A Study of Daisaku Ikeda

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Philosophy of Action between East and West

By

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If I have discerned rightly, there is a close bond of union between hope and a certain affirmation of eternity, that is, of transcendent order.

On the other hand–as I say in *Remarks on the Irreligion of Today*–a world where techniques are paramount is a world given over to desire and fear; because every technique is there to serve some desire or some fear. It is perhaps characteristic of Hope to be unable either to make direct use of any technique or to call it to her aid. Hope is proper to the unarmed; it is the weapon of the unarmed, or (more exactly) it is the very opposite of a weapon and in that, mysteriously enough, its power lies. Present-day scepticism about hope is due to the essential inability to conceive that anything can be efficacious when it is no sort of a power in the ordinary sense of that word.

—Gabriel Marcel, *Being and Having*, March 17th, 1931.

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INTRODUCTION

1. A New Philosophy of Action

This book collects texts of lectures and articles I have devoted to the philosophical and religious work of Daisaku Ikeda (池田大作 [Ikeda Daisaku]; 1928–2023) over the past decade or so. Ikeda's work is vast. Known the world over, this man of faith, action and thought has, over the course of more than six decades of astonishingly assiduous and profound commitment, created a considerable body of work, notable in terms of its social and institutional value as well as its cultural value. This body of work is articulated and developed in various fields and domains: from religion to ethics, from sociology to politics, from history to economics, from philosophy to literature, from communication theory to poetry, and from the philosophy of peace to the philosophy of education. *Ikeda Daisaku zenshū* (池田大作全集; Seikyo Shimbunsha, Tokyo), the complete collection of Ikeda's written works, consists of 150 volumes: it is a work of monumental proportions, but as yet there has been no systematic critical synthesis of it. Although at present the entire body of work is only available in Japanese, Ikeda's major works have all been reproduced in English–the official language of Sōka Gakkai International (SGI), of which Ikeda was honorary president–and many are also available in other languages, including Italian, Spanish, French and German. Considering Daisaku Ikeda's internationalist vocation and the underlying character of his work, which was developed according to the ideals of global citizenship and global civilisation, it is considered reasonable–if not also useful or even mandatory–to have as a fundamental reference the texts published in English (which, as mentioned, brings together all his major texts). With respect to this discourse, an important distinction must be made–beyond the specialised case of contributions analysing and interpreting literary and philosophical works by Japanese and other Asian authors–with regard to Ikeda's constitutive reference to the Buddhist philosophy of Nichiren Daishōnin (日蓮大聖人; 1222-1282), a reformist Japanese monk who lived in the thirteenth century. His exegesis and interpretation of the Buddhist scriptures can only be studied, analysed and evaluated from a theoretical-specialist point of view by those with full mastery of the Japanese language (modern and ancient),

as well as a deep understanding of Buddhist doctrine and a thorough knowledge of the culture, traditions and religious history of medieval, modern and contemporary Japan.

I have been engaged in the systematic study of Ikeda's oeuvre for about twenty years now, with a predominant interest in his philosophical vision. I have encountered (and still do) several difficulties in this research, starting with the existence of a secondary critical literature that is still meagre and deficient. Moreover, in Ikeda's writings themselves, references to philosophy are often fragmentary and scattered across extremely varied fields, domains and genres of discourse (for example, a reference to Henri Bergson (1859-1941) might be found within a doctrinal explanation for Buddhist practitioners, in an academic speech, within a novel or in a peace proposal). There is therefore a need for an all-round investigation which, at the same time, groups texts by genre of discourse; thus, peace proposals were studied in a first book (see Busacchi 2014),[1] essays in a second book (see Busacchi 2014b),[2] speeches, novels and poems in a third volume (see Busacchi 2019), and finally books of dialogues in a fourth volume (see Busacchi 2021).[3]

I propose the thesis that Ikeda's work is expressive of a philosophical vision that can be treated as a rational construction, as "philosophy," in fact. On the side of his deepest philosophical though–one that is, in many ways, closest to the Buddhist philosophical-religious perspective–Ikeda can be approached from the tradition of existentialist spiritualism (especially Gabriel Marcel [1889-1973]); he has also been likened to Bergson's spiritualist evolutionism (one of his major philosophical references) and, for his humanistic and moral sensitivity, to Ralph W. Emerson ([1803-1882] another philosophical reference). On the side of his philosophy of culture and education, the main and most direct reference is undoubtedly John

[1] From 1983, when he received United Nations Peace Medal, to 2023, Ikeda addressed a series of annual proposals to the UN containing philosophical and practical reflections and proposals.

[2] I consider his essays to be Ikeda's most theoretical and speculative publications. Beyond the speculative domains (science, medicine, philosophy of life, ethics, politics etc.) are his autonomous and articulated works. I do not include his doctrinal essays among them.

[3] I considered and analysed all of Ikeda's major works of dialogue, starting with Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi [1972], to pursuing with Arnold Toynbee [1975], René Huyghe [1980], Aurelio Peccei [1984], Bryan Wilson [1985], Josef Derbolav [1988], Linus Pauling [1990], Austregésilo de Athayde [1995], Johan Galtung [1995], Michail Gorbačëv [1996], René Simard and Guy Bourgeault [2000], Hazel Henderson [2003] and many others.

Dewey (1859-1952). On the side of the philosophy of peace, on the other hand, his central reference points are (1) the dialectical theories of Martin Buber (1878-1965) and Jürgen Habermas (1929-)–as Olivier Urbain points out in his book *Daisaku Ikeda's Philosophy of Peace* (2010); (2) "ideas concerning global citizenship and cosmopolitan democracy developed by Daniele Archibugi, among many others" (Urbain 2010, 7); and (3) conceptions elaborated in the field of peace studies (Johan Galtung [1930-2024] stands out here). Reasoning, then, in terms of direct and continuing personal influence, Ikeda's name should be linked to that of Arnold J. Toynbee, the historian of civilisations who ranks among the philosophers as an exponent of historicism, alongside and in polemic with Oswald Spengler [1880-1936]. Toynbee's last signed work was a book written with Ikeda; it is a dialogue that has had worldwide resonance and been translated into 27 languages. However, although Toynbee is undoubtedly Ikeda's most significant intellectual influence, little or no prominence is given to historicism in Ikeda's work (except for a certain recurrence of Max Weber [1864-1920]'s name).

Reflecting from a very general perspective, it seems that none of the comparisons brought forward have proven to be sufficiently representative of Ikeda's philosophical position and the possibility of its place in the philosophical tradition. On closer inspection, only when placed between philosophy of action (John H. Newman [1801-1890], Léon Ollé-Laprune [1839-1898], Maurice Blondel [1861-1949], etc.) and pragmatism (José Ortega y Gasset [1883-1955], among others) does Ikeda's general conception seem to find its appropriate and acceptable speculative placement. His is, we might say, a new philosophy of action, the heart of which is expressed as a philosophy of "human revolution" (*ningen kakumei*; 人間革命), where pragmatic development takes on the character of the new universalistic humanism. In short, unlike Urbain and others, I do not think his is a "simple" philosophy of peace.

Why a philosophy of action? Because this tradition of thought, which dates back to the nineteenth century, presents itself as a philosophy with a strong spiritualistic brand and an explicit religious reference (as we find in Ikeda). This is a conception that on the one hand ploughs through and broadly investigates the field of the spiritual, the interior and the human, but on the other hand rejects pure philosophical-contemplative and theoretical-speculative activity (and we find the same in Ikeda). The philosophy of action has, like spiritualism, a religious interest and character, but reads consciousness and interprets the human in the perspective key of the emancipative will and commitment, that is, of religious and practical, social

and creative action. Therefore, the philosophy of action is translated–just as we find in Ikeda–into philosophical practice: into philosophical practice and practical, social, civic engagement.

In this research I often cite the tradition of philosophy of action, suggesting a possible closeness and connection that remains to be explored and verified. Naturally I do not think of the tradition of philosophy of action according to the framework given by analytical philosophy through the research of Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951) and Elisabeth Anscombe (1919-2001), or Donald Davidson (1917-2003) and Georg Henrik Von Wright (1916-2003)–or those whom research has retrospectively re-actualised and placed in new connections with each other, such as Plato and Aristote, Duns Scoto (1265-1308) and Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), René Descartes (1596-1650) and John Locke (1632-1704), Thomas Reid (1710-1796) and David Hume (1711-1776), Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) and Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), Max Weber and Gilbert Ryle (1900-1976) and others. There is undoubtedly a very important tradition that has explored and continues to explore key aspects of human action in its nature, forms and expressions–causes-reasons, intentionality, agency, responsibility, bodily movements, decisions, speech acts, collective acts, desire and pleasure, volition and motivation, and so on. The theoretical results achieved are of great importance in the scientific field and contribute significantly to the understanding of specific aspects of human nature. But this philosophical-analytic approach never finds expression in a philosophical vision capable of embracing the human being in their totality and within the context of the circumstances in which they live and that form the framework of their dilemmas, challenges and existential and meaningful pains of planning and realisation as a human being. The ancient opposition between the analytical approach and the continental approach in philosophy is still felt today and finds countless representatives even outside of the philosophies of action, as in the case of existentialism or neo-personalism. These representatives, by contrast, place at the centre precisely the difference in the understanding of man and the human. Consider what Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), for example, already stated in *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* (1929): "No age has known so much, and so many different things, about man as ours. … And no age has known less than ours of what man is. Never before has man become as problematic (*fragwürdig*) as is the case in our time" (Heidegger 1991, 209).

The continental tradition of the philosophy of action carries forward precisely this deepening of human reality, and it does so according to a holistic reflective exercise that rethinks the human being by including the

sphere of experience, and rethinks philosophy and philosophising as theory and practice with an emancipatory value. This is an approach that arises as a specific form of modern spiritualism but which also finds roots in nineteenth-century German idealism. It is the moralism of Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1814) in particular that draws attention to action as a metaphysically superior centre of human reality. It is not by following the path of the study of human nature that we know and understand the human being. For Fichte, man is not something already-given, already-made, he is not a fact (*Tatsache*): he is freedom, he is to-be-made (*Tathandlung*) along a plane of action and progress that tends toward infinity. His knowability, therefore, is not a fact of theoretical, philosophical or scientific study but a fact of practice, reflection on practice and experience. This tradition of the philosophy of action, which matured between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in a spiritualist key, brings together and links the experiences and research of very different, yet similar, authors such as John Henry Newman, Léon Ollé-Laprune, Maurice Blondel, Lucien Laberthonnière (1860-1932), Alfred Loisy (1857-1940), Edouard Le Roy (1870-1954), and others. These philosophers can be united by an interest in action understood, in various ways, (1) as the fulcrum of human existence, (2) as the path of the search for meaning and moral and spiritual fulfilment, and (3) as the insurmountable cornerstone of speculative reflection and research around the human being.

Ikeda can be compared to this tradition to the extent that one recognises in his work the close intertwining of philosophical research and spiritual and religious research. On the one hand, in Ikeda the discourse of the "human revolution" is central, that is, the idea of interior transformation and character as the principle and foundation of every self-reform, of one's existence and of the community and social reality in which one lives. On the other hand, Ikeda pays particular attention to the idea that the human revolution is expressed in the creation of value, that is, in practical and creative activity that finds expression first and foremost not in culture, art and feeling in general but in the moral and interrelational, social and religious sphere. This does not affirm the simple primacy of the creative act but the primacy of practical reason (precisely according to the Kantian ideal of moral faith) and of individual responsibility, or the centrality of living and acting morally according to an emancipatory purpose. In his works, Newman repeatedly emphasises the natural and necessary fallout of faith in action: it is not only for inner satisfaction or mental clarity, but when faith lives and authenticates, it substantiates action, shakes the will. The truth of an idea can never be something theoretically affirmed and maintained: if an idea is true then it is alive; if it is alive it creates history. In this regard,

Newman explains that faith is a principle of action, and action leaves no time for careful and thorough research. Whatever its character and consequences, it does not meet the needs of daily life. Carefully gathering evidence, sifting through arguments, weighing conflicting testimonies may suit people who have leisure and can act when and how they please, but it is not for the multitudes. This is true of all faith, and not only of religious faith (see Newman 2007, 221-222).

Ollé-Laprune, a thinker for whom religious interest is considerably narrowed to philosophical interest, is also on the same line of a critique of theoretical and cognitive truth, or of scientific truth. This can be seen in particular through his profound analyses of practical action guided by faith, and of faith as the foundation of certainty, or as the foundation of an existential and moral state in which all instances (including scientific ones) can find harmonisation and agreement. The following considerations of his are of considerable value (among other equally notable ones):

> Each one judges, each one can only judge with his own mind, but to judge well, what is it finally if not to recognise by certain marks where the truth is? It is you, it is me, who, with our mind, with our reason, discern the truth; but what we know how to recognise as such … in the speeches of the learned or on the lips of the simple, in ourselves or in our friends, and even in our enemies, is something which is distinct from man, independent of man, superior to man. There is no single and permanent interpreter of this universal reason. Only the sane man, wise, upright, good, would always be competent to pronounce on the true and the false, on the just and the unjust …. (Ollé-Laprune 1989, 224; trans. mine)

The same kind of religious interest intertwined with the philosophical one can be found in Blondel. His major work *L'action. Essai d'une critique de la vie et d'une science de la pratique* (1893) still stands out today as a well-rounded study on human reality, whose fulcrum is precisely identified not in reason (as Georg W. F. Hegel [1770-1831] had thought) but in the will, and not according to a theoretical-explanatory approach, but rather according to a mode of philosophising concretely immersed in the reality of human action and existence. From the first pages of the 1893 book, one can feel the particularity and practical-spiritual intensity of Blondel's philosophical approach. It is useful to quote below, somewhat extensively, some introductory paragraphs because they offer a ground for pre-understanding what will evolve into the reflexive logic and the practical philosophical perspective of Ikeda himself. Blondel writes:

If we consult the immediate evidence, action, in my life, is a fact, the most general and the most constant of all, the expression of me of universal determinism; it occurs even without me. More than a fact, it is a necessity that no doctrine denies since this negation would require a supreme effort, that no man avoids since suicide is still an act; it occurs even in spite of me. More than a necessity, action often appears to me as an obligation; it must occur through me, even when it demands of me a painful choice, a sacrifice, a death: not only do I use up my bodily life in it, I always wind into it affections and desires that would claim everything, each for themselves. One only walks, one learns, one enriches oneself by closing all paths except one, and by impoverishing oneself of all that one could have known and gained otherwise: is there a more subtle regret than that of the adolescent obliged, in order to enter life, to limit his curiosity as if by blinkers? Each determination cuts off an infinity of possible acts. No one escapes this natural mortification.

Will I at least have the resource to stop? No, I must march. [Will I have the resource] to suspend my decision so as not to renounce anything? No, I must commit myself under penalty of losing everything; I must compromise myself. I have no right to wait, or I no longer have the power to choose. If I do not act of my own accord, there is something in me or outside me that acts without me; and what lies without me ordinarily acts against me. Peace is a defeat; action suffers no more delay than death. Head, heart and arms, I must therefore give them willingly, or they are taken from me. If I refuse my free devotion, I fall into slavery; no one does without idols: the devout, the most libertine. A prejudice of school or party, a slogan, a worldly convenience, a pleasure, it is enough for all peace to be lost, all liberty sacrificed; and this is who we often live for and die for!

Do I still have any hope of leading myself, if I wish, in full light and of governing myself by my ideas alone? No. Practice, which tolerates no delay, never involves complete clarity; complete analysis is not possible for a finite thought. Any rule of life that is based solely on a philosophical theory and abstract principles would be rash: I cannot postpone acting until the evidence has appeared, and all evidence that shines before the mind is partial. Pure knowledge is never enough to move us because it does not grasp us entirely: in every act, there is an act of faith.

Will I at least be able to accomplish what I have resolved, whatever it may be, as I have resolved it? No. There is always an inexplicable and disconcerting disproportion between what I know, what I want, and what I do. My decisions often go beyond my thoughts, and my actions beyond my intentions. Sometimes I do not do everything I want; sometimes I do, almost without knowing it, what I do not want. And these actions, which I have not completely foreseen, which I have not entirely ordered, as soon as they are accomplished are present throughout my life and act on me, it seems, more

> than I acted on them. I find myself as if I were their prisoner; they sometimes turn against me, like a rebellious son facing his father. They have fixed the past, they begin to affect the future.
>
> … The terms of the problem are … clearly opposed. On one side, everything that dominates and oppresses the will; on the other, the will do dominate everything or to ratify everything, for there is no being where there is only constraint. How then to resolve the conflict? Of the two terms of the problem, which is the one? Must we start from the unknown? Is it good will that gives credit, as if it were betting on something certain and infinite, without being able to know, before the end, that by appearing to sacrifice everything it has really given nothing to acquire it? Must we, on the contrary, first consider only what is inevitable and forced, refusing to make any concession, rejecting everything that can be rejected in order to see, with the necessity of science, where this necessity of action finally leads us, unless we simply show in the name of determinism itself that good will is right?
>
> The first way is essential and can suffice for all. It is the practical way. It is necessary to define it first, if only to reserve the share of those, the most numerous and often the best, who can only act without discussing action. No one, moreover, as we shall show, is exempt from entering this direct route. But how another method becomes legitimate to confirm the first and to anticipate the final revelations of life, how it is necessary for the scientific solution of the problem, is what will be good to prove: the object of this work must be this very science of practice. (Blondel 1995, 16-19; trans. mine)

It is this connection between philosophising and acting in existence that explains the significance of Blondel's religious discourse. This examination of human will and action proceeds first and foremost from man's vital questions about the meaning of his life and his destiny. As Blondel observes:

> Man claimed to mange on his own, and to find in the natural order his sufficiency and his all: he has not succeeded; he has succeeded neither in stopping nor in moving beyond it. …
>
> What is the meaning, what is the necessary effect of this crisis which, in one form or another, secretly occurs in every human consciousness? In every human consciousness, the feeling necessarily arises that the will is not its principle, nor its rule, nor its own end. … The whole point for him is not to accept the beautiful order of the universe or to ratify the determinism of his own actions; he must also accept himself; he must want no longer what he wants, no longer life and the use he makes of it, but want, in him, produces it, criticises it and judges it. (Ibid. 357, 358; trans. mine)

Close to Blondel as representatives of the so-called modernism is Laberthonnière, who was from 1905 director of Annales de philosophie chrétienne. For Laberthonnière, philosophy is not knowledge but action. Action better configures philosophising in its effort to recreate and concretise the truth, and human existence is not only the practical field for good action but for the expression and concretisation of this truth, the pursuit of which moves and touches the deepest instances and motivations of human experience. In perhaps his most important work, *Essai d'une philosophie personnaliste* (1942), Laberthonnière states:

> Christian asceticism consists essentially in taking on human misery, all human misery, physical misery and moral misery, to the point of accepting to suffer and die for others, even and especially by suffering and dying for them … It is no longer a matter of *intellectualising* oneself, of informing oneself of some intelligible thing in oneself that one calls truth, thereby claiming to triumph over matter and at the same time to place oneself above the others whom one imagines doomed to remain mired in it, which is visibly an egocentrism, a consecration of egoism, since in this way one represents to oneself that it is for oneself that others exist. But it is a matter of … substituting for the egoism by which the individual closes himself off from other individuals an intention under which one opens up and goes out of oneself to recognise others in the fullness of their being, to want them in the same way that one wants oneself, if not in what they are, at least in what they must be, and to make room in the most intimate part of oneself for the right that they have to exist for themselves, as oneself exists for oneself. (Ibid. 698-699; trans. mine)

Loisy's contribution is also significant for a philosophy of action interested in embracing the human being in its complete reality, including the sphere of spiritual and moral life. Beyond his specific, very important contribution in the field of biblical exegesis, Loisy places emphasis on concrete religious practice, that is, on the application of the evangelical message and lesson to the precise current context, beyond the historical and cultural distance produced between religious teaching and today's life.

Differently from Loisy, Le Roy thinks of the re-actualisation of the religious through a close criticism of science, of the rationalising intellect and of the scientistic paradigm. His awakening of faith is precisely framed as a response to the process of intellectualisation and rationalisation of the world, which impoverishes and distorts human reality and world of life itself. Intelligence alone is not enough as a guide: it does not shed light on what is essential, vital and profound. Thus, in the work *La pensée intuitive* (1929-1930) he emphasises:

> The new philosophy … is not intellectualist. In its eyes, rationalism appears as the negation of the spirit. To be content with representations when one can reach the truth through actions, it considers this to be a decline. It seeks the way, the truth and life, but the truth as a way through life. Intelligence … is still in certain respects only the physical aspect of the spirit. Let us go deeper into ourselves and penetrate to the mysterious point where our insertion into universal reality is made through the efficacy profound action. There, and there only, is verification carried out. (Le Roy 1901, 298)

The approach to continental action philosophy seems to be a path to be favoured for a framing and interpretation of Ikeda's work in philosophical terms even more so because it expresses a spiritualist perspective that represents an element of proximity with the American philosophical tradition expressed in the work of Emerson, another thinker of reference in Ikeda, as mentioned earlier. Here the connection appears linear and solid. Less linear, however, is the relationship with the tradition of pragmatism, which is as important for continental action philosophy as it is for Ikeda's philosophical research. The reason for the non-linearity lies in a conflict of perspectives that today, outside of specialised research, tend not to be given much importance but which at the time were the source of highly contrasting viewpoints, as Blondel especially demonstrates. The reference text here is *Vocabulaire technique et critique de la philosophie* (1926) by André Lalande (1867-1963), on which Blondel collaborated. Lalande recalls that the term pragmatism, although not explicitly present in Blondel's 1893 work, was widely used by the philosopher to characterise his own vision. The doctrine presented in *L'action* is pragmatism, Laland explains.

> It consists of showing in the action a reality that surpasses the simple phenomenon, a fact that cannot be supported, and that the integral analysis is not necessary to pass the scientific problem to the metaphysical and religious problem. Whatever we think, want or execute, in the most speculative activity or the most material, there is always a fact *sui generis*, the act, the πραγμα, where the competitions are united with the initiative of the agent, with the contes the receives, with the reactions he undergoes, in a way told that the "composed humaine" is found "organically modified and made as it is by its same action, as it is effected". (Lalande 1926, 806)

Blondel renounced the use of the term pragmatism when the Anglo-Saxon characterisation of the term took hold, a characterisation that Blondel did not fait to criticise, as Lalande himself reports in his *Vocabulaire* with the same words of Blondel:

> I protest energetically against the pragmatism of the Anglo-Saxons, whose anti-intellectualism and immanentist empiricism I do not accept at all; and

> when I used this term, it is in a completely different sense. Whether one considers the bodily conditions that the most ideal speculation supposes or engenders; whether one considers, within the psychological and moral agent, the operation producing an intention or a work; or whether one examines the repercussions of the environment that come to instruct and, as it were, rework the agent himself, by partially incorporating themselves into him, throughout his entire course, actions are constantly translated by a set of sui generis relations, formally distinct from other facts that are not considered as acts: these relations therefore involve being methodologically studied as the specific object of a scientific discipline. And just as there is a *Physics*, for example, to consider the phenomena of nature from its point of view, so there can and must be a *Pragmatics* to study the total determinism of actions, their original process, the solidarity of the ingredients that constitute them, the logic that governs their history, the law of their growth, their reproduction and their completion. (Ibid. 803-804; trans. mine)

Ikeda does not show evidence of knowing this distinction, and certainly the coherence and unity of his vision must be weighed carefully. Certainly, from the point of view of Western philosophical sensitivity, the simultaneous coexistence of spiritualist instances and instances explicitly linked to American pragmatism does not seem coherently justified. However, two aspects must be kept in mind: (1) the fact that the comparison I propose here is a juxtaposition that does not aim to examine the possibility of inserting Ikeda's philosophy into the framework of continental philosophy of action, but rather to understand it in terms of a new philosophy of action which, similarly to the continental tradition, intertwines philosophical discourse and religious discourse, reflective research and emancipatory research; and (2) the fact that, for Ikeda, the religious horizon of reference that nourishes his spiritualism is Buddhism, not Christianity. This second aspect is not without significant implications on the philosophical level, and also in reference to the difference in understanding of the practical-experiential and spiritual fields. If Blondel denounced the difference in his understanding of the practical, tightly welding it to the sphere of interior experience, of the sense and exercise of the morally forged will, Ikeda captures a smaller distance between the interior sphere and the experiential sphere, between the spiritual and the vital, and between the mental and the corporeal. This is essentially due to the fact that, as we will see in this book, Buddhism rejects both the dualistic vision, that is, the clear distinction between the sphere of the corporeal and the sphere of the spiritual, and a hierarchical idea that places the spiritual at the top. At the top is the human being, which is an inseparable union of spirit and body.

While the aforementioned research is of purely philosophical interest, this book brings together those works in which I have more freely used and explored religious discourse and the interweaving of religious and philosophical discourse in Ikeda's thought. It is not stricto sensu philosophical research that comprehensively characterises the Ikedian parable, nor is it social engagement inspired by humanistic and ethical ideals or the work of the educator or, indeed, aesthetic and creative experience. In fact, his philosophy of the human revolution encapsulates (as actualised) the quintessence of the Buddhist conception that Nichiren extrapolated (following a certain line of interpretation) from the ancient Lotus Sūtra, namely: (1) of the eternity and innate sanctity of life; (2) of the earthly condition as an ideal and unique condition for personal and collective reformation, realisation and salvation (=enlightenment); (3) of the ability of each individual to tap into their most proper and true nature as a Buddha, transform "destiny" (or *karma*) and realise happiness; (4) of the interconnectedness of all living things and the moral responsibility of each with respect to their neighbour, to humanity, and to the Earth. As Ikeda explains, the human revolution is the starting point of everything; the human being, the individual, is the foundation of everything, for this reason, change in our life will produce a change in our family, in our community and in the society in which we live; it will change the epoch, history and even the world (see Ikeda 2002c, Ch. 1). The human being is placed at the centre, as we can see, within the framework of a design to come that only a religious perspective can think of as not utopian or phantasmagorical but realistically achievable. Even more explicitly, in the essay *For the Sake of Peace* (2001), we read that the human spirit is endowed with the capacity to transform even the most difficult situations, creating value and producing ever richer meanings. When each person brings his or her unlimited spiritual potential to full bloom, and when ordinary citizens unite in the commitment to generate positive change, a culture of peace, a century of life, will be born (see Ikeda 2001, Ch. 8). This is the intrinsic purpose of Buddhist practice, as in the Buddhist tradition, cultivating and perfecting one's character is considered the true goal of religious practice (see Ibid., Ch. 2). Thus, self-reformation and spiritual mission, scriptural work and commitment to peace, reflective work and creative production in Ikeda find their origin in the religious doctrinal source and creed of faith.

However, this is not a discourse completely alien to philosophy. It has already been highlighted by recalling the philosophy of action, and this can be done even more deeply by looking at the philosophical tradition as a whole. This is an operation that I consider important to give the right space to Ikeda and his, a figure in my opinion too little valued in the philosophical

field. There are many recognised Japanese thinkers today but Daisaku Ikeda is not among them. The best known name is undoubtedly Kitarō Nishida (西田幾多郎 [Nishida Kitarō] 1870-1945), considered one of the greatest thinkers of modern Japan and founder of the so-called Kyōto School. Nishida was also interested in Buddhism: in his works he develops an original interweaving of some speculative themes typical of German idealism, spiritualism, neo-Kantianism, phenomenology and themes belonging to the Zen conception. But Nishida, unlike Ikeda, was a professor of philosophy (at the Imperial University of Kyōto); he developed his intellectual and professional life to study and undertake speculative research, training with the first professors of philosophy of the Meiji Restoration (1868-1912). Alongside him, other important thinkers (connected to Kyōto School or outside of it) may be recalled, such as Keiji Nishitani (1900-1990), Hajime Tanabe (1885-1962), Shūzō Kuki (1888-1941), Tetsurō Watsuji (1889-1960), Kiyoshi Miki (1897-1945) and others.[4]

However, it should not be forgotten that the history of ancient, modern and contemporary Western philosophy itself does not lack non-academic and not strictly "speculative" philosophers, authors of important works and/or creators of movements and schools, just as there is no lack of "religious philosophies," religious currents in philosophies and philosophical currents in religions.

The first articulated interweaving of philosophy and religion is recorded, as is well known, towards the end of the late pagan era, along the *ethical* line (or ethical primacy) of the Hellenistic conception. Philosophy then entered into a dialectic with Christianity, "Mosaic philosophy" (Philo of Alexandria), Neo-Platonism and Hermeticism, up to patristics–thanks to which the history of Christianity and the history of philosophy were for a long time one and the same. Even in contemporary times, in certain spiritualist, existentialist etc. currents, it is difficult to clearly separate the discourse of faith from speculative discourse; and there are quite a few non-academic philosophers who have marked an epoch and a season with contributions "between reason and faith", so to speak,–or "between reason, faith and commitment", to put it better. We can cite as an example

[4] The philosophical literature on these authors is vast. As proof of the significant relevance of these thinkers for continental philosophical research itself and for the field of "Studies in Intercultural Philosophy", I think the volume edited by Tobias Endres, Ralf Müller and Domenico Schneider, *Kyoto in Davos* (2024), is emblematic, among others.

Emmanuel Mounier (1905-1950), founder of the well-known philosophical journal *Esprit* and father of a personalist movement whose theoretical foundation lay in a Christian-inspired philosophy of the person, and political foundation was built on a social theory still of Christian inspiration, conceived with an eye to the ideal of the good community or community of saints (to be realised within the kingdom of God). Mounier left behind a considerable legacy; even today philosophical and religious studies on the person refer back to him (despite the inherent narrowness of conceptual and specialised means that characterises his work).[5]

Another interesting contemporary example is that of the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur (1913-2005), in whose youthful itinerary, in particular, we find the same close intertwining of faith and reflective research, religion and speculation. From his *Autobiographie intellectuelle* (1995) we learn that Ricoeur's philosophical vocation is closely linked to the vicissitudes of his early youth. The young Ricoeur lived a life of curiosity and restlessness (cf. Ricoeur 1995, 14), a "restlessness", which he self-reflexively connects to an early moment of dialectic between faith and reason, as much amplified by the Protestant-derived idea of the absoluteness of God as by a vulnerability of character and feeling, and by the sharpness of an already problematising intellect. He found his first approach to philosophising through high-school teacher Roland Dalbiez (1893-1976), a philosopher with a neo-Thomistic background, but he soon took advantage of the fortunate circumstance of

[5] While one of the most emblematic philosophical references here is that of Paul Ricoeur (1983 and 1990; and cf. Melchiorre 1996), on the theological side there is no lack of studies on the person, some aiming to trace the ancient religious matrix (Milano 1996²). Regarding Mounier, the philosopher Ricoeur recalls: "I went to Paris to participate in congresses, colloquia; and in the years 1947 to 1950 I discovered the *Esprit* group, which I had not known well before the war because I was then much more involved in militant socialism and I considered the people at *Esprit* too intellectual … My friendship with Emmanuel Mounier grew deeper a short time before his death, which was a very great sorrow for me … The person of Mounier had truly won me over, not so much his ideas as himself. I had already been sufficiently shaped philosophically not to be one of his disciples; but I was nevertheless a companion of his. He himself was, moreover, in quest of a professional philosopher to lend him support; he had lost his 'own' philosopher in the person of Landsberg and then of Gosset, executed as a member of the Resistance in Brittany. Mounier would have wanted me to follow in their steps, which I willingly accepted. He was very aware of the fact that he lacked the conceptual structure, that he was sometimes forced to improvise. He had tried to remedy the situation by writing during his exile in Dieulefit the *Traite du caractere,* which is his most solid work. It is a good book, but it borrows too much from characterology and remains somewhat summary on the conceptual plane" (Ricoeur 1998, 22-23).

the modus philosophandi in France in the first half of the twentieth century, of a philosophising that is not only specialised and academic, but not detached from the great themes and dilemmas of existence: the human condition and faith. A red thread thus links Ricoeur's dissertation, *Métode reflexive appliquée au problème de Dieux chez Lachelier et Lagneau*, dedicated to Jules Lachelier (1832-1918) (creator of a metaphysical-spiritualist conception inspired by Maine de Biran's work and linked to Kant's philosophy) and his pupil Jules Lagneau (1851-1894), to the philosophy of Gabriel Marcel. The young Ricoeur encountered Lachelier through the "Friday meetings" to which he was introduced in his early twenties, in the academic year 1934-35 (a year that, in addition to marking his encounter with Marcel who he would soon recognise as his master, and who would later introduce him to Karl Jaspers (1883-1969)'s thought, also marked his encounter with Edmund Husserl (1859-1938)'s phenomenology). Regarding these encounters, Ricoeur recalls:

> We were … personally initiated into the Socratic method, which we saw at work in the already published essays of Gabriel Marcel, mainly in *Position et approches concrètes du mystère ontologique.* It should be emphasised that all this was before the publication of *Being and Nothingness* by Sartre in 1943. The label of existentialism had not yet been placed on metaphysical meditations on embodiment, commitment, invocation, absurdity and hope, or more importantly, on the difference between the problem, whose terms are all given, and the mystery, which is implied in the very act that apprehends it. The contrast with Léon Brunschvicg was patently obvious, and the kinship with Bergson no less so. But neither the contrast with the one nor the kinship with the other was sufficient to account for the originality of a method of thinking in which conceptual precision was never sacrificed to impression or intuition. (Ibid., 16; trans. mine)

As can be seen, on the one hand, this passage speaks of existentialism as a "label", which recalls the broad, generalising use and misuse of this term at the time. On the other hand, existentialism is presented in close connection with Sartre, as in fact it was, hence the distinctions and differentiations in the different forms. On closer inspection, French existentialism cannot be traced/reduced to Sartre alone, nor is it possible to separate Marcel's vast reflexive research from existentialism in toto, or to present it as a totally separate, radically alternative reflexive philosophy from true existentialist research. To all intents and purposes, with Marcel we can speak of an existentialist spiritualism (exactly as the same can be said of Lavelle, René Le Senne [1882-1954] and Nikolaj Berdjaev [1874-1948]). The character of a dynamic philosophical research "in transit" also qualifies in some ways the itinerary of the young Ricoeur, who also took care not only to keep

Marcel at a distance from existentialism but to distance himself from the approach and concept–a little like Bergson did with the concept of "spiritualism". But just as Bergson cannot be separated from spiritualism, the same is true for Ricoeur with respect to existentialism–first of all, because of its connection to Marcel, but also because of central passages of his youthful research through explicit and implicit comparisons with Karl Jaspers, Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) and Martin Heidegger.

The points of similarity between Marcel and Ricoeur are striking. Due to circumstances in his life, Marcel was also pushed to confront the pain of the human condition and the meaning of existence early on. And like Ricoeur, Marcel had a restless conscience which found refuge in religious conversion to Catholicism, following a similar solution of dialectical balance between faith and philosophical thought. This search for balance was more for in Marcel than Ricoeur, who separated philosophy and religion more sharply, often leaving the latter in the background. For Marcel, the search for a positive relationship between faith and reason became the key point of his research and philosophical proposal. As François Dosse states:

> Marcel's adherence to Catholicism is not seen as a secure grounding. It is part of an ascending movement that leads to the notions of sacrifice and availability, carried by a vital impulse close to Bergsonian positions. More than a subject in the Kantian sense, it is, according to Marcel, the aspiration of a body that moves through existence and provides him with its pleasure of being, its "yes" to life. What seduces Ricoeur is this indefinite, laborious, painful quest, always in movement … Marcel begins with an apology for feeling, which he opposes–with a radicalism he will alter regret–to the Cartesian *Cogito*, and leads the subject towards the act of participation. He therefore favours a first relationship of reflexivity, primary, which opens the order of experience to faith as a "mode of Being". (Dosse 2001, 26; trans. mine)

If there is an aspect that we can point to as a horizon of convergence between different traditions, united by reference or inspiration to the religious–such as spiritualism, reflexive philosophy, certain philosophies of existence, the philosophy of action and personalism–the it is this horizon or the problematisation of the human condition, reflection on the concrete man and the active engagement of philosophising. Marcel is not alone in this regard: authors such as Blondel and Mounier, who place the dimension of the concrete man and the need for philosophising beyond the purely rational/rationalising horizon and action at the centre. In short, there is a great interweaving and layering of planes in the very rich framework of French-speaking philosophy between the nineteenth and part of the

twentieth century. These are layered and intertwined planes that connect, for example, existentialism (or at least some of its forms) with spiritualism, or that link spiritualism to reflexive philosophy.

Returning to the work of Ikeda, at present there is no legacy of philosophical studies, nor an articulate research movement. The novelty of his thinking calls for close and systematic reconstructive analysis. The operation is complicated by the aforementioned variety of genres of writing by Ikeda, and by the not always explicit and often punctiform presence of the philosophical reference. Essays are alternated with novels and public speeches (of various kinds), texts of doctrinal exegesis are alternated with dialogues, peace proposals are alternated with articles and editorials, memoires and notes, poems and short stories. The "philosophical" must be literally extracted. But "extracted" according to which method? And to which "philosophical" view? It is not enough here to recall the long series of Western thinkers taken up and explored by Daisaku Ikeda in his works (thus demonstrating a kind of "closeness of spirit" with Nishida and/or a certain significant connection with the (not too distant) westernising project of the Meiji Restoration). In this book I proceed by "coring", that is through a research that proceeds to examine Ikeda's work from a defined theme or issue. The methodological procedure has an essentially reconnaissance-hermeneutic character that is descriptive and interpretative. Holding firmly to the essential discursive duality of Ikeda's thinking, both philosophical and religious, it tends to take up doctrinal moments descriptively when necessary for theoretical-speculative understanding, interpretation of the role of the exercise of philosophy and argumentative and reflective advancement in a strictly philosophical sense. The various chapters that make up this book were occasioned at different times and context by oral or written contributions of a predominantly academic nature (see below, paragraph 4). If, on the one hand, this does not offer advantage for an orderly treatment and systematic critical synthesis, on the other hand, it pushes in the direction of a critical examination that takes into account the plurality of discourses and perspectives in which Ikeda's work unfolds. In this regard, it is interesting to assess the speculative consistency of Ikeda's philosophy of action both on the existential front and on the more specific front of speculative and religious questions. This is where the usefulness of a treatment by discursively differentiated "cross-sections" arises, proceeding from the philosophical field or the religious fiend or the social and existential field.

2. Buddhism Between Philosophy and Religion: A Persistent Misunderstanding

Still oscillating, unclarified, contradictory and not infrequently openly opposed (by Easterners as well as Westerners) is the tendency to place philosophy and Eastern culture/spirituality in dialectic. Even an expert on Eastern thought such as René Guénon, for example, writes in his *L'Homme et son devenire selon le Vêdânta* (1925) that philosophy represents an exclusively Western point of view (see Guénon 1925, Ch. 1). There is, however, something seemingly contradictory and paradoxical in the fact that, even now, from a completely different perspective, the argument is made that Buddhism is not a religion but a philosophy. I will not dwell on this aspect too much. I would simply say that if religion means a complex of beliefs and acts of worship that expresses man's relationship with the sacred, the divine and/or the transcendent, then Buddhism is a religion. I would add that if a religion implies a ritual and ceremonial structure based on meditation and/or prayer, then Buddhism is a religion. Finally, I would say that if a religion implies an object of worship or veneration and a place of worship or veneration, then Buddhism is a religion. Conversely, the question "what is philosophy?" is, in itself, a philosophical problem, dating back to the earliest days of the specific use of this word, *philosophia*, in ancient Greece. It is linked to the whole of its history, and evolves with it, differentiating itself in (often contradictory) conceptions, approaches, styles and methods (analysis, clarification, contemplation, criticism, deconstruction, etc.); intra-/interdisciplinary fields (metaphysics, epistemology, logic, ethics, to name the main ones); and research agendas (conceptualism, constructivism, etc.). The question of what philosophy is does not arise, in short, only by reflecting on non-Western forms of though. In Heraclitus (and in the pre-Socratics in general) philosophy is conceived as a form of speculative research for the first cause, the origin of all things, taking on that connotation of abstractness and detachment from the affairs of the world. Later on, Aristotle takes on the marked physiognomy of the contemplative attitude and the scientific task of searching for and organising knowledge. Plato offers various definitions of it: philosophy is understood immediately as *practical wisdom*, that is, as the use of knowledge for the benefit of man (cf. *Euthydemus*) and as a form of searching and ascesis (cf. *Republic*). The first character of Plato's definitions refers to the clear path of knowing how to do something, of knowing how to lead (also politically and morally). The second character refers to the plane of the search for truth and metaphysics (understood as the plane of the only true knowledge, the philosophical plane, outside of which there is no truth). The latter aspect,

also present in Aristotle (cf. *Metaphysics*), was destined to last, like the former, for many centuries, but in the neo-Platonic era it become linked to religious discourse, taking on a more strictly theological or more generally practical slant when not, on the contrary, taking on a mystical one (from Plotin [203/5-270] to Meister Echkart [1260-1327/28]). Even if these lines of argument could find a connection in the form of a common trait of free research (scientific, speculative, spiritual, practical and technical)–as can be found in Michel de Montaigne [1533-1592] as well as in Immanuel Kant–this trait could not be said to characterise philosophy in general. In fact, the instrumental use of philosophy has also been widespread, not only in the religious field but (1) in the service of divine revelation (i.e. for a truth conceived as absolutely transcendent), (2) in the preservation of an accomplished and absolute knowledge, and (3) in defence of an ideological construction (which is not maintained by virtue of argumentative efficacy but by the choice of participatory and fideistic adherence). Nicola Abbagnano, a historian of philosophy, collects these philosophical forms under the grouping of scholasticism (also declaratively placing almost all oriental philosophies within it; see Abbagnano 1993, 393).

Although in need of further study and discussion, Abbagnano's analyses seem to identify a universalisable element of the modus and attitude that can be defined as "philosophical"–beyond the West/East distinction. Philosophy can be said to be (1) an approach or set of approaches; (2) a procedure or set of procedures; (3) cognitive, comprehensive and/or intuitive; (4) theoretical or practical or according to feeling (understood in a broad sense); (5) applicable to various fields (of investigation, experience and life) and objects; or (6) operating according to a principle of cognitive and discursive critique, practical reasonableness, and ethical and communicative responsibility. At the bottom of such a conception of philosophy there is a reference to the famous Kantian questions, which represent an important "antidote" to all scholasticism and, at the same time, do not poison the most lively and specific traits of oriental thought. Having said that, however, one is confronted with a tense and borderline region which, given the current season of globalisation and considering its more ancient (imperialistic-cultural) roots, presents itself again in a new formula–and on the side of the frontiers and possibilities of a new global season of philosophy (or philosophies) and on the side of the recovery/recognition of non-Western philosophical forms of though, vision and wisdom. In this respect, "Westernist resistance" still appears strong and persistent, in part due to the very character of the globalising ratio, accepted in both the East and West. And how can one not acknowledge, in agreement with Robert C. Solomon (University of Texas), that:

> For most of this century, Anglo-American and most European philosophers have simply ignored the rich philosophical traditions of Africa, Asia, Latin and Native America, and the rest of the world; some leading African American and African European philosophers have dismissed "ethnophilosophy" as "not philosophy," presumably to protect their own analytic credentials; universities as far flung as Singapore, Sierra Leone, and New Delhi have prided themselves on their fidelity to Oxbridge philosophy; it seems that the globalization of free market economics goes with the globalization of one brief moment in philosophy, with similarly devastating effects on local cultures and the rich varieties of human experience. (Solomon 2001, 100-104)

But the new era promises to be not only an era of challenges for mutual recognition (of the value of all traditions, cultural minorities and all forms of knowledge), but also a global era, where the definition of a shared framework of conceptions, values and principles will be central, and where even knowledge will undergo a profound transformation (among contaminations, hybridisations, renewals and new expressive, transformative and creative drives). Philosophy is not exempt from this.

The value and importance of Ikeda's philosophical enterprise lies here, in the example and contribution that a new globalising and globalised conception and approach brings. It is perhaps no coincidence that it is a Japanese person who is the interpreter of this new enterprise, given the rich Eastern cultural background on the one hand and the remarkable, sensitive and cultured disposition of the Land of the Rising Sun towards the West on the other (since the Meiji era [1868-1912]). Underpinning this (open, dialectical and intercultural) approach is the idea that "global civilization" constitutes the new horizon of action and realisation for humanity: a gamble not only cultural but intercultural and multicultural; not only confessional but inter-confessional; not just "Western" but authentically inter-national or, better, inter-popular; not only civic but moral and spiritual. In Ikeda, such a vision has its inspirational and motivational roots in the doctrinal and practical heritage of Nichiren Daishōnin's Buddhism–that is, in a motif of faith. However, the overall construction (in its overall result; argumentative substance; thematic and problematic contents; and reflective, critical and propositional apparatuses) takes on the conformation of a general active humanism, rather than of a specific confession, and of a globalising/globalised reflexive philosophy whose results and contents are variously referenced in different areas of knowledge and in the heritage of human wisdom (ancient as well as modern). It is true that a great deal of Ikeda's work is centred on the exegesis of Nichiren's religious texts, and on issues relating to religious practice and the life of the community of Sōka