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The Nature of the Kami

Ueda Akinari and *Tandai Shōshin Roku*

SUSANNA FESSLER

UEDA AKINARI 上田秋成, 1734–1809, renowned for his fiction writing, was also a serious scholar of *kokugaku* 国学, or National Learning. Of particular concern for him was the nature of the *kami* 神—their ethics (if any) and how those ethics reflected the cognitive nature of the beings themselves. In an age when the nature of the kami was being discussed by a number of kokugaku scholars, including the great Motoori Norinaga 本居宣長, 1730–1801, Akinari was but one voice in a crowd, yet his ideas on this issue differ distinctly from those of his peers. He agreed with them that Confucian and Buddhist scholars were wrong to impose their philosophical ethical framework upon the realm of the kami, for, he declared, the kami did not conform to such a normative structure. Akinari related the kami to what may be called ‘animal spirits’—foxes, badgers, and the like, animals that are attributed in Japanese folklore with supernatural powers. He held that the kami and animal spirits were behaviorally the same; both were characterized by an inability to conceive of a moral right and wrong.

Akinari kept a notebook of random thoughts and jottings on varied topics, titled *Tandai Shōshin Roku* 胆大小心録, ‘A Record of Courage and Cowardice’, 1808. A supplementary text of further jottings, plus re-edited sections of *Tandai*, followed in 1809. Written in a mixture of literary and colloquial language, the entries present Akinari’s ideas about philosophy, history, and literature, as well as his frank opinions of his contemporaries. The views expressed in the work are strong and at times biting. By the time *Tandai* was published, its author was seventy-six years old, blind in one eye and visually impaired in the other. He knew that he was at the end of his life and believed that it was time to make public his thoughts, regardless of the consequences.¹

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¹ See the ‘Ueda Akinari’ chapter in Shūichi Katō, *A History of Japanese Literature*, Kodansha International, 1983, 2, for specific citations of Akinari’s social criticism. The annotated text of *Tandai Shōshin Roku*, 1809, is found in Nakamura Yukihiko 中村幸彦, ed., *Ueda Akinari Shū* [UAS], NKBT 56, Iwanami, 1959, pp. 251–381.

The Nature of the Kami

One of the recurring topics in *Tandai*, and the primary subject of the present article, is the nature of the kami. Akinari combines his commentary on the kami with criticism of Buddhism and Confucianism, for, like other kokugaku scholars, he felt that Buddhism and Confucianism were misguided philosophies. In *Tandai*, he both discusses the nature of the kami as he understood them and criticizes his Buddhist and Confucian contemporaries.²

Akinari was concerned with two issues regarding the kami: first, their cognitive nature, and second, how that nature helped shape their ethics and behavior. Here I shall refer to animal spirits and the kami together ('kami/animal spirits'), because Akinari equated the two. The central idea is introduced in *Tandai*, 13:

By nature, such [fox] spirits do not distinguish between good and bad, or right and wrong. They protect what is good for them and curse what is bad. . . . The kami are believed to be the same. . . . They bless their faithful with happiness and curse the unfaithful.³

Here the concept of 'good and bad, right and wrong' is expressed by the term *zen'akujasei*.⁴ The same word is used later in Section 30:

According to *I Ching*, 'That aspect of it which cannot be fathomed in terms of the light and dark is called spirit.'⁵ This shows that the Chinese, too, understood that man cannot judge the nature of the kami. It is precisely because of this that we have no disputes about the good and evil natures [*zen'akujasei*] of the kami, as we do about mankind.

The kami love well the man who serves them well. If someone scorns them, they punish him. Foxes and badgers seem to be the same as the kami.⁶

We can surmise from this passage that the kami recognize when someone does well or poorly by them, but that they have no overriding moral sense of right and wrong. It may be helpful to think of this in the following way: kami/animal spirits are perceptual beings, whereas humans are conceptual. The

² Among the translations of *Tandai*, pp. 8–15, below, sections 13, 26 & 30 are direct commentaries on the mistaken conceptions of Buddhists and Confucianists regarding the kami, while 27, 28, 29 & 31 are short parables illustrating the nature of both kami and other spirits, in accordance with the ideas expressed in 13, 26 & 30.

³ UAS, p. 258; pp. 8–9, below.

⁴ 善悪邪正. This is a standard term used in Neo-Confucian writings, such as Motoori Norinaga's *Genji Monogatari Tama no Ogushi* 源氏物語玉の小櫛, 1793–1796. Akinari uses it here with emphasis on the last two characters, which imply moral rights and wrongs, as opposed to the qualitative good and bad aspects of material objects.

⁵ Richard Wilhelm, tr., *The I Ching or Book of Changes*, Princeton U.P. 1967 edition, p. 301. The word here in Chinese is *shen* 神, which can be translated as 'spirit' or 'spiritual'. Although the same character is used to write the Japanese word *kami*, it here clearly refers to a broader concept than Japanese deities. Akinari uses this line specifically to support his argument about kami. This may seem to be quoting *I Ching* slightly out of context, but given that he felt that deities in any country had the same nature as those in Japan, the use of *I Ching* here does not invalidate his argument.

⁶ UAS, p. 272; pp. 12–13, below.

kami perceive good or ill will at a specific point in time, but do not conceive of a greater system of moral right and wrong. The kami neither recognize a way by which humans can store virtue for a future time, nor do they punish humans repeatedly for past evil deeds that have already been punished once.

Blake Morgan Young sums up Akinari's view as follows:

Akinari contended that foxes, badgers, and other animals, unlike people, have no moral sense of right and wrong, but merely reward what is good for them and punish what is bad. The deities of Japan were of the same nature, he believed, blessing those who serve them and cursing those who neglect them, unlike Buddhas and sages, who have human bodies and feelings. In animals and supernatural beings Akinari saw a quality that rose above considerations of good and evil—a simple, pure, amoral instinct, beyond normal logic, to protect one's self and one's personal interest.⁷

According to Young, Akinari believed that the kami acted only to 'protect one's self and one's personal interest', in other words, they behaved only selfishly. But in *Tandai*, 31, he illustrated how some kami behavior could be altruistic:

During the Jōgan period, Mt Fuji erupted; mountain peaks crumbled and buried the valleys, and the land tumbled into the sea. People were injured, and the damage was so severe that it affected the neighboring regions. The ruler of Kai later declared, 'This has happened because the priests have neglected to perform rituals for the kami of Asama Shrine on top of Mt Fuji.' And so an imperial decree was issued and the priests were duly warned. When we think about this, we wish that the kami would have punished only the priests who neglected the rituals. Why were the kami willing to inflict this disaster upon the world?

There were two stone kami and one pond kami on Mt Aso in Higo. One day, the kami set fire and dried up all the water in the pond; the water itself seemed to become fire and remained like that for days. Provincial officials summoned a diviner to interpret the situation. He said, 'This is an omen that there will be fires of war.' Soldiers were mustered to protect Kyushu.

The kami of Asama Shrine on Mt Fuji harmed the country for its own sake. The stone kami produced an omen for the sake of the country. How is it that the kami can behave so differently?⁸

According to Akinari, therefore, the kami could at times act altruistically, but did not necessarily do so. He also showed that kami behavior was puzzling to humans, and suggested that it could not be judged on the basis of human moral constructs. The passage recording the eruption of Mt Fuji offers a good example of this: although on the one hand it appears that the kami understood 'good and evil' because they punished people for failing to worship them, it is important to keep in mind that such people did not fail to pay obeisance out of malice. Their unfaithfulness was caused by a slackening of devotion, true, but it did not involve animosity toward the kami. If the kami, like an animal,

⁷ Blake Morgan Young, *Ueda Akinari*, University of British Columbia Press, 1982, p. 61.

⁸ UAS, pp. 273–74; p. 14, below.

could only perceive the actions of humans, and not conceive of the intentions behind them, then it follows that their behavior might well be as Akinari declared.

Moriyama Shigeo also addresses Akinari's view of the kami, interpreting his philosophy as follows. Logical standards are a human phenomenon that cannot be applied to other animals; sense of harm also differs between humans and animals. Humans lead a life based on societal relationships, but fox and badger spirits exist in a world that lacks such norms. Theirs is a primal existence.⁹ The societal relationships that Akinari attributed to humans were the five basic Confucian relationships and the Buddhist teacher/disciple relationship. For Akinari, Buddhism and Confucianism were part of the human world, as distinguished from the realm of the kami, precisely because there was a direct relationship between humans and the deities of those two teachings. He states in *Tandai*, 30:

Buddhists say, 'The kami and the buddhas share the same body.' My thoughts on this are as follows. Like the Confucian sages, the buddhas send out leafy branches and roots of good deeds throughout the world; they spread their teaching far and wide. But the master who said that he would clothe everyone in dark robes and lead them on the Buddhist path¹⁰ was too narrow-minded.¹¹ The kami are divine entities; humans cannot follow religious practices and someday become a kami.¹²

This differentiates Shinto from Confucianism and Buddhism, for followers of the latter two religions can aspire to become 'deities': a Buddhist can attain enlightenment and a Confucian can become a sage. But no matter how devout, a follower of Shinto cannot possibly become a kami. By their nature the kami are distinct from humans.

But here a question may be posed—what of humans who are in fact considered kami, such as Tenjin or Hachiman?¹³ Akinari made no mention of

⁹ Moriyama Shigeo 森山重雄, *Gen'yō no Bungaku: Ueda Akinari 幻妖の文学*: 上田秋成, San'ichi, 1982, p. 316.

¹⁰ This refers to poem #1134 in *Senzai Wakashū* 千載和歌集, 1183, compiled by Fujiwara Shunzei 藤原俊成:

<i>ōke naku</i>	How unfitting
<i>ukiyo no tami ni</i>	for the people of this world
<i>ōu kama</i>	to don
<i>waga tatsu some ni</i>	darkly dyed robes
<i>sumizome no sode</i>	here for the first time.

The poem refers to leading all living beings, dressed in dyed robes, along the Buddhist path. The term *ukiyo no tami* refers to lay people who for the first time are participating in this religious practice.

¹¹ Here Akinari uses the Buddhist term *shōjō* 小乗, the 'lesser vehicle', or Hinayana Buddhism, to indicate that the view expressed is overly simple.

¹² UAS, p. 272; p. 12, below.

¹³ Tenjin 天神 is the name given to Sugawara Michizane 菅原道真, 845–903, a scholar and court figure in the early Heian period. After his death in exile, a series of natural disasters were attributed to his angry spirit. A major shrine in the capital was dedicated to him, and he is posthumously referred to as the kami Tenjin. Since the Heian period, the kami Hachiman 八幡 has been identified as the deified spirit of Emperor Ōjin 応神, r. 270–310.

this problem, but he could have presented three arguments to explain their existence: (1) they were never really kami, but were viewed as such in folklore; (2) they were never really human, but kami in human form; and (3) they were possessed by a kami or perhaps a fox spirit, and this empowered them to exhibit supernatural behavior. The last explanation is perhaps the most probable.

Animal Spirits

In *Tandai*, 27 & 28, Akinari used an animal parable and an account of fox possession to illustrate the bestial lack of a sense of 'good and evil'. In 27, a dog steals a fish from a basket, only to be chased with a long pole by the fishmonger. After the man retrieves the fish, the dog continues to try to steal it. The dog neither learns a lesson, feels guilt, nor applies its experience to realize that the fish does not belong to it. It merely perceives the existence of the fish and consequently desires to possess it. Akinari remarks:

After observing the dog's behavior, I got to thinking that if a man steals something, he won't do it again, so this happening proved that a dog's nature is not the same as a man's. Its nature is just as I saw it.¹⁴

Because Akinari has already told us that the kami have the same nature as animals, we can apply the above conclusion about a dog's nature to the kami as well. Section 28 tells the story of an innocent girl possessed by an angry fox; it believes that she purposely poured dirty water on it while it was asleep, but in fact she did this quite unintentionally. A monk comes to exorcise the girl, and in the monk's words to the fox, Akinari explains the difference between human and animal (and kami) morals:

'The place where you were sleeping was not your den. It's not as if the girl knew you were there and poured water on you deliberately. It's wrong to blame her for making a mistake out of ignorance. Mistakes people make out of ignorance are not really mistakes.'¹⁵

The priest sees right and wrong in the situation, but vainly tries to explain this distinction to the fox, who cannot distinguish between malicious and unintentional error. It can perceive only the result of the girl's action and take retaliation. A human would both perceive the result and conceive of the reason (here, an unintended accident) behind it. In essence, Akinari understood kami/animal spirits as simple beings, unhindered by the contemplation and conceptualization that humans employ in their attempt to understand the world.

In *Tandai*, 13 & 26, Akinari argues that Confucian scholars, specifically Nakai Riken 中井履軒, 1732–1817, were wrong in their contention that supernatural entities do not exist. Akinari had at one point been a member of the Kaitokudō 懷徳堂, the Merchant Academy of Osaka, the same academy with which Riken was associated, but in his later years he became alienated from its Confucian philosophies. Riken and his contemporaries at the Kaitokudō

¹⁴ UAS, p. 269; p. 5, below.

¹⁵ UAS, p. 270; p. 11, below.

focused on a rational epistemology, one that did not allow for supernatural events. But what were inadmissible superstitions to the Kaitokudō scholars were valid beliefs to Akinari.¹⁶

Akinari quotes Riken as saying, 'There are no such things as ghosts,' and 'I question whether people can really be possessed by spirits.'¹⁷ To this Akinari replied that fox possession was indeed a reality: 'There have been plenty of cases of fox and badger possession.'¹⁸ In 29, he tells of presumed cases of fox possession not only of his friend and Confucian scholar Hosoai Hansai 細合半斎, 1717–1803, but also of himself. He concludes that scholars such as Riken deny fox possession because they spend too much time confined within the walls of their academy, isolated from the real world.

Norinaga

Along with the kokugaku scholar Motoori Norinaga, Akinari criticized Buddhism and Confucianism because of their normative structure. Both men also rejected any normative analysis of Shinto, spurning the Chinese concept of an ordered universe with clear distinctions between good and evil. But Akinari did not agree with Norinaga on all kokugaku issues. He had a distinct distaste for philosophical constructs, so not only did he dismiss Buddhism and Confucianism, but he also rejected some of the popular views at the time about Shinto and kokugaku. For example, whereas Norinaga regarded the two earliest Japanese national histories, *Kojiki* 古事記, 712, and *Nihon Shoki* 日本書紀, 720, as accurate accounts, Akinari believed that the former was contrived to glorify the imperial line, and that only *Nihon Shoki* was a valid historical text.¹⁹

Akinari is also critical of the kokugaku notion that the *Kojiki* creation myth was the only true creation myth. In *Tamakushige* 玉くしげ, Norinaga held:

The True Way is one and the same, in every country and throughout heaven and earth. This Way, however, has been correctly transmitted only in our Imperial Land. Its transmission in all foreign countries was lost long ago in early antiquity. . . . [t]he ways of foreign countries are no more the original Right Way than end-branches of a tree are the same as its root.²⁰

But Akinari saw Japan and its kami as merely one country and its myths among many. He explained:

¹⁶ For the Kaitokudō, see Tetsuo Najita, *Visions of Virtue in Tokugawa Japan: The Kaitokudō, Merchant Academy of Osaka*, University of Chicago Press, 1987.

¹⁷ UAS, pp. 258 & 268; p. 8, below.

¹⁸ UAS, p. 258; p. 8, below.

¹⁹ In *Tandai*, 30, Akinari mentions the importance of *Nihon Shoki*, emphasizing that it did not embellish facts in order to legitimize the imperial reign. He also expressed his distrust of *Kojiki* in *Yasumigoto* 安々言, 1792. UAS, n. 30, pp. 399–400.

²⁰ Ryusaku Tsunoda et al., ed., *Sources of Japanese Tradition*, Columbia U.P., 1958, pp. 520–21.

Each [of the other myths] has a separate account of the creation of the universe for each country . . . and even if one transfers them to other countries they would not be accepted, being self-regarding accounts.²¹

Yet another point on which Akinari disagreed with Norinaga concerned the morals of the kami. As discussed above, the statements in *Tandai* imply that the kami operate on a perceptual level, judging events as they occur, rewarding the immediate good and punishing the immediate bad. For Akinari, the behavior of the kami was comprehensible, albeit quixotic. But Norinaga did not share this view. For him, the Japanese kami were august entities whose behavior could not be understood by human beings. He wrote, 'It was an act of insolence for humans to impose their impertinent logic on the kami.'²²

Like Akinari, Norinaga felt that the kami were operating according to a set of principles, but unlike Akinari, he believed those principles to be so sophisticated that they were beyond human comprehension. According to Norinaga:

Given that the kami are not of the same sort as the Confucian sages or buddhas associated with foreign countries, we cannot judge them by using common worldly logic. It is difficult to inquire into the goodness or evil of a kami's nature from the standpoint of human nature. All things in heaven and earth come from that kami nature. And because what the kami do is different from what humans may think, there are bound to be many small differences between kami behavior and the reason recorded in these Chinese Confucian and Buddhist texts.²³

This accounted for irrational kami behavior and did not differ significantly from Akinari's views on the subject. Both men noted that the kami could not be equated with buddhas or Confucian sages, and that the kami used a rationale different from that employed by humans. Some years later, however, Norinaga expressed resignation about his hope of truly understanding the actions of the kami:

The kami differ from buddhas and the like. There are good kami and bad kami, and they perform their deeds in accordance with their nature. Although we may think that good people are necessarily good and bad people are necessarily bad, in many cases bad people are good and good people are bad. All of their actions are deeds of the kami, so it must be that the kami do not act simply according to what is good and bad. There is nothing for humans to do but fear the kami's wrath, and take comfort in prayer.²⁴

Norinaga recognized that the kami did not behave like humans, but he avoided any discussion aimed at understanding their motives. For him, it was enough

²¹ As quoted in Katō, p. 193.

²² Hino Tatsuo 日野竜夫, *Norinaga to Akinari* 宣長と秋成, Chikuma, 1984, p. 175.

²³ Hino Tatsuo, ed., *Motoori Norinaga Shū*, Shinchōsha, 1983, pp. 462-63.

²⁴ Quoted in Hino, *Norinaga to Akinari*, p. 175. It is interesting to note that Norinaga implied that human actions were at least sometimes controlled by kami. It is not clear whether he meant that humans were occasionally possessed by kami or whether kami could actually be humans simultaneously.

to say that the kami were different and therefore incomprehensible. He placed the kami's morality on a superior, unreachable level because any closer examination would threaten their status in his writings.²⁵ He dismissed the entire question of humans imposing a normative structure on the kami, asserting, 'We must understand that the kami are simply superior to the common man.'²⁶ In other words, humans should accept that fact and not examine kami behavior any further. Norinaga's hesitation to judge the kami led him eventually to hesitate to judge human behavior as well:

Even extremely good people become angry at times, and it is not necessarily bad for persons to lose their temper. Moreover, on rare occasions bad people will do a good deed. It seems difficult to set any certain rules about human behavior.²⁷

Akinari, on the other hand, believed that human behavior clearly followed the dictates of *zen'akujasei*. Humans conceived of 'good and bad, right and wrong', and regulated their behavior accordingly. Akinari did not see people as inherently good or bad by nature, but as beings who, unlike the kami, were able to conceive of both good and bad, and who had free will to choose one or the other.

Selections from *Tandai Shōshin Roku*

13

A certain Confucian scholar²⁸ has adamantly asserted, 'There are no such things as ghosts,' thus ultimately putting me and my ghost stories to shame. He writes, 'People who have lost their senses dispute about fox possession, saying, "I am some sort of fox spirit," but I question whether people can really be possessed by spirits.' But his thinking is mired in Confucianism and he cannot understand the nature of foxes. There have been plenty of cases of fox and badger possession. Moreover, it is the nature of fox spirits and the like to get the better of mankind.

By nature, such spirits do not distinguish between good and bad, or right and wrong.²⁹ They protect what is good for them and curse what is bad. Wolves, too, often take retribution upon others, as is seen in the beginning of

²⁵ For example, if the kami were not superior to humans, how would it be possible to justify the importance accorded them in the creation of Japan? Kokugaku was founded on the concept that Japan was central in the world; any belittling of the kami threatened to weaken the nationalist arguments of the kokugaku scholars.

²⁶ From Norinaga's *Suzunoya Tōmon Roku* 鈴屋答問録, 'A Compilation of Norinaga's Answers', published posthumously by his students in 1835. In *Zōho Motoori Norinaga Zenshū*, Yoshikawa, 1928, 6, p. 115.

²⁷ *Suzunoya Tōmon Roku*, in *Zōho Motoori Norinaga Zenshū*, p. 115. For a detailed discussion of Norinaga's views on Shinto, see Maruyama Masao, *Studies in the Intellectual History of Tokugawa Japan*, Princeton U.P., 1974.

²⁸ This refers to Nakai Riken.

²⁹ This concept is central to Akinari's beliefs about the nature of kami, fox spirits, and the like.

the chapter on Emperor Kimmei in *Nihongi Kimmei*.³⁰ The kami are believed to be the same as the wolves. They bless their faithful with happiness and curse the unfaithful. But the buddhas and Confucian sages are not the same as the kami. They are humans with human emotions, and they do not indict bad persons.³¹ I discuss this matter in *Kamiyogatari*,³² and so I will not go into it further here.

26

There recently came on the scene a Confucian by the name of Master Goi,³³ and Chikuzan³⁴ and Riken were his followers. Goi believed the words of Keichū,³⁵ and he also studied kokugaku, but he made a mess of *Zoku Ochikubo Monogatari*.³⁶

People say that Chikuzan was an adventurous type. Well, he was the sort who wanted to jump at opportunities, but he lacked the ability to actually do so. Although people say that Riken was different from his older brother and had great talent, he was really just a fraud as well. When I told a ghost story, he greatly shamed me by saying, 'You are truly a fool. There is no such thing as ghosts or fox possession. Fox possession is nothing more than irascibility.'

Once when I was sitting and conversing with some students,³⁷ I said, 'You are all ignorant of the world a mere step outside of the gate. You are babies afraid to leave the sanctuary of the school grounds.' Later, Setsuhō³⁸ teasingly reported that Chikuzan didn't say a word in response to my accusation. I hear that when Riken heard Setsuhō say this loudly, he was furious. After that, he never deigned to speak to me whenever we met.

When Matsudaira Sadanobu³⁹ came to Osaka to request Chikuzan's services, Chikuzan decided to cut off his topknot rather than serve the Shirakawa

³⁰ For more detail on this episode, see *Tandai*, 31, translated on p. 13, below.

³¹ *Ashiki mono mo tsumi wa towazaru nari* あしきも罪は問(は)ざる也. This concept is different from *zen'akujasei*. Akinari is not saying that humans cannot distinguish right and wrong, but rather they do not punish evil-doers in the way that kami do.

³² 神代がたり. This text has been lost.

³³ Goi Ranjū 五井蘭洲, 1697–1762, was an instructor at the Kaitokudō, where Akinari spent his younger years.

³⁴ Nakai Chikuzan 中井竹山, 1730–1804, elder brother of Nakai Riken, was a presiding member of the Kaitokudō.

³⁵ Keichū 契沖, 1640–1701, was a student of the classics, reputed to be a strict teacher who strove for extreme accuracy. He was one of the pioneer scholars of the kokugaku movement. His work was later praised by Norinaga, and was widely used well into the Meiji period.

³⁶ 続落くぼ物がたり, a *giko monogatari* 擬古物語, or 'tale copied after the old'. Such tales were written in the Kamakura and Tokugawa periods, but imitated the writing style prevalent in the Heian period. This particular work apparently imitated a mid-Heian monogatari.

³⁷ Akinari is not clear about who these 'students' were, but we may assume from the context that Chikuzan was among them.

³⁸ Setsuhō 雪鵬 was apparently present when Akinari made the original statement, and later reported it to Riken. Setsuhō's relationship to Akinari, Chikuzan, and Riken is unclear.

³⁹ Matsudaira Sadanobu 松平定信, 1758–1829, of the Shirakawa domain in Iwaki (modern-day Fukushima prefecture).

han government.⁴⁰ I visited him sometimes, and so I noticed the difference. When I said, 'Your hair has changed,' he told me that it was due to this, that, and the other thing. When I said, 'If you had not cut off your topknot, you could have never refused the request, right?' There was nothing he could say in reply.

I did not visit him after that. It was then that I understood his limitations. The decline of the academy was perhaps due to the Nakai brothers' lack of virtue. The academy was mockingly called 'Hell's Gates'.⁴¹ In addition to being rather useless, the students were all spendthrifts, and they died untimely deaths owing to their dissipation and bankruptcy. If they had lived long lives, they surely would have had their severed heads exposed in public for all to see.⁴²

27

From 1775 to 1788, I lived near the west fish market and practiced medicine. One day a fellow came knocking on my door to fetch me, saying that a sick man needed my help. I went to him, and after examination, I administered some medicine and then went off into the crowded and bustling marketplace. A fishmonger was running eastward with a large fish-basket on his back. Behind him trailed a dog, who took hold of a large fish tail that was sticking out of the basket, obviously believing that the fish was its own food.

My servant called to the man, 'Hey, I think a dog is stealing your fish.' The fishmonger put down his load and chased after the dog with a long pole. He shouted at the dog, beat it, retrieved his fish, and once again set off toward the east with the basket on his back.

The dog looked as if it thought the fish rightly belonged to itself, and so continued following the fishmonger once again. After observing the dog's behavior, I got to thinking that if a man steals something, he won't do it again, so this happening proved that a dog's nature is not the same as a man's. Its nature is just as I saw it.

28

In a certain village in Harima, a servant maid stopped to wash her soiled feet while she was eating her afternoon meal. When she was finished, she went to throw out the dirty water from the basin. But she was unaware of a fox lying there on the ground and she ended up pouring hot water all over it. When the fox woke up startled, he looked backward and saw the servant girl's face. The girl was unaware of this.

⁴⁰ Chikuzan did not want to become a retainer for life, so he chose the status of ronin. Cutting off the topknot indicated this status.

⁴¹ A reference to the Kaitokudō. *Gokumon* 獄問, 'the gates of hell', is a pun on *gakumonjo* 学問所, or the Kaitokudō.

⁴² The implication here is that they would have committed crimes worthy of capital punishment.

That evening, the girl started rambling on vacantly: 'I was napping, and for some reason somebody poured dirty water over me that had been used for washing feet.' She glared angrily, and all night she was crazy⁴³ and frightening. In the morning a monk came from the village, and addressed the fox spirit that had possessed the girl.

'The place where you were sleeping was not your den. It's not as if the girl knew you were there and poured water on you deliberately. It's wrong to blame her for making a mistake out of ignorance. [There should be no retribution for things people do out of ignorance. You are a brute.]⁴⁴ Mistakes people make out of ignorance are not really mistakes. You did not realize this before. I must have pity on such a foolish beast.'

When the monk finished speaking the fox silently took its leave. This tale is the same as the one about dog nature.

29⁴⁵

Riken said: 'I have never met a person possessed by a fox, not to mention ever having been tricked by foxes.'

Hosoai is a very proper man, and is most polite and courteous. Despite this, people despise him for it, and this is indeed a sign of their indolence. One day he was in Kyoto and went to Nishi-Honganji to worship. He set out from the alley where he lived near Sanjō early in the morning and did not arrive even by the afternoon.⁴⁶ When it started to get dark, he absentmindedly made his way back to his dwelling. Even with his quiet, settled disposition, the fox and badger spirits were able to make him lose his way.

The other day I set out from my hut on the Kamo River and went along the road to the northeast of Yoshida Hill on my way to Ginkakuji across from Jōdo-in. The road was not such a narrow one.⁴⁷ Then, somehow, I came to Shirakawa village. I realized that I had been lost in thought and had missed my way. When I finally arrived at Jōdoji village in the southeast, I spoke with the head priest, Tonan, who told me, 'This must be an illness. Please be very careful.'

On my way home, I once again came to the north of Yoshida Hill and headed toward my hut to the west of the main road. But somehow I ended up in front of Chionji. Then I realized what had happened. I had been tricked by a

⁴³ This 'craziness' is taken to mean fox possession.

⁴⁴ This section in parentheses is believed to be a superfluous passage that Akinari forgot to erase from his original draft. The repetition in the following sentence supports this hypothesis.

⁴⁵ A re-telling of this story is found in *Akinari Ibun* 秋成遺文, where it is titled *Kitano Kamo ni Mōzuru Ki* 北野加茂に詣ずる記.

⁴⁶ The distance from Hosoai's house to Nishi-Honganji was probably no more than two kilometers.

⁴⁷ When traveling on a major, and therefore wide, road, it was difficult for people to lose their way.

fox spirit into losing my way. Still, I concentrated on the road and arrived home in the afternoon.

On another day, I went to Kitano Shrine. I left early in the morning to worship, and then headed home on the eastern road. A spring drizzle began falling. As my old legs were weak and my eyes were failing me, I stopped at Ōga Iga's⁴⁸ place and there ate my afternoon meal. The rain became heavier and prevented me from setting out.

Ōga Iga asked, 'Will you stay here tonight? If you don't, then you had better take a litter.' Just at the moment the rain slackened a little. My home was twelve to thirteen *chō* away, but I didn't mind the familiar walk and I thought the spring rain was quite pleasant. So I set out eastward from the gate, but when I reached Ichijō Horikawa it began to rain heavily once more. I turned my umbrella into the rain and it was tough going. But the road was wide and I should not have lost my way. I was enjoying the rain when I reached Horikawa no Sawaragi-chō.

It was there that I first realized that under the cover of my bamboo hat I had mistakenly gone southeast, so I set off due east again and before I knew it I was on the west bank of the Horikawa. Once I realized where I was, I wondered how I had got there, but tried to calm down and once again intently set out eastward along Marutamachi street. Dusk was falling when I finally reached home. My frail daughter was waiting for me at the corner. All I said before entering the house was, 'I was at Ōga's.' My legs were tired, my eyes blurry, and my spirits low. I crawled into bed below the lamp and slept soundly until dawn.

I wonder if it was fox trickery that caused me to lose my way? Neither Hosoai nor myself suffer from weak nerves, so the brief loss of our senses must have been because the skill of fox spirits surpasses that of man. Scholars who rarely venture outside their own gate and do not know the outside world still maintain that fox spirits cannot possess people. How curious!

30

Buddhists say, 'The kami and the buddhas share the same body.' My thoughts on this are as follows. Like the Confucian sages, the buddhas send out leafy branches and roots of good deeds throughout the world; they spread their teaching far and wide. But the master who said that he would clothe everyone in dark robes and lead them on the Buddhist path was too narrow-minded. The kami are divine entities; humans cannot follow religious practices and someday become a kami.

According to *I Ching*, 'That aspect of it which cannot be fathomed in terms of the light and dark is called spirit.' This shows that the Chinese, too, under-

⁴⁸ Probably a member of the Ōga 大賀 family samurai, living in the area around Imadegawa Horikawa.

stood that man cannot judge the nature of the kami. It is precisely because of this that we have no disputes about the good and evil natures of the kami, as we do about mankind.⁴⁹

The kami love well the man who serves them well. If someone scorns them, they punish him. Foxes and badgers seem to be the same as the kami.⁵⁰

I don't know about such matters in India, but it goes without saying that the tales of our own country's kami involve folklore and cannot be trusted because they were embellished by later generations.⁵¹ Things mentioned in our national histories⁵² should be committed to memory.

31⁵³

When Emperor Kimmei was at the beginning of his reign,⁵⁴ there was a man named Hata no Ōtsufu who often traveled to Ise on business. One day he set off, and as he passed Kiyomihara in Asuka, he came upon two wolves fighting and biting each other. When he saw this, he could not help thinking that it was pitiful, and so he helped arbitrate the dispute; he then wiped off the two wolves' blood-covered bodies and let them go back home.

The emperor had a dream in which a kami appeared to him and said, 'Hata no Ōtsufu is a good man. You should summon him and make him your servant.' When the emperor awoke, he asked who this Hata no Ōtsufu was, but nobody knew of him. When inquiries were made far and wide all over the country, it turned out that he was from some small village. He was summoned to the emperor, who asked him, 'Do you pay obeisance to the kami?'

Hata no Ōtsufu replied, 'I don't know how to worship. One day I came upon two wolves fighting each other. I helped to settle their dispute and they broke it up.'⁵⁵ The emperor told him, 'The kami must have repaid you for your good deed.' After he ascended the throne, he made Hata no Ōtsufu the Minister of Finance. The violent nature of wolves is often mentioned in scholarly writing, but because he did well by the wolves, Hata no Ōtsufu was amply

⁴⁹ The word for 'good and evil' here is *zen'akujasei*, the same term Akinari uses to describe the nature of kami in Section 13. When he says, 'We have no disputes about the good and evil natures of kami,' his underlying meaning is, 'We cannot apply the same concepts of "good and evil" to kami as we do to humans.'

⁵⁰ See sections 27, 28 & 31 for examples of this.

⁵¹ This is an indirect criticism of *Kojiki*. Akinari felt that the work had been embellished to glorify the imperial line, whereas *Nihon Shoki* was a more accurate historical text.

⁵² A reference to *Nihon Shoki*.

⁵³ The first part of this section is the re-telling of a story in *Nihon Shoki*, 19.

⁵⁴ Kimmei 欽明, 509–571, began his reign either in 531 or 539. The chronology here is slightly confusing: although the Kimmei has yet to take the throne at the outset of the story, he is still referred to as emperor. The original story in *Nihon Shoki* is similarly structured.

⁵⁵ There is a play on words here. The word for wolf is *ōkami* 狼; the word for god or spirit is kami 神, which can be preceded by the character 犬 to form a homonym of 'wolf'. So when Hata no Ōtsufu discussed wolves, it sounded as if he might have been talking about gods.

rewarded. Kiyomihara is therefore sometimes called ‘Magamigahara’, or ‘Ōkuchi no Magamigahara’.⁵⁶

During the Jōgan period [858–876], Mt Fuji erupted; mountain peaks crumbled and buried the valleys, and the earth tumbled into the sea. People were injured, and the damage was so severe that it affected the neighboring regions. The ruler of Kai⁵⁷ later declared, ‘This has happened because the priests have neglected to perform rituals for the kami of Asama Shrine on top of Mt Fuji.’ And so an imperial decree was issued and the priests were duly warned. When we think about this, we wish that the kami would have punished only the priests who neglected the rituals. Why were the kami willing to inflict this disaster upon the world?⁵⁸

Sometime around the above-mentioned disaster—I do not know whether it was before or after it—there were two stone kami and one pond kami on Mt Aso in Higo.⁵⁹ One day,⁶⁰ the kami set fire and dried up all the water in the pond; the water itself seemed to become fire and remained like that for days. Provincial officials summoned a diviner to interpret the situation. He said, ‘This is an omen that there will be fires of war.’ Soldiers were mustered to protect Kyushu.

The kami of Asama Shrine on Mt Fuji harmed the country for its own sake. The stone kami produced an omen for the sake of the country. How is it that the kami can behave so differently?

In a village in the northern part of Settsu there was a shrine dedicated to Sugawara Michizane. There was also a travelers’ inn there, located within the grounds of a temple that was a mere *chō* or so from the shrine. On the 15th day of the Seventh Month, the village would parade a portable shrine through the streets in obeisance to the kami. But few people had much interest in taking part in this event because the procession route was so short. When the procession reached the temple, the gate was closed because of some problems of sectarian strife and there was no place for the portable shrine to be taken. The people went to the village headman’s house and suggested that the temple should open its gates on this special day of the festival. The headman replied, ‘I won’t turn my back on the kami—let’s just do this outside the temple gate.’ The villagers were gloomy and unhappy.

About ten *chō* from the temple, on the banks of the Horikawa, there was a rather large Ebisu shrine⁶¹ that had been there for some time; the shrine’s com-

⁵⁶ Magamigahara 真神が原 means literally ‘field of the true kami’; Ōkuchi no Magamigahara 大口の真神が原 possibly means ‘field of the large-mouthed true kami’, wherein the *ōkuchi* refers to the large mouths of the wolves.

⁵⁷ The province destroyed by the volcanic eruption.

⁵⁸ That is to say, the kami punish those who wrong them without regretting the loss of life or property. See *Tandai*, 13.

⁵⁹ Modern-day Kumamoto prefecture.

⁶⁰ Supplementary texts indicate that this was probably in Jōgan 6 (864).

⁶¹ Ebisu 夷 is one of the seven deities of good fortune (*shichi fukujin* 七福神); the guardian deity of merchants, he represents wealth.

pound was very spacious. The people asked the kami whether the travelers' inn should be moved from the temple to the shrine. Although they dedicated the purified water and courteously asked the kami three times, it still would not consent to the move. So, taking advantage of the temple gate being closed, they merrily carried the portable shrine off to the Ebisu shrine. But soon afterward a fierce fight broke out and several people shed blood in the fray.⁶²

⁶² The section ends here, with no explanation as to the origins of the fight or the outcome. It seems reasonable to surmise that Akinari is implying that the kami, discontent over the move against its will, wreaked havoc among the parishioners. This conjecture would also be in keeping with the nature of kami as described in previous sections.