

Handout for

## »Regarding the deep structure of the Japanese language as a prerequisite of philosophy in Japan«

(»Zur Tiefenstruktur der japanischen Sprache als Bedingung der Philosophie in Japan«)

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The following excerpt is taken from »An Evening Conversation about Philosophy« (1886/1887) by the Japanese philosopher Inoue Enryō (1858–1919). The excerpt serves as an example of both a reflection of and on the translation of philosophy to Japan. I will take up this example to elucidate my main reasoning whether and if so to which extant Japanese language can be taken as a prerequisite of philosophy in Japan. Japanese language in general is thereby the more elemental form in translating philosophy in/to Japan. The »Evening Conversation« is an example for the more complex structure, i.e. of culture – in this case the cultural praxis of doing philosophy – that is transferred from the West to the East in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. (The complete translation is available here: <https://www.toyo.ac.jp/uploaded/attachment/117391.pdf>)

Based on its historical impact as testified to by these and other scholars, the great importance of the Conversation can be delineated according to five specifications: First, it is the earliest philosophical text in Japan written in an autochthonous style, mirroring the Greek structure of maieutics. Second, it is the earliest Japanese dialogical and polylogical meta-reflection exploring—both in content and form—what the cultural practice of philosophy is. Third, considering the prologue of the Conversation, the text has two levels where the first, the prologue, sketches in broad strokes the array of intellectual positions within the discourse of the time. It thereby represents a kind of self- historicization, since it contextualizes the content of the debate of the main text, the second level. Fourth, it is a statement outside of Europe regarding non-European sources of philosophy and thus offers a synthesis of Eastern and Western thought from within the East. And last, it is the earliest attempt to present a systematic position of idealist philosophy in Japan, which—at least implicitly—makes use of the Buddhist tradition.

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## AN EVENING CONVERSATION ABOUT PHILOSOPHY

INOUE Enryō 井上円了

Translated by Ralf MÜLLER

- I. Discussing the Relation of the Worlds of Matter and Mind
- II. Discussing the Original Substance of God
- III. Discussing the Nature of Truth

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## PROLOGUE

One day while taking a round trip on a small steamboat in a certain area, five or six passengers were sitting next to me. [Their] conversation turned towards philosophy [哲学].

The first [of them] said: A while ago a new sort of study [学問] called philosophy came from the West, but just what kind of a study is it?

The second said: I have heard that philosophy is the study that investigates principles [究理].

The third said: The study [学; or, learning] that investigates principles is, in other words, the study of the principles of matter [物理学; i.e., physics] and is not philosophy. In my view, since the character for *tetsu* [哲] is the character of *kentetsu* [賢哲; i.e., wise person], philosophy is the study of the saints and sages, such as the study of Confucius and Mencius.

The fourth said: Philosophy is not such a shallow thing as the study of Confucius and Mencius. Once I read *A New Theory of Ethics* [倫理新説] by Mr. Inoue Tetsujirō [井上 哲次郎] and I was surprised how lofty philosophy is.

The fifth said: Back then Professor Nishi Amane [西周] was said to do philosophy. I have read a book about the principles of mind [心理] that he translated, and so have learned that philosophy is the study of the principles of the mind [心理学; i.e., psychology].

The sixth said: I have heard that Master Hara Tanzan [原坦山], the Buddhist scholar, has become professor at the philosophy department of [Tokyo] University. So, looking at it this way, the teachings of the Buddha [仏教] must be philosophy.

The seventh said: All your views [説] are different. So then, what really is this thing called philosophy? It seems that we still do not know.

The first laughed and said: That which we cannot know, probably this is philosophy!

The crowd joined in laughter: So it is, so it is!

Sitting close by, I overheard this [conversation] and could not help but laugh. In short, all these views differed because they really did not know what philosophy is. To begin with, among the things that appear [現存] in the universe there are those that have [a concrete] form and those that do not. The sun, moon and stars, the earth, mountains and plants, birds or beasts, fish, or worms have form. Sensations [感覺], ideas, society [社会], gods, and Buddhas [神仏] do not have form. The studies that experiment with [or,

experience; 実験する] that which has form are called the sciences [理学]. The studies that thoroughly investigate [or, discuss; 論究] those things without form are called philosophy. This is one point in which the sciences and philosophy differ. Or, to put this another way, that which experiments with one part of [all] things is called the sciences; and that which thoroughly investigates the entirety of things is what is called philosophy. Or sciences learn by experimenting, and philosophy learns by [investigating] ideas [思想の学]. In short, sciences are the studies that have to do with matter [物質], which has form, and philosophy is the study that has to do with the mind, which has no form. And so, among the studies that have to do with the mind there are various disciplines [諸科] such as psychology, logic, ethics, and pure philosophy [or, metaphysics; 純正哲学]. Among these, people know more or less about psychology or logic, but when it comes to pure philosophy, people do not know in the least what kind of study it is. To put it briefly, one must say that pure philosophy is the study that thoroughly discusses the axioms of truth [真理の原則] and the foundation of all studies, since it is the study of pure principles [純理] within philosophy. If one discusses [these principles] thoroughly, questions will arise such as these: What is the real substance [実体] of mind? What is the real substance of matter, what is the original source [本源] of matter and mind? And what is the relation of matter and mind? Pure philosophy, therefore, takes the interpretation [解釈] and explanation of these [matters] as its objective. Now, since I want to show these matters of pure philosophy and their interpretations to those people who are not acquainted with philosophy at all, I came to compose *An Evening Conversation about Philosophy* in several parts. The first part discusses the relation of matter and mind and demonstrates what the world is made of; the second part discusses the original substance [本体] of god and sets out where matter and mind arise from; the third part discusses the nature [性質] of truth and what the different studies are founded upon. I would be extraordinarily happy if in the end a few readers of this little book are able to grasp some insight into what pure philosophy is.

7th Month of 1886

The Author