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Freedom as Jinenhōni : An Ontological Interpretation

メタデータ	言語: eng 出版者: 関西外国語大学・関西外国語大学短期大学部 公開日: 2016-09-05 キーワード (Ja): キーワード (En): 作成者: Swingle, Richard K. メールアドレス: 所属: 関西外国語大学短期大学部
URL	https://doi.org/10.18956/00006316

Freedom as *Jinenhōni*:

An Ontological Interpretation

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Part I: Prologue and Introduction

Comparative studies are currently fairly commonplace in many academic fields, and philosophy is one field in particular that has seen important developments in this area in the last three decades. A variety of methodologies and approaches have evolved, within a wide range of cross-cultural contexts, so that “comparative philosophy” is no longer, if it ever was, a single enterprise with a stock meaning. In some exercises, such as this one, it means revisiting a familiar philosophical concept, especially one which has well-established philosophical currency in certain cultural contexts, by considering that concept afresh in a cultural context within which the “functional equivalent” of that concept may not be readily apparent, but which may, upon careful investigation, emerge to illuminate and inform the more-familiar understanding of the concept in profoundly new and unfamiliar ways.

Therefore, when an essay, such as this one, claims to be a work in comparative philosophy, it behooves us to give some indication of what we mean, what we expect to do, and how we plan to do it. In the case of this essay, it means that we intend to consider the concept of *freedom* in terms of *jinenhōni*, as understood by Gotoku Shinran (1173-1263), the Kamakura-era founder of the *Jōdo Shin-shū* (‘True Pure Land’) sect of Japanese Buddhism and Buddhist philosophy, and we intend that the method of our investigation shall proceed along both analytical and phenomenological lines of inquiry.

We should also give some indication, at the outset, of what this essay is *not*. We have limited the scope and range of our inquiry to a single primary source because this essay is not intended as a comprehensive examination of Shinran’s religious philosophy; nor is it meant to be an

exhaustive explication of Shinran's understanding of *jinenhōni*. Our space is much too limited for either such project.

Neither are we suggesting that Shinran is intentionally offering *jinenhōni* as an alternative for other, more conventional, Japanese terms for "freedom." When we consider the Japanese philosophical lexicon, we find a number of terminological candidates for a philosophical discussion of the concept of freedom. Probably the most frequently used is *jiyū* (自由), which is commonly translated as 'freedom' or 'liberty' or simply 'independent' or 'voluntary.' Another possibility is *jizai* (自在), usually rendered as 'free will.' Either of these may serve as the basis for a philosophical discussion of the problem of freedom. This is especially so when Japanese thinkers, when considering the problem of freedom, draw upon translations of non-Japanese (usually Western) sources. For example, any proper Japanese translation of the works of Aristotle, Aquinas, Locke, Mill, Hobbes, Sartre, *et. al.* would be impossible without these terms.

When we turn to the works of certain original Japanese thinkers, however, such a dependence on these terms is not necessarily so. Shinran represents a case in point, as a careful examination of his writings reveals very few occasions when he employs either of these terms. According to the two standard indices to his work¹, we find no reference to any use by Shinran, either in his own writings or in his quotations from other Buddhist writers, of the first term, *jiyū* (自由); and with respect to the second term, *jizai* (自在), we find only a few references in the indices to Shinran's use of this term -- specifically, eighteen in *Kyōgyōshinshō*, plus seven from all other sources combined, making a grand total of only 25 references. Most significantly, only three are original statements by Shinran, and none are of any particular philosophical importance -- they are primarily references to freedom in terms of free choice, as the absence of external constraint or imposition. Furthermore, these are primarily passing references, and are not developed in any meaningful ways that would seem to make a profound contribution to the philosophical understanding of the problem of freedom.

If this, then, were the extent of Shinran's thoughts on the issue, our project would be over before it would have begun. Fortunately, this is not the case. As it so happens, we do find one possibility within Shinran's conceptual framework which may serve as the foundation for a rather insightful and provocative response to the problem of freedom. This is the concept of *jinen* (自然), or more fully, *jinenhōni* (自然法爾).

As we shall see, it is our interpretation of Shinran's understanding of the concept of *jinenhōni* that may constitute a significant contribution to the philosophical consideration of the problem of freedom. As mentioned above, we shall limit our inquiry to a single source for

Shinran's statement on the subject, a collection of letters called the *Mattōshō*, or 'Lamp for the Latter Ages.' In particular, we shall investigate carefully the contents of the fifth letter, which was written in his 86th year and is entitled *Jinenhōninokoto* -- 'Concerning *Jinenhōni*.' The translation of this short selection which follows is largely a composite of several previous translations (see Bibliography), although we have chosen to forego some of the ambiguity of the original in favor of certain more explicit expressions, the grammatical and philosophical reasons for which will be explained later. It is our contention that this source offers a most succinct, albeit densely compacted, statement regarding the meaning of *jinenhōni*, and it shall be our intention to unpack some of the more provocative philosophical insights that may be suggested by Shinran's comments. Admittedly, this translation may not represent the best expression of his full religious intentions, but our purpose is not a thorough explication of his religious philosophy; we are merely looking for suggestions that might broaden and deepen our own present philosophical understanding of the concept of freedom. As we shall subsequently argue, it is the realization of the concept of *jinenhōni*, as suggested by our interpretation of this short passage, that may provide us with a richer and fuller understanding of the concept of freedom.

Part II: Translation of *Jinenhōninokoto*

"Regarding the meaning of *jinen*, 'ji' means 'of itself.' It is not the contrivance of the practitioner. As for the meaning of 'nen,' it is 'to be so.' 'To be so' is not the contrivance of the practitioner; it is the vow of the Tathagata, which is called 'hōni.' This 'hōni' means 'that which is so,' because of the vow of the Tathagata. Since this *hōni* is the vow of the Tathagata, it means 'to be so,' because of the virtue of this *dharma*, without any contrivance on the part of the practitioner. For the first time, all human contrivance is gone and because of this, it takes that without (purposive) meaning as its meaning.

Jinen originally meant 'to always be so.' The vow of Amida is never the contrivance of the practitioner, but enables each practitioner to rely on the *Namu Amida Butsu*. It is said that when one abandons self-contrivance, and ceases to speculate on the nature of good and evil, that is called *jinen*. The nature of the vow is that all should attain supreme Buddhahood. What is called 'supreme Buddhahood' is without form, and whatever is without form is called *jinen*. So, to indicate that there is form is not to speak of the supreme *nirvāna*. It should be heard and learned for the first time that Amida has made known the meaning of this formlessness. Amida is that through which *jinen* is made

known. Having realized this principle, it becomes unnecessary to discuss *jinen*. Further, to constantly seek to define the meaning of *jinen* is to say it has meaning. Such is the inconceivability of the Buddha.”

Part III: Interpretation and Analysis

According to Shinran, *ji* (自) means ‘of itself’ or ‘by itself’ (*onozukara*). As we shall see, the ontological character of this claim is all-important. ‘By itself’ is a description of the *being* of a thing. It is the self-reference and self-identification of the thing with itself, the totally self-reflexive nature of the thing *qua* thing.

However, this ‘by itself’ may indicate more than just the ‘thingly’ nature of the thing, and in fact, exclusive concentration on this aspect may obfuscate another, perhaps equally significant, dimension. ‘By itself’ (*onozukara*) may have an ontological dimension or ‘thingly’ character of its own, ‘by itself.’ That is, a thing may stand quite apart from other things whose self-reference this ‘by itself’ may indicate.

Thus, the power of ‘by itself’ to indicate the ontological nature, the *being*, of a thing, its ability to point to whatever belongs inherently to a thing – this is simply representative of one aspect, one facet, of the total function of ‘by itself.’ This function takes account of the ‘self-effort’ or ‘own-power’ (*jiriki*, 自力) aspect of ‘by itself,’ and while sufficiently alive to the ‘own-nature’ (*jishō*, 自性) character of the ‘thing-lieness,’ the ‘being’ of ‘itself,’ it is altogether inadequate to account for the ‘otherness’ of ‘itself.’

This ‘otherness’ is best understood in terms of the *via negativa*, or what it is *not*. As Shinran says, it is *not* the result of individual contrivance or the product of personal intentionality or design or effort on the part of the practitioner. Specifically, it is to be dissociated altogether from any notion of ‘self-effort’ or ‘own-power’ – namely, *jiriki*. Thus, any efficacy whatsoever which is thought to result or obtain from the exercise of *jiriki* is explicitly denied.

Similarly, *nen* (然) is also dissociated from any sense of *jiriki*; *nen* means ‘to be so’ (*shikarashimu*). The vow of the Tathagata, the ‘thus come one,’ is identical with *nen* by way of their mutual meaning of ‘to be so.’ Further, this vow is called ‘*hōni*’ (法爾), which in this context means ‘that which is so’ as a result or product, or by virtue of, the vow of the Tathagata.

This *hōni*, then, represents the first stage of our investigation. As we shall see, freedom, understood as *jinenhōni*, is comprised of two stages, and each stage is developed in both a theoretical and practical dimension.

A. Stage One: Theory

At the first stage, in its theoretical aspect, *hōni* means ‘to be so.’ It is also ‘the vow of the Tathagata,’ and this is the case ‘because of the virtue of this *dharmā*.’ In Japanese, *dharmā* is *hō* (法), so the initial theoretical basis of Shinran’s claim lies in the simple recognition that *hōni* is *the same as* the vow of the Tathagata: theoretically, either one may be understood as ‘to be so’ because of the virtue of this *dharmā*. At this stage, the theoretical justification is to be found in the self-referential ‘virtue of this *dharmā*’ (*hō* 法). In other words, theoretically, ‘that which is so’ (*hōni*) is *the same as* the vow of the Tathagata ‘*by virtue of*’ (*toku*; 徳) that vow.

B. Stage One: Practice

The initial practical dimension of Shinran’s claim is developed by reference to the uncompromising denial of any measure of worth, merit, or efficacy to be attached to the action or activity of a practitioner. In effect, it is a practice which is a non-practice; in the total absence of all human contrivance or claims of ‘self-effort’ (*jiriki*), any activity on the part of the practitioner is so ‘because of the vow of the Tathagata.’ Accordingly, without (self-) purposive meaning or intentional content, *hōni* is simply “‘that which is so’ because of the vow of the Tathagata,” and any meaning which obtains, within the context of such a practice, must be a meaning which is devoid of any purposive meaning or intent. In the absence of any human contrivance or “purposive-ness,” ‘practice’ must then take on a very different meaning, namely a meaning which is without (purposive) meaning. Practically speaking, this becomes a practice which is not a practice in the usual sense of the term; it is a practice which is without (practical) “purposive-ness.” And by undercutting the purposive meaning of the practical dimension in this manner, the theoretical dimension (namely, that *hōni* is the same as the vow of the Tathagata) is affected as well. That is, in a similar fashion, the content or meaning of the theoretical dimension becomes not *meaningless*, but rather, a meaning which is without (purposive) meaning.

C. Stage Two: Practice

At the second stage, the practical dimension of the claim is developed in greater detail, and at first glance, appears to represent merely that, a more detailed account of the first-stage practical dimension. But, as we shall see, the practical dimension of the second stage assumes a much greater and far-reaching consequence than that of the first stage.

According to Shinran, *jinen* originally had the meaning ‘to always be so’ (*moto yori shikarashimu*). ‘*Moto yori*’ functions as an emphazier even as it functions in a parallel construction

in the sentence which follows it, as a negative emphazier in the clause which states that 'the vow of Amida is *never* the contrivance of the practitioner.' It is simply the case that, as stated above, (*ji*) nen means 'to be so.' It originally (literally, 'from the beginning') had the meaning 'to *always* be so.' Similarly, it is not simply that the vow of Amida (the Tathagata) is not now, nor no longer, the contrivance of the practitioner; it has *never* been so.

It is at this point, with the substitution of Amida for the more general Tathagata, that the specific nature of the development of the practical dimension at the second stage becomes apparent. By reference to Amida in particular, and the claim that 'the vow ... enables the practitioner to rely on the *Namu Amida Butsu*' (*nembutsu*), the specific nature of this *jinen* practice is manifest. It is the practice (of the practitioner) which is a non-practice; it is the reliance *by* the practitioner without an effort *on the part of* the practitioner.

A two-step process within the practical dimension characterizes this realization: (a) the abandonment of self-contrivance; and (b) the cessation of speculation (particularly, on the nature of good and evil). This latter condition is quite curious, if taken in too literal a fashion. That is, why should the cessation of speculation regarding the nature of good and evil necessarily characterize the condition or state of realization of *jinen*? If considered merely as an inquiry into particularity (i.e., whether *this* or *that* is a good or bad *thing*), then this step in the process would seem to suggest simply that it is only because we cannot, through mere speculation, exhaust the universe of particulars, that we should cease to speculate merely because, as a process dealing with a (practically) inexhaustible set of particulars (viz., *all things*), it would continue *ad infinitum*.

But it is not the case that one should abandon altogether the process of speculation simply because it might be an interminable enterprise; rather, two other closely connected, but philosophically more significant, suggestions would seem to be implied. The first is that *any* sort of speculation which bifurcates reality into two mutually exclusive categories (such as good and evil) is pointless, not simply for the reason stated above, but also because such categorization imposes an artificial 'either/or' judgmental and conceptual scheme upon the nature of things, such that they must conform to one or the other of the two categories, if they are to be categorized (and presumably, thereby rendered intelligible) at all. The two-fold assumption operative here is: (a) that all things are, *in principle*, categorize-able (in this case, into two categories); and (b) that speculation, as the means to effect that categorization process, is a worth-while means within a worth-while process. What is challenged here is the assumption of the worth of both the *process* and the *means* within the process.

Therefore, the second implication would seem to be, not simply that speculation *on the nature of good and evil* (with emphasis on the *type* or *kind* of speculation) be ceased, but rather that *all speculation itself* be summarily suspended. That is, questions regarding the nature of good and evil (whether in general or in particular) are just the *types* or *kinds* of speculation which must cease. And it is not just some *particular types* of speculation that are being called into question; it is the process of speculation *in toto*. The final implication of this suggestion, from the perspective of the practical dimension, should be clear. It was never a question, or topic for speculation, as to what is the right (or ‘good’) practice, as opposed to the wrong (or ‘evil’) practice; as we have already seen, the practical dimension of *jinen* is the practice which is a non-practice, or the practice which ‘takes that without (purposive) meaning as its meaning.’

D. Stage Two: Theory

The second-stage theoretical dimension of freedom understood as *jinenhōni* begins with an embellished account of the theoretical significance of the vow of the Tathagata, identified as it is at this second stage, as the vow of Amida.

This second-stage theoretical claim is really a two-part claim. The first part of the claim is that ‘the nature of the vow is that all should attain supreme Buddha-hood.’ The second part of the claim is that “whatever is without form is called ‘*jinen*.’” We will consider the first part of the claim first.

We have already indicated, at the first-stage theoretical level, what is meant by ‘the nature of the vow.’ It is ‘to be so.’ Further, ‘that which is so’ (*hōni*) is *the same as* the vow of the Tathagata *by virtue of* that vow (cf. p. 79, above). Now, if *hōni* is identified with the vow of the Tathagata, then it is the nature of *hōni* that ‘all should attain supreme Buddha-hood.’ What is meant is that all should attain to the universal condition of authentic existence. It is a condition which is realizable *in principle* by all sentient beings. Therefore, it is the nature of *hōni* that, theoretically, all should realize this authenticity. This ‘supreme Buddha-hood,’ specifically, is that which is ‘without form,’ and, theoretically, “whatever is without form is called ‘*jinen*.’”

That this is an expansion of the theoretical dimension of our account may be demonstrated by the following grammatical note. What is translated as ‘called’ (*toiu*) indicates an indirect quotation or indirect reference, or even hearsay testimony. By this, two purposes are served simultaneously: (a) it functions as a disclaimer of any personal authority or even any metaphysical absolutizing, as an identity claim very often (but not necessarily) does; and (b) it contributes a certain directness, a certain commonplace, ‘ordinary language’ type of appeal.

The first purpose amounts to a qualified appeal to authority, the qualification being constituted by the personal disclaimer; the second purpose amounts to an appeal to everyday, 'lived' experience.

The second-stage theoretical claim, that "whatever is without form is called '*jinen*,'" is at first glance, simply an appeal to the common, everyday, 'ordinary language' understanding of *jinen*. However, by implication, it is much more than that. In fact, it is at this point that Shinran's consideration of freedom, understood as *jinenhōni*, assumes its most profound relevance and greatest significance.

If, in Japanese, *jinenhōni* is understood as 'naturalness' or 'spontaneity,' then our interpretation of the term is entirely in keeping with its most original or fundamental meaning. If "whatever is without form is called '*jinen*,'" and *jinen* is used in reference to the natural or spontaneous, then whatever is natural or spontaneous in the sense of being non-pre-determined, or without being constituted or structured from without -- *creative*, in the fullest sense of the word -- is formless. *Jinen* is, in a word, freedom, a freedom of the highest order, *creative* freedom, the freedom of creative formlessness.

We have thus made explicit what was merely implicit at the most fundamental level of the meaning of *jinen*, that whatever is formless, in the sense delineated above, is that which is free: it is the most natural, the most spontaneous, the most creative. It is a response *to* a given situation or circumstance, not one which is pre-determined or structured or formed *by* the situation. It is a response which is truly *responsive*, i.e., spontaneously and creatively. It is a response which is responsive to *itself*, to its own creativity, to its own special sense of appropriateness. It is 'given,' according to the form or structure of the context within which it appears, but only upon the condition that it is not itself formed by that context. In the fullest, most authentic sense, it appropriates the contents of a given situation, *within* the givenness of the form or structure of that context, *without* being itself structured. If anything, it 'in-forms' that context in the sense that it works *within* the structure of a given context or situation to further form or structure that situation, but not at the same time to allow itself to be determined by that situation. In the purest sense, it is not something external to or independent of any situation; it is the natural, spontaneous, free, and creative response of the situation to itself, the response of the informing within the formed, not as opposed to the formed, but as constitutive of it.

That freedom may serve as a constitutive element within a given context or situation should be clear; but to emphasize this point to the neglect of the fact that the context may limit or otherwise influence the expression of freedom would be a gross imbalance. To reinstate

equilibrium, we need to look more closely at the exact nature of the relationship of freedom vis-à-vis the context or situation of its expression.

In other words, the nature of the relationship of freedom, understood as *jinen*, to any situation or circumstance within which it may be said to appropriately obtain, is not so one-sided as the fore-going description may seem to suggest. Rather, these two must be understood as abiding together in what we might describe as a 'conditionship relation.' On the one hand, to simply assert that *jinen* is the condition by which or according to which freedom takes place would be somewhat misleading. On the other hand, however, to assert that the term 'freedom' is simply descriptive of the conditions by which, or according to which, *jinen* occurs is likewise to miss the point.

In this connection, it is clear what freedom is *not*. It is not simply the absence or lack of constraints or limitations. Rather, it is to be understood in a much richer and fuller sense. Perhaps we may characterize the nature of the relationship of freedom (understood as *jinen*) with its appropriate context, a relationship which we have identified above as a 'conditionship relation,' in the following manner. This relationship is clearly not a 'relation between.' Properly speaking, we are not here dealing with two (or more) entities for there to be a relationship *between*. For that matter, there is no sense of any 'betweenness' at all, and for that reason, the 'conditionship relation' sees the context or circumstances of the authentic attainment or realization of *jinen* as the total arena within which this realization is manifest. Instead of a view of freedom as simply a perspective which (albeit critically) views the scope of the arena, with an eye for identifying whatever constraints or limitations may appear within the perimeters of that arena – freedom, then, constituting the manner in which or by which these may be successfully avoided or eliminated – Shinran's in an interpretation of freedom which is descriptive, not of the contents of the arena, but of the authentic realization of human existence within the very broad perimeters or horizons of that arena. In this way, freedom is not a perspective at all. It is a collective term which is descriptive of the various types of activities which obtain under any circumstance or within any context or situation – namely, those activities which are spontaneous, natural, and creative.

Let us conclude our explication of the second-stage theoretical dimension of this theory of freedom understood as *jinenhōni* by considering the role of Amida in all this. According to Shinran, theoretically, it is only through Amida that the meaning of the formless nature of *jinen* is made known. This would seem to follow from the first-stage practical dimension, whereby the realization of *jinen* was understood, not as the result of any contrivance or self-effort on the part

of the practitioner, but only as a result of the vow of the Tathagata.

Now, at the second stage, this same claim is made even more explicitly. It is *only* through Amida that *jinen* is made known. Any realization that is to be authentic realization may not obtain or result from any effort or contrivance of a practitioner. In this regard, the very sense of 'practitioner' is rendered *practically* vacuous, and we should note that the term does not even occur in our discussion of the second-stage development. Strictly speaking, there is no practitioner, just as, strictly speaking, there is no practice. What there is, is the attainment of freedom, the realization of *jinen*, by a human agent, but not as the result of any human agency or contrivance. Freedom is attained, or *jinen* is realized, through the mediating agency of Amida.

This sense of freedom is not to be understood in any teleological sense, whereby Amida is the means to an end, viz., the attainment of human freedom. Freedom, as *jinen*, is not the final accomplishment arrived at after the completion of a long, involved process; rather it is the refinement and cultivation of the process itself. It is the continuous and on-going response of man, as a being-in-the-world, to that world. And, as a creative response, it is not simply a passive response to the circumstances and situations of that world; it is an active, dynamic, constitutive -- in the fullest sense, free and creative -- response. To say that 'Amida is that through which *jinen* is made known' is not to relocate the purposiveness sense of human agency within some extra-human agent; it is to deny the sense of purposive agency altogether.

To say that 'Amida is that through which *jinen* is made known' is to create a perspective from which freedom as *jinen* may be viewed in the all-important sense of being divested of its human agency. Only in this manner is the realization of authentic freedom, as spontaneity, naturalness, creativity -- in a word, *jinen* -- possible. Only by shifting the perspective of human activity away from the sense of self-contrivance, self-effort, or self-accomplishment may authentic freedom be realized.

Once this principle of *jinen* is realized, in the manner and to the degree prescribed, any further discussion of any sort is rendered superfluous and unnecessary. This is not so much a device to forestall disagreement, but rather a reiteration of the earlier principle regarding the uselessness of speculation altogether; or, as we suggested above (p. 81, ff), an appeal for the process of speculation itself to be suspended. In addition, in this case, it is not simply that speculation is meaningless; however, 'to constantly seek to define *jinen* is to say it has meaning.' Neither is this to suggest that *jinen* is meaningless; rather, as we saw above (p. 81, ff), in its theoretical dimension, it is imbued with 'a meaning which is without (purposive) meaning.'

Shinran ends with a final disclaimer, that 'such is the inconceivability of the *wisdom* of the

Buddha.’ We take this to be a short-hand formula which serves two purposes, the first one epistemological, and the second one ontological. First, epistemologically, it suggests that whatever intelligibility obtains from our understanding of the concept of *jinen* does so as a function of the limitations of human insight, intelligence, and sensitivity, not as a result of some inherent difficulty in the concept itself, or in the state of affairs which it is designed to describe. Second, that this concept of *jinen* is indeed intelligible (i.e., ‘conceivable’) at all is assured ontologically by the ‘suchness’ of the concept itself.

That the ‘wisdom of the Buddha’ is ‘inconceivable’ is a reflection of the epistemological intelligibility of the concept of *jinen*; however, the extent, manner, and degree to which this concept is realized, attained, or achieved is a result, not of its epistemological or conceptual nature, but as a function of its ontological grounding. To explicate this ontological ground is to substantiate not simply the conceptual or theoretical dimension of our claim, but more importantly, to give ontological credence to the practical dimension as well. The remainder of our essay shall be devoted to just such explication.

In summary, then, the salient points of Shinran’s argument for the concept of freedom as understood in term of *jinenhōni* might be recapitulated as follows.

We perceived the structure of *jinenhōni* as developing in two stages, and within each of these stages, we discerned both theoretical and practical dimensions. At the first stage of the development, ‘practice’ was understood as a practice which is without (practical) purposiveness, and theoretically, this practice, while not rendered meaningless, is a practice which is without (purposive) meaning. However, at this first stage, the details of these claims were not specified, and any significance or implication beyond the claims themselves was not indicated.

The second stage, on the other hand, explicated these rather bold, but not at all self-evident, assertions. At this stage, we saw that the practical dimension amounted to a reliance by the practitioner, without any effort on the part of the practitioner, upon the vow of Amida, as that through which *jinen* is made known. As we saw, the attainment of freedom in terms of the realization of *jinen*, is accomplished, not as the result of any intentional or purposive human agency, but only as the natural, spontaneous, and creative response of man, as a being-in-the-world, to the various situations and circumstances that characterize the world.

Part IV: Postscript and Conclusion

It remains for us to explicate, as promised, the ontological grounding of the concept of

jinen. We have already suggested that the extent, manner, and degree to which *jinen* is realized, attained, or achieved is a function of this ontological grounding, and, further, that to explicate this ground shall be to substantiate both the theoretical and practical dimensions of Shinran's argument for the concept of *jinen* as constituting the basis for an understanding of freedom.

To demonstrate the ontological ground of the concept of *jinen* shall require that we review the earlier discussion of the theoretical and practical aspects of our interpretation, only this time with an eye for evidence which might support our current claim. We should not have to look far.

We might begin with a reconsideration of the opening remarks of Part III of our essay. It may be recalled that at this point, the barest hint of an ontological structure was exposed, but it was quickly lost in the subsequent discussion of the relationship between *hōni* and the vow of the Tathagata. Initially, we argued that *hōni* represented the first stage in the theoretical dimension of our claim, that it is *the same as* the vow of the Tathagata, by 'virtue' (*toku*) of that vow. It might appear that the only ontological assertion being proffered here is a most straight-forward one, in two parts: (a) the identification of *hōni* with the vow of the Tathagata; and (b) the justification for such an identity as a function of the 'virtue' (i.e., the character, nature or strength) of the vow itself. But throughout our analysis, one crucial point has remained un stated, obscured by our own, perhaps misleading, translation of '*shikarashimu*.' This all-important term, which we have rendered 'to be so' might be better elaborated (if not translated) in terms which more clearly indicate its grammatical form, namely a *causative* one. Therefore, it is important for us to realize that the verb '*shikarashimu*' is used to mean 'that (a thing) is made to be/become that which it is.' With this more fully elaborated translation/ interpretation in mind, we may proceed to give a full account of the nature of the ontological grounding of the concept of *jinen*.

At the beginning of Part III, we saw that '*ji*' meant 'of itself' or 'by itself' (*onozukara*), and we suggested that this "by itself" may have two meanings: (a) it may indicate the 'own-nature' or 'thing-liness' of a thing 'by itself;' or (b) it may be used to indicate the altogether separate nature, or independence, the 'other-liness,' of a thing 'by itself.' The first sense is not intended as a metaphysical claim having to do with the substance of the thing in question, but rather an ontological claim, referring primarily to the 'is-ness' of a thing, the 'that-ness,' rather than the quidity or 'what-ness' of a thing. It is the assertion *that* a thing is, "it is the self-reference and self-identification of the thing with itself; it is the totally self-reflexive nature of the thing *qua* thing" (cf. p. 78).

To deny that the first sense of '*onozukara*' is devoid of any metaphysical sense of substance,

however, is not to say that it is devoid of any metaphysical sense whatsoever. Such a claim would fly in the face of the facts, namely, that much more than the quidity or 'what-ness' of a thing is claimed for '*ji*' -- the 'how-ness' is clearly asserted as well. It is not simply, or exclusively, *that* a thing is as it is; the 'how' of the thing is equally significant. And according to our translation, 'how' a thing is to be is 'by itself.'

We need to consider in greater detail the second sense of '*onozukara*' as well. We indicated above that this term may be used to indicate the altogether separateness or independence or 'other-ness' of a thing 'by itself.' Taken in conjunction with the first sense, we have a more complete picture of what it means for a thing to be 'by itself.' It is not the case that a thing simply or exclusively is self-identical with *it*-self; it is also *of* or *by* itself in the sense that it is *other* -- it is other than things which are by *them*-selves. It is separate or independent in the sense that it is distinctive (or at least, distinguishable) from other things. The '*other*' side of a thing's being self-reflexive and self-identical is its complementary character of being (at least in principle) distinguishable or discernable from other things, even those things with which it may be identified.

This problem of the indiscernability of identicals is an old and familiar one, considered in one form or another by virtually anyone who has dealt with the problem of identity, and given perhaps its most complete expression in the works of Leibniz (see, especially, his *Correspondences*). The problem appears before us if we restate the claims of the first-stage theoretical dimension in symbolic form as follows:

According to Shinran:

i. $A = B$ (*nen* is 'to be so')

But he also tells us that:

ii. $B = -C$ ('to be so' is not the contrivance of the practitioner)

iii. $B = D$ ('to be so' is the vow of the Tathagata)

iv. $D = E$ (the vow of the Tathagata is *hōni*)

v. $E = B$ (*hōni* is 'to be so')

vi. $E = -C$ (*hōni* is not the contrivance of the practitioner)

From this we may conclude that, because *nen* is 'to be so' (i), it is also: (a) not the contrivance of the practitioner [this follows from (ii)]; (b) the vow of the Tathagata [this follows from (iii)]; and (c) most importantly, *nen* is identical with *hōni* [this follows deductively from (v), or indirectly from (iv) by way of induction from (iii)]. We also know that the reading of *ni* (爾 in *hōni* 法爾) is *shikarashimeru*, which is equivalent to the meaning of *nen* (然 in *jinen* 自然).

When all of this is taken together, we arrive at a reduction, whereby our analysis may be (at least terminologically) somewhat simplified. By identifying both *nen* and *ni* with *shikarashimu* -- in other words, if *nen* and *ni* are functionally equivalent in terms of *meaning* (viz., *shikarashimu*), then the phrase '*jinenhōni*' may be justifiably shortened to the more compact '*jinen*,' without any significant sacrifice of meaning. But while this reduction may streamline our terminology, it does not entirely validate our conclusions.

Unfortunately, in the interest of space, we must content ourselves with this all-too-brief an account of the problem of identity in general if we are to conclude our quest for the ontological grounding of *jinen*. Suffice to say, while the problem of identity is one which persists throughout this entire essay, it is one which deserves separate, and exhaustive, treatment. What is currently at issue, viz., the justification of the ontological grounding of *jinen*, while related, is one which may be resolved somewhat, although not entirely, independent of the problem of identity. It is hoped that the above remarks concerning this latter problem shall be sufficient for our immediate purposes.

We shall at present need to return to our earlier remarks concerning the grammatical form of *shikarashimu*, for herein lies the crux of the issue. If, as indeed it is the case that, *shikarashimu* is a causative form, we shall be obliged to account for the significance of such a form, if not by the way we translate the term, then certainly according to the manner in which we interpret it.

Our difficulty results from the need, on the one hand, to be absolutely clear about what a causative form, in Japanese, means; and on the other hand, the obligation to render, as briefly and as concisely as possible, a translation (not explanation) for a term which occurs in this form. To that end, then, we should reflect on the observation that, grammatically, the causative form is used to "note causation" (cf. Martin, p. 294). For the grammarians part, this 'notation' is required to be both connotative as well as denotative. We have already suggested that 'to be so' may not be the most grammatically accurate translation for *shikarashimu*; if anything, it is (perhaps) the most grammatically-neutral rendering. However, in as much as it clearly fails to explicitly denote causation, and in so far as it apparently fails to convey any connotative sense of causation as well, we are left with the rather unhappy circumstance of a translation which is no (grammatically) proper translation at all. Perhaps the only resolution to this dilemma is to review what is meant by 'causative' in the first place, and perhaps only with this clarification in mind shall we be able to render a more acceptable translation. To accomplish this, we shall need to look more closely at the Japanese 'causative.'

It might be instructive to mention that the Japanese *causative* form, which ‘notes causation’ (as we have seen above), must not be confused with a *causal* form, which, grammatically is used to *express* a cause. It may appear to be a very fine line to draw between ‘noting causation’ and ‘expressing a cause,’ but the relevance of the distinction may lie in the relative force of the two expressions. That is, the difference here is one of *degree*, not *kind*. To ‘note causation’ is to observe, remark about, or simply take heed of the *action* of causing or producing. To ‘express a cause,’ on the other hand, is a much stronger claim: it is a two-part assertion, both *how* a cause is, as well as *that* it is. The ‘causative,’ then, is a phenomenologically descriptive account of a process, an activity; it is, at most, an ontological observation of the *fact* of causation. The ‘causal,’ however, goes beyond mere ontological observation (*that* a cause is), to make a more metaphysical claim, the assertion of *how* a cause is. It is unnecessary for us to develop the significance of these differences any further. Rather, it is sufficient for our purposes to merely draw the lines as we have, indicating the differences of degree and emphasis, to reiterate that it is indeed a *causative* (not a *causal*) form with which we are concerned, and to content ourselves with the completion of our analysis of the causative form, with the above remarks in mind.

An investigation, then, of the meaning of the causative form, in Japanese, reveals that it “ranges from permission to coercion” (Martin, p. 294); and further, the *translation* ranges from “‘makes him do it’ to ‘lets him do it’” (*ibid*). Perhaps it is this enormously wide range of possible *meanings* (and *uses*) which accounts for the enormously wide range of *translations* as well.² Be that as it may, it is clear that this form, in Japanese, embraces such a wide range of meanings that, in every case, the particular circumstances of a given context may be the only clue for the translator as to which translation, from an equally broad range of possibilities, is most suitable. From a choice of meanings, which range from the most aggressive to the most passive or submissive, and a choice of translations, with an equally wide range, a host of possibilities present themselves. Without some further criterion, in addition to contextual clues, the translator’s task would appear to be a hopeless one.

Fortunately, we have in the Japanese causative one further characteristic which helps to narrow our range of choices somewhat. This is the condition, as Martin observes (*loc. cit.*) that “the Japanese causative requires the instigator to be someone *other* than the agent.” It is within this qualification that we find, if not the salvation for the translator, then surely inspiration for the expositor.

Now, we saw earlier (p. 78, and again, p. 87, above) that *onozukara* as the meaning of *ji* may be used to indicate the ‘separateness’ or ‘other-liness’ of a thing ‘by itself.’ When we consider

this claim now, in light of Martin's remarks concerning the requirement of a Japanese causative (viz., *shikarashimu*), that the instigator be someone *other* than the agent, a more complete, and perhaps more intelligible picture comes into view.

What is this picture? As we have already seen (p.88, above), both *nen* and *ni* mean (the same as) *shikarashimu*. For that reason, we have been able to justifiably reduce the terms of our formula for freedom from the larger *jinenhōni* to the simpler *jinen*, without sacrifice of meaning. Thus we are left with *ji* (which means 'by itself') and *nen* (which means *shikarashimu*); or to put it another way, we are left with *jinen* which means '*shikarashimu* by itself.'

With this identification of *jinen* as '*shikarashimu* by itself' we might satisfy Martin's last condition for the meaning of a causative form, without the need to *translate* it. That is, if the instigator of the causal, or better, causative, action is to be someone (or something) *other* than the agent, then just such a locus may be indicated by means of the 'separateness' or 'other-ness' of a thing 'by itself.' As we saw above, *ji* means 'by itself,' but this 'by itself' may have two meanings. Thus, it is not *ji* in the first sense as the 'own-nature' or 'thing-ness' of a thing 'by itself' which serves as the instigator of the causative action. In this sense, *ji* is the agent of the causative, and therefore ineligible to act as instigator. It is *ji* in the second or 'other' sense -- its use to indicate the altogether separate nature or independence, the 'other-ness' of a thing 'by itself' -- which is able to act in just this required fashion.

Ji means *onozukara* -- 'by itself.' As we have already seen, this term might have an ontological dimension or 'that-ness' about it. Further, we saw that, while devoid of any metaphysical sense of substance, this term was not devoid of metaphysical sense altogether; instead, a certain 'how-ness' is clearly asserted, viz., 'by itself.'

Nen means *shikarashimu*. Just how this '*shikarashimu*' is to be *translated* still remains a problem. But how it is to be *understood* should be clear. In so far as it is a causative form, we are not required to read any metaphysical sense into the term, as we might be were it rendered in a causal form. But this is good news, since our purpose has not been to establish the metaphysical ground for the concept of *jinen*, only the ontological ground. And in this respect, we have been successful. If the causative form of *shikarashimu* is a "phenomenologically descriptive account of a process or activity ... an ontological observation of the fact of causation" (p. 89, above), then ascribing causal agency to Amida (or anything else) is a metaphysical leap which Shinran (or others) may make out of religious conviction, but not one we are compelled to follow out of logical necessity. Quite simply, to say that "Amida is that though which *jinen* is made known" is not *necessarily* to say that Amida is the cause of *jinen* (cf. p. 84).

Regrettably, we have elected to leave our key term, '*shikarashimu*,' untranslated in any proper fashion. Our difficulty is in finding an English equivalent which conveys the necessary breadth and depth of causative meaning which the Japanese term conveys. Thus, to opt for the rather awkward 'to be so' is to accept a translation which is so vague and inelegant as to defy any reader to guess its original (Japanese) grammatical construction. On the other hand, to opt for some of the alternatives which various other translators have proffered (see footnote 2, above) is to confine and delimit this term to expressing causal agency, which may or may not have been the author's intent. Such options may be equally objectionable as our own, albeit for different reasons.

We are left, therefore, with the unfinished task of translating as well as explicating a (perhaps) untranslatable term. That we shrink from the former task (i.e., translation) is regrettable, but perhaps unavoidable, given the conceptual incommensurability of the two languages. However, we trust that we have risen satisfactorily to the challenge of the latter (i.e., explication), as demonstrated by the foregoing essay.

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注

- 1 親鸞聖人著作用語索引 / 教行信証の部 and 親鸞聖人著作用語索引 / 和漢撰述の部 ; see Bibliography for complete references.
- 2 Of the five sources consulted which contained English translations of the *Jinenhōninohoto*, none agreed on the best translation for 'shikarashimu.' The choices ranged from: 'to cause to come about' (Bloom); 'causes to be' (Matsunaga); 'it is so because it is so' (Suzuki); 'one is made to become so' (Ueda); and variously 'to cause to' or 'to be caused to' (Yamamoto). See Bibliography for complete references.

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