

31

Nishida's Conception of Person

Gereon Kopf

Nishida Kitarō (1870–1945), founder of the philosophical movement called the Kyoto school, was born in the Meiji period (1868–1912). During this time, Japan sought to rapidly modernize and to enter the exclusive club of the world powers of that time (Great Britain, Russia, the United States, and Germany). It was an intellectually vibrant period, when Japanese students traveled abroad to gain knowledge of and to assimilate European and American advancements in science as well as technology, and Japanese intellectuals were trying to redefine Japan's self-understanding in the face of modernization and imperialism. Such was the world of Nishida, who not only studied Chinese classics in high school and European languages and philosophies at Tokyo Imperial University but also suggested, in the later years of his career, that his philosophy expressed “Eastern logic” with “Western categories.” In some sense, his work embodied the slogan representative of Meiji Japan, “Japanese soul—Western genius” (*wakon yōsai*).

At the beginning of his career, Nishida applied, if we give credence to his diaries and letters, the concept of “experience”—to be exact, “pure experience,” which he borrowed from William James—to Zen experience in order to construct a new philosophy. However, he refrained from making explicit references to Buddhist thinkers and texts for most of his career and focused instead on exposing what he took to be the inherent inconsistencies of European philosophy. To be precise, he designed his philosophy as a response to neo-Kantianism in the early stages of his career (1911–17) and later began to subvert the philosophical dualism he saw as paradigmatic of

mainstream academic—that is, “Western”—philosophy. For the most part, his philosophical work focused on stratifying a non-dual paradigm. To this purpose, he coined a sequence of terms and settled, in the later stages of his life, on the notion of the “self-identity of the absolute contradictories” (*zettai mujunteki jiko dōitsu*). At the same time, he began to refer to Buddhist texts and thinkers in his philosophical writings. He felt that the non-dual paradigm he sought to formulate was best expressed by traditional Buddhist philosophy. In addition, Nishida's later work explicates an affinity between Buddhist philosophy and his own thought.

Nishida's philosophical approach is as simple as it is ingenious. In his discussion of any given topic, he identifies two possible philosophical positions, objectivism and subjectivism. The former implies linear temporality, a causal determinism based on archeology, and a pluralism of substances; the latter a circular temporality, teleology, and a monism of Being. Nishida suggests that either position only captures half of the picture and is, ultimately, untenable. Thus, when Nishida conceives of the person he subverts existing models of personhood and selfhood that dominated the philosophical discourse of academia at his time as well as the conceptual framework they represent. Nishida believes that what we call “person” is continuous-and-yet-discontinuous, subjective-and-yet-objective, individual-and-yet-universal. Concretely speaking, he maintains that personal identity—that is, identity-over-time—is not guaranteed by a transtemporal essence, while human existence is not radically discontinuous: who I am today is neither identical to nor different from who I was, for example, ten years ago.

Nishida adds another layer of complexity to this discussion when he defines persons alternately as “the creating that is created” (*tsukuri tsukurareta*) and as “from the created to the creating” (*tsukurareta mono kara tsukuru mono e*). Nishida uses these terms to indicate the existential ambiguity of the self: the self is confronted with its own historicity and facticity, while, at the same time, it is also given the creative potential to change this very predicament. Not only is the self as person-over-time continuous-and-yet-discontinuous, but, as a spatial and subsequently somatic self, it is also acting-and-yet-acted-upon. Nishida also holds that the person is neither exclusively mind nor body but mind-and-yet-body, neither exclusively intellectual nor emotional but intellectual-and-yet-emotional, neither exclusively theoretical nor practical but theoretical-and-yet-practical. Finally, persons are neither exclusively individual nor do they dissolve into a group identity or the universality of humanity, but rather exist in the tension of the independent self and the social self. Neither of these exclusive categories can ultimately convey what it means to be a person. Each of these terms “highlights one aspect...and, in so doing, casts into shadow an equally important, though, incompatible aspect.”¹ The key to this holistic self does

1. Thomas P. Kasulis, *Zen Action—Zen Person* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1984), p. 22.

not lie in the intellectual work of scholarship or the moral work of the subjective agent, but in religion, which attempts to uncover the existential basis of the self itself.

The three selections in this volume trace Nishida's use of Buddhism in the formulation of his philosophy of personhood. The first selection, which is taken from his book *The Problem of Japanese Culture* (*Nihon bunka no mondai*, 1940),² sketches his approach to Buddhist philosophy as providing a non-dual paradigm and an alternative framework to traditional academic philosophy. While the terminology of this section clearly reflects the highly problematic and ideologically divisive orientalist rhetoric of his time, it also shows how Nishida uses this rhetoric to contrast two ways of thinking, objectivism and subjectivism. Ultimately, he uses the dichotomization of "Western" and "Indian" thought as illustrations of objectivism and subjectivism, respectively, in order to point to a third way, namely "Buddhist philosophy in Western terminology." At worst, this text reinforces orientalist rhetoric to argue for the superiority of Japanese thought; at best, it suggests a way to subvert the dichotomy postulated by its own rhetoric. Be that as it may, Nishida nevertheless is successful both in his development of a standpoint that eschews the extremes of objectivism and subjectivism and in his integration of Buddhist thought into mainstream philosophical discourse. The second selection, the concluding chapter of his *Philosophical Essays Volume III* (*Tetsugaku ronbunshū daisan*, 1939),³ was designed to illustrate the notoriously difficult concept of the "self-identity of the absolute contradictories." It marks the first time in his career that Nishida freely cites Buddhist thinkers and texts. The goal here is to describe the self as "self-identity of the absolute contradictories." The third selection, from "The Logic of Basho and the Religious Worldview" (*Basho no ronri to shūkyōteki sekaikan*, 1945),⁴ adds to this discussion Nishida's unwavering belief that the true self is always and unequivocally religious in nature.

Translation: From *The Problem of Japanese Culture*

Is there a logic in the East? I think that as long as people have a view of the world and of humanity, they must possess some kind of logic. But we might say that what we call logic generally did not surface in China. Chinese culture is not logical in the strict sense of the word. Indian Buddhism, on the contrary, is extremely intellectual even though it is religious; it constitutes

2. *Nihon bunka no mondai* (1940): Nishida Kitarō. *Nishida Kitarō Zenshū*. 19 vols. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1988, vol. 12:363–366.

3. *Enshikiteki setsumeii* (1939): Nishida, *Nishida Kitarō Zenshū*, vol. 9:332–334.

4. *Basho no ronri to shūkyōteki sekaikan* (1945): Nishida, *Nishida Kitarō Zenshū*, vol. 11, pp. 429–433. For other translations of this excerpt see Nishida 1987, pp. 94–98; and Yusa 1987.

a religion that is established logically. I think Buddhism possesses its own way of seeing and thinking about things. How Indian Buddhism became that way, I do not know. However, I think the object of Buddhist philosophy is the mind that cannot be objectified. Contrary to Aristotelian philosophy, which makes the subject that cannot become a predicate its main concern, Indian philosophy focuses on the question of the "self." Buddhist philosophy emphasizes the concept of no-self. If we examine Mahāyāna Buddhism in this way, we can identify the concept of absolute nothingness of being-and-yet-non-being. The logic of such a philosophy cannot be thought of as either subjective logic or as the logic of object-recognition. I call this the logic of the mind that explicates the self-identity of the contradictories.

How can we conceive of our self? What constitutes the unity of consciousness? People say the self cannot return to the previous moment and has to be thought of simply as a linear progression. However, the self cannot be thought of simply in such a way. The self must be thought to be circular. Past and future exist simultaneously in the present. While all things that are located in the field of consciousness exist independently by themselves, they are unified as the phenomena of my consciousness. The self cannot be exclusively understood as an object. The self comprises non-being, yet, the formation of whatever exists in consciousness is grounded in it.

It is not that Indian philosophers consciously based their thought about the world on this way of thinking; nevertheless, we must say that, like the concept of time in Nāgārjuna's *Discourse on the Middle Way* (*Mūlamādhyaṃikā-kārikās*; Jap. *Chūron*), the concept of the self is thoroughly penetrated by this way of thinking. Scholars who assume the standpoint of object logic use reflection to think about the self. I call this method "approaching the subject from the standpoint of the environment." However, in reflection, we already negate the direction of the object characteristic of any speculation; this negation is located at the foundational field of determination from which the speculation about the object arises. Self-negation does not emerge from the speculation on the object itself. On the contrary, people may think of the self reflectively as they think about things, namely as object, but when we recognize a thing that is opposed to the self, we must have knowledge of the self at the same time. Originally, a thing may not be anything we call either "self" or "thing." In a second step, our consciousness of things and selves emerges through discrimination. Scholars such as J. M. Baldwin say that children begin to differentiate between things and humans about two months after birth. In this book, I cannot begin to address and critique this question. Either way, the mainstream logic of the West is incapable of clarifying the logical form of that which is thought to be the self. Even Descartes's phrase "*cogito ergo sum*" implies that the self is nothing but a substance. But what we conceive of as a substance does not constitute the "self." Buddhism penetrates the self itself and thinks of it as that which exists while being nothing. At the bottom of subjectivity, subjectivity itself must be negated; therein the objective world comes into existence. The phrase "the mind is

this Buddha and the Buddha is this mind”⁵ identifies that which is formed in this way. Even if we describe Buddhist philosophy as the logic of “mind-only” and simply apply it to the categories of Western philosophy, we cannot truly penetrate it. Such a thinking would require that we conceive of the world as mind-only in terms of either psychology or objective rationality. To be exact, we cannot think of the world as mind-only using object logic. Buddhist philosophy thematizes the world that encompasses our conscious self by transcending it, that is, the world of cause and effect in which our conscious self arises and perishes. Regardless of the label “mind-only philosophy,” this is the core of Buddhist thought. The way of thinking from the environment to the subject, which is characteristic of Western philosophy, cannot account for subjectivity at all. However, we cannot negate subjectivity completely. On the contrary, Buddhist philosophy will preserve the moment of subjectivity and see the world from this standpoint. Therefore, we can say that at the base of the way of thinking characteristic of Buddhist philosophy, there is the demand to understand the thing located in the objective world that includes everything. Buddhist philosophy did not develop simply by making the subjective self the central problem. But the problem of the world of objects that proceeds from the environment to the subject was hardly ever reflected on. Indian culture posits that which constitutes the-subject-and-yet-the-world. For this reason, Buddhist philosophy can be thought to be subjectivistic.

I would like to think that Buddhism possesses its own way of thinking of the particular thing and call this the logic of the heart or the logic of place, that is, the contradictory self-identity. The phrase “the mind is this Buddha and the Buddha is the mind” does not imply that we think about the world from the standpoint of the mind that knows itself, but that we think about the mind from the standpoint of the world. This does not mean that we see the world in self-awareness. In his *Discourse on the Middle Way*, Nāgārjuna already introduced dialectics; but does not his philosophy differ fundamentally from the forms of dialectics developed in Western philosophy? In China, Nāgārjuna’s dialectics matured into the Tiantai [Jap. Tendai] Buddhist worldview, expressed by the phrase “three thousand worlds in one thought” [*yin-iansanqian*; Jap. *ichinensanzen*], and into the Huayan [Jap. Kegon] Buddhist

5. Nishida’s *shinsoku zebutsu, butsusoku zeshin* plays on the phrase “the Buddha is this mind” (*foji shixin*; Jap. *butsusoku zeshin*) from *The Records of Zen Master Huangbo Xiyun* and on Mazu’s “the mind is the Buddha” as transmitted by the *Gateless Barrier* as *jixin shifo* (Jap. *sokushin zebutsu*) and by *The Blue Cliff Records* as *jixin jifo* (Jap. *sokushin sokubutsu*). *The Recorded Sayings of Zen Master Huangbo Xiyun* (*Huangbo xiyun chanshi yulu*; Jap. *ōbaku kiun zenshi goroku*), T. 48.2012B.385b, *The Gateless Barrier* (*Wumenguan*; Jap. *Mumonkan*) no. 30, T. 48.2005.296c; *The Blue Cliff Record* (*Biyuan lu*; Jap. *Hekigan roku*) no. 44, T. 48.2003.180c. T refers to *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō*. [A standard collection of the East Asian Buddhist canon compiled in Japan] Takakusu Junjirō, Watanabe Kaikyoku, et al. (eds.), 100 vols. Tokyo: Taishō Issaikyō Kankōkai, 1924–1932.

worldview, summarized as “the unhindered interpenetration among the phenomena” [*shishiwuai*; Jap. *jijimuge*]. Huayan Buddhism also uses the phrase “one-and-yet-everything, everything-and-yet-one” [*yijiyiqie yiqiejiyi*; Jap.: *issokuissai issaisokuichi*] to indicate this way of thinking. One may think of these phrases as verbal entanglements of Buddhist scholasticism; but I believe that the logic of the mind as explained above breathes life into them. We can take some clues from the philosophy of the Japanese Zen master Dōgen. Thinking as a Buddhist philosopher along those lines, he internally unifies this way of thought with his religious experience of “casting off body and mind, body and mind cast off”⁶ Even if we call this practice, that which is thought from the standpoint of Western philosophy differs in its meaning. From the standpoint of Western philosophy, Buddhist logic may be thought of haphazardly as mysticism. However, our self cannot but enter our world of actuality. The logic of the absolute contradictory self-identity of the many-and-yet-one and the one-and-yet-many (*duojiyi yijiduo*; Jap. *tasokuitsu issokuta*)⁷ constitutes the logic of the actual world. I do not say that Buddhist philosophy is more perfect than Western philosophy; however, only if you enter the discourse of Western logic will you be able to call Buddhist philosophy “mystical.” I explain Zen in this way even to people who think that since Zen fails to privilege either monism or dualism it is mystical. While it can be thought that there are similarities between Zen and what is called mystical philosophy, I think that their standpoints differ completely from each other. It is also not the case that Zen does not enter the experience of science in some way. However, I emphasize the uniqueness of Buddhist logic as I mentioned above; at the same time, I do not want to simply return to the conventional logic of Buddhism. Do not many Buddhist scholars themselves apply Buddhist philosophy to the categories of Western philosophy today?

Translation: From “An Explanation Using Graphs”

As the absolute contradictory self-identity of the one totality and the many individuals,⁸ the world forms itself in the form of a self-contradiction. As individuals in this world, our selves are always thoroughly self-contradictory. Therein lie the primary and the final dilemmas of human existence. Hence,

6. Dōgen attributes this phrase to his master Rujing (Jap. *Nyojō*). “The Japanese Zen Master Eihei Dōgen” (*Riben yongping daoyuan chanshi*; Jap. *Nihon eihei dōgen zen-shi*), in *The Succession of the Lamp (Jiding lu*; Jap. *Keitō roku*), *Xuzang jing* 86.1605; Dōgen, “Talk on Discriminating the Way” (Bendōwa), in *The Storehouse of the True Dharma Eye (Shōbōgenzō)*. Some reference books identify the *Record of Rujing's Sayings (Rujing xuyulu*; Jap. *Nyojō zokugoroku*) as a source of this saying.

7. While this phrase originated in the literature of the Huayan Buddhist tradition, Nishida consistently neglects to identify its origin.

8. Even though Nishida refers here to individual persons, he uses the term “individual object” (*kobutsu*) and not “individual person” (*kojin*).

this also constitutes the predicament of the world. We penetrate the root of our own self-contradiction; this way we win true life from the standpoint of the absolute contradictory self-identity. This constitutes religion. Therein lies absolute negation. Buddhism calls this the religious self-cultivation of “loosing one’s life when the body perishes.”⁹ Self-cultivation comprises neither logical speculation nor moral action. Rather, what Dōgen identifies as the method of meditation that “casts off body and mind”¹⁰ should be considered religious practice. (This is the meaning of the phrase “You should diligently study the backward movement expressed in the phrase ‘turn the light, reflect its radiance.’”¹¹) Practice thus understood occupies a standpoint that is fundamentally different from the standpoint where “speculative thought”¹² evaluates concepts. “The way of the Buddha is to study the self; to study the self is to forget the self.”¹³ Negation that is brought about by moral action does not qualify as absolute negation. It is nothing but “using your head to find your head”¹⁴ or “placing one head on top of the other.”¹⁵ We can call this attitude, which is expressed by the phrase “practicing the ten thousand dharmas while carrying the self,” “delusion.”¹⁶ What we call “religious self-cultivation” neither involves the active subject nor is mediated by it. Rather, it transforms such a subject by means of the absolute contradictory self-identity. Therefore, it neither approaches this standpoint in one push nor intuits the whole world from there. Self-cultivation constitutes an infinite progress in this direction. Even Śākyamuni Buddha practices self-cultivation incessantly. If this is so, we neither escape nor transcend the world when we engage in such a religion. From there we think and act while becoming objects in the sense of the true contradictory self-identity. “We practice the self while approaching the ten thousand dharmas.”¹⁷ Even scholarship and morality should be considered this kind of religious activity. Simple transcendence does not constitute the absolute, simple nothingness not absolute nothingness. “Casting off of body and mind,” “body and mind cast off”¹⁸ (“the donkey looks down to the well,

9. *The Records of Linji* (*Linji lu*; Jap. *Rinzai roku*), T. 47.1985.496c; *The Blue Cliff Records* no. 22, T. 48.2003.162c; Dōgen, *The Extensive Records of Eihei* (*Eihei kōroku*), chap. 9.

10. Dōgen, “Talk on Discriminating the Way” (*Bendōwa*), *The Storehouse of the True Dharma Eye*.

11. *The Records of Linji*, T. 47.1985.502a, quoted in Dōgen, *Treatise on the Universal Promotion of Zazen* (*Fukanzazengi*).

12. *The Great Dictionary for Zen Studies* (*Zengaku daijiten*) identifies Keizan Shingi’s *Notes on the Mind That Practices Zazen* (*Zazen yōjin ki*, T. 82) as the source for this phrase.

13. Dōgen, “Actualizing the Kōan” (*Genjōkōan*), in *The Storehouse of the True Dharma Eye*.

14. *The Records of Linji*, T. 47.1985.502a.

15. *The Records of Linji*, T. 47.1985.500c.

16. See Dōgen, “Actualizing the Kōan.”

17. Dōgen, “Actualizing the Kōan.”

18. See note 6.

the well looks up to the donkey”),¹⁹ and the absolute are but one; it must be the self-identity of contradictories. The absolute is power; it is not something that constitutes a unity of opposites and is opposed to relativity. Logic and ethics cannot be separated from religion. The true, the good, and the beautiful come into existence from the standpoint of the absolute contradictory self-identity. However, it is a mistake to think about religion in this way.

It is said that “the Buddha-dharma is not useful nor does it accomplish anything; it constitutes nothing but the everyday and the ordinary.” This does not mean that “to have a shit, take a piss, put on your clothes, eat and drink”²⁰ in itself is sufficient. However, if one occupies the standpoint of the self-identity of the absolute contradictories, these words are meaningful. “The heart of the dharma has no form; it traverses the ten directions; when it is in the eye, we say we see; when it is in the ear, we say we hear.”²¹ The wise person and the fool are therein one,²² and so are important and minor affairs. Everything arises from this standpoint and returns to it. The very foundation must be exclusively the “everyday.”²³ However, this does not constitute the undifferentiated one. It is said that “when Hu arrives, it is Hu who appears; when Han arrives, it is Han who appears.”²⁴ As the “one-and-yet-all and the all-and-yet-one,”²⁵ that which is signified by the above phrases is infinitely differentiated in the self-identity of contradictories. From this foundation everything arises. Even the many and the one are not completely unified. However, in our poesis, we always constitute the self-identity of contradictories. The phrase “body-mind oneness”²⁶ designates the self-identity of contradictories. Our self cannot be conceived in any other way. The practice and actualization²⁷ of “body-mind oneness” constitutes religious self-cultivation. “To study the self is to forget the self; to forget the self is to be actualized by the ten thousand dharmas.”²⁸ At the time when one “has a shit,

19. *The Extensive Records of Zen Master Hongzhi* (*Hongzhi chanshi guanglu*; Jap. *Wanshi zenji kōroku*), T. 48.2001.23b.

20. Here Nishida responds to the observation by Zen master Linji that “[t]he Buddha dharma is not useful nor does it accomplish anything; it constitutes nothing but the everyday and the ordinary; have a shit, take a piss; put on your clothes, eat and drink, retire when tired.” *The Records of Linji*, T. 47.1985.0498a.

21. *The Records of Linji*, T. 47.1985.497c.

22. Here Nishida responds to the observation by Zen master Linji that “the fool laughs at us and the wise person already knows this.” *The Records of Linji*, T. 47.1985.0498a.

23. Nishida stresses the affinity of his neologism *byōjōtei* (literally, “the depth of the everyday”) with the phrase “the everyday heart is the way” (*pingchangxin shifo*; Jap. *byōjōshin zebutsu*) from the *Gateless Barrier* (no. 19, T. 48.2005.295b) and the saying cited earlier from *The Records of Linji* (see note 18).

24. *The Transmission of the Lamp* (*Xuzhuandeng lu*; Jap. *Zokudentō roku*), T. 51.2077.593b.

25. See the previous excerpt.

26. Dōgen, “Talk on Discriminating the Way.”

27. Dōgen, “Actualizing the Kōan.”

28. Dōgen, “Actualizing the Kōan.”

takes a piss, puts on clothes, eats and drinks,” the self is actualized by the “ten thousand dharmas.” Our self reaches the point of absolute negation at the foundation of its own formation. At the place where one does not “turn the light to reflect its radiance,”²⁹ the religious question disappears.

Religion does not mediate the conduct of the moral subject. “Shinran said: I have not said the *nembutsu*³⁰ even once out of filial piety for my parents.”³¹ “Since practitioners do not practice the *nembutsu* by themselves, it is called ‘non-practice’; since the good deeds are not performed by moral agents, we call them non-good.”³² The reason for this is that “evil is deep and grave” and “passions and delusions are blind and pervasive”;³³ therefore, we have to rely on the original vow of “Amida only” [*shikanmida*].³⁴ But this should not be thought of as the “easy truth.”³⁵ To enter such a “faith in the other power”³⁶ is to truly die to oneself. The true mind of morality emerges from this attitude. Phrases such as “good and evil are not different” imply that the self truly dies and that one enters the faith in the other-power. Even in Christianity, the faith in Christ’s sacrificial death is fundamental. There is no path from humans to god. As I said before, I do not take logic and ethics lightly. I only want to clarify the essence of what is called religion. Even logic and ethics can only be explained from the religious standpoint.

Translation: From “The Logic of Basho and the Religious Worldview”

As the self-identity of the absolute contradictories space and time, our world is the world of infinite causality; it progresses from the created to that which creates as the self-determination of the absolute present. The self constitutes the individual in such a world, but because, as Pascal observed, we know the self by transcending it, it is more precious than the world that crushes us to death. The reason we can say this is that our self takes on the form of the contradictory self-identity as the self-negation of the absolute that determines itself in self-expression; we comprise the many individuals of the absolute one. We touch the absolute one by negating ourselves in an act of

29. See note 10.

30. The *nembutsu* is a short phrase, *namu amida butsu*, that is used in Pure Land Buddhism to express one’s reliance on Amida Buddha.

31. Shinran, *A Lament of Differences (Tannishō)*, chap. 5.

32. Shinran, *Lament of Differences*, chap. 8.

33. Shinran, *Lament of Differences*, chap. 1.

34. This phrase is a creative response to the slogan “Zazen only” (*shikantaza*), employed in Sōtō Zen Buddhism (Sōtōshū).

35. This phrase, *Ani no tai*, plays with the characters of “easy” in the Pure Land Buddhist slogan “Easy practice” (*igyō*) and the character used for “truth” in the “Four Noble Truths” (*āryasatya*; Jap. *shishōtai*) of Buddhism.

36. This is one of the mottos of the True Pure Land school of Buddhism (Jōdo Shinshū).

inverse correlation. It is thus possible to say that we enter eternal life in the mode of life-and-yet-death and death-and-yet-life; we are religious. I think that what we call the religious question deals exclusively with our volitional self; it constitutes the problem of the individual. However, this does not mean that religion aims at the individual's peace of mind as it is usually conceived. Peace of mind desired by the self is not a concern of religion; it assumes a standpoint contrary to that of religion. If it did, the religious question could not even be considered a moral dilemma. The desiring self that fears pain and seeks happiness is not the true individual; it acts merely biologically. From such a standpoint, religion must be called an anesthetic.

Our self constitutes the self-negation of the absolute and touches it exhaustively in inverse correlation; the more individual it becomes, the more it faces the absolute, that is, god. Our self faces god at the brink of its individuality. It faces the enormity of the one totality exhaustively as the self-identity of the absolute contradictories at the extreme point where the individual determines itself in the historical world. For this reason, every single one of us faces god as the representative of humanity that traverses from the eternal past to the eternal future. Every self faces the absolute present itself as the momentary determination of the absolute present. This means that our selves constitute numberless centers of an infinite sphere that is without a circumference and devoid of one center. When the absolute determines itself as the absolute contradictory self-identity of the many and the one, the world is bottomlessly volitional as the self-determination of absolute nothingness. It constitutes the absolute will in its totality; at the same time, the will of the numberless individuals opposes the absolute will in myriad ways. In this sense, the human world emerges from the world that embodies the "*sokushi*"³⁷ of the Prajñāpāramitā literature. Therein lies the meaning of the phrase "there is no place it abides, yet this mind arises."³⁸ Panshan Baoji [Jap. Banzan Hōjaku], a follower of Mazu [Daoyi; Jap. Baso Dōitsu; 709–788] said "it is like brandishing a sword through the air; it is not a question of whether it reaches its goal or not; it leaves no trace in the air; even the blade is not touched; if this is the case, the mind does not discriminate, it does not think, it does not imagine anything; it comprises the whole-mind-and-yet-the-Buddha and all-Buddhas-and-yet-one-person; persons and Buddhas are not different; this is the beginning of the way."³⁹ In the same way in which a sword that strikes the air leaves no trace and remains intact, the whole-mind-and-yet-the-Buddha and all-Buddhas-and-yet-the-person constitute the self-identity

37. D. T. Suzuki believed that the term "*sokushi*" (Chin.: *jifei*, literally, "is not") is used in the *Diamond Sūtra* to indicate a particular form of logic. Suzuki taught that this logic had the form "when we say A is A we mean that A is not A, therefore it is A," and was characteristic of Mahāyāna Buddhism. See *Suzuki daisetsu zenshū*, 32 vols. (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1968), vol. 5, p. 381.

38. *Diamond Sūtra (Jingang bore boluomi jing; Jap. Kongō hannya haramitsu kyō)*, T. 08.235.748c.

39. *The Mirror of Orthodoxy (Zongjing lu, Jap. Sūgyō roku)*, T. 48.2016.944c.

of the absolute contradictories. Even this phrase may seem, to someone who assumes the vantage point of object logic, to indicate pantheism. However, the words of the Zen practitioners cannot be explained in such a way; they disclose the logic of *sokuhi* and of the contradictory self-identity. All Buddhas and individuals are one in the sense of this logic. The true individual emerges in the momentary determination of the absolute present. This is the meaning of the phrase “there is no place it abides, yet this mind arises.”

That which takes on the form of the self-determination of nothingness is the will. The volitional self, that is, our individual self, constitutes neither the subject nor the predicate. It arises as the self-determination of the place as the absolute contradictory self-identity of the subjective and the predicative directions. For this reason, just as the moment can be thought to be eternal, inasmuch as our self is thoroughly individual, it touches the absolute in an inverse determination with each step. Linji observes that “in this lump of red meat, the true person of no rank resides; he constantly enters and departs through your sense organs.”⁴⁰ The phrase “to be thoroughly individual” indicates that one constitutes the extreme of what it means to be human and represent humanity. This is illustrated by the saying “If I truly consider Amida’s vow that was made after five kalpas of contemplation, I realize it was made only for myself, Shinran.”⁴¹ This does not indicate the so-called individual. For this reason, morality is universal, religion individual. . . .

In Buddhism, there is the phrase “the mind arises in an instant.”⁴² At the basis of their formation, human beings are self-contradictory. The more they are intellectual and volitional, the more this is true. Human beings are not without original sin. Morally speaking, it may be irrational to say that parents transmit their sin to their children, but the very existence of human beings can be found therein. To transcend original sin is to transcend humanity. This is impossible from the human standpoint. We can only be saved if we believe in the reality of Christ as the revelation of God’s love. Therein we return to the root of our self. It is said that in “Adam we die. . . in Christ we are born.”⁴³ In true religion, this world is always a world of karma, a world of ignorance and of life-and-death. But we are saved by Buddha’s vow of compassion and inasmuch as we believe in “the mysterious name of Amida.” This has to be understood as a response to the voice of the absolute. In the depth of this standpoint, we find that “birth-and-death is no-birth” (Zen master Bankei [1622–93]).⁴⁴ In the self-identity of contradictories, beings are “all-Buddhas-and-yet-one-person; persons and Buddhas are not different.” This is like brandishing a sword in air. Again, it is like “throwing

40. *The Records of Zen Master Linji*, T. 47.1985.496c.

41. “Postscript” (*Kōjo*), in *A Lament of Differences*.

42. *The Great Awakening of Faith* (*Dasheng qixin lun*, Jap. *Daijō kishin ron*), T. 44.1846.267a.

43. Rom. 5:12–21.

44. *The Records of Zen Master Bankei* (*Bankei zenshi goroku*).

pebbles into a stream, moment after moment the flow never stops" (Zhaozhou [Congshen; Jap. Jōshū Jūshin]).⁴⁵

Bibliography and Suggested Reading

- Heisig, James. (2001) *Philosophers of Nothingness: An Essay on the Kyoto School*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Kopf, Gereon. (2009) "Self-Identity of the Absolute What?—Reflections on How to Teach the Philosophy of Nishida Kitarō." In David Jones and Ellen Klein, eds., *Teaching Texts and Contexts: The Art of Infusing Asian Philosophies and Religions*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Maraldo, John C. (1998) "Nishida Kitarō (1870–1945)." In *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Vol. 7. New York: Routledge, pp. 13–16.
- Nishida, Kitarō. (1987a) *Last Writings: Nothingness and the Religious Worldview*, translated by David A. Dilworth. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- Nishida, Kitarō. (1987b) "The Logic of *Topos* and the Religious Worldview, Part II," translated by Michiko Yusa. *Eastern Buddhist*, Vol. 20, No. 1: 93–96.
- Yusa, Michiko. (2002) *Zen and Philosophy: An Intellectual Biography of Nishida Kitarō*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

45. *The Blue Cliff Records*, T. 48.2003.207a.