locus of co-planar points equidistant from a center; but not every schoolboy understands what he is saying. Asking what is a circle is equivalent to asking why that curve is perfectly round. And the answer is that all the radii are equal. But what justifies this answer? It is the event that occurs within us when we understand, when we apprehend in the imagined data necessity and impossibility. If the radii are not equal, then the curve cannot avoid bumps or dents; if all the radii are equal, then the curve is bound to look round. Thus when one grasps necessity and impossibility, one grasps the definition of the circle. But this necessity is not something that can be seen; what can be seen and imagined can be seen and imagined only de facto. Necessity and impossibility are things one knows when one understands. Therefore the experience of understanding a circle is different from that of seeing or imagining a circle.\(^\text{12}\)

In addition to the experience of data, insight supposes the interior dynamism that manifests itself in asking questions. It is the dynamism of the desire to know that supposes experience and wants to transcend it. If I do not ask why the curve is perfectly round, I cannot understand the definition of the circle. If I do not care about the categories implicit in Nakamura’s data, it is useless to keep thinking in the hope of understanding.

Also, as intelligence supposes experience and investigation of data, so ideas suppose intelligence. This means that intelligence tends to free itself from the image in which it arose so as to be expressed in abstract

\(^{12}\text{Here we must content ourselves with this illustration of the act of understanding. For further illustrations occurring in mathematics, physics and common sense, the reader should consult Lonergan, Insight.}\)
terms. Insight, however, can be, and usually is, expressed symbolically in a poem or a picture or a statue.

This introspective analysis discovers certain necessities and impossibilities in the data of consciousness—in the intelligence, in the imagination, in ideas. For instance, understanding is impossible without imagining; ideas are impossible without understanding. In other words, the better we understand what it is to understand, the more we engage in a process that will differentiate our consciousness. If we may believe the psychologists, a baby thinks that his toy is a part of his body. Only gradually will he differentiate his faculties from their objects, and will distinguish between dream, vision and imagination. But even a relatively differentiated consciousness needs to exert special effort to deal explicitly with differentiation of consciousness. Without the preceding analysis someone could hold that, because of the equality of the radii, the roundness of the circle is really seen; that on these pages there are printed not only conventional signs but also ideas.

I shall describe below symbolic consciousness in greater detail. It is enough here to point to the source of myth in the dynamism of undifferentiated consciousness: man finds himself dynamically oriented toward the vast field of the unknown. His senses, affections and imagination, which are susceptible to adaptation to different patterns of experience, always accompany him. Moreover he carries within himself the desire to know, and with his questions he tries to penetrate a little into the field of the unknown. The images laden with affectivity ask for interpretation; the dynamism of the desire to know tends to supply this interpretation, but the undifferentiated consciousness cannot criticize itself effectively. Herein is found the source of myth.

It is in this dynamism that we possess the category in which the Shinto myths fit. In the symbolic intelligence we discover the category for all the symbolism of life to be found within the Japanese tradition. We can, moreover, answer various questions arising from our data. ‘How could Buddhism penetrate and spread right through Japan?’ Because it found there the receptivity of a culture that was not satisfied with experience alone and was seeking to transcend it by asking, ‘What kind of culture is this? What does it have to tell us about life and death?’ It is also clear that an undifferentiated consciousness is not able to interpret and assimilate the products of a more mature consciousness. Why were Buddhist doctrines transformed in Japan? Nakamura answers that those doctrines that were other-world oriented tended, in Japanese culture, to be limited to this world. We may perhaps add that Buddhism certainly found in
Japan the desire to assimilate a higher culture, but it was the desire of an undifferentiated consciousness; the Japanese horizon was limited, incapable of self-criticism. Authentic conversion, as also authentic assimilation of a superior point of view, supposes an authentic transformation of consciousness.

Nakamura’s exposition is of interest inasmuch as it provides data by which we can discover and thematize natural, human and transcultural categories. In the present study, the discovery of a category leads in two directions. Firstly, it requires an introspective analysis in order to discover the desired category in our experience. Secondly, we try to understand the explanatory capacity of each category in relation to the data under study. For this reason I have concentrated on the dynamism of the desire to know, expressed in questions about experience that try to transcend experience; on the act of understanding as a pivot between our experience and its conceptual or symbolic expression; and on the undifferentiated nature of consciousness. Now we can learn from our data on Japanese culture that the desire to know is also active in the East. Oriental peoples also experience and try to transcend this experience, they also understand, they also suffer from non-differentiation of consciousness.

My merely structural interpretation may disenchant some. They may note, for example, that I have not studied or interpreted Shinto myths in detail, but have only localized the source of all myths in human consciousness. They would prefer to examine content rather than categories; they would prefer an attempt to penetrate into the intuitions of the enigmatic East. However, I believe that the methodical study of content presupposes the discovery of the latent dynamic structure which is to be found at the basis of all cultures and thus is implicit in our data. If this dynamic structure can be discovered, then the point of union between human cultures and the criterion of their evaluation will have been found. What is implicit in something which is common and habitual is at the same time the most simple and the most profound.

**Acceptance of Natural Human Dispositions**

‘For changeable things, a woman’s heart and the sky of autumn’, runs the Japanese proverb. Similarly another proverb could well be coined: ‘For adapting to the changes and caprices of time, the Japanese’. A typhoon may destroy half a city, but very seldom will signs of commotion or impatience be seen. The Japanese accept nature as it is and, with nature, man also. Nakamura calls this trait a typical characteristic of Japanese culture. His examples refer to a certain indulgence regarding the
passions, to a certain reluctance in the face of imported ascetical practices, and to the social complement of this attitude—benevolence.

Thus the passion of love is ‘natural’. Desires and feelings are accepted and are permitted to develop without repression. Sensual love frankly and openly expressed is a favorite theme of ancient Japanese poetry.\textsuperscript{13} Despite variation in social classes and historical periods, this tendency has remained a definite characteristic of the people.

As a result the elements of asceticism in Confucian ethical theories were accepted with such reservations as finally to be corrupted. Ogyū Sorai,\textsuperscript{14} for example, wanted to accept along with Confucian ethics the natural dispositions of man.\textsuperscript{15} For Dazai Shundai,\textsuperscript{16} man’s natural feelings are the only genuine ones, and as long as he does not offend external propriety, he may follow his natural inclinations. Whoever reads \textit{Genji Monogatari} discovers not only a language rich in nuances for expressing feelings but also a high degree of poeticizing of many aspects of life. This tendency doubtlessly conditioned the acceptance of Confucian asceticism. Just as Japanese Buddhism accepts the idea of enlightenment but believes a man can obtain it in this life, so Japanese Confucianism accepts asceticism in such a way as to adapt it to ‘natural dispositions’. If moral questioning was dormant before the introduction of Buddhism, it then awoke, not to give rise to a differentiated morality but to integrate morality in a confused way into poetry.

A tendency to accept natural desires and feelings predominates in Japanese Buddhism. Onkō (Jiun Sonja)\textsuperscript{17} preached that morality means following one’s natural dispositions; even though he did not neglect to mention the capacity of each man to control his feelings, this latter proviso did not seem to appeal greatly to those who were willing to accept the former idea. The same may be said about the Ritsu sect’s 150 precepts, which, although not severe, nevertheless still included too much that inhibited ‘natural dispositions’ for the majority of Japanese to accept them. Whereas ascetical practices were (and still are) strictly observed in Ceylon, Burma, Siam and Cambodia, the Japanese Buddhism of the Heian period tended toward hedonism. Prayer ceremonies and Buddhist services were regarded as opportunities to spend a pleasant time before listening to the delicate singing of the sutras. This tendency finally led to a

\textsuperscript{13} Nakamura, p. 373, where he quotes Motoori Norinaga as boasting of Japan’s superiority to China in this respect.
\textsuperscript{14} 萩生徂徠, 1666–1728.
\textsuperscript{15} Nakamura, pp. 373–4.
\textsuperscript{16} 太宰春臺, 1680–1747.
\textsuperscript{17} 欅光(慈雲尊者), 1718–1804.
repudiation of all disciplinary rules, especially after the Meiji Restoration. For the faithful of the Jōdo sect the observance of rules was like 'a tiger in the street', because such an observance could destroy faith in Buddha. The fact that the ascetical practices of Buddhists in India and China did not take root in Japan does not necessarily imply immorality, but it nevertheless reveals a tendency to act according to a nature that is inadequately developed from the moral point of view.

This tendency to act 'according to nature' has a social complement in benevolence, an attitude introduced by Buddhism and deepened by the Japanese sects. Thus the popular Jōdo sect teaches that Buddha saves the bad man as well as the good man, and its priests maintain optimistic views about life and benevolent attitudes toward others. Other sects have been just as benevolent. The Shingon-ritsu priest Ninshō dedicated his whole life to the service of the unfortunate and sick. Eisai, the founder of the Rinzai Zen sect in Japan, stated that the essence of Zen was

To prevent by means of self-discipline evil from without and to help others with benevolence from within.20

Regarding ascetical rules, Eisai taught,

You should arouse the spirit of great benevolence. . . . and save mankind everywhere with the pure and supreme disciplines of the great Bodhisattva, but you ought not to seek deliverance for your own sake.21

Dōgen instructed his disciples to speak with kindness to others, to use words of affection and to generate within themselves hearts of benevolence.22 The spirit of benevolence later penetrated Shinto; it became linked with one of the symbols of the imperial family and formed part of the samurai's vaunted array of virtues.

Shinto, Buddhism and Confucianism coexist in Japan. According to Nakamura, it is Japanese benevolence that makes this coexistence possible, but one wonders whether there may not be a more fundamental reason. For one thing, a tendency to accept natural dispositions leads to amorality, while an attitude of benevolence is in some circumstances conducive to heroic morality. How can one explain the unity of such diverse tendencies not only in one culture but also sometimes in the same individual? I suggest that symbolic mentality provides the context in which these problems disappear.

18 忍性, 1217–1303. 19 荒巌, 1141–1215. 20 Nakamura, p. 382. 21 Ibid. 22 Ibid.
symbolic mentality

Man always finds himself facing the unknown, that dimension of the world containing the answers to questions that are unformulated or as yet unanswered. At the same time man possesses the riches of different areas of experience and of affect-laden images that mediate a meaning. Let us call such affect-laden images symbols and go on to note two kinds of symbols.

A man can possess a clear and precise meaning for the communication of which a determinate symbol is employed. This symbol in itself has a clear and precise meaning; its function is to lure the feelings and even the senses into integrating themselves with that meaning. On the other hand, part of man’s experience includes the content of intuitions that are not conceptually expressed, either because their content is elusive, or because it is less important than the affective resonance they produce, or because, if it were expressed, it would lose to a great extent that power of suggesting what it possesses as intuition. These intuitions can be objectivized in sculpture, music or painting; their ‘comprehension’ consists of a certain reproduction of the artist’s intuitions in another person. This is the field of the transcultural category of symbolic mentality. To characterize it better I will contrast it briefly with scientific category.

The scientist also finds himself facing the unknown and mysterious. He observes, describes and constructs hypotheses that relate things among themselves; he uses symbols that suggest the operations that have to be executed, and tries to verify his hypotheses. He needs Aristotelian logic as an indispensable tool. Man in symbolic mentality also observes, understands, uses symbols and judges. But the acts of understanding in this case are intuitions that are tied to the image. The symbols do not suggest mathematical operations but rather the dimensions of a preconceptual world, fascinating, beautiful or hideous; logic proceeds more in agreement with the laws of imagination and feelings. Science develops clear and precise distinctions, but in symbolic mentality representative figures are found instead of genus and species. The terms employed in science try to be univocal, while those of symbolic mentality have many meanings. Instead of rigorous scientific verifications we find repetitions, enumerations, variations and contrasts. The scientist asserts what he verifies and denies what contradicts his verification; in symbolic mentality the content of negations evanesces. Although present in every man and in every culture, symbolic mentality is discovered more easily in the arts than in the sciences, in the uncultured man more than in the cultured, in the child
more than in the adult, in women more than in men, in the crowd more than in the individual.

From this point of view we find internal consistency in the data that we have so far studied. For instance, a people does not express interest, even in its myths, to life beyond the grave; it accepts and loves the world as it is and, along with the world, man as he is; it cultivates benevolence toward nature and toward others; and finally, owing to its symbolic mentality it does not attain to the viewpoint that can do justice to Hindu speculation. Confucianism exists side by side with Buddhism because in symbolic mentality an affirmation does not necessarily imply the denial of the contradictory. The content of the negation evanescs.

In the individual, on the other hand, when symbolic mentality accompanies the non-differentiation of consciousness, it tends to unify everything, albeit in a confused way. Hence the confusion between poetry and morality in the data under investigation is not surprising. Innumerable aspects of Japanese life became poetry in *Genji Monogatari*. Ogyū Sorai conceived poetry as something that embraces all things, and implicitly, perhaps, as something that justifies all things. Dazai Shundai regarded ‘genuine feelings’ as a universal common point where men come together. Ascetic rules naturally find it difficult to enter through the door of such a poetic morality.

It is useful to note, however, that symbolic mentality is a transcultural category, as are almost all the other categories mentioned so far. Every culture possesses it, although its content differs from one culture to another. There are some people, for example, who consider poetry a bridge of common understanding among peoples, and to a certain extent this is true. But there are also others who so emphasize the individuality of intuition and aesthetic experience that they deny the possibility of inter-cultural communication. I believe that this latter conclusion is inadmissible. The experiential, aesthetic or artistic category is like the box of the Little Prince of Saint-Exupery—everybody possesses it, but the content is private.

Since I am here interested in categories more than in contents, I do not wish to go into detail at this point. I would like to suggest, however, that Japanese literature, impregnated by Buddhism, is incalculably rich in ‘intuitions’ that are capable of developing into a well-differentiated philosophy. Moreover, inasmuch as it is true that growth is the only evidence of life, the best way of preserving the riches of a culture is to discover its seeds and make them germinate and fructify. The lines of Goethe quoted at the beginning of this article offer an intuition: self-
knowledge is the key to the interpretation of cultures. Our introspective analysis gives expression and philosophical development to that intuition. If, for instance, one theme of *Genji Monogatari* is that of hatred as a weapon which by itself is capable of causing death, I would suggest that this intuition can be developed and interpreted in a philosophical category that is being thematized only in our own age—‘the world constituted by meaning’.\(^{23}\)

At this point it may be observed that there are two levels in which all categories studied so far are included: the level of experience and the level of intelligence. Experience is organized in diverse schemes; the acts of understanding are of different kinds.

The discovery of these categories in our experience makes us realize that not all our activities are equally accessible. We can perform the experiment of seeing and not seeing by opening and closing our eyes, but such an experiment is not feasible with our acts of understanding. In order to attend to the latter and to discover in detail their conditions, we have to recreate in ourselves the experience of having understood something and make repeated use of personal experiments in which we were at first perplexed and then found light. Without this experience we will be unable to distinguish accurately between the activities of understanding and of sensing, nor will we be able to point out with precision the object of each. The fruit of the distinction is understanding what understanding is; the alternative to this distinction is the confusion that gave rise to the very problems to which we will next turn.

**THE QUESTION OF WHAT IS REAL**

Japanese philosophy since the Meiji period seems to agree unanimously that the world of phenomena is the real world. This formulation represents a tendency that has deep roots in Japanese culture. The ancient Japanese believed that there were spirits inhabiting everywhere, in mountains, rivers, trees and rocks. This way of thinking still persists in Shinto today.\(^{24}\)

This is the way of thinking that not only received but also transformed Buddhism. When the Tendai sect was introduced into Japan from China, continental Buddhist terminology was used, but used in a different sense. For example, the word ‘illumination’ appeared in the Chinese translation of a Mahāyāna theological work originally composed in India (*Mahāyāna-sraddhatpāda-sāstra*; in Japanese, *Daijō-kishin-ron*),\(^{25}\) and the term sig-

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\(^{24}\) Nakamura, p. 350.

\(^{25}\) 大乗起信論
nified comprehension, in a certain ultimate sense, of something existing beyond the world of appearances. In Japan, however, the same word was used to signify the understanding of things within the world of phenomena. Thus Tendai Buddhism in Japan put emphasis on ‘things’ and not on principles. It was from this point of view that the Chinese texts of T’ien-t’ai were interpreted and, for this very reason, poorly interpreted.26

Something similar happened in the Zen sect. Although the Chinese translated the Sanskrit word dharmatā as ‘the real aspect of all things’, Tendai Buddhism interpreted the term as ‘the real aspect is all things’. Hence Dōgen could say,

The real aspect is all things. All things are this aspect, this character, this body, this mind, this world, this wind and this rain, this sequence of daily going, living, sitting and lying down, this series of melancholy, joy, action and inaction, this stick and wand.... this study and practice, this evergreen pine and ever unbreakable bamboo.27

Therefore the transitory nature of the world of phenomena is highly significant for Dōgen:

Impermanence is the Buddhahood... the impermanence of grass, trees, and forests is verily the Buddhahood.... The impermanence of the (land) country and scenery is verily the Buddhahood.28

Two examples concerning the transformation causing illumination (Buddhahood) and the relation of these phenomena with the mind may be given. In the Mahāparānirvāṇa-sūtra we find,

He who desires to know the meaning of the Buddhahood should survey the opportunity and conditions and wait for the occasion to come. If the opportunity comes, the Buddhahood will be revealed of itself.29

Dōgen interprets this passage as follows:

Buddhahood is time. He who wants to know Buddhahood may know it by knowing time as it is revealed to us. And as time is

26 Nakamura, p. 351.
27 Nakamura, p. 352.
28 Ibid.
29 Nakamura, pp. 352–3.
something in which we are already immersed, Buddhahood is also not something that is to be sought in the future but is something that is realized where we are.³⁰

In the Chinese version of the *Avatamsaka-sūtra* we find the phrase, 'In all the three worlds there is only this one mind.' The original Sanskrit text runs,

All that belongs to these three worlds is only mind. What the Buddha discriminately talked of as the Twelve Existence-Relations depends, in reality, solely upon the mind.³¹

Dōgen nevertheless gives this interpretation: '“In the three worlds only one mind” means: these three worlds are what they appear to be . . . the worlds are not the mind itself.' In another place he makes a comment on the mind and its object. 'The mind rightly interpreted is the one mind which is all things and all things which are the one mind.' And elsewhere, 'There is not the one mind apart from all things, and there are not all things apart from the one mind.'³²

We can see here how the Japanese interpret ‘phenomena’ as ‘the fundamental mode of existence’. This way of thinking is connected with that traditional love of nature, the expression of which fills books of poetry. The Japanese hope that the ‘Absolute’ will reveal itself through nature. ‘Cherry blossoms, falling in vain, remind me of the Treasure-plants that adorn the paradise.’³³ These two characteristics, the recognition of phenomena as something absolute and the love for nature, are expressed in the oral tradition of the Tendai sect of the Middle Ages, according to which everything is by nature a Buddha—not only men, but also plants, trees and mountains. And for this reason it does not make sense to speak of ‘converting oneself into Buddha’.

These examples reveal evident traces of symbolic mentality. For the present, however, our main concern is directed elsewhere. We are now interested in knowing how one explains the tendency in Japanese culture of identifying the absolute with the world of phenomena. Nakamura argues that it is because the climate is kind and nature relatively benevolent; men admire this and feel themselves in harmony with it. Yet, ‘This seems to account only in part for the prevalence of the characteristic thought tendency of the Japanese to take the phenomenal world as absolute.’³⁴ We may accept this partial explanation, but it invites us in turn to seek its complement.

THE CRITICAL PROBLEM

The *honkaku*, or 'illumination', of Buddhism brings up the problem of the distinction between appearance and reality. The Chinese spoke of dharmatā, the real aspect of all things, but Tendai Buddhism and Dōgen changed this to, 'The real aspect is the entire thing', since there is no aspect that is not real.

This seems to be the same problem of reality, of being, of objectivity, of the subject-object relationship, which has embarrassed Western philosophy for centuries. The problem has also bothered men in the Orient. Buddhism was divided into six sects during the Nara period, yet all shared a common desire to understand the nature of the universe, and of perceiving the transcendental reality superior to the senses through which man could achieve salvation. The differences among the sects were based only upon the various ways in which they resolved the problem of being. Whether rational or mystical, the solutions led to the same conclusion.35

In other words, what is called the critico-epistemological problem in the West is transcultural. It does not arise from the individual characteristics of any one culture but from human nature. We all have senses, feelings, imagination and understanding. What are the activities that interrelated form what is called human knowledge? Why does knowledge result from these activities? The solution to these queries is none other than the solution to the key problems of all cultures. It signifies, furthermore, the discovery of the invariable, natural human structure that operates at the root of all these problems. When the category of 'affirmation' is added to the categories already studied, we shall have the answer to the first question. This in turn will provide the methodological key to studying the second question. We will turn, then, to the problem of objectivity and of being.

We have made an introspective analysis in search of self-knowledge. Finding in ourselves the two levels of experience and intelligence, we have apprehended relations in the field of consciousness. Inasmuch as we explain our data structurally by means of these categories, we have apprehended the relations between the latter and the data. In other words, we have moved to the level of understanding, the apprehension of relations. However, human knowledge is not only understanding, but correct understanding. The products of intelligence must face the critical

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question of whether what I have understood is true or not. This question makes us reflect and search for foundations that justify a rational and responsible affirmation. We know what it is to have affirmed responsibly, for everyone has reflected and weighed the reasons for affirming more than once in his lifetime. Now, evidence for self-affirmation is found in the data of consciousness. I ask myself whether I really know myself: I ask myself whether I see colors, hear sounds, feel hard and soft things. Have I asked questions, have I entered into the dynamic process of one who wants to understand? Do I have the experience of being perplexed and of suddenly having ‘seen a light’? Certainly I reflect, I weigh the evidence that is fundamental to an affirmation; this is precisely what I am doing at this moment. Then can I affirm that I know myself? The evidence present in the data of consciousness offers me a guarantee that I can make an affirmation.

By characterizing human knowledge as a structure whose parts are activities (experiencing, understanding, affirming) functionally related among themselves, I have answered the first of the two questions posed above. The next question is why knowledge results from these immanent activities of experiencing, understanding and judging.

Knowledge is a structure whose parts are activities functionally related among themselves. It is, moreover, a dynamic structure. That is to say, experience stimulates investigation; investigation is the active intelligence which through imagination leads to an act of understanding; the act of understanding leads to the conceptual formulation of what the act of understanding apprehended in experience and imagination. Concepts stimulate reflection, and reflection carries us to rational affirmation.

The source of the dynamism of this structure lies in the unlimited desire to know. This desire becomes incarnate, so to speak, in the questions which concern experienced data, in the understanding which transcends the data, in the reflection which criticizes the understanding and in the affirmation that transcends it, in the further investigation which tends toward greater understanding and profounder affirmations. The desire to know is not itself a cognitive activity, but it is present in all cognitive activities. Furthermore, in contrast to all other desires, it is unlimited. Finally, with its unending parade of questions, the desire tends toward apprehending something. And its object is being—everything, and all the aspects of everything, because nothing exists that cannot be the object of questions. This intrinsic relationship of the unlimited desire to know with its object is what constitutes the objectivity of knowledge.

Consequently, just as the unlimited desire to know takes hold of part of
reality through the activities of experiencing, understanding and judging, so also the objectivity of our knowledge has a triple component. One is experiential, residing in the data as such; another is normative, residing in the demands of intelligence and rationality, and this guides the process of knowing from data to judgment; and one that is absolute, which is reached when critical reflection combines the experiential and normative components in an absolute affirmation. This analysis is the foundation of Lonergan’s affirmation that the objectivity of human knowledge is based on an unlimited intentionality—the desire to understand—and a virtually unconditioned result, the affirmation, whose conditions critical reflection discovers and finds verified. According to this analysis, since the real world is the object of the unlimited desire to know and the criterion of the real is judgment understood as virtually unconditioned, the intelligible is identified with the real. This is the consequence of affirming that we know not only with the eyes, ears and hands, but also and especially with the head.

Theoretically this position is so invulnerable that it covers any objection raised against it; nevertheless, in practice, the ‘real world’ is given another meaning. Its content is determined by my interests, the orientation of my life, the unconscious horizon that expels from my vision the rest of reality. In this sense, my private world is the real world for me. This is exactly the position of Dōgen, who said, ‘The real aspect is all things . . . all things are this body, this world, this wind. . . .’ It is not difficult to understand his position; neither is it difficult to point out its deficiency. As long as one does not clarify which activities constitute knowledge and what it takes for our knowledge to be objective, there is no defense against the imperialism of symbolic mentality, and one’s definitions of being, of the real world, of objectivity, cannot escape deficiencies and ambiguities.

In the light of this analysis, a few observations concerning the transcultural problem may be made. Paralleling the human tendency to put the objectivity of knowledge in experience alone, in intelligence alone, in affirmation alone, or in combinations of any two of these, we find a tendency to place the field of intracultural communication in experience alone, in the content of particular ideas, in affirmations alone, or in the content of particular affirmations. Although in a certain sense there exist ideas and affirmations that are universally valid, I believe that a horizon that does not release the unlimited desire to know and a field other than the immanent cognitive structure of human consciousness cannot do full justice to the interpretation of a culture.

Failure to pay attention to this structure has in the past provided grounds
for confusion and wrong interpretations. Japanese Zen has insisted on the experience of *satori*, and D. T. Suzuki has emphasized the lack of a Western category to interpret it. I suggest that the category 'experience', as well as the spirit of investigation that penetrates and clarifies it, is universal. Furthermore, according to Nakamura, Buddhism, taken as a whole, failed in Japan in the task of communicating religious and philosophical ideas. This signifies a double failure: a lack of communication of a definite category of understanding and, therefore, a lack of integration of this understanding into Japanese experience so that a healthy and viable development could be ensured. Similarly, Christian missionaries in Japan, also on the whole, have failed in communicating a new faith, that is, in communicating a responsible affirmation. This latter case implies both a failure to vitalize with a new content an immanent category in human consciousness and a failure to integrate it with Japanese experience and understanding. Many Buddhists, Christians and Japanese do not seem to have realized in the past the fact that authentic assimilation of a higher point of view requires authentic transformation of consciousness.

**TENDENCY TO STRESS A LIMITED SOCIAL BOND**

There is still an important series of data to consider, and this will more clearly define the data already examined.

Diverse elements came into play to form a Japanese society in which a concrete social bond would acquire an absolute value. The primitive Indo-European peoples were nomads; they lived by hunting and came into contact with foreign peoples. Fierce rivalries characterized their human relations. The peoples migrated. One race conquered another, only to be conquered in its turn by a stronger one. In such communities the struggle for survival was based on ability and strategy. But in the case of Japan the community developed from small foci of rice farmers. The Japanese quickly abandoned nomadic ways, selected sites for permanent habitation, and dedicated themselves to the cultivation of fields. The family was perpetuated in such communities, and after several generations the entire society took on the appearance of an extended family. Social ties among individuals were strong and primitive; an individual who wanted to stand out could not do so without hurting the feelings of another and, therefore, without hurting himself. This type of society came to be reflected in the cult of tutelary gods, in the elaborate

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rules of courtesy between different social levels, and, above all, in the absolute value which a determinate, concrete social bond would acquire. While in India and the West it is usually thought that man possesses cosmic potentialities, according to a certain Japanese way of thinking he is subordinated to a specific and limited social unit.

This apparently simple ‘way of thinking’ permits Nakamura to give intelligible unity to a great number of aspects of Japanese culture. For example, there is an intelligible nexus between the insistence on social ties and some of the characteristics of the language. The honorific style of the language expresses a sense of ‘education’ and of ‘decorum’, and it becomes an emphasis on difference between social classes and among members of any particular class. Further, given the importance of the social bond, the individual remains in the background and society enjoys the spotlight. Thus in a Japanese sentence the subject is often unexpressed.

There is also an intelligible relationship between the tendency to stress the social bond, the belief of primitive Shinto in protective deities, and the importance that came to be attached to descent from a noble lineage. Because the primitive social unit was found in the family, the cult of the ujigami, or protective deities, naturally flourished. Primitive faith was also related to the cult of ancestors, and the idea that supported this faith was nothing less than the divinization of the social bond. The ancestors were not deified in order to render cult to them; rather, the deities were considered the common ancestors of the Japanese people. The case of Nichiren may be mentioned as an example of the importance attached to noble lineage. He was, on his own admission, of humble birth, but the majority of his biographers speak of him as being the scion of a noble family. In a similar way, all the representatives of popular religions pass as descendants of emperors.

There is also an intelligible relationship between the tendency to stress the social bond and the acceptance and transformation of Confucianism in Japan. The Analects of Confucius and his Treatise on Filial Piety were wholeheartedly accepted; the latter served as a basis for the religious speculation of the Wang Yang-ming School\textsuperscript{37} and occasioned the metaphysical meditations of Nakae Tōju.\textsuperscript{38} All this was perfectly natural, since the teaching of the Learned One held that venerable institutions and customs were based on the social bond. But there was a significant exception. Confucianism holds that the emperor receives and retains his power by a mandate from Heaven. But this doctrine opens the doors to

\textsuperscript{37} \textit{Monumenta Nipponica}, xxvii, 1

\textsuperscript{38} 玉陽明派 \textit{中江藤樹,} 1608-48; Nakamura, p. 418.
imperial abdication or to rebellion against the emperor, something that Japanese Confucianism could not accept.

Likewise, there is an obvious intelligible relationship between typical Japanese loyalty to the ruler and the tendency to stress the concrete social bond. Monks were examples of loyalty and filial piety. They worked faithfully in the interests of their sects and were ready to bring others into disrepute as long as it aided their own sects. Doctrinal differences were of little or no importance. Absolute devotion to the ruler has constituted the basis of morality throughout Japanese history. The battles between the Genji and the Heike were not always the result of hatred or difference of faith, but were often the outcome of loyalty to rulers. The attitude of a warrior is typically expressed as follows:

Besides this bond between lord and subject, we need nothing. We will not waver at all, even on the advice of Sakyamuni, Confucius, or the Sun God of Japan appearing before us. Let me fall into a hell, or let me be punished by gods; we will need nothing else than to be faithful to our lord.39

The statement of the Confucianist Kan Sazan40 comes as an echo to the voice of the warrior.

The Catholics, it is said, would willingly give their lives for their Deity. This is most outrageous. It is only because the Sovereign rules our land that we would go through fire and water in an emergency. . . .41

There is an intelligible relation between this absolute evaluation of the social bond and the fate of Lao-Tzu Taoism, Christianity, and the followers of the Pure Land sect of Buddhism in Japan. The Taoism of Lao-Tzu and Chuang-Tzu, which highly esteemed the well-being of the individual, never prospered in Japan. Christianity, and especially Catholicism, with its persistent teaching of faith in God, was suspect, persecuted and finally outlawed because it weakened the foundation of social order. The Satsuma clan killed the followers of the Pure Land sect because it was feared that they might be disobedient to their lord.42

Finally, it is obvious that there is a relation between high estimation of the concrete social bond and the development of ultra-nationalism and the emperor cult. This mentality goes to explain the adherence to judg-

39 Nakamura, p. 430.
40 菅原山, 1748–1827.
41 Nakamura, p. 436.
42 Nakamura, p. 415.
ments determined by the concrete situation, the repugnance to universal religions and to theories in general, and the disrepute of logic as a useless instrument.

I have selected above only a few examples from Nakamura’s long treatise on the Japanese tendency to stress the concrete social bond. The point I have been trying to make in all of them is that this tendency has transformed every sector of Japanese life and culture, including the Japanese themselves. Furthermore, this mentality cannot be explained in terms of the mere categories of experience and intuition for it belongs to another level. From ancient times the Japanese have enclosed themselves in this world because the gods that originated the race and the families that offered them cult pertained to this world. The individual can accept the world and man, and he can cultivate benevolence; but he will exercise benevolence only if he is not impeded by a higher loyalty. A limited intellectual horizon can impede the comprehension of foreign teachings; it is also possible that some will be passed over or openly rejected because of loyalty to the social bond. Scholars could discuss complicated theories, but their theories did not touch on the concrete values of life. Here again we find internal consistency in the diverse ways of thinking presented by Nakamura. A new and extensive series of data is integrated with the previous data—on a different level, it is true, but constituting a unified system.

VALUES

We have next to enquire why this way of thinking, which to some might appear airy and impalpable, has so strongly influenced the sentiments and daily life of the individual, his history and his culture. The answer is surely quite clear. This insistence on the concrete social bond in Japanese culture reveals the transcultural category of value, and implicitly that of ‘the good of order’.

We have considered the category of being as the object of the unlimited desire to know. In human knowledge this desire is present in the dynamic process which proceeds from experience to understanding to affirmation. But man also has appetites that relate not to being in general but to being inasmuch as it is desired in some form. And thus, in a manner parallel to the triple structure of being proportionate to our knowledge, the structure of human good emerges. On the elementary level of experience the good is constituted by the objects of desire. On the level of intelligence the good is order—a complicated group of relations, economic, political and religious, which tend to ensure and stabilize the attainment of the objects
desired by the individual, objects such as bread, education and matrimony. This order can be called feudalism, socialism, democracy or what have you, and it is capable of infinite variations. When critical reflection, affirmation, deliberation and decision occur in a determinate order, the notion of value emerges.

This structure of human good is at the same time both general and concrete. Through it is explained the value that is discovered intelligently and selected responsibly, as well as the absence of value on account of a lack of intelligence and rationality, and all the possible cases between these two poles. In the data given earlier we find a relation between the tendency to stress the concrete social bond and human good conceived as order. The Japanese empire, for example, was founded on the loyalty of its subjects; it assured the stability of the economic order and thus the attainment of the objects of desire. In those cases where an absolute affirmation comes into play, the concrete social bond appears as a value. The overpowering influence of this value in Japanese culture and history is a perfect example of the influence of affirmations and of intelligence on every point of life and on the remotest examples of human experience.48

In the light of what has been said so far, various observations and conclusions may be made.

I believe that we have found the solution to the transcultural problem from the side of the subject. The transcultural principle—transcultural categories functionally related among themselves—can be appropriated through introspective analysis by the Oriental as well as by the Westerner.

There is no denying the intrinsic difficulty of such an appropriation and the time required for such an operation. Our faculties are oriented toward the object, and the objectivization of the subject demands on our part both time and patience. In the past, Plato’s artistic dialogues offered the incipient philosopher a help toward such an undertaking. At present we possess a pedagogically better and more complete instrument in Lonergan’s Insight, a demanding and difficult work. As a result the reader who is not acquainted with the introspective method will probably not give his immediate and enthusiastic support to a way of making an interpretation through self-knowledge. On the other hand, my categories have been presented as answers to questions arising from the data under study. As long as the categories are not assimilated, the reader may think that my answers, and even the suggestion that anyone try to find the categories in his own experience, are obscure. But if he finds that the

48 See Lonergan, Insight, pp. 595 ff.
answers make sense in their overall consistency and in the light they shed, this fact may encourage him to admit the possibility of merit in the method of introspective analysis.

We asked, for instance, how it was possible for Shinto to coexist so peacefully with Buddhism and Confucianism. The answer was found in the fact that in symbolic mentality the content of negations vanishes. The full comprehension of this simple answer presupposes, however, that one does not doubt that understanding correctly is knowing; it means that a person has discovered in his own experience the solution to the critical problem. If he does not possess this solution, our answer may appear obscure because he himself is operating within symbolic mentality and does not possess the wherewithal to discover clearly the advantages and limitations of this way of operating. Yet his own experience is exactly the kind of experience expressed by our data. For him to discover in himself the necessity of the development means to discover the necessity of solving the critical problem and, with that solution, he will be able to grasp our answers fully, and even go on to nuance and expand them.

But I do not think that this last observation is enough to resolve the difficulties or misgivings of all readers. I cannot give a convincing answer, for example, to a person who sees in our self-knowledge a scheme and refuses to schematize man. The only convincing answer is the assimilation of the categories, and this is a private, hidden and prolonged process.

In the measure that these categories have been apprehended, they serve as the \textit{a priori} element through which we have interpreted our data. Moreover, if my answers are correct, this may be explained by the \textit{a priori} element; as long as they are insufficient, they need to be corrected by the same element. This amounts to affirming the necessity of an \textit{a priori} element for every interpretation and to affirming that, in the final analysis, every critical interpretation must be the result of self-criticism.

We can also conclude from the preceding point that if it is true that an excellent way to understand a problem is to study its history, it is no less true that, to write the history of a problem, one must know its solution. Otherwise we do not have a criterion for discerning the important points in the development of the matter, nor can we discern the blind alleys or evaluate the elements leading to a solution. \textit{Mutatis mutandis}, this solution must be applied to the present study. If a person reads through the section of Nakamura’s book that has been used in this study, he will notice that Nakamura does not attach the same importance as we have given to the identification of the phenomenal world with the real world in Japanese culture. In fact, the problem arising from that section has been the car-
dinal point in this study. Only when we have solved the problem of knowledge, of objectivity and of reality, can we discover signs of the unsolved problem in others. I have shown how it is found in the section of Nakamura’s book dealing with Japan, and the same could be done for the other sections of his work.

The solution to the transcultural problem on the part of the subject is only a beginning, but a necessary beginning. Westerners may marvel that modern Shintoists still believe in myths. But we also find in the West many people who, after years of university formation and even of teaching, confuse intellectual openness with intellectual emptiness and fail to distinguish the making of responsible judgments from unilaterality. I suggest that myth and this confusion have the same source—a relatively undifferentiated consciousness incapable of knowing and criticizing itself effectively. As long as the development which presupposes self-knowledge is not carried through, the problem of intercultural communication remains insoluble at its roots.

The solution to the transcultural problem on the side of the subject provides us with the instrument for working with objects. This study has, I hope, made a contribution in this direction. Nakamura voices at the beginning of his book the hope that, as a result of criticism of the apparently irrelevant ways of thinking of the Orient, it may be possible to reach a firm basis for the establishment of ‘a new and universal’ philosophy. I believe that the base that Nakamura is seeking is precisely the one that has helped us to give intelligible unity to a good number of apparently disparate data.\(^4^4\)

Moreover, Nishida Kitarō\(^4^5\) was of the opinion that the point of union between oriental and occidental cultures can be sought in Japan, because the Japanese spirit goes to the truth of things proceeding from the subject, progressing beyond the subject to the depth of the subject.\(^4^6\) These deep potentialities pertain to the human spirit, and thus we have investigated the depth of the subject to bring them to light and use them explicitly for the structural explanation of the object.

It should be clear by now that, for the most part, our study has had to do with a prelogical level of thought. Try to explain our data through logic and you will find that logic is useless. We need another technique to handle prelogical material accurately. As the prelogical level of thought is to be found in every stage of every culture, we can recognize the naïveté

\(^{44}\) Nakamura, p. 32.

\(^{45}\) 西田幾多郎, 1870–1945.

of the view that the Western way of thinking is 'logical' while the Eastern is 'intuitive'. The content of the symbolic category must be determined empirically in every case.

Finally, our invariant transcultural principle on the part of the subject respects and gives a good account of the cultural pluralism on the part of the object. We can discuss whether the interpretation of our data is sufficient or not, but no one will affirm that we have mutilated the data. In other words, our transcultural principle is radically opposed to any cultural colonialism. Every culture reacts spontaneously against those elements of a foreign culture that seem bent on oppressing its natural vitality. On the other hand, our transcultural principle, although it has been the discovery of one particular culture, transcends all cultures and is at the root of all of them. It constitutes a permanent invitation to self-knowledge and to self-development in the direction of human authenticity.

In the second part of this article, to be published in the next issue, the author applies the methods described above to make an interpretation of Zen enlightenment in transcultural categories.