# 39 Suzuki Daisetsu Teitarō: A New Theory of Religion (Shin-shūkyō ron 新宗教論, 1896)

Introduced and translated by Christoph Kleine

#### Introduction

Suzuki Daisetsu Teitarō 鈴木大拙貞太郎 (1870–1966) is arguably one of the most prominent Japanese intellectuals to date. He is considered a great mediator between East and West, and a leading transmitter of Japanese Buddhism – especially Zen Buddhism – to the West. Interestingly, the first of his many works – the Shin-shūkyō ron 新宗教論 (A New Theory of Religion), written at the tender age of 26 – has received relatively little attention. For our topic, however, this book is of paramount interest, as it marks the transition from a praxis of making conceptual distinctions on the basis of traditional, mostly Buddhist categories such as the ōbō buppō paradigm, to one based on categories that reflect a globalising order of knowledge dominated by 'Western' discourses.

Written in 1896 – i.e. shortly after Suzuki received the confirmation of awakening (satori 悟) from his spiritual teacher Zen master Shaku Sō'en 釋宗演 (1860–1919), and shortly before he left for the United States, at the latter's request, to collaborate with Paul Carus (1852–1919) – the Shin-shūkyō ron is one of the first Japanese texts to systematically relate the newly established term 'shūkyō 宗教' for 'religion' to philosophy (tetsugaku 哲學), science (kagaku 科學), morality (dōtoku 道德), education (kyōiku 教育), society (shakai 社會), state (kokkka 國家), and family (katei 家庭).

Obviously, the new discourse on religion or  $sh\bar{u}ky\bar{o}$  in relation to other social spheres — as promoted by Suzuki, Shimaji Mokurai, II Inoue Enryō, III and others — is not simply an elaboration on the theme of the interdependence of the Buddha's nomosphere and the ruler's nomosphere ( $bupp\bar{o}\ \bar{o}b\bar{o}\ s\bar{o}$ 'i 佛法王法相依), which we have dealt with extensively above. Although it would be inappropriate to reduce the  $\bar{o}b\bar{o}\ bupp\bar{o}$  paradigm to an attempt to define the relationship between religion and the state

I Michael Pye, "Suzuki Daisetsu (1870–1966): Zen für den Westen," in *Kulturvermittler zwischen Japan und Deutschland: Biographische Skizzen aus vier Jahrhunderten*, ed. Japanisches Kulturinstitut Köln (Frankfurt a. M.: Campus, 1990).

II See Hans Martin Krämer, Shimaji Mokurai and the Reconception of Religion and the Secular in Modern Japan (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaiʻi Press, 2015).

III See Jason Ānanda Josephson, "When Buddhism Became a 'Religion': Religion and Superstition in the Writings of Inoue Enryō," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 33, no. 1 (2006): 143–68.

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(or politics) – in principle, all human affairs could be assigned to one nomosphere – the actual discursive context in which this paradigm was referred to was clearly determined by this very problem. The new discourse is more comprehensive and more nuanced. What was previously assigned to the ruler's nomosphere is now differentiated into various social subsystems, areas of knowledge, or fields of activity, which are thereby granted a high degree of autonomy. Shūkyō, on the other hand, did not just replace buppō. The latter concept, which was confined to Buddhist orthodoxy, is - evidently – not a generalised comparative concept like religion or shūkyō. However, it is not the case that, as is sometimes suggested, the Japanese did not have such comparative concepts prior to the establishment of the term *shūkvō*. Very abstract concepts such as  $h\bar{o}$  法 (the latter character of  $bupp\bar{o}$  and  $\bar{o}b\bar{o}$ , roughly meaning law or nomos),  $ky\bar{o}$  教 (the latter character of *shūkyō*, meaning doctrine, teaching, or instruction), and *dō* 道 (meaning way or path) had been used since antiquity to denote socio-cultural formations, such as Buddhism, Confucianism, Daoism, Brahmanism, Shintō, and Christianity. The extension of these concepts was guite broad, however.

When speaking about concrete, institutionalised 'religions,' especially since early modern times, and in the wake of the Christion mission of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, Japanese commentators resorted instead to terms such as  $\mathit{sh}$ ū 宗 (the first character of shūkyō, roughly meaning a genealogical tradition), shūshi 宗旨 (roughly meaning a religious system, emphasising the doctrinal aspect), or shūmon 宗 門 (a religious community, thus emphasising the societal aspect of religion). Those terms were still widely in use in the late nineteenth century, and are treated as synonyms of shūkyō even in post-war dictionaries. To use the term shūkyō in the Meiji era thus signifies a deliberate decision to participate in a newly developing global discourse of religion, rather than to carry on the old national discourse on the relationship between the two nomospheres, or the anti-Christian discourse that denounced Christianity as an "evil religion" (jashū 邪宗, jashūmon 邪宗門, jashūshi 邪宗旨, jakyō 邪教, jahō 邪 法, etc.) using the old terms mentioned above.

It is evident that Suzuki, who later became a member of the Theosophical Society, W which played a significant role in the globalisation of the discourse on religion, was eager

I CK: Cf. Christoph Kleine, "When Christianity Became a Shūshi 宗旨: Cultural Encounters and Comparisons Between Europe and Japan and the Origins of a Global History of Religion." Interdisciplinary Journal for Religion and Transformation in Contemporary Society (JRAT) 10, 2 (special issue) (2024): 31-55.

IV Henry Steel Olcott had visited Japan for the first time in 1889, and gave lectures in more than 30 cities. His talks were very well received by Japanese Buddhists. It is very likely that Suzuki was informed by theosophical discourses early on, at least indirectly. For more on Suzuki's relations to theosophy, see Thomas A. Tweed, "American Occultism and Japanese Buddhism: Albert J. Edmunds, D. T. Suzuki, and Translocative History," Japanese Journal of Religious Studies 32, no. 2 (2005): 249–81. V Michael Bergunder, "'Religion' and 'Science' Within a Global Religious History," Aries – Journal for the Study of Western Esotericism 16 (2016): 86-141; "Global Religious History in Theory and Practice," Method & Theory in the Study of Religion 33, no. 3-4 (2021): 441-62.

to connect to this global discourse, and modernise or 'religionise' Japanese Buddhism. His understanding of shūkvō clearly reflects the global modernist discourse on religion. which is often regarded as the prerequisite for, or the corollary of, the establishment of secularity as an ordering principle of modern societies. While the relationship between religion and politics, or 'church and state,' still plays a dominant role in the drawing of boundaries between the religious and the secular in the late nineteenth century, the relationship between religion and science is gradually gaining equal importance.VII Based on this observation, I have selected the respective two chapters for this volume.

## **Bibliographical Information**

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Page numbers given in square brackets refer to this edition.

Passages highlighted by Suzuki's teacher Shaku Sō'en in the original have been put in italics.

Some passages have already been translated into English:

Richard M. Jaffe. Selected Works of D.T. Suzuki. Volume 3, Comparative Religion. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2016.

Larger parts of the chapter on "Religion and the State" are translated in:

Satō Kemmyō Taira. "D. T. Suzuki and the Question of War." The Eastern Buddhist 39, no. 1 (2008): 61–120.

A few passages of the text in English translation can be found in:

Kirita Kiyohide. "D. T. Suzuki on Society and the State." In Rude Awakenings: Zen, the Kyoto School, & the Question of Nationalism, edited by James W. Heisiq, and John C. Maraldo, 52-74. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 1994.

## Translation by Christoph Kleine

### 11. The Relationship between Religion and Science

Regarding religion (shūkyō) and science (kagaku 科學), worldly people hastily ponder whether the two collide with each other or not. However, their relationship is not sim-

VI For the concept of 'religionisation,' see Markus Dreßler, "Modes of Religionization: A Constructivist Approach to Secularity," Working paper series of the HCAS 'Multiple Secularities - Beyond the West, Beyond Modernities 7, 2019.; "Religionization and Secularity," Companion to the Study of Secularity, no. 7 (2019).

VII See Michael Bergunder, "'Religion' and 'Science' Within a Global Religious History," Aries - Journal for the Study of Western Esotericism 16 (2016): 86-141. See also Krämer's contribution on Shimaji Mokurai in this volume.

ply an abstract one, like collision (shōtotsu 衝突) or non-collision (hi-shōtotsu 非衝突). Non-collision encompasses various types of relationships. Therefore, I would like to contemplate this matter in detail, and address the following questions. First, is science incompatible with religion? When we determine that science is correct and religion is incorrect, or that religion is correct and science is incorrect, it means one of the two must be correct. But if both are correct, how do science and religion relate to each other? Does science provide support for religion, making it truer, and does religion offer any evidence for science?

The standpoints of Christians and Buddhists on this problem differ, due to their distinctive characteristics. To begin with, according to the Christians' interpretation, science and religion are completely opposed to each other, akin to ice and charcoal. [According to their belief,] scientism leans toward atheism, and eventually leads to naturalism (*shizenk*vō 自然教). Such a stance can by no means comply with the Christian doctrine of divine revelation. Science, in their view, diminishes the divine sacredness (*shinsei* 神聖) of religion, [p. 192/193] and undermines the dignity of the men of God (shinjin 神人). II Scientists are [considered] sinners against Christianity. Therefore, those who uphold the path of God (*kami no michi* 神の道) must vehemently reject science with all their might. [. . .]

Buddhism is a religion of the East. In the East, science has not progressed. Consequently, the problem of [the relationship between] religion and science has not been studied [in the East] [p. 193/194]. With the recent arrival of Western scholarship, the relationship between science and Buddhism has become an issue. However, older masters who have studied Buddhism within their orders have not been exposed to the spirit of Western science, while the younger generation possessing scientific knowledge hardly have any correct understanding of Buddhism. This leads to conflicts between the explanations of the two camps. Nevertheless, Buddhism and science appear to have relatively few disagreements, primarily because Buddhism does not teach the existence of one supernatural entity (chō-shizen-teki ichibutsu 超自然的一物) as Christianity does.

Only those who want to preserve the old customs would assert that Buddhism has no association with science. What they think is that "Science and Buddhism differ with respect to both their methods and their objectives. Upwardly, Buddhism's purpose is to seek *bodhi* [i.e. awakening]; downwardly, to transform all sentient beings. Science merely aims at describing phenomena in the realm of nature. Religion reflects inwardly, while science drives outwardly. The laws of science cannot govern the true principles of Buddhism. Why then should Buddhism listen to science?"

On the other hand, new Buddhists are eager to apply the results of scientific research to clarifying the fundamental basics of Buddhism. Thus, the current religious

II CK: This term is a little ambiguous. It might also refer to those who serve a god or the gods, which would in this case be read kamibito, and mean the clerics of the Christian churches. I gravitate towards this interpretation, because it would indicate that science undermines the authority of the clerics.

sphere in our country is activated by the clash of these two big prevailing trends [p. 194/195].

Having elucidated the differing attitudes of Buddhists and Christians towards science, I now wish to present my own perspective on the relationship between what is commonly termed 'religion' and 'science', pondering whether to align with what the Buddhists teach, or with what the Christians teach. In my view, the Christian theory of conflict is severely flawed, and the Buddhist theory of unrelatedness is also biased. I contend that science possesses the capacity to cleanse religion of its dust, thereby elevating the true splendour of religion.

Now, allow me to elaborate on this matter. When we thoroughly scrutinise [the nature of] truth (shinri 眞理), we come to realise that it is universal. [...p. 195/196...]

Based on this truth, religion attains spiritual peace and enlightenment (anshin ritsumei 安心立命); and based on this truth. science enhances its knowledge (chishiki 智 識). Science contemplates the universe, which discloses the truth. Likewise, religion contemplates Heaven and Earth, in accordance with reason (dōri 道理). Without this truth, religion would be like a fish without water, and science like a dragon without clouds. It may appear as if universal truth is evident in religion, but obscured in science, or that it is evident in science, but obscured in religion. However, it must be understood that religion and science never collide with each other. Rather they are things that support each other and exist in harmony.

Ultimately, truth is truth. We should not speak of religious truth or scientific truth, as if there were two kinds of truth. If something is, in fact, regarded as true from the standpoint of religion, but not from the standpoint of science, in what place should this truth be true? [. . .] Truth must be congruent in science; and it must be congruent in religion [p. 196/197]. If it is not, it can never be truth. It must be seen as something that is no more than an embodiment of delusional superstition (mōshū meishin 妄執迷信). Hence, I hold that religious truth is not different from scientific truth, and scientific truth is likewise not different from religious truth.

What then, is science?

As I see it, what we call science is that which organises and arranges the knowledge we obtain through experience (keiken 經驗). The primary objective of science is to describe facts and classify them into similar or distinct categories, while discerning the underlying laws that connect these groups [...p. 197/198]

How can science cleanse the dust of religion?

Religion has developed from mythology. III In the ancient times of ignorance, people could not perceive and acknowledge the truth as it is, so every religion had to contain a residue of dust. It is believed that the human intellect evolves from [the level of] disorder to clarity, from the concrete to the abstract; therefore, primitive people could hardly recognise abstract concepts as truth, [and could] only grasp meaning by realising it through idolatrous objects. As with the establishment of a heavenly lord (tentei 天帝) in Christianity, it is necessary for those whose wisdom is less developed to materialise the existence of the one great and rigid principle prevailing between heaven and earth, so that they can recognise it. Even when they are told that the mysterious workings of an original power govern people's behaviour, and that a violation of its rules would result in immediate punishment, ignorant people cannot think in abstract terms, and therefore their beliefs are not shaken. But if this great power is concretised by assigning it a certain place and form, and if someone preaches to them that, aside from the myriad things [in the world], there is a personified Heavenly Lord who watches over us, they will surely understand. [p. 198/ 199] The most ignorant people cannot grasp even this, and end up regarding the Heavenly Lord as resembling human beings, equipped with four limbs, five senses, and seven [kinds of] emotion. By the standards of today, this may seem extremely absurd and unfounded, but it was considered the one great truth in olden times.

For this reason, religious thinking contains a mixture of [elements that are] true and false, or right and wrong. Truth shakes hands with untruth; the real stands back to back with the unreal. This is similar to a lump of gold dug up in a mine. [The gold] must be placed in the forge of wisdom to be tempered a thousand times. In this sense, science is the forge, the tongs and the hammer to smash the delusionary [elements of] religion, and in the end only the true essence will remain.

Some may ask, "Does only religion contain a mixture of true and untrue elements, while science is thoroughly composed of only true elements? By what power can science judge religion?"

The development of religion preceded science. From times when human knowledge was still naive onwards, [the untrue elements of religion] accumulated in the human mind and seemed so natural that they could not be removed. [p. 199/200] Religion, by its very nature, tends, in particular, to be dogmatic (dokudan-teki 獨斷的), fallacious (mōshin-teki 妄信的), and conservative (hoshu-teki 保守的). And it tends to make final judgements not on the basis of present facts, or the rationality of the human mind, but rather the basis of historical facts (this bad habit is particularly evident in Christianity). In this way [religion], although based on facts, experience and truth, cannot be the same as science, which is always based on present facts,

III CK: This is an interesting wording. Suzuki gives the Chinese characters "鬼神説," which would normally be read "kishinsetsu," meaning "theories/explanations/narrations of demons and gods," but wants the readers to read these characters as "mythology" as indicated by the furigana attached to the phrase.

appeals to reason, and takes the rational but discards the irrational, in order to advance step by step. Religion is like stagnant water that stands still, while science is like a river that flows day and night. The water, however, is essentially the same. Stagnant water may reflect form on its surface in the beginning, but what remains standing tends to rot; therefore, a way must be sought to dig a trench and let the water flow. Consequently, religion should discard what is contrary to facts, in accordance with scientific explanations. This will make the light of religion shine all the more brightly.

True religion realises the truth straightforwardly [lit. "nakedly"], without being stopped by any delusion. In the past, there was no need for its cleansing by science, but today's religions mostly rely on [p. 200/201] history, and transmit both truth and falsehood without discrimination. Therefore, the demons [of ignorance] of those who stubbornly cling to outdated traditions, and are unwilling to align with contemporary ideas, must be enlightened and shattered by the light of science.

Of course, science also contains a mixture of true and untrue, or true and false elements. [. . .] Science, after all, is not omnipotent, and can inevitably fall into error, but the more experience we gain, the more it helps us to abandon outdated habits and accept newly discovered principles. In this way, science is progressing day by day, and what is true becomes truer; what is right becomes more right. Therefore, it is imperative that religion is transformed and reformed, in dependence on science.

How can science elevate the true splendour of religion? [p. 201/202]

To understand this, one must realise that the nature of religion is quite different from that of science; clarification of the opposing characteristics [will] make the reason for their mutual support even more evident. [. . .] Science is based on logical analysis, whereas religion is based on the immediate apprehension of things as they are. On this point the difference between religion and science is similar to that between religion and philosophy. [...p. 202/203...]

Religion and science contemplate the same universe; religion from within, science from without. Religion first comprehends the essence of the universe, and afterwards enters the realm of discrimination, while science thoroughly examines the realm of discrimination, and thereafter enters the sphere of equality. Science can explain religious truth, and religion can comprehend scientific truth. In the end, it may be that the difference between religion and science does not lie in objective facts, but in subjective interpretation.

Consequently, religion and science help each other to promote the truth. Just as the truths accepted in religion step out into the sphere of science, and are subjected to an infinite variety of [scientific] analysis to reveal that they are, in fact, to be regarded as true, the application of scientific principles to religion will ascertain that [the truths of religion] are not erroneous. The more they confront each other, the more they mutually enlighten each other. [... p. 203/204] In that sense, if Christianity claims to embody the purest truth, why then must it necessarily conceive of science as atheism, as immorality and impropriety, let alone despise or harm scientists? And conversely, if Buddhism wants to represent truth, it should be burnt in the blazing fire of science, and struck by the tongs and hammer of experience, to cast more light – instead of avoiding any interaction with science.

In short, religion, science and philosophy are merely [different] results of the same human mind observing the same universe. In terms of their aims and methods, there are some differences, but nothing that would contradict each other. Jointly, they promote the one great truth of the universe.

In conclusion, I would like to answer the questions I asked [at the beginning of this chapter]. Even though I have sufficiently expressed my views above, and made them comprehensible, I would like to repeat the answer at the end. What we can see is that religion and science do not contradict each other, but are mutually related to each other. Religion is true, and science is also true. Both stand together, and together they let the light [of truth] shine, so that this light may shine ever brighter. [p. 204–249 . . . ]

#### 15. Religion and the State

At first glance, one might think, state and religion appear to be extremely opposed — the reason being that the state is something founded on discrimination (sabetsu 差別), whereas religion necessarily upholds a comprehensive egalitarianism (issai byōdō shugi 一切平等主義). Religion takes the realisation of a cosmic ideal as its ultimate purpose; the state takes the preservation of its own existence as its ultimate purpose. Religion wants the whole world to be one; the state wants each [country] to exist on its own. Religion teaches that [all people in] the whole world are brothers, and that all peoples are compatriots; the state says that, throughout heaven and earth, it alone should have power. Religion preaches [that mankind is but] one family united in benevolence, and that one should not cling to the distinction between oneself and others; the state takes loyalty and patriotic feelings as their doctrine, and insists on its independence. Religion never hesitates to abolish the existence of the state and its history; the state always acts on the basis of its own self-centred interests. In this way, religion and the state are hardly compatible, and we do not know whether religion is right or whether the state is right. [...p. 249/250]

Let us look at the actual situation among the world's nations today. Each has established a country on a piece of this tiny earth, claiming that country's territory as its territory, that country's products as its products, and that country's people as its people. If conflicts arise between the interests of the respective nations, they soon forsake peace, and, taking up arms, kill people, halt commerce, and destroy production, continuing at this until one side or the other is defeated. However, owing perhaps to their ideals of civilised behaviour, they prefer not to admit that self-interest is behind all of this, so they always use "justice" as an excuse. "We attack them", they claim, "for the purpose of maintaining long-term peace in the East (or the West, or the World)".

Or "they ignored our rights, and so, in the name of justice, we cannot remain silent". Or "we desire only to help that weak and impoverished nation attain independence, and raise it to the status of a civilised state". All this talk sounds so reasonable, as if war could not have been avoided. [...p. 250–252...]

One could thus characterise today's international relations as follows: They begin in self-interest, continue in abuse, and end in exhaustion. This, unfortunately, is a credible portrayal of contemporary relations between nations. It must be admitted that it departs greatly from the ideals of religion, and I cannot help but wonder whether the state and religion can coexist at all. [p. 252/253] [...] The formation of the state is not the purpose of human existence, but only an expedient means – nothing more than a single stage through which humanity must pass, in the course of its development. Humanity exists for the sake of humanity, not for the sake of the state I. . . ]. In order that the existence of the state may not hinder the realisation of the hopes and ideals of religion - that is, of humanity - the state must, I believe, be reformed where necessary. [...p. 253–255...]

Viewed in temporal terms, state formation necessarily occurs at a certain point in the development of society. It must indeed serve as a means ( $h\bar{o}ben$  方便) $^{IV}$  to help humanity realise the purpose of its existence. However, if we look at it as a phase that we must pass through, in order to reach our goal, we have no choice but to endure it – even if it seems to distance us from that goal for a while. This is because what exists as a necessary response to the demands of a particular time and place always participates in the truth of that particular time and place; this is called relative truth (sōtai-teki shinri 相對的眞理). V And if a relative truth appears as a response to a natural necessity, how does it differ from an absolute truth? In so far as both are equipped with the dignity of truth, we cannot but act in accordance with them. Thus, although the state is only a means, it contains an intimation of truth. [p. 255/256]. Therefore, religion must also vary in its form to some extent, according to time and place. Indeed, religion must at first seek to support the existence of the state, and it must demand to conform to its history and the character of its people. [...p. 256–258...]

IV CK: This is a traditional Buddhist concept, and an important one, too. It traditionally denotes the skilful means used by the Buddha to help sentient beings to be liberated from the cycle of birth and death, in accordance with their faculties. Cf. Michael Pye, Skilful Means: A Concept in Mahayana Buddhism (London: Duckworth, 1978).

V CK: Interestingly, Suzuki deliberately refrains from using the Buddhist term zokutai 俗諦, which is traditionally associated with the ruler's nomosphere, and would have been the natural choice for more conservative authors (see Fukuda). He instead uses a modern, academic term here. This once again underlines his effort to be perceived as a modern thinker who can connect to a global discourse. It is not certain whether Suzuki already knew at the time of writing his text that he would shortly thereafter go to the USA to collaborate with Paul Carus, but we do know that there was already written correspondence between Suzuki and Carus by 1895. Cf. Tweed, American Occultism.

In any case, I do not know today what direction the future progress of society will take. Some scholars predict that we are heading towards a single undifferentiated global entity. But in no way would anyone claim that the present condition of international confrontation and rivalry represents the absolute ideal.

Nevertheless, in the present, one must act in accordance with the current situation. Therefore, as can be seen from the above discussion, all undertakings that contribute to the progress of the nation should be undertaken, keeping in mind that the nation as it is today has not yet reached the ultimate goal, and that it is desirable to always strive for its improvement. This is truly the realm of religion. Religion does not seek to undermine the foundations of the state and replace them with something new; it simply seeks the progress and development of the state, in accordance with its history and constitution. [p. 258/259]

When contemplating this, the interests of religion and the state are not in conflict with each other; rather, both sides can only hope for wholeness if they help and support each other. Admittedly, the present state of ethics governing relations between nations smacks of barbarism, and is thus quite contrary to the ideals of religion, but the fact that justice (seigi 正義) and humanity (jindo 人道) are spoken of at all shows that there is at least a grain of moral sense at the core [of these ethics]. Truly, if we do not let this this seed of moral sense grow, how should we ever germinate the seed of religion?

The problem can easily be solved when we hold that *religion exists with the state as its body* (tai/karada 體) and that the state develops with religion as its spirit (seishin 精神). In other words, religion and the state form a unity; if every action and movement of the state assumes a religious character, and if every word and action of religion assumes a state character, then everything done for the sake of the state is done for religion, and everything done for the sake of religion is done for the state. The two are one, and the one is two; discrimination (sabetsu 差別) is equality (byodo 平等), and equality is discrimination; volume volu

If we summarise what has been stated above, from one point of view, the relationship between religion and the state is a relationship between discrimination [i.e. particularism = state] [p. 261/262] and equality [i.e. universalism = religion]. From another point of view, it is a relationship between means [i.e. the state] and ends [i.e. religion].

VI CK: This is a very Buddhist mode of reasoning, but here again, Suzuki refrains from using the traditional phrases found in Buddhist scriptures.