

Nishida's "Self-Identity of Absolute Contradiction" and Hegel

Absolute Negation and Dialectics

Maren ZIMMERMANN

In taking the human being and an idea of self and world as their point of departure, both Nishida and Hegel sought a logic to grasp reality in its original indivisibility, prior to the split between subject and object. Both believed that negation and negativity are fundamental constituents of everything that exists. In addition, for both the attempt to find an absolute basis of unity and the immanent negativity inherent in it (experienced as the immanence of transcendence) was of central significance. The distinction between their philosophical paths is marked by the way they articulate the internal structure of a ground (or non-ground) of this self-constituting and self-cancelling construct. At least this is how Nishida saw it in his deliberate turn away from the Hegelian dialectic:

When I mention the concept of place, it is the place of absolute *mu* [nothingness]. This place encompasses much of the dialectic, which is represented purely as a process-oriented form of thought. My con-

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ception of the dialectic stands opposed to the Hegelian one. Mine is Buddhist.¹

To Nishida absolute nothingness “shows in Hegel’s dialectic a hidden place, which, as the locus of and simultaneously as, absolute nothingness, conceals in itself its own dialectical movement.”²

The problematic at the heart of this reproach against the inverting of the negation of negation into an affirmation comes to this: How is the connection, the relationship between negation and affirmation organized internally? Does the inverting of the negative into the positive imply that the latter takes on “something in addition” that elevates it to a higher order?

Hegel’s understanding of absolute negativity as the unity of specific negation and the negation of negation—which may serve as a basis of defence against Nishida’s criticism—shows rather that the inversion of negation represents the

turning point of the movement of the Notion. It is the simple point of the negative relation to self, the innermost source of all activity of all animate and spiritual self-movement, the dialectical soul that everything true possesses and through which alone it is true; for on this subjectivity alone rests the sublating of the opposition between the Notion and reality, and the unity that is truth.³

Whatever one thinks of Nishida’s criticism of Hegel’s dialectic as such, it does give us a valuable key to clearing up the question of how Nishida understands logic and dialectics. As he puts it, “true dialectics must be a science of concrete thought. True dialectics must be the way in which reality explains itself.”⁴

The irreplaceable value of a model of logical contradiction for which negations serve as the “motors,” Nishida’s thesis goes, consists in the fact that it preserves the un-subsumable status of subject and object, particular and universal, and so forth. The insistence on mutually oppos-

1. HASHI 2003, 275.

2. ELBERFELD 1999, 300

3. HEGEL, GW XII: 24.6. Translation from MILLER 1969.

4. Cited in MATSUDO 1990, 48.

ing identities avoids the "hegemony" of a monistic One. What needs to be shown in order "to develop a theory of knowledge in which subject and object are neither identical to nor different from each other"⁵ is how contradiction, as both the expression and the positing of simultaneous and equally balanced contradictories, is itself grounded.

The question posed here in relation to this *place*—as Nishida would have it—of absolute nothingness brings us to the very limits of thought. Whether we suppose that some ultimate thought can no longer think itself depends on whether we apprehend this thought as an absolute. To be an absolute, an ultimate place demands that every thematization, determination, finite thought, idea, or expression is always also an indication of the fact that we have not actually reached this ultimate place. We require a breakthrough—a breakthrough to the place that enfolds in itself all preceding occurrences and as such can no longer be articulated in the forms and guises used for the places that preceded it. As the locus, this breakthrough place stands over them, transcending them, but equally it must not simply hold the status of the transcendent, for otherwise the fundamental (Platonic) problem of *metexis*—the question of the participation of the principle and the instantiations of the principle—will arise.

NISHIDA'S ABSOLUTE

Seeing absolute nothingness as an identity of self-contradiction does not make it an empty nothingness. "A nothingness, separated from being," he writes, "is not the true nothingness; the one, separated from all, is not the true one; equality, separated from difference, is not the true equality."⁶ Nishida interprets negativity and nothingness as a place that, insofar as it *leaves its own self out*, can be both everything in itself and nothing in itself. As total calmness, nothing is nowhere.

In his final essay, "The Logic of Place and the Religious Worldview," Nishida writes:

5. KOPF 2004, 78.

6. NISHIDA 1987B, 211–12.

According to the Chinese characters [*zettai* 絶対], “absolute” means destroying [*zessuru* 絶する] all opposing forces [*tai* 対]. But that which simply destroys the opposites is simply nothing or mere nothingness.... If the absolute stood in some sense opposed to beings, it would be relative and not absolute. On the other hand, even that which destroys the opposites is not absolute. Herein lies the self-contradiction of the absolute.⁷

Nishida goes on to describe how an all-encompassing universal can establish and determine itself in such a way that the relative is understood as the expression and form of the (self-) negation of the absolute. By means of this special self-contradictory identity of individuals, Nishida establishes the true self that partakes of both the dimension of finitude and that of infinity. With his logic of place and logic of predicates, Nishida sets his sights, as he had from the beginning, on a *place* that will provide the ground of affirmation and absolute negation. This ground or place is none other than the affirmation of absolute negation and the negation of absolute affirmation. The movement between affirmation and negation is a *self-contradiction* that makes creativity possible.

In Nishida’s works, one of the chief “functions” of nothingness is to serve as the ground and source of all that exists, while at the same time revealing and maintaining its non-substantiality. Seen from the perspective of the place of absolute nothingness, every subject-object connection is already a mediated thought, which means that it has already departed from the foundational dimension of true reality. Understanding subject and object as null and ontologically without substance implies an epistemological negativity of the subject.⁸ As he says:

One cannot grasp the totality of the mind from the standpoint of knowledge. This is so because the mind is not an object of an act of knowing, but that which constitutes the ground of knowing. What the *Mādhyamaka-kārikā* [of Nāgārjuna] calls *kū* [“the empty”; Skt. *śūnyatā*] is empty because it is observed from the standpoint of know-

7. NISHIDA 2001, 225.

8. MATSUDO 1990, 30–1.

ing. In fact it is a powerfully creative reality, the vital force that shapes the ground of knowing.⁹

This latter aspect of reality is decisive insofar as it is a place that only appears and has value to thought as emptiness. If one tries to grasp this place by epistemological means, it loses its status as the place that grounds knowledge. Even if it is clear that absolute nothingness, as the place of the absolute ground, transcends and encompasses the sort of oppositional nothingness that destroys the opposites, we may still ask whether and in what way Being is organized for us around nothingness. Guy Axtell claims that "there is no explicit suggestion that either the idea of being or the idea of nothingness is cognitively privileged."¹⁰ But this seems to overlook the obvious sense that Nishida gives to absolute nothingness, namely as a powerful creative force that shows nothingness itself to be an "ontological negativity."¹¹

In order to bring reality and life into existence, and to sustain them there, nothingness must, as we have pointed out earlier, remain in control as a shaping force. It must "be" a place for this to occur. This nothingness is a nothingness of fullness (not of vacuity) that includes being in itself. Here one must make an effort to detach the question of the logical conjunction of being and nothingness from the usual rhetoric that contrasts the nothingness of the East with the being of the West.¹² Near the end of *Intuition and Reflection in Self-Awareness* we find Nishida giving clearer indications of an idea of nothingness on a par with that of being:

Like our will, which is nothingness while it is being, and being while it is nothingness, this world transcends even the categories of being and nothingness..., for here being is born out of nothingness.¹³

9. Cited in MATSUDO 1990, 32.

10. See AXTELL 1991, 170.

11. MATSUDO 1990, 32. According to Matsudo, "philosophy remains ontology," even if it clearly is without substance.

12. Far from wishing for the idea of "place" to smooth over naively and uncritically every distinction among positions, closer examination shows it to be close to making supposedly unbridgeable tendencies approach one another.

13. HEISIG 2001, 296.

The radical critique of positing a substantial ground to reality is deeply rooted in Buddhist thought. One of the sources to which Nishida turned in this regard was the logic of the Diamond Sutra.

THE DIAMOND SUTRA: *PRAJÑĀ* AND *SOKU-HI*

Nishida frequently repeats a formula from the Diamond Sutra¹⁴ which states that *a spirit who lives nowhere clings to nothing*. To recognize this belief and reflect on it in one's life requires what Nishida calls *heart spirit* and *radical everydayness*.¹⁵ What is the use of learning the Sutra by heart? What practical advice does the Sutra offer to acquire the knowledge of the true self and the true form of the world and reality?

The central concern of the Diamond Sutra is to show how one can reach a standpoint of non-ego that rejects everything particular, fixed, and isolated. It is a basic tenet of Buddhist philosophy that all arising is an arising in dependency, and that the constituents of existence are not real in themselves.¹⁶ Like a diamond, *prajñā*—the supreme wisdom that is the goal of life—cuts through all illusions. It accomplishes this by way of a kind of *via negativa* aimed at every false notion we harbor concerning the world, reality, and particularly the self. At the same time, *prajñā* combines the everyday lived world with spiritual activity and knowledge. The immense importance placed on the practical—repeated again and again in the Sutra like the turning of a prayer wheel—opens a horizon on the question of human happiness and restores actual life to its rightful place in the foreground. Privileging the practical in this way demands a non-dual relationship, free of monistic and one-dimensional tendencies.

The Sutra addresses negation in a wider context: negation as an internal correlation with contradiction, and negation as absolute nothing-

14. See HANH 1993.

15. See NISHIDA 1991.

16. See, for example, SHIMIZU 1981. Note also the remark by UEDA: The “true self [is arrived at as a] dynamic event that takes place for one towards, with, for, through, and from an other.... It is in itself a nothingness, and in this nothingness universal relations are centered on a once-and-for-all uniqueness” (1974: 145).

ness.¹⁷ Its logic of *soku-hi* is formulated as *A is not A, therefore it is A*. By this is meant an immediate and direct comprehension of truth and reality—what Yamaguchi calls “the truth of interdependent origination.”¹⁸ Nishida uses the *soku-hi* logic as a “heuristic tool,”¹⁹ a fact that, according to Suzuki,²⁰ clearly demonstrates Nishida’s belief that Buddhist tradition provides an adequate means to articulate this specific unity.²¹

How should *A* be understood here? In view of the foundational Buddhist idea of the nonsubstantiality of all things and the self, it is obviously not a substantial essence. The Diamond Sutra conceives of *A* in all its contradictory aspects and implications from a holistic point of view. The primacy of the relationship between *A* and *not A* here illustrates the way back to the point of, or perhaps better, the sphere of origin. Representing everything that can happen and everything that can be thought, *A* is described by means of a *logic of not*. The *soku-hi* is simultaneously the identity of contradictories and the contradictories themselves: *A is not A, therefore it is A*.

But what of the law of non-contradiction? The Diamond Sutra does not repudiate it. It simply states that the ground of the law of identity must transcend the contradictories without equating them. Axtell describes this reality from the unitive viewpoint of a “logic of life”:

The logic of *soku-hi*, or “is and is not” represents a balanced logic of symbolization reflecting sensitivity to the mutual determination of universality and particularity in nature, and a corresponding emphasis on non-attachment to linguistic predicates and subjects as representatives of the real.²²

17. See KOPF 2005, 319–21.

18. SHIMIZU 1981, 153.

19. KOPF 2004, 83.

20. Suzuki is said to be the first to elaborate the logic of *soku-hi* from the Diamond Sutra. On the question of the different readings and receptions of the text, see especially KOPF 2005, 320–1.

21. HASHI (2000, 174–5) argues that Suzuki’s epistemological perspective is not sufficiently grounded, in addition to which it presupposes familiarity with Zen practice, both of which make it liable to misunderstanding without further explanation. Suzuki himself is said to have recognized this towards the end of his life.

22. AXTELL 1991, 177.

Both sides of the opposition or contradiction—*A* as well as *not A*—remain active in the ordinary and mutually exclusive fashion of their opposition, and *as such* are grasped as the unity of the contradiction. Shimizu Masumi puts it this way:

The meaning of contradiction is theoretically that of a full opposition that leaves no bonds intact. But reality cannot begin from such a concept. The “logic of *engi*” consists in the fact that reality is necessarily mediated between contradictories and grasped as a contradictory “identity,” that is, as an “identity of *soku-hi*.”²³

The *logic of engi* refers to the logic of dependent emergence; it underscores once more the belief that no thing arises or exists in itself alone. Even the immediate posited as prior to or above contradiction is conceived to express an identity without form.²⁴

One of the main reasons Nishida uses *prajñā*-logic is to bolster his criticisms against conventional abstract logic, which, as he once wrote to Suzuki, is incapable of formulating an absolute.²⁵ As Axtell observes, Nishida’s reliance on negative logic shows that he is “not attempting to construct a synthesis that resolves opposition.... that the contradictory identity of self and absolute refers us to a relation that is unmediated by concept.”²⁶

HEGEL’S NEGATIVE UNITY: CONCRETE UNIVERSALITY AS THE UNITY OF CONTRADICTION

Arguments for a non-duality that at the same time avoids monism, so important for Nishida’s philosophical project, can also be found in Hegel. German idealism can be read as a project that seeks to overcome the dualism of the modern era. Hegel’s philosophical

23. SHIMIZU 1981, 21. *Engi* 縁起 is the Sino-Japanese translation of the Sanskrit *pratītya-samutpāda*.

24. See UEDA’s comment (1974, 148) that “immediacy [remains] in formless unity.... Distinction means unity and unity means distinction.”

25. HEISIG 2002, 65–7, 306–7. See also SHIMIZU 1981, 17.

26. AXTELL 1991, 171.

grip on reality and its reformulation as "world" not only represents thought about thought but also thought about being and nothingness (or negativity). Hegel claimed that in his age "the power of unification has disappeared from the life of men, and opposites have lost their living relationship and reciprocity, accruing autonomy."²⁷ Hegel believed that his contemporaries mistakenly regarded the independent status of opposing elements as a deficiency, and in its place erected a petrified and one-sided philosophy of reflection. The resulting notion of the absolute blocked the mediation of the two spheres that need to become one in the idea. "To represent this mutual interpenetration of opposite poles is the task of a dialectical logic as onto[theo]logy."²⁸

The consideration of absolute idea as subject-object understands concepts as objective thoughts. As a metaphysical principle of reason, the absolute spirit makes negativity the foundation of a positive and negative—living and dynamic—totality. This understanding of reality requires that the law of contradiction be valid without being limited by opposing, either-or determinations. Hegel's view of speculative truth as a totality goes beyond opposing determinations by seeing them as sublated aspects of the absolute. Nothing acts in isolation, neither the absolute nor the opposing determinations; the only real action is an interaction.²⁹

27. HEGEL, GW IV: 14. Unification is described as "Being emerging... out of totality" (16).

28. BICKMANN 2003, 207: "Only at the end of the process, through this reciprocal interpenetration of poles, can we anticipate the principle that alone renders the whole process conceivable."

29. In terms of structural method, the process of negation comes down to a dialectical moment "through which the incipient universal, out of itself, defines itself as its own other" (HEGEL, GW XII: 242). The first negative step in the method is the mediation of the first immediacy, which is also the mediated. The second step is "a relationship, a relation to... the other in itself, the other of an other, ...and thereby, as a contradiction, it posits its own dialectic" (HEGEL, GW XII: 245). The method is self-contradictory in the sense that it is a negation of the first step (positive affirmation), and yet contains this excluded part (that which has been negated) in itself. The first negation is conditioned—in distinction to the unconditioned undetermined immediate—and this makes it dialectically a contradiction; it contains the "material, the antithetical determinations, within a single relationship" (HEGEL, GW XII: 246). At this "point" the negation of negation encloses both sides, and in mediating them mediates itself as its own object. This is treated at the end of the *Science of Logic*.

As Hegel writes, “What is inherent in the element of speculation is not unity alone or division alone, but both together.”³⁰ Only as a negative unity can it be a process at all.

Against this background, absolute negativity is seen as the unity of a specific negation and the negation of that negation. The various functions of absolute negation generate otherness—an otherness that belongs to absolute negation itself. Only when this is guaranteed can the problem of a unity that is differentiated in itself be solved. Only thus can negativity overcome the dichotomy of speculative thought. As Giancarlo Movia has observed:

From the very beginning, Hegel makes mediation absolute in his speculative logic.... The elevation of mediation to an absolute is the elevation of negation to an absolute.³¹

Dialectic contradiction is a marker for the elements at the ground of Hegel’s logic. Contradiction, an expression of indissoluble non-identity,³² a guarantee of the “equality” and “oneness” of contradictory elements, becomes an permanent dynamic of “eternal negativity.” For Hegel, the negation of the negation *is* affirmation; and this in turn means that affirmation is the negation of a negation, or absolute negativity. This lies at the heart of the potential of the absolute in its dialectical movement. But how are these elements organized around *this* identity?

It is with this question that Nishida begins his assault on Hegel’s logic. Hegel does not explicitly treat the (ontological) ground of negativity as an abyss or non-ground. Ha Tai Kim observes:

Nishida was not totally satisfied with Hegel’s rationalistic schematic dialectic. Nishida sought a dynamic dialectic, and found an irrational element in the Hegelian dialectic. This was possible for him because he read Hegelian dialectic in the light of Zen Buddhism.³³

In this same vein, Nishida himself contends:

30. HEGEL, *Vorlesung*, GW X: 87.

31. MOVIA 2002, 25.

32. See TAKAYAMA 2005, 216–23.

33. KIM 1995, 27.

In Hegel's logic, contradiction is precisely the discursive form of logic's own self-development.... Logic is the discursive form of our thinking. And we will only be able to clarify what logic is by reflecting on the form of our own thinking."³⁴

Interpreting Hegel's logic as discursive, however, runs counter to Hegel's own understanding. As I stressed at the outset, Hegelian logic must be clearly distinguished from discursiveness of any sort. His concept of negation argues that the succession of logical elements³⁵ follow neither discursively nor temporally but rather unfold in a series of self-referential negations of one and the same absolute.

At the same time, the process of Hegelian negation is always engaged with the empirical world. It does not abandon the logic of understanding; instead it revises and negates the claim to ultimate knowledge and its monopoly on truth. In the Hegelian sense, negation means sublation (*Aufheben*); it is a denial that also contains an affirmation: "lifted up out of and retained, being sublated... is not being disposed of."³⁶

NISHIDA'S *TOPOS* DIALECTIC AND HEGEL'S *PROCESS* DIALECTIC

Negativity and negation can, and indeed must, indicate a nothingness, a *place* not itself mediated by conceptuality or otherwise articulated. Paradoxically, at the same time this place begs to be experienced. As Matsudo Yukio notes, for Nishida philosophy is

the conflict one has with one's own life... This pre-philosophical attitude to the question of why we philosophize corresponds precisely to the traditional East Asian attitude to life and is nothing other than a religious way of thinking.³⁷

In Nishida's case, a "vivid experience of the Absolute" stands at the

34. NISHIDA 1987B, 125–6.

35. See HEGEL, GW XX: 118–20, §79–83.

36. HASHI 2000, 109

37. MATSUDO 1990, 25.

center of his thought.³⁸ In his earlier idea of reality as “pure experience,” immediacy is the *leitmotiv*. His aim was to overcome the teleological character of Hegel’s logic by elaborating the logical structure of pure experience. The crux of the difference between Nishida and Hegel may be viewed as a distinction between process and completion. In Hegel’s case, the manifestation of the unfolding—the self-reiterating course of the one and the same self-propagating dynamic—is at the same time a witness to its own necessity. This is central to his argument. Nishida, for his part, is not interested in the dialectical unfolding as such but rather in the actual completion of the process in the place of absolute nothingness. Both their dialectics—the one a speculative dialectic of process, the other a topological dialectic grounded in a logic of *soku-hi*—insist on the importance of self-determination as contradiction. Both understand completion to occur in contradiction and aim at uncovering the ground of that contradiction.

For Hegel a true speculative concept (namely, the absolute) is always a real concept which, on achieving its cognitive completion, grasps its objective reality. As we see in the concluding chapter of the *Science of Logic*, objective reality is the result of a process by which the true concept (or absolute idea) conceives and assimilates the *other as its own*. But the very conceptual possibility of one’s “own other” inevitably entails an other that is never wholly absorbed in *das Eigene*, and *das Eigene* is never wholly absorbed in the other. The utter otherness of reason is a negation that foreshadows absolute negation. As Fujita Masakatsu puts it:

The separated, the negative, or the unreal is [according to Hegel] a necessary moment of the real. This has to endure a moment of separation and negation in order, thereby, to become the real.³⁹

The critical question here is how Hegel and Nishida deal with the two elements that make up the final and absolute contradiction. Kim, aligning Nishida’s thought with Zen philosophy, offers the following explanation:

38. FUJITA 2003, 52. Fujita also takes up in more detail the relationship between philosophy and religion.

39. FUJITA 2000, 117.

What really distinguishes Zen from the dialectic of Hegel may be found in its thoroughgoing contradiction included in the antinomy. In Hegel, the antinomy is sublated in the synthesis, as cancelling and preserving the original antinomy, thus progressing towards an endless realization of the possibilities of the original term. But Zen simply asserts the identity [of] the antinomy, without following the three-way dialectical process of Hegel. The antithesis, instead of developing into a synthesis, reverts to the thesis, and Zen simply declares that thesis is antithesis and antithesis is thesis.⁴⁰

This interpretation of the Hegelian dialectic bypasses the decisive fact and condition of Hegel's concept of an absolute: the overcoming of contradiction. This does *not* mean a simple discarding of the antinomy as pure nothing, which would be the case in abstract logic, but a contradictory negating in which the terms of the antinomy arrive at existence and identity. This *act* of overcoming has to be regarded as the core of Hegelian philosophy. The *de facto* need for movement and completion stems from the underlying need for mediation. In Nishida's case, mediation is bound to an idea of negation that establishes between the opposites a unity of thought and existence in which nondifferentiation does not mean that one is reduced to the other. At the structural level, absolute negativity plays the role of intermediary; it serves as the "place" of the self-constitution of the absolute.

Such an understanding of unity circumvents the violence of a final and all-inclusive appropriation and instead tries to rethink Hegelian negativity in an open-ended fashion, retaining the possibility of a self-identity that enables the other to be its own other without ceasing to be itself. Nishida expresses this aspect of dialectical unity as follows:

The mediation of place [*topos*] is a real, discontinuous continuity, a contradictory self-identity or a dialectical unity. To say that independent things mutually influence each other means that the place determines itself. Here something new emerges as *topos*, namely a determination of relatedness: by the fact that the present determines the present itself, something new emerges in the present. This novelty

is a consequence or phenomenon produced by mutual interaction among things.⁴¹

This passage raises the question of mutual *identification*, insofar as the novelty emerging from a *topos*-related self-determination is an *action* of two opposing elements on each other. The “new” is, in effect, an occurrence that “takes place” within this *topos*. Only dialectical thought can grasp this kind of mediation:

From the standpoint of abstract logic, it is impossible to claim that things that contradict each other are connected; they contradict each other precisely because they *cannot* be connected. But there would be no contradiction if they did not come into contact with each other somewhere. The very fact of each other is already a synthesis. This is the realm of dialectical logic.⁴²

How are we to conceive of this “movement” philosophically? How can we think, in other words, the *creative*? How can we make the *how* of dialectical genesis logically transparent?

Hegel’s insistence on the meaningfulness of the momentary and the “mere coming-together of moments” underlines his representation and unfolding of the dialectical principle. This insistence reinforces the claim that speculative and negative unity lay on the dynamic:

For sake of the freedom that the concept achieves in it, the idea contains within itself its own most severe opposition; its rest consists in the security and certitude of eternally producing and eternally overcoming that opposition.⁴³

This rest-in-movement is constituted by the three-fold activity of production, overcoming, and synthesis. The simultaneity of disclosed and undisclosed elements guarantees the value of, as well as the truth of, the principle and—not least of all—its freedom.

If Hegel himself points to this self-moving dynamic as the origin and ontological ground of absolute negation, Nishida aims rather at a locus

41. NISHIDA 1990, 60–1.

42. NISHIDA 1958, 177.

43. HEGEL, GW XII: 177.

of nothingness that is logically prior to any process. The question of *how* this realm of nothingness *is* at the moment that it becomes manifest in the finite world of being, remains to be answered.

Self-identity does not come about through a direct self-positing, but through the self's negation of its own authenticity. If the prime mover here is not self-aware, that is, if it does not possess itself as an object in this self-knowing, then this process is exterior to the self and conditioned by outside factors. Both Nishida and Hegel emphasize the irrevocable nature of self-determination. Like Hegel, for whom the autonomous nature of negation⁴⁴ is essential to the genesis and maintenance of its own alterity, Nishida, too, emphasizes the self-relating aspect of absolute nothingness:

What is face to face with itself must negate itself. But what negates itself must in some sense exhibit the same origin as itself. For what possesses no connection to itself cannot negate itself.... The absolute must contain in itself absolute self-negation. The fact that it contains in itself absolute self-negation likewise means that it becomes absolute nothingness.⁴⁵

It is critical here to see the sense in which for Hegel negativity remains the "prototype" of all subjectivity, such that he is able to refer to the "point of absolute negativity" as beginning from itself and related to itself.⁴⁶ The sublation of contradiction takes place within the structure of subjectivity, and is therefore to be seen as "the most interior, most objective moment of life and the spirit, whereby a subject, a person is a free existence."⁴⁷ Hegel argues that the infinite is the truth of the finite and, conversely, that the infinite can only be determined and satisfied in itself when it includes the element of the finite. It is in this sense that Ōhashi Ryōsuke argues:

44. HENRICH 1989, 213–29.

45. NISHIDA 2001, 225.

46. HEGEL, GW XII: 177.

47. HEGEL, GW XII: 246–7. There it is also stated, "As the absolute negativity, the negative moment is that of absolute mediation, the unity that is the subjectivity and the soul."

Hegel's *is* has to be understood as "active" and transitive. In the speculative determination of the finite and the infinite, the usual rule (God is infinite, I am finite) does not apply.⁴⁸

In Hegel's words, "God may as well be the finite, and I as well the infinite."⁴⁹ Ōhashi concludes, "The *is*, understood in its truth, has another sense than that of activity, vitality, and spirituality."⁵⁰

PHILOSOPHY AND LIFE

This dialectical way of thinking—arguing neither dualistically nor monistically—is, I submit, the consequence of a worldview with two objectives: to establish the world as a living organism and to integrate humans into the world in such a way that they can realize themselves by understanding that the responsibility and freedom that mark their self-determination—in both the positive and negative sense—belong absolutely to an immanent-transcendent primordial principle.⁵¹

A crucial point of convergence with Hegel's position may be seen in Nishida's insistence on the necessary yet contradictory nature of the relationship between nothingness and the true self as the highest realization of one's humanity. Both philosophers sought to achieve a unifying ground in which the opposites could retain their autonomy without being absorbed into a greater totality. This ground is characterized logically as a dialectic rooted in contradiction and negation that provides the foundation of all life and movement. Negativity *animates* thought, as Hegel said; it is "the energy of thought."⁵²

Reading Hegel in the broader context suggested by Nishida may seem to weaken the place of thought in his philosophy and logic of negation through excessive self-reflection on thinking. But in fact the dynamic

48. ŌHASHI 1984, 31.

49. From the *Theorie Werkausgabe* XVI: 192, cited in ŌHASHI 1984, 31.

50. ŌHASHI 1984, 31.

51. Nishida's "basic pre-philosophical belief is that the 'true self' is identical to the essence of nature or the whole of the cosmos." MATSUDO 1990, 29.

52. HEGEL, GW IX: 27.

of the Hegelian dialectic is based on a non-discursive form of speculative logic that may be closer to a logic of *soku-bi* relationships than one might assume from Nishida's criticisms alone.

For both thinkers, the driving force of contradiction is a real manifestation of a vital, absolute spirit. What I have tried to show here is that the ultimate cognitive and linguistic structure of reality and of the absolute (be it conceived as being or as nothingness) needs to be understood in terms of an open dynamic that keeps life, the individual person, the true self, and, finally, the life of life itself—the cosmos—within our field of vision. When Nishida writes that "philosophy is nothing other than the self-conscious expression of life,"⁵³ and Hegel that "the absolute idea alone [is]... being, eternally ceaseless life, self-knowing truth,"⁵⁴ they are both speaking of a vision that is central to their thought.

Only in its lived vitality can the idea produced by the dialectical be said to be true.⁵⁵ The idea posits itself by mediating itself negatively and it is this movement that takes place from out of itself precisely because it occurs from that which is most alive deep within itself. The all-encompassing unity such movement leads to is not a fixed and static condition but always an over an open-ended process:

If the step into contradiction is correctly understood and performed, it is likewise the cancellation of the opposition between concept and reality; it is the unity that is truth. Hegel grounded this paradoxical-sounding equation of generating a contradiction and then dissolving it in the idea that the elimination of the self-contradiction within knowing keeps it cut off from the life that signals its reverse—the "return to life."⁵⁶

It is at this point that brings philosophy and life into contact:

What is relative cannot be said to stand up against an absolute. Conversely, an absolute that merely opposes the relative is not the true absolute; for in that case it would merely be relative, too. When a

53. Cited in MATSUDO 1990, 26.

54. HEGEL, GW XII: 236.

55. HEGEL, GW XII: 248.

56. MENKE 1992, 59.

relative being faces the true absolute it cannot exist. It must pass over into nothing. The living self relates to the divine, encounters the divine, only through dying—only in this paradoxical form.⁵⁷

Nishida seems to have arrived at what Hegel calls “the point of contradiction... and in it the negation that is the indwelling pulsation of self-movement and vitality.”⁵⁸

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57. NISHIDA 1987B, 68.

58. HEGEL, GW XI: 81.

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