DIOGENES

The Birth of Ehiyehlogy: Beyond Buddhist Thought and Ontotheology

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Our era is like that of Job, the just, the suffering innocent who curses the day of his birth saying: "Perish the day that saw my birth … Why did I not die in the womb, perish as soon as I was brought forth?" (Job 3, 3–11). But the tragedy of our times lies in the fact that human beings not only cannot live because of their sufferings, but also cannot die in the authentically human sense. In the gigantic machine of our civilization they are seen as merchandise, simply things, "living corpses".

This tragedy is typically actualized and symbolized by Auschwitz, the Nazi concentration camp. There human beings were always between life and death. They were called "muslims" (*Muselmann* in German) and "walking corpses". Giorgio Agamben accurately expresses this human condition:

> As ever it is Levi who hits on the aptest and at the same time the most terrible formulation: "One hesitates, he writes, to call their death death." The aptest because what defines the muslims is not so much that their life is not a life; rather it is that their death is no longer their death. The fact that a human being's death can no longer be called a death, that is the specific horror brought into the camp by the muslim, brought into the world by the camp.

> (Agamben 2003: 75; Levi 1987: 97; cf. Adorno 2003)

Elie Wiesel (1982: 174–175) also speaks of his experience of death:

> Three days after the liberation of Buchenwald I became very ill: poisoning. I was transferred to hospital and spent two weeks between life and death. One day, summoning all my strength, I was able to get up. I wanted to see myself in the mirror hanging on the wall opposite. I hadn't seen myself since the ghetto. From the mirror's depths a corpse stared at me. I can't forget its eyes looking into mine.

So we need to ask ourselves a radical question: what is the monstrous evil that brought about that tragedy for humanity?

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Based on Western Thought: Ontotheology and the "logos" tradition

Behind Auschwitz we find a monstrous entity: the Nazi totalitarian state which saw Jews, gipsies, homosexuals and political opponents as beings unworthy of life, as living corpses. Similarly, behind the contemporary tragedy that annihilates individuals who are seen as heterogeneous and abnormal, there is an econo-techno-bureaucratic totalitarian regime, in the sense that the world of life (*Lebenswelt*) is ruled and colonized by economic, technological and political powers. Indeed the totalitarian tendencies described above presuppose an ideology or philosophy (thought) that is basically totalitarian.

Among the ideas characteristic of totalitarianism we can think of ontotheology as a typical case. To summarize its essential features we need to go back to the source of western thought, classical Greek thought. Here we find two ideas that distinguish classical Greek thought.

First the tradition of the λόγος. Since Socrates it stresses thinking, dialogue, discussion in the agora and demonstration as ways to establish a consensual space in the πόλις. The main subject of this tradition is a free citizen and a philosopher. Through it there was established a first form of democracy and ethics, focused for example on justice and prudence, despite the obvious limits it still had.

The second element is the birth of ontotheology. According to Martin Heidegger (1966), since the Greek period the history of western and European thought has been guided by this question: "what is being?" The question of the being is thus posed as a question about the being of being and has two distinct forms. The first form is: "what is being as being, that is, being in the most universal sense without residue?" The research triggered by this question threw up metaphysical concepts such as form and matter or act and power. It gave rise to ontology within the history of philosophy. The second form may be formulated as follows: "what is the highest being among beings?" This is the question about divine beings and God, which was the origin of theology. So through this dual formulation the question about the being of beings gave rise to ontotheology, as we clearly see in Aristotle. As for the features of God according to ontotheology, we can refer to two, described by Jean-Luc Marion (1995: 36):

> 1. In the metaphorical domain God must act as the causal foundation (*Begründung*) of all the common beings he acknowledges; 2. in order to do so he must always carry out the function and possibly the name of *causa sui*, that is, the being that is supremely founding because founded by himself.

Therefore, provisionally and formally, we can define ontotheology using the two following features:

a. it seeks the most universal object of its thought; in this search, in classical Greek times, "being as being" became the most universal field;
b. it orders this object through some causality or reason and based on the founder or supreme being (in Aristotle).

Apart from this temporal definition of ontotheology we can look at its metaphysical aspect from Aristotle's philosophy in order to see its content more clearly and define it. As its title *Τὰ μετὰ τὰ φυσικά* indicates, this ontological work seems to be related to a context in which the being, or rather Greek being, τὸ ὄν, is sought and analysed. Through the word "metaphysical" one is openly positioned "behind", beyond the physical, perceptible reality of the world. This is why it

is better to approach it after discovering what teachings are contained in the *Physics*. That makes it possible to understand how metaphysics was conceived as the beyond of physics. Indeed in the classical Greek period the world and physical being are positioned within the framework of a cosmology. The whole cosmos turns eternally around the earth, so that the concept of time is spatialized: time is no longer seen as a linear or historical development, but as a cyclical repetition (or a repetitive cycle). Thus the Greeks thought being within a spatial physics or cosmology: they constructed a vertical hierarchy, a causality peculiar to the movement of being, from perceptible being (moving motor) up to immaterial being, then at the apex supreme being, the prime mover of all beings, both mover and immobile (*prima causa movens immobilis*).

And so from stage to stage thought crosses the physical world and its multiple celestial spheres to reach the first sphere of fixed stars, which marks the frontier between perceptible and imperceptible being; in crossing that frontier it reaches the metaphysical world.[1]

This brief recap has allowed me to point up one of the essential features of the Greek existing and being, that is, their physical and spatial character. The supreme being is also spatial but transcendent; it acts as the cause; it remains immobile, not caused and not affected by other beings, which it assimilates, reduces and articulates into a hierarchical causality; it is itself enclosed within an eschatological space without horizon or hope for an unexpected future. So, because of its tendency to unify and systematize all beings without exception, this thinking can become a matrix for totalitarian and ontotheological thought.

As Heidegger and Marion note, this supreme being has passed through several stages throughout the history of western thought, for example Descartes's "*cogito*", Nietzsche's "*eternal return of the Same*" or modern technology. If we follow the history of this ontotheology that radically closes off the horizon of the other, we are able to grasp one of its characteristics. We can begin by noting a decisive u-turn in Greek ontotheology in Descartes's time, when the human *cogito* replaced the divine version (νόησις νοήσεως) and the Greco-Latin supreme being. This *cogito* represents and calculates everything according to its unique categories or mathematical signs. Through the signs of "*mathesis universalis*" it creates the world of physico-mathematical laws and sets up a hierarchy of being that is both calculable and mechanical, while at the same time excluding any alterity heterogeneous to its uniform system and its image of the physical world.

If we wonder what this ontology leads to in the contemporary world, it is the reign of technology that appears before us. It rules over this world like a Creator-God. It creates a world of "virtual realities" (for instance "financial engineering") by means of a worldwide computer network. The discourse and speech it uses have the form of the linguistic mechanisms employed by computers, electronic messages, infography, telemechanics, informatics. Through this discourse it effaces speaking subjects and their spoken world.

The world of this technology forms what Heidegger calls *Gestell*: a state of general mobilization of beings in which the useful, ever-replaceable being reigns, and there comes about a conception of the human being as useless and unworthy of life. So thinking subjects and their world objectively constructed by the *cogito* disappear together, carrying away with them the autonomous citizen and democratic society.

If we think of the history of ontotheology in its different stages, we see its totalitarian character emerging, produced by the desire for a founding principle (*cogito*, will to power, reign of technology) to govern all beings. But these founding principles take on a character that is all the more real as they appear substantial and substantialize their world in order to take a firmer hold on it and possess it by assimilating any heterogeneous alterity. If you are not part of it you will be excluded and reduced to nothing outside of this totalitarian world centred on the Same.[2] That is why ontotheology easily becomes a seedbed for totalitarianisms such as Nazism or Stalinism.

The narrative implications of ontotheology should also be emphasized. Modern nation-states have created more or less totalitarian narratives, such as those about "freedom" that the USA claims to defend with its military forces, or the emperor-god in fascist Japan, and so on. Such grand narratives have allowed those nation-states to keep their narrative identities while dismissing and belittling the minor narratives of other nations, races, ethnic groups, as well as social minorities such as women, the victims of all kinds of pollution, refugees … Behind ontotheology and the history of its birth there is a deadly causal chain: *causa sui*, the substantialization of all beings, attachment to substances (οὐσία), desire to possess the substantialized beings, monopoly of all goods (οὐσία), incorporation of others' goods into the Same, the advent of conflicts and wars, annihilation of the other, the advent of totalitarianism, the tragedy of our times.

Our thinking will therefore attempt to suggest a way of moving beyond this ontotheological chain so as to identify an area of encounter with the other, beyond the totalitarian mechanism of the kingdom of the Same. For the purpose we shall move from the viewpoint of western thought to that of the eastern tradition, through Buddhist and Hebrew thought.

Buddhist thought, Emptiness (空) and Engui (縁起, affinity and relational connection)

The chief reason that encourages me to present Japanese Buddhism as a key, allowing us to move beyond ontotheology, is that it contains a principle reversing the deadly chain condemned above. It now becomes a life-giving causal chain. We find an ultimate reality where every phenomenon is relational and non-substantial (Emptiness); all evil comes from a spiritual lethargy, that is to say, from a mind unable to perceive that ultimate reality; to escape from it one must first free oneself from that spiritual lethargy through a great Awakening (悟り), making it possible to realize that our ego is basically nothingness and emptiness; at the same time we have to practise zen meditation, which awakens us to the fact that in the end everything has its origin in a relational, causal connection, that is, a non-substantial one (空); thus we clearly perceive this world's goods as vain, so that we can use them for the common good without becoming attached to them; whence the annihilation of egocentrism, which wants to appropriate all the good, whence also the mutual reconciliation of human beings and the achievement of coexistence.

The source of this chain, which reverses that of ontotheology, is ultimate reality (真如). It penetrates and rules within all this world's phenomena, bringing about harmony and peace. All phenomena, whether living, non-living or even artificial, are incorporated into this ultimate reality and in the final analysis themselves form ultimate reality.

Dogen (道元 1200–1253)

We can quickly look at this Buddhist thinking focused on Emptiness (空) in the writing of one of the great Buddhist masters, Dogen. He shows us the spiritual attitude that makes it possible to achieve Awakening. First I shall quote some extracts from his book *Shobogenzo* (正法眼蔵, which could be translated as "The treasure of the eye of the true law"). The chapter we shall study is entitled 空華, "Flower of Emptiness".

Before starting to read these difficult passages we shall pause a moment on the word 空華 (*Küge*), which is alien to western thought. This term literally designates certain illusory flowers which are seen only by people with cataracts or those with a cast in their eye. Thus 空華 has no substantial reality in this world. That is why it designates the "Flower of Emptiness". Why does Dogen mention this 空華 and what does he really mean by his discourse on this flower of Emptiness?

With this question in mind, let us read the whole chapter.

Those who have no eyes to see nor ears to hear cannot perceive the flower of Emptiness. As they see neither colour nor light, neither leaf nor flower, they can only smell it. You should know that, in the Way of the Buddha, we talk of the flower of Emptiness, which non-Buddhists do not do, and in these conditions how can they achieve Awakening? Only Buddhists and patriarchs know that this flower of heaven and earth blooms and falls like flowers in the world. They know that all the flowers of heaven, earth and the world are books of sûtras. They are the rule and compass of the study of the Buddha. It is because the flowers of Emptiness are the vehicle of buddhas and patriarchs that the world of the Buddha and all his Laws are flowers of Emptiness.

Nevertheless, when ordinary humans and stupid people hear Shâkyamuni say: "The eye obscured by casts sees the flowers of Emptiness", they spread the rumour that those "casts on the eye" are a disorder of the eyeball, and that it is because of that disease that people see flowers of Emptiness in the vast blue heavens. It is because they persist in this extreme logic that their mistaken views lead them to distinguish three worlds and six destinies, existing buddhas and transcendental ones, and to see existing where everything is non-existing. They imagine that, once those casts in the eye causing the visions have disappeared, people should no longer see flowers of Emptiness. That is how they understand the statement: "Basically there are no flowers in the heavens"! It is quite deplorable that they are utterly ignorant of the circumstances of the "flowers of Emptiness" which the Buddha speaks of.

What ordinary people and non-Buddhists perceive has nothing to do with the principle of the flowers of Emptiness and obscured eyes of the Way of the Buddhas. Through the practice of the flower of Emptiness all buddhas put on the robe of the Tathâgatha, enter into his house and sit on his throne. That is how they achieve Awakening and garner its fruits. "They raise their eyebrows and blink" realizing completely that *koan*: "The eye obscured by a cast sees the flower of Emptiness". To transmit exactly the Treasure of the eye of the true Law and the marvellous spirit of nirvana is ceaselessly to see the flowers of Emptiness with obscured eyes. Awakening, nirvana, the body of the Law, our own nature, etc., are two or three petals out of the five open petals of the flower of Emptiness

(Dogen 1988: 87–88).

Let us now attempt to interpret this passage in accordance with Buddhist thought about Emptiness (空). As unawakened humans we live an ordinary life full of sufferings, conflicts, pleasures, desires and despair. Thus we live an ephemeral, fragile life, which we see as a solid ultimate reality and which we are attached to as if it were our ultimate good. Unawakened people think of 空華, flowers as seen by others with cataracts, as illusory, unreal and empty. However, according to Dogen, the Flowers ordinary unawakened people see and think of as real do not really exist substantially. Those people substantialize them and think of them as real. People who have achieved Awakening to ultimate reality (Emptiness) clearly see the whole phenomenon of the flowers existing in a non-substantial manner according to the vision of Emptiness. For them flowers that bloom and fade do not exist as such.

The vision of the awakened person is like that of the person with cataract. Both of them see non-substantial, nonexistent flowers, though the first sees them consciously and the second unthinkingly. And so, through flowers (空華) seen by a person with cataract, we can guess at the world of Emptiness, where at any moment millions and millions of petals of Emptiness open and fall.

In order to understand the world of Emptiness (空) more clearly, I shall now quote the first lines of 梅華, "The plum-tree flower".

Here are the words of an ancient Buddha, my master Tiantong Rujing, who was the great master of preaching in the thirtieth generation at the Jingtesi temple in Tiantong Monastery on the famous mount Taibai in the great land of the Song. One day he went up into the pulpit to address the assembled monks: "This is my first sermon in the winter retreat in Tiantong. The old plum-tree with its branches pruned is covered with buds. Suddenly it bursts into flower, one or two flowers open, then three, four, five, then all the many, many flowers. Their purity is wonderful and their perfume beyond any praise. When the petals fall, spring is not far off, a breeze plays in the trees and grass. One by one the monks awaken to an inner vision. Then gusts and showers bring a sharp change and once more the ground is covered in thick snow. The old plum-tree remains unbending, the storm does not affect it one bit."

The old plum-tree, which we have just mentioned, is unbending. Suddenly it flowers, then bears fruit. Now it meets with spring and winter, now it faces gusts and showers. Now it is nothing but the monks' inner vision and the perfect vision of ancient buddhas, now it becomes grasses and trees, purity and perfume. The mystery of its sudden metamorphoses is inexhaustible. Furthermore the extent of the earth and heaven's vault, the radiant sun and the bright moon, all are part of the old plum-tree's rising sap, all together they weave an inextricable skein. The sudden opening of a flower on the old plum-tree marks the advent of the flowering world and at that very instant when the flowering world arises, there spring has come. At that precise moment the tree bears the single five-petalled flower. As soon as it bears the single flower, then three, four or five others, then hundreds, thousands and tens of thousands, all the many, many flowers start to open. We can never say often enough that all those flowers, without any exception, as soon as they open on one or two branches, open on all the numberless branches of the old plum-tree. In the same way the flower of the udumbara and the blue lotus are simply variants of the plum-tree flower. In the end all the flowers that bloom have the benefits of the plum-tree. The plum-tree lives among humans and rises towards heaven. Through it the heavenly hall and human space are created. The hundred and thousand flowers are what we call flowers of humans and the heavens. The ten thousand and hundred thousand flowers are what we call flowers of the buddhas and patriarchs. And the precise moment when the single flower opens will be called "the domain where all the buddhas are made manifest", it will be called "the coming upon earth of the first patriarchs". (Dogen 1999: 65–67)

In this text we can guess that the old plum-tree is ultimate reality, that is, Emptiness. This in fact represents "affinity and relational connection" (梅華). Why do we use this phrase? Because, according to general opinion, connection is made up of two more or less substantial terms which are like real phenomena but essentially empty.

To give an example: two terms A and B form a whole and in their mutual relationship a phenomenon, but the term A is in turn formed by the terms C and D in their mutual relationship, just as the term B is formed by the terms E and F. It is possible to follow ad infinitum the same logic and the same method of composition for C, D, E, F. It is an infinite chain of relational causality.

However, it is not linear. On the contrary, it divides ad infinitum into other chains, multiplying as infinite terms appear. If we could see in an instant and by intuition all the causal chains in which the phenomena manifest themselves, we would see Emptiness, including ourselves. That is why, according to Dogen, "all phenomena are part of the old plum-tree's rising sap (空) [force of relational connection]", and why "in the end all the flowers that bloom [all the phenomena following one another] have the benefits [are caused by the force of relational affinity] of the plum-tree [which is 空 or 縁起]". Our world, including my ego, is fundamentally 空華 and 梅華 both expressing the eastern doctrine and wisdom of Awakening.

Because of this awakening to Emptiness (空) and relational affinity (縁起) we can free ourselves from the obstacles of the strong substantial chain and from the substantialist thinking in which we are imprisoned and which prevents us living fraternally with others.

Ryokan (良寬, 1758–1831)

Having discussed Dogen's Buddhist thought focusing on Emptiness and Awakening, I shall mention a man who incorporated this Awakening into his whole existence and lived freely and charitably with others.

Ryokan was born into a well-to-do family in the village of Izumozaki, in a region where it snowed a lot in winter, in the present-day department of Nïïgata. At the age of eighteen he decided to enter the Zen monastery. He had been a solitary child, studious and almost religious, and was not at all interested in following his father as a village administrator. After a providential encounter with the Zen master Kokusen, he became one of his disciples. And so he started to practise Zen meditation in the Entsu-ji temple at Tamashina on the shore of the Inner Sea. At the temple he took the name "Ryokan", which means "good and generous". Apparently he is said to have experienced illumination, that is, Awakening, after twelve years of assiduous Zen practice. That is why his master Kokusen, at the end of his life, gave Ryokan the *inka*, the seal certifying his Buddhist awakening and his name in the Way: 大愚 (Big-fool). A poem by Kokusen expresses in the Zen manner Ryokan's awakened state of mind.

> There you are as good as a fool,
> Your way is broad
> Gaily you follow the course of things,
> Who knows it?
> Carry with you this wooden stick of burnt wisteria shaped like a mountain,
> Everywhere, facing the wall as during the siesta.

When his mater died, Ryokan was forced to leave Entsu-ji because his vision of Buddhism was incompatible with that of Kokusen's successor. Leaning on his wisteria stick, he spent ten years as an *unsui*, the free, itinerant Zen pilgrim who assimilates the Buddhist Law "to the clouds and the waters". From time to time he had access to Dogen's *Shobogenzo* manuscripts, which were dispersed here and there in different temples. In 1795 he decided to go back to live in his native region and he finally settled in a hermitage Gogo-an made of thatch and wood. Behind the hermitage water from a spring made its way between the rocks. He lived there for twenty years as a man of Awakening, a free man. Unlike the hermits in the desert of ancient Egypt, he did not cut his links with the people from the surrounding villages.

Let us quote from some poems that show his state of Awakening.

> The mist is rising,
> Long spring day
> With the children
> Playing ball
> This day passes.

He always kept that ball hidden in his sleeve. For him playing ball with children was the expression of Awakening and time an opportunity to share the light of Awakening with children.

> When with the children
> Hand in hand
> In the spring fields

> We gather young herbs
> What happiness!

Ryokan went to the hamlets and farms to beg for rice and gather fresh herbs. On the way he played ball with children. His heart was always with the poor, marginalized people in that world ruled by the Shogun (military chief) of the Tokugawa clan, the great lords and even the high-ranking bonzes. He was a man of deep compassion.

> If the sleeves of my robe
> Dyed with black ink
> Were wider, I would hide there
> The people of this floating world
> Where everything is upside down.

He talked, drank saké and kept his friendship alive with the peasants, joined in with country festivals and danced with them. It was also a good opportunity to share the light of Awakening with the peasants and simple people.

> The wind is clear
> The moon bright
> Let's go together
> Let's dance all night
> One last memory for my old age.

It is said that "the divine spirit sprang from him like sparks", so that meeting him was "as if spring arrived on a dark winter's day". One episode has come down to us about his heart full of compassion: Ryokan's eyes full of tears cured the vicious heart of his nephew without any preaching, because his tears were themselves sermons full of the sparks of his compassion.

We should mention another marvellous episode: Ryokan's encounter, then aged sixty-nine, with a pretty female bonze, Teishin, who was twenty-seven. Their friendly communion was so profound that they felt their spiritual presence though they lived far away from one another. When he was going away for a brief time Ryokan prepared a vase of flowers, accompanied by a poem, for Teishin's visit during his absence. Here is the poem, which expresses a presence in absence.

> I have nothing special
> To give you
> Just a lotus flower
> In a little vase
> To look at for a long moment.

Aged 71 Ryokan fell ill. Shut in his hermitage he lived his life's end in solitude and isolation. On his deathbed he fervently wished to see Teishin once more. Finally she arrived. Ryokan then composed a poem dedicated to her.

> When ? When?
> The person I was waiting for
> Has arrived at last

> Seeing her now
> What more could I ask for?

In 1831 his stay in this ephemeral world, free, simple and rich in encounters with others, came to its end. The following poem maybe expresses best his whole life.

> Like a thin stream of water
> Making its way between the rocks
> Covered in mosses,
> Just as gaily
> I have gone through this life.

He loved children, peasants, his kinfolk, his friends, Teishin, his master Kokusen, poor people like him and nature, without becoming attached to them, bringing forth in them sparks of Awakening. Those spiritual sparks are still now bringing about reconciliation and fraternity in the hearts of Japanese people. Ryokan transcended any substantialization of the self and any dualism between subject (I) and object (the other), based on a vision of Emptiness expressed through his calligraphy, as in the following poem:

> Amid the light snow
> The three thousand worlds
> Among which
> The light snow falls.

The next two poems, in Chinese, also express his state of Awakening:

> All my life too lazy to get established
> gaily, gaily, I give free rein to my nature
> in my bag three measures of rice
> beside the pan a bundle of wood
> why seek proof of Awakening or error?
> As for seeking fame or profit in the world of dust
> pointless to talk of it
> in the night rain, in my hut,
> at ease I stretch out both my legs.

> Looking back, seventy years or more
> the true and the false in the world of human beings,
> I have gone beyond it in the deep night.
> the traces of my comings and goings
> have disappeared under the snow
> incense burns under the old window.

Nowadays Ryokan is compared to St Francis of Assisi, since both lived freely and in friendship with humans and nature.

I have tried to show how a Buddhist view of the world can reverse the substantialist chain of ontotheology. Now I should mention briefly the theo-philosophical weaknesses of that view. The first lies in the fact that thinking about Emptiness has not raised the problem of radical evil, because

according to that thinking every phenomenon comes from the Law and Emptiness. Chapter "諸法実相" ("The true reality of things") reveals this weakness:

> The reality of things is that of all phenomena, that is, all phenomena are like that, their character is like that […], the world is like that, clouds and rain are like that, one's sadness and joy are like that, one's emotions and calm are like that […], practice and discernment of the Way are like that. (Dogen 1988: 17)

However humanity has rapidly developed, since the 19th century at least, an artificial civilization based on the capitalist system of production. Our existence and lives are almost entirely surrounded by artificial things and we have become prisoners of the products our capitalist machine has over-produced. In addition computer technology has created a whole virtual reality in which people risk losing their sensitivity towards "natural" reality. Finally human beings, gripped by a limitless desire for huge wealth, have invented all sorts of armaments – nuclear and biochemical weapons, missiles, toxic gases … can the Buddhist see all that as manifestations of the law of Emptiness?

The second weakness comes from a lack of reflection on history, less in the chronological sense than in the existential, prophetic sense. This failure implies the absence of an ethical, creative subject, able to shape a new era and get involved in the democratic building of the public sphere through ethical effort aimed at producing justice and the common good. Western tradition has shown us the paradigm of the citizen-subject, however imperfect.

After studying the eastern tradition of the λóγος, then that of Buddhist Emptiness, I shall attempt a synthesis of these traditions using Hebrew thought. I shall focus in particular on the Old Testament narratives.

Hebrew thought according to the narratives from Exodus

Let us re-read Exodus. How and where would this historical narrative allow us to go beyond onto-theology? Its overall plot is as follows: Pharaoh, king of the ancient empire of Egypt, decides to kill all the Hebrew slaves because of their demographic and economic prosperity. In opposition to him the prophet Moses frees these slaves and guides them out of that empire. What is the historical key to that liberation?

It is probably the intervention of God-*YHWH*, who called Moses for that liberating mission. That is why I choose the passage of the "burning bush", which contains both the call of *YHWH* to Moses and the revelation of the name of God-*YHWH*. Based on this text we can disentangle Hebrew thinking about being and compare it to Greek ontology. The text requires us to use narratological hermeneutics, since it asks the question *who are you?* instead of *what are you?* so the narratological reading involves us in the story and forces us to say "I" in a new way.

1   Moses, who was grazing Jethro's herds and had taken them over the desert, came to the mountain of god: Horeb.
2   The Angel from Yahweh (= *YHWH*) showed himself to him in the form of a flame of fire leaping up from the midst of a bush (which was not burned)
4   Yahweh saw him move forward to see better, and God called him from the middle of the bush: "Moses, Moses!" – "Here I am," he replied
6   God spoke again: "It is I, the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob." Then Moses covered his face, fearing to fix his eyes on God.
7   And Yahweh said: "I have seen, I have seen the misery of my people who live in Egypt. I have turned my ear to the clamour their taskmasters draw from them. Indeed I know about their anguish.

8   I am resolved to come down from above to deliver them out of the Egyptians' hands and bring them up from that land to a country flowing with milk and honey…

9   Now that the clamour of the children of Israel has come to me and I have also seen the oppression the Egyptians inflict on them

10   Now go, I send you to Pharaoh to get my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt."

11   Moses said to God: "Who am I to go and find Pharaoh and get the children of Israel out of Egypt?"

12   God said: "I will be with you and here is the sign by which you will recognize that your mission comes from me … When you have led the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain."

13   Then Moses said to God: "So be it! I am going to find the children of Israel and tell them: "The God of your fathers has sent me to you!" But if they ask what his name is, what shall I answer?"

14   Then God said to Moses: "I will be what I will be (*'ehiyeh' 'asher' 'ehiyeh'*)" And he added: "these are the words you will use to speak to the children of Israel: JE SERAI (*'ehiyeh'*) has sent me to you."

15   God spoke again to Moses: "You will speak thus to the children of Israel: Yahweh, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you. It is the name I shall bear for ever…"

Exodus 3, 1–15

Using this text I shall interpret the Divine Name (*'ehiyeh' 'asher' 'ehiyeh'*) to extract from it a Hebrew ontological thought that will be called "Ehiyehlogy" for reasons I shall explain later. I am creating this neologism in order to emphasize a specific feature of the verb "Ehiyeh".

Before starting to interpret the divine name we should pause for a moment to examine the context in which the name is revealed as well as the name itself.

First of all, as Ex. 3, 1 indicates, Moses has had to cross the desert to reach Mount Horeb or Sinai. Crossing the desert is an essential condition for receiving the revelation of God's name. In Hebrew thought the desert is always seen as an empty place outside civilization and untouched by it. There individuals experience a kenotic state, in other words an annihilation of their egocentrism and the subject epistemologically constituting their world of phenomena. Through this kenosis they may receive in their empty inner being the transcendent Other (the Absolute-Other, YHWH) and so transcend the civilized life controlled by ontotheology. At the same time, through this encounter with the transcendent Other, they find their new ego (themselves) and discover the meaning of their lives. It is because the Divine Name was revealed to Moses in this kenotic, empty place that he was projected into a new horizon of life.

Secondly, and in accordance with an etymological, contextual interpretation (Ex. 3, 14–15), the name YHWH is connected with the Hebrew being: "Ehiyeh", that is, the unaccomplished form of the first person singular, and "Hayah", that is, the accomplished form of the third person singular. Through the Exodus narrative and the use of the Divine Name YHWH we can thus see the character of Hebrew ontology. But let us just mention some aspects of biblical and ontological interpretations of this name that seem likely to meet with a minimum consensus. First, the unaccomplished form of the being "Ehiyeh" stresses the subject's deliberate dynamism: it appears as being becoming, ever unaccomplished but coming out of itself to adopt a new way of being. In contradistinction to Aristotle's first motionless substance and Plotinus's eternal One, "Ehiyeh" is a dynamic, ecstatic being that comes down from above (Ex. 3, 8) to intervene and come among the slaves (the "others") of history. This ecstatic character may also be interpreted as the dynamic encounter with the Other, as a ceaseless becoming Other to form a fraternal community with it.

Thirdly, this dynamism moving towards the Other calls Moses and entrusts the Israelite people to him so that he may free them from the totalitarian land that is Egypt. In the same way it can call the person who embodies it in our time in order to get out, using Moses as a model, of the country or system that reduces everything to "a being everything", that is totalitarianism based on ontotheology.

Fourthly, in the past the name expressed the nature of the person or of God. So knowing the name meant grasping its force and existence. But the repetition of "Ehiyeh" reinforces the enigma of the name. So it prevents human beings from using God magically and allows God to establish a free and therefore gratuitous relationship with them.

In the fifth place, the relationship between "Ehiyeh" and the slaves takes the form of an alliance. It makes the slaves a people independent of others, particularly because of the ethics set up by the Decalogue (Ex. 20, 1–17). "Ehiyeh" therefore has a communal, ethical character.

In the sixth place, the ecstatic character of "Ehiyeh" is in fact an opportunity for καιρός, a time to encounter the Absolute-Other creatively. Indeed this encounter brings about a new era, a fresh stage of life and culture in history. So "Ehiyeh" seems, by comparison with Aristotle, to be resolutely historical.

In the seventh place, human history has always seen individuals personifying this character of "Ehiyeh": prophets, philosophers, the anonymous flock of poets, politicians, fathers and mothers … Those people lived and spoke against the totalitarianism of their time, and even when they did not speak or write, they themselves became the living word (*Dâbâr*), breaking apart totalitarian and ontotheological systems and groups. That is why the energy of "Ehiyeh" penetrates to the heart of human existence, is embodied there and transfigures it in the very image of "Ehiyeh", the Absolute-Other. In this sense we are faced with a sort of birth of the "ehiyehlogical" prophetic subject.

Finally, "Ehiyeh" is made manifest in the narrative (*Dâbâr*) of the Exodus and in its historical event in the sense that the Exodus story is based on the Easter event (*Dâbâr*). This narrative, and at the same time historical, manifestation of "Ehiyeh" is possible in Hebrew thought, where the term *Dâbâr* designates both word (narration) and event. This thought leads humans to involvement in history in order to announce a new prophetic word or a new story, so that that prophetic word or story might in its turn give rise to new events. That is how the narratives in which "Ehiyeh" is embodied may create a new historical and communal reality, rolling back and transcending the great ontotheological narratives.

Thus we can say the "Ehiyeh" is made manifest in the form of prophetic words both in creation stories and in epoch-making events. I give the label "Ehiyehlogy" to the articulation I have outlined. A Japanese patrologist, Tetsutaro Ariga (1981), has long pointed out the specificity of the term "*Hayah*" from a grammatical and theological viewpoint as well as that of the comparative history of religions. He describes Hebrew thought through the neologism "Hayatology" and Judeo-Christian thought with the term "*Hayah-ontology*", a synthesis of "Hayatology" and Greek ontology. For my part, inspired as I am by *Hayatology*, I propose a new *Ehiyehlogy*, emphasizing the properties of the verb "*Ehiyeh*" and its historical context.

My aim is to go beyond ontotheology, then to confound the totalitarianism of our time. To do this I choose narratology as a hermeneutic method, because it is important to bring out the *ehiyehlogical* character of the narrative stories (particularly those belonging to the oppressed and forgotten) through the narrative of the redemptive encounter with the Absolute-Other. In addition *Ehiyehlogy* attempts to show a new type of subject which embodies the dynamism of "*Ehiyeh*" and established a new narrative of the encounter with the Absolute-Other, by deconstructing the great totalitarian narratives. Finally this open narrative identity is fundamentally focused on consciousness of the crisis experienced by the world post-Auschwitz, in both the historical and the symbolic sense. Indeed the radical evil perpetrated by the capitalist empires during the Second World War in Asia and everywhere in the present-day world partakes in that same radical evil that led to Auschwitz. Theodor W. Adorno asked a question that applies perfectly to our contemporary world: "Why is humanity sinking into a form of barbarism instead of involving itself in truly human conditions?" (Horkheimer & Adorno 1974: 13).

Prospects for *Ehiyehlogy*

I began my argument by noting the eschatological crisis that is the tragedy of our time. According to my analysis that crisis seems to spring from totalitarianism, whose ontotheology is the theoretical backdrop. Today that totalitarianism, symbolized by Auschwitz, assumes the form of an econotechno-bureaucracy ruling the whole world. To transcend it and counter its philosophical ideology, ontotheology, I have examined the western philosophical tradition as it was shaped in classical Greece, as well as the oriental wisdom contained within Buddhism. Thanks to the hermeneutics of Dogen's and Ryokan's texts I have laid out a Buddhist vision of Emptiness and relational affinity. It brings us face to face with the vacuity of this world's phenomena and provides in a radical way a means of going beyond all substantialist thinking. Furthermore we noted that there is in the eastern philosophical tradition a force of the Logos which appears through the various forms of discussion, debate, dialogue, demonstration … These structures are likely to bring about a democratic community focused on justice, political ethics and the idea of the common good. Through this articulation of the thinking about Emptiness, the tradition of the Logos and a narratological reading of Hebrew texts I have identified a Hebrew ontology which I call "*Ehiyehlogy*" (Miyamoto 2008).

Now it is time to pose one final question: what responsibility does *Ehiyehlogy* bear, and what future does it lead on to in today's world? First, it allows us to penetrate to the deepest level of our existence, where we encounter "*'Ehiyeh' 'Asher' 'Ehiyeh'*, the source of our existential energy and our ethical praxis. So it can shape our profound subjectivity. For Buddhists this encounter takes place with Buddha who manifests Emptiness, and is called Awakening. In order to achieve this encounter or Awakening one must first go through a *kenotic* state, a stripping down. It is only because of this existential experience that one can establish, as an "*Ehiyehlogical*" subject, a multiple relationship with the Absolute-Other, which no human science can define simply by means of its intelligibility and its categories.

Secondly, *Ehiyehlogy* allows the subject to criticize the Being-the-same of the kingdom of the Same, which submits the world of life (*Lebenswelt*) to its power and dominates it. It tries to deconstruct every kind of ontotheology, whether technological, politico-economic or philosophical. To carry out this mission and train its messengers it tends to create a community for study and education where young people can learn the Socratic method of the *Logos*, a new prophetic discourse and thinking about Emptiness.

Thirdly, *Ehiyehlogy*, in collaboraton with the other human sciences, should get involved in research that will make it possible to reach the roots of the radical ill of our time. With this aim the *ehiyehlogical* subject must cross the frontiers of life and death, encounter the living dead of the thousand Auschwitzes of our era and experience the presence of radical evil.

Finally, to go beyond the systematic concepts of ontotheology and respond to the historical demand of "Ehiyeh" and the other, that subject must learn to say "I" in an *ehiyehlogical* manner. That is how this "I" will be able to become sensitive to the many narrative stories of the little people and the poor. These efforts lead us to retell them as narrative stories that open the infinite horizon on to Alterity. And so will unfold stories of people like Ryokan, who struggled against the dominant interpretations of Buddhism, like Mother Teresa, Gandhi, the Korean Ham Sokhon, Michiko Ishimure[3] and Shozo Tanaka.[4] Also to be studied will be the stories of anonymous people such as the victims of the Minamata sickness in Japan, lepers or sex slaves,[5] in order to share in their humanity through the inspiration of *ehiyehlogical* thinking.

Translated from the French by Jean Burrell

Notes

1. See Metaph., VII: "there is something that is eternally moved, in a movement that never ceases; and this movement is circular. [...] Therefore the first heaven 'must be' eternal; so there is also something that gives it movement. But as 'what' is moved and in its turn moves 'is only an intermediary', we have to conceive of something that causes movement without being moved, something eternal, which is substance and which is action. This how it gives movement: like the desirable and the intelligible, which impart movement without being moved" (Aristotle 1991: 413).
2. To give an idea of this word, I quote some passages from Levinas (1961: 27): "We should take seriously this turn-around of the alterity of the world to self-identification. The moments of this identification – body, home, work, possession, economy – should not figure as empirical, contingent givens, copies on a formal framework of the Same. They are the articulations of that structure. Identification with the Same is not the vacuum of a tautology, or a dialectical opposition to the Other, but the concrete shape of egotism."
3. As a shaman and writer Michiko Ishimure shared the sufferings of the sick of Minamata, poisoned by the mercury emitted by a fertilizer factory (Chisso). Her writing embodies their sufferings and hopes.
4. Shozo Tanaka (1841–1913) was at the head of a movement of peasant women who suffered from environmental pollution.
5. Cf. the "comfort women" used by the Japanese army during the Second World War, and currently the trafficking of human beings for prostitution.

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