

The Philosophy of Action of Daisaku Ikeda: A Path of Intra-worldly Spiritual Emancipation

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Abstract

The figure and work of Daisaku Ikeda (1928-) are so strongly inspired by Nichiren's Buddhist doctrine and vision that it seems impossible to distinguish between creed and argument, faith and reason, religion and philosophy. In fact, the concept of philosophy in its speculative sense cannot be used to synthetically resume the meaning and entity of this work and action. As a work and action clearly and explicitly inspired by faith, the unifying religious perspective is its true spiritual, cultural and moral source. Except in the disciplines of peace studies, environmental philosophy and sociology of religion, Ikeda is of little or no significance in speculative philosophy. This is true even in his own country, where he is not even ranked among the Japanese philosophers who connect philosophy and Buddhism. However, we have to introduce another historical approach to evaluate this case as well as we recall that our western history of ancient, modern, and contemporary philosophy is filled with non-academic and non-rigorous speculative figures who are not of secondary importance. As well, religious philosophers and religious movements in philosophy and philosophical movements in religions are not rare. Among them, a contemporary tradition of Philosophy of Action seems to be of particular interest. In this paper we will argue in favour of an interpretation of Ikeda's work as a kind of Buddhist philosophy of action.

Keywords: Philosophy of Action, Hermeneutics, Emancipation, Buddhism

Introduction

In Daisaku Ikeda's works, it seems rather difficult to separate his religious creed from his speculative work so deeply intertwined are his theoretical and practical reflections and his doctrinal and spiritual teachings. Moreover, although he has on several occasions been qualified as a philosopher (as well as an educator, a social reformer, a writer and creator of academic and cultural institutions), Ikeda is above all a religious master and a peace builder. In 1960, he was elected president of Soka Gakkai, a contemporary Japanese religious organisation which was then a movement of approximately 1 million families created 30 years before (at first as an association of educators by philosopher of education Tsunesaburo Makiguchi (1871-1944) and educator Josei Toda (1900-1958) and then transformed into a religious movement connected to the teachings of Nichiren Daishonin, a medieval Japanese Buddhist master and founder of a new Mahayana tradition). Fifteen years later, Ikeda was elected president of Soka Gakkai International¹ (SGI), a nongovernmental organisation recognised by the United Nations (UN) to which all of Soka Gakkai's religious organisations, associations and institutions are related directly or indirectly. He is still the president, and SGI is now a worldwide movement of approximately 13 million people in 192 countries. This could be a reflection and consequence of his massive, continuous, tireless personal commitment to travelling across the world for decades, giving several thousand public speeches and conferences, making more than two thousand recorded dialogues with scientists, writers, philosophers, activists, religious leaders, and political figures (around fifty published as books) and writing hundreds of published articles and essays and several books. In recognition of these efforts, he has received around thirty national honours, six hundred honorary citizenships, and three hundred degrees *honoris causa*, and in 1982 he won an important UN peace prize. Certainly, Ikeda is a celebrated and beloved personality within Soka Gakkai and a controversial figure in the public sphere and the mass-media, especially in Japan where, in 1964, he created the political Kōmeitō party which is a leading party today.

¹ See: <www.sgi.org>.

To give an idea of how controversial the public dialectic in Japan around this figure has become, we may mention an independent study published in 2004 which was co-authored by Takesato Watanabe, a professor of media ethics at Doshisha University of Tokyo, and American writer and investigative reporter Adam Gamble: *A Public Betrayed: An Inside Look at Japanese Media Atrocities and their Warnings to the West* (Gamble - Watanabe, 2004). This is a powerful, strong title, and this book analyses a series of scandalous cases of distorted, manipulated and dangerous public communications by newspapers and media, including the case of Daisaku Ikeda (see chapter 6 ‘Smearing a Buddhist Leader’), along with a series of attempts to deny the historicity of the Nanjing massacre (chapter 7), their attacks against former sex slaves (chapter 8), their Anti-Semitism and denial of the Holocaust (chapter 5) and other cases. It is not my task here to go into these issues, which require competences in sociology, ethics, media studies, sociology of communication and so on. However, even a philosophical survey of Ikeda’s work may constitute an effective challenge. I started my reading and study of Ikeda’s books, essays and public speeches while a practitioner of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism (becoming an SGI member in 1998). Only recently have I started studying his works in an analytical-critical way as a scholar of philosophy. However, to separate my approach as a believer from the scholar is not an easy task, and I somehow understand those who “feel” a sense of deception, irritation, and judgment at me working this way. I can recall a number of occasions during conferences when I was annoyed by a speaker with a dogmatic, ideological or even fanatical tone. In those cases, I made myself listen and remembered that a considerable amount of theoretical, practical and speculative advancements had been realised investigating the limits of philosophy and beyond. Sometimes, in worse situations, I forced myself to view the lecture as an occasion to exercise *ataraxia* (to improve the ability to safeguard peace of mind and an attitude of detachment)!

On a more serious note, I think it could be useful, or at least interesting, to investigate a new subject (or object) by assuming the preliminary intellectual-methodological approach of *epoché*, suspending all our prejudgements and judgements in order to fully analyse all aspects and possibilities from different perspectives. I want to proceed in this way, with three preliminary clarifications concerning (1) philosophy as a discipline with a long tradition of intertwined approaches, (2) the specific speculative methodology I am applying and (3) the complex, somewhat contradictory (and unclear or non-clarified) context of philosophy of action within which I am trying to place Ikeda’s thoughts. Only after that can I focus Ikeda’s work with a certain degree of speculative contextualisation. Obviously, he must be treated like everyone else: he should be studied and discussed if his thinking does seem and turn out to be useful and productive for theoretical and/or practical philosophy; he should be rejected if his thinking is speculatively weak, unfruitful or inconsistent.

The figure and work of Ikeda are so strongly inspired by Nichiren’s Buddhist doctrine and vision that it seems impossible to distinguish between creed and argument, faith and reason, religion and philosophy. In fact, the concept of philosophy in its speculative sense cannot be used to synthetically resume the meaning and entity of this work and action. As a work and action clearly and explicitly inspired by faith, the unifying religious perspective is the true spiritual, cultural, and moral source of this philosophy. In the book *For the sake of peace* (2001), Ikeda stresses that the human spirit has the capacity to transform even the most difficult situations, creating value and producing ever richer meanings. He emphasises that, when all people flourish, reaching their full spiritual potential for enlightenment and simultaneously progressing, a new culture of peace and a new era of life will arise. Spiritual self-reformation and religious commitment are the alpha and omega of this conception and vision.

Therefore, there is no room for a (*merely*) rational, argumentative philosophy. If there is any place for such a philosophy, then the question of under what argumentative logic it is possible to separate it from the doctrinal/religious corpus arises. Except in the disciplines of peace studies, and environmental philosophy and sociology of religion, Ikeda is of little or no significance in speculative philosophy. This is true even in his own country, where he is not even ranked among the Japanese philosophers who connect philosophy and Buddhism, as is the case of Nishida Kitarō (1870-1945). A possible explanation lies in the fact that, unlike Ikeda, Nishida was not only a professor at the Imperial University of Kyōto but also a scholar who developed a large body of theoretical research on Idealism, neo-Kantianism, and phenomenology, connecting them to Zen. However, we have to introduce another historical approach to evaluate this case as we recall that our western history of ancient, modern and contemporary philosophy is filled with non-academic and non-rigorous speculative figures who are not of secondary importance. As well, religious philosophers and religious movements in philosophy and philosophical movements in religions are not rare.

Which methodology for which philosophy of action with religious bases

Speaking at a very generalised level but also considering the particularity of personal and communitarian (philosophical and religious) research throughout the centuries, we can classify philosophy and religion as two independent *and* variously interdependent *spiritual* and *cultural* expressions of the human exploration of the meaning of life and knowledge, of wisdom and happiness. We can mention a very long series of well-known, important figures, such as the Christian Platonists of Alexandria (Clement [c. 150-215] and Origen [c. 185-254]) during the Hellenistic era and the Jewish philosopher Philo Judaeus [c. 20 B.C.-40 A.D.], who similarly used philosophy to elucidate religious ideas and notions. A reductionist historical-philosophical approach tends to qualify these cases as isolated or specific sectarian philosophical-religious cases. However, the entire western philosophical and theological history from the Hellenistic era through the middle Ages until the end of the Renaissance was marked by this intertwined approach: hermeneutically using philosophy to clarify and develop biblical doctrines and applying biblical concept and approaches to realise and articulate new speculative systems and conceptions. Certainly, after the Renaissance, philosophy regained its autonomy, entering into a productive, complex, and, truthfully, difficult dialectics with religion through politics (or, even better, theory of politics) and, above all, science. However, a profound and important diverse line of religious-philosophical thinking persists even after the Renaissance, through Occasionalism (Luigi De La Forge [XVII], Arnold Geulincx [1624-1669] and others), Immaterialism (George Berkeley [1685-1753]), Spiritualism, Idealism, neo-Spiritualism, [some forms of] Existentialism, Personalism and so on. Moreover, there are singular cases of Jewish, Christian and Muslim philosophers (Philo Judaeus, Saint Augustine [354-430], Avicenna [980-1037], Anselm of Canterbury [1033-1109], Moses Maimonides [1135-1204], Saint Thomas Aquinas [1225-1274], and Averroës [1126-1198]; more recently: Blaise Pascale [1623-1662], Søren Kierkegaard [1813-1855], Ernst Troeltsch [1865-1923], Ralph W. Emerson 1803-1882], Karl Barth [1886-1968], Emmanuel Mounier [1905-1950], Martin Buber [1878-1965] and many many others).

A second discursive line brings us to a similar conclusion on the complex, intertwined, dialectical relation of religion with theoretical and practical philosophy (or a certain parts of it). I refer to the discursive line of eastern traditions, both philosophical and religious. This does not constitute an easy theme, and I do not expect to resolve it now through a few, rapid assertions. I know that there is a persistent controversy on what philosophy represents/constitutes for eastern cultures and traditions and whether it should be considered the same concept as religion in these traditions and cultures. However, for the specific interests and aims of this paper, it seems sufficient to offer a generalised definition of what philosophy is. Certainly, what philosophy is does not 'enter' into a representative 'picture' of the typical rational manifestation of western thinking. Philosophy can be variously considered to be (1) *a rational, reflective or practical discipline or inter-discipline*; (2) *a way to live and to approach life and the world*, or (3) *even a set of approaches, procedures and/or exercises that concern specific (practical or theoretical) objects of knowledge, contemplation, reflection, and moral, spiritual or social advancement*.

This definition can appear to be insufficient, partial or even distorted (and thus disappointing) from the perspective of the cultural heritage of eastern countries, such as India, China and Japan. One might even feel surprised when listening to western Buddhist scholar summarising his philosophical-religious views in a rationalised and occidentalised way. However, the figure of Daisaku Ikeda and the specific cultural context in which he acted and developed his research – that is, contemporary Japan – strongly supports this position. The considerable interest in Ikeda for western cultures and traditions does not contradict his deep affiliation with eastern culture, first as a practitioner of a specific Japanese Buddhist tradition (which is connected to the Hokke-Tendai Japanese school and to the Chinese tradition of the T'ien-T'ai school) and second as a man of culture and thought in constant, deep dialogue with the major figures in the philosophy, literature and arts of ancient, modern and contemporary Japan. Ikeda's ideal of *global civilization* is not only in unity with his humanistic universalism rooted in Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism but also reflects the predominant spirit of contemporary Japan – one of the more Occidentalised eastern countries. It is a distortion to interpret Ikeda as an example of a mass-movement philosopher with a 'dispersive' approach who lives in an epoch of globalisation and, taking advantage of it, acts in a globalised, 'global' way, shifting *randomly* among traditions and schools to create the effect of a universal approach and a 'global civilisation'. The convergence, connection and harmonisation between Ikeda's eastern spiritual sensitivities and his cultural openness to the west are largely due to the contemporary historical, cultural and social uniqueness of Japan as an eastern country.

Japan's considerable efforts in making scientific, technological and social advancements through internationalisation since the Meiji Restoration (1868-1912) into the present are radically distinct and without comparison in the world.

It is neither simply a matter of globalisation nor a question of staying among or dropping out of the top 10 industrialised countries. Japan is the most Occidentalised of the eastern countries, but has had the time and wisdom to completely absorb foreign culture and re-express it in an original, living manner. Japan has thus crystallised its specific identity and cultural-spiritual uniqueness in a way that constitutes a model for all other countries of globalisation-through-mutual-cultural-enrichment, which is the only possible future for humankind. It is thanks to this fortunate condition and environment that Ikeda's work can express eastern and western values, sensitivities and cultures in an equitable, creative and fruitful way. His work has a double constitution of a conception built on a specifically Japanese philosophical-religious tradition and directed to all world traditions but articulated and developed following an intercultural, inter-popular logic with a pragmatic, diversified approach to practical wisdom.

Beyond this discourse, we must define in a clear, justified manner in what way we can philosophically approach this complex, multi-discursive work made of (1) theoretical and speculative analysis (on the human being, on values, on the world and our cosmos); (2) religious considerations, public discourses and hermeneutical exercises on doctrinal texts, history, literature, biographies of various kinds, all addressed to believers and followers; (3) practical peace proposals for politicians and leaders of various organisations and non-governmental institutions; and, finally, (4) essays, papers, books of dialogue, public speeches (for followers, academics and institutions), novels, stories and poems. Among others options, I consider the example offered by Paul Ricoeur [1913-2005]'s personal commitment and philosophical work as especially interesting, favourable, productive and even *paradigmatic*. He does not simply offer an example of a Christian philosopher with an articulated connection to the Christian branches of Spiritualism, Existentialism and Personalise. Moreover, he developed a non-systematic philosophy in which it is clearly possible to separate theory from doctrine, argumentation from belief, and conviction from creed. His reflective and phenomenological hermeneutics can be applied to many disciplinary and inter-disciplinary domains and themes: from the eidetic of the voluntary and involuntary to empirical psychology and hermeneutics of symbol and myth, guilt and evil; from history to psychoanalysis; from epistemology to methodology and practical philosophy; from structuralism to philosophy of language and action; from theory of text to narrative hermeneutics; from human and social sciences to philosophy of culture and literature; from biblical exegesis to religion, from anthropological philosophy to neuroscience; from historiography to philosophy of law and anthropology; and so forth.

The meaning of Ricoeur's 'renunciation to Hegel', as announced in the third volume of his book *Temps et récit* (Ricoeur, 1991: 349-373), has been interpreted precisely by François Dosse as a renouncement to a speculative 'spirit of system', of a final, totalising synthesis of human knowledge. As Dosse argues, 'To this regard, he adopts a more modest position of dialogue, of a philosophy opened up onto other spheres of knowledge without pretension to absorption, having an interest for the respect of the linguistic game plurality, as Wittgenstein teaches' (Dosse, 2001: 584-585; translation by the author). The concentric semicircles which compose the logo of the Fonds Ricoeur – the French institution created after the philosopher's death according to his express will – summarise well the various implications of this discourse: the ideal of the communitarian work of philosophy, or the dialogue and shared research and study among researchers, scholars and experts (this is an ideal borrowed from Karl Jaspers [1883-1969]' thought); the idea that 'all the books are open simultaneously' (Ricoeur, 2004: XVII); the nature of 'genuinely interdisciplinary' thought 'with distinguished and original contributions in a host of different areas' (Clarck, 1990: 1); and finally, the humanistic and universalistic disposition of thinking genuinely rooted in a religious and moral spirit. A synthetic approach considering Ricoeur's speculative and practical work as a whole offers the possibility to extract and profile a procedural model of *critical hermeneutics*, methodologically and epistemologically articulated between explanations and understanding under the coordinating rule of interpretation and reflection (see Busacchi, 2015). This specific kind of hermeneutics not only (1) works between theory and praxis, developing speculation through a multi-levelled argumentation within different degrees, levels and registers of discourse, but (2) can also have a non-philosophical or pre-philosophical discourse or material as point of departure – as Ricoeur did several times, for example, working on symbols and literature, investigating the unconscious and language.

In his work, the ‘non-philosophical’ generally indicates the application of hermeneutics to specific disciplinary, interdisciplinary and cultural themes or objects and the dialectics between reasons-argumentation and ideologies-creeds (generally conceived of as non-rational *positions*). Such a method may help us consistently summarise and evaluate, appreciate and productively use the work of Ikeda. I propose to consider this work as a new form of *philosophy of action*. This point should be clarified before going forward.

First, I advance the thesis that, in general, all of Ikeda’s work is the expression of a philosophical perspective vulnerable to being treated as an argumentative construction in accordance with reason, common sense and practical wisdom without any involvement in terms of creed or personal belief. I approach his work in the same way Ricoeur presents, summarises and discusses his own in *Soi-même comme un autre* (1990), his most important work in which he describes his entire philosophical enterprise as (holistic) research on the human being. He expressively states:

The ten studies that make up this work assume the bracketing, conscious and resolute, of the convictions that bind me to biblical faith. I do not claim that at the deep level of motivations these convictions remain without any effect on the interest that I take in this or that problem, even in the overall problematic of the self. But I think I have presented to my readers arguments alone, which do not assume any commitment from the reader to reject, accept, or suspend anything with regard to biblical faith. It will be observed that this asceticism of the argument, which marks, I believe, all my philosophical work, leads to a type of philosophy from which the actual mention of God is absent and in which the question of God, as a philosophical question, itself remains in a suspension that could be called agnostic, as the final lines of the tenth study will attest (Ricoeur, 1995: 24).

Considering (1) the general philosophical perspective of Ikeda’s work, (2) the series of explicit references to philosophers and philosophical schools in his books and essays and (3) certain commonalities in moral and humanistic sensitivities, Ikeda can easily put in parallel or even in connection with (1) the tradition of existentialist spiritualism, particularly Gabriel Marcel (1889-1973), (2) the spiritual evolutionism of Henri Bergson (1859-1921), and (3) the work and thought of Ralph W. Emerson. Among philosophers of education, Ikeda’s main reference is certainly Makiguchi’s theory of creation of values, which has been largely practised and developed by him. Like Makiguchi, Ikeda can be here connected to the work of John Dewey (1859-1952). As well, in what concerns Ikeda’s philosophy of peace and social life, I think (according to Oliver Urbain’s research; see Urbain 2010) that Martin Buber and Jürgen Habermas (1929-) must be considered to be Ikeda’s main references, along with Johan Galtung (1930-). Finally, from a particular-experiential perspective, even the historical-philosophical work of Arnold J. Toynbee (1889-1975), one of the most important representatives of contemporary philosophical historicism, has been of great importance. Indeed, Toynbee’s last book is a dialogue with Ikeda. All these reminders and references help position Ikeda’s research within the contemporary philosophical context. However, they are insufficient to precisely indicate what kind of philosophy his philosophy is as it cannot be categorised as a kind of spiritualism, spiritual existentialism, spiritual evolutionism or hermeneutics. Only philosophy of action seems to have sufficiently similar characteristics and elements for an adequately large and comprehensive speculative and practical contextualisation of Ikeda’s work and commitments. Why philosophy of action? And *which* philosophy of action.

The theme of action, like issues related to the dynamic of potential-acts, human action, agency and so on, has a long history in philosophy, running through Aristotle (c. 384-322 B.C.), Thomas Aquinas, René Descartes (1596-1650), David Hume (1711-1776), Johann G. Fichte (1762-1814), Maurice Blondel (1861-1949), Max Weber (1864-1920), Charles Taylor (1931-), John Searle (1932-), John McDowell (1942-), to mention only some of the (western) thinkers on this topic from ancient times to the modern and contemporary epoch. Beyond this general interest in action in western philosophy, more precisely, in the Anglo-Saxon world, a specific tradition of studies since the second half of the twentieth century has identified itself as a ‘philosophy of action’, in other words, an intra-discipline within philosophy. As is known and fully recognised, philosophy of action has three major speculative interests: (1) the study of act/actions *as* or *in-relation-to* basic actions, speech acts, causal (theories of) action, bodily movement, collective action and so forth; (2) the study of action in connection with such questions as volition/will, intention, cause/motivation, mental acts, agent causation, agency, patency, irrational acts, and so forth; and (3) the study of action through issues connected to specific disciplinary domains of application, such as the theory of knowledge, ethics, cognitive psychology, history, social sciences and others (see O’Connor - Sandis, 2010; see Busacchi, 2016a).

However, there is another tradition, within the Francophone area, which has been characterised as philosophy of Action. It is less recognized today but equally important in the history of philosophy and practical philosophy. Ikeda's philosophy seems more comparable to this philosophy of action which is a tradition with a deep spiritualistic nature and strong religious references.

It privileges and endorses the interior and practical experience of the human being and promotes an introspective and practically engaged philosophy over an attitude of pure reasoning or neutral analysis and classification. Following traditional spiritualism (Maine de Biran [1766-1824], Henri Bergson), it focuses on the human conscience and will from the perspective of a general interest in human *emancipation*, acting as a moral, civic, religious and creative-of-value practical philosophy. As does Ikeda, this philosophy of action is a practice of philosophy, the perpetual exercise of practical-philosophical investigation and practical wisdom *in daily life*.

This specific modern form of spiritualism has been promoted and disseminated primarily by the work of Léon Ollé-Laprune (1839-1898) and M. Blondel, who developed Fichte's moral idealism (which is largely constructed around the notion of action). However, even the work of John H. Newman (1801-1890) and Georges Sorel (1847-1922), in a certain way, has played a special role. Somehow, Newman has come to be considered the initiator of this tradition of philosophy of action. The majority of the works by this man of religion (he became a cardinal in 1879) are religious writings, but two books have a consistent philosophical (albeit if apologetic) nature: *An essay on the development of Christian Doctrine* (1845) and *An essay in aid of a grammar of assent* (1870). Both maintain the idea that a living doctrine is not a purely mental or theoretical matter: it embraces the whole will and all the practical activities of daily human living. In Sorel's conception, philosophy of action has a very different nature. Philosophy of action loses its religious connection and gains a political-historical orientation. Reinterpreting Bergson's lesson, Sorel puts on the same level the exploration of the deep life of the human conscience and the history of human emancipation as expressed in history through revolutionary myths. In Sorel's major book, *Réflexions sur la violence* (1908), he embraces Marx's view on class struggle and Bergson's general perspective on human condition. To Sorel, human history and reality must be interpreted and considered to be an incessant movement of development and action because of which life can be experienced as *freedom*. Human liberty finds its possibility and emancipatory character through the dialectic of action and project or fantasy. The *social myth* is a natural expression of will that drives us to challenge past-present conditions and so make progress.

Even so-called Modernism, which has its major representative in Abbot Lucien Laberthonnière (1860-1932), can be connected to this philosophy of action. For Laberthonnière, whose publications include books on studies on Descartes (1935) and Christian philosophy (1937), philosophy is not a discipline or a science but a constant, conscious, reflexive *effort* of the human spirit to grasp the ultimate truths and the true meaning of all things. To the contrary, Ollé-Laprune and especially Maurice Blondel develop a more substantial discourse for what concerns the supply of philosophy. As is known, Ollé-Laprune conducted important research on Malebranche and published a series of books of practical-Christian philosophy: moral certainty (1880), life and its value (1894), Christian vitality (1901), and reason and rationalism (1906). In Ollé-Laprune's view, the practical use of reason constitutes the only truly *full* use of reason. Purely speculative and theoretical work and research express only half of the true power of reason, in contrast to the practical-moral domain. However, this unity between mind and spirit, between theoretical and practical realities represents a true challenge not simply between reasons and personal dispositions but even between reason and (religious) faith. The *truth*, in fact, is within a unique hierarchy constituted of *moral law, liberty, the existence of God, and future life* (eternity of life).

Finally, we turn to Blondel, who is without a doubt the leading philosopher among these. His book *L'Action. Essai d'une critique de la vie et d'une science de la pratique* (1893) remains a work of great speculative interest and certainly his major philosophical work. His other works have a markedly apologetic and not fully rational-argumentative attitude, with an explicit tendency to re-propose certain classical Christian-religious arguments, such as the work of Providence throughout human history. The theme of action is the speculative node of Blondel's research. In explicit contrast with Hegel, Blondel counterpoises the Will to Reason in describing the real logical-ontological dialectics between the human spirit and the world. *Action* is the key to dialectical movement – a movement essentially interpreted as a constant struggle or challenge between the acts of the will and the consequent realisation or acting-for-realisation. Only action reveals what the human being *is* and *must be*, living in a constant contradictory-but-emancipatory tension between a finite condition and the aspiration for infinity.

To reflect on the connections of this philosophy of action to other, similar coeval schools is not simple, even if it is clear that certain speculative and reflective elements of this school penetrate in France – primarily but not exclusively – through studies on morality and anthropology and through existentialism and pragmatism. Somehow, even Ricoeur, as a Christian philosopher (or, as it preferable to say, as a Christian and as a philosopher), can be put in relation with this religious-philosophical tradition.

Indeed, he not only started his philosophical education with a thesis (or better a *mémoire* for a *dipôme d'études supérieures*) on Lachelier and Lagneau (*Méthode réflexive appliquée au problème de Dieu chez Lachelier et Lagneau*, 1933). Moreover, he soon entered into connection with the French personalist movement and its leader Emmanuel Mounier, who founded the well-known philosophical journal *Esprit*, which remains active and influential today. Certainly, Ikeda's speculative approach can be better put into comparison with certain figures of philosophy of action, such as Newman and Sorel, than Ricoeur. In Ikeda, the work of engaged speaking and writing predominates, where in Ricoeur, the work of reflexive and speculative speaking predominates. However, both have another aspect as a complementary element in their research. Even their other basic and general points of departure are comparable: questioning faith, reflecting on the human being, acting and speaking for it.

Essentially, Ikeda acts on the basis of the idea that 'the voice carries out the work of the Buddha' (for ex., in WND, 2006, II: 57). In contrast, in 1955, Ricoeur expressed his view as follows:

Je crois à l'efficacité de la réflexion, parce que je crois que la grandeur de l'homme est dans la dialectique du travail et de la parole; le dire et le faire, le signifier et l'agir sont trop mêlés pour qu'une opposition durable et profonde puisse être instituée entre "théoria" et "praxis". La parole est mon royaume et je n'en ai point honte; ou plutôt j'en ai honte dans la mesure où ma parole participe de la culpabilité d'une société injuste qui exploite le travail; je n'en ai point honte originairement, je veux dire par égard pour sa destination. Comme universitaire, je crois à l'efficacité de la parole enseignante; comme enseignant l'histoire de la philosophie, je crois à la puissance éclairante, même pour une politique, d'une parole consacrée à élaborer notre mémoire philosophique; comme membre de l'équipe *Esprit*, je crois à l'efficacité de la parole qui reprend réflexivement les thèmes générateurs d'une civilisation en marche; comme auditeur de la prédication chrétienne, je crois que la parole peut changer le "cœur", c'est-à-dire le centre jaillissant de nos préférences et de nos prises de position. En un sens, tous ces essais sont à la gloire de la parole qui réfléchit efficacement et qui agit pensivement (Ricoeur, 1964: 9).

Beyond this parallel between their works, there is another parallel that should be of great help in more strongly connecting Ikeda to philosophy of action via Ricoeur. The generalised methodology of a critical hermeneutics that we extracted from his vast research helps us find in thinkers such as Ikeda a way to harmonise theory and practice, reflection and belief, doctrinal interpretation and theoretical work, personal commitment and moral values, different perspective from various disciplinary and doctrinal traditions, speculation and interdisciplinary work, the work of research with the work of dialogue and so on. However, Ikeda's philosophy is neither phenomenological reflective hermeneutics nor critical hermeneutics. It is a kind of philosophy of action, pragmatically oriented and expressive of a new humanism which – similarly to spiritualism, personalism and the philosophy of action that we are considering – is anchored to a religious doctrine, and is practised as a reflective philosophy and a practical way of life.

On Daisaku Ikeda's New Philosophy of Action

As mentioned before discussing the book *For the sake of peace* (which summarises Ikeda's essential points of view on civic commitment, social change and peace as expressed in his annual peace proposals addressed to the UN since 1983), his most important idea is that the human spirit has a tremendous capacity to transform all difficult situations and make even the worst situations progressive and fruitful for human advancement and emancipation and the creation of value. Behind this view lies a specific anthropological-philosophical notion that, for many reasons, can be put in parallel with speculative conceptions, such as Ricoeur's philosophy of the human being (his idea of spiritual-symbolic inner human life as expressed in his major books between the 1950s and 1960s [see Busacchi 2011: III, 39-50; IV, 51-60], and his theory of the *capable human being* as expressed in his major book *Soi-même comme un autre*; see Busacchi, 2016: 7). Spiritual self-reformation, moral emancipation and personal and religious commitment are the keys to fully unleash this human creative power. At the same time, they are also the concrete contents of our personal daily dialectics between meditation and action, between determination and practical wisdom.

We can achieve human emancipation and social peace only by helping people, one by one, to enrich their spiritual disposition, strength and capacity to face, challenge and overcome problems and sufferings to realise change, open themselves to new perspectives and achieve concrete advancement. Following a common-sense line of reasoning and referring to specific historical moments and cases, Ikeda has consistently stressed the power and centrality of ordinary people. 'It is important – he affirms – to bear in mind that human history is not determined by political and economic factors alone.

In the society of every period, stretching away in the background behind the great statesmen and other prominent figures of the time, is the vast plane of ordinary human activity, and developments among the masses working and living their lives on that plane must also be taken into consideration' (Ikeda, 2009: 27).

Ikeda calls this process *human revolution*, and he is convinced that, in the immediate context of our daily lives, we can find the way and the ability to face, challenge and overcome the problems of our societies, nations and the world as a whole. Sharing his views in a book of a dialogue with Joseph Rotblat (1908-2005), Ikeda emphasises how important this point of personal emancipation is to develop true *wisdom* (which is different from *knowledge*):

Humankind has amassed an enormous store of knowledge over the course of our long history. However, can we really say that we have grown commensurately wiser with the passage of time? Wisdom cannot be bequeathed to succeeding generations the way knowledge can be passed down, because it can only develop through the knowledge gained by living and through cultivating one's character. This is the foundation on which human beings create value and thereby seek to build a peaceful world that ensures the happiness of all people (Ikeda - Rotblat, 2007: 91).

Ikeda emphasises the central need to develop moral and spiritual strength by challenging one's own personal limits and difficulties. If an initiative is connected to a moral education or, better, to spiritual-religious reform, then it becomes a promising way to develop a great capacity to create moral, social and cultural value beyond the effective preliminary conditions, dispositions and limits of the commencement. There is no question that the role of education is to cultivate human beings. At the same time, I cannot help but think about the role of religion as I observe the various phenomena in contemporary society that manifest a pathology characterized by an absence of humanity. I believe that religion can play a critical role in reviving and radiating a sense of humanity in people's hearts (93).

In discussing religion, Ikeda's reflections go beyond the sentimental idea of a vague religious approach to life, looking for an afterlife. In another book of dialogue, he recalls Nichiren's treatise *On establishing the correct teaching for the peace of the land* (1264), explaining that 'the treatise articulated his view that religion should contribute to the construction of a peaceful land more than the repose of the individual's soul in the afterlife' (Ikeda - Theranian, 2003: 30). Moreover, 'if the religion of our time remained something personal—to heal one's psychological wounds—then it would be a kind of egotism and no more than a means of consolation or easing one's mind' (39).

Even philosophy can be distorted and made ineffectual. In general, for Ikeda 'any idea, philosophy, or religion is one-sided. if it is removed from the realities of human beings, human life, and day-to-day living' (47). A philosophy is neither a true nor a valid humanistic philosophy if it lacks a practical dimension or the ability to realise change and emancipation. Similar reasoning must be applied to religion as the two domains are intertwined. Buddhism, Ikeda explains, 'finds what you call a strong sense of responsibility in a single moment in the individual's life (*ichinen*). The mighty efforts produced moment by moment by this prodigious will springing from each person's character, bringing forth a dramatic impact I call "human revolution", can transform a human personality and the world around that person' (Ikeda - Gorbačëv, 2005: 7). This possibility to transform one's personal human revolution into a worldwide revolution depends, on one hand, on the interdependent condition of human beings – on our mutual influence on one another – and, on the other hand, the embrace and practise of this new humanism as *a philosophy in practice*. *Mutual* (human, social, and cultural) *recognition*, *personal commitment* (in education and civic, social, political, and cultural affairs), and *engagement in dialogue*² are the

² 'How can twenty-first-century humankind overcome the crises that face us?// There is, of course, no simple solution, no "magic wand" we can wave to make it all better. The way forward will be perilous as it requires finding an appropriate response to the kind of violence that rejects all attempts at engagement or dialogue.// Even so, there is no need to fall into meaningless and unproductive pessimism. All these problems are caused by human beings, which means that they must have a human solution.

major instruments of this philosophy in practice.

They are practised on the basis of certain philosophical, moral and practical assumptions. First is the ideal of the innate dignity and sacredness of life, which demands that all lives must be respected and have the right of the full expression and realisation of dignity and happiness. This ideal is not simply a point concerning behaviour and the disposition of good-will; rather, it is a matter of concrete commitment to eradicate violence, inequality, poverty³ and so on. Second, central importance is given to the responsibility of the individual person and to the common people as the true sources of all changes and renewals in history and civilisation. As Ikeda explains, 'if one likens political and economic relations to ships, connections between ordinary people are like the ocean itself. So long as the ocean of mutual understanding and friendship continues to link peoples, amicable interactions will be maintained even through crises in which the ships risk running aground. This faith in the importance of people-to-people connections is the basis for all my actions' (Ikeda, 2006: 25).

Third, the ideal of global citizenship is practised in daily life based on the motto 'think globally, act locally'. Fourth, the value and importance of inter-cultural and inter-religious relationships are recognised. Fifth, respect for human rights is promoted through education and laws to reinforce and defend their functioning and actualisation. Sixth, the recognition of social solidarity and mutual support enables to improve personal conditions and promote autonomy and emancipation. For Ikeda, 'our efforts to improve the human condition must be more than mere stopgap measures; they must enable people struggling in the face of dire threats to recover the hope and strength needed to lead lives of dignity. Steadily bringing such efforts to fruition, we must take on the larger challenge of transforming the currents of history from destruction to construction, from confrontation to coexistence, from divisiveness to solidarity' (Ikeda, 2013: 3).

Seventh, history, literature, science and philosophy have great importance for social development, and the strengthening of renewal and wisdom. Science, philosophy and literature (from all places and time) helps us in various ways to better know and comprehend human psychology, our world and the meaning of life, while history is an essential discipline for understanding human and social tendencies and reality to effectively realise social progress and peace. In this area, Ikeda assumes the same viewpoint as Toynbee recognising that 'our vision should not be clouded by immediate phenomena; that the future can only be accurately envisaged by carefully attending to the deeper, slower movements that are the ultimate determinants of history' (Ikeda, 2001a: 14). Eighth, the critique of power and public communication is recognised as the moral responsibility of the community of scientists. Ninth, research on a universal ethics should be based on a culture of human rights and the rights of the Earth and future generations. In this regard, Ikeda affirms that, 'in recent years there has been growing awareness of the need for a new form of humanistic education, education that encourages creative coexistence with the natural environment and which fosters a culture of peace... Environment education, like peace education and human rights education, must be at the heart of a new vision of humanistic education. By promoting the kind of education that empowers all people in their active quest for happiness and a better future, we can establish the foundations for a new era of hope in the twenty-first century' (Ikeda, 2003: 14). Tenth and finally, nonviolence should be practised at all levels, from *inner disarmament* to the disarmament of all military arsenals.

However long the effort takes, so long as we do not abandon the work of unknitting the tangled threads of these interrelated issues, we can be certain of finding a way forward.// The core of such efforts must be to bring forth the full potential of dialogue. So long as human history continues, we will face the perennial challenge of realizing, maintaining and strengthening peace through dialogue, of making dialogue the sure and certain path to peace. We must uphold and proclaim this conviction without cease, whatever coldly knowing smiles or cynical critiques may greet us' (Ikeda, 2005: 2).

³ 'The eradication of poverty, one of the four specific subtopics of the Millennium Summit, is a humanitarian challenge of great urgency. One effect of globalization has been an ever-growing gap between rich and poor. While people in a few countries consume a disproportionately massive amount of resources and enjoy affluent lifestyles, fully one quarter of the world's population subsists in extreme poverty. For these people, human dignity is under constant assault. We must eliminate these obscene imbalances if we are to fulfil our responsibilities for the new millennium' (Ikeda, 2000: 13).

Conclusion

Beyond the novelty and specific character of a work with strong Buddhist roots, Ikeda's philosophy and practical commitment can be genuinely considered to be a new philosophy of action comparable to the tradition of *practical philosophy* and *philosophy in practice* opened during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries by religious philosophers, including Newman, Sorel, Ollé-Laprune, and M. Blondel. This comparison offers a solution to the dilemma of the lack of recognition, even in Japan, of Ikeda as a philosopher – a philosopher like, for instance, Nishida Kitarō, who put into a dialectic relationship modern and contemporary western philosophy and Buddhist philosophy. Beyond an intellectual parallel between Buddhist doctrine and western idealism or phenomenology, Ikeda's work expresses a new philosophy of action that can be put in dialectics with other philosophical traditions, particularly Bergson and Emerson's Spiritualism, Marcel's Existentialism, Dewey's Pragmatism, Ricoeur's (Phenomenological Reflective) Hermeneutics.

In this last case, we discover not only a thematic-dialectical line of analysis and reflection – centred on but not limited to the human being – but also a methodological approach to a diverse work articulated in different registers and discourses: doctrinal, theoretical, practical, speculative, narrative, religious, philosophical-political, moral and so forth. Ikeda's philosophy has several key points, but all these discourses find a general logic and point in harmonisation within two poles: (1) the ideal of *human revolution* through self-reformation as a possible means of value creation and emancipation and (2) the ideal of a *universalistic humanism* as a concrete, spiritual and practical goal for humankind in order to achieve social reformation, happiness and peace among all nations and all peoples.

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