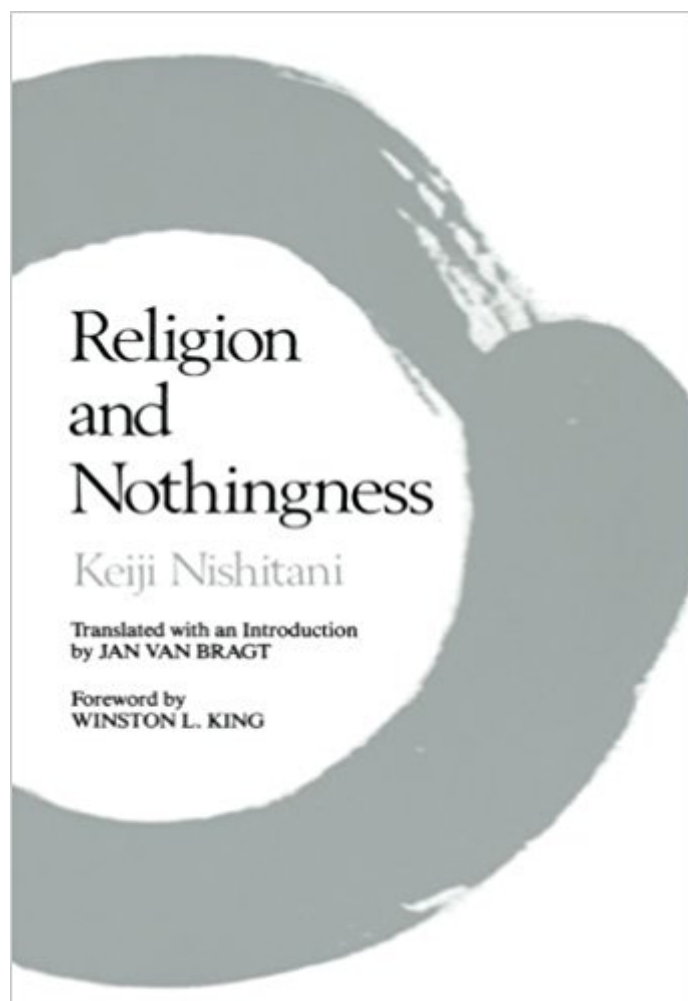


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Religion And Nothingness (Nanzan Studies In Religion And Culture)



Synopsis

In *Religion and Nothingness* the leading representative of the Kyoto School of Philosophy lays the foundation of thought for a world in the making, for a world united beyond the differences of East and West. Keiji Nishitani notes the irreversible trend of Western civilization to nihilism, and singles out the conquest of nihilism as the task for contemporary philosophy. Nihilism, or relative nothingness, can only be overcome by being radicalized to Emptiness, or absolute nothingness. Taking absolute nothingness as the fundamental notion in rational explanations of the Eastern experience of human life, Professor Nishitani examines the relevance of this notion for contemporary life, and in particular for Western philosophical theories and religious beliefs. Everywhere his basic intention remains the same: to direct our modern predicament to a resolution through this insight. The challenge that the thought of Keiji Nishitani presents to the West, as a modern version of an Eastern speculative tradition that is every bit as old and as variegated as our own, is one that brings into unity the principle of reality and the principle of salvation. In the process, one traditional Western idea after another comes under scrutiny: the dichotomy of faith and reason, of being and substance, the personal and transcendent notions of God, the exaggerated role given to the knowing ego, and even the Judeo-Christian view of history itself. *Religion and Nothingness* represents the major work of one of Japan's most powerful and committed philosophical minds.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Text: English, Japanese (translation) --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this

title.

Another guy I wish I'd met while he was on this side of the divide. Not a light read, but fairly accessible. And unlike most in this genre, I find that even short, random browsings deliver insight and enjoyment. Perhaps all real Zen teaching is holographic - any snippet encodes the whole.

Recommended book for the field.

Received on time and as described.

The basic underlying thoughts in this book are wonderful, and ultimately very trenchant and prophetic in their critique of nihilism. That is, if you can distill what those thoughts are. Of course, that it should all be devoted to classic notions of idiomatic Zen No-Mind adds a layer on top, almost as if you were talking with Jewish New Yorker with a heavy accent, and you couldn't tell if he were speaking of "The Void" or "The Word" in discussing classic Logo-centric philosophy. The real issue with this book, for most readers, would likely be that the fact that Nishitani was a student of Heidegger's (during the 1930's in Germany-gulp!) is something very evident on every single page. He out-Heideggers Heidegger, and boy that takes a lot. Further, when one remembers that famous quip that you should never read heidegger in the original language, and instead choose a more comfortable translation, we have a sense of the labyrinthine and potentially off-putting hermeneutical circle in which this book exists. I only wish I knew Japanese, so I could say this with more emphasis. But it would seem that the straight-forwardness of Japanese would be a hard linguistic locus in to which to situate the Heideggarian metaphysical nugget of meaning and philosophical delectation. I think that is the right way of putting it, because there does seem a sort of aesthetic predilection at work here, yet operating in the background. As to the foreground, the actual translation, it is comprehensible only if you have a lot of Heidegger under your belt. Which I did when I first read this book, and loved it. On the other hand, from a artistic point-of-view of word-smithery, this book in this translation seems almost like a parody. And lovely phrases like "abyssal nihility" come floating as often as myriad cherry blossoms in the spring. It makes me recall when the great Zen philosopher Masao Abe came into town for the American Philosophical Association's conference at the Washington Hilton just a few blocks from my house. I surprised and delighted to get a call from him, as I had only met him once before. and we had dinner together with his wife at La Tomate down the street. He then invited me to come hear him speak at the

conference. It was very enlightening on the very matter of Heideggerianism. For the room seemed filled with them. Though Masao Abe gave a great presentation, his take on the Heideggerian language for Zen purposes did not seem to go over well, to judge by the number of quite notably critical comments. Several people said that he had misunderstood Heidegger, and offered didactic moments for our edification. Masao Abe replied that he was not really discussing Heidegger per se. Those assembled Daseins were not about to budge one bit from the orthodoxy. But of course, in one limited sense he was discussing Heidegger. The entire vocabulary that had been developed in the Kyoto tradition was very close to German thinking. Be it Leibnizian, Classic Idealism or later Heidegger himself. It was done with a good purpose. To try to translate and dialogue on linguistically vexed philosophical and religious matters. The real problem, as I can discern it, was having to deal with Nietzsche because Heidegger had dealt with him. I think history has shown that the best way to deal with Nietzsche is just to say he was a nut, a talented nut. Sadly, so many of the ideas in this book, especially using the notion of Nietzschean "masks", is hobbled by trying to make some sense out of Nietzsche, even negatively. It is clear they wanted to use him for his negative example almost. But using him at all -- and without a clear Ideengeschichte that Nietzsche had quirky Enlightenment skeins in his thought -- made the very language based on the crazy guy's tropes kind of a non-starter. I only wish I could reproduce the extremely trenchant critique that J.N. Mohanty provided that day for Masao Abe, who received it with great grace. Namely, that even if you handle the notion of "Absolute Nothingness" with the most dexterous and thoroughgoing dialectical force -- that is, NOT to be just a negation -- still at least linguistically there is some unhelpful residue of a quietistic blank, or worse. I think he had a point, and Dr. Abe told me later that he thought so too in a way. But in a sense, leaving aside personal experience, the whole linguistic apparatus that Masao Abe deployed so elegantly was ultimately a sort of historical-cultural trope in itself, and he gave me indication he knew that. But what's a guy to do?-- you gotta dance with the one what brought you. Still, I emphasize this is a book very well worth reading, if the subject draws you. At least you will finish the book feeling you have encountered something very serious and sincere. Unlike the guy I used to see on DC Cable from time to time, named Eli Jaxon Bear or something, and his wife with a name like Gangaji-- very exotic!. There will always be those who come to the spiritual life and the inevitable linguistic horn-of -the-dilemma, with facile tabula rasas to offer, and blissed out talk of mental blankness. I always want to recommend, only partly tongue-in-cheek, Alastair Hannay's great "Mental Images-A Defense" to such people, as if they would ever read such a thing. (The best description of what Wittgenstein was really interested in also!) . The horn of the dilemma is as always, that we gotta dance with at least some of the words

we got. Though language, like Heidegger's is often more fun when you don't understand and have the humility to say-- translation please!

Discussing Buddhism and Christianity together, might seem a little strange, but adding Nietzsche to the mix makes for something truly unique. The title first drew me to the book, as it spoke to my vague sense that the correct way to address my spiritual doubts was to dive into them. I can't speak of what Keiji intended to communicate, or why those better educated in religion or philosophy would be interested in this book. I read it as "personal spirituality", though it took a long time and I probably wouldn't have finished if I'd been living somewhere that I had a TV or internet access or a car. I don't know if it's the fault of the translation or it's part of Keiji's style, but I'd have a hard time paraphrasing what the book was about. And yet, I understand. Or there are many things I understand better from having read this book. I found it interesting to consider how Buddhism can correct those aspects of Western rationality which have corrupted the practice of Christianity. Sorry, that probably doesn't help much.

I wonder how these 317 elaborate pages sprang from nothingness. Chatter, meaning, chatter, no meaning, shatter chatter. Silence? No need to shatter chatter.

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