ZEN BUDDHISM TODAY

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE KYOTO ZEN SYMPOSIUM

No. 14 November 1997

THE KYOTO SEMINAR FOR RELIGIOUS PHILOSOPHY

Cover Calligraphy by

Seikō Hirata

"Katsu"
(a shout to awaken trainees)

Published by

The Kyoto Seminar for Religious Philosophy
Tenryū-ji Institute for Philosophy and Religion
68 Susukinobaba-chō, Ukyō-ku, Kyoto-shi, 616-8385 Japan

Printed in Japan

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Our approaches to investigating the issue of religion and the contemporary world are largely the legacy of Nishitani Keiji (1900–1990), a thinker who deeply pursued the implications of the present historical situation, expressed by him in the words, "There is no 'present age' in religion, and there is no religion in the present age." Nishitani's investigations were not mere descriptions of the estrangement between religion and the contemporary world; rather, they were charged with a distinct sense of urgency as they delved into the background of this estrangement and, from there, impelled a reexamination of the various issues relating to religion and the world as it is today. In the present paper I would like to examine the basic elements of Nishitani's thought on the problem of religion and the contemporary world, thought that deeply questioned the nature both of religion and of humanity's present situation while never losing sight of the relation between the two. The decisive characteristic of Nishitani's approach is to be found, I believe, in the manner in which he simultaneously situated the issue of religion and the issue of "the world" at the very ground of his thought.

Our immediate task is to describe, in broad strokes and yet in as much detail as possible, the overall system of Nishitani's thought during his early period (that is, until 1945). In order to follow the development of his thought most accurately I would like to focus on those texts written during

The present article represents a thorough reworking of the first half of the author's "Nishitani Keiji ni okeru 'sekai' rikai: Setsudan to hanpuku" 西谷啓治における「世界」理解—切断と反復 ["The world" in the thought of Nishitani Keiji: Severance and repetition], in *Zen to gendai sekai* 禅と現代世界 [Zen and the contemporary world] (ed. Ueda Shizuteru and Horio Tsutomu, pp. 457–97, Kyoto: Zen Bunka Kenkyūsho). A different, more lengthy version of this article that takes up a wider variety of issues in Nishitani's early thought may be found in *The Bulletin of the Institute for World Affairs and Culture* 15 (1997), presently in press.

this period, paying due attention to the year and the order in which they were published. And yet we must keep in mind Nishitani's own testimony when, in "Watakushi no tetsugakuteki hossokuten" 私の哲学の発足点 [The departure point of my philosophy] (1963), he states that "the fundamental problem of my life, both before and after I encountered philosophy, has always been, to put it simply, the overcoming of nihilism *through* nihilism" (*NKC* 20:192). The issue of nihilism in Nishitani's "prephilosophical" period is beyond the scope of this paper, and would require a separate investigation in itself. Confining myself to Nishitani's philosophical publications issued prior to 1945, however, I can say that, despite Nishitani's later testimony, nihilism is never explicitly taken up as a central theme. The emergence of nihilism as a global problem in Nishitani's thought involved a certain "break" in history as well as in Nishitani's life. Nishitani's words "The history of Japan was severed with the end of World War II" (*NKC* 4:461) indicate that 1945—the year of the end of WWII, the mid-year of Nishitani's life, and the year of his teacher Nishida Kitaro's death—marked the division between the earlier and later periods of Nishitani's thought.

The principal work of Nishitani's early period is clearly *Kongenteki shutaisei no tetsugaku* 根源的主体性の哲学 [The philosophy of fundamental subjectivity] (1940). This collection of his earlier writing features "Niiche no Zaratsusutora to Maisutaa Ekkuharuto" ニイチェのツァラツストラとマイスター・エックハルト [Nietzsche's *Zarathustra* and Meister Eckhart] (1938) as its lead article, and includes also such pieces as "Shūkyō, rekishi, bunka" 宗教·歷史·文化 [Religion, history, and culture] (1937) and "Kindai ishiki to shūkyō" 近代意識と宗教 [Religion and the modern consciousness] (1928, 1935). It is originally planned as a three-part work, with part 1 dealing with the issues of religion and culture, part 2 with history and nature, and part 3 with thought and will. Of these only parts 1 and 2 were actually published. The essays that were to comprise part 3, such as "Aku no mondai ni tsuite" 悪の問題に就いて [On the problem of evil] (1923, 1927) and Nishitani's graduation thesis for Kyoto University on Shelling (1924), were published in 1987 as volume 2 of his *Chōsakushū* [Collected works].

One intriguing characteristic of *The Philosophy of Fundamental Subjectivity* is that the articles are presented in the reverse order of their original publication, with part 1 containing the latest material and part 3 the earliest, indicating a development of Nishitani's early philosophical interests from the theme of "thought and will" through "history and nature" to "religion and

culture." I would like to leave until a later occasion the detailed analysis of this development, from Nishitani's encounter with Nishida and his subsequent investigation of Shelling, the Christian mystics (particularly Meister Eckhart), and Nietzsche. What I would here like to emphasize is that when Nishitani compiled *The Philosophy of Fundamental Subjectivity*, the first book-length expression of his own philosophical standpoint, the initial theme he chose to present was that of religion and culture.

If we examine the articles in this book from the perspective of this theme, the most important (from a structural point of view as well) is his 1937 essay "Religion, history, and culture." This article constitutes a departure point for considering the work of Nishitani's early period as a whole, and for considering the issues in the present paper as well. A direct development of "Religion, history, and culture" was the thesis "Shūkyō tetsugaku: Joron" 宗教哲学—序論 [The philosophy of religion: An introduction], published in 1941 and accepted as Nishitani's doctoral dissertation in 1945. This dissertation constitutes three parts: 1) Faith (*shinkō* 信仰), cognition (*ninshiki* 認識), and experience (*taiken* 体験); 2) Religion and philosophy; 3) The problem of evil. Of these, part 1 has the deepest and most significant connections with the essay "Religion, history, and culture."

Another important article of this period with fundamental ties to these writings is "Shūkyō to bunka" 宗教と文化 [Religion and culture] (c. 1940). The central portion of this thesis, entitled "Hongenteki jijitsusei" 本源的事実性 [Fundamental facticity], is quoted and discussed at great length in the fourth chapter ("Kū no tachiba" 空の立場 [The standpoint of *sunyata*]) of Nishitani's major work, *Shūkyō to wa nani ka* 宗教とは何か [What is religion?] (translated into English as *Religion and Nothingness* [NISHITANI 1982]). It thus anticipated Nishitani's mature thought, and is important for an understanding of Nishitani's views of religion, the topic of the present paper.

The Central Issue of Nishitani's Early Period

An exposition of the central theme from which we may directly survey the overall structure of Nishitani's early thought can be found in the introduction to *The Philosophy of Fundamental Subjectivity*, in the section where he explains the background of the book's title. For the sake of analysis I would like to divide his explanation into three parts.

a) At its most fundamental ground the notion that "I am" *is some-*

thing utterly without foundation.

b) At the very *ground of our life* there is absolutely nothing to set our feet upon. Indeed, life is life precisely because it stands where there is no-thing to stand upon.

c) From this *self-awareness of "bottomlessness"* (*dattei* 脱底) emerges a *new subjectivity* (*shutaisei* 主体性) *consistent in* religious intelligence, rationality, and natural life (*shizenteki sei* 自然的生). This is the keynote of this work (*NKC* 1:4; emphasis by the author).

a) *At its most fundamental ground the notion that "I am" is something utterly without foundation.* Depending upon how we view this "something that lacks any basis," it is either infinitely complex or infinitely simple. First, the use of the words "I am" as a single phrase indicates that what is involved is not just the "I" as indicating a distinct ego, nor just "am" as indicating the concept of existence, but the direct fact that *"I am."* This expresses the fact of being alive ("am") simultaneously with the fact of the self being cognizant of the self ("I").

We find an unusually clear expression of this self-awareness in "Shinpi shisō shi" 神秘思想史 [A history of mystical thought] (1932) when Nishitani discusses the notion that "I myself am I myself." Nishitani points out the duality implicit in this statement, a duality that takes the form of the contradiction between "a transcendent freedom and self-existence that even God cannot take away" and "self-enclosure, the isolation of the special person (*tokushusha* 特殊者)" (*NKC* 3:153). The focal point of the awareness that "I am I" is found in these two aspects: the former (freedom) is seen in the fundamental experience of "the *courage* to [accept] that I myself am I myself" which marked Nishitani's life from the time he was a youth, while the latter (isolation) is seen in the question of self-will or egotism (*ga'i* 我意) that constituted the central area of interest in Nishitani's early thought. Nishitani perceived a more subtle and refined self-will behind the efforts made in ethics and religion to overcome egotism, and it was the question of how to cut off this hidden self-will that formed Nishitani's prime concern. The destruction of the self-enclosure of this notion that "I myself am I myself" (that is, the knocking out of the "bottom" of the "I am" notion and the realization that our ultimate ground is something utterly bottomless) requires that we encounter something (a special teacher like Nishida or a figure such as Eckhart) that is "closer to ourself than ourself" (*NKC* 2:94).

b) *At the very ground of our life there is absolutely nothing to set our feet upon.* Here the key concept is no longer *self* but the fundamentally bottomless nature of the notion "I am." This is, to put it differently, the very essence of Life (*sei no kongensei* 生の根源性). This expression, *sei no kongensei*, forms the key concept of *The Philosophy of Fundamental Subjectivity*, particularly the opening essay, in which Nishitani writes, "I attempt to find a standpoint similar to mine in the work of Nietzsche and Eckhart" (*NKC* 1:4). The concept of the essence of Life thus forms a point of departure for Nishitani, and connects directly with the important notion of "fundamental naturalness" (*kongenteki shizensei* 根源的自然生), a notion that comprises the reverse side of the book's theme of fundamental subjectivity. The concept of "naturalness in religion" (*shūkyō ni okeru shizensei* 宗教における自然生) is distinctive to Nishitani, and is not seen in Nishida. It comprises a development of the notion of *Gottes Natur* (*kami no shizen* 神の自然) that Nishitani drew from his study of Plotinus, Augustine, Eckhart, and Böhme in *A History of Mystical Thought*. As we shall see later, this concept of "naturalness" (*shizen* 自然), combining at its essence both light and darkness, constitutes the key to overcoming self-consciousness.

c) *From this self-awareness of "bottomlessness" (dattei) emerges a new subjectivity (shutaisei) consistent with religious intelligence, rationality, and natural life (shizenteki sei).* The ground of life is at the same time the "bottomlessness" of life. From the realization that our "ground" is "bottomless" (that is, "turnaround" involved in the "dropping of the bottom" *[dattei]*) emerges a new subjectivity (*shutaisei*), one consistent with religious intelligence, rationality, and natural life (*shizenteki sei*).

We must note two factors here. The first is the thoroughgoing stress on subjectivity. We can perceive here the courage to think things through to the end as well as the related standpoint of pure spiritual practice (*jun'itsu naru gyō* 純一なる行, the central point of Nishitani's article "Religion, History, and Culture" [*NKC* 1:89]). The importance accorded to this subjectivity incorporates, paradoxically, both a respect for the standpoint of human autonomy (i.e., culture) and the overcoming of the anthropocentrism that represents the reverse side of this respect.

The second factor we must take note of relates to the statement that the new subjectivity is consistent with religious intelligence, rationality, and natural life. These three elements—religious intelligence, rationality, and natural life—can be seen to comprise a "triple world" that overlaps in content the "religion, history, and culture" of the article of the same name. The relation

of the "nature" of the former and the "history" of the latter remains to be clarified here, but in any event the relation between the questions of religion, history, and culture, forming as it does a pathway to understanding "the world" in Nishitani's standpoint of fundamental subjectivity, provides the overall framework for Nishitani's early thought.

The Framework of Nishitani's Early Period: Religion, History, and Culture

Nishitani's terms "religion," "history," and "culture" must not be understood, as these terms usually are, in the sense of categorizations of the behavioral patterns that define the realm of human activity. This would situate them, not in Nishitani's fundamental subjectivity, but in the same realm as the egotism and anthropocentrism that has always characterized modern thought. The basic meanings of the terms "religion," "history," and "culture" as used by Nishitani are defined, respectively, in chapters 4, 5, and 6 of the "Religion, History, and Culture" article; they correspond, moreover, to the three categories of "religious culturalism," "eschatology," and "mysticism" discussed in chapter 2 ("Shūkyō ni okeru mitsu no tachiba" 宗教における三つの立場 [The three standpoints of religion]) of the same article. These three categories may be defined as follows:

1) *Culture*: The standpoint of human autonomy characteristic of the modern age. (***culturalism***)
2) *History*: The standpoint of the doctrine of faith (***shinkō shugi*** 信仰主義: the doctrine that faith is central to salvation); the opposition of faith and rationality. (***eschatology***)
3) *Religion*: The standpoint of absolute nothingness; the unity of faith and rationality. (***mysticism***)

The fact that "history" in this schema is represented by faith and eschatology—that is, by Christian thought—may seem a bit strange at first, but it may have been necessary in the context of the times, when there was a sharp opposition between church historians and the dialectical theologians like Karl Barth regarding the historicity of culture and religion. In any case, Nishitani saw history as constituting the foundation (or, rather, the ***location***) of the basic relationship between religion and culture, and thus situated in the space, as it were, between "history" and "culture" in his schema. For this reason Nishitani's concept of "religion, history, and culture" is not simply a categorical arrangement of the three constituent elements, but represents a methodological overview involving the interrelationship between them, as expressed in notions like "the three standpoints of religion" (*NKC* 1:37) "the three major directions of the religious life" (*NKC* 1:45).

In a deeper sense the definitions presented in the schema above indicate that the concepts``` of "religion, history, and culture" can be replaced by those of "absolute nothingness, the doctrine of faith, and human autonomy" or "absolute nothingness, faith, and reason." What we must pay particular attention to here is the opposition between faith and reason in Nishitani's element of "history" (that is, the standpoint of ***shinkō shugi***, the "doctrine of faith"). This is an expression of the traditional split between faith and reason, but one not restricted to the boundaries of theology; from Nishitani's point of view, this opposition reflects the opposition, or the rupture, between religion and culture. At the time, the term ***culture*** was undoubtedly infused with far more question-evoking tension than it is today. Nishitani's central task here was to delve into culture until he penetrated through to the problem of religion, and from there open a reinvestigation of the entire relation between the two. On the question of the deep rupture between culture and religion, for example, he writes as follows:

> Whether we speak of Heaven, the Buddha, or God, it seems not to reach the ears of cultured people today. It is not that they have no desire for religion, however—quite the contrary, this need seems more intense than before. It is just that the established religions (or rather, sectarian doctrine and theology) possess no pathway to the present-day ordinary person, nor do they attempt to open one. Similarly, many of those who are seeking something religious have little interest in what the established religions offer. This gap has isolated religion from the world of everyday reality, and has rendered culture into something drifting along on its final foundations. This has deprived man of a certain sincerity at the very root of his being, obstructing profundity of expression and largeness of scale in philosophy and the arts and leading to a degeneration in morality and political ethics. (*NKC* 1:133)

What is the best way in which to overcome the split between religion and

culture? In contrast to the tendency in religion to criticize and reject the standpoint of culture, in Nishitani's thought it is esteemed as "the actualization of human autonomy" (*NKC* 1:58). Noting Kant's exhortation to "have the courage *yourself* to use *your own* understanding" (*NKC* 1:59; emphasis by Nishitani),[1] Nishitani states that "man's discovery in himself of the strength to stand alone without relying upon the guidance of God was the cause that laid the foundations for the great historical shift from the Middle Ages to the modern era" (*NKC* 1:59). He then goes as far as to say, "The modern awareness of human autonomy can be characterized as the awareness of ***fundamental subjectivity***" (*NKC* 1:60; emphasis Nishitani's [this, significantly, is the first mention of the term "fundamental subjectivity" in the book of the same name]). The human essence (that is, human nature) incorporates infinity and universality, and can even partake of a particular grandeur and sacredness. This, however, is only because the autonomy of reason that excludes all heteronomy is, in a sense, a "self-universalization through self-negation" involving the denial and transcendence of self-will.

Contrasting with this aspect of subjectivity (i.e., human autonomy) is the standpoint of the doctrine of faith, which from the opposite pole demands transcendence through absolute negation (*NKC* 1:69).

> The doctrine of pure faith, of the centrality of God, expresses most directly the absolute negation of the human standpoint in its teaching that only through faith is salvation attained, a teaching that regards man as thoroughly evil in nature and divests him of all capacity to work toward his own salvation, attributing even the decision to do so to the workings of God's grace. (*NKC* 1:69)

This standpoint, incidentally, leans toward a simple dismissal of the autonomy of reason as an expression of self-will, of an absolutization of the human ego, or of a defiance of God. And indeed, from one point of view we can say that

> the autonomy of reason, insofar as it attempts through self-established rules to effect the negation of self-will, can be regarded as the greatest form of self-attachment, as a sign pointing to the roots of the most deeply hidden self-will. (*NKC* 1:73)

[1] This quote is found in the section of Kant's famous treatise "Was ist Aufklärung" [What is Enlightenment?] that discusses the subject of "emerging from immaturity."

Yet from another viewpoint it can be said that "autonomy incorporates within itself a dialectic structure in which self-will returns to the ground of the self through the mediation of self-negation," or at the very least that "insofar as it constitutes a negation of self-will, [autonomy] represents a form of advancement and progress for humankind (*NKC* 1:74).

In other words, the standpoint of faith, though possessing an opening to subjectivity in the form of a decision for faith, runs the risk of overemphasizing the fundamental sinfulness of man and thus obliterating this potential for advancement and progress. Furthermore, the adherence to the standpoint of the Absolute Other in the doctrine of faith may even lead to "a form of self-attachment (or rather, doctrine-attachment) marked by self-enclosure and the inability to accept its opposite (reason) through negation-*sive*-affirmation" (*NKC* 1:76).

As a means of overcoming this opposition between reason and faith, Nishitani investigated the standpoint of absolute nothingness. It is important here to note the manner in which he presented this standpoint. He writes as follows in the introduction to the sixth chapter of *The Philosophy of Fundamental Subjectivity.*

> When faith is presented as the absolute negation of reason, this absolute negation has yet to transcend the relative level of absolute negation. Only when it itself is negated does the standpoint of absolute negation manifest. Reason, in other words, is absolutely negated in the true sense not when it is situated in opposition to that which attempts to negate it, but only when it is employed as a *tool* of absolute negation—that is, when it leaves the grasp of self-will. This absolute negation as negation-*sive*-affirmation represents the standpoint of absolute nothingness (***zettai mu*** 絶対無), as opposed to that absolute negation that is still relative nothingness (***sōtaiteki mu*** 相対的無). (*NKC* 1:77; emphasis Nishitani's)

The absolute nothingness spoken of here corresponds, I believe, to the self-negation of faith in Nishitani's category of "reason and faith," or to the self-negation of religion in his category of "culture and religion." At the same

time, reason (corresponding to "culture"), as the tool of negation, realizes the affirmative aspect of negation (negation-*sive*-affirmation) and thus attains a negation that is complete (i.e., absolute negation). "Absolute nothingness" is definitely not something introduced from the outside, whether it be as the fundamental concept of Nishida's philosophy, the basic teaching of Zen, or anything of that kind. It is quite the opposite. Whether in philosophy or religion, absolute nothingness lies in the self-negation of the very source.

Following the explanation cited above, Nishitani delineates three characteristics of absolute nothingness.

1) Absolute nothingness, owing to the absoluteness of its negation of all that exists, shares the absolute other-ness of the Absolute Other revered in the doctrine of faith. (*NKC* 1:77)
2) Moreover, "the fact that this is not Being (***u*** 有) but nothingness (***mu*** 無) signifies that, in the absolute negation of the ego, the fundamental subjectivity of absolute nothingness manifests as the subjectivity of no-self. (*NKC* 1:77)
3) "Autonomous reason can be taken *subjectiv*-ly (***shutaiteki ni*** 主体的に)[2] only from the standpoint of that absolute nothingness in which absolute nothingness and self (or of God and man) are one" (*NKC* 1:78).

The above analysis of absolute nothingness may make the concept seem extremely abstract, but the concrete nature of the absolute nothingness that overcomes the rift between faith and reason is captured vividly in the mystical thought of Meister Eckhart, Nishitani's "predecessor" (*NKC* 1:80).

It is impossible in a short article like the present one to do justice to Nishitani's subtle analysis of mysticism, but a rough summary incorporating points 1, 2, and 3 above might be as follows. The standpoint of mystical thought stands in contrast to that of the doctrine of faith, which emphasizes the division between God and humanity and the personal, opposing (***gegenüber***) nature of the two. Mysticism (particularly that based on

[2] (Translator's note) Since the English word "subjective" too easily suggests merely the antonym of "objective," the German ***subjectiv*** has been used for the Japanese adjective ***shutaiteki***, where the intended meaning is "having to do with the [subject as the] originator and carrier of cultural reality, with the historically creative human individual" (Nishitani 1982, p. 304). The adverbial form (***shutaiteki ni***) has been rendered as "***subjectiv***-ly," which is admittedly clumsy but which avoids the ambiguity of the English word "subjectively."

Eckhart's concept of *Durchbruch* [breaking-through]) holds that the soul breaks through its own ground to transcend the personal God and reach the divine nothingness that constitutes God's essence, thereby also penetrating through to the very source of the "I am" concept that forms the soul's subjectivity. "The ground of God is the ground of man, and the ground of man is the ground of God. Here the self attains to perfect freedom and to a transcendent religious intelligence" (*NKC* 1:65). Moreover, this "bottomless" freedom signifies that

> self-will has been negated by the appearance of the Absolute Other (i.e., the birth of the son of God) in the ground of the self, so that a new self emerges and, within the divine nothingness, becomes one with God in essence and in subjectivity—that is, it becomes no-self. (*NKC* 1:80)

"Breaking-through" is thus an expression of "the fundamental subjectivity that transcends the personal God standing in opposition to us and that attains to a thoroughgoing self-realization" (*NKC* 1:65).

We see, therefore, that in the "breaking-through" of Eckhart the three characteristics of absolute nothingness delineated above are already fully expressed. We can say, in other words, that absolute nothingness 1) displays the transcendence characterizing the standpoint of the "Absolute Other" emphasized in the doctrine of faith, but 2) has the capacity, since this other-ness has the nature not of Being (***u***) but of nothingness (***mu***), to manifest its fundamental subjectivity as "the subjectivity of no-self" or as "bottomless subjectivity," and also 3) to envelope and give life to the standpoint of autonomous reason due to its "thorough penetration of the essence of absolute negation" (*NKC* 1:80).

To those who hold to traditional religious views (particularly Christian ones), this teaching of the breaking-through of God to the divine ground must seem not so much an expression of the mystical union of God and man as a ludicrous and objectionable display of spiritual hubris. Nevertheless, we find here a conjoining of the standpoint of "breaking-through" with the distinctive feature of Nishitani's thought—the previously unaddressed matter of *Gottes Natur* (*NKC* 1:87), taken up by Nishitani as the problem of "the naturalness present in religion."

The Problem of Fundamental Naturalness and the Structural Relation of Nishitani's Central Concepts

The "mystery" (*myō* 妙) of absolute nothingness transcends the conceptual definitions above and displays its vastness and profundity in the context of concrete, living reality. Nishitani's distinctive notion of "naturalness in religion" bears witness to this. Life in the natural world is in itself indifferent, being neither good nor bad (*NKC* 1:85); similarly, the religion of the human world is capable of opening to the "opposite shore" beyond distinctions of right and wrong, as suggested in the teaching that "God causes his rain to fall on the just and unjust alike." This is "the standpoint of absolute love, that is, of the manifestation of the nothingness (*mu*) or the bottomless no-self (*dattei no muga* 脱底の無我) of the Divine" (1:86). This is "love as life itself," or, as the mystics express it, *Gottes Natur*, which manifests in "the nonpersonal personality, or personal nonpersonality, that constitutes the ground of human nature" (*NKC* 1:87). Or, to express this differently, "In the *subjectiv* 'One' that transcends *Personalität* in both God and man there appears what might be called 'fundamental naturalness,' an expression of Life that differs radically from ordinary naturalness, rationality, and spirituality" (*NKC* 1:87). Here we can discern a probable reworking of Schelling's "love as the *Ungrund*."

As noted earlier in this paper, this notion of Life as fundamental naturalness, or of the "essence of Life," constitutes the basic standpoint of the early Nishitani, and the key to overcoming the deep division between religion and culture. "Between religion and culture we can discern, as the reverse side of this division, a certain living continuity" (*NKC* 1:94); the division is identified as lying on the side of logic, while the continuity is identified as lying on the side of Life. Although there are many other important issues involved (such as the fact that this Life is not restricted to the aspect of continuity but also incorporates the duality of light and darkness [tying in with the problem of the root of self-will]), I would like to focus on the question of logic as it relates to structure. Of particular interest is the connection between Life or nature and absolute nothingness.

First, let me note that in the title of Nishitani's pivotal article "Region, History, and Culture" there is no direct mention of the "hidden" main themes of "naturalness in religion" (which is only mentioned in the heading of the seventh section, "Naturalness in religion. The dialectic of dialectic.

Pure practice") and "the essence of Life" (which is taken up in the eighth section, "The logic of Life in dialectic. Culture and religion"). It may be that the conceptual association of "religion, history, and culture," or, to express these linked concepts in terms of their underlying dynamics, of "absolute nothingness, faith, and reason," will only provide an opening to "the world of fundamental subjectivity" when they are supplemented with the concept of "nature," to form "religion, history, culture, and nature" or "absolute nothingness, faith, reason, and naturalness."

I would like to devote the rest of my paper to an analysis of these structurally linked concepts (Nishitani's "dialectic of dialectic," *benshōhō no benshōhō* 弁証法の弁証法 [*NKC* 1:88]), centering my discussion on figure 1 below. In order to present the overall structure of Nishitani's thought in this area I have also added a diagram (figure 2) from his treatise "Shūkyōteki jitsuzon no benshōhō" 宗教的実存の弁証法 [The dialectic of religious *Existenz*] (1935; *NKC* 2:244), which incorporates the concept of nature.

FIGURE 1

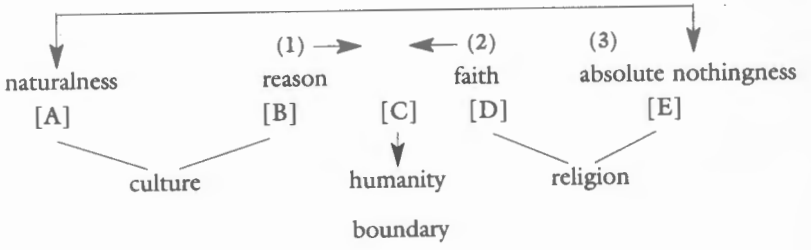
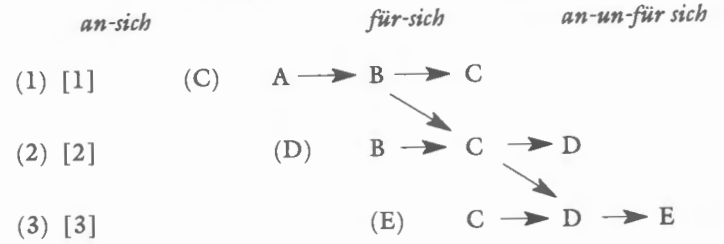


FIGURE 2 (The three levels of religious *Existenz*)



(A: appetite; B: morality; C: original sin; D: the God of Justice; E: the God of Love)

Nishitani explains figure 1 in the following passage.

> Beginning from the two forms of dialectic obtaining between naturalness and reason, and between reason and faith, we may proceed further and conceive of *a third dialectic that bridges the two poles of absolute nothingness and naturalness*. The first dialectic, utilizing reason (the relative negation of self-will) as negative mediation, returns to self-will; the second dialectic, utilizing the relative absolute negation of autonomous reason (i.e., the standpoint of faith) as negative mediation, sublates reason from the standpoint of absolute nothingness. These two dialectics converge toward the opposing poles of naturalness and absolute nothingness. In the comprehensive third dialectic, however, negative mediation comprises the boundary-plane (***genkai heimen*** 限界平面) that separates the two aspects of reason (relative negation) and faith (relative absolute negation). It is, in other words, the boundary (***genkai*** 限界) between the overall standpoint of man (comprising self-will and reason) and the overall standpoint of absolute negation (comprising faith and absolute nothingness). (*NKC* 1:87)

The word *genkai*, translated here as "boundary," is used in a special way by Nishitani. When the rupture between reason and religion is reexamined from the standpoint of absolute nothingness, the "middle" between the two sides forms a "turning point" that is in itself neither reason nor faith. This turning point is what Nishitani refers to as *genkai*.

> Even as it forms the fulcrum for the "turnabout" of reason to faith and of faith to reason, the boundary, which itself remains indifferent to all directionality, signifies the original standpoint of the human being. It is, in other words, that very human subjectivity that forms the foundation of autonomous subjectivity (***jiritsuteki shutaisei*** 自律的主体性) and resolute subjectivity (***ketsudanteki shutaisei*** 決断的主体性). (*NKC* 1:84)

How does the "overall standpoint of man" differ from "man as the boundary itself"? When man takes on a dual nature then dialectic too becomes dual.

> Here there forms an overall association that has the third dialectic as its foundation and the complex dialectical associations between the first two dialectics as its contents. This overall association then forms a dialectic in which the first dialectic is the condition of ***an-sich*** (***soku jitai*** 即自態), the second dialectic is the condition of ***für-sich*** (***tai jitai*** 対自態), and the third dialectic is the condition of ***an-un-für sich*** (***soku ji tai jitai*** 即而対自態). It is, in other words, a ***dialectic of dialectic***. (*NKC* 1:88; emphasis Nishitani's. cf. 2:244)

When we compare the above description with the diagram from "The Dialectic of Religious *Existenz*" (figure 2), we find that the levels of religious *Existenz*, [1], [2], and [3], show a remarkable correspondence with the three categories we have been considering: [1]: culture (reason, culturalism); [2]: history (faith, eschatology); and [3]: religion (absolute nothingness, mysticism). Next, if we add to these three categories that of "naturalness," as in figure 1, then compare the result—"naturalness, reason, faith, and absolute nothingness"—with the respective correlates of the three levels of religious *Existenz*—A: appetite; B: morality; C: original sin; D: the God of Justice; E: the God of Love—we discover that original sin corresponds to the "boundary" (*genkai*) between reason and faith, and thus to humanity itself. It is from here—from this boundary and from humanity itself—that the root of self-will as original sin is investigated in the ground of nature.

Even at the level of the first and second dialectics the negation of self-will is total, and it is successful in terms of what these dialectics are aiming for. However, according to Nishitani "this negation does not penetrate to the inside of self-will" (*NKC* 1:88). Here we must take a further dialectical "step," one penetrating to the naturalness—particularly to the aspect of "indifference" in naturalness—that forms the inner portion of self-will. Nishitani continues, "When the aspect of indifference in absolute negation manifests as the fundamental subjectivity of no-self *(**muga** 無我)*," this fundamental subjectivity of no-self, taking this dialectical step, breaks through the concept of a substantive, existent self "and thereby liberates the natural life that had become a mere expression of basic desires" (*NKC* 1:88). This situation is described by Nishitani using the distinctive term ***hi-ka*** 非化, in which the character ***hi*** 非 signifies negation and ***ka*** 化 signifies change or transformation; the implication is that something is transformed yet is also restored to what it originally was. The term is related to the notion of "absolute negative-*sive*-affirmation." Nishitani writes:

> This liberation occurs when, within the innate indifference of natural life, natural life is *subjectiv*-ly sublated in the indifference of fundamental naturalness (i.e., divine naturalness). At this time natural life and its manifestations (e.g., perception and desire), insofar as they constitute expressions of fundamental naturalness, reemerge as they were before and yet not the same as they were before. Natural life becomes, so to speak, nature as not-nature (not "unnatural"); it is a naturalness that has undergone *hi-ka*. Self-will undergoes absolute negation in its profoundest sense when, from within self-will, naturalness is sublatively affirmed as nature-that-is-not-nature. (*NKC* 1:88)

This *hi-ka* opens up the realm of action beyond logic. In Nishitani's words,

> The *subjectiv* fusing with all things resulting from the *hi-ka* of all things is the standpoint of the *pure practice* that penetrates all stages. The *hi-ka* of divine personality, the *hi-ka* of reason, and the *hi-ka* of naturalness is the actualization of the practice that *subjectiv*-ly unifies both the source and the extremities of life. (*NKC* 1:89)

When Nishitani speaks of "pure practice" one can sense in the word "practice" the two meanings of *action* and *praxis*. The empathy one might feel with the life of an insect or a fish is a form of this practice, "a practice that *subjectiv*-ly unifies naturalness and the abyss of life" (*NKC* 1:90). One may also see this practice, as "the spontaneous manifestation of the fundamental subjectivity of no-self" (*NKC* 1:87), in the "indifference" of the "everyday mind" expressed in the Zen saying "When hungry I eat, when thirsty I drink." Thus this practice gives continuity to the respective elements of religion, history, culture, and nature; it "penetrates and links them all with a single noetic or *subjectiv* strand, or rather, it *subjectiv*-ly unifies them while retaining the distinctiveness of their respective worlds just as they are" (*NKC* 1:90).

Incidentally, if we turn around here and view "the naturalness that is not-nature" from the standpoint of this practice that penetrates "both the source and the extremities of life," we see that Nishitani's distinctive concept of "nature" forms the foundation of the other elements of religion, history, and culture. Or rather, it is not simply a foundation but that which opens the

dimension of "bottomlessness." Earlier I said that the conceptual association of "religion, history, and culture" will only provide an opening to the world of fundamental subjectivity when it is supplemented with the concept of nature, to form the linkage of "religion, history, culture, and nature" or of "absolute nothingness, faith, reason, and naturalness." Or rather, it might be more appropriate to see nature not as simply another element lined up with and supplementing the other three, but as a "realm of bottomlessness" that forms the "ground" upon which the other three rest.

How, then, does practice in this ground relate to the dialectic of dialectic? *The Philosophy of Fundamental Subjectivity* represents a philosophical presentation of the theme of "religion, history, and culture," and incorporates "the four standpoints of naturalness, reason, faith, and absolute nothingness" (*NKC* 1:91). Then there are the fundamental processes (dialectics) of turnaround and synthesis between naturalness and reason, between reason and faith, and between faith and absolute nothingness, and furthermore the third process that "bridges the two poles of absolute nothingness and naturalness." The overall process that incorporates all of these aspects is called by Nishitani "the dialectic of dialectic" (*NKC* 1:88).

However, the fundamental life (i.e., the subjectivity of no-self) that penetrates through the core of this overall process is so simple in nature that Nishitani labeled it "pure practice" (*NKC* 1:89). This suggests that between the two aspects of "pure practice" and "the dialectic of dialectic" there will reemerge on a deeper level the problem identified in the title of the eighth section—"the logic of life; culture and religion." The issue of religion and culture is thus repeated anew in the issue of religion and philosophy.

Abbreviation

NKC *Nishitani Keiji Chosakushū* 西谷啓治著作集 [Selected works of Nishitani Keiji], 26 vols. Tokyo: Sōbunsha, 1987–95.

Reference

Nishitani Keiji
1982 *Religion and Nothingness*. Trans. by Jan Van Bragt. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Nishitani's Philosophy

The Later Period

HORIO TSUTOMU

THE PHILOSOPHICAL CAREER of Nishitani Keiji (1900–1990) was an unusually long one, extending over much of his ninety-year life span, and it reflected the varied interests and lively intellect of this remarkable thinker. It is partly for this reason that scholars have yet to arrive at a definitive categorization of the various periods of Nishitani's thought. For the purposes of the present paper, however, we may divide it into three basic sections. The first comprises the period prior to the publication of Nishitani's book *Nihirizumu* ニヒリズム [Nihilism] in 1949; the second comprises the period between the publication of *Nihirizumu* and that of his principal work, *Shūkyō to wa nani ka* 宗教とは何か [What is religion?],[1] in 1961; and the third—the period to be examined in the present paper—comprises the time from then until the end of his life in 1990 at the age of ninety.

One of the most striking things about Nishitani's later-period work is the large number of writings that deal with the theme of Zen. Prior to this time the word *Zen* virtually never appeared in the titles of his works, the first example being the article "Kagaku to Zen" 科学と禪 [Science and Zen] that Nishitani contributed to a collection entitled *Bukkyō to bunka* 仏教と文化 [Buddhism and culture], issued in honor of D. T. Suzuki's ninetieth birthday in 1960. Following the publication of "Kagaku to Zen"—written five years after the 1955 publication of "Kū no tachiba" 空の立場 [The standpoint of *śūnyatā*], the core essay of his chief work *Religion and Nothingness*—Zen in its various aspects came to form the central theme of Nishitani's scholarly activities.

One important example of this is the eight-volume series *Kōza Zen* 講座禅 [Lectures on Zen] (1967–68), for which Nishitani was editor in chief. In 1986 the four articles that Nishitani himself contributed to this series were

[1] Translated into English as *Religion and Nothingness* by Jan Van Bragt (NISHITANI 1982).

combined with his earlier essay "Kagaku to Zen" and published under the title *Zen no tachiba* 禅の立場 [The standpoint of Zen]. The volume was subtitled "Shūkyō ronshū II" 宗教論集 II [A second collection of religious discourses] to indicate its relationship with *Religion and Nothingness*, which Nishitani looked upon as his "first collection of religious discourses."

Nishitani also began a twelve-year series of lectures (1966–78) on Dōgen's *Shōbōgenzō* 正法眼藏 for the Zaidan Hōjin Kokusai Nihon Kenkyūsho. These lectures, in which Nishitani subjected Dōgen's words and expressions to detailed philosophical analysis, were transcribed and issued as the four-volume series *Shōbōgenzō kōwa* 正法眼藏講話 [Lectures on the *Shōbōgenzō*]. Other examples of his work on Zen include his articles on *geju* 偈頌, a distinctive form of poetic expression that developed in Chinese Zen; representative essays are "Shige" 詩偈 [Poetic verses] (1961) and "Kanzan shi" 寒山詩 [The poetry of Kanzan] (1974). The fact that so much of Nishitani's later work deals with the theme of Zen provides, I believe, an important indication of Nishitani's central philosophical problem during this period and of the intellectual approach through which he attempted to resolve it.

As with the development of his philosophical thought, Nishitani's involvement with Zen can be divided into three basic stages. The initial stage began at the time he first encountered Zen at around the age of twenty, just before his graduation from the First Higher Level School (Daiichi Kōtōgakkō 第一高等学校, the precursor of the present Tokyo National University). This was a time when Nishitani was quite undecided about what course to follow in the future. He saw three main possibilities: philosophical study under Nishida Kitarō 西田幾多郎 (1870–1945); ordination as a Zen monk; and life in the utopian community Atarashiki Mura, founded by the Japanese man of letters Mushanokōji Saneatsu 武者小路実篤 (1885-1976). Nishitani's interest in Zen at this time was fostered by the essays and fiction of the eminent Japanese novelist Natsume Sōseki 夏目漱石 (1867–1916). He came to feel, however, that he lacked the strength to follow the life of a Zen monk, so he finally decided to pursue the study of philosophy. In his later writings Nishitani observes that what finally decided him upon this course was the belief that through it he could discover a way to overcome the deep sense of nihility that consumed him both physically and mentally.

Nishitani began his philosophical studies with an investigation of fundamental evil or "original sin" (*kongen aku* 根源悪) as treated in the thought of

the German Idealist philosophers, particularly Schelling. From there he extended the scope of his inquiry to Western mysticism, a widening of outlook that was accompaned by an increased originality in the themes he considered. However, despite this process of philosophical maturation (or perhaps because of it), Nishitani began to suffer from a quite unexpected "psychological condition" in which he sensed "a great voidness inside myself." As he explains it, he felt as though the philosophy he had been studying "had not, in any real sense, become part of my being"—"my feet seemed not to be solidly on the ground," as though "something like a thin veil" separated the soles of his feet from the surface of the earth. This feeling of voidness emerging from the very core of his intellectual endeavor was enmeshed with a fundamental sense of misgiving regarding the philosophical approach of the great thinkers like Aristotle and Hegel. The standpoint of *noesis noeseos* that their speculation led them to is a standpoint based on *theoria*, in which the philosopher positions himself a step above—or perhaps a step back from—the raw reality of facts themselves and observes them from the ivory-tower realm of scholarly analysis. Nishitani realized that as long as this is the case the thinker is prevented from ever becoming grounded in the true *realness* of reality.

This welling sense of voidness was qualitatively different from the sort of self-critical reappraisal seen in philosophy whenever thinkers encounter a speculative deadend. Nishitani's voidness was in the nature of a "bottomlessness" that broke through the ordinary stance of philosophical self-criticism, in which the authority and the proper exercise of speculation is evaluated from the standpoint of speculation itself—his voidness was a bottomless sense of vacuity that rendered empty the very foundations of philosophical speculation and thus brought into question the entire history of philosophy itself. This sense of voidness, the early intimations of which had driven Nishitani to the study of philosophy in the first place, increased to the point where it left him uncertain about the validity not only of philosophy but of scholarship as a whole.

Zen must thus have appeared to Nishitani as a higher approach that broke through the standpoint of conceptualization and found its ground in the direct awareness of *real* reality. Thus began Nishitani's practice of Zen, in which he "set speculation aside for a while and just sat." This was in 1936, when, at the age of 36,[2] he started formal training as a layperson under

[2] This date is based on information found in the correspondence of D. T. Suzuki. Suzuki wrote

Yamazaki Taikō 山崎大耕 (1875–1966) at Shōkoku-ji monastery in Kyoto. This can be seen to mark the start of the second stage of Nishitani's involvement with Zen.

Not long after beginning Zen practice, Nishitani reports, his sense that his feet were not solidly on the ground inexplicably disappeared. This was no doubt an effect of the meditation, but it by no means signified the attainment of *satori* or an enlightened awareness of things in their true suchness, nor did it represent a true resolution of the sense of voidness that Nishitani felt. It can be thought of, rather, as the point of departure from which Nishitani was able to begin a genuine search for this resolution, and from which he could embark on the "investigation of self" (*koji kyūmei* 己事究明) that constitutes true Zen practice.

From there, too, the possibility opened for true philosophical thought based on an "awareness of *real* reality." For Nishitani, Zen practice and philosophical speculation were qualitatively different, but precisely because of this they were able, through the mediation of "real reality," to complement and highlight each other's strengths. Thus Nishitani began, in his words, a lifestyle of "thinking then sitting, sitting then thinking." These two endeavors—Nishitani's philosophical reflection as mediated by nonintellectualizing *zazen* and his *zazen* as mediated by critical reflection—intersected to create a place (*ba* 場) of "real reality," a place where the two endeavors strove, through a kind of competitive, mutually stimulating dynamic, to elucidate the true nature of existence. The mode of thought that emerged from this environment of creative inner tension was the "self-awareness of bottomlessness," the standpoint that characterized the philosophy of Nishitani's early period. In his first book, *Kongenteki shutaisei no tetsugaku* 根源的主体性の哲学 [The philosophy of fundamental subjectivity] (1940), Nishitani writes:

> At its most fundamental ground the notion that "I am" is something utterly without foundation. At the very ground of our life there is absolutely nothing to set our feet upon. Indeed, life is life precisely because it stands where there is no-thing to stand upon. From this self-awareness of "bottomlessness" (*dattei* 脱底) emerges a new subjectivity (*shutaisei* 主体性) consistent with religious intelligence, rationality, and natural life (*shizenteki sei* 自然生). (*NKC* 1:4)

a letter of introduction for Nishitani addressed to Furukawa Gyōdō 古川尭道 (1872–1961), master of Engaku-ji in Kamakura; this letter, recently rediscovered, is dated 1936. Nishitani was able to attend only one retreat at Engaku-ji, due probably to the distance of Kamakura from his home in Kyoto. Soon afterwards he commenced practice under Yamazaki Taikō, master of Shōkoku-ji, a temple not far from where he lived. In an earlier article ("The Zen Practice of Nishitani Keiji," *The Eastern Buddhist* 25: 92) I identified 1933 as the year Nishitani started his Zen practice, but this information (based on the recollection of a friend of Nishitani) was incorrect.

This self-awareness of bottomlessness is a self-awareness that arises from the direct experience of the fact that "*I am*"; it is, in other words, a self-awareness that breaks through all former standpoints, whether of God, reason, life, or materialiality; a self-awareness that destroys all hidden self-attachments masquerading as "ideals" and "principles" and penetrates through to a direct experience of that which lies at the ground of them all. It is a self-awareness of the raw reality of life that arises at the point where life is directly contacted; if we must define it as a standpoint, it is the standpoint without a standpoint. Thus Nishitani also called it a "new subjectivity." This realization that "there is absolutely nothing to set our feet upon" is clearly reflected in the field of mutual stimulation between Zen and philosophy pointed to by Nishitani's phrase "thinking then sitting, sitting then thinking." It is a field that permits no stagnation in the standpoint either of intellectualization or of nonintellectualization.

Following his realization of the standpoint of bottomlessness, Nishitani concerned himself with fostering self-awareness of the fact that "there is absolutely nothing to set our feet upon"—that is, with elucidating the true nature of the fundamental nothingness (*mu* 無) because of which life is life. This, as a manifestation of the mutual mediation of Zen practice and philosophical speculation, was an expression not only of Nishitani's Zen-influenced mode of life but of his scholarly work as well, most noticeably in the philosophically mediated Zen terminology he so frequently utilized to express central ideas.

The period when Nishitani was most deeply involved with Zen practice was that from 1947 to 1952, a quite difficult time for him as he had lost his position at Kyoto University.[3] Altogether his formal practice continued for twenty-two years, from 1936 until 1957, when his teacher, Yamazaki Taikō, retired from teaching due to failing health.

Despite the fact that this second stage of Nishitani's Zen practice was, in terms of praxis, the most intense one for him, it was not accompanied by any

[3] The Kyoto school of philosophy was seen by the postwar American Occupation government as ideologically linked with the wartime militarist government. Thus Nishitani was barred from employment at all government-supported institutions, such as Kyoto University.

corresponding philosophical output directly related to Zen—as we have seen, Zen became a major theme in his writings only from the year 1960. The appearance of Zen-related writings thus suggests a new development in Nishitani's relationship with Zen, one that shaped the distinctive character of his thought in the later part of his life and can be seen to mark the beginning of the third and final section of his philosophical career.

"The Standpoint of Śūnyatā" and the Central Issues of Nishitani's Later Thought

In 1986 Nishitani published *The Standpoint of Zen*, which, as noted above, was a collection of his various essays on Zen written subsequently to the release of *Religion and Nothingness* in 1961.

The first line of the introduction describes the purpose of the work: "The present volume is an attempt to elucidate the fundamental characteristics of that distinctive standpoint known as Zen." The introduction, written especially for *The Standpoint of Zen* when Nishitani was eighty-five years old, is of particular interest to us since it is the latest piece in the book, following by several years the publication of the other essays in the collection, such as "Hannya to risei" 般若と理性 [*Prajñā* and reason] (1979) and "Kū to soku" 空と即 [*Śūnyatā* and nonduality] (1982). It thus constitutes an overall presentation, based on Nishitani's long years of Zen practice and philosophical speculation, of his most mature reflections on the potential and significance of Zen as a subject of philosophical analysis.

As "an attempt to elucidate the fundamental characteristics" of Zen, the basic direction of *The Standpoint of Zen* is essentially the same as that of *Religion and Nothingness*, described by him as "a philosophical investigation of that which is called religion." When one takes into consideration *The Standpoint of Zen*'s central concern with the issue of Zen, however, the essays making up the volume, his "second collection of religious discourses," are seen to differ quite fundamentally in import from those constituting *Religion and Nothingness*. Nishitani's introduction to *The Standpoint of Zen* was, I believe, motivated in part by a desire to clarify the relation between philosophy and Zen practice, in that the book takes up various aspects of his "thinking then sitting, sitting then thinking" approach to life, in which Zen and philosophy take on the nature of mutually stimulating forces. The fact that his own intellectual life appears as a theme in Nishitani's later work can be

seen as the defining characteristic of his thought in this period. The question remains, however, as to what inner question made it necessary for him to take this theme up.

In *Religion and Nothingness* Nishitani examined nihilism—the "eternal face of the human disease" and the most fundamental ontological problem to emerge in the modern age—and attempted to elucidate the only direction in which this problem could be finally resolved. The radical approach he delineated, one already apparent in the "self-awareness of bottomlessness" that characterized the philosophy of his early period, was "the overcoming of nihilism *through* nihilism"; the standpoint from which this "overcoming" takes place is *śūnyatā*, the standpoint that emerges with (and at the same time precipitates) the fundamental turnaround arising when the self-awareness of bottomlessness is pushed to its extremes and the self-awareness of fundamental nothingness is endlessly deepened. It is the standpoint manifested in Nishitani's self-awareness as the *topos* of the fundamental self-emptying (*ekstatic*) conversion in which the very process of seeing through the essential nothingness of the ego undergoes a further self-emptying conversion. It is, in other words, the "dropping out of the bottom" of the self-awareness of bottomlessness. In *Religion and Nothingness* Nishitani comments on this issue as follows:

> [Prior to this fundamental conversion] nihility is still being viewed...from the bias of self-existence as the groundlessness *(Grundlosigkeit)* of existence lying at the ground of self-existence. (*NKC* 10:108; NISHITANI 1982, p. 96*)*

> The standpoint of nihility merely advises of the ineluctable demand for a conversion. If in nihility everything that exists reveals its original form as a question mark at one with the subject itself, then the standpoint of nihility itself needs in turn to be transcended. (*NKC* 10:126; NISHITANI 1982, p. 112)

> The foundations of the standpoint of *śūnyatā* lie elsewhere: not that the self is empty, but that emptiness is the self; not that things are empty, but that emptiness is things. Once this conversion has taken place, we are able to pass beyond the standpoint on which nihility is seen as the far side of existence. (*NKC* 10:156; NISHITANI 1982, p. 138)

The word *śūnyatā* is, needless to say, a fundamental term in Mahāyāna Buddhist thought, and is expressed most directly as practice in the world of Zen, as described by D. T. Suzuki. Nishitani's standpoint of *śūnyatā* is in essence an existential standpoint that emerged out of a state of dynamic tension with the world of Zen, but his use of the term does not mean that his position was explicitly derived from Buddhism. To say that this standpoint is an existential one is to say that it is a thoroughly *philosophical* standpoint: *śūnyatā* as mediated through the discipline of philosophy. The same holds true for all of the other Buddhist terminology (such as *gō* 業 [karma], *genjō* 現成 [manifestation], and *ego* 回互 [circuminsessional]) employed by Nishitani. Nishitani comments as follows:

> [The fact that Buddhist terminology is used] does not mean that a position is being taken from the start on the doctrines of Buddhism as a particular religion or on the doctrines of one of its sects. I have borrowed these terms only insofar as they illuminate reality and the essence and actuality of man. (*NKC* 10:5; NISHITANI 1982, p. xlix)

It was only because Nishitani's "borrowed" *śūnyatā* was a ***philosophically mediated śūnyatā*** that it was able to serve as a "standpoint" for the overcoming of nihilism through nihilism. The doctrine and praxis of traditional Mahāyāna Buddhism were no longer prepared to bring about the self-awareness and transcendence of the "human disease" that underlay the modern sense of nihilism. That which illuminated the true pathology of this disease and enabled the traditional concept of *śūnyatā* to overcome it was Nishitani's existential elucidation of the *acual* self-awareness of reality (***jitsuzai no jitsuzaiteki na jikaku*** 実在の実在的な自覚). The *topos* of *śūnyatā* where reality manifests not only as *śūnyatā* but also as the *real* self-awareness of reality is what Nishitani is referring to when he talks of "the standpoint of *śūnyatā*." That is, the standpoint of *śūnyatā* is not something that philosophically elucidates the traditional Zen (Mahāyāna Buddhist) point of view, but rather something that philosophically breaks through Zen's traditional outlook and pressures it to find a new position.

This is an easy point to misunderstand. In his introduction to *Religion and Nothingness*, Nishitani comments:

> The fundamental meaning of religion—what religion *is*—is not to be conceived of in terms of an understanding of what it *has been*. Our reflections take place at the borderline where understanding of what has been constantly turns into an investigation of what ought to be; and conversely, where the conception of what ought to be never ceases to be a clarification of what has been. (*NKC* 10:4; NISHITANI 1982, p. xlviii)

The "borderline" of which Nishitani speaks is the place where our historical situation takes root. The fact of conversion is the reality of our lives, and the fact that we *must* undergo such a conversion is the result of the fundamental problematic of the historical situation we find ourselves in. The statement "our reflections take place at [this] borderline" thus means that each and every step of our search is philosophically reflected upon, so that the world of religion, which in essence is transcendental, is mediated through our historical situation and rendered into a force for illumination. Endeavors of this type have traditionally been regarded as the primary mission of philosophy. And it was as a faithful fulfillment of this mission that Nishitani developed his standpoint of *śūnyatā*.

Nevertheless, *śūnyatā* thought, constituting as it did a fundamentally new domain of philosophical inquiry, presented a basic problem that brought with it the need for a rethinking of the basic standpoint of ontology—as Nishitani commented, "Ontology needs to pass through nihility and shift to an entirely new field, different from what it has known hitherto" (*NKC* 10:126; NISHITANI 1982, p. 112). This basic problem of *śūnyatā* thought, simply put, involved defining what manner of speculation would emerge as the ***manifestation*** of *śūnyatā*, and what the situation of this fundamentally new direction in philosophy (the realm of speculation) would be with regard to religion (the realm of faith).

Śūnyatā thought, as that which illuminates "the ground of the historical situation known as modernity," emerged through a process of inquiry into the basic nature of religion. Thus the standpoint of *śūnyatā* is the place ***(ba)*** where the very source of religion manifests; it is, in other words, the place where reality exists in its most real mode of being and at the same time functions in the form of self-aware reflection. The standpoint of *śūnyatā* is the very site where the phenomenon-in-itself (***jitaiteki ji*** 自体的「事」) of reality and the self-aware noumenon (***jikakuteki ri*** 自覚的「理」) of reality manifest as one. In that sense it represents what might be called a higher-order standpoint of *noesis noeseos*. The term "higher-order" here signifies that this is no longer the standpoint of *theoria*, one step removed from the actual fact (*ji*)

of reality, but the standpoint of self-awareness attained through a radical negation of *theoria* and a breakthrough to the realization (actualization-*sive*-appropriation) of the field of *śūnyatā*, the field where suchness—the actual *fact* of reality—manifests.

However, this particular standpoint of *śūnyatā*, defined by Nishitani as "the full *realization* (actualization-*sive*-appropriation) of the reality of self and all things" (*NKC* 10:26; NISHITANI 1982, pp. 21–22), is still the manifestation of a *śūnyatā* characterized by self-awareness and the state of unity between noumenon and phenomenon (*riji ichinyo* 理事一如)—it is, in other words, *śūnyatā* as the *fact* of *śūnyatā*, or *śūnyatā* as the *phenomenon* of *śūnyatā*. It has yet to attain the absolute openness of the *śūnyatā* that both precedes and succeeds this self-aware "standpoint of *śūnyatā*." Viewed from a different angle, this means that the self-aware "standpoint of *śūnyatā*" has yet to open to a realization of the emptiness of *śūnyatā* itself—there still remains something to be broken through.

Of course, the resolution of a problem like this no longer lies within the province of philosophical reflection. It is a problem that can be answered only through an awakening at the level of "realization," a waking-up from and transcendence of the "standpoint of *śūnyatā*" itself. It is similar to the situation in Zen, where it is said that one who has attained *satori*—the realm of "form is emptiness, emptiness is form"—still remains in a type of dream-realm as long as attachment remains to this state, the enlightened state of Buddhahood; true *satori* requires that one break through this state and proceed to "transcend Buddhahood" (*Butsu kōjō* 仏向上). The representative example of Nishitani's thought on this question is in his essay "*Prajñā* and Reason," where he emphasizes the necessity of going beyond the state of universal oneness by citing the Zen koan "Nan Ch'uan's Flower":

> As the officer Lu Hsuan was talking to Nan Ch'uan, he said, "Master of the Teachings Chao said, 'Heaven, earth, and I have the same root; myriad things and I are one body.' This is quite marvelous."
>
> Nan Ch'uan pointed to a flower in the garden. He called to the officer and said, "People these days see this flower as a dream." (CLEARY and CLEARY 1977, p. 292)

Again, though, Nishitani's thought on this matter was not simply a borrowing from Zen doctrine, but fundamentally differed from it in both origin

and character. In Zen, needless to say, the call to "transcend Buddha" relates to the attainment of true enlightenment, while the "renewed awakening" stressed by Nishitani involves an authentication of genuine philosophical speculation. It was simply that a problem experienced in the world of Zen practice bore a meaningful resemblance to an issue which emerged as an ineluctable part of the development of *śūnyatā* thought, and was thus cited by Nishitani as a way to clarify his point.

Characteristics of Nishitani's Later Thought

The above-mentioned book *The Standpoint of Zen* and the essays "*Prajñā* and Reason" and "*Śūnyatā* and Nonduality" may be regarded as the most representative expressions of Nishitani's later thought. Each of these works was written in response to a distinctive set of circumstances, and thus there is no consistent theme connecting the three. *The Standpoint of Zen*, as noted above, is "an attempt to elucidate the fundamental characteristics of that distinctive standpoint known as Zen"; "*Prajñā* and Reason" is a reevaluation of the standpoint of reason using the thought of Hegel as a foil; and "*Śūnyatā* and Nonduality" is an inquiry into the nature of *jōi ni okeru kū* 情意における空 ("*śūnyatā* manifesting in *jōi*," *jōi* being a force of creative imagination—usually translated as "emotion" or "sentiment"—that in some ways transcends intellect, and that finds expression in the form of art and religion rather than philosophy). However, if we view these writings as explicit statements of problems that were merely implicit in his central work *Religion and Nothingness*, then they can be seen to express a certain developmental process in Nishitani's later thought.

The Standpoint of Zen, to begin with, deals directly with the theme of Zen, incorporating Nishitani's reflections on Dōgen's *Shōbōgenzō* and on the Chinese Buddhist *geju*, mentioned at the beginning of this paper. The fact that Zen itself constituted the subject matter of this book reflects Nishitani's concern with the field of his own Zen-influenced thought ("thinking then sitting, sitting then thinking"), a field with its origins in the above-mentioned "self-aware 'standpoint of *śūnyatā*'," in "*śūnyatā* as the *phenomenon* of *śūnyatā*."

In his essay "*Prajñā* and Reason," Nishitani, as though to overturn this position, carries out a thorough examination of the rationality that underlies the process of self-awareness. The essay critiques Hegel's standpoint of

dialectical reason, then delineates the standpoint of *prājña* wisdom, a form of "reason" that overcomes the problems inherent in Hegel's position. This thoroughgoing process of critique and transcendence signifies Nishitani's emergence from the "bottomless" state of doubt regarding *noesis noeseos*—the doubt that originally drove him to the practice of Zen—and his manifestation of a fundamentally new approach to philosophical thought.

The fundamental problem that remains unaccomplished in Hegelian thought is that of absolute escape from the ambit of conceptualization. This hinders, on the one hand, a full realization of the unmediated knowledge (*chi no sokujisei* 知の即事性) of things in themselves (*jijitsu sore jitai* 事実それ自体), a form of knowledge that transcends the intellect; and, on the other hand, it impedes a complete transcendence of the substantive notions of "absolute being" that arise from the intellect's primal drive toward self-affirmation. These substantive concepts circumvent the full freedom that can arise only when the mind has freed itself of all dependence and all restriction through a process of absolute negation. That which brings about the transcendence of speculative intelligence and the manifestation of original intelligence is the thoroughgoing dynamic of absolute negation, a dynamic that forms a primary element of the mind. The intelligence that emerges as a result of this dynamic—and that emerges *as* this very dynamic itself—is the *prajña* wisdom representing the standpoint of absolute being-*sive*-absolute nothingness.

When this standpoint of *sive*, so to speak, is taken to its extremity there appears the aforementioned imperative to "transcend Buddha." This imperative emerges, not from the state of realization attained upon experiencing the state of absolute being-*sive*-absolute nothingness—that is, not from the above-mentioned self-aware standpoint of *śūnyatā* as the *phenomenon* of *śūnyatā*—but from the state in which even this self-awareness is emptied. In that sense it can be conceived of as arising when the logically mediated reality—the product of this self-awareness—reverts back to reality itself. *Prajñā* wisdom, in other words, is wisdom that is awake to the fact that the standpoint of *śūnyatā* has been attained.

The unfolding of intelligence into *prajñā* wisdom, however, brings into focus the limits of this type of wisdom. This final issue is addressed in Nishitani's essay "*Śūnyatā* and Nonduality." Here Nishitani addresses the limitations inherent in *prajñā*, limits defined by *prajñā*'s nature as a form of wisdom grounded in nonduality, that is, in absolute being-*sive*-absolute nothingness. These limits relate to the fact that *prajñā*, as an expression of

"*śūnyatā* as the *phenomenon* of *śūnyatā*," is "absolutely nonlogical, or absolutely not-logical." To express this in another way, *prajñā* wisdom emerges from the structural experience of absolute-nothingness-*sive*-absolute-being ("emptiness is form, form is emptiness"), from the experience of the phenomenon (*ji*) of *śūnyatā*-manifestation within the form (*sō* 相) of the absolutely dialectical noumenon (*ri*).

In this sense it constitutes a standpoint grounded in what Buddhists would call "the Dharma-realm of the nonobstructed interpenetration of noumenon and phenomenon" (*riji muge no hokkai* 理事無礙の法界). However, underlying and surrounding this standpoint there exists a realm—the world of "the unobstructed interpenetration of all phenomena" (*jijimuge* 事事無礙)—in which a direct unity obtains between the actuality (*ji*) of the absolute, immediate manifestation of absolute nothingness, or *śūnyatā*, and the actuality of the absolute and immediate particularization of absolute being, or form (or, to put it in another way, in which the particularities of actual existence [*jitsuzai* 実在] transcend all doctrinal principle to manifest individually as facts in their simplest form). The realm of "*śūnyatā* as the *phenomenon* of *śūnyatā*" is the realm of, to use Lin-chi's expression, "clear, solitary light" (*rekireki komyō* 歴歴孤明). In Nishitani's words it is "the site of the ecstatic self-awareness of the Dharma-realm of the nonobstructed interpenetration of noumenon and phenomenon" (*riji muge hokkai no datsujiteki na jikaku no tokoro* 理事無礙法界の脱事的な自覚の処). This realm, which emerges from the standpoint of absolute not-logic (in Anselm's words, "Credo quiu absurdum"), finds expression in the above-mentioned *jōi*, the creative functioning of the imagination that gives rise to such expressions of artistic and religious feeling as the *geju* Zen verses. This is Nishitani's "*śūnyatā* manifesting in *jōi*" (*jōi ni okeru kū*).

Conclusion

As we have seen, Nishitani's later-period thought may be seen to have developed around the axis of what can be called the self-examination of the standpoint of *śūnyatā* as presented in *Religion and Nothingness*. In this process of self-examination there emerged a realm—the realm of "the unobstructed interpenetration of all phenomena"—that delineated the boundaries of *prajñā* wisdom, the wisdom constituting the intelligence which functions in, and functions *as*, the standpoint of *śūnyatā*. Returning for a moment to the

above-mentioned passage from *The Standpoint of Zen* ("Ontology needs to pass through nihility and shift to an entirely new field, different from what it has known hitherto"), we may identify this process of self-examination as one that establishes philosophy (that is, ontology in its most fundamental sense) as the "wisdom" (*chi* 智) of this "entirely new field," and that confirms faith (*shin* 信) as that which sustains this wisdom. This process is none other than that through which the true form of Nishitani's "thinking then sitting, sitting then thinking" approach to philosophizing was shaped and revealed. Near the end of his life Nishitani, looking back upon this process, wrote as follows:

> My path has been one in which I progressed from a prephilosophical stage to the stage of philosophy, then from the stage of philosophy to a postphilosophical stage. However, this process may also be seen to move in the opposite direction, from the standpoint of Zen praxis (the postphilosophical stage) through that of philosophy to return to the realm of prephilosophy. This implies an illumination of the prephilosophical state from the standpoint of the postphilosophical state, with philosophy functioning between the two in a mediatory capacity. In the total context of this I regard my life as a life of philosophizing, a life aided by the stages of prephilosophy and postphilosophy even as it found sustenance and growth in philosophical activity. (*NKC* 11:8)

Abbreviation

NKC *Nishitani Keiji Chosakushū* 西谷啓治著作集 [Selected works of Nishitani Keiji], 26 vols. Tokyo: Sōbunsha, 1987–95.

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Political Engagement and Political Judgment in the Thought of Nishitani Keiji

BERNARD STEVENS

I CANNOT BEGIN MY PAPER without first of all expressing my deepest gratitude for this invitation. It is not just that I feel greatly honored by an invitation to speak in front of people who know more than I about the issue at hand, but also that I am impressed by the remarkable open-mindedness it shows on the part of the organizers. Those familiar with my writings on the Kyoto school know that I have been extremely critical about the school's political attitude during the Fifteen-year War and that I have gone so far as to express strong concern about the renewed interest in such ideas as the "overcoming of modernity" (Jap., ***kindai no chōkoku*** 近代の超克).[1] The fact that I am encouraged to say more about all of this today shows a remarkable will to dialog on a difficult issue.

What I will present here is only an attempt to interpret a very delicate issue. It is, so to speak, a hypothesis concerning what I believe to be Nishitani's political misjudgment. Though this reflects my deepest conviction, it is certainly not my final word on the matter for the simple reason that,

I wish to thank Professors Shizuteru and Matsumaru Hisao for their kind remarks concerning my criticism of the Kyoto school; their advice has helped clarify my understanding of the issue. But what is written here remains of my sole responsibility, of course, and I am solely to blame for any remaining "misjudgments."

[1] The most radical criticism I have ever written on this topic is "Ambitions japonaises: Nouvel Asiatisme et dépassement de la modernité" (STEVENS 1995a). I would like to take this opportunity to express my dissatisfaction with *Espirit*'s editorial policy regarding this article. For example, my original title was "Les implications idéologiques du dépassement de la modernité au Japon," and not the inflammatory one chosen by the editor. Moreover, the summary of my article, with its reference to Huntington's notion of a "clash of civilizations," is not mine. Finally, the editor suppressed my final paragraph, where I stressed the need for Westerners to engage in self-criticisms concerning their own political failings if they wish to sound convincing when addressing themselves to the failings of non-Western cultures. These three important changes in my article, which were made without my knowledge, lent it a strong polemical (and almost aggressive) tone, which was certainly not my intention.

until now, I have lacked direct access to the original texts of Nishitani; all I know is through translations and secondhand commentaries.[2] Although the picture these sources present seems sufficiently consistent, I must on principle acknowledge the possibility that a better knowledge of the written facts might lead me to a different perspective in the future.

It is indeed most striking, and most admirable, the way Nishitani stresses the importance of not just remaining in the realm of pure intellectual observation, but of involving oneself existentially in concrete reality—and more particularly, in a very Nietzschean way, in historical reality. I see here some reminder of the original task of philosophy: that one not to remain as a mere onlooker but

[2] My main sources concerning the political involvement of Nishida, Nishitani, and the Kyoto school in general were as follows:

1) Political texts by Nishida Kitarō: *Nihon bunka no mondai*, 1938–40 (French translation by Pierre Lavelle: "La culture japonaise en question," Presses Orientalistes de France, 1991); *Sekai shinchitsujo no genri*, 1943 (English translation by Yōko Arisaka: "The Principle of the New World Order," to be published in *Monumenta Nipponica*); *Kokutai*, 1944 (French translation by Pierre Lavelle: "L'essence nationale du Japon." In *Cent ans de pensée au Japon*, ed. Yves-Marie Allioux and Philippe Picquier, 1996).
2) Secondary literature on the political involvement of Nishitani and the Kyoto school: "Le dépassement de la modernité," Araki Tōru and Alain-Marc Rieu, in *Ebisu: Etudes japonaises* 6, July–September 1994; *Rude Awakenings*, HEISIG and MARALDO 1994; *La pensée politique du Japon contemporain*, Pierre Lavelle, Presses Universitaires de France, 1990; *Postmodernism and Japan*, Masao Miyoshi and H. D. Harootunian, eds., Duke University Press, 1989 (especially the articles by Harootunian and Naoki Sakai); *Die Philosophie der Kyoto-Schule*, Ryōsuke Ohashi, Freiburg/München: Alber, 1990 (especially Tanabe Hajime's "Versuch, die Bedeutung der Logik der Spezies zu klären"); "The putative fascism of the Kyoto school and the political correctness of the modern academy," Graham Parkes, *Philosophy East and West* 47: 305–336, 1997; *Japan in Traditional and Postmodern Perspectives*, Charles Wei-Hsun Fu and Steven Heine, Albany: SUNY, 1995 (in particular the articles by Bernard Faure and Dale S. Wright).
3) Books by Nishitani Keiji: *Nishida Kitarō: Sono hito to shisō*, 1936–1968 (English translation by Yamamoto Seisaku and James W. Heisig: *Nishida Kitarō*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); *Nihirizumu*, 1949 (English translation by Graham Parkes and Setsuko Aihara: *The Self-Overcoming of Nihilism*, Albany: SUNY, 1990); *Shūkyō to wa nanika*, 1961 (English translation by Jan Van Bragt: *Religion and Nothingness*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).
4) Articles by Nishitani Keiji: "The awakening of self in Buddhism," "The I-Thou Relation in Zen Buddhism," and "Science and Zen," in *The Buddha Eye: An Anthology of the Kyoto School*, Frederick Franck, ed., New York: Crossroad, 1991; "Vom Wesen der Begegnung," "Die 'Verrücktheit' beim Dichter Basho," in *Die Philosophie der Kyoto-Schule*, Ryōsuke Ōhashi, Freiburg/München: Alber, 1990; "Reflections on Two Addresses by Martin Heidegger," in *Heidegger and Asian Thought*, Graham Parkes, ed., Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1987; "Über das Gewahren," in *Philosophie der Struktur 'Fahrzeug' der Zukunft?* Für Heinrich Rombach, Freiburg/München: Alber, 1994.

involve oneself in both the life of the world and the search for true wisdom (Gr., *sophia*), a search motivated by "love" (*philia*). And there is no doubt that Nishitani regarded such an existential involvement as implying also a political involvement or "engagement." Nishitani proved himself capable of such an engagement with an authenticity and radicality that are, in themselves, quite admirable. However, the political choices he made during the Fifteen-year War seem to me both incomprehensible and unacceptable. We must admit that they were a mistake, not because they were connected with a war that ended in military defeat but because they were based on a lack of political insight and judgment, and also because they were ethically indefensible. The purpose of my paper is to strive for a better understanding of the political misjudgment in Nishitani's political engagement.

There are two principal reasons why I am so concerned with clarifying the political question.

First, one cannot doubt Nishitani's significance, not just as the most faithful disciple of Nishida but also as a particularly creative thinker in the field of religious ontology, as is witnessed by his epoch-making work *Shūkyō to wa nanika* 宗教とは何か [What is religion?] (translated into English as *Religion and Nothingness* [NISHITANI 1982]), which may be as important in the history of philosophy as Nishida's *Zen no kenkyū* 善の研究 or even Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit*. (Indeed, I must confess that it was the discovery of Nishitani's *Religion and Nothingness* some six years ago that initially, and decisively, awakened my interest in the philosophy of the Kyoto school). One must acknowledge the remarkable authenticity and total existential dedication with which Nishitani continued Nishida's task of delving through the traditions of Western and Eastern metaphysical thought in order to discover a deeper common ground for mutual understanding that would at the same time disclose a more fundamental dimension of human essence. And one can only admire the way he endeavored to put Nishida's pioneering work into a philosophical discourse that maintained the particular potentialities of the Japanese language and was perfectly intelligible to the Western mind.

Moreover, while doing so he carried out an extensive hermeneutic of the historical development of Mahāyāna Buddhism that made it accessible and acceptable in terms of Western philosophic categories, but that did not obscure its own particular contribution to universal thought. The position of Kyoto-school philosophy at the meeting point of East and West is thus more explicit in Nishitani's work than in Nishida's. This I believe to be an achievement

deserving of close attention from contemporary philosophers.[3]

Nishitani's philosophical effort has been—to a great extent—to make of himself an instrument to accomplish what he sensed was the task of twentieth-century Japanese culture. He once wrote:

> We Japanese have fallen heir to two completely different cultures.... This is a great privilege that Westerners do not share in...but at the same time this puts a heavy responsibility on our shoulders: to lay the foundation of thought for a world in the making, for a new world united beyond differences of East and West. (VAN BRAGT 1971, p. 278)

This statement, while expressing something basically true, contains the seeds of what, under certain circumstances, could (and did) lead to both cultural nationalism (which can be acceptable to a certain extent) and political nationalism (which, though understandable to a limited degree, is fundamentally unacceptable).

This brings us to the second reason that I find it important to clarify the political question vis-à-vis Nishitani, namely, the obscure and paradoxical link between his nationalism and the universal scope of his philosophy. Nishitani's thought appears to be another example of a phenomenon—quite frequent in the history of philosophy (as Jacques Derrida has recently shown [DERRIDA, in press])—in which a double claim is made to express both a universal truth and yet to be the quintessential expression of a particular culture. Examples are found in Jewish culture (the notion of a God that chose the Jewish people and yet reigns over all humanity), French culture (Enlightenment philosophy, described as a product of French spirit, *l'esprit français*, and yet valid for all humanity), and German culture (Fichte or Heidegger's search for values that are at once essential and yet most perfectly incarnated in the German *Geist* and only expressible in the German language). A similar dynamic can be seen in Nishitani's idea that the Japanese people have a particular responsibility as the heirs of the spiritual traditions of both the East and the West and as the holders of a unique "moral energy" *(moralische Energie)* that is nevertheless meant to be extended to the whole of mankind.[4]

[3] My first attempt to interest French philosophers in the Kyoto school was "En guise d'introduction: Une présentation de l'école de Kyoto" (STEVENS 1995b).

[4] The tension between Nishitani's nationalism and his universalism is clearly described by Minamoto Ryōen in his remarkable analysis, "The Symposium on 'Overcoming Modernity'" (MINAMOTO 1994). Minamoto writes:

> There is no denying the fact that Nishitani was a nationalist and that he supported the war. Still, we cannot leave the fact that he was a universalist out of the picture. As I mentioned earlier, at the same time as he made a case for a "national ethics" in his presentation to the symposium, Nishitani recognized the pitfall of a national egoism and argued also for a "world ethic."

As long has such claims remain in the realm of cultural nationalism they are acceptable (although exaggerated), and may simply show that a profound and original system of philosophical thought needs to be rooted in a rich soil of cultural identity, tradition, and language. But when such a nationalism becomes political, as is the case of Nishitani and a number of others, then it becomes much more problematic. And this problematic aspect is what I am most concerned with here.

So for me the question is not just, "How is it that Nishitani succumbed to the nationalism of the 1930s and 1940s?", but rather, "Why does a certain type of philosopher, dedicated to religious ontology or to speculative philosophy, so often fall prey to national-totalitarian ideologies?" Indeed, it was not just Nishitani who believed in the philosophical justification of political nationalism and war, but the greater part of the Kyoto school. Moreover, the case of the Kyoto school, as we all know, is very similar to the case of Heidegger and a number of other philosophers who believed, to a certain degree, in the value of nationalism and even fascism. These included Graf Durkheim, Giovanni Gentile, Mircea Eliade, and the young Maurice Blanchot, to name just a few of Nishitani's contemporaries. Communist totalitarianism has also been supported by a number of famous names: Antonio Gramsci, Jean-Paul Sartre, and how many others? But the list could go back in time at least as far as Plato, whose *Republic* seems to be much more a prophecy of the communist totalitarian state than an illustration of Greek democracy.

Of course, one could wonder why it is so important to aim at a universal humanism beyond the dimension of national particularity. I will answer by quoting André Malraux's concise response to the question of why he was studying non-Western cultures:

> We are entitled to wonder whether human beings from various cultural backgrounds have more in common than just hunger, aggressiveness, sex, and death, and if something more deeply human unites them on a more noble level" (MALRAUX 1951).

Hunger, aggressiveness, sex, and death are things that humans have in common with the animals. And humans reduce themselves to such bestiality when they reduce themselves to the brutality *(bestialitas)* of fascism, which is the final result of unbridled nationalism. The quest of philosophy, in contrast, is is the search for the more noble level that Malraux was speaking of. And it is this more noble level that we call universal humanism, which encompasses both the ***essence of man*** and the ***human condition***. The essence of man is what contemplative philosophy, ontological or religious (represented by Heidegger and Nishitani), sets out to discover; the human condition—that which all humans share simply because they live in an organized society—is, as both Aristotle and Hannah Arendt have shown, the object of political philosophy.

So the question becomes all the more disturbing: "Why is it that the type of philosopher dedicated to religious ontology so often falls prey to national-totalitarian ideologies?"

The Experience of Nationalism in Europe.

Before tackling the paradoxical and obscure link between philosophers of religious ontology and nationalistic-totalitarian politics, I would like to make a relatively long remark concerning the reasons for my severity toward the political stance of Nishitani and the Kyoto school.[5]

[5] When I speak of "nationalism" here I mean a political ideology where national or patriotic feelings, which as such are normal components of civic consciousness, become the central political force and are magnified to the point where they engender an irrational and xenophobic collective egotism. Nationalism turns into fascism when these irrational and xenophobic tendencies are encouraged by a propaganda that distorts the true perception of reality in favor of a national historical fiction or myth in which collective egocentrism is directed towards the sacralization of the state and in which xenophobia is directed towards the development of militarism. A regime is openly fascist when it is ruled by a one-party system organized around a charismatic leader. Such regimes undertake the progressive suppression of intellectual freedom, basic individual rights, political plurality, parliamentary representation, and the rule of law. Fascism presupposes the rejection of the international juridic consensus that international organizations and treaties are meant to guarantee, though it retains strong bond with traditional capitalism in order to insure its own economic strength.

When all of these goals are achieved—when the rule of coercion and terror is the reigning force in domestic relations and when the logic of ideological confrontation is the reigning force in relations with the outside democratic world—then the system has become totalitarian. Totalitarianism is the logical outcome of fascism.

What I call "democracy" is first of all the ancient Greek ideal of the *politeia* (political organization) in which all citizens participate in public affairs and contribute to decisions relating to law and to the common good (such participation can never be direct when a large number of people are involved, so the principles of collective representation, publicity, and public debate become

In my case there is, first of all, a very personal feeling of responsibility: since I consider myself to be the main interpreter of the Kyoto school for the French philosophical public, it is my duty to be absolute clear regarding the political-ideological aspect if I want to be convincing and acceptable to people who generally know nothing about the school except for the accusations that it was "fascist." But there are deeper reasons for my opposition to the ideology Nishitani supported some sixty years ago.

Why am I, why are we (in Western Europe), so strongly opposed to the type of ideology seen in the ultranationalist politics and emperor system of the 1930s and 1940s in Japan? Of course, it is not just because Imperial Japan was at war with our American allies. It is, much more essentially, a matter of ethical and ideological conviction that regards nationalism in general as a misleading foundation for a political system—even when such a nationalism sees itself as a means to aid other nations (e.g., as a means to liberate them from foreign colonization).

First of all, the history of modern Europe is a history of nationalistic (i.e., fratricidal) wars: the long French-British conflict,[6] the First World War (the combined result of all European nationalistic—and capitalistic—rivalries put together), the Second World War (with its underlying German nationalism and imperialism), and, finally, the still-fuming civil war in Yugoslavia. All of these conflicts have given Europeans sufficient opportunity to think about the absurdity of nationalism, the logic of which, when developed until its ultimate conclusions, almost inevitably leads to fascism and war. Moreover, the very idea of war—which until the nineteenth century had something heroic about it, involving the bravery of soldiers fighting hand-to-hand—has become utterly abhorrent, since war has become something almost exclusively technological that victimizes mainly defenseless civilians.

As we see in the case of Yugoslavia (and this is what makes European intellectuals so nervous today), a new tide of nationalism seems to be rising in

important). The modern variant of democracy, which can be called "political liberalism," is distinct from the Greek ideal in many aspects: in the priority of the private sphere over the public sphere, in the priority of the individual over the group, in the importance of social equality, and in the importance of the economic dimension in public life. Because of this last factor political liberalism is often identified with economic liberalism, which actually means market economics and capitalism. I strongly disagree this type of identification, since capitalism can easily forget the political ideals of liberalism and take the road that leads to fascism and totalitarianism.

[6] This conflict started with British efforts to conquer the continent in the Middle Ages, continued with the French support for American independence, and reached its epilogue with the British-led coalition that defeated Napoleon and put an end to French continental imperialism.

Europe as well as in many other parts of the world. Most European countries today know the phenomenon of extreme right-wing political parties that garner more new votes with each election. Such nationalisms are either those of the traditional great nations (France with the Front National, Austria with its Neo-Nazi Party, etc.) or, more often, those of regions (Corsica, Lombardy, Flanders, Slovakia, Scotland, etc.) in which ethnic groups are demanding independence from larger states. In such a perspective the Yugoslav civil war of 1991–96 comprises a warning of what could happen on a larger scale, much as the Spanish Civil War of 1936–39 formed an actual preparation for the Second World War. In both cases a fascist ideology threatened democracy.[7]

Of course, as is always the case with fascism, there has been in these conflicts a self-congratulatory discourse of collective egocentrism and a romantic rhetoric about protecting high cultural values against barbaric foreigners: the Serbs with their Orthodox civilization that had to be defended against Islamic oppression, the Franquists with their Christian Spanish culture that had to be defended against the dangers of communism, etc. And as we all know, the

[7] The comparison of the Spanish and Yugoslav civil wars is not as exaggerated as it might appear. It is not so much that, following the Yugoslav conflict, we might have large-scale violence and war in Europe aimed at achieving nationalistic goals (such goals can be achieved by other means), but that nationalism as such (be it based on ethnic, linguistic, or religious pretexts) will increasingly become the main political force in the consciousness of the ordinary people, to the exclusion of more noble (and more difficult) political and ethical ideals. And this is where the ideological aspect of the problem of nationalism has to be clarified.

Why did so many European intellectuals go to Spain in 1936–39 to defend the Spanish Republic against the Nazi-supported Franquist rebellion? It was because they feared that the winner of the Spanish Civil War would be the winner of the impending European war, and that this winner would impose its principles on the European continent. The Republic was a legally elected government defending the rule of law and the principles of democracy, plurality, equality, and humanism, whereas the Franquist rebellion had all of the most obvious characteristics of fascism: violent aggression (in this case against the Republic) and against all the values that the Republic strove to defend; rule by military force and coercion; leadership by a head of state possessing absolute authority; and total commitment to "the nation." The fascist flavor was increased by the sacralization of the nation, since, at that time, the Franquist movement had the benediction of the Spanish Catholic Church. So it was of course not their love of Spain that drove the intellectuals to fight against fascism, but their belief in democracy.

In Yugoslavia, if European intellectuals such as Bernard-Henry Levy and a few others (including myself) tried to defend Sarajevo (the only remnant of the legal Bosnian Republic) against the Bosnian Serb terrorists, it was not because they had arbitrarily chosen the side of the Bosnian government against the side of the Serbs. It was because the Bosnian government represented a legal democracy and a tolerant multicultural society whereas the Bosnian Serbs espoused the fascist principle of ethnic purity and practiced a brutal ethnic cleansing upon the civil population, on a scale that amounted to genocide.

Nazis had a similar rhetoric about a superhuman Aryan race that had to purify itself of contamination by foreign (mostly communist and Jewish) elements. And always, hidden behind the aesthetic rhetoric of superhumanity and higher human values lay the horrifying reality of hatred and animal brutality that forms the true face of fascist totalitarianism.

Postwar political analysts such as Hannah Arendt have shown that the two extreme types of European totalitarianism (Hitlerism and Stalinism), although almost antithetical in their ideological propaganda and mythology, shared fundamentally the same cultural and historical causes, the same coercive structure, and the same self-destructive logic (Arendt 1951).

Let us mention just a few elements of Arendt's explanation of the historical causes. The excessively rapid access to industrialization in such countries as Germany and Russia at the beginning of the century engendered a massification and atomization of society, in which individuals lost their traditional points of reference and felt increasing alienated, and at the same time were unable to discover new meanings for life, society, and history.[8] One element of this uprooting process was the loss of a common social community (as with the peasantry, which was removed from the land and literally forced into urban industrial labor, and also as with the aristocracy, which was uprooted socially through its loss of position to the bourgeois industrialists and capitalists). And this is where the ideology of fascist or communist propaganda came in, by responding to the people's nostalgia for social communion and need for a new meaning with the myth of a common national (or class) destiny, described in terms of a great romantic epic that caught people's imagination and overpowered their sense of reality. An additional element of fascist thought was the way it skillfully responded to the religious frustration of secularized industrial society by sacralizing the nation and the state, creating a sort of mystic euphoria that weakened people's sense of critical and ethical judgment.

Before turning to the case of Japan, I would like to note a final element of Arendt's analysis of the origins of totalitarianism in Europe. Interestingly, she

[8] The loss of meaning referred to by Arendt can be equated to Nishitani's description of the sociohistorical dimension of nihilism:

> The phenomenon of nihilism shows that our historical life has lost its ground as objective spirit, that the value system which supports this life has broken down, and that the entirety of social and historical life has loosened itself from its foundations. Nihilism is a sign of the collapse of the social order externally and of the spiritual decay internally—and as such it signifies a time of great upheaval. (Parkes and Aihara 1990, p. 3).

shows how the phenomena of nineteenth-century European capitalism, imperialism, and colonialism constituted a relatively direct preparation for the advent of totalitarianism. Indeed, it was the expansionist logic of capitalistic growth that led, not just to the inter-European rivalries that caused the First World War, but also to the extra-European imperialism that led to the colonization of America, Africa, and Asia. And it is within the process of colonization that pretotalitarian tendencies appeared. The expansionist logic of colonial imperialism prepared the way for the annexationist imperialism of the totalitarian systems; the lawlessness and brutality of colonial administration prepared the way for the totalitarian negation of human rights and the rule of law; the status differences between the European colonizers and the non-European colonized peoples prepared the way for the racist ideology shared by all fascist totalitarianism; the colonizers' rationalizations regarding their responsibility to civilize the "undeveloped" people prepared the way for the fascist aesthetic rhetoric about its own historical mission, etc. Thus behind the principles of democracy and humanism that the Western European countries applied to their own citizens there lurked a hypocrisy with regard to applying these same principles to non-European peoples and countries.[9]

And so one is tempted to say that the only difference between colonial policy and fascist policy was that the latter abandoned hypocrisy and practiced openly what Western capitalistic and colonial imperialism had practiced tacitly. But there were, of course, other, more fundamental, differences. The first difference was one of degree: fascism brought racist logic to its extreme when it declared that its own people and the so-called inferior races were totally different *in nature*, thus opening the doors to unrestricted massacre and even systematic genocide. The second difference was one of essence: fascism was able to go to the extremes it did only after destroying the last remnants of the rule of law, which, in democratic countries, had the effect of restraining the fascist logic implicit in colonial policy—the colonized peoples still had recourse to the principles of the democratic legal system to defend their rights (as did Gandhi in South Africa and India). Thus the British could be openly opposed through the utilization of their own humanistic and legal principles, but the Nazis could not, since they had no such principles and ruled only through the brutal and arbitrary principle of coercion.

The symbolic event that demonstrated this essential difference between the

[9] Such hypocrisy was clearly denounced in the *Chūōkōron* discussions. See HORIO 1994, p. 313.

democratic powers and the Nazi regime was the official withdrawal of Germany from the League of Nations in 1934, an act that signified the open rejection of the *consensus juris*, the common acceptance of a rule of law necessary if people are to act in a civilized way towards each order. Once a nation decides to become a literal "outlaw," the only logic it can still understand is the logic of force.

The victory over Nazism in 1945 meant a victory of democratic values over fascist totalitarianism. The creation of the United Nations and the European Community, along with the proclamation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, were aimed at establishing a world wherein the rule of law would prevail over the rule of coercion, where each individual (whatever his origin, sex, nationality, or religion) would be protected against political oppression and economic poverty (this was the start of the welfare state), where violence would no longer be a way of settling conflicts among people. This was a time of great hope for humanism and for liberalism in its political sense. It was the expression of an archetype that is very strong in the European political psyche: the victory of freedom over tyranny, like the triumph of the Greeks over the Persians. And it seemed to make possible the Kantian hope of a true league of nations capable of overcoming the Hegelian principle of the rule of the strongest and the law of war.

If so many European intellectuals are anxious today it is because capitalism, in Asia as well as in the West, seems to be developing in a way that neglects humanistic principles in favor of the increasingly exclusive law of economic growth. In other words, economic liberalism (which follows the logic of capitalist expansion) seems to be growing at the expense of political liberalism (which follows the logic of democratization). The progressive erosion of the welfare state in the United States and (to a lesser degree) in Europe is a telling sign of this phenomenon. Another sign is the recent American initiative to achieve total world hegemony by any means possible; in this context the Japanese-Asian model of intensive economic growth with little concern for democratic principles seems to have played some role. And the increasing globalization of the economy during the past decade has meant the growth of capitalistic rivalry on a planetary scale and an erosion in our sense of political and ethical meaning. Such a loss of meaning, as we have mentioned earlier, is one of the conditions that favors the rise of fascist-oriented nationalism.

There are thus reasons for concern that democracy is seriously threatened. Our hope, in Western Europe, is that Japan's rise to the status of an economic

superpower will be accompanied by a sense of moral-political responsibility to contribute to the reinforcement of democracy, or, even better, to improve the democratic ideal itself. Our fear, however, is that Japanese intellectuals and politicians may lack any real interest in democracy, and may on the contrary promote the renewal of anti-democratic ideologies conducive to the rise of a new totalitarianism. The ambiguity of our interest in the Kyoto school, which itself has shown a good deal of ambiguity, is a direct reflection of this equivocal state of affairs.

Japanese Nationalism

Many observers have stressed that Japan during the ultranationalistic period showed a tension between two separate driving forces or logics.[10] The first such force involved the search for a national power capable of resisting Western imperialism and liberating Asia from Western colonialism; the second involved the mimetic adoption of the combined phenomenon of Western-type capitalism, expansionism, and colonial imperialism.

I believe that it was the first type of logic, the logic of resistance, that inspired the Meiji Restoration and the early stages of Japanese Western-style modernization; I also believe it was this resistance logic that first motivated Nishitani and the philosophers of the Kyoto school to adopt a stance of cooperation with Japan's imperialistic policy. And to this extent it is understandable (illuminating in this regard is MORI 1994). But on the other hand I am convinced that the resistance logic of nationalistic Japan was rapidly overcome by the logic of capitalistic expansionism, which was in turn rapidly overcome by the fascist-totalitarian logic that fundamentally drives the latter. This happened at least as early as 1933, when Japan decided to leave the League of Nations; or even as early as 1929, when the Japanese government embarked upon its policy of thought control, putting an end to Taishō liberal democracy. And all of the subsequent rhetoric about the historical and spiritual world-mission of Japan was progressively reduced to the aesthetic, romantic, and self-flattering discourse typical of all fascist (and communist) propaganda, a discourse aimed at hiding the system's crude militaristic drive, its will to power, its fascination with oppression and destruction, and its total disrespect for human dignity.

[10] See in particular the illuminating essay by Ueda Shizuteru in *Rude Awakenings* (UEDA 1994). Although in a different vein, we find the same analysis in Maruyama Masao's *Thought and Behavior in Modern Japanese Politics* (MARUYAMA 1963).

Indeed, when closely examined, militaristic Japan clearly shows all of the characteristics of fascist totalitarianism mentioned above: the expansionist and pretotalitarian logic inherent in capitalistic growth; the excessively rapid industrialization and consequent social uprooting and loss of meaning; the search for new meaning and the all-too-willing acceptance of romantic and irrational fascist myths; the suppression of civil rights and rule of law in favor of coercion, terror, and the absolute authority of the leader; the development of a police state with no freedom of thought or action; the sacralization of the nation through state religion; the imperialistic logic that inevitably leads to war, and the brutal submission of supposedly inferior peoples (or "younger brothers"). But I need not belabor the point since it is quite well known.

The Question of Philosophic Political Misjudgment

Now let us return to our leading question: Why were philosophers such as Nishitani so easily deceived and seduced by the fascist ideological fiction, and why did they lack the clarity of political judgment that would have allowed them to see the actual political reality of their time? My conviction is that Nishitani's cooperation with the regime was caused by a political naiveté or lack of understanding that blinded him to the reality of things. Moreover, I consider his political involvement to be in contradiction with the ethical implications of his own religious ontology as it has been developed in *Religion and Nothingness*. And I consider his case to be generally similar to that of comparable intellectuals such as Heidegger.

It might be illuminating here to recall briefly a few elements of Heidegger's case, which has been thoroughly debated in France (see especially AUBENQUE 1988; DERRIDA 1987; FEDIER 1995; FERRY and RENAUT 1988; and TAMINIAUX 1992). Many observers have stressed that if Heidegger was easily seduced by the romantic ideological myth of Nazism it was precisely because of his fundamentally *nonpolitical* stand. Heidegger's philosophy is so extremely ontological that it has no room for political thought, and the result, for Heidegger as an individual, was that he totally misunderstood the complexities and hidden forces of political issues. What Heidegger *did* have was a sense of history, but on such an abstract level—the history of Being—that he failed to grasp the concrete level of political history where complex socioeconomic factors are more determinative than ontological ones.

It now seems to me that the political vision of Nishitani was also based on

an abstract, speculative philosophy of history that missed the concreteness of political reality. My proposal is that this "nonpolitical political" stance has two sources: 1) the long Western philosophical tradition of theoretical misreading of political affairs, and 2) the more specific Japanese (Zen) tradition of trying to grasp the absolute within the relative.

1) "Theōria" and "Praxis"

The Western philosophical tradition of the theoretical misreading of political affairs reaches back as far as Aristotle, and can be seen in the distinction he made between the political life (Gr. *bios politikos*) and the contemplative life (*bios théoretikos*) as the two existential ideals for man, both clearly superior to the hedonistic search of material pleasure (see, for example, Aristotle, *Nicomacean Ethic*, 1:5). These two different life ideals, though not mutually exclusive, belong to two different realms, two different dimensions of human existence.

Political life is proper to all humans since by necessity they all live in an organized society; it relates to what Arendt (as well as Sartre and Malraux) called "the human condition," and it must accept the imperfections and limitations of ordinary human beings (ARENDT 1958).[11] The contemplative life is accessible only to a few rare individuals who are motivated by a search for the Absolute, a search that involves the highest potentials of mankind. It relates to what Heidegger called the human "essence" (*menschliches Wesen*), and it generally necessitates that one retire from the imperfections of human affairs.[12] It seems clear that the contemplative life is in nature the same as the age-old Eastern search for the true self (be it called *atman* or *anātman* in Sanskrit, or *jiko* 自己 or *muga* 無我 in Japanese).

The two Aristotelian definitions of man as the *zōon logon ekhon* (speaking animal), and the *zōon politikon* (political animal) refer to essentially equivalent things, since the main characteristic of political life (*bios politikos*) is that decisions concerning the common social good are arrived at through *logos*, that is, through speech (dialogue, argument, persuasion, logical demonstration, etc.)

[11] The German version (*Vita activa oder vom Tätigen Leben*, Munich: Piper Verlag, 1981) is terminologically clearer than ARENDT 1958.

[12] See, for example, the contrast established by Heidegger between "authentic existence" and "existence dominated by the 'They'" *(das Man)* (HEIDEGGER 1927, §. 25 ff.). The necessity to leave or renounce the ordinary human condition in order to practice the contemplative life has its Buddhist equivalent; see, for example, *Dhammapada* 373 and 395, or *Shōbōgenzō* 75 ("Shukke" [Renunciation of the world]).

(see VERNANT 1962). This political existence, called *praxis*, was highly regarded by the Greeks, since for them public speaking was a noble art, and since the political system that such speaking was meant to perpetuate was one in which citizens were part of the lawmaking process and were thus not subject to a superior authority (in contrast to the Persian imperial system). Such political freedom (*eleuthèria*) was a point of pride with the Greeks when they compared themselves to foreigners (*barbaroi*). The capacity to participate in public life was considered a sign of intelligence and status, whereas to remain exclusively concerned with private matters, leaving political decisions to higher authorities, was a sign of mediocrity and "idiocy" (*idioteia*: an *idiōtès* was someone involved only in his personal interests).

The art of politics was not restricted to the art of speaking well but also necessitated a particular talent or virtue called *phronèsis*, a word difficult to translate in any language[13] (the difficulty, in the realm of politics, of translating the Greek word *phronèsis* may be comparable to the difficulty, in the realm of aesthetics, of translating the Japanese word *iki* [see KUKI 1930]). *Phronèsis* means something like the capacity to make the right decision, to act in each particular situation with prudence, wisdom, and a sense of human limitations, and not just to rely on general principles or social customs. *Phronèsis* is, in sum, the art of creative thinking and prudential acting at a given moment, particularly in unpredictable political situations. It is the art of grasping the right time (*kairos*) for proper action (*eu praxis*).

Aristotle's other existential ideal for man, paralleling the political existence with its focus on the human condition, was the contemplative existence (*bios théōrètikos*), concerned with the human essence. Indeed, the Greek word *théōria* originally meant contemplation (the verb *théorein* indicates the act of seeing, of observing and contemplating what is far away, such as the divine constellations of the cosmos, or what is nearby but beyond phenomenal appearance). Such contemplation could take either a more religious form with the divine as its aim (this is the origin of the medieval notion of the *vita contemplativa*) or it could take a more ontological and speculative form with the aim of understanding the fundamental principles of being (this is the origin both of Western metaphysics and of "theory" in its usual sense of theoretical or rational knowledge). Religious contemplation necessitated a higher type of

[13] Most European languages have, however, retained a faint memory of this notion. See AUBENQUE 1963.

wisdom (*sophia*) and involved the faculty of *noūs*, intuitive understanding, which went beyond mere words—it was ultimately "without speech" (*aneu logou*). Ontological speculation, on the other hand, necessitated *logos*, speech in the sense of expressing metaphysical principles in logical discourse. The concept of *logos* later developed to mean the faculty of logical reasoning (*ratio*, reason, *raison*, *Vernunft*), and was no longer connected with the *logos* of political life, which belonged to the entirely different realm of *praxis*. The *logos* of theoretical metaphysics lies at the origin of rationalistic thought (which Kant studied as "pure reason," *reine Vernunft*), whereas the *logos* of political life lies at the origin of ethical, juridical, and political thought (which Kant studied as "practical reason," *praktische Vernunft*, and which Habermas has recently been considering under the notion of communicational action, *kommunikatives Handeln*). The first type of reason is what Ricœur calls *le rationnel* (the "rational," namely, that which is accessible to abstract or formal theory), and the second is what he calls *le raisonnable* (the "reasonable," i.e., that which is related to common sense and concrete social experience) (see RICŒUR 1986, p. 237, and RICŒUR 1955).

The Western philosophical tradition of misreading political affairs reaches back, I believe, to a confusion between these two different types of intellectual activity. The theoretical reason of metaphysical thought has its own logic that can be highly speculative, abstract, and formal, and that very often remains linked to the search for the purity and perfection of the Absolute proper to religious contemplation. Moreover, it can be pursued by the solitary philosopher who has decided to retire from human affairs (a retirement, incidentally, that can occasionally become indistinguishable from the *idioteia* of the citizen who gives up public affairs in favor of his own private interests). Political thought and action, on the other hand, are not accessible to theoretical reason or solitary speculation, but emerge through dialogical communication (*logos* in its original sense) between various individual points of view on the same issue. Moreover, such thought and action must accept the constant limitations and imperfections of ordinary relative human reality, and function via the compromise indissolubly linked to collective decision making.

A typical misuse of philosophical thought is to treat political affairs with the same absolutist turn of mind that characterizes religious contemplation, or with the rational tools meant for the theoretical-speculative work of metaphysics and ontology. What happens then is that the qualities of theoretical reason (abstract rationality, the purity of the Absolute, the clarity of the contemplative overview, and so on) are forced onto the practical realm of communicative reason, where the rule is concreteness (not abstraction), compromise (not purity), human finiteness (not divine absoluteness), and prudential action (not rational programming).

This type of misuse of philosophy is first seen in Plato's *Republic*, where the state is governed by a philosopher since he alone is capable of contemplating the world of Ideas and he alone is capable of knowing Absolute truth. This entitles him to impose his views on the relative realm of the ordinary citizen's life. In such a vision the individual citizen's point of view is simply not taken into account, and everybody must accept the coercive rule of the philosopher. Plato's republic was a totalitarian state, a negation of the principles of Greek democracy that Aristotle had understood so well.

We encounter this type of philosophical perversion throughout the Western metaphysical tradition. Hegel and Marx are two interesting examples because, though they succeeded in shedding light on certain aspects of political reality, they nullified their insights by relegating them to subordinate positions within their absolutist philosophical theories. Hegel, for example, skillfully demonstrates the different factors within the structure of a constitutional state; but then relativizes and flattens his analysis by subjugating these factors to the absolute law of history understood as the self-unfolding of Reason (Ricœur comments that Hegel remains interesting only if we can reintroduce a sense of human finitude, such as Kant was capable of; his term for the resulting standpoint is "post-Hegelian Kantianism"). Marx too is illuminating in his analysis of the socioeconomic factors of political reality, but again he losses the whole point when he subordinates these factors to the absolute necessity of Marxian historical progress (a "post-Marxist Marxism" would learn from Marx's criticism of capitalism without sharing his solutions nor his positivistic-sociological vision of man and history). In both cases the final absolutization of history through some theoretical vision of human destiny blinds the philosophers to the concrete richness of their earlier insights into the realities of political life and renders them indifferent to the experience of ordinary people. Indeed, ordinary experience, including the experience of suffering, becomes an insignificant detail in comparison to the actualization of the "Truth of History."

With Heidegger, the so-called "Truth of History" is reduced to the history of Being, and this exclusively ontological dimension completely obliterates the political dimension of the human condition. With Nishitani and the Kyoto

school the historical dimension is richer than in Heidegger, while incorporating certain elements of the Hegelian view of history (in a way comparable to Giovanni Gentile). But again there are the same failings: history is understood as the unfolding of some higher Truth or Destiny, and everything must be subjugated to the latter.[14]

2) "Samsāra" as "Nirvāna"

Combined with this Western philosophical misreading of political reality is a more specifically Japanese tradition of grasping the absolute within the relative, a tradition that, when applied to political realities, leads to exactly the same erroneous results.

This tendency has its roots in the Mahāyāna Buddhist doctrine of ***nirvāna*-as-*samsāra***.[15] I do not wish to deny the profundity of this doctrine when applied to the idea that ***nirvāna*** is separate neither from ***tathāta***, the "suchness" of things (Jap. ***nyojitsu*** 如実) nor everyday existence (***samsāra***) when the latter is lived on an authentic level of awareness or self-awakening (***jikaku*** 自覚)—in such circumstances the ***nirvāna*-as-*samsāra*** doctrine is a variation of Aristotle's ***bios theorètikos*** (contemplative life) in its religious dimension. What I am concerned with here is the danger of losing sight of the fundamental Buddhist conviction that the Dharma is of an essentially different nature than secular truth. In other words, when the ***nirvāna*-as-*samsāra*** doctrine is applied to secular and political reality it opens the door to any number of ideologically dishonest compromises that can eventually go against such fundamental principles of Buddhist ethics as universal compassion (***karuna***) and nonviolence (***ahimsa***).

This is precisely what happened during the long history of Zen's compromise with worldly power (in a way remarkably similar to the case of the Catholic Church in Europe). This compromise started with the identification of Buddhist law and imperial law under the Chinese Sung dynasty, continued with the misusage of Zen discipline for the training of the warrior class in the Kamakura period and later, and lead to the cooperation with the militaristic regime during the Fifteen-year War (see HIRATA 1994). Nishitani and the

[14] The essentially historical dimension of Nishitani's political thought (together with its religious-contemplative inspiration) appears throughout his writings. But it is particularly obvious in the title of the ***Chūōkōron*** discussions: "The World-Historical Standpoint and Japan."

[15] I share here Jan Van Bragt's position in his penetrating analysis, "Kyoto philosophy: Intrinsically nationalistic?" (VAN BRAGT 1994).

Kyoto school followed in this tradition, and while sacralizing the state and viewing politics from a religious perspective they were actually mixing two different realms and logics—the contemplative-religious logic and the social-political logic—in a way comparable to Plato.[16] By subjugating the sociopolitical realm to the contemplative-religious one they ended up losing the essence of the latter, which, as a search for the Absolute, can only be lived in separation from the relative, imperfect reality of the human social condition.[17] Nishitani all too clearly believed in the possibility of imposing the religious-ontological level of absolute truth on the finite political level of a particular, and thus relative, state. He believed, in other words, in Plato's rule of the philosopher, at the expense of what the ordinary people might think, feel, need, or suffer.

It seems to me that other elements of the Japanese cultural context might also have contributed to the weakness of Nishitani's political judgment. Shinto, though admirable in many aspects (as in its respect for nature, beauty, and the harmony of the community), tends to foster group conformity and unconditional respect for authority that can only diminish each individual's ethical and political consciousness (see NAKAMURA 1964). This lack of civic consciousness was further encouraged by the educational system, which since Meiji times had attempted to counter Western imperialism by developing a nationalistic feeling that left little room for individual moral and civic judgment (see MARUYAMA 1963). All this may have contributed to Nishitani's all-too-ready compliance with the ideology of the day.

3) Nishitani at the Crossroads of East and West, for Better or for Worse

Thus in my interpretation the combination of these two traditions of philosophical "déformation professionnelle," Eastern and Western, led Nishitani almost inevitably to a political engagement that was at once authentic (in that he deeply believed in it) and at the same time mistaken (in that it was based on political misjudgments). Nishitani, a philosopher of great stature in the realm of contemplative religious ontology, fell into philosophical error when he applied his thought to a realm that was not his: the political. Believing that one could identify the Absolute of religious ontology with the political reality of

[16] The religious inspiration of Nishitani's ethical and political thought is obvious in nearly all of his political statements. See in particular HEISIG and MARALDO 1994, pp. 218, 234, and 244.

[17] Ichikawa Hakugen's analysis would seem to confirm my view. See IVES 1994.

the state, he repeated Plato and Heidegger's misdirected effort to understand the logic of *praxis* through the logic of *theōria*. Moreover, his absolute faith in the philosophical notion that the moment had come for Japan to fulfill its historical and spiritual destiny by overthrowing Western imperialism and materialism led him to believe any means were justified for achieving this goal—even cooperation with a ruthless militaristic regime in violence and total war. He also believed, quite naively, that the military authorities would listen to his advice and understand his views, and he thus failed to see the true nature of fascism, which in its concern for power is impervious to any type of spiritual argumentation.[18] He lost sight of the fact that history is determined not so much by spiritual ideals as by socioeconomic factors, and that any attempt to spiritually influence the course of history must start with the unexciting but necessary task of tackling these socioeconomic and juridical factors on their own ground.

The Political Implications of Nishitani's Religious Ontology

> Just as the individual ego manifests itself in its true form at the point of self-negation or no-self (that is, at the point of transcending the ordinary natural-rational mode of existence), so, too, the nation attains its true form only when it has transcended its ordinary mode of being and has discovered a new mode of being centered on self-negation. (*NKC* 4:286; quoted in MORI 1994, p. 325)

Despite all the reservations discussed above, Nishitani's religious ontology undoubtedly contains elements that can contribute to the renewal and deepening of authentic humanism and democracy. I will mention here only a few possibilities, as a full analysis is clearly beyond the scope of this paper.

Once one has unmasked the true nature of fascism as the radicalization of the very nihilism it was meant to overthrow,[19] one is left with an intensified sense of nihility (Jap. ***kyomu*** 虚無). In both *Nihirizumu* ニヒリズム [Nihilism]

[18] After the war, Nishitani repeatedly made declarations such as, "I tried to open up a path in thought that might overcome from within the ideas of extreme nationalism that were taking control at the time" (quoted in MARALDO 1994, p. 351).

[19] This is an idea strikingly developed by Heidegger in his two-volume masterwork on Nietzsche.

(1949) and *Religion and Nothingness* Nishitani admirably describes the rise of this sense of nihility in European post-idealistic philosophy, from Nietzsche and Dostoevsky to Heidegger and Sartre. Nishitani shows that this consciousness of nihility, although ontologically unsatisfying, has a positive significance as well. The sense of nihility implies first of all an awareness of the loss of meaning in the modern world, of its lack of a religious or spiritual dimension, of its intrinsic nothingness. But it also opens the way to the freedom of the "creative nothingness" developed by such "active" nihilists as Nietzsche, Stirner, and Sartre, a freedom that becomes possible once one has been delivered from the "passive nihilism" of dethroned values like the Platonic over-world and the Christian God.

But more fundamentally, as Heidegger already sensed, the consciousness of nihility provides an occasion to realize a greater dimension of ontological awareness: nothingness as the truth of being as such (*Wahrheit des Seins*). Nihility then opens the way to the "great doubt" (***daigi*** 大疑) of Buddhism, through which the self-centered ego (***jiga*** 自我) may be transcended to reach the dimension of the authentic self (***jiko***) via a process of negating (or, stated more positively, of emptying) the ego. What this implies is the negation of nihility (***kyomu***) by emptiness (Jap. ***kū*** 空, San. *śūnyatā*). Once emptied of the ego, one can become receptive to the higher wisdom (Jap. ***daichi*** 大智, San. ***maha-prajnā***) and compassion (***daihi*** 大悲; ***maha-karuna***) of the authentic "selfless self." From this standpoint it becomes possible to realize the "suchness" of the world and of every being within it. One perceives that all beings are mutually dependent upon one another, and that indeed it is because of this very interdependence that self and other exist. The self-emptying of the one makes it a servant of the other, and the self-emptying of the other makes it a servant of the one. This is what Nishitani calls the circuminsessional interpenetration of every being.

Such is the standpoint of emptiness, where egocentrism—be it the metaphysical egocentrism of modern Cartesian-theoretical subjectivity or the political egocentrism of collective ethnocentrism (nationalistic or religious)—is finally overcome. In this stress on the transcendence of egocentrism Nishitani offers an implicit criticism of the theoretical speculation that has dominated modern ontology (up to the point of political misjudgment) and of all types of nationalism and imperialism, fascism included. Compassion is thus extended to the degree where absolute respect for the other (individually or collectively) becomes fundamental, which is the meaning of authentic

humanism[20] and the first step towards the democratic ideal. Nishitani writes:

> In the circumincessional relationship a field can be opened on which contradictory standpoints—where the other is seen as telos, and where the self is seen as telos; where the self serves others and makes itself a nothingness, and where the self remains forever the self itself—are both radicalized precisely by virtue of their being totally one. It is the field of the "knowing of non-knowing" that we spoke of as no different from the "being" itself of things themselves. It is also the field of absolute freedom. (NISHITANI 1982, p. 284)

Abbreviation

NKC *Nishitani Keiji Chosakushū* 西谷啓治著作集 [Selected works of Nishitani Keiji], 26 vols. Tokyo: Sōbunsha, 1987–95.

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[20] I would agree, however, that the classical definition of humanism is not sufficient. One step in the direction of a deeper and richer concept of humanism would be to clarify our very understanding of human existence with the help of Japanese notions of ***ningen*** 人間, such as that proposed by Watsuji Tetsurō in his *Rinrigaku* [Ethics] (trans. YAMAMOTO and CARTER 1996).

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The Circle Play
Nishitani and Hegel

KEN KADOWAKI

We're captive on the carousel of time
We can't return
We can only look behind
From where we came
And go round and round and round in the circle game

(*The Circle Game*, by Joni Mitchell)

IN HIS LATER TREATISE "Hannya to risei" 般若と理性 [Prajñā and reason] (1979) Nishitani examines and criticizes Hegel's standpoint of reason or logos. His critique, however, seems aimed not only at Hegel but at himself as well. By criticizing Hegel, who brought the philosophy of reason to completion, Nishitani seems to be attempting to transcend a predilection toward reason in himself and to confirm his standpoint of *śūnyatā*.

"Hannya to risei" is made up of seven chapters: 1) "Shōkaku, hannya no seikatsu" 正覚·般若の生活 [The activity of prajñā]; 2) "Hannya no rihōsei" 般若の理法性 [The logos of *prajñā*]; 3) "Risei no mondai to sono haikei" 理性の問題とその背景 [The problem of reason and the background of this problem]; 4) "Heigeru tetsugaku ni okeru benshōhō to risei" ヘーゲル哲学における弁証法と理性 [Dialectic and reason in the philosophy of Hegel]; 5) "Shibenteki risei ni tsuite" 思弁的理性に就いて [Concerning speculative reason]; 6) "Noesis Noeseos"; and 7) "Zettai hiteisei to shite no kū" 絶対否是性としての空 [*Śūnyatā* as absolute negation]. These chapters seem to form a kind of conceptual circle. If considered as a way of thought that begins with *prajñā* and ends with *śūnyatā*, a process of what we might call "*prajñā* thinking" would be involved. The involvement of such a process would put it in basically the same category as Hegel's thought, which begins with being and ends with the negation of negation, thus comprising a circle of thinking.

It is only at first glance, however, that Nishitani in this treatise appears to begin with the being of *prajñā* and to end—through logos, the negation of *prajñā*—with *śūnyatā*, the negation of logos. In Nishitani's thought *prajñā* never has being and *śūnyatā* never has a process. It is *theoria*, observation, that needs being, since *theoria* can be *theoria* only when it has being as an object. *Theoria* creates a process of thinking through the pursuit of objective truth—logos or reason. *Prajñā*, on the contrary, has no object in any sense of the word, nor has it any subject. *Prajñā* is truth as such, without object and subject. It is a type of direct intuition, and can only be discovered in *śūnyatā*. Because *śūnyatā* is a place of intuition, it needs no process. If so, why did Nishitani write this treatise, which seems, as noted above, to form a conceptual circle?

Two Fingers

In the first chapter of "Prajñā and Reason" Nishitani introduces two koans. The first is "[The Buddha] holds a flower and [Mahākāśyapa] smiles." One day Śākyamuni stood in front of the assembly and simply held up a flower. No one reacted except Mahākāśyapa, who broke out in a smile. At this the Buddha said,

> I possess the True Dharma Eye, the Marvelous Mind of Nirvana, the True Form of the Formless, the Subtle Dharma Gate that does not rest on words and letters but is a special transmission outside the scriptures. This I entrust to Mahākāśyapa. (DUMOULIN 1988, p. 9)

This represents living *prajñā*. The second koan is "Nan Ch'uan's flower."

> As the officer Lu Hsuan was talking to Nan Ch'uan, he said, "Master of the Teachings Chao said, 'Heaven, earth, and I have the same root; myriad things and I are one body.' This is quite marvelous."
>
> Nan Ch'uan pointed to a flower in the garden. He called to the officer and said, "People these days see this flower as a dream." (CLEARY and CLEARY 1977, p. 292)

Lu Hsuan realizes the truth that he and the universe are one, but from this standpoint he dwells in a world of idealistic truth and is unable to see a flower

as it really is, a flower as such. He is not in the real world, but in a dream world of ideas. Thereupon Nan Ch'uan points to a flower with his finger. What does this action mean? Nishitani says,

> To point is to mark distance, to create a separation. It destroys the standpoint of unity of self and universal truth. This action of pointing negates all passive dwelling in the Dharma-body, in the realm where the self and the Buddha are one. (*NKC* 13:38)

Nan Chuan's pointing thus shatters Lu Hsuan's idealistic dream-world. Where then is Lu Hsuan? Nishitani continues,

> But at the same time the pointing also links the flower and the Self in a straight line that cannot be severed by anything. The distance created by the pointing, by clarifying this connection, also removes every type of gap. To open distance is to erase all discontinuity. (*NKC* 13:38)

By the very action of pointing, an action that opens a distance between the self and the flower, the self is able to stand in the real world where a flower is as it is. Pointing destroys the idealistic world, the standpoint of *theoria*, and at the same time (and with the same finger) lets the real world, the realm of *śūnyatā*, emerge.

In this way, direct pointing opens the way to the standpoint of *śūnyatā*. To this extent "Prajñā and Reason" has no need of the chapters between the first and the last. What, then, was Nishitani attempting to convey in these middle sections?

In the second chapter Nishitani mentions another finger famous in Zen, the finger that points at the moon. This finger is compared to the light of the moon. Because the light of the moon and the moon itself cannot be separated, people are unable look at the moon as such—the moon, in a sense, is hidden behind its own light. Here the moonlight can be said to represent the human intellect. The intellect attempts to use its own light to illuminate the logos of a fact, but it does not look toward the source of intellect, that is, toward the moon as such. The intellect cannot see the truth as such—even when developed to its highest limits, it is incapable of transcending its own standpoint, the standpoint of *theoria*. In the middle chapters of this treatise Nishitani traces the development of the European intellect to its extreme expression, which he identifies as Hegel's *noesis noeseos*, the standpoint of Hegel's

absolute knowledge, the absolute knowing of the fact of knowing. It is true that this standpoint transcends the standpoint of knowing something as an object, but it remains at the level of knowing knowing itself, and thus at the level of thought. The character of *theoria*, "zuschauen," is such that it cannot escape this standpoint.

Here Nishitani suggests the approach of *docta ignorantia*. But he himself turns to *prajñā*, direct intuition, and develops no further the process that culminated in *noesis noeseos*. From this ultimate development of *theoria* he returns at a single bound, as it were, to his standpoint of *śūnyatā*. This change of direction clears the process to that final point. Was it in vain, then, that Nishitani pursued to its ultimate the European logos? It might be said that in this treatise Nishitani demonstrates the meaninglessness of the European logos, but he would respond that the standpoint of *śūnyatā* is fundamentally different in direction from that of logos (though, as Nishitani points out in the second chapter of this work, there is always the danger that *prajñā* itself will take the direction of logos). To return to our original image, Nishitani does not adhere to the finger pointing at the moon, but attempts to enter the moon itself, truth as such.

Consequently, the standpoint of *śūnyatā* has no process and constructs no circle. Certainly this standpoint is expressed in the form of a circle, but this circle is only a symbol of the infinity of *śūnyatā* and does not represent a train of thought.

The Circle as a Play

As viewed from Nishitani's standpoint of *śūnyatā*, Hegel's logos-based endeavor takes a wrong direction at its very start. Hegel's starting point, Nishitani says, is not nothingness but a being. Is this true?

In the "Einleiting" of his *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, Hegel says "dass das Absolute allein wahr oder das Wahre allein absolut ist" (HEGEL 1970, p. 70). It is true that "das Absolute" is a being, as Nishitani says. However, is not Hegel's starting point expressed in the entire sentence, not just in the two words "das Absolute"? Cannot this "starting point" be seen as a kind of direct intuition? Since nothing begins there it does not really comprise a starting point, and no being could be present there—it is only because this intuition is expressed in terms of a subject-object structure and forms a process of thinking, a circle of *theoria*, that it can be said to be a starting point. The

human intellect cannot remain there in this intuition, however, because it is compelled to pursue something certain. This compulsion, Nishitani says, is the karma of humanity, and it splits this direct truth into subject and object—into, that is, the pointing finger and the moon. Nishitani's standpoint transcends this karma, but Hegel takes it in and attempts to transcend it by utilizing the karma itself. This endeavor gives rise to the process of logos, that is, to science. And it is performed by Hegel as "der sich vollbringende Skeptizismus" (HEGEL 1970, p. 72). This skepticism doubts the certainty not only of the object but also of itself. And this way of doubt leads to the *Verzweiflung*. Hegel says in the last chapter of *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, "Das Wissen kennt nicht nur sich, sondern auch das Negative seiner selbst oder seine Grenze. Seine Grenze wissen heisst, sich aufzuopfern wissen" (HEGEL 1970, p. 590).

At the ultimate point of the process of logos, logos encounters its limit. Then subject jumps into the first truth and the process of logos becomes a circle. The subject, "das Wissen," does not forget itself, but "weiss sich aufzuopfern. Sich aufzuopfern" is to throw the self as a thing into reality. But this thing does not only play innocently like a child—"das Wissen," which "weiss sich aufzuopfern," also observes the thing itself like a spectator or a director. *Wissen* has a dual viewpoint, as if it were a player or a dancer on the stage. It may be said that this duality contains a kind of a contradiction, but it is this contradiction that transforms mere skepticism into that which doubts itself. The swing of the skepticism between object and subject creates a rhythm of "spekulativ Denken." Hegel says in the "Vorrede" of *Phänomenologie des Geistes*,

> In dieser Natur dessen, was ist, in seinem Sein sein Begriff zu sein, ist es, dass überhaupt die *logische Notwendigkeit* besthet; sie allein ist das Vernünftige und der Ryhthmus des organischen Ganzen, sie ist ebensoseher Wissen des Inhalts, als der Inhalt Begriff und Wesen ist,—oder sie allein ist das *Speklative* (HEGEL 1970, p. 54–55)

It is this rhythm that informs Hegel's "dance before a rose," and that permeates *Phänomenologie des Geistes*. The process of this rhythm is a play—not the play of children but that of actors on a stage. Certainly the result of the play is quite important, but it cannot come about without the process. Hegel says, "Dass die Darstellung des nicht wahrhaften Bewusstseins in seiner Unwahrheit nicht eine bloss negative Bewegung ist" (HEGEL 1970, p. 73).

Ordinary skepticism would throw this *Unwahrheit* into *Nichts*, because such skepticism does not doubt itself. Skepticism that doubts itself, however, doubts this *Unwahrheit* as such. It follows the pursuit of certainty to its end and confirms that it (human reason) has no certainty, then constructs a system of constant self-criticism.

Humanism

Nishitani critiques Hegel's standpoint for its humanism. For Nishitani, humanism is a continuation of ego, that is, of anthrocentrism. Science with its pursuit of certainty is the expression of this humanism, because whatever certainty it discovers is "certain" only from the human perspective. And at its origin, where ***humana scientia*** decides its course toward certainty, it already sets out in the wrong direction. It is in this sense that the process created by science is negated by Nishitani. For Nishitani, it is not possible for the process to form a play—a true play can only be performed in *śūnyatā*, where the self is forgotten. Then it is a beautiful and innocent play, as though performed in the Garden of Eden. It is innocent because it never aims at certainty. Because of our desire for knowledge, however, we have fallen into original sin and have become human.

Nishitani says that original sin can be transcended only through faith. Is it possible, though, to discern this sin through knowledge? Knowledge, of course, is only illuminated by truth and is not the truth itself—it is, in other words, only a finger pointing at the moon of truth. But as long as humans are human, knowledge cannot be transcended. This is our karma as human beings. The self-consciousness of this karma is the absolute knowledge of Hegel, which of necessity has before its eyes the eternal wisdom of God. Hegel's dialectic is fundamentally a dialog between God and a human being; he would never attempt to transcend the human standpoint as illuminated by God, because man can never escape this real world.

Nishitani, on the other hand, does attempt to transcend the human standpoint because his goal is to perceive reality as it is. This reality need not incorporate all of history or all of the world—a little flower contains the whole of reality, and an innocent child's play expresses the truth of the entire cosmos. If there exists a human standpoint that negates this beautiful reality, then, as Nishitani says, that standpoint has been headed in the wrong direction right from its very start. Nishitani's standpoint of *śūnyatā* would transcend all conflicts, for it "does not include the standpoint of 'other' in any sense" (*NKC* 13:46). But when he stands in the human world and deals with human science, he must involve himself to all kinds of opposition (as when, in "Prajñā and Reason," he takes a position against Hegel).

When Nishitani uses the term "standpoint," it generally indicates the *tokoro* (場, place) of *śūnyatā*, but at the same time it refers to the standpoint of Nishitani himself. Nishitani understood this, and the strong self-awareness seen in his work comes from his realization that his standpoint was in opposition to those of most other thinkers (including Hegel's human standpoint). One recognizes the truth in Nishitani's position, but the problem remains as to how one might critique other standpoints from the standpoint of *śūnyatā*. Though Nishitani would not claim that he wishes to conduct such criticism, he is drawn to do so by the human condition in which people do not even try to understand the standpoint of *śūnyatā*.

This situation is in a way quite tragic for Nishitani. While reciting the ***haiku*** of Bashō, for example, he seems as happy as a child innocently at play. But has human karma brought us to the point that we cannot return to *śūnyatā*? *Śūnyatā* as a principle of critique is valid, but it is bound to be opposed to the usual human outlook when it reveals the meaninglessness of the process of human logos.

In order to transcend this opposition, might not Nishitani need Hegel's principle of negation, which negates and at the same time retains? In this way, the critique of Hegel in Nishitani's treatise might include Hegel's standpoint, and thus find completion as the circle of a play.

Abbreviation

NKC *Nishitani Keiji Chosakushū* 西谷啓治著作集 [Selected works of Nishitani Keiji], 26 vols. Tokyo: Sōbunsha, 1987–95.

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Emptiness Thought and the Concept of the Pure Land in Nishitani

In the Light of Imagination and Body

HASE SHŌTŌ

Two Problems Concerning Emptiness

WHEN CONSIDERING THE CONTRIBUTIONS of Nishitani Keiji to the study of religion, we might first of all mention that he brought to light the possibilities of "emptiness thought" in the present age. His originality as a religious thinker lies in this breathing of new life into the emptiness thought that constitutes the core of Mahāyāna Buddhism, and thus rendering it possible for us too to sense the living pulse of that thought. And if asked what enabled Nishitani to arrive at this creative interpretation of emptiness thought, we might say that he possessed a particularly sharp sense for the problems inherent in the contemporary age, and that he sought for a way to solve these problems in an existential manner. This search may be seen in the manner in which Nishitani approaches emptiness thought.

Roughly speaking, Nishitani pursues emptiness thought in connection with two problems: that of nihilism and that of imagination (***kōsōryoku*** 講想力). Nishitani saw nihilism as the central problem of contemporary society; imagination he regarded as the key to understanding contemporary man. Both problems touch the core of the problem when it comes to understanding the contemporary situation and the condition of humanity within it.

The problems of nihilism and emptiness were central in Nishitani's early and middle periods, as is clear from the fact that they form the central theme of his main work, ***Shūkyō to wa nanika*** 宗教とは何か [What is Religion?] (1961; translated into English as *Religion and Nothingness* [NISHITANI

1982]). The problem of imagination, however, is nowhere treated in a thematic and systematic way. One might therefore think it unjustified to regard it as an important aspect of his thought on emptiness. However, it is a fact that from early on and into his later years Nishitani continually showed a deep interest in the working of the imagination as the fountainhead of all human knowledge. And in his later years Nishitani's treatment of emptiness thought was profoundly related to the problem of the imagination, with the root of the relationship between imagination and emptiness revealing itself in what might be called "emptiness within sentiment" (Jap. *jōi ni okeru kū* 情意における空, "*śūnyatā* manifesting in *jōi*" [emotion, sentiment, or sensibility]).

I do not wish here to go into the relationship between emptiness and nihilism in Nishitani's thought, since I have considered the matter before (HASE 1996). Instead, I would like to concentrate on Nishitani's later thought on the relation between imagination and emptiness. To state my conclusion in advance: in the thought of Nishitani's later years there appears an element that differs from his thought in the early and middle "nihilistic" periods. Here, alongside emptiness, one finds another major pattern of transcendence—namely, "transcendence in the earth" (*do ni okeru chōetsu* 土における超越), a transcendence finding form in what he called the Buddha Realm (*Bukkokudo* 仏国土), the Pure Land (*Jōdo* 浄土), and also the Kingdom of God. What does this signify? What kind of problems might have steered Nishitani's thought in this direction?

We must remember that by his later years the dual aspects of the emptiness problem—namely, nihilism and imagination—had already given rise to differences in nuance in the direction of Nishitani's thought. Therefore I had better start my reflections there, before tackling the question of "transcendence in the earth."

Nishitani's investigation of emptiness basically circles around the meaning of reality, which he questions in his thought both on nihilism and on imagination. However, the angle from which the question is posed differs in the two cases. Nihilism is the experience of a meaninglessness wherein all reality is lost. Nishitani then saw emptiness as the "place" (*ba* 場) in which nihility is overcome; emptiness is the place where all things appear (*ereignen*) in their reality. But the nature of emptiness as the place of reality does not mean that in it there appear new meanings and values transcending nihility—what it means is a penetration to the bottom of nihility and a breaking through of this bottom. For example, the situation presented in the world of Zen as "no

Dharma in the three worlds; where then to look for the heart?" can be said to be a nihilistic situation; according to Nishitani, however, the turn-about from nihility to emptiness lies precisely in regarding the heart as the very Dharma-lessness in which the heart is nowhere to be found.

Positively speaking, there is nothing to distinguish emptiness from the nihility of nihilism. What is found there is only a turn-about of 360 degrees. The difference lies in the fact that what tormented the heart in nihilism no longer causes vexation in emptiness. But precisely therein appears a basic difference in the quality of reality.

What does it mean, however, to say that in emptiness all becomes reality? Nishitani explains the turn-about from nihility to emptiness by way of the notion of "image." To say that in emptiness all becomes reality means that in emptiness all becomes image. In the fact of becoming an image a thing appears in its reality—this is implied in the saying "the bird flies, just as a bird." Therein the world of images is more real than reality. In his later years Nishitani expresses this world of images using the aforementioned phrase "emptiness in sentiment." The fact of emptiness being reflected in our sentiment is called "image." From this perspective emptiness shows a somewhat different face. The emptiness that opens up when nihility is transcended in the realm of nihility now descends to our level and is reflected in our sentiments. To speak in Buddhist terms (used in connection with the Tathāgata), the emptiness that, in the context of nihilism, was "thus gone" now appears on the scene as "thus come" (*nyorai* 如来).

This delicate transition from an emptiness that has overcome nihilism to an emptiness that is reflected in sentiment can also be expressed—using a phrase coined by Ueda Shizuteru—as "the smell of the open sky making itself felt in the midst of the sorrow of nihility" (UEDA 1996, p. 290). It is this "smell of the open sky" that colors Nishitani's later thought on emptiness. Here the emptiness that through the overcoming of nihility had aimed at the open sky, where no humans dwell, descends into the human world (that is, the world of sentiment), and there discovers the open sky. The Nishitani who, in the context of nihilism, had attained immediate contact with emptiness as he stood on the peak of a mountain range high in the heavens, has now, in the context of imagination, come down to the foothills of that range. But the imagination has a still broader scope: the image descends from the level of sentiment to the level of the body wherein it has its roots, and the body, in turn, connects with the earth that forms the body's foundation.

Here, in the place of the "transcendence in emptiness," there opens up the realm of "transcendence in the earth," such as is spoken of in Buddhism as the Buddha Realm or Pure Land and in Christianity as the Kingdom of God. In his quest for a solution of the problem of nihilism Nishitani was led to a creative contemporary interpretation of the concept of emptiness, and, by linking this concept with the problem of the imagination, he came in touch with the questions of the body and the earth, and was led thereby to investigate the contemporary possibilities of the Pure Land concept. It was in his lectures at Ōtani University that Nishitani investigated the various problems of the philosophy of religion from this angle. I now wish to seek a foundation for the concept of the Pure Land, thereby focusing on the problems of the imagination, the body, and the earth, which had become the center of Nishitani's later thought.

Concepts such as the "Kingdom of God" and the "Pure Land" have in the present intellectual climate become largely moribund and bereft of any relevance. Tillich states that among all religious concepts that of faith is the most difficult to grasp, stained as it is by distortion and misunderstanding. The concept of the Pure Land, however, is not only difficult to grasp but is also largely without meaning—it has become something floating in the air without any foundation in present reality. Therefore, before the concept of the Pure Land can contribute to the salvation of people the concept itself stands in need of salvation.

So what can we do to save the idea of the Pure Land? Nishitani says that we have to consider the concept from as wide a perspective as possible. We should first recognize that the problems relating to the Pure Land concept apply equally to the concept of the Buddha Realm in general Buddhism and the Kingdom of God in Christianity. It is also necessary to consider the concept in conjunction with that of the Other World. Even this does not suffice, however—we must ask what the Pure Land can mean in the present, as opposed to what it might have meant in the past. Nishitani also says that our inquiry will be insufficient if we do not question the concept in light of the pain and pathos of life.

Earlier I noted that in his later years Nishitani rethought his standpoint of emptiness in connection with the problem of the imagination and was led thereby to consider the problems of the body and the earth. Indeed, the place where emptiness, imagination, body, and earth interconnect and interact constitutes the place where the later Nishitani carried out his investigations;

Nishitani tried to express this place of interconnection with the term ***jinen hōni*** 自然法爾 (naturalness, spontaneity). We can say that it is on this point that Nishitani's thinking is turned to the matter forming the foundation of the Pure Land concept. It is from that angle that I now wish to examine Nishitani's ideas about imagination, body, and earth.

Image and Body

As mentioned above, Nishitani never dealt with the problem of the imagination in a systematic way. However, from his early days onwards he showed a deep interest in the working and significance of the imaginative power that serves as the fountainhead of cognition in the human mind. It is in a late essay entitled "Kū to soku" 空と即 [*Śūnyatā* and nonduality] (1982) that Nishitani first treats the problem of the imagination, which is dealt with as "emptiness in sentiment," that is, the world of images. Nishitani regards images as the reality wherein "things" (color/form) and the cognition (understanding) of things are one, and suggests that therein lies what could be called a "primordial awareness" inherent to human existence. This is the reason why the imagination was so important for Nishitani, who wished to pursue the idea of emptiness as a problem of self-awareness.

In the imagination a "thing" and "the understanding of the thing" are one. When we hear the voice of a cicada we know it is a cicada, and when we hear the voice of a bird we know it is a bird, indicating that, at the bottom of this knowing, we have the image of a cicada or bird. When we hear the chirping of a cicada we simultaneously receive, in the hearing of the sense organ, the image of a cicada. In this image we grasp the chirping as that of a cicada. In this way, all of the realities and events that we encounter in this world contain, as at one with them, an image that serves as a germ. "The image as image itself showing its specific shape" means, according to Nishitani, to really know a reality from its inside. At the ground of all sensation or understanding there is the working of such an imagination.

In ***Arisutoteresu ronkō*** アリストテレス論考 [Aristotelian studies], a relatively early work, Nishitani understands the working of the imagination as that of a "common sensibility" (in the Aristotelian sense). This "common sense" works at one with the five senses, yet, as their common ground, it transcends them and cannot be perceived by them. The functioning of the imagination

may also be regarded as an "unveiling" in which things and the self are simultaneously illuminated and from which all of the various higher workings of the intellect develop. In this work Nishitani analyses and describes that process, attempting to understand the highest workings of the intellect by going back to sensation as their foundation. His later article "Emptiness and Nonduality" then reconsiders the "primordial awakening" contained in the imagination in light of "emptiness," and defines the imagination as that wherein emptiness is reflected (transferred) into the innermost feelings of the human being, or again, as "emptiness reflected in sentiment." The coming down of this emptiness (or "open sky") from the heavens and its reflection in things and in our minds is here understood in terms of the world of images. Nishitani then writes the following:

> In Japanese and Chinese literature emptiness appears with various nuances of meaning. The particularity in our case is the point that emptiness appears within all the sensations, perceptions, feelings, and moods of our daily lives as the element that determines them. Here, emptiness is what imparts to all sensible and affective stirrings their idiosyncratic particularity. What kind of thing would such a sensible and affective emptiness be? (*NKC* 13:117)

"Emptiness and Nonduality" is short but, in my opinion, extremely important, since it contains the crystallization of Nishitani's lifelong thinking on the problem of the imagination. In it he pursues the working of the imagination from two directions.

The first direction is that of emptiness becoming image ("image-ination"), the process we earlier referred to as "the point where emptiness reflects itself into sentiment." What Nishitani calls here the "becoming image" of emptiness refers to the descent of emptiness—the formless transcendent principle—into the world we live in and its revealing itself there as image. Here "image" possesses a twofold significance in that, though present in our world, it reflects something that transcends us. The image, in other words, may be seen to have its origin in emptiness.

The second direction from which Nishitani understands imagination is that which he calls "the becoming transparent (the diaphanation, *tōmeika* 透明化) of being." It is this direction that is most significant for our endeavor to connect the problem of the imagination with that of the Pure Land. "The becoming transparent of being" indicates the process by which images—at

one with all realities and events and contained in them in germinal form—show their true form as images and reveal themselves as that which illuminate these realities and beings from the inside and make them transparent. Nishitani calls this direction "the transition of a reality from its reality to its image," and explains this as follows (the passage is rather difficult to understand, but let me quote it anyway):

> When a reality appears (*ereignet*) as reality, i.e., at the primordial point where it is "given," it is given as a stubborn reality. Consequently, there is no other way of approaching it than experiencing it from within itself. But what would it mean, exactly, to return to the primordial point of a reality and to see it from within itself?.... To see a reality from within itself is linked to the fact of the "front," that which could be called the native "site of being" of the reality opening up.... Between "being" and the "site" of being there exists a relationship of identity but at the same time one of displacement. This means that the "inner scenery" lying within being comes to be displayed. This is the foundation of seeing reality itself from its inside. This displacement means basically a transition from the reality of a reality to its image. Or, rather, the fact that, within the reality, the image which is one with it comes to show its proper form as image. Or again, that the power which, as common sense, dwells within every one of the senses, comes to appear as the power of imagination. (*NKC* 13:140)

Thus Nishitani explains the activity of "diaphanation" in imagination as "the transition from the reality of a reality to its image," or as "the fact that, within the reality, the image which is at one with it comes to reveal its proper form as image." In contrast to the first direction, where emptiness descends as image into human sentiment, here image awakens as image from within reality. This means that the image forms a unity with reality and being—in other words, that the image has its roots in the opaque body. In the image these two directions—"the imagination of emptiness" and the "diaphanation of being"—overlap. The image finds its place in the zone where the skyward direction (emptiness) and the bodyward direction converge, and it delineates the frontiers of both. The fact that the image has its roots in the body means that the brightness of the image illuminates the body from within and makes it transparent. Therein the "world" opens up, and this world is the place

wherein emptiness is reflected. In "Emptiness and Nonduality," Nishitani, while viewing imagination as "emptiness in sentiment," pays attention to both sources of the image.

The direction I wish to focus on now is that of diaphanation, since it shows that imagination has deep roots in both the unconscious and the corporeal. When investigating imagination from this perspective the problem of the body inevitably arises. In fact, from early on Nishitani showed deep insight into the bodily origin of imagination. For instance, in a short essay entitled "Kyōto zakkan" 京都雑感 [Miscellaneous feelings about Kyoto], he speaks of "the association of representations," which, having its roots in something that predates consciousness, forms the fountainhead of all poetry. He locates the origin of the arts in the formative activity of imagination, which appears as "incarnational fantasy" from the wellsprings of life itself. The body from which the imagination arises is not the material body that we can see and touch, but the invisible body that forms the basis of the self's existence and the foundation of all knowledge of self and things. It contains not only natural reality but also historical reality, and it forms the root source of self-awareness. This body, which is the true basis of cognition, is not something separate from the material body, but is another body that is hidden by the material body. To clarify the meaning and structure of this body became one of Nishitani's main objectives in his later years.

Body and Earth

In another short essay, entitled "Meshi o kutta keiken" 飯を食った経験 [The experience of having eaten rice], Nishitani discusses an experience that occasioned his awareness of the body's importance as the root source of self-awareness. Nishitani relates his experience of eating rice after a long period of having nothing but Western food during his studies in Europe, and finding that the rice was unbelievably delicious. The tastiness of the meal was not something that could be graded on a scale of "tasty" to "tasteless," but was an unconditioned, absolute tastiness, a certainty of tastiness that could not be experienced without a body. He goes on to say that it was an experience that went beyond mere taste and shook his whole body, an experience that, in a bodily sensation, touched the very foundation of the existence of his self. Nishitani then goes on to relate how this experience led him to consider the earth wherein the body is located:

> Furthermore, this experience made me reflect on the meaning of "one's country." "One's country" means basically the inseparable connectedness of soil and human being, especially human being as a body. It is "the nonduality of soil and body" of which Buddhism speaks. In my case, "one's country" is the "Land of Vigorous Rice Plants": a soil fit for rice and a people that has found the mainstay of its livelihood in rice cultivation. From age to age my ancestors have made rice their staple food. The elements that compose the soil of Japan have become the elements of the rice characteristic of Japan, and have passed into the blood of my ancestors through their eating of the rice. This blood flows also in my body. The vital link that since time immemorial has bound together the rice, the soil, and the innumerable people that are my ancestors forms the background of my life, and actually comprises my life. For a long time I had forgotten about that link, but this experience brought it forcefully back to me. (*NKC* 20:202)

Many expressions in the Japanese language attest to the fact that since times of old there has in Japan been an awareness of the important part the body plays in obtaining certain kinds of knowledge. There are words such as ***etoku*** 会得, ***tainin*** 体認, and ***taiken*** 体験, and also phrases like ***mi ni tsuku*** 身につく (to learn something physically; lit., "to stick to one's body"), ***mi ni oboe ga aru*** 身に覚えがある (have a bodily remembrance), ***mi ni tsumasareru*** 身につまされる (feel it in one's bones), etc. Such expressions denote an awareness that the process of knowing something involves a penetration to the depths of one's existence, where the knowledge lives and functions through the body. Much painstaking effort has been devoted in the fields of science and medicine (and also today in the field of "life science") to investigating the material aspects of the body and its organs, but more important might be the investigation of those aspects that escape scientific analysis—that is, to the body as the place where reality is grasped, to the body as the foundation of self-awareness. This body is one with the self and can never become the object of objective observation. In philosophy and religion—especially religion—it is this meaning of the body that is of utmost importance, since issues like salvation, healing, and the transformation of the self's way of being make little sense if one does not take the human being as a corporeal reality.

In his thematic treatment of this subject in his Ōtani lectures Nishitani located the foundation of "being alive" in the body. The body is a material

thing, but the point of difference with the merely material lies in its being a living material thing, an animate thing. Without something beyond the material, *a* + (), the significance of the body does not emerge. This + () is the fact of being alive. But what is it to be a living being? The character of a living being is its possession of a "self"—in other words, its maintenance of a distinct identity while relating to other beings. To be alive means to possess such a "self." Human beings are in the world not in isolation but in relationship with all kinds of other things in the world—they breathe air, drink water, ingest food, deal with other people, and live in the context of all kinds of cultural-historical realities. What lies at the basis of these interrelationships is the body as a self. The I as ego has the body-as-self at its foundations and originates against that background.

The body-as-self cannot be grasped objectively. According to Nishitani, the fact of this "non-objectivity" does not mean that I and the world of nature exist apart from one another as different points of focus, but that both converge in the body and that there the demarcation line between the two becomes transparent. It is a matter of the world ceasing to be an object over against me with its own focal point. My focal point and that of the world overlap, with the world becoming a great "self" and my self too being simultaneously conceived from there. Nishitani describes this as "the primal point in which the body exists nonobjectively, the basic point where the entire natural world is linked into one," and writes:

> It is the fact of the primal point of the world and the primal point of our existence converging into one, becoming continuous in, as it were, a transparent form. What I mean by transparency is the fact that life of all kinds originates there.... Speaking from the standpoint of the self itself, it is a duality that is still one. I call this "transparent," in the sense that no border lines or partitions are present there. For that reason it is alive. For the self to be alive means that life flows or breathes in this type of great nature, in this place without partitions. At the very source of the life of the self there lies something like such a place, a place wherein the focal point of the world and the focal point of the self overlap into one. (*NKC* 24:95) 6372-3

Nishitani thus says that the fact of being alive lies in the partition between the world and the self becoming transparent, and in the life streaming there coming to be felt in the body. He describes the perception of the "life flowing at the point where the partition has become transparent" in the following way:

> Let us take an example that everybody has experienced: the sun rising or the moon coming up when you stand at the seashore. When you look carefully, the light of the sun or moon seems to stream directly towards one, like gold or silver snaking its way across the surface.... This is only natural. Since the self is that which sees, the sun (owing to the relationship between eye and light) appears to come towards the seeing self.... Anyway, at such a time, although one cannot call the sun one's own, neither can the sun be separated from the self. In other words, when seeing a sunrise, one experiences the sun illuminating only oneself.... The sun is directed nowhere else, but only towards the self. The sun's inseparability from the self, the sun's illumination of the self alone—there is indeed something like this in the self's way of being. The sun shines in the direction of the person who sees it, and in this sense it is the sun of that one person alone. If there is no point at which the sun is the sun only of the seeing self, the fact of seeing does not obtain. Since seeing the light of the sun consists of sensing the light of the sun with one's eyes, vision cannot take place without something like this occurring. Therefore, as long as there is seeing, there is a way of being wherein the sun is one's own or the sun illuminates only oneself.... In a word, the fact that the sun shines obtains in the fact that the self exists. (*NKC* 24:385)

The Body, Ecology, and the Concept of the Pure Land

In his later years Nishitani turned from the problem of emptiness to the question of nature and the soil. This relates to the fact that he gradually came to pay more attention to the human being as a bodily existence. Prior to its existence as an ego the human being exists as a corporeal being, and it is on the basis of this corporeality that the ego itself exists. At this point the problem of transcendence comes to concern the earth rather than emptiness.

It is at the point where earth and nature become the locus of transcendence that the notions of the Pure Land and the Kingdom of God take on meaning. In the Pure Land and the Kingdom of God, salvation and tran-

scendence necessarily deal with the human being as a bodily existence. Salvation means that something nourishing to the human being is at work in the very ground of the self, just as food sustains the body. The state in which there is a reality at work that nourishes human existence at its very source is called the Pure Land or the Kingdom of God. Just as plants grow only when air, water, and light are available, so too humans can live, grow, and work only in a place where they are touched and penetrated by the force referred to by such names as the Primal Vow of Amida Buddha and the love of God. This force is the form that the Tathāgata-as-emptiness takes on in its contact with man-as-bodily-existence. It is like the light of the sun nurturing living beings through its transformation into warmth. To use Nishitani's expression, this force can also be called "emptiness reflected in sentiment." The Primal Vow of Amida and the love of God are encountered in sentiment.

But why are the Primal Vow of Amida and the love of God said to be matters of faith? It is because these realities are encountered and received as images in the inner depths of human existence. The nature of faith lies in the fact that images appear more real than reality—faith is the conviction that in its depths human existence is linked to an invisible truth. Therefore we can conceive of faith as the most purified and interiorized working of the imagination in the depths of human existence.

In philosophy the problem of the body is given pride of place, especially by such people as Gabriel Marcel, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Paul Ricoeur, Emmanuel Levinas, and Michel-Henry in the French phenomenological school. The importance of the body in the thought of these scholars is related to the movement that arose in philosophy to look for the concrete source of knowledge rather than for the idealistic foundation that had been sought until then. Sensation, feeling, and emotion came to be evaluated, not as "lower faculties," but as things closer to the depths of human existence than reason and intellect. This led to a reevaluation of the body as the root source of knowledge.

Nishitani's basic interest lay in the search for the true basis of knowledge. When he sought to ground knowledge through a return to sensation (the knowledge inherent in things), he was faced with the problem of the body as a gate that had to be passed through. Though this is a problem he shared with the French phenomenologists, he sought a solution in a direction different from theirs. While the phenomenologists focused on the relation

between the body and the spirit, Nishitani inquired into the relationship of the body with the earth that forms its foundation. In this respect Nishitani was the more realistic of the two.

Important here is the understanding of reality implied in the notions of earth or soil. Soil signifies the basis of reality as such, wherefrom everything originates and whereto everything returns. The soil is the ground of existence of all living beings, human beings included. Plants, needless to say, cannot exist apart from the soil, but neither can animals. Even the birds in the air and the fish in the water belong basically to the soil. In a word, the soil comprises the source of being of living things, as the ground from which they arise and to which they return, in a tie-up with both life and death.

"Being alive," then, requires that the entity obtain a place in the soil wherein it is located; that it receive water, air, and nourishment from that soil to link it with what could be called the "web of life": and that the linkage of living being and soil become "transparent" in the body. One could say that Nishitani, by thus conceiving the problem of the body in terms of its connection with the earth, clarified the "philosophical basis" of the Pure Land or Buddha Realm as a place wherein human beings live.

Takeuchi Yoshinori maintains that in considering transcendence it is insufficient to view it in the context of the relationship between the human and the Transcendent. It must also be grasped in terms of a relationship between this world and the transcendent world, for a being cannot find rest without a place to exist in. To speak of something existing is already to imply its connection with a specific locale. Nishitani writes, "When a thing is said to be, the meaning of 'being in the world' is already included in the being itself of the thing," and he adds, "That a thing is means that it has obtained a place" (*NKC* 24:302). This is all the more true when it comes to "living." Take, for example, a plant. It will not grow except in a certain place and climate, meaning that it has an intimate connection with the place wherein it lives and that its very being is based on that connection.

The discipline of ecology focuses on the intimate link between a living thing and the place where it is located. Ecology pays close attention to the relationship of a certain living being both to various other plants and animals and to the environment (the conditions of soil and weather in which it exists). At the base of this enterprise lies the insight that living beings are intimately connected to their location and to the entire web of life, and that they are sustained and given life by this connection. Therein lies the significance

of ecology. In the science of ecology, nature is the place within which living beings exist. When, however, the connection of thing and place is pursued not only on the biological level but on the human cultural level, "earth" comes to take on a historical-social meaning as well.

It is at this point that the concept of "earth in religion" (the Pure Land) appears. The Buddha Realm and the Kingdom of God are gestalts wherein the "place" of a being takes on a quite concrete shape. Here the connection between a being and the place in which it is situated—a question taken up by ecology on the level of nature and biological life—is grasped in the inner depths of human existence.

What difference does it make, then, whether in religion the place where things are located—the place from which they originate and to which they return—is conceived of as "emptiness" or is conceived of as "earth"? First, while the nature of emptiness is such that in it all things disappear, the nature of earth is such that in it everything is preserved; earth is the place of memory. Second, earth is the place in which all things are nourished. Just as for a plant the earth is where it roots, grows, produces buds, and bears fruit, so too for humans the earth is where the self finds sustenance, grows, and bears fruit. And, just as the water and nutrients needed for the growth of a plant are provided in the soil, so the sustenance that penetrates into the inner depths of human existence and promotes its growth is supplied in the place referred to as the Pure Land or the Kingdom of God.

At the bottom of the concepts of the Pure Land and the Kingdom of God is an awareness of the human being as a bodily existence, a recognition of the fact that the spiritual as well as the physical dimensions live by breathing and taking in nourishment. For the spirit too is "body," and thus the laws at work in it are the same as those of the natural world. Shinran called the natural law at work in the Pure Land *jinen hōni*. This is the law whereby anyone who encounters in faith the transcendent light is assured without fail of obtaining unsurpassed nirvana. The same law is also at work in the place where God reigns. "The place where the single grain of wheat grows and brings forth fruit, for which the time of reaping is near" is called the Kingdom of God.

Nishitani pursued the question of the imagination, in which the above-mentioned two directions converge in the direction of the body, and from there devoted his later years to deep reflection on the matter of "transcendence in the earth." I believe that this theme, although not explicitly developed in any of Nishitani's works, represents, along with the logic of emptiness, a quite important current in Nishitani's thought.

Abbreviation

NKC *Nishitani Keiji Chosakushū* 西谷啓治著作集 [Selected works of Nishitani Keiji], 26 vols. Tokyo: Sōbunsha, 1987–95.

Referencess

HASE Shōtō
1996 Nishitani ni okeru nihirizumu no mondai to kū no tachiba 西谷におけるニヒリズムの問題と空の立場 [The problem of nihilism and the standpoint of emptiness]. *Daijō Zen* 857: 48–67.

NISHITANI Keiji
1982 *Religion and Nothingness.* Trans. by Jan Van Bragt. Berkeley: University of California Press.

UEDA Shizuteru
1996 *Shūkyō to hishūkyō no aida* [Between religion and nonreligion]. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten.

Resources for Ecological Thinking in the Philosophy of Nishitani Keiji

Graham Parkes

1

> "What is the indestructible Dharmakāya?" The master replied: "Flowers cover the mountainsides like brocade, the valley stream deepens into an indigo-hued pool. (*Hekiganroku,* case 82; cited by Nishitani in *Religion and Nothingness*, p. 190 [translation slightly modified])

In *Religion and Nothingness* Nishitani wrote that "the problem of religion and science is the most fundamental problem facing contemporary man" (Nishitani 1982, p. 46).[1] Almost forty years later the problem persists, with one aspect of it having attained the status of near-crisis in the contemporary world: increasing environmental devastation. I would like therefore to consider some aspects of religion and philosophy in a practical context, by looking at Nishitani's thoughts on nature in the light of their potential contribution to environmental issues. But first let me sketch some general background concerning "the problem of religion and science" as it relates to the field of ecology.

Although environmental problems now affect us on a global scale, discussion of them tends to be conducted in quite parochial terms. Current debates for the most part presuppose a worldview with its roots in Europe—a world-

[1] For an illuminating exposition of Nishitani's later ideas concerning nature, in a discussion of such notions as "earth," "soil," and "body," see the essay in this volume by Hase Shōtō entitled "Emptiness Thought and the Concept of the Pure Land in Nishitani: In the Light of Imagination and Body."

view deeply informed by the Platonic/Christian tradition as well as Cartesian philosophy and Newtonian science. Even though contemporary physics and biology are giving us a very different picture of the world from that envisaged by Newton and Descartes, the latter vision gave rise to modern technology, which has preserved the viability of this form of thought and extended it throughout most of the globe. Beliefs in the natural superiority of human beings and their right to dominate a supposedly soulless world stem from this religious and philosophical worldview, and they continue to condition—in less arrogant guise—current debates on the ethics of environmental concern.

Although some of the criticisms of Christian thought on this issue are rather facile, it does seem reasonable to suppose that people are going to have relatively few qualms about exploiting the natural world for their own purposes when their lives are informed by ways of thinking that denigrate the physical world in favor of a purely spiritual realm (as with the Orphic strain of Platonism), by cosmogonies that postulate a natural world created for the benefit of humans beings formed in the image of their Creator (as in the Genesis story), or by soteriologies that see the soul as alienated from the natural world and emphasize the individual's direct relation to God (as in Gnostic Christianity and "the American Religion").[2]

The corollary seems equally reasonable: that where worldviews prevail in which nature is regarded as the locus of ultimate reality or value, as a sacred source of wisdom, or as a direct manifestation of the divine, one can expect that, other things being equal, people will refrain from inflicting gratuitous harm on the environment. The nature of the connection between a religious or philosophical worldview and actual behavior is difficult to determine, since, for the most part, other things are *not* equal. An individual's desire for material well-being may occlude his or her self-understanding vis-à-vis the cosmos, and the pressures of culture—and of contemporary consumerist culture especially—may overwhelm one's reverence for the natural world. But in general I am supposing that a different understanding of nature together with direct experience based on that difference will transform the ways people behave toward the natural world.

Let me now establish a context from the Japanese philosophical tradition

[2] Harold Bloom has remarked the pronounced Gnostic strain in contemporary American religion, thanks to which believers understand themselves as essentially separate from nature; see BLOOM 1992, chapters 1 and 2.

in which to consider Nishitani's ideas, through a brief sketch of some ideas from the philosophies of Kūkai and Dōgen—ideas that would be fruitful for discussions of environmental issues. I am unsure about the extent of these thinkers' influence on Nishitani, though the presence of Dōgen is strong and clear in his thinking while Kūkai's seems minimal.

2

In the wake of a long debate in Chinese Buddhism about extending the potential for Buddhahood to nonsentient beings, or to beings other than humans and animals, Kūkai expresses his belief in the awakened nature of vegetation (*sōmoku* 草木):

> If trees and plants are to attain enlightenment,
> Why not those who are endowed with feelings?...
> If plants and trees were devoid of Buddhahood,
> Waves would then be without wetness.
> (HAKEDA 1972, pp. 254–55; translation slightly modified)

In his later *Hizōki*, Kūkai argues for the Buddhahood of grasses and trees on the grounds that they are included within the "five great elements" that comprise the Dharmakāya (*hosshin* 法身) of the cosmic Buddha Dainichi Nyorai (*Kōbō daishi zenshū* 2:37). He qualifies this statement by adding that the Buddha-nature of plants and trees is not apparent to normal vision, but can be seen only with one's "Buddha eye." In distinguishing his own esoteric Buddhism from other schools, Kūkai's *Sokushin jōbutsu gi* makes a more comprehensive claim concerning natural phenomena, to the effect that the exoteric Buddhist teachings regard "the four great elements [earth, water, fire, and wind] as nonsentient beings," whereas he sees them as "the *samaya*-body of the Tathāgata" (HAKEDA 1972, p. 229).

Another feature of Kūkai's teaching helps illuminate the idea that natural phenomena possess Buddha-nature, and that is his notion of *hosshin seppō* 法身説法, "the Dharmakāya expounding the Dharma."[3] This idea emphasizes the personal nature of Dainichi Nyorai by drawing attention to the way in which he teaches the truth of Buddhism through all phenomena, and through speech as one of the "three intimacies" (*sanmitsu* 三密; the other

[3] For a fine explication of this idea, see KASULIS 1995. See also KASULIS 1990.

two are body and mind). The element of intimacy, or mystery, comes in because Dainichi's teaching is strictly, as Kūkai often emphasizes, "for his own enjoyment." It is only in a loose sense, then, that the cosmos "speaks" to us, for properly speaking Dainichi does not expound the teachings for our benefit. (The other embodiments of the Buddha—the Nirmānakāya and the Sambhogakāya—take care of that.)

Since visualization plays an important role in the meditation practices of Shingon, the sacred nature of the world is also accessible to the sense of sight. As well as hearing the cosmos as a sermon, Kūkai sees, or reads, the natural world as scripture. In one of his poems he writes:

> Being painted by brushes of mountains, by ink of oceans,
> Heaven and earth are the bindings of a sutra revealing the truth.
>
> (*Kōbō daishi zenshū* 3:402; cited in HAKEDA 1972, 91).

Natural phenomena expound the Dharma simply by being themselves—***jinen*** 自然, as other Buddhist thinkers have put it. The philosophy of Dōgen has several roots in common with Kūkai's, and his understanding of the natural world is especially similar (no doubt owing to some influence). Parallel to Kūkai's identification of the Dharmakāya with the phenomenal world is Dōgen's bold assertion of the nonduality of Buddha-nature and the world of impermanence generally. He famously rereads the line from the *Nirvana Sutra*, "All sentient beings without exception have Buddha-nature," as "All is sentient being, all beings are Buddha-nature" (*Shōbōgenzō*, "Busshō" [Buddha-nature] chapter/fascicle).[4] Dōgen argues that all beings are sentient beings, and as such ***are*** Buddha-nature—rather than "possessing" or "manifesting" or "symbolizing" it. Again, as with Kūkai, while the natural world is ultimately the body of the Buddha, it takes considerable effort to see this. Dōgen regrets that most people perceive nature only superficially, and are unable to experience "the sounds of the river valley as the Buddha's voice and the forms of mountains as his body" (Dōgen, "Keiseisanshiki" [Voices of river valleys, forms of mountains]).

Perhaps in order to avoid the absolutist connotations of the traditional idea of the Dharmakāya, Dōgen substitutes for Kūkai's ***hosshin seppō*** the

[4] Subsequent references to Dōgen will be simply to the title of the relevant chapter/fascicle of his major work, the *Shōbōgenzō* (vol. 1 of *Dōgen zenji zenshū*, ed. Ōkubo Dōshū. Tokyo, 1969–70).

notion of ***mujō-seppō*** 無性説法, which emphasizes that even insentient beings expound the true teachings. They are capable of this sort of expression since they, too, are what the Buddhists call ***shin*** 心 (mind/heart). And just as the speech of Dainichi Nyorai is not immediately intelligible to us humans, so, for Dōgen,

> the way insentient beings expound the true teachings should not be understood to be necessarily like the way sentient beings do.... To wrest voices from the sentient world and liken them to the voices of the insentient is contrary to the Buddha-way. (Dōgen, "Mujō-seppō" [Nonsentient beings expound the Dharma])

Only from the anthropocentric perspective would one expect natural phenomena to expound the true teachings in human language.

While the practice followed in Dōgen's Sōtō Zen is less esoteric than in Kūkai's Shingon, the aim of both is the integration of one's activity with the macrocosm. Whereas Kūkai's practice grants access to the intimacy of Dainichi's "conversing with himself for his own enjoyment," Dōgen tells his students,

> When you endeavor in right practice, the voices and figures of streams and the sounds and shapes of mountains, together with you, bounteously deliver eighty-four-thousand hymns of praise. Just as you are unsparing in surrendering fame and wealth and the body-mind, so are the streams and mountains. (Dōgen, "Keiseisanshiki")

If we devote our full attention to them, streams and mountains can, simply by being themselves, teach us about the nature of existence in general. Dōgen emphasizes that this process works only as a cooperation between the worlds of the human and the nonhuman, and as "the twin activities of the Buddha-nature and emptiness."[5]

Kūkai's idea that heaven and earth are the bindings of a sutra painted by brushes of mountains and ink of oceans is also echoed by Dōgen, who counters an overemphasis on the study of scriptures in certain forms of Buddhism

[5] For an excellent account of Dōgen's understanding of nature and of the force of the nature imagery in his texts, see Hee-Jin KIM 1975, especially in the section entitled "Nature: The mountains and waters," pp. 253–62).

by maintaining that sutras are not just texts containing written words and letters:

> What we mean by the sutras is the entire cosmos itself... the words and letters of beasts...or those of hundreds of grasses and thousands of trees.... The sutras are the entire universe, mountains and rivers and the great earth, plants and trees. (Dōgen, "Jishō zammai" [The *samādhi* of self-enlightenment])

I am suggesting that where a worldview such as Kūkai's or Dōgen's prevails, in which nature is regarded as sacred and a source of wisdom, there will be a "natural" tendency to treat the environment with respect.

3

Nishitani's thinking about nature is very much in the tradition of Kūkai and Dōgen, the major difference being that Nishitani witnessed the radical transformation in the human being's way of relating to the natural world which has taken place during the modern period. In *Religion and Nothingness* he writes of the process in which "the teleological conception of the world," a cosmic order under the providence of God, "gave way to a mechanistic one, bringing a fundamental change in the relation between man and nature." With the advancement of the natural sciences, "the natural world assumed more and more the features of a world cold and dead, governed by laws of mechanical necessity, completely indifferent to the fact of man" (NISHITANI 1982, p. 48). This was indeed a momentous change, since up to the seventeenth century in the West—whether thanks to the persistence of pagan ideas of the "world soul" *(anima mundi)* or Christian notions of man's place in the divine *ordo creationis*—relations between human beings and nature had always been fairly close. But the influence of Aristotle's rich reflections on the vegetal soul had steadily waned, and when Descartes denied that even animals had souls he effected a sharp dichotomy between animated human minds on the one hand and dead, soulless matter on the other: a dualism of two ontological realms separated by an abyss of difference.

A worldview according to which the natural world as *res extensa* is abysmally different from our essential being as *res cogitans* alienates us from nature—just as it enables the development of technologies that afford ever-

increasing manipulation and domination of the natural world. Nishitani sees that such developments in the modern period raise "a problem fundamental for all religions," which he formulates in two questions: Is it possible for us to regard a natural order [utterly] indifferent to our human mode of being... as belonging to a greater divine order? Or is such an indifferent natural order altogether incompatible with the idea of God? (NISHITANI 1982, p. 49). Reconciliation of this conflict seems especially difficult in the case of Christianity, largely because of the personal nature of God as exemplified in the three persons of the Trinity. It is therefore an interesting question whether such a conflict is obviated, or resolved, in a religious philosophy such as Kūkai's, which identifies the universe with the Dharmakāya as the body of Dainichi Nyorai. What is significant here is the nature of the personal aspect of Dainichi, who as a "person" is distinguished from other Buddhas (looking recognizably different from Amida, for example) and expounds the Dharma through the "three intimacies" of body, speech and mind.

Nishitani points out that the contrast between "the total impersonality of the [natural] world" and "personality," whether human or divine, arises from the circumstance that notions of "soul," "personality," and "spirit" have been viewed in the West only from the side of *life*. "And yet from the very outset life is at one with death. This means that all living things, just as they are, can be seen under the Form of death" (NISHITANI 1982, p. 50).

One could also say that all dead things can be seen under the aspect of life—as suggested by Nietzsche in an important (but generally ignored) feature of his philosophy of nature. A number of notes in Nietzsche's notebooks from the early 1880s discuss the benefits of participation in the "dead" world of the inorganic. One of these benefits is framed in terms that are remarkably reminiscent of certain Buddhist ideas: "To procure the advantages of one who is dead... to think oneself away out of humanity, to unlearn desires of all kinds: and to employ the entire abundance of one's powers in *looking*." And yet this unlearning of desires is by no means nihilistic and makes existence anything but dull: "It is a *festival* to go from this world across into the 'dead world'.... Let us *not* think of the return to the inanimate as a regression!.... *Death* has to be reinterpreted!"

The image of the festival reappears in connection with love of nature: "To be released from life and become dead nature again can be experienced as a *festival*—of the one who wants to die. To love nature! Again to revere what is dead!" (Nietzsche, *Werke: Kritische Studienausgabe*, vol. 9, 11[35],

11[70], 11[125]). Nishitani may not have been familiar with these passages, but it is certain that he would have appreciated the ideas as helping to weaken not only our anthropocentrism but also our tendencies toward biocentrism.

Nishitani is well known for his discussions of nihilism, but his insights on the connections between this phenomenon and the disruption of human relations with the natural world have not (as far as I know) received any attention. In chapter 3 of *Religion and Nothingness* he points out two related tendencies that have come to the fore in the modern period. On the one hand, with the advent of the machine, human life has become progressively mechanized and depersonalized, and culture has become dominated by "an abstract intellect seeking scientific rationality"; correspondingly, nature, by being reduced to abstractions, has undergone a progressive "denaturalization" (NISHITANI 1982, p. 85). On the other hand, "man now behaves as if he stood entirely outside of the laws of nature," and thus finds himself "in a mode of being of the subject that has adapted itself to a life of raw and impetuous desire, of naked vitality" (NISHITANI 1982, p. 85–86). The upshot of this "perversion of man's original relation to nature" that has made of him "a subject in pursuit of its desires" is ***nihilism***—albeit "a nihilism that has yet to reach self-awareness" (NISHITANI 1982, p. 88).

In the forty years since Nishitani wrote this the tendencies he pointed to have been exacerbated to the extreme. In the industrialized countries the products of technology have brought about, for much of the population, an alienation from the natural world that is unprecedented in human history. At the same time the growth of consumerism, driven in part by this alienation, attests to the vast number of people who understand themselves primarily as subjects in relentless pursuit of their desires. This high pitch of consumerism in turn exacerbates the alienation at the same time as it wreaks devastation on the natural environment. It seems to me, therefore, that Nishitani's association of the disrelation to nature with nihilism is most prescient—and that progress on environmental issues could be improved if people were to "see through" consumerism to the nihilism that lurks beneath it.

4

Though there is not much discussion of nature as such in the rest of *Religion and Nothingness*, the text employs a significant amount of imagery drawn

from natural phenomena, and this imagery plays an important role in Nishitani's thinking in general. Even when the focus is on human existence he emphasizes the necessity for the inquiry to go beyond the anthropocentric standpoint.

> For a fundamental investigation of human existence, the man-centered point of view...has to be broken through. To look on the birth-and-death of man...as a transmigration along the "six ways," from a total horizon that embraces the other forms of existence and types of species within the world, in fact points to a true prehension of the essence of the life and death of man himself. (NISHITANI 1982, p. 172)

Since one of the "six ways" of ***samsara*** is inhabited by beasts, the idea of transmigration extends the inquiry into the animal realm as well. Nishitani further mentions (more than once) the dictum of Musō Kokushi: "Hills and rivers, the earth, plants and trees, tiles and stones, all of these are the self's own original part" (NISHITANI 1982, p. 108). This consideration takes us beyond the animate and organic realms into nature as a whole.

One of the key ideas in the book is a development of the central Buddhist idea of "codependent arising" ***(pratitya-samutpāda)*** in terms of ***egoteki sōnyū*** 回互的相入, or (in Jan Van Bragt's translation) "circuminsessional interpenetration." A feature of this development that is seldom explicit in the traditional idea is Nishitani's conception of the field of emptiness (***śūnyatā***) as "a field of force" (NISHITANI 1982, p. 150).

> All things that are in the world are linked together, one way or the other. Not a single thing comes into being without some relationship to every other thing.... [This lets us] conceive of a force by virtue of which all things are gathered together and brought into relationship with one another, a force which, since ancient times, has gone by the name of "nature" (***physis***). (NISHITANI 1982, p. 149)

The "ancient times" Nishitani has in mind here appear to be those of the Presocratic thinkers, and he may also be thinking of Heidegger's interpretations of their ideas about *physis*. Similarly, when Nishitani talks of "ontological order" (NISHITANI 1982, p. 191), the logos is surely that of Heraclitus rather than the later notion that gave rise to Western logic. The idea that the

world of nature consists in the mutual dependence and interrelationship among natural phenomena has also been central to Western ecological science.[6]

In a late essay on the topic of nature Nishitani discusses the roots of the Japanese term *shizen* 自然 in an idea that dates from "ancient times" in a different place, namely, the Daoist *ziran* 自然—written with the same characters as *shizen* ("Shizen ni tsuite," *NKC* 14:111). He cites these key lines from chapter 25 of the *Laozi*:

> The human emulates earth,
> earth emulates heaven.
> heaven emulates *dao*,
> *dao* emulates what is natural *[ziran]*.
> (*NKC* 14:111)

Nishitani explains that *hō* (Chinese *fa*, the word rendered above as "emulates") is here used as a verb meaning "follows," or "takes its law from," such that what everything follows—including even *dao*—is *shizen* as "the law of laws [Dharma of Dharmas], the ultimate law, the most fundamental ground" (*NKC* 14:115). Nishitani had already, in *Religion and Nothingness*, associated "ontological order" with notions of law and naturalness in a Buddhist context:

> All things are in the "ontological" order and under the control of logos: they are a "dharmic naturalness" [*hōni jinen* 自然法爾]. ... All things, just as they are, are dharma-like. ... Being just what they are is completely in harmony with their being what they ought to be. (NISHITANI 1982, p. 191)

This is not to project a human "moral law" onto nature, or to subsume natural phenomena under "laws of nature" formulated by science, since this dharmic naturalness is not seen "from the viewpoint of human interests" at all.

Even aside from these considerations, the reader of *Religion and Nothingness* who is familiar with Daoist ideas can be excused for expecting

[6] Nishitani draws attention to a remarkable passage in Rousseau's *Émile* in which the Savoyard vicar, in professing his faith, talks about the order of nature in terms that are highly reminiscent of the idea of codependent origination (*engi* 縁起). "Shizen ni tsuite," in *NKC* 14:108.

Nishitani to characterize "the force by virtue of which all things are gathered together" as *dao*—especially when he goes on to say that "the force of the world, or 'nature', becomes manifest in the pine tree as the *virtus* of the pine, and in the bamboo as the *virtus* of the bamboo" (NISHITANI 1982, p. 150). This *virtus* would correspond to the Daoist term *de* 德 (Jpn. *toku*), insofar as *dao* can be understood as a field of force with *de* as the "focus" of each particular within the field. (A feature of Daoist practice is to "accumulate" or "thicken" one's *de* to the point where one is able to participate in the *de* of other beings.) Nishitani is of course borrowing the examples of pine and bamboo from the famous lines of Bashō:

> From the pine tree
> learn of the pine tree,
> and from the bamboo
> of the bamboo.

He glosses these lines by saying:

> [Bashō] means for us to enter the mode of being where the pine tree is the pine tree itself, and the bamboo is the bamboo itself, and from there to look at the pine tree and the bamboo.... to attune ourselves to the selfness of the pine tree and the selfness of the bamboo.... It is on the field of śūnyatā that this becomes possible. (NISHITANI 1982, p. 128)

If we are able to "enter the mode of being" of the pine or bamboo, we will no longer be projecting the "natural light" of reason onto them, but will rather be seeing them in their *own* natural light (NISHITANI 1982, p. 140). This would be what the Daoists call "seeing things in the light of heaven [*tian* 天]" rather than from the merely human perspective (*Zhuangzi*, chap. 2). Whereas environmental ethics in the West wonders about the possible bases in human existence for obligations toward natural phenomena, Nishitani says of this "reverting to the 'middle' of the thing itself" that the obligation comes from the natural phenomena themselves: "Even a single stone or blade of grass demands as much from us" (NISHITANI 1982, p. 140).

From the standpoint of "dharmic naturalness," Nishitani suggests that the *logos* of ontological order can be assimilated to the Japanese notion of *koto* ("matter and word"). This assimilation brings him close to Kūkai's idea of

hosshin seppō, according to which all things—as Dharmakāya—expound the Dharma.

> That things *are* means, aboriginally, that they express themselves; and that in expressing themselves they give expression, at the same time, to what it is that makes them be.... This is what it is for things to be in a dharma-like mode. The one aspect we referred to as things *preaching* the dharma, the other as their *obeying* its imperatives.... The pine speaks the *koto* of the pine tree, the bamboo the *koto* of the bamboo. (NISHITANI 1982, p. 195)

Just as for Kūkai we have to enter into the three intimacies if we are to be able to hear or understand such preaching, so for Nishitani we have to transcend the anthropocentric standpoint if we are going to become truly ourselves.

> Man, to be truly himself, has to rid himself of the merely "human" or "man-centered" mode of being. He has to turn toward the field of will to power and there to overcome himself ecstatically. He must die the Great Death in the abyss of nihility and come back to Life again. (NISHITANI 1982, p. 232)

Even more suggestive than the allusion to Hakuin (who speaks of dying the Great Death and returning to Life) is the mention of Nietzsche's will to power. When not just "all life" but "all existence" is understood as will to power, we have a paradigm case of "a force by virtue of which all things are gathered together and brought into relationship with one another." For Nietzsche the way to celebrate "the *festival* [in which we] go from this world across into the 'dead world'" is to realize ourselves as configurations of drives (*Triebe*) within the totality of will to power that is the world.[7]

The final section of *Religion and Nothingness* explicates transcendence of the merely human standpoint through extending "love of the neighbor" to a love of all things.

> The self is here at the home-ground of all things...where every thing becomes manifest as what it is, where all things are assembled together into a "world." This must be a standpoint where one sees one's own self in all things, in living things, in hills and rivers, towns and hamlets, tiles and stones, and loves all these things "as oneself." (NISHITANI 1982, p. 281)

[7] I have discussed this issue at length in the essay "Staying Loyal to the Earth: Nietzsche as an Ecological Thinker," in LIPPITT, 1998.

The "tiles and stones" are an allusion to Dōgen's conception of Buddha-nature, but the section (and the book) ends with a moving discussion of St. Francis of Assisi, who "referred not only to his fellow men but to all things as his kin" (NISHITANI 1982, p. 281–84) . Nishitani admits that the case of St. Francis, whom he numbers among his most important early influences (NISHITANI 1982, p. xxxv), "may be rather exceptional in Christianity." St. Francis's idea of kinship with all beings (and not just living beings) is exceptional indeed—even though his is a paradigm case of resources for ecological thinking that can be found within the Christian tradition itself. It may be that another figure mentioned by Nishitani as an early influence is relevant in this context: Ralph Waldo Emerson, whose understanding of nature was always central to his thinking and shifted toward a less anthropocentric standpoint in the course of his career.[8]

5

In conclusion let me be inconclusive, by bringing up a possible criticism of Nishitani's views and leaving the question of its validity open for discussion among my fellow participants. The criticism comes from the perspective of Nishitani's philosophy as a resource for environmental thinking, and it can be articulated in several kinds of questions.

Does the idea of "dharmic naturalness" (*hōni jinen*) apply to all natural phenomena, including, for instance, the tubercle bacillus? Because if, for all things, "being just what they *are* is completely in harmony with their being what they *ought to be*," would this not imply that attempts by human beings to annihilate the tubercle bacillus are a violation of the Dharma?

And does the idea of "Dharmic naturalness" apply to *all* things, and not just natural phenomena? Nishitani's talk of "a standpoint where one sees one's own self in all things, in living things, in hills and rivers, towns and hamlets, tiles and stones" suggests that it does, insofar as towns and tiles are

[8] See the discussions of Emerson in my essays, "Floods of Life around Granite of Fate: Nietzsche and Emerson as Thinkers of Nature," in *ESQ: A Journal of the American Renaissance* 43, and "The Place of the Human in Nature: Paradigms of Ecological Thinking, East and West," in *Human Nature* , ed. Leroy Rouner (Notre Dame, 1998).

human artifacts. But wouldn't one then be committed to endorsing the injunction to love "as oneself" such noxious artifacts as plutonium waste?

In other words, Nishitani's elaboration of Mahāyāna universalism might appear to lead to a kind of quietism with respect to environmental problems—in the same way as Kūkai's claim that the world is the Dharmakāya, or Dōgen's assertion that all things are Buddha-nature, might be taken to militate against the initiative to eliminate certain things as environmentally harmful.

In the case of plutonium waste the solution might lie in the direction of invoking a normative notion of naturalness. Just as the Western notion of nature has connotations of birth *(natura)* and growth *(physis)*, so the Japanese notion of ***shizen***, with its roots in the Chinese ***ziran***, connotes something that unfolds from out of itself—rather than something that is created by human technology. Nishitani discusses these connotations of ***shizen/ziran*** in "Shizen ni tsuite" (*NKC* 14:113–15). The tubercle bacillus, by contrast, is undeniably a natural phenomenon and so presumably an instance of ***shizen***. Here one would have to emphasize the total context of the interdependent whole (Buddha-nature as ***shitsu-u*** 悉有) and focus on the relative costs and benefits of human intervention for the sake of the flourishing of the whole. And indeed it is this emphasis on openness to the total context along with attunement to the selves of particular things that is one of the most valuable resources in for ecological thinking in Nishitani's rich and fertile oeuvre.

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Nishitani's *Religionsphilosophie*

Nihilism and the Standpoint of *Śūnyatā*

Hisao Matsumaru

Nishitani Keiji, in his book 禅の立場 [The standpoint of Zen] (1986), noted that "generally speaking, religions have always been too much influenced by the self-centeredness of mankind." In the historical world in which we live, people are accustomed to viewing religions from a egocentric or anthropocentric standpoint, though few are aware of this tendency in themselves. This approach to religion has persisted from early modern times to the present, and today comprises a general outlook. Nishitani continues:

> Even if God, or the gods, are considered from a theocentric viewpoint, people still tend to regard them anthropocentrically, as if God and the gods were interested in nothing else than the affairs of certain nations or of mankind in general. To put it in another way, human beings still consider the relationship between the divine and mankind to be principally one in which the former grants various kinds of human demands and aids in the attainment of human goals. Accordingly, even when a person attempts to understand the human condition from the standpoint of religion, he tends to do so from a human-centered point of view. (*NKC* 11:257)

This is the reason that religions have become powerless. Nishitani finds the cause of this trend in the nihilism that permeates modern man's ground of existence.

Nihilism

"Nihilism" in the philosophy of Nishitani refers to that condition in which nihility opens up in man's very ground of being, making him aware of the meaninglessness of his existence. He loses his footing completely, for both his

self and his world are nullified from their very source. He feels that a nihility—hidden beneath the face of everyday life until now—has manifested itself, and he finds himself at the brink of an abyss of existential doubt.

Such doubt causes him to view his existence as of no significance, and makes present to him (*anwesen* in a Heideggerean sense) the meaninglessness of self and world. This condition is very hard to overcome even for someone who is conscious of it. Let us suppose that there are two persons, one of whom tries to forget the sense of nihility and the other of whom decides to remain in the abyss and accept the "not self" as his own true self. In Nishitani's view the latter is aware of the meaninglessness of his self-being and of the world, while the former remains outside the abyss even though he is conscious of it. Thus Nishitani differentiates between the consciousness of nihility and the state in which one is self-aware or self-awakened to it.

The self-awareness of nihility signifies that one has set oneself in the abyss of nihilism and obtains one's footing nowhere else. This is done by breaking through the mode of being in which we regard the emergence of nihility as something that happened outside of ourselves. Nishitani considers nihilism as having not only a negative side but a positive one as well. This is one of the characteristics of Nishitani's philosophical thinking: to grasp both the manifest and the concealed aspects of a matter at the same time.

According to Nishitani, materialism, scientific rationalism, and the notion of progress are the forces that have given rise to the modern sense of nihilism. All three arise from the "awakening of man to a free and independent subjectivity" that accompanied the modern liberation from authority, acquisition of independence, and establishment of self-identity in the world. The resulting freedom from conditions once believed to be imposed by God gave modern man a sense of release from divine domination, and eventually led to the denial of God's existence. Hence nihilism is closely related to atheism. The sense of independent subjectivity that underlies it is an essential feature of the modern age, and has spread along with the dissemination of the scientific way of thought.

As the above remarks suggest, Nishitani finds a double significance in this awakening to subjectivity. On the one hand this awakening has led to the "self-centered standpoint of mankind" so characteristic of modern times. The natural sciences, for example, have fostered "rational" thought through the concept of objectivity, but this method of thought is actually an expression of human self-centeredness in that it would never have come about without

the development of an independent human subjectivity. On the other hand, the awakening to subjectivity has opened the way to the realm in which a man can exist as a truly free and independent subject. The awakening in this sense signifies, not a loss of oneself in superficial independence and sense gratification, but the possibility of realizing the standpoint of *śūnyatā* (emptiness) from which one can attain the subjectivity of true independence.

> In our times, however, atheism has gone a step further. For one thing, there is a sense of the meaninglessness of a purely materialistic and mechanistic world and an accompanying awareness of the nihility that lies concealed just beneath the surface of the world. For another, it seems possible to speak of subjectivity today only as an awakening to a nihility within human nature that lies beyond the reach of reason and yet constitutes the very ground on which we stand. To feel this nihility underfoot is to break through the "existence" of things all at once, to pass beyond that dimension in which each and every thing in the world is thought to have an objective existence, and to uncover for man a standpoint of subjectivity that can never be reduced to mere objective existence. (NISHITANI 1982, p. 54)

It is extremely difficult for modern humans to realize true subjectivity, however, because of the permeation of atheism deep into the ground of human existence. We can no longer demand support from God as before, for we have not only denied God but have replaced the locus of his existence with the *nihilum* that constitutes the self-centered locus of mankind. Present-day humans, therefore, are forced to take their stand at the bottomless bottom of *nihilum* where they cannot expect any support from a transcendent being, since a *nihilum* has become the ultimate locus of contemporary human existence. The atheism arising from nihilism is permeated by the scientific way of thought, since in the worldview of the natural sciences the laws of the natural world are "indifferent," calling into question the Providence, and thus the very existence, of God.[1]

[1] Nishitani comments:

> But the laws of the natural world that rule over life and matter alike, that govern life as well as death, are in themselves indifferent to questions of our life and death, of the fortune and misfortune that comes our way, of the good and evil we do. Nature greets with indifference distinctions like these which belong to the concerns of man. Nature's insensitivity is felt in the circle of man as distant and unfeeling, at times even as coldhearted

Nevertheless, the possibility exists for a subject to break through the "objective" dimension of existence by standing in nihility; in this way a new dimension, that of true subjectivity, can emerge even under the conditions of modern atheism. In this sense, the belief in scientism and scientistic rationalism can be regarded as the subjectivization of nihility, or as the subjectivization of atheism. Nishitani sees this situation as the "inversion of the relation" of domination between the human being and natural law, in which the domination of the laws of nature over humanity reached its limit and then changed to the domination of humanity over the laws of nature. Humans now use nature for their own purposes.

The mode of being in which man obeys natural law is excluded also from such anthropocentric philosophy as that of Jean-Paul Sartre, since contemporary nihilism has brought us to the point where we cannot but see natural law as lying quite outside of ourselves, so that it appears to be effective only in the field of objective phenomena outside of ourselves. Thus no direct relationship between natural law and human existence is recognized, and

> in its place there appears a mode of being wherein a man situates himself on the freedom of nihility and behaves as if he were using the laws of nature entirely from without. It is the mode of being of the subject that has adapted itself to a life of raw and impetuous desire, of naked vitality. (NISHITANI 1982, p. 86)

When one establishes a free subjectivity by escaping to a "mechanization" of the human condition, one is faced with the issue of subjectivization within an anthropocentric (egocentric) freedom and independence. If freedom is regarded as unrestricted, the agent of this freedom is no longer free in the proper sense, but is merely in a state of license, making of him an orectic agent seeking only the satisfaction of his desires.

In contrast to this approach, certain existentialists such as Heidegger situate themselves in nihility by choice, seeking to remain faithful to their own self-existence and avoid the fall *(Verfall)* to the orectic state in which one loses the awareness both of nihilism and of the mechanization of man. But

and cruel. If these same laws of nature are attributed to God as part of the order created by him, then perhaps there is a side to God other than the personal for containing this cold indifference. Or perhaps we should conclude that the laws of nature do not belong to God at all, in which case God would lose his absoluteness and thus cease to be God. (NISHITANI 1982, p. 60)

this attempt is by definition futile, since the "perversion" into which we modern humans have fallen is itself the result of the activity of nihility, and since we cannot rid ourselves of the activity of nihility as long as we ground ourselves in this very nihility.

The Transitional Character of the Standpoint of Nihility

Nishitani explains a contradictory character of nihility in the following manner:

> In a word, nihility is still, to a certain degree, seen as a far side, and hence at the same time still clings to the standpoint of a near side looking beyond to a far side. Its character is essentially a transitional one.
>
> Nihility is an absolute negation aimed at all "existence," and thus is related to existence. The essence of nihility consists in a purely negative (antipodal) negativity. Its standpoint contains the self-contradiction that it can neither abide in existence nor abide being away from it. It is a standpoint torn in two from within. Therein lies its transitional character. We call it the standpoint of nihility, but in fact it is not a field one can stand on in the proper sense of the term.... As essentially transitional and a negative negativity, it is radically real; but the standpoint itself is essentially hollow and void, a nihility. The very standpoint of nihility is itself essentially a nihility, and only as such can it be the standpoint of nihility. (NISHITANI 1982, pp. 137–38)

The transitional character of nihility can be seen as the result of the dual-natured action of nothingness: 1) absolute negation as the intrinsic activity of absolute nothingness and 2) negative negation (i.e., mere negation) as the action of the nihility in modern nihilism, which has led to a egocentric mode of being and to a *relative* view of nihility as something opposed to existence in general, as in Sartre's thought. The nihility of modern nihilism can therefore be interpreted as a relative nothingness.

The Task of Dasein

One can neither realize nor attain one's own true existence, because nihility can manifest itself only as the mere negation of the nihility of modern

nihilism. With regard to this, Nishitani refers to the task of *Dasein*.

> The character of the task belonging to Dasein means that Dasein forever realizes (actualizes-*sive*-apprehends) itself as itself in its suchness. It means that the self is forever becoming the self itself in its original sense. The task is to actualize existence as emerging into its nature from non-ego, and to disclose the "meaning" of such an existence, and in so doing to locate and apprehend that existence. (NISHITANI 1982, p. 260)

What kind of existence is possible if the mode of being based on the standpoint of nihility cannot realize true existence? What must we do in order to actualize true existence? And what kind of standpoint would make this possible?

True existence comes into being when something is as it is in its true suchness, with nothing added. Insofar as nihility functions as a simple negation of existence, it is incapable of bringing a being to suchness; that is, it cannot actualize-*sive*-apprehend a being in its suchness. Nihility is only a transitional stage between the disclosure of the bottomlessness of human existence and the actualization-*sive*-apprehension of true existence in its suchness, even if it is assumed that nihility can disclose being in its own way, that is, by means of negation.

As seen in the quote above, Nishitani did not see the task of *Dasein* as merely theoretical in nature. In my opinion, his flesh-and-blood experience as well as the historical task that he imposed upon himself played an important role in the expression of these words. His book *Nihirizumu* ニヒリズム [Nihilism] (1949)[2] should be touched on briefly in order to understand the task of *Dasein* in more detail.

Analyzing the spiritual situation in modern Japanese history, Nishitani pointed out that the Japanese, having lost themselves in the pursuit of Westernization since the Meiji era, are unaware of the spiritual hollowness that has eroded their very ground of existence and caused them to lose their "Original Selfness." This spiritual hollowness at their very foundation is masked by the present appearance of material prosperity, but is evident in the blind compulsiveness that characterizes so much of what the Japanese have done during this century. Hidden spiritual crises mark nearly every aspect of Japanese life.

[2] *NKC* 8. English translation by PARKES and AIHARA 1990.

The origins of modern nihilism lie in Europe, where the influence of Christianity had since the time of the Renaissance gradually waned and Western intellectuals had become aware of crucial fissures in the very ground of existence. Nietzsche, for example, warned of a coming crisis in which all values, which had been largely rooted in traditional and Christian ways of thinking, would be denied and human existence would lose its meaning. With this in mind, he defined the "will to power" as the ultimate reality and at the same time as the means to surmount the historical crisis. This idea led Nietzsche into confrontation with tradition, and he was destined to oppose Christianity, which was the supporter of tradition. Nishitani locates the essential feature of the Nietzchean standpoint in the interaction between responsibility to tradition ("the ancestors") and the will to carve the way to the future.

> His nihilism, a radical confrontation with history, was backed up by responsibility toward the ancestors to redeem what is noble in the tradition. His standpoint calls for a returning to the ancestors in order to face the future, or to put it the other way around, a prophesying toward the tradition. Without a will toward the future, the confrontation with the past cannot be properly executed; nor is there a true will toward the future without responsibility toward the ancestors. (PARKES and AIHARA 1990, p. 177)

The Japanese, however, have since the Meiji era been apt to forget their responsibility to their ancestors. Occupied with assimilating Western culture and technology, they have lost interest in reflecting on their own inner ground, on the traditional spiritual base on which they stand. Even though Western spiritual bases, like Christianity, were brought to Japan, they did not spread since most Japanese had little interest in Western forms of spirituality. The result has been a general disregard for *all* spiritual bases, both Eastern and Western, in modern Japan. Hence the Japanese have never attempted to come to terms with modernity on the basis of their own traditional spirituality, but have kept setting the problems of spiritual tradition aside. Thus, nihility has opened up a spiritual hollowness that has stolen into the spiritual ground of the Japanese.

In spite of the fact that we are presently facing a critical situation of cultural confusion, contemporary Japanese—in contrast to Meiji-era Japanese—no longer possess "moral energy" and the will to seek "the elemental

source." More precisely, most Japanese no longer know how to awaken to the spiritual ground that constitutes the elemental source of moral energy. Indeed, we tend not even to be conscious of the crisis, of the hollowness arising from the loss of our "Original Selfness." While Europeans made, of their own free will, the decision to take on nihilism, among the Japanese even the ***awakening*** to nihilism has yet to occur. But despite the fact that the problem of nihilism is still a latent one in Japan, a proper way of being in the form of Original Selfness should be recovered. This is the historical mission that Nishitani imposed upon himself. For this reason, Nishitani intensively studied the philosophy of Nietzsche in order to find a proper mode of being in which the East, and in particular Japan, might overcome the invisible influence of nihilism.

The thorough study of Nietzsche's philosophy provided Nishitani with many ideas for "overcoming nihilism *through* nihilism," but he still believed that for nihilism to be surmounted in Japan it was necessary to study anew such traditional Eastern concepts as the "emptiness" or "nothingness" of Buddhism. He says:

> Creative nihilism in Stirner, Nietzsche, Heidegger and others was an attempt to overcome the nihilism of despair. These attempts, conducted at varying depths, were efforts (in Nietzsche's words) "to overcome nihilism by means of nihilism." The tradition of oriental culture in general, and the Buddhist standpoints of "emptiness," nothingness," and so on in particular, become a new problem in this context. Herein lies our orientation toward the future—westernizaiton—and at the same time our orientation toward the past—reconnection with the tradition. (GRAHAM and AIHARA 1990, p. 179)

For Nishitani, "creative nihilism" is that which mediates between the past and the future. More precisely, it provides, at one time, a bridge from the past to the future and from the future to the past, so that the responsibility to the ancestors can be fulfilled by restoring the traditional thought that has come to us through the generations. It also means that one can take upon oneself the spiritual nobility inherited from one's own traditions. This was the task that Nishitani felt he had been entrusted with. This task is, I believe, superimposed on that of the *Dasein* mentioned above.

Conversion from the Standpoint of Nihility to that of Śūnyatā

Although Nishitani approaches the task of *Desein* from the standpoint of *śūnyatā*, he has no intention of being a spokesman for or, even less, an exponent of Buddhism, as some may view him as on account of the Buddhist nature of the *śūnyatā* concept. Taking world history into account, he seeks to clarify an original standpoint of self-understanding from which his original mode of being in suchness can be realized. By "self-understanding" I mean an understanding of one's situation and of the significance of one's existence; this includes an understanding of the relation between one's existence and the world in which one finds oneself, and of the relation of one's ground of being with that of other beings such as God.

In brief, Nishitani reaccepts the history of Eastern thought by matching it against the contemporary historical and philosophical viewpoint characterized by scientism, and reinterprets the meaning of tradition and of antecedent Western and Eastern thought from the standpoint of *śūnyatā*, so that people may cut their own way out of the present situation of chaos. Nishitani sees no other way to overcome nihilism than through the realization-*sive*-apprehension of the mode of existence in which a being exists of itself, in its suchness. This cannot occur until that being breaks through the field of nihility and attains the standpoint of *śūnyatā*. Through the opening up of nihility at the ground of its existence a self-centered being becomes "not-self-being," since the nihility negates that mode of existence in which the self is taken to be the center of everything. Nishitani calls this phenomenon *Nichtung* (nullification)—the action of *śūnyatā* (absolute nothingness as emptiness) through which the ego (*Ich*) is negated and the egocentric mode of being broken through.

"Not-self-being," however, is immediately re-negated through the action of *śūnyatā* and is realized as "self-being through not-self-being." This action (or function) of *śūnyatā*—the negation of negation—is none other than absolute affirmation. Through the function of absolute nothingness, which is effected solely from the standpoint of *śūnyatā*, the once-nullified mode of being is reestablished to become "being-of-itself-in-its-suchness," that is, Original Selfness as "self-being through not-self-being." Hence the Original Self is not an everlasting substance, but something that undergoes a never-ending conversion from "not-self-being" to "self-being through not-self-being" and vice versa. Nishitani calls this process "be-ification" (*Ichtung*).

Herein the Ego is reborn as an Original Self through the absolute negation of the self-centered self (see NISHITANI 1982, p. 124).

The incessant turnabout between *Nichtung* and *Ichtung* gives rise to the dual nature of the action of nihility and makes possible the conversion from the standpoint of nihility to that of *śūnyatā*.

Life-sive-Death, Death-sive-Life

This logic is also applicable to the relationship between life and death. When being is negated to become not-self-being, the self comes to nothing. This is so-called death. In order to attain the Great Death, however, it is not enough to throw the existence of the self into doubt. This doubt must lead, by virtue of the function of absolute nothingness, to the complete negation of all existence—that is, to the Great Doubt.

The Great Death and the Great Doubt are not two different things when viewed from the standpoint of *śūnyatā*. Not-self-being cannot emerge, nor can the field of emptiness open, until one completely breaks through the mode of being that has been cast into doubt. The Great Death occurs at the very moment of this breakthrough and not at any other time. Through the Great Death, "not-self-being" is converted to an affirmation of being, signifying that the former self has revived and taken absolute life as its ground. This sudden and incessant turnaround from death to life can be called "death-*sive*-life." The Great Death, once attained, is not something static, but involves an incessant movement from self-being to not-self-being and from not-self-being to self-being. Hence at the moment when the death-*sive*-life is realized it must immediately transform to life-*sive*-death.

If even after the Great Death a person clings to life in the form of "death-*sive*-life," then he or she retains the same standpoint as that of the old egocentric self—the standpoint in which the self is the center of all things and rules over them by re-presenting (*vor-stellen* in the Heideggerean sense) them as its *ob-ject* (*Gegen-Stand als Vor-gestelltes*) and setting them before itself. The self, in other words, *allows* them to exist in the world. To set oneself within the cycle of death-*sive*-life and life-*sive*-death signifies the taking of a stance between the two aspects of the movement, so that the self is situated right in the *middle* of the swing between life and death. The self, in other words, is found at the "*sive*" of life-*sive*-death and death-*sive*-life.

Circuminsessional Interpenetration

When the self reaches the "suchness" mode of being it enters a field wherein not only it but all other beings come into existence. This is because the self has passed through the field of "not-self-being" in which it is absolutely negated, so that the leading parts on the stage are taken by beings other than the self. Accordingly, on the field of emptiness, where the incessant turnabout from life to death and back again is effected, a being is itself while it is not itself and, at the same time, is not itself while it is itself.

That a being is in its original mode of being (that is, in its suchness) signifies that the being is absolutely independent of other beings and thus is the absolute master on that scene. However, this being is situated together with other beings in the world, or, more precisely, in compound worlds that can be opened according to the situation the being finds itself in. Since this being is an absolute master, all other beings are subordinate to it. However, this being can be "not itself" if it passes through the stage of not-self-being, something that can only happen if being-as-absolute-master undergoes absolute negation. This absolute negation of being-as-absolute-master makes it the servant of all other beings, at which point the latter take the place of master. The above-mentioned relation of master and servant is applicable to every being in the world. We might say that everything is master to everything else even as it is the servant of everything else.

The reciprocal shift between subject and object, or the reciprocal conversion of subject to object and object to subject, is called *circuminsession*. In the circuminsessional relationship all things are gathered together as one and yet remain unique, and all things are both master and servant to each other. This reciprocal relationship is called by Nishitani "circuminsessional interpenetration." This term is not intended to suggest, however, that the roles of master and servant occasionally replace one another, but that the relation of the two is that of a dynamic, reciprocal turnabout involving beings that retain their absolute autonomy even as they exist in absolute dependency upon all other beings.

Utilizing the logic of circuminsession as the dynamic expression of *śūnyatā*, Nishitani tackled various important problems of the contemporary world, such as history and time, *samsāra* (life and death), and true subjectivity. Here, however, I would like to focus on the problem of science, which we identified at the beginning of this paper as an issue central to the crisis of

the contemporary world.

The natural sciences are based on a positivistic way of viewing the world; most theoretical research is conducted on the principle of cause and effect, which holds that a particular result has an antecedent cause and that this cause will consistently lead to the same effect. Science, in other words, searches for a cause when faced with a certain effect. The ultimate goal of the science search is to find the original cause from which all phenomena came into being, and to do so it searches the past to its farthest limits. This search is grounded in the notion of time without beginning, as it would be impossible without the notion of an eternal succession of time in the direction of the past. Disciplines like ethics and theology take a more idealistic position: they search, not for a cause, but for a purpose that constitutes the end (*telos*) of everything. This attitude too is based on the notion of endless time. Each approach has "failed to realize yet that the time that provides it with its field, a time unrestrictedly open to both past and future, can only come about by virtue of an infinite openness lying at the ground of the present" (NISHITANI 1982, p. 227).

Insofar as a man holds to the above-mentioned views of time, the basic human drive to achieve autonomy tends to be grasped within a closed circuit of self-satisfied egocentricity. With time one considers it natural to view things from within this closed field of vision and to pay no more attention to existence beyond the natural, phenomenal world. This attitude is necessarily linked with a tendency to regard human reason as independent of any supernatural being; the resulting "secularized" human reason is then seen as having an absolute essence and meaning. This tendency tends to blind us to the infinite openness that forms the supertemporal home-ground of time, so that we assume that time can be traced back to its essence within the context of time itself. Those who consider this to be possible are suffering from an "optical illusion," says NISHITANI (1982, p. 227), since no essence could exist amid the nullification of nihilism without the infinite openness that lies at the ground of the present.

When one seeks to achieve one's purposes solely within the confines of one's life, one is inevitably led to a search for a self-contained world and a consequent secularization of time, history, nature, and human reason. This tendency thus departs from a standpoint centered in reason and leads to one centered in the human ego. From the standpoint of *śūnyatā*, therefore, we can characterize the viewpoint of scientific positivism as one in which man-

as-observer defines himself as the center of his field of vision, and from that field (i.e., his world) he re-presents (*vor-stellt*) things as objects of observation. In this sense the scientific standpoint is essentially based on human self-centeredness, but a self-centeredness hidden under the name of objectivity. Thus the objectivity of the sciences (and of the humanities as well) is simply the self-centered human viewpoint turned inside out. The standpoint of secularization disregards the fact that at its very ground a nihility opens up, a nihility that can be overcome only from the standpoint of *śūnyatā*.

At the same time, however, it should be mentioned that the standpoint of scientism can connect immediately with the standpoint of *śūnyatā* if the former returns to its own home-ground by passing through the state of "not-self-being," then returns from there to its former self. In this way a scientific standpoint can be established on the basis of *śūnyatā*.

There is one point we need to touch on briefly once again: circuminsessional interpenetration as the dynamic function of *śūnyatā*. In *Religion and Nothingness* the circuminsessional relation is presented as the fundamental link between the *koto*[3] that arise in the field of *śūnyatā*. This might have left us with the impression that Nishitani intended to explain every *koto* in terms of this relation (NISHITANI 1982, pp. 141–50), whereas in fact the relation is merely a means of understanding these *koto*. The circuminsessional relation is not something intrinsic to the *koto* in themselves (*an sich*), but a type of interpretation intended to convey something of the nature of *koto* as they are in their suchness. In this sense the notion of circuminsessional interpenetration is itself a kind of abstraction of reality. Hence Nishitani "breaks through" this relation from the standpoint of *jijimuge* 事事無碍—that world in which all phenomena exist in a state of mutual harmony and nonhindrance (*NKC* 13:142). It is the world in which a fact comes about as it is in itself.

> There each thing exists in its suchness, absolutely, at the elemental source. Insofar as it shows itself in its suchness, its mode of being presents itself to us as a "stubbornly enclosed" self-identity, and it is self-enclosed from the ground up. The Being of the thing in its self-identity is completely within its own boundary and therefore completely enclosed in itself. Each "Being" as absolute oneness transcends both relative and circuminsession relations with other

[3] *Koto* has the meanings of "event," "phenomenon," and "word"; I have chosen to translate it as "thing"

> beings, such as reciprocal interpenetration and reciprocal identity (*sosoku* 相即)[4] In this sense, each Being is noncircuminsessional in the same way as the earlier-mentioned openness of the world, which is absolutely at one with itself. (*NKC* 13:141)

In the field where a fact occurs as it is and manifests its own nature—that is, in the world of ***jijimuge***—every ***koto*** and the world in which it is found are self-enclosed; accordingly, every ***koto*** and its world are beyond all "threads of logic" as well. Still, the viewpoint of circuminsession has not been abandoned since the philosophical explanation of a thing in its suchness cannot be accomplished until both modes of being—circuminsession and noncircuminsession—are grasped at one time. This is the standpoint in which philosophy must situate itself in order to comprehend (apprehend) the factuality of a ***koto*** and its world.

Incidentally, the Being of a thing cannot be separated from the locus in which this Being engages in action (***geschehen***) and exists in concrete historical reality; without this locus the existence of a thing and its Being would be merely imaginary. Thus even if the Being of a thing is noncircuminsessional—that is, completely self-determined and self-enclosed—it cannot be free of this fundamental "element" (in a Hegelean sense). So Being must have the element of locus and manifest itself within this. Moreover, insofar as Being determines and manifests itself in a locus, it takes its place in a world that maintains relations with other worlds. This means that, even as Being never ceases to be itself in itself (i.e., even as it never ceases to be self-enclosed), it establishes itself in correlation with the world, which contains the locus of self-closed Being as one of its parts.

> In other words, it is as if the limiting walls that kept Being penned in and let it exist in closed individuality (***Jemeinigkeit*** in a Heideggerean sense) become transparent, so that it takes part in a circuminsessional relation with others in the world in correlation. (*NKC* 13:141)

[4] ***Sosoku*** indicates that phenomenon is identical with noumenon, as waves are with the water and the water is with the waves.

The Standpoint of Religionsphilosophie

In reading books of philosophy it soon becomes apparent that there are philosophers who have tried to reconstitute religion from their liberal, reason-oriented standpoint. This is an act of arrogance, however—philosophers should realize that religions have their own "elemental source" from which qualities proper to religion originate. Philosophy, in other words, should be aware of its own boundaries. Where then does Nishitani find his place as a philosopher in the age of nihilism? How does he fulfill his "task of ***Dasein***," the overcoming of nihilism by means of nihilism?

With his awakening to the fact that religions tend to disregard historical reality—even as disciplines influenced by the scientific way of thinking (the natural and social sciences, the humanities, philosophy, etc.) tend to ignore religious reality—Nishitani became oriented toward ***Religionsphilosophie*** (the philosophy of religion or religious philosophy). He believed that religious philosophy could mediate between religious and historical reality from both sides (see *NKC* 4:125–26). Nishitani explains the functions of criticism and mediation:

> Generally speaking, mediation involves finding a standpoint from which that which mediates (the mediating) correlates internally with that which is mediated (the mediated). Here the mediating starts externally to the mediated—it is, as it were, an action from outside of the thing to be mediated. In contrast, to critique involves starting from the inside the object of critique to find a standpoint from which to view the object from outside. It is, as it were, an action from the inside to the outside. (*NKC* 6:69)

The two contrary directions of critique and mediation are, however, nothing but the products of reason. Thus for Nishitani, religious philosophy, situated between religion and philosophy, can mediate between the two by mediating itself through self-negation. That is, critique means mediation through self-negation, while mediation in the narrow sense involves bridging the two concepts without distorting the essence of either. Religious philosophy is, therefore, a standpoint of the reason that, while taking a position simultaneously critical and liberal towards both religion and philosophy, mediates between the two through self-negation (see *NKC* 6:61–62, 139)

Religious philosophy must, therefore, be situated in the middle, between

religion and philosophy. This standpoint of the "middle" must remain outside of both in order to critique them, and, at the same time, inside of both in order to mediate between them. Nishitani conceptualized this "middle" as the standpoint of *śūnyatā*. However, when he encountered the noncircuminsessional phase of a fact as a stubbornly self-closed one, he was forced to go a step beyond reason and into the realm of feeling and will (*jōi ni okeru kū* 情意における空, "*śūnyatā* manifesting in *jōi*" [emotion, sentiment, or sensibility]).

Some Concluding Words

The task that Nishitani took upon himself as his historically imposed mission was the clarification of the essence and ground of nihilism: how to become "aware of" nihilism as a historical reality in the present day, and how to adopt a responsible stance toward the variety of problems that nihilism has brought about. Among the problems faced by Nishitani were the following:

1) *The self-centeredness of man and the distorted, anthropocentric nature of his standpoint.* This standpoint regards all things in nature as objective material "beings" that are re-presented (*vor-gestellt* in a Heideggerean sense) in opposition to a subject. The view of nature inherent in the natural sciences originates from this self-centeredness.
2) *The scientistic standpoint that forces us to apply the laws of nature not only to objective, material things, but to mind, life, and the human mode of being.* From this standpoint human beings are regarded as subjects standing in opposition to objects. This is the basis of the anthropocentric perspective of science. This leads to the host of problems that Nishitani took upon himself to resolve, seeking the "home-ground" of the origin of all things.
3) *Nihility as the cause of problems such as those mentioned above when taken by man as his quasi-ground of being.* A related issue is the way in which the awareness of this nihility can be transformed into an awareness of emptiness.
4) *The surmounting of nihilism by means of nihilism: the mediation of historical reality by the standpoint of śūnyatā (as in Zen Buddhism or the mysticism of Eckhart).* Nishitani identified the circuminsessional relationship as the dynamic structure of the standpoint of *śūnyatā*. This relationship describes the structure of Being in the field of emptiness and at the same time presents a logical means to explain the structure of this field. The circuminsessional relation was seen by Nishitani as capable of leading to the true knowledge of a fact in its suchness. However, Nishitani could not avoid the possibility of noncircuminsession when he was faced with the "stubbornly closed self-identity" of a particular thing. But when the "middle" ground between these two (circuminsession and noncircuminsession) is grasped, the philosophy of Nishitani makes it possible to mediate between religious and historical realities. Nishitani's attempt to transcend nihilism by means of nihilism led him inevitably to the stance of *Religionsphilosophie*.
5) *The historical task of formulating a new Religionsphilosophie from the standpoint of śūnyatā.* Here the standpoint of the "middle" plays an important role in establishing a bridge between the fact that reveals itself to us and the fact that hides itself.

Abbreviation

NKC *Nishitani Keiji Chosakushū* 西谷啓治著作集 [Selected works of Nishitani Keiji], 26 vols. Tokyo: Sōbunsha, 1987–95.

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Afterword

Thomas Kirchner

The Fourteenth Kyoto Zen Symposium, held in the familiar surroundings of the Hotel Rantei, where twelve of the fourteen symposia have now been held, marked the beginning of the final phase of these yearly gatherings. Originally planned as a ten-year series, the Kyoto Zen Symposiums have continued beyond their expected lifespan owing primarily to the unexpected strength of the Japanese yen during the past decade and the corresponding increase in the resources of our sponsor, the Taniguchi Foundation. The Taniguchi Foundation, however, never intended itself to be a permanent organization, having been established for the sole purpose of financing the various symposia envisioned by the founder, Taniguchi Toyosaburo, as international forums for small groups of scholars to gather together for a week of scholarly presentations, collegial discussion, and informal exchange. Its original goals having been more than adequately fulfilled, the foundation is scheduled to conclude its activities in 1999, leaving the Kyoto Zen Symposium with now only the 1998 meeting to complete.

For the final two meetings—the Fourteenth and the Fifteenth Kyoto Zen Symposiums—the symposium committee decided to return to its roots and reexamine the contributions of the late Prof. Nishitani Keiji; both gatherings share the theme, "Religion and the Contemporary World in Light of Nishitani Keiji's Thought." When Taniguchi Toyosaburo first proposed the symposium series to Rev. Hirata Seikō (Chief Abbot of Tenryū-ji and former president of the Institute for Zen Studies), Hirata turned to Nishitani for advice in deciding the fundamental direction and objectives of the gatherings. Nishitani, whose central philosophical concern was the contemporary spiritual crisis as expressed in the modern upwelling of nihilism, hoped that the symposia would serve as experiments in exploring the significance and the possibilities of religion (particularly Zen Buddhism) in the world of today. The themes of the meetings were thus chosen with an eye to illuminating

some of the major questions relating to religion's role in the modern world, and, at Nishitani's direction, almost always included the phrase "in the contemporary world" in their titles:

1) 1983 Zen Buddhism—Humanity and Religion in the Contemporary World
2) 1984 Zen and Mysticism in the Contemporary World
3) 1985 Zen Buddhisn—The Significance of Meditation and Samādhi in the Contemporary World
4) 1985 (August) Zen Buddhism in the Contemporary World—The Encounter between Religion and Our Age
5) 1987 Religion and Natural Science in the Contemporary World
6) 1988 Religion and the Human Sciences in the Contemporary World
7) 1989 Nature, Life, and Human Being
8) 1990 Religion and Ethics in the Contemporary World
9) 1992 Religion and Culture in the Contemporary World
10) 1993 Religion and the Modern World
11) 1994 Zen, the Kyoto School, and the Question of Nationalism
12) 1995 Tradition and Creativity—Religion and Modernity in Japan
13) 1996 Tradition and Creativity—Traditional Doctrine in the Modern Age

Until his death at the age of ninety in November 1990, between the eighth and the ninth symposiums, Nishitani played a central role in deciding the themes and shaping the direction of the meetings. He participated as actively as he was able in the gatherings themselves, enjoying the special atmosphere of the symposiums and the relaxed exchange they fostered between scholars from all over the world. Given this background, and taking into consideration the fact that over seven years have now passed since Nishitani's death, the committee felt that it was time to begin the task of reassessing Nishitani's thought and its significance for the present world. To that end a group of scholars holding a variety of viewpoints on Nishitani's legacy were invited to present papers:

HASE Shōtō	Professor of the Philosophy of Religion Kyoto University, Kyoto, Japan
HORIO Tsutomu	Professor of the Philosophy of Religion Ōtani University, Kyoto, Japan
KADOWAKI Ken	Assoc. Professor of the Philosophy of Religion, Ōtani University, Kyoto, Japan
MATSUMARU Hisao	Professor of the Philosophy of Religion Dokkyō University, Tokyo, Japan
MORI Tetsurō	Assoc. Prof. of the Philosophy of Religion Kyoto Sangyō Univ. Institute for World Culture and Affairs, Kyoto, Japan
PARKES, Graham	Professor of Philosophy University of Hawaii
STEVENS, Bernard	Assoc. Prof. of Philosophy University of Bruxelles, Belgium
UEDA Shizuteru	Prof. Emeritus of the Philosophy of Religion Kyoto University and Hanazono University Kyoto, Japan

Participating as specially invited discussants were:

IWATA Fumiaki	Assoc. Prof. of the Philosophy of Religion Osaka Kyōiku University, Osaka, Japan
KIRITA Kiyohide	Professor of Education Hanazono University, Kyoto, Japan
MINAMOTO Ryōen	Professor Emeritus of Japanese Intellectual History, Tōhoku University, Sendai, Japan

The daily schedule during the four-day gathering was as follows:

March 10 (Mon.)	Papers by Prof. Parkes and Prof. Hase; discussion
March 11 (Tues.)	Memorial service for Nishitani Keiji at Tenryū-ji Papers by Prof. Mori, Prof. Matsumaru, Prof. Horio, and Prof. Kadowaki; discussions
March 12 (Wed.)	Papers by Prof. Stevens, Prof. Ueda; discussions; excursion; reception hosted by the Taniguchi Foundation
March 13 (Thurs.)	General concluding discussion; farewell party

Despite the fact that the number of participants was smaller than in previous years, the papers managed to touch upon a number of important points relating to Nishitani's role in the development of contemporary thought. Prof. Parkes explored the potential contributions of Nishitani's thought in the increasingly important field of ecology, while Prof. Stevens turned to the

question of Nishitani's political choices before and during World War II, examining some of the factors that have drawn not just Nishitani but a number of other thinkers interested in religious ontology and speculative philosophy toward national-totalitarian ideologies. Overviews of central themes in early- and later-period Nishitani philosophy were presented by Profs. Mori and Horio, respectively. Prof. Kadowaki took up the questions of reason and *śūnyatā* in Nishitani's thought; the topics of nihilism and *śūnyatā* were further examined by Prof. Matsumaru. Prof. Hase investigated the heretofore little-explored theme that appeared in Nishitani's later *śūnyatā* thought: *jōi to shite no kū* (*śūnyatā* as expressed in imagination or emotion), in which the standpoint of *śūnyatā* transcends the world of emptiness and manifests as creativity in the world of everyday reality. During the concluding discussion it was this aspect of *śūnyatā* in particular that was identified by Prof. Ueda as a potentially fruitful avenue for exploring the implications of Nishitani's philosophy in the contemporary world.

Committee Members of the Fourteenth Kyoto Zen Symposium

HIRATA Seikō (Chairman): Chief Abbot of Tenryū-ji Temple
UEDA Shizuteru (Advisor): Professor Emeritus at Kyoto University
HORIO Tsutomu (General Secretary): Professor at Ōtani University
IWAMOTO Akemi (Secretary for Administration): Ph.D. candidate, Kyoto University
KIRCHNER, Thomas (Information Secretary): Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture

There has been a further small change in the address of the Kyoto Zen Symposium Committee, one involving the address numbers. Please send all correspondence to the following address:

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ISSN 0912-8298