Nishida Kitarō famously remarked that “from a standpoint like Tanabe’s, there is no salvation by faith.” This criticism has greatly influenced interpretations of Tanabe’s philosophy of religion. The criticism may apply to Tanabe’s thinking up until 1944, but it seems wide of the mark after he set out to rebuild his philosophical standpoint in the autumn of that year with his theory of zangedō or “metanoetics.” The theory has been widely studied but an attempt has yet to be made to study the complex relationship it establishes between faith and knowledge. I will argue here that Nishida’s criticism relates to Tanabe’s earlier writings, where faith was absorbed without remainder into the rational pursuit of the absolute knowledge of reality. With metanoetics, there is a crucial change: faith is now seen to arise precisely where the “belief” in reason collapses. The renunciation of self-power in full self-awareness opens one to salvation by the absolute. With faith, Tanabe argues, faith and knowledge are not one and the same but distinct and mutually enhancing forces that cooperate to transform knowing into a “knowledge of bearing witness.”

**KEYWORDS:** Tanabe Hajime—metanoetics—philosophy of religion—faith—knowledge—morality—praxis—reality—absolute disruption—Nishida Kitarō
Thanks to Takeuchi Yoshinori’s English translation of *Philosophy as Metanoetics*, it has become broadly known that Tanabe Hajime 田辺元 (1885–1962) set out to reconstruct his philosophy in the fall of 1944. This reconstructed philosophy, with the rather odd appellation “a philosophy of religion as a non-philosophical philosophy,”\(^1\) appears to be possible only by drawing upon faith. That is, after 1944, Tanabe took conversion and *faith* to be necessary conditions for philosophy as the endeavor toward *knowledge*. To date, this peculiar stance has been investigated through various avenues.\(^2\)

Now bringing together the terms “Tanabe Hajime” and “faith” looks like a non-starter. Tanabe’s stance on faith has been the target of harsh critique from Buddhists and Christians alike and, as Nishida Kitarō famously rebuked, “from a standpoint like Tanabe’s, there is no salvation by faith.”\(^3\) Indeed, even after 1944 Tanabe believed in no particular religion and presented himself as irreligious.\(^4\) From such a standpoint, Tanabe’s claims about religion could only be expected to serve as fuel to the fire of his critics.

1. THZ 9: 335.
2. To take a few examples, Kōsaka Masaaki (1965, 336–58) has presented the characteristic features of “metanoetics” in some detail; James Heisig (2001, 151–79) introduced an overall sketch of Tanabe’s philosophy of religion to the English-speaking world; Hase Shōtō has grappled with the meaning of absolute nothingness qua the object of faith, i.e., the concept of nothingness-qua-love (see Unno and Heisig 2020, 89–116); John Maraldo (ibid., 235–55) discusses “metanoetics,” particularly the aspects of absolute critique and reason in the context of Western philosophy; recently, Morisato Takeshi (2019, 137–80) has indicated the reliance of “metanoetics” on elements of Japanese thought in his presentation of its philosophical characteristics. Still, no attempt has been made to discuss the relationship between faith and knowledge in “metanoetics” or to relate this to the thought of Nishida. In this regard, I believe this paper can make a novel contribution to the discussion.
3. NKZ 19: 368.
4. Tanabe says “I must say that I am, in a sense, an irreligious man, that is, one who has no faith to confess” (THZ 11: 444).
That being said, it is not as though Tanabe only began problematizing religion and faith in 1944. On the contrary, since Tanabe embarked from the same religiously-oriented standpoint as Nishida, he remained ever conscious of religion throughout the development of his thought. It would follow that religion and faith have a determinate position in the space of Tanabe’s inquiry. Still, though departing from the same standpoint, the orientation of his inquiry diverges from Nishida and the distance that emerged between the two is captured by Nishida’s above-mentioned rebuke.

The aim of this paper is to clarify how Tanabe brought together knowledge and faith in “metanoetics” (zangedō 懺悔道) and to thereby attempt to understand the nature of his philosophy of religion. As we proceed, I would like to keep Nishida’s criticism in mind. To this day, no other criticism has had a greater influence on the scholarly interpretation of Tanabe’s philosophy. But what, precisely, motivated Nishida’s assessment? And to what extend is it valid? Does it hold true, both before and after the turn of 1944, that there is no salvation in Tanabe’s philosophy? Considering these questions will allow us to clarify the character of metanoetics in a new perspective. Specifically, we shall strive to elucidate the conception of faith purported to lie at the foundation of Tanabe’s thinking in relation to knowledge both before and after 1944. We may, thus, come to better understand the validity and merits of Nishida’s criticism.

Tanabe’s definitions of the philosophy of religion

Tanabe twice tried to define the philosophy of religion. The first attempt is found in the 1933 Outline of Philosophy (『哲学通論』), the second

5. It is doubtful that the English word “religion” corresponds precisely to the Japanese word shūkyō 宗教. Keta indicates two types of meanings of the term in modern Japan:

On the one hand, [the word] has a generic meaning which includes various specific religions; on the other hand, it grasps religion in its universality, without considering the peculiarities and differences of each religion—i.e., religion as a general concept. (Keta 2018, 1)

Tanabe adapts the latter in his own way. In his philosophy, the concept of shūkyō means that which realizes the unification of the relative and the absolute. Moreover, what he refers to by the term shūkyō are only Shin and Zen Buddhism and Christianity, where he finds a common structure of salvation (THZ 11: 125–7).

6. As we will see later, Tanabe took Nishida’s 1911 An Inquiry into the Good as his point of departure, a work which attempts to explain everything in terms of pure experience as reality.
in *The Fundamental Problems of Philosophy* ([哲学の根本問題]) of 1949. The first attempt emerged just after establishing his own position as one of “absolute dialectics” in the 1932 publication, *Hegelian Philosophy and Dialectic* ([ヘーゲル哲学と弁証法]), and just before he entered the period characterized by his “logic of species” ([種の論理], 1934–1941). The second attempt is found in the period of metanoetics (1944–1953), during which Tanabe saw religion as the basis of his philosophical project. Given that each attempt is unique, it would serve us well to examine them in turn.

**First definition (1933)**

As Fig. 1 suggests, in 1933 Tanabe took the philosophy of religion to be no more than a branch of philosophy.⁷ According to *An Outline of Philosophy*, the philosophy of religion is “what presupposes, through contemplative intuition or faith, immediate unity, which is beyond dialectics and is established in virtue of transcending, without the mediation of historical actuality, the link to what is historically relative,”⁸ where this contemplation is “supersensible and spiritual” ([超感性的霊的]).⁹ That is to say, the philosophy of religion of 1933 is a philosophy that surpasses all relation to our lived historical actuality, one established in a mystical intuition or faith indifferent to dialectics. This definition overlaps with the criticism Tanabe aimed at Nishida following his essay of 1930, “Requesting the Guidance of Professor Nishida” ([西田先生の教を仰ぐ]).¹⁰ Tanabe criticizes Nishida’s philoso-

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7. The English translations for the terms in Figure 1 are as follows: 哲学 (philosophy), 宗教哲学 (philosophy of religion), 芸術哲学 (philosophy of art), 実践哲学 (practical philosophy), 理論哲学 (theoretical philosophy), 美学 (aesthetics), 教育哲学 (philosophy of education), 倫理学 (ethics), 歴史哲学 (philosophy of history), 法律哲学 (philosophy of law), 認識論 (epistemology), 論理学 (logic), 形而上学 (metaphysics), 存在論 (ontology), 価値論 (axiology), and 哲学史 (history of philosophy). As the allotted place here is limited, we, unfortunately, cannot linger over the whole figure, and will focus instead on the different placements of the philosophy of religion between Figures 1 and 2.


9. Ibid. In this passage, Tanabe puts the philosophy of religion and the philosophy of art (aesthetics) in the same category, where we have the “standpoint of aesthetics” when contemplation is “sensible” [感性的].

10. In fact, Tanabe describes Nishida’s standpoint as “religious philosophy” (*THZ* 4: 315; 6: 224). During the period of his logic of species, religious philosophy (宗教的哲学) and the philosophy of religion (宗教哲学) are the same. Both are criticisms of Nishida. However, after 1944, the definition of philosophy of religion takes on a different meaning for Tanabe, as we shall see.
phy as being based on religious experience (the place of absolute nothingness). This is because it interferes with the essential task of philosophy, that is, to speculate radically without presuppositions, and by so doing, philosophy becomes impossible without religious experience. Thus, as Tanabe’s critique of Nishida indicates, what “makes philosophy an imperfect imitation of religion” is a philosophy of religion that “makes philosophy religious.”

Of course, this should not lead us to think that there is some two-part classificatory scheme of religious and non-religious philosophy, Nishida belonging to the former, Tanabe himself to the latter. Tanabe’s definition of philosophy is polished in *Hegelian Philosophy and Dialectic* (1932). In this framework, the stage of absolute knowledge in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is taken to be “the standpoint of philosophy,” which is, in turn, regarded as the synthesis of morality and religion. In other words, when Hegel grasps absolute knowledge as the unification of conscience and revealed religion, which “wraps up this series of shapes of spirit,” Tanabe interpreted this as expressing the relation between morality, religion, and philosophy. It follows that, as early as 1933, Tanabe already took religion to be a necessary moment of philosophy.

Now, if both involve religion as a moment, what is the difference between the philosophy of religion and philosophy? According to Tanabe, philoso-

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12. Ibid. (translation modified).
14. For Tanabe, “absolute knowledge” (for him, knowledge of philosophy) means “self-witness and self-awareness (自証自覚) of the realization of the absolute in praxis” (*THZ* 5: 19). This definition does not change until his later years.
phy relies on historical actuality, whereas the philosophy of religion relies on mystical intuition and faith. Thus, he claims that “while the philosophy of religion resides within philosophy, it has something that transcends philosophy.”\(^{16}\) In other words, the philosophy of religion regards such intuition and faith as absolute and tends to disregard how actuality is now, and thus Tanabe criticizes it not only because it “makes philosophy religious,”\(^{17}\) but because “the primary motivation of this philosophy is the religious demand, which seeks peace of mind to escape from actuality.”\(^{18}\) That is to say, according to Tanabe, the religious moment of philosophy is necessary for us to act in a manner rooted in historical actuality. For this reason, Tanabe can also claim that, not only philosophy, but morality, too, “is impossible without religious faith.”\(^{19}\)

Nevertheless, even as religious faith, this must differ, Tanabe thinks, from the faith of any historical religion\(^ {20}\) because the latter is “what philosophy cannot treat.”\(^ {21}\) Tanabe’s “philosophy” thus emerges from quite an odd standpoint, one which includes faith that is in some sense religious, but not a kind of faith arising from any determinate religion.

**Second definition (1949)**

In 1949, the philosophy of religion is newly defined as what considers “the relationship between the universal and the particular, between the absolute and the relative, as applicable to any religion from the standpoint of philosophy in general.”\(^ {22}\) That is, the philosophy of religion is defined generally as that which considers the relationship between the absolute and the relative, conceived broadly enough to be communicable across all religions,
and so defined, not from within any particular religion, but from the universal standpoint of philosophy external to religion. Furthermore, as Fig. 2 indicates, the philosophy of religion is now at the apex of philosophy, as its “final and highest branch.” Tanabe states his reasoning as follows:

So long as philosophy demands absolute knowledge, it must ultimately and inevitably extend its teaching to the relationship between the absolute and the particular. Yet because the relationship between the absolute and the particular originally comprises the content of religion, this means that inevitably contact between philosophy and religion becomes necessary.

Tanabe states that the relationship between the absolute and the particular is the content of religion. Therefore, if philosophy, as the endeavor of what is relative, demands absolute knowledge—“the wisdom of knowing the absolute”—then there is no possibility of attaining this knowledge without taking a step into the realm of religion. At their point of contact, philosophy and religion cross swords, as it were, with the result being what Tanabe calls “the philosophy of religion as the philosophical self-awareness (自覚) of religion.”

Still, why is it that philosophy must be brought into confrontation with religion in order to obtain absolute knowledge? Tanabe defines philosophy as “the path winding from relative to relative and, finally, to the

23. In Figure 2, the Japanese term 政治哲学 means “political philosophy.” For the rest, see the translations for Figure 1 in note 7.
24. Ibid., 430.
25. Ibid., 429 (emphasis added).
27. THZ 11: 430.
absolute.”28 That being said, he also claims, “No matter how our relative studies proceed from their relative standpoint, there is no arriving at what is absolute.”29 Philosophy is an endeavor wherein the relative advances relative knowledge, such that reaching the realm of the absolute becomes impossible by means of such an advance alone. Therefore, being sustained by religion as “the path where the absolute reveals itself to the relative,”30 philosophy then becomes capable of reaching absolute knowledge. For this reason, Tanabe states that “the philosophy of religion is impossible without being touched by the absolute from beyond (向こうから).”31 On the basis of what we have discussed thus far, we could say that Tanabe’s philosophy of religion as of 1949 is a philosophical comportment concerned with the relationship between the relative and the absolute, one made possible by the absolute dwelling within the relative. It is not the case, then, that we ourselves arrive at absolute knowledge, but rather that absolute knowledge becomes a real possibility only through the arrival of the absolute. In fact, in Philosophy as Metanoetics (1946), Tanabe describes his turn away from the logic of species in terms of a change from a “philosophy of self-power” to a “philosophy of Other-power.”32

To summarize Tanabe’s changing attitude toward the philosophy of religion from 1933 to 1949, we could say something like the following: where the former attitude considers a philosophy built on an intuition of, or faith toward, the absolute to be imperfect, the latter takes this to be the very means by which philosophy is possible. Stated otherwise, what the former takes to be an excess for philosophy, the latter takes to be a necessary moment for philosophy’s completion.

28. Ibid.
29. THZ 11: 431.
30. Ibid., 430.
31. Ibid., 431.
32. PM, 384, 391; THZ 9: 236. Since Tanabe never became the follower of any particular religion, “Other-power” here is not the power of the absolute of any religion, but that of absolute nothingness. After 1944, he added to this concept the capacity of salvation and came to call it “nothingness-sive-love,” where it took on the meaning of something like the absolute of religion (I will deal with the specifics of this concept in the next section). Thus, this transition from self-power to Other-power means a shift from doing philosophy “by only our reason” to doing philosophy “with nothingness-sive-love.”
Faith and knowledge in tanabe

In this section, I would like to clarify the relationship between faith and knowledge, beginning with a characterization of faith. As Tanabe writes in 1949, for the philosophy of religion “there is no other method than, with the faith of each individual as our starting point, progressing to self-awareness and engaging in philosophical inquiry.”

The logic of species and its precursors: Faith as a “postulate”

Before continuing, we need to make an important linguistic note. Like the German Glaube, the Japanese shin 信 can mean both faith (shinkō 信仰) and belief (shinnen 信念). As I hope to show, Tanabe considers it of utmost importance to take up this concept according to both of its inflections. With that stated, shin first arrives on the stage of Tanabe’s thought in his 1917 essay “On Moral Freedom Revisited” (「再び道德的自由について」, hereafter, MFR) in the form of shinnen, namely, the “belief (shinnen) in the rationality of reality.” While Tanabe’s speculations on shin were based on the thought of the early Nishida, their developments were decisively Kantian. Following the 1924 Kant’s Theory of Teleology (「カントの目的論」), he would express his thoughts on shin in terms of Vernunftglaube or “rational faith” (理性信仰) and, in his logic of species, in terms of “faith (shinkō) in an absolute good.” This phraseology, however, gives expression to a single concept of shin: “believing (信ずる) in absolute rationality” or “faith in absolute rationality.” Therefore, in this section I will try to clarify his early discussion of shin—which develops into his account of the logic of species—by taking the “belief in the rationality of reality” as a concept prototypical of Tanabe’s thought. To that end, we will need to examine Tanabe’s relation to Nishida’s theory of pure experience.

In Tanabe’s maiden work, the 1910 “On Thetic Judgement” (「措定判断について」, hereafter TJ), he defines reality as “pure and unified experience,
which transcends discrimination between self and other.”39 Here, we see an overlap with Nishida’s standpoint in An Inquiry into the Good (1911, hereafter IG), which seeks to “explain all things on the basis of pure experience as the sole reality.”40 This signals to us that both Nishida and Tanabe developed their thought from the same starting point, namely, pure experience. We have further evidence of this intellectual intimacy in a letter from Nishida to Tanabe dated April 2, 1914. There, Nishida notably writes of “our direct experience.”41 Tanabe continued to develop his thinking in close proximity to Nishida, who would progress from pure experience, through “absolute free will,” and then on to his theory of “place” (basho 場所).

In IG, pure experience is the principle that realizes the good as reality. It is well known that here the good has two aspects, the moral and the religious. While the former is taken up in part three of IG, the latter is dealt with in part four. These concepts, however, should not be regarded as separate elements, but rather express degrees of depth, where the good is ultimately the “true good”42 when we “know the true self and fuse with God.”43 Now, attending to Nishida’s gloss of this concept of the good in terms of the Zen concept of kenshō 見性—an articulation of enlightenment, which means something like “seeing one’s true nature”—refers undoubtedly to what Nishida regards as the ultimate realization of the good, a notion that relies on the fundamental Zen task of “clarifying the matter of the self” (己事究明). Thus, when Nishida says, “in this, both religion and morality reach their consummation,”44 he presupposes that the idea of the good is realized in stages corresponding to the degree in which the true self is known in pure experience. As Kōsaka Masaaki has pointed out, this is possible because of the sheer variety and possible depth of pure experience, which extends “from the state like that in the consciousness of a small child who immedi-

39. THZ 1: 10.
40. NISHIDA 1990, xxx; NKZ 1: 4.
41. NKZ 19: 510 (emphasis added). Here “direct experience” is a gloss of “pure experience”; cf. NISHIDA 1990, 3; NKZ 1: 9.
42. NISHIDA 1990, 145; NKZ 1: 167.
43. Ibid.
44. Ibid., translation modified.
ately feels the heat of fire, sees the red of something red, to the inspiration of artists and, finally, that of religious figures."45

The simplicity of this moral theory has been the target of much criticism,46 but for our purposes, we need only confirm the following three points: (1) along with the absolute in pure experience goes the realization of not only religious value but also of moral value; (2) pure experience is stratified and involves stages; and finally, (3) these stages involve the "spontaneous self-development [自発自展] of pure experience,"47 which means that each successive stage emerges from the evolution of pure experience itself. Thus, through its "involutional" (内展的) evolvement (発展) as reality, pure experience realizes an even "greater unity."48 As Nishida says in *Intuition and Reflection in Self-Awareness* (1917),49 reality comprises "a system of spontaneous, self-developing (自発自展的) experience."50

Tanabe penned two essays dealing with the stage of moral value in pure experience: "On Moral Freedom" (1917, 「道徳的自由」, hereafter, MF), where he first turns to the issue of religion, and MFR, which he presented the following month. In both essays, Tanabe takes up the theory of freedom in Kant's first two *Critiques* and, with an eye to Neo-Kantianism, describes a viewpoint that brings together Nishida and Kant.51

In MF, he expresses the view that "religion is the culmination of morality,"52 that "religion is achieved through morality."53 We can find this view to be based on Tanabe's reading of how religion and morality are connected in the *Critique of Practical Reason*. Tanabe himself would later (ca. 1949) mention that, in the second *Critique*, religion signifies "the demand

46. To take one example, Keta Masako has indicated the "weakness of the standpoint of pure experience with regard to the problem of evil or social issues." (Keta 2011, 97)
47. nkz 1: 207.
48. Nishida 1990, 75; cf. also NKZ 1: 90, 95, 172.
49. Translated as *Intuition and Reflection in Self-Consciousness*.
50. Nishida 2020, 64 (translation modified); NKZ 2: 127.
51. As both titles indicate, the problem of morality was, for Tanabe at the time, tied to the problem of freedom. Since I have treated freedom with respect to its relation to absolute nothingness elsewhere, I will not enter into that discussion here. For details, see Urai 2020.
52. THZ 1: 128.
53. Ibid.
for the perfection of morality,” implying that what he took from this is that we arrive at religion through morality. Yet what he sees as facilitating the transition from the sensible self to the intelligible self is what Nishida refers to as pure experience. Tanabe observes the necessary moment for this transition as overlapping with the content of Nishida’s IG, namely, a “unification with God.” Hence, for the early Tanabe, the moral subject arises by uniting with reality qua God through pure experience, and the complete realization of this unity is religion.

In MFR, Tanabe expresses the view that “infinite and absolute reality only effects its internal evolvement through the finite and relative us” and that, through this process, reality itself “gradually realizes the ideal.” Integral to this process is the belief that reality, as it dwells within the self, realizes moral value through pure experience—or, as Tanabe puts it, “belief (shinnen) in the rationality of reality.” So, I believe that we can define Tanabe’s concept of shin as follows: (1) with respect to its form, shin is belief oriented toward reality; (2) with respect to its content, it is the belief that the development of reality itself realizes moral value in us. Tanabe would later (1924–1926) conceptualize this notion of “reality in us” as “infinitesimal actuality” or “infinitesimal rationality.”

It demands no stretch of the imagination to see how such ideas could be drawn from IG. By connecting the stages of pure experience to the degrees of moral good, adding to this the idea that spontaneous and self-developing pure experience ultimately realizes the ideal through us, and then taking the completion of this realization to be religion, what we have amounts to an interpretation of IG through the lens of Tanabe. Nevertheless, Nishida himself would disagree with this interpretation. As one of his letters (dated May 10, 1926) to Tanabe reveals, the two fiercely debated the relationship between religion and morality:

54. THZ 11: 22.
55. THZ 1: 126.
56. Ibid., 139 (emphasis added).
57. Ibid.
58. Ibid., 136.
59. THZ 3: 66.
60. THZ 4: 94.
That religion is a necessary condition for the realization of other values, that without faith (shin) the real good would be impossible, on these points I am in complete agreement. I do not deny them. In particular, I find moral values to be of special relevance. Still, I cannot agree with placing [religion] above moral value, as does Kant. Religion can transcend morality. If we are to call this a höhere Moralität [higher morality], I concede the point; however, this is not a quantitative limit, but a qualitative transformation.61

Nishida and Tanabe do, however, agree on the point that religion is necessary for the realization of moral value or the good; where they part ways is on whether religion is a quantitative limit of moral value. We perhaps find this idea of “quantitative limit” (極限) in the previously cited definition of religion as the “culmination (極致) of morality.”62 For Nishida, this amounts to confining religion to the sphere of morality, even if Tanabe qualifies religion as “higher.”

I think that we can see them as parting ways as early as T1, thereby characterizing their disagreement in terms of how they understood “the I who knows reality.” In that essay, Tanabe describes thetic judgment as the moment when discriminatory dualism emerges from the non-differentiation of subject and object (主客未分). Thetic judgment is the first judgment, whereby I come to know that which first appeared in pure experience. On the other hand, after T6 Nishida progressed in the direction of eliminating the “the I who knows,” as captured by his famous expression, “seeing without a seer.” Therefore, as Nishida’s interest turned toward “self-awareness in the nothingness of the self,” we could say Tanabe remained steadfast to the knowledge of the self.

We find this position reflected in Tanabe’s thoughts on the relationship between morality and religion. To the extent that the “I” contains within itself reality as “infinitesimal rationality,”63 the “I” pertains to the corresponding “stage of infinite rationality.”64 The higher the “I” rises in the stages of reality’s “tireless development,”65 the higher are the moral values

61. NKZ 19: 589.
62. THZ 1: 128.
63. THZ 4: 94.
64. Ibid., 88.
65. THZ 1: 139.
of the “I.” At the limit, we reach religion as the “perfection of morality.” 66 Thus, Tanabe calls belief in this perfection “rational faith.” This view contrasts with Nishida, who, in the 1928 essay “The Intelligible World” (「叡智的世界」), described the “the place of absolute nothingness” as “religious consciousness.” 67 The difference between the two can be characterized just as Nishida stated: it is the difference between the “quantitative limit” and a “qualitative transformation.”

Now, after proposing his absolute dialectics, Tanabe would target for criticism any unification with the absolute in experience, thus altering his definition of religion thenceforth. Nevertheless, there is reason to believe that his position regarding the relation between the absolute and faith never changed. Even from his dialectical standpoint, Tanabe says that the absolute is responsible for “infinitesimal manifestation” 68 in sublation. For Tanabe, this means that the “I” is sublated by the absolute to a higher stage of knowledge. In this context, shin expresses the belief that the “I” makes the self and society more rational through the attainment of higher levels of knowledge in the infinite process of sublation. Therefore, “rational faith” (shinkō) and “faith (shinkō) in absolute good” are of a character consistent with “belief (shinnen) in the rationality of reality.” They point to shin (faith or belief) oriented toward the idea that “the irrational is overcome and the rational satisfies actuality.” 69 Thus, we can say that, leading into his logic of species, faith is characterized as the belief that the irrational submits to the rational.

Still, even with this consistency, it is not as though the concept of shin underwent no change in conception at all. As Tanabe developed his ideas on the object of shin—namely, the absolute—the content of shin was enriched. 70 Since the days of his early writings, the notions of reality, as the object of faith, and God are spoken of in the same breath, 71 but in Kant’s Theory of Teleology God is defined as the organizer “who presides over all

66. Ibid., 128; THZ 3: 69.
67. NKZ 5: 177.
68. THZ 3: 228. Later, Tanabe would express “infinitesimal” as “differential” or in terms of “Dedekind cuts.”
69. THZ 4: 94.
70. For further details, see URAI 2020.
71. THZ 1: 126.
being and guarantees that nature accommodates moral reality.” In other words, in 1924 Tanabe’s thought was based on the moral teleology of Kant’s *Critique of Judgement*, whereby God was assigned the position of enabling that standpoint. While Tanabe here refers to God as the “teleological universal,” this is precisely the expression he would later use to describe absolute nothingness in 1931. For Tanabe, absolute nothingness is the principle that enables mediation and sublation in dialectics. This principle, far from being blind, guides historical actuality in a rational direction. We could, therefore, say that absolute nothingness is the principle that transforms the irrationality of historical actuality into rationality. Tanabe’s standpoint in the logic of species is characterized by his account of “absolute rationalism.”

The content of shin, faith, or belief is the rationalization of self and society to the extent that they are irrational, an activity that is accomplished through the actions of the self by means of the “infinitesimal actuality” or “infinitesimal rationality” already realized within the self. The object of shin is reality or absolute nothingness, where even when referred to as “God,” they represent the absolute of no particular religion, but rather serve as something like the fountainhead of rationality itself. It is for this reason that we can say that Tanabe’s “religious faith” differs from the faith of any historical religion.

Until now, we have examined the nature of faith, albeit removed from its relation to knowledge. If, as Tanabe says, faith is “faith within knowledge,” by bringing it back into relation with knowledge we should be able to achieve a more comprehensive picture of how he construes this relationship during the logic of species period of his philosophy.

72. THZ 3: 67.
73. Ibid., 361; THZ 4: 404.
74. Tanabe’s dialectics is characterized by his own interpretation of mediation, that is, absolute mediation. It means that all things are mediated, and nothing remains in a state of immediacy. In other words, he thinks that everything is mediated with other things and that all things are always in the process of change. In this process, all things oppose and affect each other.
75. THZ 3: 66.
76. THZ 4: 94.
77. THZ 3: 28.
The logic of species and its precursors: On faith and knowledge

In his Hegelian Philosophy and Dialectic, Tanabe takes over the concept of “absolute knowledge” as his own, defining it as the “self-awareness of praxis” (実践の自覚).\footnote{Ibid., 81.} Given that some years later in the 1937 essay “Clarifying the Meaning of the Logic of Species” (「種の論理の意味を明にす」), Tanabe would also claim that philosophy “must begin and end with the self-awareness of the standpoint of historical praxis concerned with forming what is actual,”\footnote{THZ 6: 521.} it would seem that philosophical knowledge is always for the purpose of changing reality as it appears before us.

That being said, what makes “absolute knowledge” absolute? For Tanabe, a moment in the sublation of absolute dialectic is the moral praxis of an individual and it is through this praxis that the absolute performs its “infinitesimal manifestation.”\footnote{THZ 3: 228.} This praxis is responsible for, Tanabe says, making historical actuality “develop so as to seem purposive.”\footnote{Ibid., 227.} This is the standpoint proposed by Tanabe in Hegelian Philosophy and Dialectic, a standpoint that “emphasizes teleological, moral praxis with respect to the invisible whole [namely, absolute nothingness] that governs history.”\footnote{Ibid., 82.} In other words, at the moment of moral praxis, we serve as the site where the absolute manifests its activity. It is only through such praxis that the irrational can be transformed into the rational. Now, what makes this absolute knowledge is that, in moral praxis we recognize the absolute’s immanence within ourselves: it is known, or in other words, it is for itself (für sich). For this reason, Tanabe emphasizes not only praxis, but also the “self-awareness of praxis.”\footnote{Ibid., 81, emphasis added.}

As we saw in the previous section, absolute knowledge qua philosophy is the unity of moral praxis and religious faith. Therefore, faith comprises a constitutive moment of absolute knowledge as the “faith (shin) within knowledge.”\footnote{Ibid., 28, emphasis added.} Faith, as what underpins not only moral praxis, but even phi-
losophy itself, is faith in the rational development of history through the absolute. Therefore, as Tanabe puts it, “neither morality, as the absolute’s realization in life, nor philosophy, as its logical self-awareness, are possible without religious faith (shin).”

At this point in Tanabe’s thought, shin denotes a kind of faith wherein the absolute guides history in a rational direction. Otherwise expressed, it is “faith (shin) in the absoluteness of good as dialectical unity,” a “faith (shin) promised to be fulfilled through the mediation of one’s actions.” In the context of the logic of species, he designates this as “faith (shinkō) in absolute good.” It follows that, in the logic of species, shin (信) means believing (shinzuru 信ずる) that the self attains absolute knowledge and that, through moral praxis grounded in this knowledge, actual society progresses toward the ideal society. If we take this to be a necessary moment of philosophy, then faith is a “postulate” orienting the philosophical agent’s moral praxis.

In this sense, we can characterize Tanabe’s concept of faith in this period as a postulate of reason whereby reality or absolute nothingness actualizes the good. Indeed, Tanabe himself describes Kant’s postulates as “faith (shin) projected onto knowledge.” Faith then appears to be something like a shadow cast on the plane of knowledge and not at all something with its own, independent domain. It would follow that “rational faith” (shinkō) or “faith (shinkō) in absolute good” are of a different quality than what is generally taken as religious faith and, in fact, seem closer to belief or shinnen (信念). In that respect, Nishida’s criticism of Tanabe in December of 1944 hits home: “[Tanabe] has not left the Kantian standpoint.” So, how then does shin as a “belief” or “postulate” emerge as a necessary condition of philosophy in the philosophy of metanoetics?

Because philosophy is taken to be the unity of morality and religion, the agent whose moral praxis is supported by rational faith is the philosophical agent. Following his argument concerning the “logic of social being” (「社会存在の論理」, 1934–1935), a constitutive moment of the philosophi-
cal agent is what is called “the turn (転回) of life-sive-death” or “the transformation (転換) of life-sive-death.” For Tanabe, when Kantian theoretical reason falls into an antinomy, this moment emerges as reason’s sublation to practical reason. The philosophical agent is none other than this transformed practical reason.

In the logic of species, the philosophical agent is put to a task commensurate with its “faith in absolute good”: changing irrational, actual society into a rational society. In other words, the ideal of the logic of species is the thorough rationalization of the state and society by way of the intelligible self. Precisely for this reason, the philosophical agent must transform mere theoretical reason into practical reason and absolute knowledge must be the self-awareness of praxis.

Nevertheless, as Tanabe’s own words in the preface to Philosophy as Metanoetics indicate, as the ultimate failure of the logic of species, when absolute knowledge as the self-awareness of praxis is pushed to its limits, the result is “absolute disruption.” “It is both a matter of destiny and ultimate truth,” Tanabe writes, “that in the pursuit of full autonomy, reason must finally break down.” At the breakdown of reason, our maxims fall into antinomy, or to use the inverted formula of Kierkegaard that Tanabe was so fond of using, we reach a point of “neither/nor.” Practical reason finds nothing “right” to determine its maxim. In such “absolute disruption,” practical reason finds itself incapable of advancing by means of self-power (自力). Indeed, when both theoretical and practical reason become profoundly self-aware of their own powerlessness, we have what Tanabe calls “repentance” (zange 懺悔; metanoia, μετάνοια). This, in turn, indicates knowledge of the powerlessness of reason as a whole.

According to Tanabe, however, this absolute disruption is brought back into unity by absolute nothingness. The philosophical agent is transformed. She transitions from being the subject whose actions unify absolute nothingness in the historical world to being the object with absolutely disrupted maxims having been unified. In the powerlessness of her authority, the agent of dialectical unity becomes the patient of unification. For Tanabe,

90. THZ 6: 207–8.
91. THZ 7: 175.
92. PM, 118; THZ 9: 48.
this implied the transformation of his “philosophy of self-power”\textsuperscript{93} into a “philosophy of Other-power (他力).”\textsuperscript{94} The absolute disruption of absolute knowledge, the powerlessness of reason \textit{is saved by} absolute nothingness. Thus, Tanabe grasps the transformation of absolute nothingness itself as the moment when the Great Compassion of Buddha or the Love of God become operative in life. Following the moment of this transformation, absolute nothingness is called nothingness-sive-love (無即愛).

This \textit{salvation} is not a transformation of life-sive-death as a transition from theoretical to practical reason, as it was in the logic of species, but rather “a transrational resurrection of reason.”\textsuperscript{95} Here, practical reason passes through a transrational transformation and is turned from morality to religion. As we saw, very early in his thought Tanabe called religion the “culmination of morality,”\textsuperscript{96} yet this view would only be fully realized, so to speak, in the transformation from the logic of species to metanoetics. It goes without saying that this transformation is not achieved by the self, but only through the arrival of the absolute. We could say that Tanabe found fresh ground for his philosophy within his discovery of the crisis of knowledge. As the site of reconstruction, this fresh ground represented the “knowledge of ignorance”\textsuperscript{97}—that is to say, the point of departure for all philosophy. It is here that Tanabe’s philosophy of religion, as “the concrete mode of philosophy,”\textsuperscript{98} begins anew.

\textit{“Faith mediated by reason” in metanoetics}

To clarify the nature of faith in metanoetics, I will begin by examining its relation to philosophy, for according to metanoetics faith in some sense renews the possibility of philosophy. Built from the ashes of the logic of species, metanoetics “has arisen,” Tanabe writes, “from the vestiges of a philosophy I had cast away in despair [yet, still] it maintains the purpose of functioning as a reflection on what is ultimate or as a radical self-aware-
ness [i.e., absolute knowledge], which are the goals proper to philosophy.” Abandoning the philosophy of self-power, Tanabe believes that philosophy cannot be repeated in the same fashion and so takes metanoetics as possible only as a philosophy of Other-power, as possible only through the arrival of the absolute. “When all philosophical standpoints and methods are laid to waste as powerless,” metanoetics arises as a philosophy “rehabilitated from their ruins.”

In repentance, the arrival of the absolute (salvation) manifests as the “fact of faith (shinkō)” within the “I’s” self-awareness. Tanabe’s concept of faith in metanoetics is characterized by precisely this self-awareness, which, at the same time, serves as Tanabe’s new starting point. Metanoetics is a philosophy of religion that departs from the “undeniable fact that within me there is, however small, that which can be called by no other name than faith (shinkō).” For Tanabe, faith is the only possible starting point for the philosophy of religion. Specifically, it must always “embark from the faith of the individual” before “progressing to self-awareness and philosophical inquiry.” In the Philosophy of Metanoetics, Tanabe re-defines faith by recasting the Kantian model of rational faith:

Faith (shinkō) is the absolute negation of reason; only in surpassing rational thinking do we have faith. Hence, “rational faith” does not mean that faith belongs to reason, but it must imply faith mediated by reason.

In the previous section, we saw that when practical reason is confronted by an antinomy, it proceeds toward “the transrational resurrection of reason.” Tanabe believes that reason and faith come in contact at this point of transformation. Although the realm of faith is secured, though not within the realm of reason, but beyond it, faith must nonetheless be mediated by reason. Tanabe locates the emergence of faith in the crisis of reason.

99. PM, 55; THZ 9: 37.
100. PM, 55 (translation modified); THZ 9: 43.
102. THZ 11: 445.
103. Ibid., 440.
104. PM, 133 (translation modified); THZ 9: 57–8.
105. PM, 106; THZ 9: 39.
Faith according to metanoetics then implies the self-awareness of something beyond yet linked to reason.

Tanabe attributes two characteristics to faith: privacy and incompleteness. What he means by privacy is defined as follows:

One’s faith (shinkō) involves a secret accessible to no one else. Everyone has something hidden away. The same goes for the relationship between the absolute and the self. As what is called “the hidden God,” the absolute cannot be known completely by our relative selves; it does not fully appear to us, but always withholds what is hidden. This withholding is with respect to the individual relative and so must be different for each.

Faith is different for everyone and we cannot know the faith of another. For Tanabe, this implies that we as individuals each perceive a different aspect of the absolute. For this reason, Tanabe says that repentance is “like a gate through which horses and vehicles can pass privately, even though officially it does not allow even a needle to pass.” As for the incompleteness of faith, he explains it as follows:

We could probably say that one who takes his faith to be sufficient or perfected, one who takes himself to be saved, is, to the contrary, one who faces damnation.

Tanabe’s view in this period is that faith is never complete, but only enhanced through repeated repentance. Interestingly, Tanabe expresses his view on shin by quoting Mark 9:24: “I do believe (信じます); help me overcome my unbelief (mushin 無信).” Here we see the tension between faith (shin) and unbelief (mushin) characteristic of faith’s instability. Faith remains true only through continuous renewal.

However, here it is important to distinguish the concept of faith (shinkō) from the earlier conception of belief (shinnen) as a postulate. In the logic of
species and its precursors, *shin* was in some sense a kind of faith in the absolute, but only as a shadow cast in the realm of knowledge, only as postulated by an agent. For this reason, I claimed that it is better to call this a notion of belief as it refers to *shinnen* rather than faith in reference to *shinkō*. Where belief is a postulate underpinning philosophy and its concrete actuality in moral praxis, there arises no tension between faith (*shin*) and unbelief (*mushin*). However, in the context of metanoetics, faith is the self-awareness of salvation that occurs when *we are directly touched* by the absolute in repentance. Only then do we recognize the absolute, not the shadow. Furthermore, because this self-awareness is private, there is no uniform manner of expressing it. Faith cannot be captured in a communicable definition on the order of “belief in the rationality of reality.”

It would then appear that it was not until the period of metanoetics that Tanabe could express faith as distinct from merely subjective belief. Hereafter, I will, therefore, distinguish between *shin* leading up to the logic of species as belief corresponding to *shinnen*, and *shin* as outlined by metanoetics as faith represented by *shinkō*.

**Faith and knowledge in metanoetics**

To determine how faith is connected to knowledge in metanoetics, I would like to take the concept of absolute knowledge as our guiding thread. In *Philosophy as Metanoetics*, the attainment of absolute knowledge is described as follows:

> The claim of reason amounts to no more than an ideal that can never be fulfilled completely so long as we maintain the standpoint of self-power. Even if it were somehow possible for this claim to be fulfilled, if we were to acquire knowledge of the absolute and put it into practice, this could not be attributed to an “ascent” of self-power, but only to a “descent” of Other-power transforming the relative into the absolute and thereby causing the absolute to be mediated through the relative.\(^{111}\)

Our transformation through the descent of Other-power refers to the “resurrection” we touched on previously. This means that in metanoetics absolute knowledge is the knowledge attained amidst the crisis of reason,

\(^{111}\) PM, 103; THZ 9: 37.
the knowledge attained in our transformation through the arrival of the absolute. Absolute knowledge is our knowledge to the extent that we know the absolute. However, it is not knowledge achieved through self-motivated study or improvement, but knowledge granted by the absolute in the collapse of all such efforts.

None of this should imply that absolute knowledge becomes alienated from practice in metanoetics. Indeed, even in 1949, Tanabe would claim that “the individual’s action and praxis is the ultimate standpoint of philosophical self-awareness.” In relation to the praxis of knowledge, Tanabe introduces three moments derived from Shinran: action (gyō 行), faith (shin 信), and bearing witness (shō 証). In this context, gyō indicates the transformation or resurrection effected by the absolute, shin refers to the moment of faith (shinkō), while shō represents the mediating activity through which we submit to the absolute in gratitude for our salvation in repentance—that is to say, the praxis of absolute knowledge. Drawing these moments together, Tanabe depicts the relationship between faith and knowledge as follows:

From the viewpoint of ōsō (往相), reason-based knowledge is heightened to action-faith by being made to break through itself by means of the antinomies. At the same time, from the viewpoint of gensō (還相), it is brought back again to the knowledge of bearing witness [that is mediated by the absolute].

Ōsō and gensō are concepts from the Pure Land Buddhist tradition, for ōsō refers to the ascent of sentient beings to the Pure Land, while gensō specifies the descent of Bodhisattvas from the Pure Land to this world in order to teach and guide others. Reason-based knowledge, insofar as it is finite, inevitably ends in repentance, thereby requiring transformation into action-faith through the arrival of the absolute. Yet, knowledge undergoes a second transformation back into knowledge. That is what Tanabe means by the “knowledge of bearing witness.” Through the arrival of the absolute, reason-based knowledge is transformed and, when passing through faith, it achieves a second metamorphosis toward a higher level of knowledge, the knowledge of bearing witness. Faith and knowledge are not unified,

112. THZ II: 71.
113. PM, 121 (translation modified); THZ 9: 50.
but through knowledge faith is elevated as it were. Knowledge advances by appropriating the remnants of resurrection.

Tanabe further contends that repentance is never a singular event, but must be ever repeated. From this, we derive Tanabe’s oft-mentioned expression “incessant repentance” (不斷の懺悔). Therefore, the elevation of knowledge in the development of action-faith to bearing witness is also constantly repeated. Whenever the knowledge of praxis (bearing witness) falls into an antinomy, we are raised up and settled back down. The cycle of antinomy and resurrection, action-faith and bearing witness (the knowledge of praxis), continues ad infinitum.

Knowledge in metanoetics cannot be the universal and uniform absolute knowledge of the logic of species. Because faith is private and incomplete, our elevated knowledge is also private and incomplete. As the “wisdom which knows the absolute,”\(^\text{114}\) we can still call it absolute knowledge, but we contact the absolute only privately and incompletely. This may be why Tanabe gradually stopped using the expression absolute knowledge, preferring instead to call it wisdom. Philosophy then becomes a collaboration with the absolute; hence, Tanabe’s odd idiom of philosophy of Other-power or non-philosophical philosophy. When the philosophy of religion is a non-philosophical philosophy, it expresses the character of metanoetics.

To take one last perspective, we should examine this non-philosophical philosophy in terms of a system. Just as soon as Tanabe says “thought is led by faith (shinkō),”\(^\text{115}\) he tries to voice every field of philosophy from the standpoint of his own resurrection. As we can see in Fig. 2 and his lecture series *Introduction to Philosophy* (『哲学入門』) between 1948 and 1951, Tanabe assembled a system of knowledge based on repentance and resurrection.\(^\text{116}\) Thus, Tanabe’s systematic thinking in metanoetics is oriented toward the apex of Figure 2, the philosophy of religion. In contact with the absolute, he progresses downwards, renovating the system from above in gensôtic (還相的) descent.

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114. PM, 412; THZ 9: 246.
115. THZ 11: 449.
116. His philosophy of art was not developed in the *Introduction to Philosophy*, but only in the contemporaneous *Valéry’s Philosophy of Art* (『ヴァレリーの芸術哲学』) and in his last work, the 1961 publication of *Mallarmé Aide-mémoire* (『マルルメ覚書』).
At the same time, however, the system of knowledge is “never brought to eternal completion as a self-identical system, but bears constant negation-sive- affirmation in virtue of its contradictory moments.”117 Through “repentance the self qua agent is permitted to be master of the system even as it perpetrates contradiction.”118 The system of knowledge is then in a process of constant generation, destruction, and renewal. This renewal is achieved as one lives through repentance and resurrection and, whenever faith is renewed in resurrection, the system of knowledge effects its destruction-sive-renewal. Thus, what Tanabe means by the system of knowledge is an ever-expanding process, at once collapsing into antinomy and achieving resurrection.

Tanabe further adds that philosophical self-awareness ultimately involves a point with no other means of expression than the “I believe [shinzuru] it to be thus” spoken in individual confession.119 The object of this “I believe” is the renewed system of knowledge. In this respect, according to metanoetics the system of knowledge is a system of belief. Therefore, when the “I believe it to be thus” (as a system of knowledge/belief) falls into antinomy, it is elevated through the occurrence of action-faith in repentance. Therein lies the relationship between belief (shinnen) and faith (shinkō) and the relationship between faith (shin) and knowledge in metanoetics. As should be clear, this renewal is different in kind to the spontaneous self-development of pure experience. As a system of belief (shinnen) undergoing repentance and resurrection, the renewal is always the renewal of destruction. Such ever repenting, systematic destruction-sive-reconstruction characterizes Tanabe’s later philosophy of religion.

Where Tanabe consistently links knowledge and faith, he may be criticized for misunderstanding the nature of religion as being concerned exclusively with faith. Based on what we have seen, it is possible to imagine Tanabe’s response. Escaping merely subjective belief demands repentance, which, in turn, is only possible through a praxis of testimony firmly based in the tightly bound, albeit never perfected, nexus of faith and knowledge. As Tanabe states in his criticism of Shin Buddhism, “so-called believers lack

117. THZ 7: 288.
118. Ibid.
the very ethical, rational element of metanoesis essential to the mediation of religious salvation.” To speak only of faith, with no praxis for changing historical actuality, commits one to the danger of self-satisfaction, the hallmark of merely subjective belief. With that in mind, we can perhaps say that Tanabe’s philosophy of religion aspired to clear away all religious self-satisfaction or self-sufficiency and always sought a path back to society, a path back to others.

**Conclusion**

On the basis of what we have discovered thus far, I would now like to look back at Nishida’s criticism that “from a standpoint like Tanabe’s, there’s no being saved by faith.” The target of Nishida’s criticism was Tanabe’s standpoint leading up to 1944. Faith for Tanabe in this period corresponds to the belief that we attain knowledge through contact with reality or absolute nothingness and, armed with this knowledge, we make ourselves and society rational. Since, prior to 1944, faith was conceived of as a postulate of reason belonging to the sphere of knowledge having no distinct sphere of its own, I contend that the faith spoken of in this period is better described as subjective belief. Nishida’s criticism here finds its mark.

Nevertheless, the notion faith described in the period of metanoetics arises precisely where such subjective belief collapses. When one becomes self-aware of the fact that reason cannot attain absolute knowledge by means of self-power and recognizes that one can neither know nor do anything “right,” in this moment of repentance, Tanabe states that we are saved by the absolute. Because the faith of metanoetics is self-awareness of the fact of salvation, it is something in which one cannot help but believe. When faith thereby arises, Tanabe continues, our knowledge transforms into the knowledge of bearing witness. Through metanoetics, faith and knowledge are thus not one, but rather separate and cooperative elements that yet serve to elevate one another. This cooperation is not a singular event, but bears constant repetition, or, to employ Tanabe’s expression, it is an “incessant repentance.”

In a sense, Tanabe’s standpoint is just as Nishida says. It is not one where

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120. PM, 91; THZ 9: 29–30.
we are “saved by faith.” Instead we must say that, by being saved through knowing the limits of reason-based knowledge, faith is granted by the absolute—and it is here that we should recognize the necessity of Shinran’s notion of faith in *Philosophy as Metanoetics*. In this sense, metanoetics accords with Tanabe’s early thought that “religion is achieved through morality.” Nevertheless, this involves not only a quantitative limit, as Tanabe had once understood it, but rather a *qualitative* transformation at the quantitative limit. For this reason, we can say that Nishida and Tanabe ultimately took very different paths. Their difference in standpoints was perhaps best expressed by Tanabe himself:

Salvation through the Great Compassion of Other-power is not bestowed on indolent, shameless persons who, frustrated with the impotence of self-power, turn in admiration to the omnipotence of Other-power, forsaking any further ethical effort on their part. Salvation through Other-power is achieved only by those who have used every means at their disposal to seek the truth, who have felt the shame of their own impotence, and finally turned to the practice of metanoesis.121

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