

## Contributions to Dialogue with the Kyoto School

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### **“Japanese Philosophy” in the World**

Since philosophers have often spoken of Greek philosophy, French philosophy, English philosophy, American philosophy, and so on, it would seem plausible to speak of “Japanese philosophy.” Nevertheless, until about twenty or thirty years ago, philosophers in Japan generally did not take this to be a philosophically meaningful locution. It was from the beginning regarded as out of the question. If one did speak expressly of “Japanese philosophy,” this tended to be understood as stressing the “Japanese” character of the philosophy in question, and this was deemed inappropriate to the scholarly nature of philosophy as an objective and universal discipline. The universality of philosophy was implicitly understood to mean the scholarly nature of Western philosophy. When one spoke of “philosophy” in Japanese academia, this was understood to obviously imply “Western philosophy,” and if one studied philosophy at a Japanese university, one studied as a matter of course—and often exclusively—Western philosophers from Plato and Aristotle, through Descartes, Kant, and Hegel, to Husserl and Levinas. Of course, one might focus on a particular topic in order to clarify the relations between these different figures or to trace the history of a certain problematic; or one might go a step further and develop one’s own philosophical path of thinking through one’s study of these Western philosophers. But it remained the case that philosophy in modern Japan was an imported academic discipline of Western origin. The above state of affairs is historically explicable insofar as in pre-modern times there was, as Nakae Chōmin famously quipped, “no philosophy in Japan”—assuming, that is, that we strictly adhere to the Western concept of “philosophy.”

While this state of affairs had its historical conditions, the situation is beginning to change as we enter into a new era in which we can say—as Nishida Kitarō foresaw in the midst of the world-historical developments of his time—“the world is today becoming real.” In the wake of a shift away from the past identification of Western philosophy with philosophy as such, and in a movement toward opening up a discourse of “world philosophy,” new and important contributions to philosophy can be expected to come from ideas that originate in non-Western traditions of culture and thought. One reason for this is that the European philosophical tradition, the tradition that Japanese philosophers have long held up as a model, has entered an era of radical self-questioning. In particular, certain dominant ways of thinking in modern European philosophy, certain foundational ideas that were previously held to be certain and even self-evident, have fallen into question. The ontological notion of substance, the logical principle of identity, subject/object dualism in epistemology, the strict division between reason and sensibility, and underlying everything the idea of “God” or the distinctively modern idea of the absolute “subject”—all of these at once dominant and fundamental ways of thinking, have fallen into question. We can look upon “deconstruction” as one palpable manifestation of this state of affairs.

The turn away from the previous identification of European philosophy with philosophy as such, and the development of world philosophy, will no doubt advance a philosophical thinking that is no longer restricted to the specific “love of wisdom” and “science of principles as the science of sciences” that originated in the West. Contact between different traditions promises to help shed light on shared fundamental structures of human existence, and it will encourage new ways of bringing to awareness the understandings of the world and the self found in our various manners of being-in-the-world. What is being heralded as “the end of philosophy” concerns the system of knowledge that places metaphysics in the position of first philosophy. “World philosophy” calls for a transformation of philosophy itself along with a transformation of the world. For Western philosophy as well, an “other beginning” of thinking is called for; and the possibility of discovering indications for such an other beginning in the insights of traditions outside of Europe is now being realized.<sup>1</sup>

Now, in order for Japanese philosophy to be capable of making a meaningful contribution to world philosophy, Japanese philosophers need to go beyond their specialized research in European philosophy in order to discover, by way of a dialogical confrontation, what Nishida called a “deeper ba-

sis" between traditions. Then, concrete efforts of thinking must be carried out in the newly shared world-horizon that opens up on this deeper basis. Two examples which met the above conditions, and which were articulated so as to be comprehensible to Westerners, are Suzuki Daisetsu's (Daisetz Suzuki) "Eastern Way of Seeing" and Izutsu Toshihiko's "Eastern Philosophy." It is the content of their works, and not just the fact that many of them were written in English, which made them significant initial formulations of what Japanese thinkers can contribute to world philosophy. While both concerned themselves with "Eastern" ideas, these ideas were reinterpreted within a world-horizon and were creatively transformed to address the world. Beyond these contributions, on a properly philosophical level stands the thought of Nishida Kitarō, who took up the theme of the "world." And after Nishida, in the wake of changes in the spiritual climate of the world, the philosophy of Nishitani Keiji assumes special significance.

Just as European philosophy as such should not be inflated into world philosophy, non-European traditions as they are cannot contribute directly to world philosophy. While European philosophy must be deconstructed and perhaps even pass through what Heidegger calls the end of philosophy to an other beginning from which it can undergo a transformative turn to world philosophy, the insights harbored in Eastern traditions need to be transformed into "philosophical principles" before they can contribute to world philosophy. Nishida's key ideas, such as "pure experience," "place," and "contradictory self-identity," can be viewed as traditional insights transformed into philosophical principles. Nishitani took Mahāyāna Buddhism's key term "emptiness" and refashioned it into a fundamental philosophical category.

The potential for Japanese philosophy to contribute to the development of world philosophy is based in at least the following two aspects of its historical foundations. First of all, the "place" of Japan—which is constituted in the understanding of self and world by means of the Japanese language—is not simply that of Japan alone, since the Japanese tradition harbors the influence of a number of traditions, including those of India, central Asia, China, and Korea. Shaped by these cross-fertilizations, the "place" of Japan developed as one great confluence of the rich sediments of these non-Western traditions, one that can undoubtedly serve as a significant reservoir of ideas for the formation of world philosophy.

Secondly, this "place" of Japan now contains within it the experience, accumulated over the course of a century and a half, of a monumental encounter, collision, and exchange with Western culture and its products. Traversing

the two stages of the “opening of the country” (*kaikoku*) in the Meiji period and the country’s defeat in World War II, and despite the fact that Japanese society on the whole—albeit with some exceptions—was characterized by a turning of its back on tradition (this too is a phenomenon of cross-cultural encounter), there were exceptional individuals who placed themselves in the gap between these radically different traditions and took up the challenge of rethinking the fundamental principles of the world from this vantage point. We inherit the fruits of the efforts of these great thinkers who subjected their very existence to their cross-cultural experiments. Examples include Natsume Sōseki in literature, Nishida Kitarō in philosophy, and Suzuki Daisetsu in religion. Such intercultural experience in the “place” of Japan may well come to be seen as one paradigm for the interculturality and multiculturalism that is becoming such a prevalent concern in the world today. Japanese philosophy unfolds in the world and for the world, and Japanese philosophers are called on to show the world what and how they think.

A positive contribution to world philosophy can be made by Japanese philosophers only if they engage in genuine self-criticism, that is to say, in self-criticism made real by taking into account criticism from the world. The present anthology, *Japanese and Continental Philosophy: Conversations with the Kyoto School*, which includes critical interpretations of and dialogues with the Kyoto School by European and North American scholars, is certainly a timely and significant venture. Confronted with Western philosophy, Nishida realized that the Eastern tradition was lacking in “logic,” and so he took as his life’s task the formulation of such a logic. Japanese philosophy became in this situation a *topos* of thought which lets Japan be reflected in the world and lets the world be reflected in Japan. What is needed today is a world brought together by the fruits of mutual critique and mutual supplementation between different traditions. In order to discuss more specifically the kind of contributions that can be made by Japanese philosophy, let us look more closely at the philosophy of the Kyoto School.

### **The Core of the Kyoto School: Nishida’s Nothingness and Nishitani’s Emptiness**

The core issue that animates both Eastern and Western philosophical thinking is that of “being,” “nothingness,” and “being and nothingness.” It would be oversimplifying to categorically characterize the West in terms of a philosophy of being, and the East in terms of a philosophy of nothingness. Among

European philosophical thinkers who were deeply moved by an idea of nothingness, Meister Eckhart and Nietzsche immediately come to mind. And yet, even in these cases, when we compare them to Nishida and Nishitani and the intellectual tradition in their background that conceives of what is originary in terms of nothingness, it does after all seem that in European philosophy what is originary is ultimately grasped in terms of being. That is to say, in the West nothingness is understood as non-being, that is, as the negation of being, and in this sense is based on being. Even when negativity is actively or even ardently grasped, in the end it is grasped as a self-negation of being that serves to elevate being itself.<sup>2</sup> By contrast, in the intellectual tradition behind Nishida and Nishitani, nothingness (*mu*) is not only non-being (*hi-u*) as the negation of being (*u*), but also contains a sense that goes beyond this, and this “additional sense” is brought to life when the originariness of nothingness is existentially realized and thoughtfully cultivated. When nothingness is limited to non-being as the negation of being, it is restricted to the horizon of being. Nothingness does not then tear through the horizon of being (which includes non-being), but rather, on the basis of what might be called a transcendental ontological preeminence of being, it is from the start posited as what can be comprehended in terms of non-being.

In the Western tradition, the thinker who has most thoroughly inquired into the mutual interpenetration of being and nothingness is the later Heidegger. When he writes, “As the shrine of Nothing, death harbors within itself the essential presencing of being,”<sup>3</sup> he is almost pronouncing being-qua-nothingness and nothingness-qua-being. Yet it remains the case that Heidegger’s ultimate concern is still with being. Being (*das Sein*) is spoken of in terms of nothingness to clearly distinguish it from beings (*das Seiende*), but nothingness is not the origin. Even when being—verbally understood as the event of appropriation/expropriation (*Ereignis/Enteignis*)—approximately expresses the dynamic of “from nothingness/toward nothingness,” it is an event of being, not of nothingness.

In short, there are two orientations of thinking being and nothingness. On the one hand, there is the orientation of seeing nothingness as more than the negation of being, and of realizing the ultimate origin of nothingness in a higher level of negativity, namely that of *neither* being *nor* nothingness. On the other hand, there is the orientation of seeing the negativity of nothingness over against being in terms of non-being, and of subsuming the negativity of non-being into being so as to elevate being to the level of absolute being. While these two directions cannot be further elucidated here, let us note that

they correspond to different ways of thinking the being and nothingness of the subject—in other words, life and death. On the one hand, one can be oriented by the idea of life and death as an inseparable pair and by the ideal of true enlightened existence in the midst of the recurrence of life and death;<sup>4</sup> on the other hand, one can be oriented by the idea of a transcendence of death's negation of life that leads to a transformation into eternal life. What is at stake here is not a comparative question, a matter of judging which orientation is superior, but rather an existential question, a matter of how one is to live and die as a human being.

With these issues of being and nothingness in the background, and amid the encounter—the collision and exchange—of Eastern and Western traditions of culture and thought, Nishida Kitarō and Tanabe Hajime first developed philosophies based on the idea that the absolute must be thought in terms of nothingness. The fundamental category of their philosophies was therefore “absolute nothingness” (*zettai-mu*). While following the methodologies of Western philosophy, they took into consideration the East Asian notion of a primordial origin of “nothingness” (Ch. *wu*; Jp. *mu*) as well as Mahāyāna Buddhism's notion of “emptiness” (Sk. *śūnyatā*; Jp. *kū*). With absolute nothingness as their philosophical principle, they set out on a difficult road toward bridging the differences between East and West, with the aim of conceiving the world anew within a horizon that included these differences.

Despite their commonalities, there are also differences between Nishida's and Tanabe's conceptions of “absolute nothingness.” While Nishida's conceived of it in terms of “place” (*basho*), Tanabe's conceived of it in terms of “praxis” (*jissen*). Nishida developed a philosophy of “the place of absolute nothingness” (including “contradictory self-identity” as the “logic of place”), while Tanabe developed a philosophy of “the working of absolute nothingness” (absolute nothingness-qua-love). It is beyond the scope of the present essay to enter much further into the vast topic of—and the profound questions regarding—absolute nothingness. Here I wish to merely draw attention to the potential for Western philosophy to garner from Nishida's philosophy indications for a radical turn in thought, a potential that arises in the contemporary world-situation. Nishida's philosophy of absolute nothingness developed the ideas of “place” rather than “substance,” “contradictory self-identity” rather than the “principle of identity,” a “movement from a place preceding the subject/object split to a unification of the mutual opposition of subject-and-object” rather than a “dualism of subject and object,” and a thoughtful cultivation of the reason inherent in sensibility rather than the supposition of a strict division

between reason and sensibility. Such are the indications that can be gleaned from Nishida for developing new principals of philosophical thought.

Succeeding Nishida in the lineage of the Kyoto School, Nishitani's "philosophy of emptiness" is perhaps exerting a more direct impact on Western philosophy, meeting with positive as well as critical reception in Europe and North America. As a key term in Mahāyāna Buddhism, "emptiness" has received a nearly exhaustive amount of attention and has been discussed in a variety of manners. I will not delve into these discussions here, but will focus rather on Nishitani's "standpoint of emptiness" and sketch the development of his notion of emptiness in relation to Nishida's notion of nothingness.

Despite his direct connection to Nishida, Nishitani worked out a novel standpoint of emptiness. Why did Nishitani speak of the standpoint of emptiness rather than absolute nothingness? It can be said that the reason for this was the significant role that the arrival of nihilism played in Nishitani's thought, a problem which had not been an issue for Nishida. Nishida's project was aimed at uniting the cultures of East and West in their differences, deepening the possibilities of human existence, and constructing a comprehensive and concrete system of thought which would include the sciences. Put simply, this was a matter of uniting the spirit of modern science with Mahāyāna Buddhism. In contrast, Nishitani, who began to philosophize thirty years after Nishida did, faced a different problem, a problem which was increasingly shaking the spiritual and intellectual ground of the world. Nishitani wrote: "The space for a primordial relation with the transcendent is closing, and because of this the world and human existence are becoming fundamentally meaningless and aimless. This condition is lurking at the base of the way of being of modern civilization and human being. Such a situation is what is called the arrival of nihilism" (NCK 11: 163). In that modern science destroyed the teleological worldview, according to Nishitani it too bears the mark of nihilism.

Exposing his thinking and his very existence to this problem of nihilism, Nishitani's fundamental task became that of "overcoming nihilism by way of passing through nihilism." The crux of his inquiry into and response to nihilism was reached in the central chapters of his *What is Religion?* (translated as *Religion and Nothingness*), "Nihilicity and *Śūnyatā*" and "The Standpoint of *Śūnyatā*" (NKC 10: 87–187; RN 77–167). In the opening remarks of his final lecture at Otani University in June 1987, Nishitani reflected on his decades-long path of thought and remarked: "If pressed to say what the central issue is, it is thinking in response to the basic problem of nihilism" (NKC 26: 287). Born in the year of Nietzsche's death, as if by a fateful coincidence of the intel-

lectual and spiritual history of the world, Nishitani inherited Nietzsche's penetrating nihilism and found a way to live through and beyond it. "Overcoming nihilism by way of passing through it" thus characterized the urgent matter pervading both his life and thought.

The problem is the unrelenting sense of meaninglessness and nihility that comes from the impermanence and nihility of human existence. Nietzsche positively accepted this nihility by proclaiming that "God is dead," and that in the place left vacant by "God" as the ultimate ground of everything and basis of all meaning is found an abysmal nihility which threatens everything with an "eternal meaninglessness." To the extent to which nothingness is enfolded back into being as non-being, nothingness is approached as a bottomless nihilism. This is the nihility which encroaches upon the modern spirit and its quest for endless freedom and total independence. It is a nihility which rises up to an ever higher level to nihilate any and all attempts to oppose it with some kind of substantial being. What Nietzsche revealed as "European nihilism"—as the culmination of two thousand years of Europe's intellectual and spiritual history (including its religion, metaphysics, science, etc.), a nihilism which he says will haunt Europe for two hundred years to come—this has now, as a consequence of the Europeanization of the world, become nihilism for the world.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, the Europeanization of non-European lands has brought about a severance from their native traditions, and this severance has made the nihilism in these lands all the more severe.

In the midst of this abysmal nihility unveiled by nihilism, the idea of "absolute nothingness" could not help but be impacted. In a thoroughgoing nihilism, the very notion of the "absolute" rings hollow. Even if one repeatedly stresses that the absolute must be thought in terms of nothingness, and even if one adds the warning that this nothingness is not to be understood as the simple contrary to being, "absolute nothingness" remains a fundamental term within the horizon of ontology, and ontology as such has been rendered ineffective. For Nishitani, the effects of nihilism were not limited to the "death of God" in Europe; even "absolute nothingness"—an idea conceived in the horizon of the world and with Eastern traditions in its background—had ceased to be effective in its present form. Although the idea of "absolute nothingness" originated out of Nishida's bold venture of thought, it had quickly become a ready-made concept for the next generation of thinkers, and, in a rapidly changing world that was covering over differences between East and West, it was left suspended within the nihility of this superficial "one world." This shallow global nihilism is, as it were, a nihilation of the abysmal depth of



the abyss of nihility that was revealed by Nietzsche. Nihilating the nihilism witnessed by Nietzsche, this endlessly nihilistic nihility of shallowness is the end-stage of nihilism. (In passing let me add that Nishitani saw in this end-stage of nihilism what can be spoken of as the “wickedness” [*ma*] that runs rampant in the present world-historical era.) The issue at stake in the world today is not the reality of “East and West,” as it was for Nishida, but rather what makes meaningless the distinction of East and West, namely, the “superficial one world and its nihility.” This is the true problem of the “world” today, a problem now shared by all those whose being is that of being-in-the-world. And this is where Nishitani’s thought is situated.

Because of the collapse of the absolute, the loss of the horizon of ontology, and the endless nihilization of nihility, “absolute nothingness,” which would accommodate within itself even absolute being, could no longer be the basic category of thought in a world horizon. What was direly needed was a simple basic category that could accommodate as an ambiguous possibility absolute nothingness on the one hand and nihility on the other, and, moreover, which could convey the dynamic of a qualitative obversion, conversion, and recovery from the reality of nihility (and the nihility of reality) to absolute nothingness. Nishitani found this basic category in “emptiness” (*śūnyatā*, *kū*), an idea that was, as he said, “demanded by the problem of nihilism.” From the standpoint of thought and existence within the modern world, Nishitani developed a concrete and embodied understanding of this key term of Mahāyāna Buddhism. At the same time, Nishitani proceeded to develop a penetrating account of thought and existence within the modern world in light of this notion of emptiness. He dialectically demonstrated his philosophy of emptiness by way of carrying out an extensive dialogue and confrontation with the Western history of thought. This dialogue took into consideration nearly all the dimensions of the questions of “being and nothingness” and “life and death,” including a dialogue and confrontation with Western ontology and its idea of substance, with Christian theology and its idea of a personal God, and with Western philosophy of human existence and its idea of the subject.

Although “emptiness” is a fundamental concept in the tradition of Mahāyāna Buddhism, given its unprecedented use in this modern context, Nishitani tells us that he “borrowed” it and used it “rather freely” from a “standpoint that attempts to stand at once within and outside of tradition” (NKC 10: 5; RN xlix, translation modified). Precisely for this reason, in a world that included traditions which did not know such an idea of emptiness, the term was able to take on new significance through the medium of

Nishitani's thought. When one simply hears the word "emptiness," even if one knows that its core meaning is that of Mahāyāna Buddhism's *śūnyatā*, one can freely put in play other possible connotations, such as: (1) futility, vacuity, and nihility; (2) the sky,<sup>6</sup> and in particular a vast blue sky. Nishitani speaks of the sky as the invisible infinite become visible, as the visible eternal, and of the open expanse (*kokū*)<sup>7</sup> as an image of the fundamentally invisible infinite. He suggests that "the blue sky is this open expanse as it appears in visible form to human sensibility," and that "the sight of the blue sky with the eyes of the body is directly transferred to the sight of the open expanse with the eyes of the mind/heart";<sup>8</sup> and finally (3) the wind, which is closely related to emptiness and the sky for Nishitani. (In 1980 he titled a collection of his essays *The Heart of the Wind* [NKC 20].) Nishitani was the first to use "emptiness" as a basic category of thought in such a way as to put all of these nuances into play, and to think through their interrelations.

The core issue is that of breaking free of nihility, and the positivity of the freedom that emerges from this break. And furthermore, the structure of the self-awareness that arises in this process is at issue. Nishitani writes: "As a valley unfathomably deep may be imagined set within an endless expanse of sky, so it is with nihility and emptiness. . . . Emptiness is an abyss for the abyss of nihility. Furthermore, the abyss of emptiness opens up more to the near side, more immediately here and now than what we call ego, or subjectivity." And yet, because it is more to the near side of us than we ourselves are, "we fail to realize that we stand more to the near side of ourselves in emptiness than we do in self-consciousness" (NKC 10: 110–11/RN 98). The question is whether, in the bottomless self-awakening that leaps into nothingness, the nihility that endlessly nihilizes our being-in-the-world is itself emptied and converted into the emptiness that lies open underfoot. The insight reached at the end of Nishitani's path of thought was that the transcendence out of the limitless nihilizing of nihility is only possible—if it is indeed possible—by way of this emptying and conversion into emptiness, in other words, by way of the realization that "nihility too resides within emptiness." The endless futility of the hollow vacuum and the bottomless brightness of the open expanse are two revolving sides of the 360-degree modulations of emptiness.

What was the "living God" for Nishida became the "dead God" for Nishitani. Both the word "God" and the word "absolute nothingness" were engulfed in a vacuum of nihility wherein they rang hollow. But what Nishitani called "emptiness" is an infinitely deep and open expanse that is able to empty and

convert (or obvert) even this hollow vacuum of nihility, such that once again “God” lives and “absolute nothingness” takes on significance.

Now, what one becomes aware of in the realm of thought as the problem of nihilism is, more originally and immediately, the problem of life as such—that is to say, the problem of life and death. The idea of “overcoming nihilism by way of passing through nihilism” could be said only because it was lived. This is conveyed by the various impressions recorded by those who had the opportunity to meet Nishitani and get to know him personally.<sup>9</sup>

We have seen that for Nishitani “overcoming nihilism by way of passing through nihilism” was an event of nihility/emptiness. The concreteness of the affirmative aspect of the standpoint of emptiness—in the language of Mahāyāna Buddhism, this would be the “marvelous being” aspect of the key phrase “true emptiness, marvelous being”—became a central concern of Nishitani’s after the 1961 publication of *What is Religion? (Religion and Nothingness)*. A noteworthy example of this is his 1981 essay, “Emptiness and Sameness” (NKC 13: 111–60).<sup>10</sup>

### The Modern World as a Problem

It is possible to view the basic tendency of the Western philosophies of Nietzsche, Heidegger, and deconstruction as heading “toward nothingness.” By contrast, we can view the thought of Nishida and Nishitani, with the Eastern traditions in their background, as on the whole moving in a direction “from nothingness.” While moving solely in the direction of “toward nothingness” may lead to a negative questioning that persists in problematizing everything, moving in the direction of “from nothingness” harbors the possibility of discovering creative responses. However, the power of these responses weakens if one moves solely in a direction “from nothingness”; one can even degenerate into a lukewarm complacency of inactivity. The reinvigoration of responses requires exposure to the severity of questioning that “toward nothingness” provokes.

In this sense, it has perhaps become possible for the directions of “toward nothingness” and “from nothingness” to converse by standing back-to-back, as it were, each contacting the other by means of the nothingness shared between them. The collision and rift between East and West has ultimately given rise to this possibility. Responding “from nothingness” was occasioned by the questioning “toward nothingness,” and this questioning together with this responding can bring about a mutual enhancement of East and West. It might

even be said that the vitality of this questioning and responding could give birth to new world-philosophical principles. These would be principles for a world that would include the rich content of the variety of different traditions, a world wherein each of these traditions could be revitalized. Yet this world remains but a possibility; and it may vanish without ever having become anything more than a possibility.

It must be said that the grim global reality of today is the formation of a mono-world which renders meaningless the differences between East and West, and which thus invalidates the historic undertaking of Nishida and Nishitani alike. A hypersystematization of the world is bringing with it a swift and powerful process of homogenization that is superficial and yet thoroughgoing. This in turn is engendering friction and even confrontation between ethnic groups and their cultures; the accelerating destruction of nature; human physiological irregularities and disorders as well as the deepening of internal psychological fissures; the spread of a feeling of vacuity; and an endless mad frenzy of vacuous activity. Despite efforts to bring about a world full of diversity that is yet unified by means of contact between different traditions, it does not appear that such efforts today are able to clear the way for a worldwide countercultural movement that would oppose the contemporary hypersystematization of the world and its concomitant homogenization. The uniform world system increasingly covers over a variety of areas and arenas, such that this variety itself is becoming meaningless. Just like asphalt in a metropolis, the cement of the uniform world system is gradually yet thickly covering the entire world, including so-called outer space, and the thickness of this covering corresponds to the hollowness of the vacuum that is being spread. It is as if, without regard for this historically vital moment of raising and responding to the question of nothingness, this nothingness—situated at the point of contact between the backs of questioning and responding—has itself been nihilated, and the cement of the uniform world system has been poured in to fill up this gap of nihility. And now, drowning out the voices of both questioners and responders, if not indeed clogging up their mouths and sweeping them away, this cement spreads out endlessly.

Situated between the possibilities of a mutual enhancement of East and West on the one hand and a uniform world system that is becoming a global reality on the other, what is philosophy able to do? This is the question that we who live in the world today are facing. Philosophy is almost powerless. And yet, precisely such dire straits can become an authentic opportunity for philosophy to recollect and retrieve its original radicality. For human beings,

who think while living and live while thinking, the very act of living originally entailed the act of philosophizing. Philosophy ignited the quest for knowledge of life, and activated the knowledge that springs forth from life. As the classic sources tell us, philosophy is at once an elevated science of sciences and an immediate concern of the soul. Precisely in the midst of despair in the modern world, this unadulterated radical origin of philosophy as a practice of thinking while living and living while thinking can be revived. But this too is a possibility that might remain unrealized.

Nishida spoke of “digging down in between East and West.” Today it is necessary to dig down beneath the bottom of the homogenized world. With a shared sense of dismay, and by means of mutual questioning, we are called upon to dig down deeper. This may be thought of as the task of the present anthology.

*Translated from the Japanese by Bret W. Davis*

#### NOTES

1. The fact that at the first annual meeting of the Society for Nishida Philosophy in 2003 there were present, alongside many Japanese philosophers specializing in European philosophy, quite a number of foreign scholars of Nishida's philosophy, provides some evidence of the state of philosophy in the world today. And perhaps we can view this as one sign of an impending new stage in the world history of philosophy.

2. This issue requires a thorough examination. In this regard see Ueda Shizuteru, “Mu to kū o megutte” [On nothingness and emptiness], *Nihon no tetsugaku* [Japanese philosophy] (2006) 5: 3–18.

3. Martin Heidegger, *Vorträge und Aufsätze*, 7th edition (Pfullingen: Neske, 1994), 171. Translator's note: The English passage can be found in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Alfred Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 178–79, translation slightly modified.

4. Translator's note: Ueda is using Mahāyāna and specifically Zen Buddhist terminology here. In Chinese and Japanese, *samsāra* (the cycle of birth and death) is often referred to by a word that conjoins the characters for “birth/life” and “death.” The Mahāyāna and especially Zen ideal is then expressed as that of becoming a “true person existing in the coming and going of life-and-death” (*shōjikyōrai-shinjitsunintai*).

5. Translator's note: For Nietzsche's notebook writings on European nihilism, see Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage, 1967), 7–82. Also see Shizuteru Ueda, “Das absolute Nichts im Zen, bei Eckhart und bei Nietzsche,” in Ryōsuke Ohashi, ed., *Die Philosophie der Kyōto-Schule* (Munich: Alber, 1990).

6. Translator's note: In Chinese and Japanese “sky” is written with the same character as “emptiness” (Ch. *kung*; Jp. *kū*).

7. Translator's note: In Buddhism *kokū* metaphorically refers to an “empty space” that envelops all things without getting in their way.

8. Translator's note: See NKC 13: 111–12; Nishitani Keiji, “Emptiness and Same-ness,” in Michele Marra, *Modern Japanese Aesthetics: A Reader* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999), 179–80.

9. See the leaflets inserted into Nishitani's Collected Works (NKC) and *Keisei Nishitani Keiji kaisō-hen* [Keisei Nishitani Keiji: Reminiscences] (Kyoto: Tōeisha, 1992).

10. Translator's note: For an English translation of this essay, see above note 8.