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Jaspers' *Schuldfrage* and Hiroshima Does the Concept of Guilt Exist for Japanese Religious Consciousness?

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Abstract: Confronting the radical evil committed by humans in WWII, Jaspers' *Die Schuldfrage* discusses the notion of metaphysical guilt as the "lack of absolute *solidarity* with the human being as such." In it Jaspers emphasizes that only through the boundary situation of metaphysical guilt can one engage in the genuine pursuit of solidarity, which ultimately leads to the existential transformation of one's consciousness. This essay will inquire into this Jaspersian notion of metaphysical guilt from a Japanese perspective, by asking whether Japanese survivors of Hiroshima experienced metaphysical guilt in the Jaspersian sense. This question arises from the realization that there is originally no Japanese word for guilt, while there are the Japanese words for defilement and sin that, according to Paul Ricoeur, are the two experientially primary phenomena of evil, from which the consciousness of guilt can emerge. To discuss how the Japanese have developed their moral foundation without the notion of guilt, I will first examine the Japanese concepts for defilement and sin, as revealed in the narratives of Japanese myths. Based on this analysis, the essay will further show that the Japanese moral foundation has been developed out of the notion of *Mono-no-aware*: the experience of being moved by the *Existenz* of other beings - an encounter that makes one transcend one's ego, dissolves the distinction between one's consciousness and others', and leads to the realization that "one is lived by other beings," i.e., the realization of human solidarity and co-responsibility with the collective. Finally, the essay demonstrates that Japanese religious consciousness also pursues what Jaspers calls the "solidarity with the human being as such," but its pursuit is fulfilled, not by way of metaphysical guilt, but by way of *Mono-no-aware*.

Introduction

This essay discusses Jaspers' notion of metaphysical guilt from a Japanese perspective. Our purpose is to inquire into whether Japanese survivors of Hiroshima experienced metaphysical guilt in the Jaspersian sense. This question has originally been raised by Alan M. Olson in his essay "Metaphysical Guilt" (*Existenz*, Vol. 3/1 Spring 2008, pp. 9-19), where he emphasizes that Jaspers famously referred to metaphysical guilt as the

guilt "of being still alive"¹ in the case of surviving citizens of post-Nazi Germany. In connection with this, Olson mentions the HBO Documentary, *White Light/Black Rain*,² commemorating the 60th Anniversary of the destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Let us examine how he poses the question then:

¹ Karl Jaspers, *The Question of German Guilt*, trans. E.B. Ashton (NY: Fordham University Press, 2000), p. 65.

² *White Light/Black Rain: The Destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki*, written, produced, and directed by Steven Okazaki (HBO Documentary Film, 2007).

It is interesting to note that some of the survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki also experienced the "guilt of being alive" believing that it would have been better to have perished with the rest of the citizenry, i.e., that those who perished were "better off" in the sense of not having to endure the horror and suffering of still "being alive." This led one individual to make a distinction between "the courage to die," in the case of a sister who committed suicide, and the "courage to live." ... A critical question, in this instance, is whether Japanese survivors experienced metaphysical guilt in the Jaspersian sense, or whether this can be better understood by way of what Ruth Benedict describes as the difference between "shame" and "guilt" cultures, Japanese culture being epitomized by the former and the Western (Christian) culture being the latter.³

There is, however, a misunderstanding in Olson's discussion of the film. In the actual film, the Japanese survivor mentioned above never uses the word "guilt." She just says in Japanese, "I am so *sorry* for my deceased brother and sister. I thought I would rather die than live instead of them." So what this Japanese survivor expresses is not the guilt, but the sorrow or sadness of being alive. This misunderstanding seems to have happened in translating Japanese into English; the American translator of this film consciously or unconsciously chose the expression, "the guilt of being alive," to describe her statement in this scene. In the first place, however, there is originally no Japanese word for guilt, while the Japanese do have the words for defilement and sin. Now this lack of a Japanese word for guilt poses an interesting question.

Olson concludes that the Jaspersian concept of metaphysical guilt is *a posteriori* in time but *a priori* in logic, and as such, that metaphysical guilt is a unique form of moral essentialism based upon the idea of humanity. If we follow this conclusion, then we may want to ask: In the Japanese sadness culture, which does not seem to have the consciousness of guilt, how is the idea of humanity understood? What kind of moral implication can we get from this sadness culture?

To discuss the absence in Japanese of the notion of guilt, and steer away from the thesis of shame vs. guilt culture as proposed by Ruth Benedict in the 1940s, I will introduce, instead, the thesis of *Mono-no-aware*: the notion of *being moved* by the *Existenz* of other beings, traditionally held in common by the Japanese as the

basic bond of human relations. Before commencing this task, however, let us first examine, in the manner of Ricoeur, how the concepts of defilement and sin have developed in Japanese religious/mythical consciousness. For, according to Ricoeur, it is the result of an *Aufhebung* of these two experientially primary phenomena of evil that the consciousness of guilt can emerge as a "veritable revolution"⁴ of consciousness.

The Notion of Defilement

In *The Symbolism of Evil*, Paul Ricoeur maintains that the development of Western mythical consciousness represents the salvation process of a captive free will, which constantly engages in the elimination of evil to deliver itself from self-enslavement.⁵ Now what is the evil so persistently opposed in Western culture? Ricoeur answers this question by providing three archetypal myths that foreshadow the problem of evil in monotheistic religions. These myths represent three major moments of consciousness respectively: defilement, sin, and guilt. The first type representing the schema of defilement is the Mesopotamian creation myth, the *Enuma elish*, in which evil was experienced as the primordial chaos that existed before god's creative activity. To analyze how differently the notion of defilement manifests itself in Japanese and Western consciousness, let us first examine how Ricoeur interprets the Western manifestation of defilement.

According to Ricoeur, the central theme of *Enuma elish* consists in "the final victory of order over chaos" (SE 175), the theme that goes on to underlie the Judeo-Christian cosmogony. He maintains that the god's work consists in founding the world, in creating the cosmos. What disturbs this cosmos-creation is regarded as chaotic, irrational, and uncontrollable, and therefore, evil. The god's purpose is to eliminate these chaotic elements to make the world intelligible and logically coherent. Ricoeur calls this eliminating process "salvation" (SE 173) that liberates humans from the blindness inherent in the primordial chaos. In the *Enuma elish*, this primordial chaos is symbolized by Tiamat, who, being the disordered and the irrational, is ultimately slain violently and exterminated completely

⁴ Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, trans. Emerson Buchanan (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), p. 102. [Henceforth cited as SE]

⁵ By "Western," Ricoeur means, more precisely, the Judeo-Christian tradition.

³ Alan M. Olson, "Metaphysical Guilt," in *Existenz*, Vol. 3/1 Spring 2008, footnote 20.

by Marduk, her offspring. Ricoeur expresses that this overwhelming irrationality of Tiamat provokes "a specific sort of fear that blocks reflection" (SE 25)—the fear that is closely connected with the sense of defilement. In it, the concept of evil still does not take the psychological connotation, but is experienced more straightforwardly as something physically defiled. In Ricoeur's expressions, it is a "stain" (SE 46), an "objective event" (SE 29), which "infects by contact" (SE 29). The only possible way of improving this situation is to get rid of this stain. Removing the stain is possible because, insofar as it is a stain, the defilement is not inherent, but something put on from outside. This metaphor of stain well explains the fundamental characteristic of evil for the Judeo-Christian consciousness. Evil is something other than oneself; it is not inherent in the true self, but a heterogeneity that should be abhorred and exterminated.

This primordial experience of defilement takes on a totally different mode for the Japanese mythical consciousness. In Japanese myth, defilement appears, not as the origin of evil, but rather, as a process necessary for the reinvigoration and reorganization of being. Here, we should note that the Japanese understanding of being is different from that of the Judeo-Christian. The Japanese cosmogonic myth that marks the beginning of the *Kojiki*,⁶ the oldest recorded myth of Japan, describes the origin of being in a totally different way from the Judeo-Christian tradition. Cosmogonies vary in the way they express ontophany, the appearance of being. The diversity of cosmogonic myth, therefore, shows the way each culture understands the concept of being. The *Kojiki* begins as follows:

At the time of the beginning of heaven and earth, there came into existence in TAKAMA-NO-HARA a deity named AME-NO-MI-NAKA-NUSHI-NO-KAMI; next, TAKA-MI-MUSUHI-NO-KAMI; next, KAMI-MUSUHI-NO-KAMI. These three deities all came into existence as single deities, and their forms were not visible.⁷

This opening sharply contrasts with Genesis, which proclaims: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." According to Genesis, there

was nothing before God; God is the prime mover, the first principle, and cosmic agent. Every being therefore is created by God *ex nihilo*. In the Japanese cosmogony, by contrast, what existed in the beginning was not God, nor even nothingness, but *Taka-ma-no-hara* (the Plain of High Heaven), which was already there without being created. Upon this plain appeared the triad of *kami* (deities): *Ame-no-mi-naka-nushi-no-kami* (The Deity Who Is Lord of the Sacred Center of Heaven), *Taka-mi-musuhi-no-kami* (High Deity of *Musuhi*), and *Kami-musuhi-no-kami* (Divine Deity of *Musuhi*). Interestingly, these deities took no positive action. Unlike the Western God, they created nothing, but concealed themselves after emergence. As its name indicates, the first deity is supposed to be lord of heaven, and therefore, of the entire cosmos that will come into being. In spite of this seemingly central role, this deity appears only in this opening remark, and is never mentioned in the rest of the text. In contrast with the mysterious character of this deity, the following two deities embody *musuhi*, the core principle dominating the *Kojiki*.

The Japanese word *musuhi* consists of two parts: *musu* and *hi*. First, *musu* is a verb that primarily means "to come into being" (産す/生す: *musu*). Not only that, however, this word is also used in the sense of "steaming" (蒸す: *musu*), and further, associated with the concept of "breathing" (息: *musu*). Uniting these multiple meanings, the Japanese word *musu* suggests the primordial image of constant appearing, i.e., the ever-proliferating process of being. On the other hand, *hi* of *musu-hi*, which is also pronounced *tama*, overarches various meanings, such as "the sun" (日: *hi*), "the fire" (火: *hi*), and more abstractly, "the awe-inspiring mysterious divine power" (靈: *hi*)—the notion that seems to be very close to Rudolf Otto's definition of the primordial experience of the Holy: *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*. By introducing these *musuhi* deities at the very beginning, the *Kojiki* provides a contrasting worldview to that of the Judeo-Christian. The Judeo-Christian cosmogony is characterized by the concept of creation, which is based on the duality of the creator and the created. By contrast, being indifferent to this kind of duality, the Japanese cosmogony describes the image of an organism's dynamic process of emerging, growing, and proliferating, informing how the Japanese mythical consciousness has understood the fundamental principle of being. The concept of being has never meant for the Japanese to exist absolutely or eternally, as in the case of the Judeo-

⁶ The *Kojiki* (古事記) means the "Record of Ancient Events." It is the oldest recorded myth of Japan, completed in 712 CE.

⁷ The *Kojiki*, trans. Donald L. Phillipi (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1968), p. 47.

Christian tradition; rather, the Japanese have understood "being" by such process phenomena as "being born," "becoming," and "being matured," i.e., the dynamic process of life force that never ceases but is always in flux.⁸

In the *Kojiki*, this cosmogony is followed by the myth of Izanagi and Izanami, the first couple that give birth to numerous beings in the world. Different from Genesis, where God creates all beings through His Word, the Japanese myth describes the birth of all beings as a result of this couple's procreative activity. They first give birth to numerous islands of Japan, and then, various deities that symbolize constitutive elements of the world. Here, too, the metaphor of giving birth suggests the idea of natural proliferation, making a contrast to the Judeo-Christian concept of controlled creation. A happening, however, suddenly disrupts the peaceful scene of abundant procreation of Izanagi and Izanami, i.e., the appearance of the fire-god whose birth killed Izanami, the first death introduced in the *Kojiki*. Because of this death, Izanami hereafter becomes the symbol of defilement in Japanese myth.

Comparing the deaths of Izanami and Tiamat will provide some insight what defilement means for the Japanese mythical consciousness. Izanami passes away, not by being killed, but by giving birth to a baby. Unlike Tiamat who was slain by her own offspring, Izanami's death is a natural death caused by a difficult delivery. Now, Izanami becomes the symbol of defilement, not because she is regarded as inherently evil, but just because she has eaten at the hearth of Yomi, i.e., sharing the cooking fire of the realm of the dead has contaminated her. Stated differently, what Japanese myth regards as defilement is not Izanami herself, but the very phenomenon of death. In the last analysis, unlike Tiamat, Izanami was not exterminated from the world after all. On the contrary, she continues to exist in the Land of the Dead as its ruler. Later in the myth, this Land of the Dead is also called the Mother Land, or the Nether Land, which is regarded as the place where all the souls ultimately return.

In the Izanagi-Izanami myth, Izanami's death symbolism does not necessarily contradict Izanagi's life symbolism. Rather, death is an inescapable phase of the life cycle. In other words, the myth provides us, not

with the dualistic opposition of life and death, but rather with the monistic encompassing of those two elements. This non-negating tension between life and death is impressively described in the resolution that Izanagi and Izanami made when breaking their marriage. After their battle in the Land of the Dead, Izanagi does not slay the defiled Izanami, but locks her in the nether world by placing a boulder between the realms of the dead and the living. Enraged by this separation, Izanami endeavors to kill a thousand people a day, to which Izanagi responds by begetting a thousand and five hundred people a day. This results in a victory of life over death, leaving five hundred more infants than corpses—a mythical explanation for the natural phenomenon of population increase. The formula $[1,500 - 1,000 = 500]$ does not ignore but acknowledges the daily presence of death.

The difference between *Enuma elish* and the Izanagi-Izanami myth lies in the manner they treat the chthonic Mother. Tiamat was finally slain and overcome by Marduk, while Izanami was never killed by Izanagi but continued to exist as the one dominating the realm of the dead. Ultimately, the realm of the chthonic in the Japanese myth was neither negated nor annulled as in the case of the Mesopotamian myth. On the contrary, in the Japanese folkloric tradition, the chthonic later became an object of worship that was believed to provide the realm of the living with tremendous power. The defiled, the chthonic, is indeed abhorred and negated; but this tremendous power has a possibility of being transformed into a positive power that brings dynamism into a rigid reality, only if treated properly.

What is the principle that enables such transformation between the opposing forces of the chthonic? The etymology of the Japanese word for "defilement," *kegare* (穢れ), gives us an answer. Inquiring into the etymological meaning of *kegare*, Tanikawa Kotosuga, a Japanese scholar in the 19th century, introduced a view that the word *kegare* originated from 氣枯れ:⁹ the word that is similarly pronounced *kegare* but means "the decline of *ki*" (気).¹⁰ The Japanese concept of *ki* denotes the unfathomable force behind all natural transformations, the force

⁸ See Maruyama Masao, "Rekishi-ishiki no Kosō (The Old Stratum of Historical Consciousness)," in *Chūsei to Hangyaku* (Faith and Rebellion) (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1993), p. 298.

⁹ Tanikawa Kotosuga, *Wakun no shiori* (A Dictionary of Japanese Words), Vol. 1 (Gifu: Seibido, 1898), p. 435.

¹⁰ The Japanese concept of *ki* corresponds to the Chinese concept of *ch'i*.

encompassing both energy and matter; it is the psycho-physiological power associated with blood and breath, and thus translated as "vital force." It is the concept that opposes the mechanistic view of the body emphasized by mind-body dualism, and instead, inquires into the way we can develop the potencies of the body into producing a new mode of being. In Japanese, the physically as well as mentally healthy state is called *gen-ki* (元気), literally meaning "the original state of *ki*." As this word shows, *ki* undergoes increase and decrease, but the original state of *ki* is supposed to be full of vital force; it is the state that one can realize by uniting oneself with the *ki* of the world, i.e., the ebb and flow of vital force in nature.

According to Tanikawa's etymological analysis, the Japanese concept of defilement (*ke-gare*) was defined by the ebb and flow of *ki*. Among various types of defilement, the Japanese have traditionally viewed the defilement of death (called *kuro-fujyō*: the black defilement) and that of blood (called *aka-fujyō*: the red defilement) as the two primary aspects of *ke-gare*. When *ki* leaves one's body, the typical case of which is death, one is regarded as defiled. The bloodshed called *aka-fujyō* is another typical example that shows the energy, represented by blood, departing from one's body. In these cases, defilement means the condition lacking in *ki*. The role of purification ritual is to transform this defiled state into a pure state that might produce health, vigor, luck, fortune, and long life. What is unique about the Japanese purification ritual is to bring about this pure state, not by exterminating the defiled, but by utilizing its power in an opposite manner that leads toward increase of potencies. This transformation is possible because the philosophy of *ki* presupposes the ever-circulating system of life, in which defilement is an inescapable phase of the life cycle. In this philosophy, defilement is no longer a stain or an otherness to be annihilated, as in the case of Judeo-Christian tradition, but rather, a process necessary for the reinvigoration and reorganization of being.

Also the concept of sin—the second schema that Ricoeur maintains constitutes the consciousness of evil—is portrayed quite differently in Japanese myth.

The Notion of Sin

Ricoeur regards the *Adamic Vision of Sin and Myth of the Fall* as the paradigmatic myth elucidating the Western understanding of sin. In it, the concept of sin is recognized when a human confronts God, the moral

lawgiver, who is the source and foundation of an ethics of prohibition, condemnation, and forgiveness. In the *Kojiki*, the archetypal myth foreshadowing the notion of sin is the myth of Amaterasu and Susanowo, which comes right after the Izanagi-Izanami myth. Amaterasu and Susanowo are two of the three deities that were born out of Izanagi's purification ritual, which was performed after his battle with Izanami in the Land of the Dead. Amaterasu is the Sun Goddess born out of Izanagi's left eye, and Susanowo is the Storm God born out of his nose. In this Japanese myth, the sinner is symbolized by Susanowo; who sins against Amaterasu. This Sun Goddess, however, is not necessarily depicted as a moral lawgiver. Then what is Amaterasu? How does Susanowo sin against her? What is the meaning of sin in this Japanese context?

The central episode of the Amaterasu-Susanowo myth is Amaterasu's concealment in the rock-cave, which was caused by Susanowo's violent conduct. His lawless acts dissolve the order of things one after another. To take concrete examples, he broke down the ridges between the rice paddies of Amaterasu, and covered up the ditches. Also he defecated and scattered the excrements in the hall where Amaterasu was celebrating the harvest festival. Moreover, he opened a hole in the roof of this sacred hall, and dropped down into it the sacrificial pony that he skinned with a backward skinning. These destructive behaviors of Susanowo eventually made Amaterasu enraged and conceal herself in the rock-cave, which brought complete darkness to the world.

Scholars have proposed that this episode provides the genesis of the Japanese concept of sin, because a historical document entitled the *Engi-shiki*, the compilation of laws and minute legal regulations completed in the 10th century, introduces the Japanese word for sin (*tsumi*) for the first time by defining the above brutal conducts of Susanowo as the Heavenly Sins (*ama-tsu-tsumi*). In order to understand the Japanese concept of sin in this mythical context, we had better analyze what consequence this conduct of Susanowo brought about. The climax of the Amaterasu-Susanowo myth comes when Amaterasu conceals herself in the rock-cave, which metaphorically expresses her death. After she hid herself in the rock-cave, the Plain of High Heaven was completely dark, and all kinds of calamities arose. The eighthundred myriads of gods assembled to discuss how to lure Amaterasu out of the cave. They collected cocks, whose crowing precedes the dawn, and hung a mirror and

maga-tama jewels in front of the cave. Then the goddess Ame-no-uzume began a dance on an upturned tub, partially disrobing herself. This so delighted the assembled gods that they roared with laughter. Amaterasu became curious how the gods could make merry while the world was plunged into darkness, and was told that outside the cave there was a deity more glorious than she. She peeped out, saw herself reflected in the mirror, heard the cocks crow, and was thus drawn out from the cave. Now the world was filled with light, and brought to life again. The myth finally tells that Susanowo was punished and expelled forever from the heavenly realm of the divine.

It is said that this episode is the model for the later Shinto renewal ritual, which is one of the most important rituals in the Shinto tradition perpetuated to this day. We have already observed that Susanowo interrupted the harvest festival. This festival corresponds to the *Niiname-sai*, meaning the festival celebrating the new crops of rice. The *Niiname-sai* intends "the driving out of *the old year* and the coming of *the new year*." Here, the "new year" means the birth of a new mode of existence in the spiritual sense, not only for individuals, but also for society as a whole. The ancient Japanese most vividly experienced this sacred moment—the transition from the old year to the new year, or more metaphorically, the transition from death to rebirth—on the winter solstice. In ancient Japanese agricultural society, the concept of fertility was conceived within the rhythm of the seasons, and developed to the idea of periodic regeneration that occurs once a year, most symbolically on the winter solstice when the sun experiences its metaphorical death.

This idea of death and rebirth constitutes the core of the *Niiname-sai*. The important ritual *Chinkon-sai*, which is held on the day before the winter solstice, precedes the *Niiname-sai*. The central theme of the *Chinkon-sai* is to experience imitative death and rebirth—the theme depicted in the *Kojiki* as the concealment and unconcealment of the Sun Goddess Amaterasu. Previous studies describe that, when this ritual was held in the Imperial Court, the emperor first lay on the sacred bedding covered with *madoko-ou-fusuma*, which was like a robe or a net that seemingly functioned as a magical covering in which the emperor performed imitative death.¹¹

The emperor's concealing himself in the *madoko-ou-fusuma* symbolizes what Mircea Eliade calls "the return to the womb." In *Myth and Reality*, Eliade discusses the symbolic meaning of this concept:

From the structural point of view, the return to the womb corresponds to the reversion of the Universe to the "chaotic" or embryonic state. The prenatal darkness corresponds to the Night before Creation and to the darkness of the initiation hut.... The initiation myths and rites of *regressus ad uterum* (the return to the womb) reveal the following fact: the "return to the origin" prepares a new birth, but the new birth is not a repetition of the first, physical birth. There is properly speaking a mystical rebirth, spiritual in nature—in other words, access to a new mode of existence. The basic idea is that, to attain to a higher mode of existence, gestation and birth must be repeated; but they are repeated ritually, symbolically.¹²

This statement properly applies to the Japanese myth and its ritual. In the *Kojiki*, Amaterasu conceals herself in a cave, which appears to symbolize the womb. In the *Chinkon* ritual held every year, the emperor reenacts this return to the womb, mythically performed by Amaterasu. This point should be emphasized as a striking difference between the Japanese and the Mesopotamian mythical consciousness, which we discussed in the previous section. The Mesopotamian New Year's festival consisted in the ceremonial recitation of Marduk's paradigmatic recreation of the cosmos (i.e., a scene of *Enuma elish*, in which Marduk violently slays Tiamat and recreates the cosmos). By contrast, the Japanese myth and its ritual dramatize the return to the womb, and not the negation of the womb as represented by Marduk's slaying of Tiamat. The Japanese mythical consciousness emphasizes the womb, death, or the Night before Creation, regarding it as what conceives the origination of life, the source of energies on which the life in the universe depends. After death comes rebirth; after the emperor conceals himself in the *madoko-ou-fusuma*, the *Chinkon* ritual brings about the rebirth of the emperor by reinvigorating his life force. A court lady in front of the *madoko-ou-fusuma* stands on an overturned box, and strikes the box ten times with a halberd. This

Chosaku-shū (Collected Works of Matsumae Takeshi), Vol. 6 (Tokyo: Ōfū, 1996), pp. 212-245.

¹² Mircea Eliade, *Myth and Reality* (New York, NY: Harper & Row Inc., 1963), p. 80.

¹¹ Orikuchi Shinobu, *Orikuchi Shinobu Zenshū* (Collected Works of Orikuchi Shinobu), Vol. 3 (Tokyo: Chūō Kōronsha, 1995), pp. 187-189. Also see Matsumae Takeshi, *Matsumae Takeshi*

performance, which the *Kojiki* describes as Amenouzume's dancing in front of the cave, represents the act of calling in life force from outside and attaching it to the emperor's body so that it can rejuvenate his life again.

Now the meaning of Susanowo, and that of sin in Japanese myth must be analyzed from this perspective. Susanowo's outrageous conduct indeed caused the death of Amaterasu. But it is this same conduct of Susanowo that provided the world with its dynamism. In fact, to regard Susanowo as the archetype of sinner, and so, as the symbol of evil, has not been accepted in the Japanese tradition. On the contrary, in Japanese folk religion, Susanowo has long been worshipped as a vital god who brings about fertility. How can we understand this contradiction of Susanowo, who is once the sinner and the god of fertility? To answer this, we need to inquire into how differently the Japanese and the Judeo-Christian understands the notion of sin. According to Ricoeur, the category dominating the Judeo-Christian notion of sin is that of before God; sin is the concept that defines the relationship of a finite human facing the infinite God. To provide a concrete image of sin, Ricoeur analyzes Hebrew words in the Bible that constitute the primordial experience of sin for the Judeo-Christian: *chattat* (missing the target), *awon* (a tortuous road), *pesha* (revolt), and *shagah* (being lost). From these, Ricoeur concludes that the Judeo-Christian notion of sin originates in such image as "missing the mark, deviation, rebellion, and straying from the path"¹³—the path that should go straight to meet the infinite demand of God. When we compare this image of sin with that of the Japanese, we find a totally different view. In the first place, in Japanese myth, the original sinner Susanowo is not a human. The Japanese myth has no clear distinction between the human and the divine, and therefore, no conflict between them. Susanowo is a deity, so his conduct is not a rebellion against God. Rather, his sinful act is regarded as an aspect embodied in the divine itself. In Susanowo, the values of good and evil co-exist simply as different modes of being. Or more precisely, the Japanese traditionally have not made a value judgment on these two elements as good and evil, but instead regarded them as the co-existence of *ara-mi-tama* (the wild soul of the divine) and *nigi-mi-tama* (the peaceful soul of the divine), which are believed to constitute two necessary,

innate elements of being. Susanowo, whose name literally means the Raging Male, was also the Storm God not only because he was unruly and destructive, but because his excessive vigor simultaneously represented the extraordinary power originating life. With the images of thunder and rain, the Storm God Susanowo symbolizes the epiphany of force and violence, the necessary source of energies on which the life in the universe depends. Thus, the symbol of Susanowo is never simple, but complex. And it is in this complex symbol of Susanowo that the Japanese mythical consciousness has found the fundamental principle of being.

Mono-no aware: A Japanese Moral Foundation

Now our question is: What kind of moral implication can we establish upon this Japanese principle? This was indeed the question that Ruth Benedict and other Western scholars confronted during and after WWII. In *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, Benedict maintains:

In Japanese philosophy the flesh is not evil. Enjoying its possible pleasures is no sin. The spirit and the body are not opposing forces in the universe and the Japanese carry this tenet to a logical conclusion: the world is not a battlefield between good and evil. Sir George Sansom writes: "Throughout their history the Japanese seem to have retained in some measure the incapacity to discern, or this reluctance to grapple with, the problem of evil." The Japanese have always been extremely explicit in denying that virtue consists in fighting evil.¹⁴

Based on this observation, she proposes that famous thesis contrasting shame vs. guilt cultures, Japanese culture being epitomized by the former and the Western culture being the latter. She describes the difference of these cultures as follows:

In anthropological studies of different cultures the distinction between those which rely heavily on shame and those that rely heavily on guilt is an important one. A society that inculcates absolute standards of morality and relies on men's developing a conscience is a guilt culture by definition. (By contrast,) True shame cultures rely on external sanctions for good behavior, not, as true guilt cultures do, on an internalized conviction of sin. Shame is a reaction to other people's criticism.¹⁵

¹⁴ Ruth Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2005), pp. 189-191.

¹⁵ Benedict, *op. cit.*, pp. 222-223.

¹³ Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, p. 74.

We notice that this seemingly scientific statement is already tinted by her value judgment. The contrast that she makes between guilt and shame cultures corresponds exactly to the Kantian schema of categorical vs. hypothetical imperatives. Benedict asserts that the Western guilt culture is established on the categorical imperatives, and so can develop a conscience that always follows the absolute standard of morality, while the Japanese shame culture only refers to the hypothetical imperatives, and cannot internalize the moral consciousness in the true sense. However, the lack of distinction between good and evil in the Western sense does not necessarily mean the absence of internalized morality in Japanese culture. For the Japanese, morality is not derived from the metaphysical Absolute, but from the depths of the flesh, not from above but from below, as it were. The contrast between Western and Japanese cultures, therefore, should be reconsidered from this perspective, and not by way of the Kantian screening of either the categorical or the hypothetical.

As a distinguished study exploring the Japanese mode of morality, we can refer to the work of the eminent Japanese scholar in the 18th century, Motoori Norinaga. Motoori is known as a philologist who turned his attention to deciphering the language of Japanese myth, and further, of Japanese classical literature as a whole. Through his enormous work, Motoori pursued what lay at the core, not only of ancient Japanese, but of those religious experiences that might have been commonly held by his contemporaries as a tradition transmitted from antiquity. According to Motoori, it is "the Way of Knowing *Mono-no-aware*"¹⁶ that characterizes the Japanese mode of morality. *Mono-no-aware* means the feeling of being moved. Examined more precisely, *Mono-no aware* consists of two Japanese words: *mono* and *aware*. First, *mono* is usually translated as "a being" or "beings," but what Motoori means by this term here may correspond better to the Jaspersian concept of *Existenz*: it signifies a mode of determinate being, in which being itself is manifested. The other term, *aware*, means the exclamatory "ah." We let out such " when we are deeply moved by the modes of other determinate beings; it is an encounter that makes one transcend one's ego, dissolves the distinction

between one's consciousness and others', and leads to the realization that "one is lived by other beings," i.e., the realization of human solidarity and co-responsibility with the collective. This notion of *being moved* is a natural phenomenon for humans. However, if we are occupied by conventional self-interest and do not transcend the selfish ego, we can never experience such ecstatic moment of being moved. When one is dispossessed of the egoistic and narcissistic ego and fully engaged in the experience of *Mono-no-aware*, the being of others no longer becomes an object standing over against oneself. Instead, the beings of one and others transcend their distinction, and become united in the totality of being. It is this experience of unity that brings about an existential transformation of one's consciousness. Motoori maintains that this principle of *Mono-no-aware* strongly characterizes the Japanese mode of morality throughout history. In addition, he stresses that the true morality consists in knowing this *Mono-no-aware*, and not just feeling it. In other words, the phenomenon of being moved should not simply dissolve in a reflex sensation, but should be sublimated to the pure activity of consciousness.¹⁷

In the principle of *Mono-no-aware*, morality is not defined by the categorical imperatives; it does not originate in the commandment of the Absolute, but comes from below. For this principle is derived from the very essence of human beings. As we have already examined, the Japanese mythical consciousness has found this essence in the enigmatic symbol of Susanowo, in which good and evil co-exists. Then, how can we connect this symbol of Susanowo with the principle of *Mono-no-aware*? A key to this question might be found in the philosophy of Georges Bataille, who inquired into the essential meaning of life revealed in the psychology of eroticism.

Bataille's analysis begins with the realization that our beings are fundamentally discontinuous. He

¹⁷ The 19th century Japanese scholar Ōnishi Hajime asserts that the experience of *Mono-no-aware* provides "spiritual salvation." In an essay entitled "The Catharsis of Pathos," he maintains: "A selfish ego is not our real nature. When one weeps for others, one feels as if there were no longer a distinction between oneself and others. It is at this moment that one's real nature shines forth. Humans seek to return to their real nature, in which they transcend the false ego and transform themselves into the real self. All the artistic activities such as poetry and fine arts are intended to achieve this lofty purpose, aren't they?" (*Meiji Bungaku Zenshū*, Vol 79 [Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1975] p. 180.

¹⁶ Motoori Norinaga, "Iwagami-sasamekoto," in *Motoori Norinaga Zenshū* (Collected Works of Motoori Norinaga), Vol. 2 (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1968), pp. 99-108.

develops this thought in the light of reproduction, which reveals the essential mode of our beings. Bataille maintains:

Reproduction implies the existence of discontinuous beings. Beings which reproduce themselves are distinct from one another, and those reproduced are likewise distinct from each other, just as they are distinct from their parents. Each being is distinct from all others.... He is born alone. He dies alone. Between one being and another, there is a gulf, a discontinuity.¹⁸

Bataille posits the discontinuity of beings as what determines our life in the first place. The nature of our beings, however, cannot bear this reality, and tries to do away with this gulf between one being and another. He contends:

On the most fundamental level there are transitions from continuous to discontinuous or from discontinuous to continuous. We are discontinuous beings, individuals who perish in isolation in the midst of an incomprehensible adventure, but we yearn for our lost continuity. We find the state of affairs that binds us to our random and ephemeral individuality hard to bear. Along with our tormenting desire that this evanescent thing should last, there stands our obsession with a primal continuity linking us with everything that is. [EDS 15]

According to Bataille, this nostalgia is responsible for the three types of eroticism in humans: physical, emotional, and religious. He emphasizes that, with all these types of eroticism, the primal concern is "to substitute for the individual isolated discontinuity a feeling of profound continuity" [EDS 15]. It is in this yearning for continuity that Bataille finds the most essential attribute of being. Bataille, however, is not unconditionally praising this erotic impetus. Rather, he shows its destructive aspect by maintaining that "the domain of eroticism is essentially the domain of violence, of violation" [EDS 16]; it "always entails a breaking down of the patterns of the regulated social order basic to our discontinuous mode of existence" [EDS 18]. Of all those violent drives of eroticism, the most violent thing for us is *death* which "jerks us out of a tenacious obsession with the lastingness of our discontinuous being" [EDS 16].

¹⁸ Georges Bataille, *Erotism: Death and Sensuality*, trans. Mary Dalwood (SF: City Lights Books, 1986), p. 12. [Henceforth cited as *EDS*.]

It may be said that the Japanese mythical symbol Susanowo embodies this principle of eroticism. Susanowo represents the outrageous power that destroys the regulated social order and plunges the cosmos founded on our discontinuous mode of existence into chaos. This excessive power, however, is in fact the other side of the same coin, only from which the possibility of our spiritual transcendence comes into being—the possibility of transcending one's confined subjectivity and uniting oneself with the totality of being. The Japanese mythical consciousness has conceived that the source of this transcendence is deeply embedded in the essential mode of our existence, which Bataille calls *eroticism*. The principle of *Mono-no-aware* is an expression of this yearning for unity derived from the fundamentally erotic mode of existence: the yearning for dissolving the distinction between oneself and another, and bringing them into the region of oneness.¹⁹

Conclusion

It may be said that Jaspers was the philosopher who seriously confronted this problem of eroticism in humans. Living in the reality where the destructive aspect of eroticism seizes human minds so cruelly, Jaspers has come to the realization that this violence of eroticism is so essential to humans. In *Die Schuldfrage*, he maintains:

¹⁹ Erich Neumann, a Jungian psychologist, calls "the unconscious" what Bataille expresses as eroticism. In *Depth Psychology and a New Ethic*, Neumann describes this violent drives of eroticism as "the shadow," maintaining: "Psychologically...love and acceptance of the shadow is the essential basis for the actual achievement of an ethical attitude towards the 'Thou' who is outside me.... Surprisingly enough, the analysis of individuals reveals that the encounter and reconciliation with the shadow is in very many cases a *sine qua non* for the birth of a genuinely tolerant attitude towards other people, other groups and other forms and levels of culture. We have in fact first to assimilate the primitive side of our own nature before we can arrive at a stable feeling of human solidarity and co-responsibility with the collective.... The acceptance of the shadow is a part of that process of development in which a personality structure is created that unites the systems of the conscious mind and the unconscious." (*Depth Psychology and a New Ethic* [Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1990], pp. 95-97) We can relate this statement of Neumann with the Japanese mythical symbol, Susanowo, which is regarded as a Japanese expression of the unconscious.

In tracing our own guilt back to its source we come upon the human essence – which in its German form has fallen into a peculiar, terrible incurring of guilt but exists as a possibility in man as such.²⁰

Confronting this radical evil so essential to humans, Jaspers struggles with "the guilt of being human" [QGG 94]. The concept of metaphysical guilt arises exactly from this understanding of the brutal reality of human essence. When one becomes fully conscious of such brutal aspect of eroticism in humans, not being overwhelmed by it, but confronts it, one begins to bear the sense of metaphysical guilt. And it is only through this boundary situation of metaphysical guilt that one can experience the existential transformation of consciousness. As Jaspers asserts, "only the pure soul can truthfully live in this tension: to know about the possible ruin and still remain tirelessly active for all that is possible in the world" [QGG 116].

Jaspers maintains that "metaphysical guilt is the lack of absolute *solidarity* with the human being as such" [QGG 65], and emphasizes that the genuine pursuit of this solidarity brings about the existential transformation of our consciousness. This idea of solidarity, however, will never come into being without a profound realization of each human being as *Existenz*. From this Jaspersian standpoint, Hiroshima and Nagasaki become the symbol that tests our determination of pursuing the solidarity with the human being as such. For, these are to date the only attacks with nuclear weapons in the history of warfare, which resulted in the largest scale of mass murder carried out by one bombing. In this contemporary mode of warfare, humans are completely stripped off their dignity, their *Existenz*, and degraded to the mere target of the exterminating mission conducted by ideology.

The Western metaphysics pursues the solidarity in the Absolute that is accessible only by negating and transcending the body. The Japanese religious/mythical consciousness too pursues the solidarity, but its pursuit consists, not in the negation, but in the affirmation of the body. After all, is there no agreement between the Western and the Japanese understanding of being? Not really – we find a promise of their mutual

understanding in the writing of Hermann Cohen,²¹ the Jewish philosopher who wrote *Religion of Reason*. This Neo-Kantian contemporary of Jaspers, who rigorously pursued the *rational* dimension of religious consciousness, entitles the last chapter of his book "Peace" and discusses how humans can complete this mission of peace:

There are two physiological signs of this life of peace in man: the feeling of being moved and joy. In the *Aesthetics of Pure Feeling* I have tried to show that the feeling of being moved furnishes a proof of the aesthetic consciousness. However, this view does not contradict our attempt at this time also to claim the feeling of being moved for the religious consciousness in its virtuous way of peace. For the religious consciousness uses the aesthetic consciousness as amply as the ethical consciousness, and there is no reason for the religious consciousness to claim its own originality in the feeling of being moved. This feeling is the love for the nature of man which, expressed its pureness, shines forth in the countenance of man, where it reflects the splendor of the pureness of this feeling of being moved. The religious consciousness takes possession of this aesthetic power in order to establish the virtue of peace in the mind. Thereby the feeling of being moved originates, as a witness of the mood of peace, which animates man and which becomes a power of his soul.²²

At the end of his pursuit in *Religion of Reason*, Cohen comes back to the feeling of being moved as the foundation of peace, of mutual understanding. Is this feeling not the most fundamental attribute of human existence, which the Japanese religious consciousness has emphasized as *Mono-no-aware*? Ultimately, the Japanese religious consciousness questions: Do humans really need to posit the Absolute in pursuing the transcendence, which Jaspers called "the solidarity with the human being as such"? As a way to go beyond ideologies and experience each human being as *Existenz*, returning to the feeling of being moved might now be required for us.

²¹ Hermann Cohen (1842-1918) was Jaspers' Neo-Kantian contemporary. Alan M. Olson points out that Cohen's "idea of humanity" had a considerable influence on Jaspers' thought. See Olson's essay "Metaphysical Guilt," in this volume, Footnotes 14 and 21.

²² Hermann Cohen, *Religion of Reason: Out of the Source of Judaism*, trans. Simon Kaplan (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), pp. 454-455.

²⁰ Karl Jaspers, *The Question of German Guilt*, trans. E.B. Ashton (NY: Fordham University Press, 2000), p. 94. [Henceforth cited as QGG]