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Neither I nor other

Dialectical formulations of the experience of self-awareness in Hegel and Buddhism

“ – How do you see your real self subjectively? – the monk
immediately asked.
– You have to tell me that yourself.
– If I were to tell you myself, it would be seeing myself
objectively.
What is the self that is known subjectively?
– To talk about it in such a way is easy to do,
but to continue our talking makes it impossible to reach
the truth”.

The Transmission of the Lamp, 17¹

1. Introduction

In one of his writings, the philosopher Nishitani Keiji 西谷啓治 (1900-90) describes absolute selfhood in terms of “neither I nor other” using the words that the Sōtō Zen master Gasan Jōseki 峨山韶碩 (1275-1365) inscribed over his self-portrait:

The heart and mind of this shadowy man
At all occasions is to me most familiar
From long ago mysteriously wondrous,
It is neither I nor other.²

¹ The dialogue starts as follows: “Once the Master asked a monk what his name was. The monk answered that his name was so-and-so. The Master further asked: “Which one is your real self?” “The one who is just facing you.” “What a pity! What a pity! The men of the present day are all like this. They take what is in the front of an ass, or, at the back of a horse and call it themselves. This illustrates the downfall of Buddhism. If you cannot recognize your real self objectively, how can you see your real self subjectively?”. Ch.-Y. Chang, *Tsao-Tung Ch’an and its Metaphysical Background*, “The Chinghwa Journal of Chinese Philosophy”, 1, (1965), p. 56.

² K. Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, transl. by J. V. Bragt, University of California Press, Berkeley 1982, p. 72. See 「幻人心識、處々最親、自古靈妙、非吾非人」, K. Nishitani, 「宗教とは何か」 [What is religion?] in 『西谷啓治著作集』 [Collected works of Keiji Nishitani], vol. 10. Sōbunsha, Tokyo 1987, p. 82.

According to Nishitani, the self of this “shadowy man” is his actual conscious and personal existence with its living activities³. Nevertheless, he argues that it does not describe how we ordinarily understand ourselves. From the standpoint of self-consciousness, we tend to see ourselves as rational or personal entities that are possessed of body and mind. Since “our reason grasps itself from the posture of reason; and our personality grasps itself from within the personality itself,” self-consciousness becomes “a self-immanent self-prehension or a self-centeredness”⁴. Thus, the body-mind, reason or personality turns into a self-enclosed confinement, and the grasping of the self by the self comes to be an attachment to the self. It is through the negation of this standpoint that the personal self can reveal itself as subjectivity in its elemental sense. As the affirmation of true absolute selfhood includes its negation, it can only be expressed in antinomies like “neither I nor other.”

In his Introduction to Nishitani’s work, the translator, Jan Van Bragt, places the Japanese philosopher within the framework of the Kyoto School and explains that its members “seem to agree that their logic is necessarily dialectical in the highest degree, indeed ‘more dialectical than Hegel’s logic’”, and wonders about the extent to which this type of logic not only expands the limits of reason, but also frees itself from those limits altogether⁵. This kind of question is hardly unexpected as, from a philosophical perspective, the Buddhist view of reality is characterized by change. It is the ‘becoming’ more than the static being that has centered its speculations. Over time, Buddhist thinkers have articulated different types of reasoning to account for this view and by so doing have developed a sort of dialectical thinking. For its part, Hegelian dialectics is well recognized in the Western philosophical tradition as an attempt at dealing with contradictions⁶. Therefore, it was natural for both paths of thought to cross at some point. Hegel himself explicitly referred to Buddhism in his *Science of Logic* (*Wissenschaft der Logik*, 1812, 21.70)⁷. As

³ K. Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, cit., p. 75.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 103-104.

⁵ See K. Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, cit., p. XXVIII.

⁶ Di Giovanni explains that Hegel relied on negativity to make room for discursive meaning, much like Fichte did but conceiving his “not” as affecting “being”, internally prioritizing “becoming” over “being”. G. Di Giovanni, “Moment”, “Negativity, negation”, “Identity and Contradiction”, in A. De Laurentis – J. Edwards (eds.), *The Bloomsbury Companion to Hegel*, Bloomsbury, London 2013, p. 257.

⁷ G.W.F. Hegel, *The Science of the Logic*, transl. by G. di Giovanni, Cambridge Univ. Press, Cambridge 2010, p. 60: “In the oriental systems, essentially in Buddhism, it is well known that nothing, the void, is the absolute principle”. [“In orientalischen Systemen, wesentlich im Buddhismus, ist bekanntlich das *Nichts*, das Leere, das absolute Prinzip.” *Wissenschaft der Logik I* (1812), Surkhamp Verlag, Frankfurt a M. 1986, p. 54].

for modern Japanese academic philosophy, the Kyoto School has provided scholars with some outstanding examples to explore the reception of Hegel in Buddhist-influenced modern thought. Some remarkable studies in this regard are Takeuchi Yoshinori's "Hegel and Buddhism" (1962)⁸, Peter Suares' book *The Kyoto School takes over Hegel* (2010)⁹, and Ōhashi Ryōsuke, *Towards the Depth of the Sensible: The Phenomenology of the Spirit of Hegel and the Compassion of Great Vehicle Buddhism* (2011).

The present paper addresses an example of Buddhist logic in light of the dialectic of the Hegelian experience of consciousness. Hegel's *Phenomenology of the Spirit* (*Phänomenologie des Geistes*, 1807) has been described on more than one occasion as a *Bildungsroman*, that is, a formative or educational novel in a philosophical key in which the protagonist is consciousness. Hegel's *Phenomenology* would thus seek to bring natural consciousness from its own certainties to the perspective of philosophy, in such a way that it would educate the non-philosopher in the ways of philosophy. From a Buddhist perspective, although the journey traced by Nishitani from consciousness to emptiness – going through self-consciousness and nihility – would lend itself to this kind of reading, our approach here is not based on the dialectical thought of Nishitani but on that of Gasan Jōseki or, better yet, on the one expressed by the doctrine of the *Five Ranks* (Ch. *wuwei*; Jp. *goi* 五位) that the Zen master incorporated into his teachings.

As Dumoulin argues, Gasan was the first Japanese Sōtō Zen master

⁸ "It is no wonder that we Eastern Buddhist philosophers sometimes feel much more affinity to Hegel's philosophy than do Western philosophers and theologians at present. For instance the Hegelian conception of 'absolute knowledge' (*das absolute Wissen*), is familiar to the Buddhist mind, while it sounds to the Western theologians like the arrogance of the inflamed fancy of speculation", Y. Takeuchi, *Hegel and Buddhism*, "Pensiero: rivista di filosofia", VII, 1/3, 1962, pp. 6-7.

⁹ See P. Suares, *The Kyoto School's Takeover of Hegel. Nishida, Nishitani, and Tanabe Remake the Philosophy of Spirit*, Lexington Books, Lanham, 2011. Suares remarks that "Japan's Buddhist heritage fostered its appreciation for the affinities between Hegelian and Mahāyāna metaphysics" and mentions two of these affinities: first, Buddhist sense of interdependence and lack of inherent nature of reality (as expressed in the notion of emptiness) and Japanese Kegon school teachings on the individual identities grounded in something other than themselves with Hegel's view that all beings are determined by otherness "everything finite is by nature relative to something else; a thing is defined through the complex of its finite relationships"; and second, "the inner unrest and multiperspectivism of Hegel's dialectic, which draws upon the notion of an ever-shifting and fluid nature of conceptual determinations" and Tendai Buddhism attempts of reconcile two opposite views and rejection of an inherent reality of phenomena. See: P. Suares, *The Kyoto School's Takeover of Hegel*, cit., p. xi.

to give this doctrine a central place in his teachings, which went on to play an important role among the members of this school by providing speculative content that met the intellectual needs of Gasan's followers¹⁰. Through symbolic elements and poetical figures, the texts of the *Five Ranks*¹¹ depict "the progressive stages of the enlightened mind coming to the transcendental interpenetration of Absoluteness and the relative phenomena"¹². Unlike another renowned Zen story used by masters to train the mind of their disciples – the Ox-herding Pictures – it does not start from an unenlightened mind that aims to become an enlightened mind, but takes the latter as its starting point, so it could be considered a more advanced journey not meant for beginners. Be that as it may, it can be read as a journey towards self-awareness. Our approach will be based on the interpretation made by one of the representatives of the Kyoto School, Hisamatsu Shin'ichi 久松真一 (1889-1980)¹³, for whom the scheme of the *Five Ranks* attributed to the founder of the Chinese Caodong School, Dongshan Liangjie 洞山良价 (Jp. Tōzan Ryōkai, 807-869), corresponds to the structural analysis of the process of awakening¹⁴.

Our purpose here is not to compare Buddhist and Hegelian dialectics but to reflect on two distant experiences of self-awareness, following the line proposed by Marcello Ghilardi in his noteworthy essay on Hegel and Huayan Buddhism:

(...) try to give greater solidity to the understanding of conceptual tools which, as such, cannot be the exclusive prerogative of a single culture, or the legacy of a single culture rather than another, but arise and develop in a terrain that it is that of the human experience and reflection, in its variegated multiplicity and in its basic unity.¹⁵

¹⁰ H. Dumoulin, *Zen Buddhism: A History. Japan* (1985), transl. by J.W. Heisig – P. Knitter, Macmillan, New York 1990, pp. 208-209.

¹¹ This is a doctrine with a long and complex textual tradition in constant change that is constantly readapted.

¹² A. Verdú, *The 'five Ranks' Dialectic of the Sōtō-zen School in the Light of Kuei-fēng Tsung-mi's 'ariya-shiki' Scheme*, "Monumenta Nipponica", 21/1-2, 1966, p. 195.

¹³ In 1960, Hisamatsu delivered a lecture series at his F.A.S. Institute in Kyoto on *The Five Stations of the Zen Master Tosan Ryokai* now included in his Collected Works. There is a German translation by Tsujimura Kōichi (Pfullingen 1980) and a Spanish translation by Ana María Schlüter (Herder 2001).

¹⁴ The attribution of the *Five Ranks* to Dongshan was first recorded in the *Record of Dongshan Liangjie*, but this work could have been composed during the Song dynasty, after Dongshan's time.

¹⁵ M. Ghilardi "La Dialettica tra Oriente e Occidente. Hegel e il Buddhismo Huayan: un'ipotesi di comparazione." In S. Zacchetti (ed. by), *Fazang, Trattato sul leone d'oro*, Esedra, Padova 2000, p. 238 [the original in Italian, the translations of quotations, unless

2. Hegel's odyssey of *Geist*

It is well known that Hegel understood history as the progress of the awareness of freedom, as for him history was the development of the *Geist*, usually translated as spirit or mind in English. Therefore, in *The Phenomenology of the Spirit*, he tried to show why the spirit develops as it does. In this work, Hegel conceives the speculative knowledge of reason as a history of the formation of consciousness through different forms of consciousness that grasp reality ever more fully. This journey culminates in absolute knowledge (*das absolute Wissen*), that is, the moment when the Spirit is transparent to itself and the subject fully coincides with the object. The process is described as a phenomenology, meaning an experience of consciousness, because knowledge is systematically presented as it appears to consciousness or, in this case, as the Spirit appears to itself. In turn, the course is presented as historical, for it traces the history of how humanity became aware of itself and of the so-called objective world.

The changes in consciousness in the different stages of its development are given by a kind of dialectical movement: until the perfect identification of object and the concept is achieved, the relationship between the two goes through moments in which they do not coincide according to the criteria established by consciousness itself. Each form of consciousness reveals itself to be less than true knowledge and leads to a determinate negation. In this way, the criteria are corrected and overcome by the successive stages. The consciousness experiences moving from confident certainty to despair, to renewed certainty as it revises its position and sees things in a different way. This process of self-correction of consciousness in the different stages is regarded as a dialectical movement¹⁶. The negation of each unit of consciousness with its object, gives rise to a new object and its corresponding knowledge that contains what was previously denied. This dynamic is described using the term *Aufhebung*, namely, a negation that is both an overcoming and a conservation. Interestingly, negativity is posited as something as original as positivity. The movement consists of simplicity, scission, and reconciliation, or immediacy, alienation (exteriorization), and unity mediated by itself (that is, a differenti-

otherwise indicated, are my own].

¹⁶ Hegel's dialectical method draws on his investigations of the *Logic* in which he works through sets of opposing categories to show that once we get to the categories of universal, particular, and individual, truly dialectical thinking becomes possible for us. In Hegel's view, once these categories are brought together, combined, or mediated, a more unified and rational world-picture will emerge.

ated unity). Dialectics is a circular movement, a reflection. Differences and oppositions that appear in the moment of scission are not eliminated but overcome (*aufgehoben*) in the third stage. In this process, marked by continuous skepticism, consciousness overcomes its one-sidedness and apparent absoluteness when being confronted with its own figures, thus increasing the complexity of its content:

Dialectic as a negative movement, just as it immediately *is*, at first appears to consciousness as something which has it at its mercy, and which does not have its source in consciousness itself. As Scepticism, on the other hand, it is a moment of self-consciousness, to which it does not *happen* that its truth and reality vanish without its knowing how, but which, in the certainty of its freedom, *makes* this 'other' which claims to be real, vanish. What Scepticism causes to vanish is not only objective reality as such, but its own relationship to it, in which the 'other' is held to be objective and is established as such, and hence, too, its *perceiving*, along with firmly securing what it is in danger of losing, viz. *sophistry*, and the truth it has itself determined and established. Through this self-conscious negation it procures for its own self the certainty of its freedom, generates the experience of that freedom, and thereby raises it to truth.¹⁷

Thus, *The Phenomenology of the Spirit* deals with consciousness (which develops from sense-certainty in two further stages: perception and understanding), self-consciousness, observing reason and active reason, and the spirit as ethics, culture and morality, religion and absolute knowledge.

Although we cannot go into detail here about the whole process, we will point out some aspects of special importance to our argument. First, it is worth noting that, according to Hegel, we can have true knowledge of reality, absolute knowledge is achieved through philosophy, and knowledge must be conceptual. The spirit grasps reality while understanding

¹⁷ G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of the Spirit*, transl. by A. V. Miller, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1977, § 204, p. 124 ["Das *Dialektische* als negative Bewegung, wie sie unmittelbar *ist*, erscheint dem Bewußtsein zunächst als etwas, dem es preisgegeben und das nicht durch es selbst ist. Als *Skeptizismus* hingegen ist sie Moment des Selbstbewußtseins, welchem es nicht *geschieht*, daß ihm, ohne zu Wissen wie, sein Wahres und Reelles verschwindet, sondern welches in der Gewißheit seiner Freiheit dies andere für reell sich Gebende selbst verschwinden läßt; nicht nur das Gegenständliche als solches, sondern sein eigenes Verhalten zu ihm, worin es als gegenständlich gilt und geltend gemacht wird, also auch sein *Wahrnehmen* sowie sein *Befestigen* dessen, was es in Gefahr ist zu verlieren, die *Sophisterei* und sein *aus sich bestimmtes* und *festgesetztes Wahres*; durch welche selbsbewußte Negation es *die Gewißheit seiner Freiheit sich für sich selbst* verschafft, die Erfahrung desselben hervorbringt und sie dadurch zur *Wahrheit* erhebt." *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (1807), Suhrkamp, Frankfurt a M.1974, p. 160].

that reality is its own construction. In his view, we achieve knowledge by means of ordering our particular sense-experiences according to a conceptual scheme that classifies and unifies what we experience under a universal aspect, and so makes it possible to communicate our experience through language. In each step, spirit conceives itself as rational and universal and thus realizes its freedom. The individuals who have a free spirit are those who acknowledge that they can achieve freedom through rational choice, because reason is universal. For Hegel, reason is universal not only because the minds of individual human beings share a common universal reason, but because the minds of individual beings are aspects of the spirit itself, which is inherently universal.

Secondly, the role of otherness in Hegelian reasoning must be emphasized. In addition to the importance for self-awareness of recognition by another self-awareness (as exemplified by the famous figures of the master and the slave¹⁸) and, therefore, of social interaction, otherness is significant in morals and religion. Insofar as self-consciousness is developed by working in the world and changing it, it becomes clear that the figures of consciousness considered before the spirit is reached are analytical moments of the essence of the spirit, which is only effectively realized in the historical world. The alienated spirit¹⁹ returns to itself, conferring on freedom a positive sense of morality as self-determination. However, morality must rise above both the duty of the Kantian categorical imperative and the narcissism of the Romantic

¹⁸ Whereas Hegel refers to master and slave, he focuses on a relationship between two individuals, one considered by both the master and the slave as free of attachment to life and things, and the other, considered by both as linked to and dependent on life and things. Hegel's interest lies in tracking the changes in self-understanding experienced by master and slave, and thus exploring the dialectic inherent in consciousness and self-consciousness, and the way in which self-understanding is undermined by one own's experience.

¹⁹ In reason, the relationship between self-consciousness and the other turns from negative to positive: reason investigates the laws of the world and of its own conscience with the certainty of making up itself the entire reality. Yet, to the extent that it is treated as a thing, it also finds its own limits. Self-consciousness only manifests its interiority within the ethical sphere, where individuals satisfy their needs through common work, and are embedded in customs, laws, and the universality of their people by eliminating various individualistic behaviors. At this point, the discussion gets more historical. The opposition between universal and individual is renewed by means of another series of figures from classical antiquity (the Greek polis, Roman law), the modern world and the Romantic period. The consciousness of the futility of all things leads to faith as an evasion towards a better world; on the other, the pure intellection of the Enlightenment – in struggle with the former – reduces all things to their degree of usefulness, proclaiming the freedom of the subject with the French Revolution, and emancipating itself from all social ties until it becomes pure will. Hence the alienation of the spirit.

beautiful soul to exercise and influence reality and thus become true morality, that is, a unit of consciousness that acts and judges at the horizon of mutual recognition and indulgency. According to Hegel, it is in the experience of forgiveness in which the individual overcomes the otherness of the other by finding himself in them, it is there that the religious or absolute spirit manifests itself. From here, the *Phenomenology* exposes how religion develops into a series of historical and supra-historical manifestations in which the previous relations of consciousness with the world on the plane of self-consciousness are resumed. Thus, the various standpoints of self-consciousness, reason, and spirit, discussed by Hegel proved to be incomplete until the spirit reconciliates them into a unifying complex whole. It can be said that through this process of self-examination, consciousness becomes aware of its own limitations: “The *Phenomenology* is thus a *via negativa* for consciousness” that according to Hegel’s philosophical system “served its essentially pedagogical and motivational function, of leading us on to the *Logic*, where the positive doctrine is systematically elaborated in terms of pure categories and thought-forms”²⁰.

3. The journey to awakening in the *Five Ranks*

The *Five Ranks* is a dialectical formulation of the enlightenment in terms of the stages of the journey to awakening, and it represents one of Zen’s most elaborate philosophical frameworks. It is about awakening, its expression, its incarnation and integration into our life, to finally transcend steps and stages because, as Hisamatsu says, from the point of view of the awakened, there is no need for rules, stages, or differentiations, as we should rather speak of a single rank, or better, of one position of positionlessness (*mui no ichii* 無位の一位)²¹. With this argument, Hisamatsu did not intend so much to differentiate between the unenlightened mind and the enlightened mind, as to accentuate the need and reciprocity of both, as well as the dynamism that this teaching contains. Indeed, it does not simply refer to an object of contemplation, but to the need of a continuous practice to prevent the danger of

²⁰ R. Stern, *Routledge Philosophy GuideBook to Hegel and the Phenomenology of Spirit*, Routledge, London 2002, pp. 196-197.

²¹ Although the common translation into English of the original Chinese *wei* (Jp. *i* 位) is “rank”, the sinogram does not always denote a hierarchy. As R. Bolleter suggests (*Dongshan’s Five Ranks. Keys to Enlightenment*, Wisdom Publications, Boston 2014, p. 24), “position” can be used instead because it captures the dual meaning of “a point in relation to others” or “a perspective on reality,” as in “having a position” on an ethical or political issue, which is appropriate for this context.

attachment when adopting a fixed position, as well as to the freedom to enter and exit each rank, transcending both movements. For Hisamatsu, the dynamic aspect is important because it is what creates things and changes the world of reality, and it is the true activity of our historical creativity.

As many commentators of the *Five ranks* have noted, Zen avoids expressing its principles speculatively and prefers to translate them into life, to test them through experience rather than through the power of reasoning²². The first remark that should be made, therefore, has to do with the form of exposition of the experience of consciousness in dialectical terms that we are examining here, which is completely different from the Hegelian phenomenological account. The doctrine of the *Five ranks* has traditionally been expressed laconically through a few sinograms²³, symbols²⁴ (see Figures 1 and 2), and poetically²⁵. In view of the origins of the formula in Mahāyāna Buddhism²⁶ – which was given

²² For this reason, as A. Verdú notices: “It is not unusual to come across some Zen Kōan, which under the clothing of absurdity, embodies a dialectical process of three stages, namely, thesis and antithesis into a synthesis.” (A. Verdú, *The ‘five Ranks’ Dialectic of the Sōtō-zen School in the Light of Kuei-fêng Tsung-mi’s ‘ariya-shiki’ Scheme*, cit., p. 126).

²³ 1) 正中偏 (In the straight, the bent); 2) 偏中正 (In the bent, the straight); 3) 正中來 (Get out of the straight); 4) 偏中至 (Come to the consistency); 5) 兼中到 (Having come home to consistency).

²⁴ According to the *Yijing* symbols, the right is symbolized with a black circle and the bent with a white circle. See Sh. Hisamatsu, 「洞山五位提綱」 [Talks on the Essentials of Dongshan’s Five Stages] in 『久松真一著作集』 [Collected writings of Hisamatsu Shin’ichi], Hōzōkan, Kyoto 1994, p. 428 and Figs. 1 and 2 in the Appendix.

²⁵ While the dialectic between two poles remained intact, there were different formulations of the doctrine like the Five Ranks of Merit, the Five Ranks of the Lord and Vassal, or the Secret Meaning of the Five Ranks. On the origin, the different versions and the transmission of the *Five ranks*, see R. Bolleter *Dongshan’s Five Ranks. Keys to Enlightenment*, cit.; Ch-Y. Chang, *Tsao-Tung Ch’an and its Metaphysical Background*, cit.; H. Dumoulin, *Zen Buddhism: A History. India and China* (1983), transl. by J.W. Heisig – P. Knitter, Macmillan, New York 1994; A. Verdú, *The ‘five Ranks’ Dialectic of the Sōtō-zen School in the Light of Kuei-fêng Tsung-mi’s ‘ariya-shiki’ Scheme*, cit.; A. Verdú, *Dialectical Aspects in Buddhist Thought. Studies in Sino-Japanese Mahāyāna Idealism*, The University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas 1974.

²⁶ The dialectics of the *Goi* is traced back to the teachings on the oppositional poles 事 (Ch. *shi*, Jp. *ji*) and 理 (Ch. *li*, Jp. *ri*) by the Chan Master Shítóu Xīqiān (Jp. Sekitō Kisen, 700-790), which in turn follows the metaphysical speculation found in the Middle Way of Nāgārjuna, whose Mādhyamika dialectics systematizes the doctrine of the Prajñāparamita Sutras. Another important source for the development of the *Goi* dialectics is the one contained in the Tiantai (Jp. Tendai) doctrine of the Threefold Truth of Emptiness, Conventionality, and the Middle (空諦, 假諦, 中諦). Nāgārjuna’s emphasis on the notion of emptiness would have deeply influenced Tiantai, Huayan (Jp. Kegon) and Chan/ Zen’s interpretation of Buddhist teachings in the direction of a non-oppositional principle that transcends both consciousness and the world, in contrast to other interpretations such as those derived from the Yogacara view of *ālaya-vijñāna* consciousness.

a Chinese form – and due to its affinity with the *Yijing* (*The Book of Changes*), Dumoulin considers the *Five Ranks* an expression of Chinese philosophy²⁷. In fact, Chinese Chan, Zen in Japan, is often considered the fruit of the encounter between the Indian Buddhist tradition and Chinese thought.

The starting point of Hisamatsu's analysis, however, is not the first rank but the experience of Master Tōzan's awakening. In a similar way to the narratives of Zen masters or other figures such as saints or sages, something arouses an unease within him that triggers a search. The following words from the *Heart Sutra* had an impact on him: "No eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, mind; No forms, sounds, smells, tastes, touchables or objects of mind"²⁸. Interestingly, Ōhashi refers to the same passage in his study of Hegel and Buddhism, in which he argues that the *Phenomenology of the Spirit* could be interpreted as a theory of sensitivity, as, in his opinion, this theme is not only central in the first part of the book, devoted to the sensitive certainty of consciousness, but it also runs through the entire work. For Ōhashi, this passage sums up the *Heart Sutra's* fundamental content and the perspective in which the place of the "sensitive", in its deepening, is finally linked to religious experience while going through various philosophical positions²⁹. According to Ōhashi's interpretation, this "there is no" means "no-me", and when there is no more "me", the eye, the ear, the nose, the tongue, the body and volition are founded for the first time, as are color, voice, perfume, flavor, the tangible and the phenomena. That is to say, the I, aware of its non-objectifiable nothingness, becomes non-subjective. It would describe something similar to the "neither I nor other" mentioned above and what Nishitani calls "the point of de-internalization"³⁰, where the field of true human existence opens up beyond the outer and the inner, and thinking, feeling, and action come to be entirely illusory appearances with nothing underlying them. Hisamatsu explains that, for Tōzan, this meant the kind of perplexity that Zen narratives call a "ball of doubt", that is, the whole individual became a question. In his search

²⁷ H. Dumoulin, *Zen Buddhism: A History. Japan*, cit., p. 224.

²⁸ Ch. 無眼耳鼻舌身意、無色声香味触法 (*Heart Sutra*, transl. by E. Conze, *Buddhist Wisdom. The Diamond Sutra and the Heart Sutra*. Vintage Spiritual Classics, New York 2001, p. 97).

²⁹ R. Ōhashi, *Vers la profondeur du sensible: La Phénoménologie de l'esprit de Hegel et la compassion du bouddhisme du Grand Véhicule*, "Revue philosophique de la France et de l'étranger", 136/3, 2011, p. 367.

³⁰ K. Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, cit., p. 73. [K. Nishitani, 「宗教とは何か」 [What is religion?], cit., p. 83: 全体的にその内にあるが、絶対の無ということでは、脱体的にその外にある。]

for an answer and instruction, when crossing a stream, suddenly, a great awakening came over Tōzan. His teachings on the *Five Ranks* would have arisen from his need for transmission of his experience.

Thus, the five ranks or positions deepen during the experience of awakening according to five possible relationships between the two elements in play, the “straight” (正)³¹ and the “bent” (偏)³², also translated as “biased” or “crooked”. Both terms admit different readings from different domains (ontological, epistemological, psychological, literary, and so on): the first can be seen as synonymous of purity or tranquility, body or substance, void, ideal or principle, equality, absolute, original knowledge, and suchness; while the second can be understood as defilement or motion, function, visible matter, concreteness, diversity, relative, no-knowledge, origination or decay³³. In sum, it could be deduced that the straight refers to that which is absolute and ultimate, while the bent refers to the particular, conventional, and relative. The sinogram meaning “center”, “middle” or “in” (中) that connects both poles can be interpreted as the potential of one for relating to the other. Thus, the dialectical formula would express the fundamental identity of the Absolute and the relative, or the universal One and the phenomenal many³⁴. As Hisamatsu clarifies, drawing on the abovementioned *Heart Sutra*, while the straight is emptiness, the bent corresponds to the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind.

According to this line of reasoning, the Absolute, the One, foundation of all beings, is dynamic, it is in constant movement and activity, the mind cannot understand it and so it objectifies it. The supreme wisdom consists in realizing that Absolute and relative are not separate, they are not two, but one. The Absolute is Absolute with respect to the relative, the relative is relative to the Absolute. The Absolute manifests itself in the phenomenal world and the relative-phenomenal is inseparable from true emptiness. Then, the first two ranks recognize the identity between the Absolute and the relative: in the first, all the diverse elements are the same in their essence, without form and emptiness; and in the second,

³¹ Ch. *zheng*, Jp. *shō*.

³² Ch. *pian*, Jp. *ben*.

³³ A. Verdú, *Dialectical Aspects in Buddhist Thought. Studies in Sino-Japanese Mahāyāna Idealism*, cit., p. 178.

³⁴ As explained by the master of the Caodong lineage Caoshan Benji 曹山本寂 (840–901), “The rank of the straight is the realm of emptiness, where originally there is not a thing. The rank of the crooked is the realm of form, where the myriad shapes and objects exist.” Quoted by Ch. Byrne, *Neither Straight Nor Crooked: Poetry as Performative Dialectics in the Five Ranks Philosophy of Zen Buddhism*, “Philosophy East and West”, 70/3, 2020, p. 662.

the whole is seen in each individual thing. In the first rank, the knower separates from the straight and the movement goes from the Absolute to the relative. In the second one, the movement goes in the opposite direction, from the relative to the Absolute, beyond the purely phenomenal. Since there is no separation between the two, now the attention falls on the relative, now on the Absolute. Being is the fullness of appearance and appearance the fullness of Being. In the terms of the *Heart Sutra*, “form is emptiness, emptiness is form.” They coincide completely. In the first two ranks, one is fully contained within the other, linked by the middle or in-between; that is why they would be opposite to the other two positions where each pole is alone.

For Hisamatsu, the next three ranks represent the transformation of the first two, which meant not being trapped at one of the two poles. The third rank has to do with the Absolute alone, without reference to the relative. There is no other side, and no middle, as it loses its meaning of interpenetration and implicitly means merely the potentiality of the relative within the Absolute; that is, the Absolute before any exteriorization or unfolding, but pregnant with all possibilities, like seeds before sprouting. The Absolute is the starting point of an evolution through which every development, every word sinks into silence. Following the interpretation of the Zen master Hakuin Ekaku (白隠慧鶴1686-1769), Hisamatsu argues that the third rank means not resting on the success achieved so far with awakening; like the bodhisattva in Mahāyāna Buddhism, moved by compassion, one must act. It would be about going out into the world and acting for the benefit of others. It is clear that in his reading of the *Five ranks*, Hisamatsu was interested in the ethical aspect of the awakening and in the influence it may have for the future of humanity, in the world, and in history.

The fourth position refers to the relative alone, as pure relativity. Phenomena, conditional combinations and forces are seen in their respective individual forms. The Absolute is evident through the relative. Also, here Hisamatsu introduces an ethical interpretation of the relative that involves suffering beings, so that to come to it would be meeting them without making distinctions. Besides, following Hakuin again, Hisamatsu also relates this position to the action of helping suffering beings on the basis of the consistency between the right and the bent, that is, non-differentiation and non-discrimination.

Finally, the contradiction is “resolved,” the Absolute and the relative come together. It is the supreme rank, the undifferentiated unity,

the transcendence of the interpenetrated opposites in the first two ranks and the other two ranks where they appear alone. It encompasses all opposites and becomes absolute affirmation, the freedom of awakening. In Nishitani's terms, this would be the standpoint of emptiness where reality is seen as it is, beyond all dichotomies –subject and object, being and not-being, samsara and nirvana– from the very flow of becoming. Nishitani explains it with the help of an ancient Buddhist metaphor that Hisamatsu also uses:

The waves that roll on one after another in endless succession all return to the one great water, which in turn swells up again into its waves. No “waves” exist apart from their water, nor does “water” exist apart from its waves. Rather, at the point that water and waves are self-identical [水と波の自己同一] (as water-waves), this flowing wetness emerges into reality for what it is, water there being water and waves there being waves³⁵.

³⁵ K. Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, cit. pp. 103 [K. Nishitani, 「宗教とは何か」 [What is religion?], cit., p. 116]. Cfr. Sh. Hisamatsu, 「洞山五位提綱」 [Talks on the Essentials of Dongshan's Five Stages] cit., pp. 453-454: 「波が単なる波であれば、差別だけがあって一がない。だから単なる波から水へ入らなくてはならない。そこに波が一になるところがある、つまり方法一に帰すというところがあるのであります。しかし、他方その一だけ、単なる一であり、水だけの水でありましたならば、それはいわば一に墮する、正位に墮してまいります。だからして、水というものが波から遊離してしまう、差別の世界とは別のものになってしまうのであります。そういう水の有り方は水の本当の有り方ではない。水から波へという、そういうところが水になくなくてはならないのであります。それでこそ水と波とが密接不離なものになって来ます。そうなると、波は水を離れない、水は波のものである。波は水の表現である、現われであり、働きである、というふうになります。そしてその場合の波というものが偏というものが同じになるわけでありまして。そういう有り方が波の本当のあり方でありまして。波が波だけというのは波の本当のあり方ではない。水が単に水だけというのも、水の本当のあり方ではありません。だから水と波というものは一体不二なるものであります。ただ水からそれを言った場合と、波から言った場合とを区別するわけでありまして、前の場合が正中偏であり、後の場合が偏中正である、と言えます。波と水とは一体不二である、その一体不二なるものこそ、真の意味での水波未分の一位、正でも偏でもない、そういう無位の一位であります。」 [If a wave is just a wave, there is only discrimination and there is no oneness. It is necessary to enter the water from a mere wave. There is a place where the wave becomes one, that is, there is a place to return to the method. But in contrast, if only one of them were only one, and only water, one would fall, so to speak, into a straight position. Therefore, water is released from the waves and thus departs the world of discrimination. Such a way of being water is not the true way of water. That kind of thing, from water to waves, must already be in water. Only then water and waves will become inextricably linked. When that happens, the waves do not leave water, water is the source of the waves. Waves are an expression of water, a manifestation, an act, and so on. And the wave in that case is the same as the bent. That is the original way of being waves. The fact that waves are the only waves is not the true way of being waves. The fact that water is just water is not the true way of being water. Therefore, water and waves are an inseparable unity. It just distinguishes between the case of saying it from water and the case of saying it from waves, and it can be said that the former case is the straight-in-the bent and the latter case is the bent-in-the straight. Waves and water are a nondualist unity, and that nondualist unity is the undivided one position

It is the position of the rank without rank, that which contains the previous four. Although it is the last, as the true reality, it is the beginning, so there is a certain circularity. Hisamatsu regards this position as an advance over the previous one and in the same direction. It would consist in going out into the world of differences – the path ends again in the historical world – and acting freely for the other (or better, without establishing a distinction between myself and the other, “neither I nor other”), that is, being in the world without being trapped by the world.

4. Conclusions

Despite the fact that the two itineraries examined here intend to lead the self-aware consciousness (aware of itself and of what it is not) to knowledge, to the historical world and to freedom, it goes without saying how dissimilar the assumptions on which they are based are, how differently they are performed, thought and formulated. In both we find clearly different metaphysical, ethical, or religious considerations. Comparing them would require a detailed analysis that falls beyond the scope of this article.

However, some conclusions can be drawn from the dialogue between the two. First, the role of doubt and negativity in the dialectical formulation of both routes should be highlighted. The ultimate goal is to know what really is, the Absolute, and doubt plays a crucial role in showing how that cognition is possible. The most basic assumptions about oneself and the world must be called into question. For Hegel, philosophy must not take anything for granted, but must start from universal doubt. Hence his phenomenological method: undertaking an immanent examination of consciousness to show that the ordinary worldview is wrong and only philosophy understands the truth. In this way phenomenology tries to lead the natural conscience of non-philosophers to the philosophical truth, the truth found through philosophical practice. As Stephen Houlgate remarks, in *Hegelian Logic*, the notion of “pure science” implies liberation from the opposition established by consciousness, and to this effect, phenomenology must entail “a state of despair over so-called natural ideas, thoughts and opinions” (§78/61)³⁶. It seems that we are faced with the very purpose and function of negativity in Zen awakening: to pass through the great “ball of doubt”, with the anguish and despair that it entails (it is practi-

of positionlessness of water-waves in the true sense, which is neither straight nor bent.]

³⁶ S. Houlgate, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, Bloomsbury, London 2013, p. 8.

cally synonymous with the Great death), to achieve liberation. Hegelian phenomenology can be seen as an exercise in skepticism: it frees us from ordinary consciousness, just as the great Zen doubt. However, Zen radical negation leads to self-awakening that in Zen terms is usually expressed as the ordinary mind because upon its return to the world, it underlies the actions of everyday life. Moreover, while the first is guided by speculative philosophy, the second follows another method and seeks to free itself even from speculative philosophy and go beyond it. In fact, phenomenology shows how the certainties of natural consciousness undermine or invalidate themselves. Yet, as interpreters have noted, the philosophical point of view is, after all, presupposed in this.

Besides, Hegel – like Zen – is well aware that, in our attempt to order the world, the faculty of thought establishes determinations and adheres to them as if these were distinct and self-identical aspects of the world itself, disregarding the fact that they are but abstractions. For this reason, the dialectical stage, through negation, introduces movement and shows the finitude of the partial categories of understanding. At that point, according to Hegel the speculative reason apprehends the unity of the determinations in their opposition and arrives at a new affirmative and conceptual standpoint that overcomes the skeptical negation. As we have seen, the fifth rank (i.e., the straight and bent as neither one nor two) pointing to the oneness of unrestricted interpenetration surpasses all opposition. However, the opposition remain, in Huayan-Kegon terms, in a sort of harmonious interplay between particularities and also between particularities and universality.

Furthermore, while the teleological aspect is clear in the *Phenomenology*, by contrast, in the *Five ranks* there is an apparent hierarchy and an implicit teleology but, as we have seen, the fifth rank does not truly represent an absolute and final point of view. There is a certain circularity, as Hisamatsu noticed, or rather, a process that remains open as it reaches its fulfillment without implying intentionality or finalism. It seeks to show the interpenetration of all things in the identity of the true reality (emptiness). When this unity is experienced, the expression cannot be fixed, its form becomes irrelevant. Every word and every action, no matter how insignificant it may seem, can make up reality. And this brings us to the question of language and mode of argumentation.

As mentioned above, the doctrine of the five ranks was concisely formulated and, unlike the journey of the Hegelian consciousness experience, which was presented in a discursive way, the description of the five ranks was accompanied by commentaries, poetry, and de-

picted in the form of diagrams or symbols. Perhaps under the influence of the *Yijing*, complex doctrines of Indian Buddhism on how to understand the relationship between the self and the world ended up reduced to a few strokes or even as small circles painted black or white. François Jullien remarks how, in China, consciousness is born from each stroke, and the *Yijing* is the work *par excellence* of stroke writing³⁷. The *Yijing* is based on a continuous and a broken line and their combinations, which are situated between the phenomenon and the sign. According to Jullien, it serves as mediation between the order of nature and its logical formulation. In turn, regarding the interplay between image and concept in the *Yijing*, Hellmut Wilhem has argued that:

Image and concept confront each other here, not as hostile twins but in an intricate interplay, supporting and elucidating each other in different ways in order to clarify the polarities of the phenomenal world and of human life taking place in this world inasmuch as this world is a product and a replica of the polarity within the human mind.³⁸

Despite the fact that the *Five ranks* are meant for practice, they maintain a logical structure and yet are closer to the language of images, “semi-imagistic terms that thinly veil their philosophical import”, as Byrne puts it:

Victor Sōgen Hori has previously analyzed the ways in which Zen language is performative in the context of *kōan* literature. [...] The aim of the Five Ranks verses themselves is to embody the ultimate within the conventional realm of dualistic and relative language. In other words, instead of simply rejecting the adequacy of language and logic, Zen doctrinal poetry expresses the ineffability and irrationality of reality within a refined verbal discourse based in the logic of Buddhist dialectics.³⁹

With regard to the *Phenomenology*, it is hard to argue against the claim that Hegel is, so to speak, the philosopher “of the concrete concept (*Begriff*)”:

and thus anything said about his work that is not conceptual in tone seems

³⁷ F. Jullien, *Figuras de la inmanencia (Para una lectura filosófica del I Ching)* (1993), transl. by M. J. De Ruschi, El hilo de Ariadna, Buenos Aires 2015, p. 29.

³⁸ H. Wilhem, “The Interplay of Image and Concept in the Book of Changes”, in T. Izutsu – H. Wilhelm, *On Images: Far Eastern Ways of Thinking*. Eranos Lectures 7, Spring Publications, Dallas, Texas 1988, p. 42.

³⁹ Ch. Byrne, *Neither Straight Nor Crooked: Poetry as Performative Dialectics in the Five Ranks Philosophy of Zen Buddhism*, cit., p. 662.

questionable. When Hegel has made the concept itself concrete, imaginative speech seems unnecessary. Fundamental to Hegel's philosophy is that the concept should be understood in its own terms; content and form are to come together in the concrete concept. Commentary on Hegel traditionally focuses on the concept and on the language of the concept, which is discursive.⁴⁰

And yet, in his study of images in the *Phenomenology of the Spirit*, Donald P. Verene asserts that there is a struggle between "imagistic or pictorial ways of thinking" and the "concept":

In this work Hegel is struggling to give the concept birth. This struggle is one of passing through the image to the concept, moving from a language of appearance to a language of reality. In this process *Bild* and *Begriff* work dialectically against each other. This opposition within Hegel's philosophical doctrine is also present in Hegel's manner of writing.⁴¹

Therefore, we can conclude that, in a certain way, the two works move between the image and the concept, the experience and the discursive thought, and only a dialectical form of expression can account for the tension between them. Dialectics, as we have seen, does not seek to resolve the contradiction by taking up one side or the other, but rather tries to recast the issue by showing how the dichotomy underlying the opposition is false, and that it is therefore possible to integrate elements from both positions. Even though these considerations do not bridge the gap between the two analyzed works, they undoubtedly offer elements to think about the ideas proposed in each text and the way in which they were formulated on the basis of the different cultural resources available to their authors.

⁴⁰ D. Ph. Verene, *Hegel's recollection. A study of images in the Phenomenology of spirit*, State University of New York Press, Albany 1985, p. x.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

5. Appendix

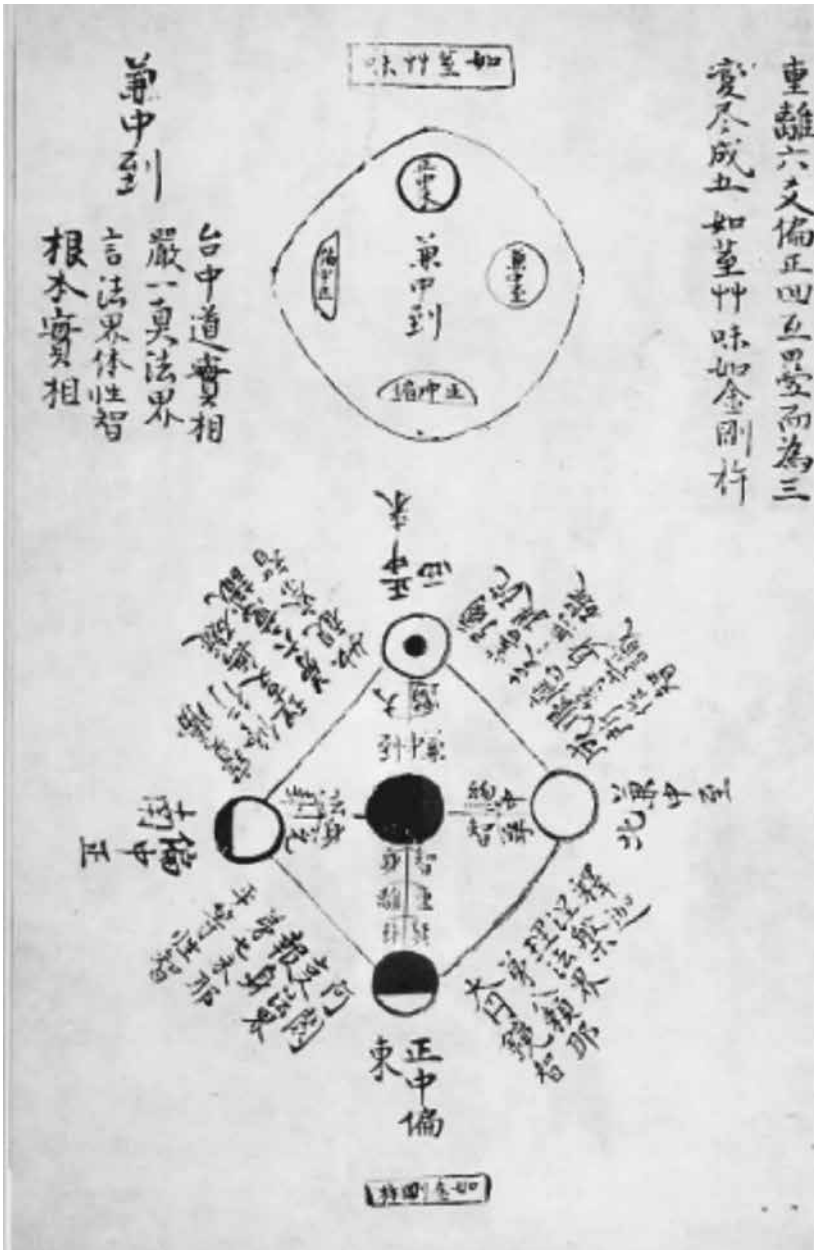


Fig. 1 Sh. Hisamatsu, 「洞山五位提綱」 [Talks on the Essentials of Dongshan's Five Stages] in 『久松真一著作集』 [Collected writings of Hisamatsu Shin'ichi], Hōzōkan, Kyoto 1994, p. 449.

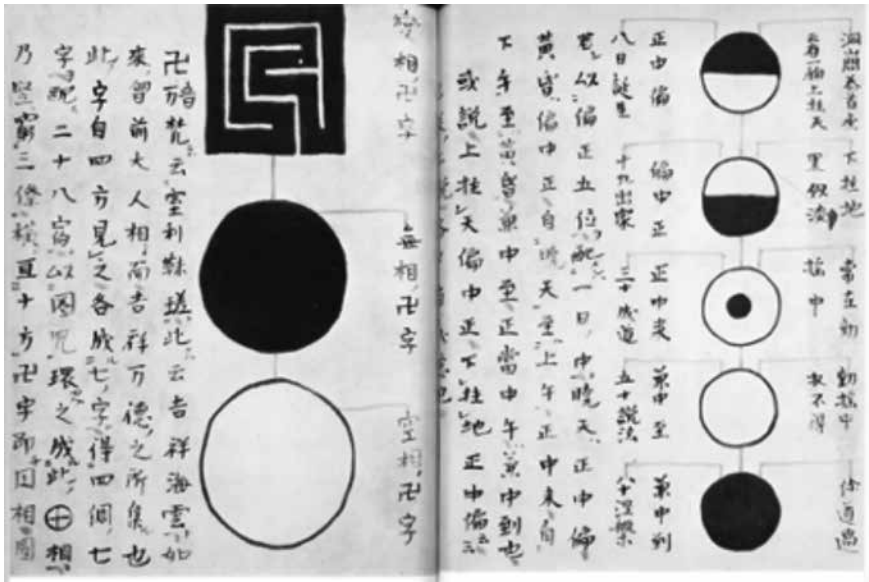


Fig. 2. Sh. Hisamatsu, 「洞山五位提綱」 [Talks on the Essentials of Dongshan's Five Stages] in 『久松真一著作集』 [Collected writings of Hisamatsu Shin'ichi], Hōzōkan, Kyoto 1994, pp. 449-450.

**Neither I nor other.
Dialectical formulations of the experience of self-awareness
in Hegel and Buddhism**

This paper examines two philosophical accounts of self-awareness considering their dialectical character. On the one hand, it discusses Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* and its pedagogic aim of helping us see that contemplating the world in the right manner reveals it as rational, which leads to the conclusion that philosophical inquiry can bring this rationality to consciousness. According to this, absolute knowledge, by overcoming one-sided assumptions as a result of a sort of *via negativa*, will dissipate the contradictions generated by our understanding as the natural starting point of our thoughts. On the other hand, this paper will reflect on the journey of self-awareness suggested by the dialectic of the Five Ranks in Zen Buddhism. This journey culminates in the identity of the Absolute and the relative as seen by an enlightened mind, which is no other than the ordinary mind positioned beyond discursive thinking. Despite the very different contexts in which these accounts were conceived and formulated, in both cases we can see how they do not seek to resolve contradictions by taking up one side or the other, but rather to show how there is an underlying unity that can only be achieved through doubting and self-negation. Rethinking both itineraries may cast the role of dialectics in the experience of self-awareness in a new light.

KEYWORDS: Hegel, Zen, Dialectics, self-awareness, Five Ranks