[A Comment on the Symposium]

Acceptance of "Otherness":

The Uncanny, Helplessness, and the Unpredictable

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Abstract

Despite the fact that psychoanalysis and education are adjacent academic fields, they each have a different way of looking at things. The objectives of the two fields are different, and what they emphasize are also different. As such, discussions between the two do not tend to align well with each other. Moreover, when the issue of translation is taken into consideration, the discussion becomes even more complex. Without a careful choice of language, the discussion will go nowhere.

This paper will examine three reports that were presented at an online debate titled "Psychoanalysis and Education: Freudian Thought as an Educational Theory" in the 63rd Annual Meeting of the Philosophy of Education Society of Japan (PESJ). I will assume that the reader has already read the articles compiled in the reports, and I shall extract a few points for consideration here.

1. What is "Otherness"?

The keyword for Prof. Britzman's ideas is "otherness", which has been translated as "*tashasei*" in Japanese. While this is not a mistranslation, this kind of convenient translational equivalent using the word "*tashasei*" does not convey the chaotic depth of the unknowability that the original term tries to highlight. Given the nature of chaos, it cannot possibly be explained in a single word. It has been rephrased in various ways: "the unknown," "unconscious situations," "that which cannot be wholly tamed," "the uncanny," and so on. Prof. Britzman states that no one is immune to such otherness. It is always something unknowable to us, it is an uncontrollable strangeness that disturbs the stability and instills apprehension. Furthermore, otherness is also spoken of in connection with the "helplessness in infantile life." Otherwise, it is also spoken of with "the influence of the other" or "the primacy of fantasy life." Traditional depth psychology has called this "the unconscious," or "unconscious energy." Freud called it "Es." In any case, we are

unable to know its true character, and we can neither recognize nor become conscious of it. That unknown something that we cannot become conscious of is what Prof. Britzman calls "otherness."

On Being Helpless

What is exceedingly interesting is the word "helpless." This is that "which cannot be controlled but can nonetheless be the most important scene of existence." Prof. Nishi speaks of this exact matter as "transference and countertransference" in psychoanalytic relationships: "Transference can plunge a therapist into a helpless situation that differs from the one for which he or she had prepared." The expressions that convey delicate situations such as these are subtly different in English and Japanese. The subject in the Japanese sentence is "therapist," and the intransitive verb "to fall into" is used. In the sentence that Prof. Nishi herself wrote in English, "transference" is the subject, and the line continues, "Transference can plunge (...)." Perhaps she was not satisfied by either expression. Instead, she is probably thinking of a situation that bears both of these. The word "helpless" has the aspect of passively being subjected to the influence of external factors, where one suddenly finds oneself in a situation before one realizes, as well as another aspect where the therapist involved intransitively inventing.

When it comes to psychoanalysis, this transference is treated with much importance. If anything, "it is not an exaggeration to state that modern psychoanalysis aims to answer the question of how these transferences can be facilitated and how one can survive them." This verb "survive" is remarkably interesting. When expressing this verb in Japanese, Prof. Nishi uses the direct translation of "*ikinobiru*." This is a word usage not found in ordinary Japanese conversation. The expression "surviving human relationships" is odd in Japanese; however, in this case, there does not appear to be any fitting expression other than this one. To talk about a sense of otherness which transcends ordinary senses, there is a need to follow the trail of foreign expressions and use language that deviates from the ordinary usage of our mother tongue.

2. Transference and Resistance: Otherness as Helplessness

Prof. Nishi states that "the psychoanalytic process will be adversely affected if the therapists also play the role of an educator," and many therapists seem to think this way. Well, what is "the psychoanalytic process" in the first place? Prof. Nishi says plainly that it is transference. Then, she introduces an interesting anecdote about Japanese pioneer of

psychoanalysis, Heisaku Kosawa, and his protégé Seishi Shimoda, calling the episode "the event during which a transference had taken place," and stating, "This is when psychoanalytic development appears to have occurred". Transference is "a helpless situation that differs from the one for which he or she had prepared."

The above episode can also be understood as a discrepancy in understanding that arose from the process of analysis. Shimoda (the analysand) is unable to accept Kosawa's (the analyst) interpretation. Perhaps losing his patience, Kosawa tried to demonstrate the correctness of his own interpretation, and scolded Shimoda, "blasting his voice throughout the entire room." However, Shimoda does not give way: "Dr. Kosawa, who dismissed the notion of education without scolding, tried to change my mind by scolding me, but I did not budge even an inch." This is exactly the kind of battlefield scene that plays out over transference and countertransference. The two of them fall into a helpless relationship, as if they "had been thrown in and were drowning without noticing." However, naturally, "modern psychoanalysis aims to answer the question of how these transferences can be facilitated and how one can survive them." This is the core of Prof. Nishi's understanding of psychoanalysis. On this point I agree. However, as a non-analyst, I thought about the following issues, from the point of view of an observer.

How does an analyst facilitate transference? That is to say, the job of the analyst is to 1) before they realize it, 2) facilitate a situation with the client such that they seem to be swallowed up by and are drowning in a helpless situation, and 3) to survive this. The word "survive" expresses a compelling state of affairs, as seen above. However, what I want to pay attention to here is the verb "facilitate." Since this is meant to be facilitated before one realizes it, it is not intentional. The English phrasing is "how these transferences can be facilitated," and the causative meaning of *facili-tate* is not strong here, but it is expected that the process will be heading in some direction. Or perhaps the analyst faces the client so as not to obstruct the process that is supposed to arise inevitably in the psychoanalytic relationship. In other words, they both head toward the helpless situation and deepen the transference/countertransference relationship within that. Prof. Britzman depicts such helpless situations as otherness, as well. In teaching–learning relationships, this "otherness as helplessness" arises. It is unavoidable. However, Prof. Britzman does not think of leveraging it. It would be preferable to avoid it, but since it cannot be avoided, the idea is to engage with it skillfully. On the other hand, psychoanalysis requires this "otherness as helplessness." Not only that, but psychoanalysis tries to facilitate it. It tries to experience otherness together with the client, work through it, and then survive it. In short, these conversations intersect. School teachers embrace "otherness as helplessness" between themselves and their students,

even though it is not desirable, and somehow just barely survive that battlefield. In contrast, analysts hope that such a situation will arise and stay by the side of their clients while both sides survive that dense battlefield.

These two fields are different somehow, perhaps the things they hope for and expect are different. However, on a profound level, they reverberate with each other. Both teachers and analysts try to survive. Then, they see some kind of growth in that process. Regarding the substance of that growth, teachers, and clients may have different points of view and assessments. They are different, but both recognize "otherness as helplessness" within relationships between people, and I think that surviving this while feeling helpless or out of control, has some kind of important significance.

Resistance

In this way, Prof. Britzman does not have the idea of "facilitating transference." There is no need to go out of their way to deliberately facilitate transference, it is something which inevitably arises in the relationship between teacher and student. Instead, she focuses on the resistance that arises in that relationship. In many cases, that resistance arises unconsciously. Perhaps we could think that they do not notice it, but to be precise, that would be the mechanism of repression. We pretend that there was never any "otherness as helplessness," or we forget about it. Prof. Britzman sees this tendency in the classroom, especially on the teacher side. This is a tendency to unconsciously resist "otherness as helplessness." Teachers have a tendency to defend against otherness. Therefore, she recommends that teachers accept otherness. Of course, this is not easy. It arouses both conscious and unconscious resistance. This is because teachers must then recognize that their own selves are torn. They must recognize that the integrity and completeness of their selves is broken, and admit the unknown, uncontrollable otherness within themselves. Teachers cannot control themselves on their own. With this self-awareness in hand, they stand in front of students.

Incidentally, in this context, Prof. Britzman has the following to say about growth. The acceptance of otherness changes one's understanding of the concept of growth. Growth carries with it potential, but it also has the power to cause disruption. Growth brings about misalignment. Foreignness is uncanny. It perplexes, annoys, and confuses people. To grow is to accept exactly such foreignness into oneself. In other words, it means transforming into something that is not the self: "The self is the stranger unto itself." If we think about it this way, growth is none other than the acceptance of that situation. Prof. Britzman understands education as the business of accepting otherness as a stranger into oneself. On this point, I completely agree with Prof. Britzman's view.

3. Nachträglichkeit: Otherness as the Unpredictable

Prof. Geshi discusses *Nachträglichkeit* in the following way. The meaning of an experience is only understood afterward. In other words, it is a troublesome issue in which an experience is re-interpreted *after* an event has already happened. I learned the word *Nachträglichkeit* about 30 years ago, when I was thinking about field study reflections. After going on a field trip with students, we came back to the classroom and have time for reflections. In response to student impressions such as "I didn't understand it at the time" and "I won't understand it until I get a little distance and time," I made the counterargument that "Aren't you adding a deferred embellishment?" and "Aren't you just attaching meaning to the event after it has occurred?" *Nachträglichkeit* is a word I first learned about when making arguments such as these.

Prof. Geshi formulates this issue as follows: "Learning matters, which a child is not ready to understand, are believed to act after the event" or "Past experiences of which individuals are not aware, because they were, at one point, beyond the realm of comprehension, can eventually be understood by the occurrence of similar experiences after going through puberty." We might not understand something in the turmoil of an experience, but we might only understand its meaning afterward. When I contemplated this, the concept of the hermeneutic circle came to mind. But beyond that, I thought of eschatology. To take a grand historical viewpoint, *Nachträglichkeit* has the same vector as eschatology. Only after arriving at the end-times is the significance of all the history leading up to that point revealed. In the end-times, even tragic events are shown to all have been a part of God's plan. In other words, it is a time vector of anticipating a future point in time, and speaking in the perfect tense from a future point in time (its differences with the reincarnation time vector are a fascinating topic).

Prof. Geshi's attempts focus on trying to apply this *Nachträglichkeit* in a positive form. That is, its point of view is to reconstruct the deferred feeling that something went well. If we can think that something went well after the event has been completed, that would mean we have succeeded. When we are experiencing something, we do not know if the experience is "good" or "bad." Only by being able to reflect back on something having gone well afterward do we decide that it was "good." However, the results are unpredictable. While we are working on trying to bring about good results, we cannot decide beforehand what must be done in order to obtain good results. We are placing a bet. If the standards for what is seen as positive are decided *afterward*, even if we work

with the thought that something is good, we cannot guarantee that the standards set afterward will judge that work to have been good. Prof. Geshi thought of this kind of groundlessness of education as otherness. Education does not have a reliable foundation. It is built on otherness. He took up the issue of how to approach that otherness.

By the way, it is precisely because Confucian wisdom understands this issue which is why it constructed built a system of striking first and not permitting changes later on. It is a system in which the successors are compelled to follow the same standards up to the present day, and the standards have all been indicated in the founders' ideology. People must not destroy these standards, or deviate from them. It is a system that is passed on to the next generation exactly as it was inherited from the previous generation. Seen from the perspective of this kind of cultural transmission (or emphasis on tradition), *Nachträglichkeit* is a frame of mind that acknowledges changes. Even better, we could say that it is a frame of mind that encourages new generations to take new ways of viewing things. If that is the case, it would be an idea that falls under the same corollary as the ideology of new education that has advocated for child-centered education.

Negative and Positive Aspects of *Nachträglichkeit*

Now, Freud also paid attention to *Nachträglichkeit*. However, Prof. Geshi's perspective is a different one. Freud highlighted the negative aspects of *Nachträglichkeit*. What Freud thought of was a situation of falling into a more negative understanding through deferred comprehension. This is the exact opposite of the hopes of eschatology; it is a state of becoming more and more miserable by understanding something anew after it has happened. Even though it would have been better to just forget, by stopping for a moment and re-understanding afterward, one experiences darkness and uncovers his or her dark side. In short, "it becomes a deferred trauma." Freud himself thought that this was a necessary process for psychoanalysis. For the sake of personality growth, one must experience deferred understanding on at least one occasion. To be precise, Freud believed that in the protected transference/countertransference relationship of the psychoanalytic relationship, confronting this dark side made people grow or at least progress to the next step. If we think about it this way, Freud's treatment theory also included the potential to apply *Nachträglichkeit* in a positive way in the long run. However, Freud did not advance the topic in that direction. Instead, he continued to focus on the potential or danger in experiencing one's negative dark side. It amounts to staying in the dangerous realm that Prof. Britzman called "otherness" and Prof. Nishi called a "helpless situation." Should we regard this dangerous realm as the core of education, or as noise (or an obstacle or impediment)? It may be fine to understand this in various ways,

but I will at least include that realm within the area of expertise of the word "education." That was the main focus of "An Educational Theory for Otherness" in Prof. Britzman's paper.

However, Prof. Geshi goes even further than this. It does not merely look at otherness. It attempts to look at the potential to apply otherness in a positive way. This is the point of assessing something as good when looking back afterward. Rather than seeing the negative aspects of *Nachträglichkeit*, as Freud does, he tries to see its positive aspects; "If this transformation acts negatively, it becomes a disorder; however, if such transformation has a 'positive' effect, it can be deemed educational (i.e., *a positive traumatic experience*)." This is, so to speak, "Beyond the Trauma Principle." Prof. Geshi experimentally brings up "education when reflected upon later." In other words, it is an argument made in three steps, seen from Prof. Britzman's line of thought toward otherness. First, it considers otherness to be unpredictable. Second, it considers Freud's perspective on *Nachträglichkeit*. Third, it observes the positive aspects of *Nachträglichkeit* rather than its negative aspects. In this way, Prof. Geshi ultimately tries to accept otherness as a positive thing, but nevertheless, what this inquiry digs up on its way to reaching that point, is the profound difficulty of education's groundlessness.

Education has no foundations. Education cannot be planned. This is because even if we hope for better education, what is good is decided only after reflecting back on the event. Thus, the standard for better itself does not hold. Only when we reflect back does education become valid as education. If that is the case, teachers cannot judge whether their work is a form of good education at the point in time when they are working on their students. There is nothing to guarantee that what one is doing will be for the sake of the other person. There is no guarantee that either way that one will be thanked, or criticized, when looking back afterward. Furthermore, at what point in time will students reflect back? Their evaluation of the effect of education will change depending on its time. If that is the case, the standards are completely fluid. The assessment standards are not only "relative" but also "relativistic." If we think about it this way, we end up with the conclusion that no matter what we do, it is all the same. We cannot help but fall into relativism, skepticism, nihilism, and finally populism of finding futility even if we strive. I am apprehensive about the argument advancing in that direction. Perhaps Prof. Geshi is also trying out a theoretical dispute for that inclination.

The business of education has an aspect of "only understanding its significance when reflecting about it later in time". Therefore, there are no foundations, no guarantees in education. In spite of having shared that reality, how much courage to educate can we have? Prof. Geshi, who saw a link between psychoanalysis and education in the concept

of *Nachträglichkeit,* is trying to hold out for the courage to educate in a tight space by highlighting aspects of that concept that were different from Freud's thinking.

4. What is the "Acceptance of Otherness"?

By setting otherness as a keyword, a great many fascinating discussions and topics arise in the themes of psychoanalysis and education. While reading the papers of the presenters, I thought of the following two topics.

On Trusting

The first topic is about the meaning of "accepting" in the context of accepting otherness. Prof. Britzman emphasizes that otherness threatens the self. Otherness is something that antagonizes the self. Otherness confronts the self, and amounts to a menace to the self. In spite of this, she wants people to accept it. However, doesn't otherness also have a complementary role for the self? In other words, doesn't it sometimes also function in a positive way for the self?

For example, Jungian psychology puts confidence in unconscious energy. Above all, in the individuation process, the analyst trusts otherness, and recommends that the client leave things up to it. Does the word "accept" also include these meanings? That is to say, is the acceptance of otherness the reluctant acceptance of something hostile, or does the concept instead include the idea of trusting otherness? In Prof. Nishi's discussion, when she mentions "facilitating transference," does that include trusting the otherness that arises there? Under the appropriate conditions, can we expect that it is alright to trust the helpless and uncontrolled things that arise, as is bound to happen? Since this is a process that occurs inevitably, does this mean that it is alright to leave everything up to otherness? This is also related to Prof. Geshi's argument. He saw hope in the potential for *Nachträglichkeit* to operate positively. Can we consider this to mean trusting in otherness? Or is it impossible to declare trust after all? Is accepting an ambivalent event premised on the presence of resistance? In this way, we are faced with the necessity of digging into this concept and examining what "accepting" really means. Furthermore, what is the subject of the verb "accept"? Is the subject "the ego" or is it "consciousness" or "the subject," or is it "the self, including the unconscious"? Not to mention, if we include the perspective that the subject will change, the discussion gets even more complicated.

Otherness and "*Mu*" (Nothing, Zero, Empty)

The second topic is about the link between otherness and Eastern philosophy. Japanese philosopher Toshihiko Izutsu understood such otherness as non-articulation. Properly speaking, he understood the self as articulation, and otherness as non-articulation. To put it more precisely, he understood the opposition of the self and the other as one phase of a grand framework of articulation and non-articulation. Eastern philosophy called the extreme end of this non-articulation "*Mu* (nothing, zero, empty)." Furthermore, Eastern philosophy has clarified aspects in which "*Mu*" works on "*Yū* (existence)" in negative and de-constructive ways, and aspects in which it works in positive and re-constructive ways. If we think about it from the perspective of otherness, this means that both the aspects in which the otherness works on the self in negative and de-constructive ways, and the aspects in which it works in positive and re-constructive ways, have both been clarified.

When we consider the issue from the perspective of Eastern philosophy, otherness is understood as one phase of "*Mu*." To put it the other way, this means that when we examine Eastern philosophy with modern language, the concept of otherness becomes a valuable clue. In this way, the word "otherness" is a promising intermediary between psychoanalysis and Eastern philosophy. The "acceptance of otherness" is an important research topic. It has the potential to become a new ontological epistemology that will enable an understanding of "education" that differs from modern education. I hope that discussions of otherness will trigger the opening up of new alternatives in the context of modern education.