

Shinran and Heidegger on the Phenomenology of Religious Life

親鸞とハイデガーにおける宗教的存在の現象学的考察

Dennis Hirota

Shinran and *Shinshūgaku*

Among Shinran's surviving correspondence are three letters addressed to his disciple Jōshin 淨信, all responding to questions regarding the teaching.¹ In one case—atypically in the traditional collections of Shinran's correspondence—even the text of the initial question communicated to Shinran has also been preserved and transmitted. In all three cases, however, the gist of Jōshin's original query is clear from the summary Shinran gives in his reply. In other words, Jōshin's question takes the format of a concise presentation of his own understanding of a particular issue, with a request for Shinran's assessment.

While in two of his responses Shinran generally affirms Jōshin's understanding, in the letter quoted below (Letter 10 in the collection *Lamp for the Latter Ages*), the answer is ambivalent:

I have read your letter thoroughly. In your question regarding the [Pure Land] Buddhist teaching, you state that at the point of the

1 The letters are 7, 10, and 15 in *Lamp for the Latter Ages*. Nothing is known with certainty about Jōshin; it is also unclear whether all three letters are address to the same person.

awakening of the one thought-moment [of shinjin], one is grasped and protected by the unhindered light of wisdom-compassion; hence, the karmic cause for [birth in] the Pure Land is established in ordinary times. This is splendid. Yet, though you speak thus splendidly, it appears to have all turned utterly into your own calculative thinking. (CWS, p. 537, revised)

御文くはしくうけたまはり候ひぬ。さては御法門の御不審に、一念発起のとき、無碍の心光に摂護せられまゐらせ候ふゆゑに、つねに浄土の業因決定すと仰せられ候ふ。これめでたく候ふ。かくめでたくは仰せ候へども、これみなわたくしの御はからひになりぬとおぼえ候ふ。

From the exchange in which the text of Jōshin's own letter has been preserved intact (appended as preface to Letter 7, *Lamp for the Latter Ages*), it is evident that he is both studious and reflective, seeking, on the basis of sutra passages and Shinran's teachings, to formulate a logically satisfying and consistent understanding. We can also surmise from Shinran's replies that diverse interpretations of the Pure Land path have been circulating among people of the nembutsu, causing confusion and occasioning questions from disciples. In the passage above, we see from Shinran's summation that Jōshin is seeking to work out the practical implications of "the awakening of the one thought-moment of shinjin" (*ichinen hokki*), perhaps the crux of Shinran's interpretation of the Pure Land path. But while Shinran first praises the *content* of what Jōshin has written ("this is splendid"), he goes on to deliver a stern admonition: "it appears to have all turned utterly into your own calculative thinking (*hakarai*)."

I wonder whether, particularly for those involved in Shin Buddhist studies (*shinshūgaku* 真宗学), this passage does not pose fundamental questions regarding the contours and significance of the academic study of Shinran's thought. In its starkest form, it is the question of whether

one's own work remains confined within the boundaries of our self-affirming calculative thinking or *hakarai*, or whether it is genuinely guided by and illuminative of the enlightened wisdom that Shinran asserts lies at the heart of the Pure Land path. This is not to suggest that an intellectual understanding of the teaching is meaningless or detrimental, or that in Shinran's view, the Pure Land path demands something akin to a 'blind faith.' Shinran does continue, in the letter quoted above: "Once you have come simply to trust that it surpasses conceptual understanding, there should be no struggle to reason it out (*hakarai*)" ただ不思議と信ぜさせたまひ候ひぬるうへは、わづらはしきはからひあるべからず候ふ。But his postscript to this letter—"Other Power means to be free of any form of calculation" 他力と申し候ふは、とかくのはからひなきを申し候ふなり—indicates that what Shinran terms becoming free of calculative thinking is not simply an attitude one can assume, but manifests the working of Other Power.

If *shinshūgaku* as an academic discipline takes as its primary object of investigation what Shinran terms *jōdo shinshū*—"the true essence of the Pure Land way"—and not merely Shin tradition as a set of abstract Buddhist concepts or objectified historical and social phenomena, then surely it must take Shinran's reaction to Jōshin's letter seriously. Even though Jōshin has mastered the terminology and grammar of the teaching, Shinran indicates that he may have gone astray, so that what is most crucial in the tradition has not been grasped. If the reasoned elucidation of Shinran's Pure Land path is the central work of *shinshūgaku*, does this make any difference?

It is not inappropriate, I think, to correlate Shinran's cautionary response to Jōshin—"though you speak thus splendidly, it appears to have all turned utterly into your own calculative thinking"—with his fundamental distinction between the teaching that is true and real (*shinjitsu*), on the one hand, and that which is temporary and provisional (*gonke*, *hōben*),

on the other. As Yuien-bō tells us in the postscript to *Tannishō*, “That we abandon the accommodated and take up the real, set aside the provisional and adopt the true is the Master’s fundamental intent (*hon’i*).” Shinran’s entire enterprise—the clarification of *jōdo shinshū* established by Hōnen—may be said to turn on his distinction between “self-power within [the path of] Other Power” (*tariki no naka no jiriki*) and authentic engagement, what he terms “the realization of shinjin.” Further, realization of shinjin or Other Power is itself none other than the falling away of calculative thinking. Thus, “Other Power means: no self-working is true working.”

What is striking in Shinran’s response to Jōshin is the subtlety and elusiveness of this critical boundary line between the stances of self-power and Other Power, at once totally decisive and, from the perspective of our ordinary thinking, perhaps imperceptible. In Shinran’s eyes, even so earnest and diligent a disciple as Jōshin may be found, in the manner of his quest to formulate an understanding of Shinran’s Pure Land teaching, to be precariously suspended between genuine apprehension and mere intellectual self-satisfaction and self-deception. Where the final issue is Shinran’s distinction between the accommodated and the true, it appears that even explicit doctrinal content may fail to be determining (“what you say is splendid”). How then are we to proceed? How can we find a means for exploring and articulating the insights of Shinran’s Pure Land Buddhist path without reducing it either to a set of doctrinal propositions or mere complex of historically and socially formed beliefs and practices?

To begin with, this surely requires reflection on the stance of Shinran himself in his own efforts at a *shinshūgaku*—an exposition of “the true essence of the Pure Land Buddhist path” that might effectively convey it to others. As an effort in such reflection, I will propose here that our understanding of Shinran may be deepened, and more importantly, our current methodologies for studying his Buddhist thought may be amended

and enriched, by bringing the basic orientation of his Buddhist path into conversation with aspects of the thought of Heidegger.²

Shinran and Heidegger

Despite the vast differences in their intellectual backgrounds, cultural contexts, and purposes, as part of the fundamental orientation of their work, both Shinran and Heidegger take as their starting point profound limitations and distortions in human awareness. They consequently confront a similar problem: the inadequacy of what they both might describe as the deeply ingrained, commonsense notion that human knowledge and judgments about the world are based on the relationship of an autonomous ego-subject and stable objects around us. This shared challenge leads them both to tackle the question of how awareness genuinely arises from within the context of bounded, conditioned experience. It is above all for this reason that bringing these two thinkers into comparative consideration may be both plausible and potentially fruitful. I might note that recent research indicating the influence of Luther on Heidegger's early thought suggests not only that underlying the similarities between the thought of Heidegger and Shinran is the often remarked resemblance between Luther and Shinran, but also that the early Heidegger may cast significant light for the comparative study of the two religious thinkers.

To pursue the similarities between Shinran and Heidegger further, we find that they arrive at structurally analogous notions of the nature of human engagement with what is true. Both thinkers seek to delineate the contours of human awareness—which itself implies a dichotomy of knower and known—without the reification of either the knowing subject

2 This essay builds on an earlier article: D. Hirota, "Shinran and Heidegger on Truth," in Paul Numrich, ed., *Boundaries of Knowledge in Buddhism, Christianity, and the Natural Sciences* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2008), pp. 59-79.

See also my book, D. Hirota, *Asura's Harp: Engagement with Language as Buddhist Path* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2006).

or known object, which both thinkers regard as falsifying and, in essence, resulting in a flawed mode of human existence in ignorance and attachment. This thinking leads in both figures to the development of two broad, interrelated motifs that mirror each other from opposite sides of the dichotomy of awareness:

1. On the side of the knower, there is engagement with what is true and real wholly from *within* a prior horizon of directed behavior, that is, ignorance or oblivion;
2. On the side of the known, there is truth as apprehensible form emergent out of formlessness and inconceivability.

In their interaction, these two motifs together point to the arising of an ineluctably doubled structure of awareness, in which truth is simultaneous with and inseparable from untruth. In Shinran's terms, "blind passions and enlightenment are not two in substance" (*Hymns on the Pure Land Masters*, 32, CWS p. 369). In Heidegger's terms, truth as unconcealedness, which is always partial and perspectival, is inseparable from withdrawal and concealedness.

The similarity in basic orientation reveals itself in interpretive applications as well. Regarding Shinran's response to Jōshin's query mentioned above and, more broadly, his distinction of the provisional and the true that forms a pervasive undercurrent in his thought, we find an illuminating parallel in Heidegger's early lectures, *The Phenomenology of Religious Life* (1920-1921).³ There Heidegger takes up Paul's letters to the Thessalonians, the first of which is the earliest New Testament document, as manifesting the religious existence of what he calls "primal Christianity." Heidegger's concern, like Shinran's, is not the intellectual grasp of doctrinal propositions, but elucidating the mode of existence manifested in the written communication. Because of this shared concern, Heidegger's central themes in his discussion of 1 Thessalonians—lan-

3 Martin Heidegger. *The Phenomenology of Religious Life*. Translated by M. Fritsch and J. A. Gosetti. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004.

guage as the call that occasions entrance into religious existence, and the temporality of alreadiness (“already having become”) in relation to the parousia or second coming of Christ—also have significant analogues in Shinran’s distinctive concerns with linguisticity and temporality.⁴ In relation to our topic in this article, perhaps the most arresting parallel may be seen in Heidegger’s reading of Paul’s response to queries from the Thessalonians regarding when the parousia will occur. Heidegger emphasizes Paul’s response that there is no need to answer because the Thessalonians already “well know” out of their own religious life-experience. Further, Paul develops his assertion in concrete terms by distinguishing two groups of people by their relation to the parousia, those who seek peace and security, but who dwell in darkness and are destined for sudden destruction, and those live in wakefulness and self-awareness. This is a distinction not merely of intellectual apprehension, but of two modes of existence, and although the content differs, it resembles Shinran’s distinction of accommodated and true, or self-power in Other Power and genuine Other Power. Thus, Shinran states, “There are two kinds of people who seek birth in the Pure Land: those of Other Power and those of self-power. This has been taught by the Indian masters and Pure Land teachers” (*Lamp for the Latter Ages*, letter 2, p. 525).

Further, in rejecting commonsense notions of an autonomous subjective agent, both Shinran and Heidegger focus on an event of occurrence of truth, rather than a kind of consciousness or subjective experience, and on that which allows or empowers truth to emerge for the always situated being. Shinran calls the event “the one thought-moment of [realizing] *shinjin* (true mind given by Amida Buddha)” and Heidegger uses the term

4 On Shinran and language, see my article “Shinran’s View of Language: A Buddhist Hermeneutics of Faith,” *Eastern Buddhist*, xxvi: 1 (Spring 1993), 50-93 and xxvi: 2 (Autumn 1993), 91-130. On temporality, see Ueda Yoshifumi and Dennis Hirota, *Shinran: An Introduction to His Thought* (Kyoto: Hongwanji International Center, 1989), pp. 168-182, and Nishitani Keiji, “The Problem of Time in Shinran,” *Eastern Buddhist*, 11:1 (1978), pp. 13-26.

“the open region” [ET, p. 144] or “clearing” in which unconcealment or disclosure occurs. I will consider here the dynamic that enables the emergence of truth in the two thinkers and its field or locus as human existence, taking up three general aspects of a conception of an enabling activity in apprehension that are developed by both Shinran and Heidegger, each in his own way: (1) the emerging of meaningful form from formlessness; (2) the drawing or summoning of finite beings to what is real, and the human posture of waiting and listening; (3) the mode of fulfilled human existence as “dwelling.” It may be said that in the delineation of authentic “dwelling” as entering and abiding in a field of polarities in interaction, each thinker sets forth a vision of human life that possesses ethical force. In relation to Heidegger, I will take the published lecture “On the Essence of Truth” as the point of departure, considering its reference to the early Greek idea of *phusis*, but will also turn to several concepts developed in later essays, including the relation between “earth” and “world” as seen in “The Origin of the Work of Art,”⁵ and the interaction among the “fourfold” (*Geviert*) of earth, sky, divinities, and mortals, as set forth in “Building Dwelling Thinking,” “The Thing,” and other essays.

The Occurrence of Truth as Event

1. The Emerging of the Other from Formlessness

In his discussion of truth as freedom in “On the Essence of Truth,” Heidegger states that, on the side of the perceiving subject, human beings expose themselves in openness and approachability. At the same time, with regard to beings or things, he expresses a more dynamic aspect:

5 “On the Origin of the Work of Art,” in particular, includes a restatement of Heidegger’s thinking in “On the Essence of Truth” in a treatment of the occurrence of truth in the working of the artwork.

Beings as a whole reveal themselves as *φύσις*, “nature,” which here does not yet mean a particular sphere of beings but rather beings as such as a whole, specifically in the sense of upsurgent presencing [*aufgehendes Anwesen*]. (ET, p. 145)

Heidegger employs the term *phusis* for the active appearing of the things of the world, the emergence itself that may be distinguished as the ungraspable “worlding” of beings “as a whole” prior to any specific form. There is no further clarification of the term *phusis* in “On the Essence of Truth,” but it is discussed throughout *Introduction to Metaphysics*, a lecture course given five years later in 1935. There Heidegger states that “the Greek essence of truth is possible only together with the Greek essence of Being as *phusis*” (p. 107). Concerning the meaning of the word *phusis*:

It [*“phusis”*] says what emerges from itself (for example, the emergence, the blossoming, of a rose), the unfolding that opens itself up, the coming-into-appearance in such unfolding, and holding itself and persisting in appearance—in short, the emerging-abiding sway. . . . *Phusis* is Being itself, by virtue of which beings first become and remain observable. (IM, p. 15)

There are two central points here that may be brought into comparison with Shinran’s thought. First, Being as *phusis*, while enabling beings as apprehended things and objects of understanding to “become and remain observable,” is in itself, as the “upsurgent presencing” of “beings as such as a whole,” beyond concrete apprehension or conceptual grasp. Second, although Being or *phusis* is not itself a being—is not to be grasped as any thing, such as reality as substratum—but rather is a dynamic “coming-into-appearance,” it may nevertheless be said to “emerge *from itself*” as the beings we apprehend. On the one hand, Being is ungraspable, while

beings are precisely all that we perceive and comprehend; on the other hand, to borrow Heidegger's metaphor, Being "blossoms" from itself, thus enabling beings to become observable and humans to apprehend them.

Both Shinran and Heidegger face the question of the ultimate horizon of intelligibility and how it is traversed and entered from beyond, with an 'inward' movement in the direction of conditioned human existence. Without such "emerging from itself" or "unfolding that opens itself up," human conceptuality would be no more than chimerical construct and Heidegger's thought would become a form of rootless idealism. Heidegger identifies this approaching movement into the field of receptivity or "coming-into-appearance" using the term "*phusis*," which is to be understood as a dynamic power (*Walten*, "*sway*").

A delicate balance, however, is required to preserve this emergence from reification. As a Greek word for "beings," *phusis* was translated into Latin *natura*, but according to Heidegger, for the early Greeks it "does not yet mean a particular sphere of beings but rather beings as such as a whole." In other words, it does not indicate primarily the things themselves of the natural environment that we perceive around us, but rather the very unfolding of an intelligible world. The focal meaning of *phusis* concerns the "event of *standing forth*, arising from the concealed" (IM, p. 16). This emergence of the intelligibility of things is the arising of a horizon or "world" that, while ungraspable itself, functions as a context for engaging and understanding what appears and "takes its stand" within.

Shinran, quite late in life, adopted as a crucial term for reality (suchness, dharma-nature, uncreated dharma-body, nirvana, etc.) the word *jinen* (自然, in modern Japanese, *shizen*), which, like the Latin translation of *phusis*, came to be used to indicate the world of nature. The word *jinen* is made up of two Chinese characters, *ji* meaning "oneself" or "itself" and *nen* serving as an adverbial suffix sometimes similar to the English "-ly," indicating the manner of an occurrence; thus, "of itself" or "spontaneous-

ly.” Originally *jinen* indicated the modality of occurrence seen in Heidegger’s example of the “blossoming of a rose,” naturally, spontaneously occurring out of itself, free of human contrivance. Shinran’s usage of *jinen* holds a number of correspondences with Heidegger’s discussion of the Greek *phusis*, for in both cases the terms identify a dynamic of activity that functions centrally to resolve the shared problematic, outlined above, of characterizing the enabling of apprehension of what is, of truth, by human beings.

A detailed discussion of Shinran’s use of *jinen* is not possible here; I will merely mention several parallels that may be drawn with Heidegger’s *phusis*, which suggests that to some extent these two concepts serve an analogical role in the structures of thought of the two thinkers. First, Shinran adopted *jinen* as a term synonymous with traditional terms for inconceivable reality; thus he states: “Supreme Buddha is formless, and because of being formless is called *jinen*.” Like Heidegger’s Being, *jinen* is understood to lie beyond the horizon of intelligibility.

Again like Heidegger’s Being, however, *jinen* must not be taken to refer to a transcendent absolute. Rather, as with Being as *phusis*, the basic meaning of *jinen* is dynamic and inseparable from beings: ‘*Jinen* signifies “being made to become so from the very beginning.”’ For Shinran, *jinen* points in particular to the inward traversing across the horizon of human understanding and the manifesting of intelligible form. The fundamental model of this movement for Shinran is Amida Buddha: “Amida Tathagata comes forth from suchness and manifests various bodies—fulfilled, accommodated, and transformed” (Chapter on Realization, 1, CWS, p. 153). That is, *jinen* expresses not only the formlessness that lies beyond human conceptuality, but also the dynamic manifesting of form *as that which is formless*. Thus Shinran states:

Buddha, when appearing with form, is not called supreme nirvana. In order to make it known that supreme Buddha is formless, the name

‘Amida Buddha’ is expressly used; so I have been taught. Amida Buddha fulfills the purpose of making us know the significance of *jinen*. (CWS p. 428)

Just as Heidegger speaks of *phusis* as “what emerges *from itself* ..., the unfolding that *opens itself up*,” Shinran also points to a continuity across the horizon of intelligibility that binds formlessness and form or concealment and disclosure.

It is in comparison with Heidegger here that we find a means for grasping the potentially broad significance of Shinran’s *jinen*. Within Shin Buddhist tradition, the meaning of *jinen* is largely restricted to the soteriological realm of Amida Buddha as arising from transcendent reality and becoming known to human beings. Pursuing a Heideggerian emphasis on *phusis* as the dynamic of the emerging of “beings as a whole” suggests the possibility of an understanding of *jinen* as likewise expressing Shinran’s engagement with the larger issue of human awareness within the apprehension of reality as dynamic. Here, the things of the world are indeed, as with Heidegger, pervaded by reality and in some sense sacralized. This vision carries an ethical force, which we will discuss below.

Entering the Field of Discriminative Awareness

A further similarity between the conceptual structure of Shinran’s *jinen* and Heidegger’s discussion of *phusis* is that both terms are employed to offer an account of the apprehension of what is real while at the same time maintaining a dimension of nonduality between object and subject. Once again, this pattern of thought arises from confronting a shared problematic in the effort to avoid reification or an absolutized dichotomy. Heidegger speaks of the historical ‘narrowing of *phusis* in the direction of the “physical”’ (IM, p. 17) in opposition to the “psychical,” but for early Greek thinkers like Parmenides, “Being and thinking, in the

sense of contending against each other, are unified.” Heidegger explains:

How are we to understand this? Let us base our answer on Being, which as *phusis* has become clearer to us in various respects. Being means: standing in the light, appearing, stepping into unconcealment. Where this happens, that is, where Being holds sway, apprehension holds sway too and happens too, as belonging to Being. (IM p. 147)

In further explicating Parmenides:

Apprehension happens for the sake of Being. Being essentially unfolds as appearing, as stepping into unconcealment, only if unconcealment happens, only if a self-opening happens.... *Apprehension belongs to phusis*; the sway of *phusis* shares its sway with apprehension. (IM, p. 148; emphasis added)

If the arising of truth to finite human existence is possible, apprehension must occur as the opposite face of the emergence of beings and not as the mere imposition of a conceptual grasp by a transcendent subject. Human apprehension also is thus an aspect of the unfolding of Being, and it may be said that “apprehension belongs to *phusis*,” where *phusis* itself is a dimension of Being.

Shinran makes a structurally similar assertion when he states:

Tathagata (formless reality, suchness, dharma-nature, etc.) pervades the countless worlds; it fills the hearts and minds of the ocean of all beings. Thus, plants, trees, and land all attain Buddhahood. Since it is with this heart and mind of all sentient beings that they entrust themselves to the Vow of the dharma-body as compassionate means (i.e., Amida), this shinjin is none other than Buddha-nature. (*Notes on ‘Essentials of Faith Alone’*, CSW p. 461)

In other words, *shinjin* as the apprehension of Amida Buddha, who brings beings to know that supreme Buddha is formless, itself belongs to Tathagata or Buddha-nature. Shinran states that *shinjin* as the Buddha-mind is directed to or given to beings. We will take up this sense of givenness and the response of gratitude below.

When Heidegger states that “apprehension happens *for the sake of Being*” in the passage quoted earlier, there is a suggestion of anthropomorphism that is perhaps inescapable in seeking to express the dynamic of an underlying nonduality of subject and object in the arising of human truth. Shinran goes further in this direction in his development of the concept of *jinen*, asserting that its functioning in taking form is specifically directed to awakening persons to formlessness. His assessment of the depth of the ignorant self-attachment that must be broken through for apprehension of truth to take place results in a conception of *jinen* as the active creation of form (Amida, Vow, Name) that awakens beings to formlessness: “As the essential purport of the Vow, [Amida] vowed to bring us all to become supreme Buddha.” In “On the Essence of Truth,” Heidegger appears more optimistic that absorption in the dimension of forgetfulness of the mystery can be overcome through a shift toward “philosophical thinking”: “The glimpse into the mystery out of errancy is a questioning—in the sense of that unique question of what beings as such are as a whole” (ET, p. 151). Nevertheless, the fundamental structural elements in Shinran have their echo in those more generally applied in Heidegger.

Shinran treats the polarity of the movement across the threshold of intelligibility in terms of the twofold dharma-body, a concept he borrows from the Chinese Pure Land Buddhist master T'an-luan, who states:

All Buddhas and bodhisattvas have dharma-bodies of two dimensions: dharma-body as dharma-nature and dharma-body as compassionate means. Dharma-body as compassionate means arises from

dharma-body as dharma-nature, and dharma-body as dharma-nature emerges [into human awareness] from dharma-body as compassionate means. (quoted in “Chapter on Realization,” 17, CWS p. 165)

Dharma-body as dharma-nature is synonymous with suchness or formless reality, and Shinran takes dharma-body as compassionate means to refer specifically to Amida Buddha, whose vow to liberate all beings and whose Name (nembutsu) provide conceptual form: “*Compassionate means* refers to manifesting form, revealing a name, and making itself known to sentient beings” (*Notes on Once-Calling and Many-Calling*, CWS, p. 486). As we have seen, Shinran states that “Amida Buddha fulfills the purpose of making us know the significance of *jinen*.” The two poles that embody the dynamic of *jinen* and between which it moves may be identified as the dimension of formlessness and nondiscrimination, beyond word and conception, and the dimension of discriminative apprehension, thought, and language. For both Shinran and Heidegger, the tendency of persons is to become absorbed solely in practical concerns within the realm of the latter dimension, condemning oneself to a truncated life of clinging. Shinran calls this attitude “afflicting passions” (which are inherent in human existence) and “calculative thinking” (which falls away); in “On the Essence of Truth,” Heidegger calls it errancy, oblivion, and forgetfulness of the mystery.

Heidegger develops his notion of Being as *phusis*, “emergent self-upraising” (IM, p. 64), by adopting the term *polemos* from Heraclitus in order to treat the polarity informing the movement of entrance into the field of discriminative apprehension. In *Introduction to Metaphysics*, he quotes Heraclitus (translated here according to Heidegger’s interpretation): “Confrontation (*polemos*) is indeed for all (that comes to presence) the sire (who lets emerge), but (also) for all the preserver that holds sway. For it lets some appear as gods, others as human beings, some it produces (sets forth) as slaves, but others as the free.” Heidegger explains *polemos*:

As Heraclitus thinks it, struggle (*polemos*) first and foremost allows what essentially unfolds to step apart in opposition, first allows position and status and rank to establish themselves in coming to presence.... In con-frontation, world comes to be.... The struggle meant here is originary struggle, for it allows those that struggle to originate as such in the first place.... (IM, p. 65)

Although Heraclitus's *polemos* may strongly suggest conflict and strife, Heidegger's emphasis falls rather on the rendering of the differentiation inherent in apprehension: "struggle in the sense of the confrontation, the setting-apart-from-each-other (*Aus-einander-setzung*)" (IM, p. 140). Here, Heidegger's concern appears to be the discriminative nature of human awareness, distinguishing subject from object and thing from thing, that is also a central issue in Shinran's Buddhist thought. As Shinran states in a commentary, "The word 'to encounter' implies form" (*Notes on Once-Calling and Many-Calling*, CWS, p. 485), suggesting that a person's uncalculated "encounter" with what is real (Vow, Name, etc.) requires the compassionate activity of self-manifestation in apprehensible form. This leads to our second topic.

2. Givenness: The Summoning of Beings by What is Real

As we have seen, to treat the relationship between the two dimensions of formlessness and form or of the inconceivable and the discriminative, Shinran refers to the concept of the twofold dharma-body, in which the two opposing dimensions unfold into each other in the process of awakening beings that he terms *jinen*:

From this treasure ocean of oneness (dharma-body as dharma-nature) form was manifested, taking the name Bodhisattva Dharmakara, who, through establishing the unhindered Vow as the cause, became Amida Buddha (dharma-body as compassionate means).... This Tatha-

gata (“come-forth-from-thusness,” Amida Buddha) is light. Light is none other than wisdom; wisdom is the form of light. Wisdom is, in addition, formless; hence this Tathagata is inconceivable light Buddha. (*Notes on Once-Calling and Many-Calling*, CWS, p. 486)

The spontaneous (*jinen*) unfolding of reality as wisdom-compassion may not be a concept either available or acceptable to Heidegger, but he develops a functionally analogous pair of terms in “On the Origin of the Work of Art” (1935-36). This lecture revisits and expands on the treatment of truth in the earlier essay “On the Essence of Truth” by focusing on the work of art at the locus of the event of truth. To explore the work-being or functioning of the artwork as the happening of truth, Heidegger sets forth a dichotomy of earth and world, which in aspects of its broad outline may be brought into comparison with Shinran’s twofold dharma-body.

Heidegger’s concept of world remains basically that seen above: “not a mere collection of things” nor “a merely imaginary framework added by our representation to the sum of things that are present,” a world is “always-nonobjectual” (OWA, p. 23.), yet enables our apprehension of things as meaningful parts of our surroundings. In functioning to make things available to our understanding, our “world worlds, and is more fully in being than all those tangible and perceptible things in the midst of which we take ourselves to be at home.” “Earth,” introduced in “On the Origin of the Work of Art” to complement world, may be understood to express the counter-movement of concealment that is inherent in truth. Thus, “earth shatters every attempt to penetrate it” and “is apprehended and preserved as the essentially undisclosable, as that which withdraws from every disclosure, in other words, keeps itself constantly closed up” (OWA, p. 25).

Several points may be noted with regard to our concerns here. First, the duality of earth and world, like the twofold dharma-body, is used to

delineate the dynamic circularity moving between formlessness or nondiscrimination, on the one hand, and the field of discriminative apprehension or conceptual understanding, on the other. These two dimensions of reality or of the happening of truth, while standing in polar opposition, are for both thinkers interfused. Thus, Heidegger states: “World and earth are essentially different and yet never separated from one another.” Further he states: “World is grounded on earth, and earth rises up through world” (OWA, p. 26). These statements have their close parallel in Shinran. Concerning the interaction between the two dimensions, as we have seen, Shinran quotes T’an-luan’s formulation: “Dharma-body as compassionate means [form] arises from dharma-body as dharma-nature [formless reality], and dharma-body as dharma-nature emerges [into human awareness] from dharma-body as compassionate means. These two dimensions of dharma-body differ but are not separable; they are one but not identical.”

Further, both thinkers propose that the relationship of interaction between formless reality and forms also signifies, regarding the aspect of the subject, that human awareness is brought into contact with the dimension of the formless *through and as* apprehension of things in the world of form. Such a dynamic is, in fact, required for the apprehension of beings in their truth and reality, for ordinary human understanding absorbed in the field of things cannot attain such a grasp through its own discriminative operations. In relation to the functioning of the artwork, then, on the one hand, the work makes manifest both a world and earth:

Rising-up-within-itself the work opens up a world and keeps it abidingly in force. To be a work means: to set up a world. (OWA, p. 22)

The work moves the earth into the open of a world and holds it there. *The work lets the earth be an earth.* (OWA, p. 24; emphasis in original)

The setting up of a world and the setting forth of earth are two essential traits belonging to the work-being of the work. Within the unity of that work-being, however, they belong together. (OWA, p. 26)

While “earth rises up through world” to become manifest as “essentially self-secluding,” on the other hand, there is a reciprocal, opposite movement: “This setting forth of the earth is what the work achieves by setting itself back into the earth” (OWA, p. 25).

The “setting itself back into the earth” expresses a movement perhaps analogous to Shinran’s notion that “in order to make it known that supreme Buddha is formless, the name Amida Buddha is expressly used,” so that “Amida Buddha fulfills the purpose of making us know the significance of *jinen*.” Jinen in fact holds a multiple significance more complex than Heidegger’s *physis*. It is formless, inconceivable reality, and it is a dynamic of the emerging of form that further brings beings to awareness and to attainment of formlessness. In other words, it enables encounter (implying form: Amida, Vow, Name) and further “draws” beings unendingly to formless reality. In interpreting a passage from the *Larger Sutra*, Shinran states:

[The sutra states:] *Never at variance with the [Pure] Land, one is drawn there by its spontaneous working (jinen)....* The person who has realized true and real shinjin naturally [by *jinen*] is in accord with the cause of birth in the Pure Land and is drawn by the Buddha’s karmic power; hence, going [to the Pure Land] is easy, and ascending to and attaining the supreme great nirvana is without limit.... *Jinen* means that there is no calculating on the part of the practitioner. (*Notes on the Inscriptions on Sacred Scrolls*, CWS pp. 496-498)

In his dichotomy of earth and world, however, Heidegger moves toward a structure of thought similar to Shinran’s:

The earth is openly illuminated as itself only where it is apprehended and preserved as the essentially undisclosable, as that which withdraws from every disclosure, in other words, keeps itself constantly closed up. (OWA, p.)

That earth as “essentially undisclosable” and formless may be “openly illuminated” in the artwork means:

The self-seclusion of the earth is, however, no uniform, inflexible staying-in-the dark [Verhangenbleiben], but unfolds, rather, into an inexhaustible richness of simple modes and shapes. (OWA, p. 25)

In words of Seng-chao quoted by T'an-luan and reproduced in Shinran, “The dharma-body, being formless, takes on all forms.... It being without words, profound writings spread more and more widely.”

It may be objected that, despite the structural parallels in their thought, Shinran's conception of *jinen* is specifically soteriological, while Heidegger explicitly avoids an overtly theological orientation in seeking to illuminate human existence in the world. Thus, while *jinen* indicates the working of reality moving beings toward awakening, *phusis*, in Heidegger's thought, bespeaks the general “worlding” of the world. For this reason, while Shinran interprets the motive force moving in his concept of *jinen* in anthropomorphic terms such as wisdom-compassion, Heidegger employs neutral, impersonal concepts of sway and *polemos*.

Two points may be briefly noted here regarding this objection. First, concerning Shinran, although the metaphor of emergence into the field of human apprehension is applied particularly to the salvific working of reality (formless supreme Buddha, suchness, dharma-nature, etc.), this does not necessarily mean that his concept of *jinen* is restricted to overt manifestations of Buddhist transmission such as Amida's Vow and Name, Sakyamuni's teaching, or Hōnen's preaching. *Jinen* as “becoming so of

itself, not through the practitioner's calculation," also characterizes the modality of the practitioner's present existence and the existence of the things of the world in which the person carries on her life. This is because, as we have seen, the world of the practitioner is one in which "Tathagata (true reality, suchness, etc.) pervades the countless worlds; it fills the hearts and minds of the ocean of all beings. Thus, plants, trees, and land all attain Buddhahood." Formless reality is said to fill the mind of the practitioner and all the things of the world. The practitioner comes to apprehend this reality through its realization as *shinjin*, and in such apprehension Shinran states:

How joyous I am, realizing as I humbly reflect that my heart and mind stand rooted in the Buddha-ground of the universal Vow, and that my thoughts and feelings flow within the dharma-ocean, which is beyond comprehension. (*Passages on the Pure Land Way*, CWS, p. 303)

The "Buddha-ground" or "dharma-ocean, which is beyond comprehension" may be said to indicate the dimension of formless reality that "pervades the countless worlds" and in which the practitioner and all things have their existence. According to Shinran, *jinen* may be said to be a synonym for truth as "dharmicness" (*hōsoku* 法則), meaning "the way that things have become settled to be" (*"koto no sadamaritaru arisama," sakun* annotation, CWS, p. 481), that is, as they are in themselves in the world and in human involvement, not as objects of calculative thinking empirically observed by the self. Thus: "*Dharmicness* expresses the natural working (*jinen*) in the life of the person who realizes *shinjin* and says the Name once" (CWS, p. 481).

Second, Heidegger, tracing perhaps a reverse path from Shinran's, is led from reflection on the locus of truth as event toward anthropomorphic expressions of the holy in setting forth the principal significance of earth

for human existence:

φύσις lights up that on which man bases his dwelling. We call this the *earth*. What this word means here is far removed from the idea of a mass of matter and from the merely astronomical idea of a planet. Earth is that in which the arising of everything that arises is brought back—as, indeed, the very thing that it is—and sheltered. In the things that arise the *earth presences as the protecting one*. (OWA, p. 21; emphasis added)

As we have seen, earth shares the dual character of truth, or the non-duality of discrimination or differentiation and nondiscrimination that we have been considering: “Earth is the coming-forth-concealing [Hervorkommend-Bergende].” On the one hand, “All things of the earth, the earth itself in its entirety, flow together in reciprocal harmony,” and on the other hand, “this confluence is no blurring of outlines” (OWA, p. 25). In addition, like *jinen*, “Earth is that which cannot be forced, that which is effortless and untiring,” unyielding to calculative grasp or contrivance (“earth shatters every attempt to penetrate it”) and yet emerging to the patient, heedful mind, so that earth presences “in the things that arise” in the world.

Further, “Earth is that in which the arising of everything that arises is brought back... and sheltered.... [E]arth presences as the protecting one.” Here we find expressed a function of earth that is perhaps analogous to Shinran’s perception of Amida Buddha as fulfilling “the purpose of making us know the significance of *jinen*” and of the dharma-ocean within which his “thoughts and feelings flow” as he carries on his present life in the world. Heidegger goes on to state, “On and in the earth, historical man founds his dwelling in the world.” This sense of “dwelling,” simultaneously or coincidentally, in the field of discrimination and attachments and in the dimension of the inconceivable is crucial for both

Shinran and Heidegger.

3. Mindful Dwelling in Engagement with the Things of the World

As we have seen, in their explorations of truth, both Shinran and Heidegger seek to avoid the distortions rooted in the reification of subject and object and the consequent absorption in egocentric, calculative thinking. They therefore focus on issues of how reality emerges into the field of finite human awareness. To sketch the contours of this event of truth, both thinkers evolve complex but structurally similar conceptions of reality as simultaneously ungraspable and dynamic. Heidegger's *phusis* embraces both "Being itself" and beings' coming-into-appearance in humanly meaningful contexts, and Shinran's *jinen* involves both formless Buddha and a bi-directional dynamic of the arising of form (Amida, Vow, Name) and beings' awakening thereby to formless reality.

Nevertheless, both Shinran and Heidegger find it necessary to continue the trajectory we have been sketching beyond the polarity of the twofold dharma-body or the struggle of earth and world. This is because a simple polarity alone cannot adequately elucidate the locus of understanding as at once utterly situated and true, that is, as occurring within the limits of mutually conditioning interrelationships and, at the same time, aware of inconceivability or mystery. There are several elements needed for a fuller depiction of human apprehension of that which is true and real. One is a characterization of the mode of existence in which such apprehension takes place. Another is the demarcation of the locus of such existence, given the nature of the dynamic of apprehension itself.

Human Existence as Dwelling

Regarding the first issue, both Shinran and Heidegger employ the metaphor of "dwelling" as a central metaphor for ongoing human existence in genuine engagement with truth or reality. For both thinkers, it may be said that "to dwell" expresses the mode of existence in which

persons abide in the highest fulfillment of their existence as human beings. Heidegger states that “man is insofar as he *dwells*” (BDT, p. 147). For Heidegger, the genuine sense of dwelling (as *bauen*, building) tends to fall into oblivion as attention is focused on various *means* of livelihood, and thus modern man in particular is beset by a sense of alienation and “homelessness.” For Shinran, the verb “to dwell” (*jūsu*) is a central expression for the mode of existence of the person who has realized shinjin: persons of shinjin dwell (abide) in the stage of nonretrogression; dwell among the truly settled; dwell in the same stage as Maitreya,⁶ dwell in Amida’s Vow;⁷ their heart and mind constantly resides in the Pure Land, even as they live out their lives in this world.⁸

Why should both Shinran and Heidegger employ the metaphor of “dwelling” to refer to genuine, fulfilled human existence in the world? For both thinkers, it characterizes existence in unwavering contact and interchange with that which exceeds conceivability and yet enables apprehension of what is true and real. There are, I think, three important aspects of the experience of “dwelling” that both thinkers may be said to share to varying degrees, though with different emphases: settledness, givenness, and compassion or “preserving” or caring for.

It will not be possible to draw parallels or comparisons in detail here, but to suggest the general direction of thought, I will briefly consider a single passage from Heidegger, from “Building Dwelling Thinking,” then take up a complex of similar elements in Shinran. Heidegger states:

-
- 6 “Because persons of shinjin dwell in the same stage as Maitreya, who will attain Buddhahood after one lifetime, it is certain that they are grasped, never to be abandoned” (*A Collection of Letters* [Zenshō text] 7, CWS p. 574).
 - 7 “To respond to your question concerning the cause of birth, at the moment we realize true and real shinjin, we receive [the benefit of] Amida’s grasping, never to abandon us; hence, we unfailingly come to dwell in the Tathagata’s Vow” (*A Collection of Letters* [Zenshō text] 7, CWS p. 573).
 - 8 ‘The heart of the person of shinjin already and always resides in the Pure Land. “Resides” means that the heart of the person of shinjin constantly dwells there’ (*Lamp for the Latter Ages*, letter 3, CWS p. 528).

[T]he Gothic *wunian* [cognate of *bauen*, to remain, to stay in a place] says more distinctly how this remaining is experienced. *Wunian* means: to be at peace, to be brought to peace, to remain in peace. The word for peace, *Friede*, means to free, *das Frye*, and *fry* means: preserved from harm and danger, preserved from something, safeguarded. To free really means to spare. The sparing itself consists not only in the fact that we do not harm the one whom we spare. Real sparing is something *positive* and takes place when we leave something beforehand in its own nature.... The fundamental character of dwelling is this sparing and preserving. It pervades dwelling in its whole range. (BDT, p. 149)

The three characteristics of the experience of dwelling may be seen expressed here in succession. Regarding settledness, to dwell implies being at ease, knowing oneself secure whatever may occur. This results from apprehending the sources of one's existence in the concealed and inconceivable. Thus, it is "to be at peace, to be brought to peace, to remain in peace." This peace or security is not gained through exertion of self-will, but is given as a freedom from absorption in one-dimensional calculative thinking. Further, this givenness is expressed in terms of a passivity: dwelling as being "preserved from harm and danger, preserved from something, safeguarded." At the same time, however, such preserving manifests itself in an active sense: "Real sparing is something *positive*." For Heidegger, to dwell is *bauen* in a twofold sense of cultivating and building, and "this word *bauen* however also means at the same time to cherish and protect, to preserve and care for, specifically to till the soil, to cultivate the vine."

To consider these briefly as they appear in Shinran's thought, for Shinran, "to dwell" expresses a settledness (*jō*, *sadamaru* 定) possessing several dimensions; the most important may be seen in the following quotation:

Practicers who have realized true shinjin... abide in the stage of “the truly settled” (*shōjōju*, those whose attainment of birth in the Pure Land and perfect enlightenment at the time of death is inalterably established), for they have already been grasped [by the light of Amida’s wisdom-compassion], never to be abandoned. There is no need to wait in anticipation for the moment of death, no need to rely on Amida’s coming [to receive one at death]. At the time shinjin becomes settled, birth too becomes settled; there is no need for the deathbed rites that prepare one for Amida’s coming. (*Lamp for the Latter Ages*, letter 1, CWS p. 523)

Because shinjin has become settled in one (Shinran also expresses this as Amida’s “giving” the Buddha-mind to beings, and as one’s “attaining” or “acquiring” the mind of entrusting that is itself the Buddha’s mind), one’s birth in the Pure Land and attainment of enlightenment at death becomes settled (inevitable, determined, coming about of itself): “Because of the realization of this shinjin, a person necessarily attains the supreme nirvana.” “Settled” has this meaning of the firmness of the outcome resulting from present attainment (realization of shinjin) or certainty of the eventual result (birth, enlightenment) because, at bottom, it indicates for Shinran a person’s awakening to and enduring contact with the dimension of formless reality. According to Shinran, once this occurs, it is subject to no regress, though the person remains immersed in the happenings of ordinary life.

In addition to the meaning of the stability of a radically transformed mode of existence, “settled” also expresses a sense of equanimity and assurance: “There is no need to wait in anticipation for the moment of death.” Having been “grasped” by the dimension of the inconceivable, death has also ceased to be a source of anxiety and uncertainty.

A second shared characteristic indicated by the metaphor of dwelling is givenness. This is stated by Shinran in his concept of Amida’s giving

(*ekō*) of all aspects of the path—teaching, practice, realization—to sentient beings. The vehicle for this giving is shinjin as the mind of Buddha, which is itself “directed to” or “given to” beings by Amida. Moreover, this mind of shinjin is formless dharma-body pervading all sentient beings. Thus, the “call” (Shinran’s metaphor) of the teaching and the response or practice (*nembutsu*) are both the unfolding of what is real as the life of the being. At another level, for Shinran, the fragility and contingency of one’s own existence is supported and “protected” by powers one cannot know.

Finally, Shinran states that the gift of bringing to the kind of dwelling described above manifests itself in gratitude and compassionate concern for beings, so that persons who have realized shinjin “constantly practice great compassion.” Thus,

Those who feel that their own birth is completely settled should, mindful of the Buddha’s benevolence, hold the *nembutsu* in their hearts and say it to respond in gratitude to that benevolence, with the wish, “May there be peace in the world, and may the Buddha’s teaching spread!” (*A Collection of Letters*, 2, CWS p. 560)

The Locus of Dwelling

For both Shinran and Heidegger, “to dwell” is also delimiting. It is to recognize one’s existence as fused with one’s own particular historical, geographical, and cultural locale. Both thinkers share a strong sense of their concrete point within the flow of epochal changes over broad extents of time, and of their secluded place in the global landscape. “To dwell” expresses this self-awareness of fundamental situatedness that belongs to genuine human existence. It means to sense the bounds of time and place that form the horizon of the very possibilities of one’s own awareness.

To delineate the locus of dwelling, both Shinran and Heidegger again devise structurally similar conceptual motifs. In Heidegger, this is “the

fourfold,” which is developed particularly in his later essays, “Building Dwelling Thinking” and “The Thing.” In Shinran, it is a fundamental framework that informs his thinking regarding a number of central issues, such as the nature of Amida Buddha, the cause of birth in the Pure Land, and the nature of shinjin.

There are two basic elements for both Shinran and Heidegger: (1) two polarities that form axes along which there is constant tension and movement; and (2) the point of intersection of the two axes, which forms the locus of dwelling or of genuine human existence. This structure would account for the necessity of the *fourfold* in Heidegger, as well as the complexity of Shinran’s exposition of a number of key concepts, as well as a complexity in his use of imagery that distinguishes it from, for example, from that of T’an-luan. The necessity of the structure itself would seem to lie in the paradoxical nature of the basic problem both thinkers face of accounting for the apprehension of the inconceivable as inconceivable from within a situation of ignorance and finitude.

In Heidegger, the two axes are earth and sky, and divinities and mortals. Perhaps these two dynamics or axes may be seen as reflecting the two aspects of *bauen* as cultivating and building. For the sake of brevity in the case of Shinran, we will focus on the two axes as seen in the following passage:

Thus, when one has boarded the ship of the Vow of great compassion and sailed out on the vast ocean of light, the winds of perfect virtue blow softly and the waves of evil are transformed. The darkness of ignorance is immediately broken through, and quickly reaching the land of immeasurable light, one realizes great nirvana and acts in accord with the virtue of Samantabhadra. Let this be known. (“Chapter on Practice, 78, CWS p. 56)

Drawing on Shinran’s imagery in this passage, we may say that the axes

are the winds of virtue (working of the Vow) and the waves of evil (personal karmic existence), and the darkness of ignorance and the land (and ocean) of light.

It is at this point of intersection that we find perhaps the deepest fundamental difference between the views of the two thinkers. For both, the intersection involves a fusion of spatial and temporal elements. For Heidegger, it is the locus where one has become a mortal capable of death, and dies “continually, as long as he remains on earth” (BDT, p. 150). For Shinran, however, the intersection is the unfolding of the transformative moment in which one becomes a foolish being (*bombu*) incessantly animated by false attachments, so that “anger, wrath, jealousy, and envy are overwhelming, arising without pause; to the very last moment of life they do not cease, or disappear, or exhaust themselves.” Thus, the character of the finitude of human existence that emerges as self-aware and self-reconciled is fundamentally different in the two thinkers. For Heidegger, it is death that inhabits the present, and for Shinran, it is afflicting passions. Nevertheless, despite this basic difference regarding the nature of human existence, the structural parallels in methodology and focus of thought that we have charted here suggest that new, nonreductive approaches for interpreting and developing Shinran’s Pure Land path in our contemporary situation may emerge from comparative considerations with the thought of Heidegger.

Abbreviations

- BDT Martin Heidegger. “Building Dwelling Thinking.” In *Poetry, Language, Thought*.
Translated by Albert Hofstadter. Harper and Row, 1971.
- CWS *The Collected Works of Shinran*. Volume I. Edited and
Translated by Dennis Hirota et al.
Kyoto: Jōdo Shinshū Hongwanji-ha, 1997.

- ET Martin Heidegger. "On the Essence of Truth." In *Pathmarks*. Edited by William McNeill. Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- IM Martin Heidegger. *Introduction to Metaphysics*. Translated by Gregory Fried and Richard Polt. Yale University Press, 2000.
- OWA Martin Heidegger. "On the Origin of the Work of Art." In *Off the Beaten Track*. Edited by Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes. Cambridge University Press, 2002.