

Is There a Method to Chance?

Contrasting Kuki Shūzō's Phenomenological Methodology in *The Problem of Contingency* with that of his Contemporaries Wilhelm Windelband and Heinrich Rickert

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Had Kuki Shūzō's (1888–1941) European colleagues and teachers been aware of his book on contingency, they might well have considered it an anachronism. His contemporaries such as Wilhelm Windelband (1848–1915) and Heinrich Rickert (1863–1936) sought to place the study of contingency on a firm footing by developing a scientific understanding of the phenomenon. However, in *Gūzensei no mondai* 偶然性の問題 [The Problem of Contingency, 1935],¹ Kuki gives primary place to the metaphysical concepts of necessity and contingency, which had historically been used to prove the existence of God, a metaphysical question that had fallen out of favor with twentieth-century philosophers. Abstruse debates about the contingency of human existence and

1. First printed in Tokyo by Iwanami Shoten; reprinted in *Kuki Shūzō zenshū* 九鬼周造全集 [The Complete Works of Kuki Shūzō], vol. 2 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1981). Translated by Omodaka Hisayuki as *Le problème de la contingence* (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1966). Further references will be to the French translation.

its relation to the necessary existence of God had been dismissed since Immanuel Kant as questions of faith about which reason tells us nothing. And yet they return to occupy a primary place in Kuki's text. The purpose of this paper is to explore why Kuki treats contingency as he does, and to explain how this treatment is not an anachronism, but rather an innovation—the result of the application of a new phenomenological methodology to an ancient question.

There are a number of unique aspects to Kuki's study of contingency. The first is the primary place that Kuki gives to contingency in his study. Unlike most of his European contemporaries, he does not seek to derive a concept of contingency from necessity. Instead, after a brief discussion of the relationship between necessity and contingency, he launches directly into a detailed investigation of contingency. The second unique feature of Kuki's study is his application of this study of contingency to ethics.² This differs from previous applications, which were primarily epistemological (Aristotle, Kant, Hegel, Rickert) or metaphysical (Aquinas, Spinoza, Leibniz). In contrast, Kuki emphasizes the ethical significance of contingency for the responsibility that arises from the chance meeting with another. The third unique feature of Kuki's approach is in the aspect of contingency that he finds most interesting. Of the three types of contingency that he identifies, *viz.* categorical, hypothetical and disjunctive, the most important to him is disjunctive contingency, because it deals with the metaphysical relationship between the phenomenal world in which we live and the absolute. However, as we will see, for Kuki, unlike his contemporaries, all three types of contingency are involved in determining the meaning of ethics. The fourth unique aspect of Kuki's study arises from the distinction between his ethics and those of his Japanese contemporaries. Omodaka Hisayuki identifies Kuki with the philosophy of *bushidō* 武士道, the “way of the warrior,” and Friedrich Nietzsche (KUKI 1966, VIII–IX). This is in contrast to the identification of Nishida Kitarō with an intellectualist ethics, and the identification of Tanabe Hajime with a voluntarist ethics (KUKI 1966, VIII). I will argue that this identification of Kuki's ethics with that of *bushidō* is not correct.

2. On the relationship between ethics and contingency in Kuki's philosophy, see MARRA 2004, 14.

Kuki's ethics is not Nietzschean. It does not take Sisyphus as its paragon. Rather, Kuki's ethics is based not on the solitary affirmation of the individual's fate in the face of the impossibility of its realization but on the recognition of the responsibility that the ultimate emptiness of human striving requires us to take for the contingent encounters we have with others.

In order to make clear some of the original features of Kuki's study of contingency, I will develop Kuki's unique concept of ethics. I will do so by comparing and contrasting Kuki's phenomenological methodology with the methodologies of his contemporaries, Wilhelm Windelband and Heinrich Rickert. Both have written important works on the nature of contingency—works with which Kuki was familiar, and on which he relied in writing *The Problem of Contingency*. A full appreciation of the novelty of Kuki's phenomenological methodology will only be possible when it is contrasted with the scientific and rationalist approach of his Neo-Kantian contemporaries. Undertaking this comparison will help to illustrate how Kuki's phenomenological ethics is most consistent with an ethics of responsibility that is loosely based on Buddhist ideals.³ However, before launching into the comparative section, let me begin with a brief introduction to Kuki's theory of contingency.

AN INTRODUCTION TO KUKI'S THEORY OF CONTINGENCY

The goal of Kuki's study of contingency is “to shed light as far as it is possible on the ontological structure of contingency and its metaphysical sense” (KUKI 1966, 5). For Kuki, the question of contingency is primarily a metaphysical question, and it is only an epistemological ques-

3. There are also interesting parallels between Kuki's ethics of responsibility and the phenomenological ethics of Emmanuel Levinas. Levinas calls ethics the “calling into question of my spontaneity by the presence of the Other” (LEVINAS 1961, 43). According to this ethics, when faced with the other in a chance encounter, I am forced to take responsibility for my subjectivity in the face of the strangeness and difference of the other (LEVINAS 1961, 43; CRITCHLEY 1992, 5 and 19).

tion, or more specifically, a question for scientific investigation, to the degree that epistemological questions lead back to metaphysics (KUKI 1966, 5). By describing the problem of contingency as “metaphysical,” Kuki means that it deals with the question of nothingness (KUKI 1966, 5–6). In characterizing the problem of contingency as metaphysical, he is referring to metaphysics as Martin Heidegger might have used the term, had the latter not been so intent on characterizing his project as an overturning of traditional metaphysics. In other words, for Kuki, the problem of contingency is a fundamental problem of the nature of human existence.⁴ What sets Kuki’s study of contingency apart is its refusal to discuss contingency purely in relation to necessity. According to Kuki, while necessity is the domain of identity—A is A (KUKI 1966, 5–6)—contingency is the domain of difference and the encounter between two different people or things—A and B (KUKI 1966, 192). The encounter of A and B, and hence the experience of the difference between them, is possible because of nothingness—i.e., the affirmation of B relies on the possibility of not affirming A (KUKI 1966, 192). Our experience of the contingent encounter of something other than me, and the surprise that accompanies this experience, is a fundamental human experience, because it makes us aware of the possibility of nothingness—the possibility of non-being that underlies being. Contingency is not simply to be understood in contrast to necessity, as many of Kuki’s contemporaries believed; rather, our experience of contingency is fundamental to human existence, because it leads us to uncover something essential about this existence and how we should lead our lives.

Finally, as I mentioned earlier, although it is not obvious at the outset, by the end of *The Problem of Contingency*, Kuki is interested in exposing the ethical meaning of contingency. In the section on disjunctive contingency, Kuki writes at length about the relationship between contingency and destiny, and he gives this discussion ethical significance. Contingency, when it manifests itself as blind destiny, by which I imagine Kuki is referring to a surprising and unforeseen event that in fact manifests one’s hitherto unknown destiny, is closely related to neces-

4. Marra also makes the link between Kuki and Heidegger (MARRA 2004, 18).

sity (KUKI 1966, 168–9). One thinks that one has possibilities in front of one—that one has free will—and yet one finds oneself, as Schelling points out, not in the midst of possibilities, but confronted with the real (KUKI 1966, 171). On this understanding, the contingent has ethical meaning, because it brings home to us the apparent inevitability of our fate, and brings into question how we should live when faced with this fate. Contingency, to the degree that it manifests our fate, leads to an existentialist ethics that questions how we should live our lives given the certainty of death.

However, existentialist ethics, which exhorts us to live with the consciousness of our finitude and the creative power of human projection, is not the end of Kuki's ethical thought. Kuki also discusses ethics at the very end of *The Problem of Contingency* where he refers to the doctrine of the Pure Land: “If we are able to discover the desire and the possibility of salvation of the Buddha, then nothing happens in vain” (KUKI 1966, 259). He explains this passage by saying that the “infinitesimal possibility that approaches the impossible becomes reality in contingency, and this contingency again produces a new contingency, which develops to the point of necessity: and this is the salvation of man through his desire for the salvation of Buddha as destiny” (KUKI 1966, 195–6). What Kuki appears to mean is that it is the slim possibility of the impossible—our salvation through the Buddha—that is the source of redemption for humans. Each contingent moment which contains within it the sudden possibility of nothingness—our death—is also a moment in which we can be redeemed as the Buddha was and escape this contingent existence. Unlike the existentialist ethic, which requires us to encounter our own finitude alone, the possibility of Buddhist redemption arises in the encounter between oneself and another. While the existentialist ethic considers the contingent event as giving rise to our awareness of the unavoidability of death and annihilation,⁵ in Kuki's ethics, the contingent encounter with another opens up the contingent possibility of salvation. To use the language of Kuki, through the surprise encounter

5. See Heidegger's discussion of *das Unheimliche* (HEIDEGGER 1996, 188–90).

with another, we “interiorize” the possibility of redemption, which can become our destiny (KUKI 1966, 195).

Having briefly discussed the outlines of Kuki’s theory of contingency, I turn now to a more detailed discussion of his phenomenological methodology and the comparison of this methodology with that of contemporary studies of contingency.

THE RELATIONSHIP OF KUKI’S CONCEPT OF CONTINGENCY TO THOSE OF HIS CONTEMPORARIES

To understand the novelty and innovation that characterizes Kuki’s study of contingency, one must first set it in the context of contemporary treatments of the issue. I have chosen to contrast Kuki’s views with those of two neo-Kantians of the Baden School—Wilhelm Windelband and his student, Heinrich Rickert. There are two reasons for picking these two contemporaries. First, they are mentioned in *The Problem of Contingency* and Kuki divides contingency into roughly the same categories as they do. Second, both Windelband and Rickert employ a scientific methodology in their study of contingency that Kuki rejects and criticizes. Thus the contrast between the approaches of Windelband, Rickert and Kuki will make clear the unique aspects of Kuki’s theory.

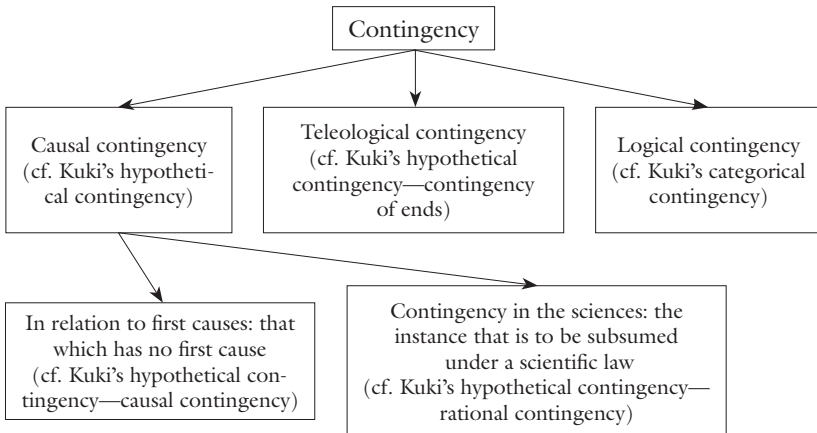
Wilhelm Windelband

The goal of Wilhelm Windelband’s theory of contingency is to isolate a scientific concept of contingency, which he identifies as the relationship between a general concept and its specific instance. All other forms of contingency, Windelband argues, are unscientific, because they are constructed on the basis of a false analogy with logical contingency (categorical contingency, in Kuki’s scheme, which is the type of contingency that deals with the non-essential or accidental characteristics of a thing; MAYEDA 2006, 182). Philosophers who are guilty of such a false analogy mistakenly modeled the relationship between God and humans on the relationship between concept and specific instance of that concept. They thought that God, like a concept, was characterized by all neces-

sary characteristics, while human existence, like an instance of a concept, is replete with inessential, accidental characteristics. These philosophers analogized between logical contingency and the human-divine relationship in order to extend human knowledge to the realm of God, and to understand human values in relation to God's ends. According to Windelband, this is not the correct way to understand contingency. The world is a world of purely contingent events. These events can only be understood in a general way through scientific concepts. But these concepts necessarily abstract from everyday life, and so cannot capture the essence of human existence. Another method is thus necessary to capture the essence of everyday contingent events.

In *Die Lehren vom Zufall* [Theories of Contingency, 1870], Windelband considers three types of contingency: causal contingency (*das causal Zufällige*), purposive contingency (*das teleologisch Zufällige*), and logical contingency (*das logisch Zufällige*) (WINDELBAND 1870, 70). As we will see, causal contingency is further divided into two types: first, there is contingency as it relates to first causes (*Ursachen*), and second, contingency as it relates to scientific laws (*Gesetze*) (WINDELBAND 1870, 5–26, 26–52).

Windelband begins his investigation of these various types of contingency by exploring the widely-held view that contingency is the nega-



tion of necessity, an approach which, in contrast to that of Kuki, derives the meaning of contingency from that of necessity (WINDELBAND 1870, 5). Accordingly, Windelband relates each of the different types of contingency to a particular type of necessity. However, as we will see, for Windelband the world is simply a world of pure contingency (WINDELBAND 1870, 78). The necessity with which this contingency is contrasted does not truly exist in the causal or teleological senses. It only exists in the logical sense, and all metaphysical attempts to contrast contingency with necessity are false applications of the logical relation between the general concept and the individual instance to causal and teleological concepts.

By examining various concepts of contingency and their relationship to necessity, Windelband comes to the conclusion that contingency is not truly a causal term (WINDELBAND 1870, 69). He examines two possible causal conceptions of contingency and rejects both. First, Windelband rejects the view that the contingent is that which has no cause (*der Ursachlosse*) (WINDELBAND 1870, 26). He rejects this first on the ground that it seems contradictory. If something came about by chance in the sense that it is not the result of any physical cause, then it appears that it has a cause, *viz.* chance (WINDELBAND 1870, 6). Second, he rejects the premodern identification of that which is without cause with the first mover—God. The identification of contingency with pure being—that which is not itself determined by anything and which does not work by means of the principles of physical causality—places the contingent outside of the realm of human knowledge, which, as Kant demonstrated, is dependent on the phenomenal world in which causes act. The purely contingent as the fullness of being without cause cannot be known, and so cannot be the basis for objective knowledge of contingency (WINDELBAND 1870, 19).

Windelband also rejects a second approach to understanding contingency as a causal concept, *viz.* the scientific approach. Science views the relationship between the contingent and the necessary as the relation between the instance and the necessary law. It seeks to explain particular instances in terms of these laws. He gives two examples of this sort of contingency. The first is the coincidence of two events that are not causally connected, and whose coincidence is thus “contingent” (WIN-

DELBAND 1870, 52). The second is the actual coincidence as a single contingent event (WINDELBAND 1870, 52). Science attempts to find a single causal law that would explain how what appears to be contingent is in fact the necessary consequence of a scientific law (WINDELBAND 1870, 53). However, science fails in this regard: it is unable to account for a particular contingent event. At best, scientific explanations can use statistics to explain the likelihood of such an event, but statistics cannot describe any causal relationship (WINDELBAND 1870, 49). And even if science can reflect on the laws of nature that must have been in play to bring about a particular event, science is in no way able to know all of the complex conditions that led by means of these rules to the emergence of a particular event (WINDELBAND 1870, 52).⁶ From a scientific viewpoint then, a contingent event is just an event that we have insufficient knowledge to explain (WINDELBAND 1870, 68).

Having rejected definitions of contingency that relate to causal necessity in which cause is understood as first cause (*Ursache*) or scientific law (*Gesetz*), Windelband next turns to teleological conceptions of contingency that contrast the contingent with necessary goals (*Zweck*) (WINDELBAND 1870, 54). This means defining contingency as the opposite of a necessary goal. This can be understood in two ways. The contingent can either be that which is without goal or purpose within human activity, or it can be that which interrupts human goals or purposes (WINDELBAND 1870, 56). In the former sense, contingency is that which inserts itself into human action without any intention on the part of humans, thereby interrupting the fulfillment of human intention (WINDELBAND 1870, 57). Examples of this are well known in theatre, where the intentions of one character result in a fully unintentional consequence as a result of the character's actions being interrupted by unexpected and unintentional events (WINDELBAND 1870, 57). Sophocles' *Oedipus* is a

6. Guy Oakes characterizes Windelband's conclusion on the scientific attempt to understand particular events as follows: "The occurrence of individual events cannot be explained by general laws. Put another way, there is no set of nomological statements, regardless of how exhaustive and precise, from which any description of an individual event can be deduced. This is why our theoretical interest in individual phenomena cannot be satisfied by natural science" (OAKES 1986, XIII).

good example of this.⁷ In the latter sense of an interruption of a human goal or purpose, contingency is that which appears as the unintended consequence of intentional human action. For instance, an alchemist intends to discover primary substance, but succeeds in creating gunpowder (WINDELBAND 1870, 58). Here again, contingency is conceived as that which interrupts the realm of human purpose. It is the interference of the natural world, which does not heel to human purpose, in the domain of human means and ends (WINDELBAND 1870, 66–7).

According to Windelband, all metaphysical attempts to understand contingency—and in “metaphysical” he includes the scientific concept of the scientific law, the premodern concept of first cause, and the goal-oriented final cause—have failed to characterize contingency as anything other than a lack of knowledge (WINDELBAND 1870, 58). The premodern concept of contingency as the uncaused cannot be scientific, because the uncaused is beyond the ken of humans, who are limited to perceptions of the phenomenal world. The scientific concept of contingency sees contingency as the result of an inability to fully explain an individual event by means of scientific laws because of insufficient knowledge about all the causal factors involved. Finally, contingency in goal-oriented human action is the intervention of other human action or the natural world in ways that unexpectedly interrupt the achievement of a human goal. In all cases, contingency from a metaphysical point of view is simply the inability to explain a particular occurrence because of a lack of sufficient knowledge about the totality of circumstances that determine it (WINDELBAND 1870, 68).

Having rejected these metaphysical concepts of contingency, Windelband concludes that contingency only makes sense within the realm of logic. The relationship between contingency and necessity is only possible as the relationship between a specific instance and a general concept (WINDELBAND 1870, 69). If a concept requires that a thing falling under that concept have a certain quality, then that quality is necessary. All other qualities are contingent or, to use scholastic terminology, accidents. In the world of cause and effect, if the concept of one state of

7. Oedipus kills his wife’s brother, Creon, only to discover that Creon is his brother, and Creon’s wife, Jocasta, his mother.

affairs does not necessitate the arising of another, then the relationship of the second state of affairs to the concept of the first state of affairs is contingent (WINDELBAND 1870, 71–2). For instance, a particular event such as a stone falling on the head of a man can only be considered contingent in relation to the general concept of a stone falling. There is nothing in the concept of a stone falling that necessitates it hitting a man (WINDELBAND 1870, 72). The stone hitting a man is a purely contingent event from the point of view of the general concept, although from a causal point of view, the fact that the falling stone hit the man was the necessary causal consequence of a whole host of prior events, which include the stone coming loose from a mountain at a certain time in a certain place when a man was walking by at a certain time and in a certain place, and so on.

In Windelband's view, previous attempts to understand the nature of contingency and its relation to necessity have failed because they confuse logical contingency with other forms of contingency. One such confusion arises when we ascribe causal significance to the general concept, thereby confusing logical and causal contingency. For instance, many philosophers considered the general concept to be absolutely valid independent of any particular conditions. Consequently, they reasoned that the existence of the general concept must be absolutely necessary, not contingent on particular prior conditions. But this was a mistake, according to Windelband. The existence of the general concept is not absolutely necessary. To think it is confuses logical with causal necessity by imagining that what is logically necessary is also causally necessary. The correct view, as was later pointed out, is that the existence of the general concept is not causally necessary, but contingent—its existence depends on the existence of its particular instances. For example, there is no concept of a chair independent of particular chairs. However, a failure to grasp the relationship between a concept and its instances resulted in the confusion of logical with causal necessity, and in turn those who succumbed to this confusion falsely understood the contingent in relation to causal necessity, rather than in relation to logical necessity (WINDELBAND 1870, 73).

In a similar fashion, logical contingency became confused with teleological contingency. Philosophers incorrectly surmised that the relation-

ship between God's purpose and human purposes was analogous to the relationship between a general concept and its instances. The concept defines the necessary qualities of a thing, while the instance has many accidental qualities. By analogy, they reasoned, God's purposes, because they are necessary, must be inevitable—they are fated to come about. However, human goals, like specific instances, lack this quality of necessity. They are not assured of being realized, unlike God's plans (WINDELBAND 1870, 75). However, this understanding of the relationship between divine and human purpose unjustifiably imposes the relation between concept and instance on the relation between the divine and the mundane.

Applied to ethics, this confusion led to the view that only God has true worth, since individual action is never entirely free of the contingent worldly circumstances in which humans act. But this too is a carry-over of the relationship between the general concept and the individual instance. Rather than recognizing that a general concept is merely an abstraction from the existence of particular exemplars, those who committed this error imagined that the general concept exists as God, who alone understands the absolute goal of all existence. Those who mistook logical for teleological contingency thus considered that the lack of identity between God and His creation irredeemably contaminated the goal-oriented ethical behavior of this creation. They longed to fulfill God's purpose, rather than realizing human purposes. They wished to lead divine rather than ethical human lives. In Windelband's words, they thus longed for fruit while picking cherries (WINDELBAND 1870, 77).

In conclusion, for Windelband, the history of human philosophy is an attempt to battle against the contingency that we encounter in the world. Science, religion, ethics and art attempt to understand the complexity of the human world and its many contingent events by constructing an ideal world that functions in accordance with necessary rules, and which can therefore be understood. However, all previous attempts to contrast the contingency of everyday life with the necessity of this ideal world are frustrated. Contingency only exists in relation to necessity in a logical sense, and all other attempts to define it in relation to necessity are wrongheaded, since they seek to carry over logical contingency to other domains.

What does Kuki adopt from Windelband? Primarily, he adopts the idea that the truly contingent is the isolated event—the particular state of affairs. For Windelband, the only thing that is truly contingent is an actual act or state of affairs. And what is contingent about this act or state of affairs is that it is not contained within the concept of that act or state, but rather occurs in circumstances that are entirely accidental from the logical point of view. Kuki takes this as his starting point. For him, the true significance of contingency arises from the contingent meeting between two people. As he points out, “the radical meaning of contingency is, in principle, the possibility of another, rather than the same, which is the perspective of necessity” (KUKI 1966, 192).

However, Kuki cannot wholly adopt Windelband’s approach. While Windelband might be right that we cannot understand the world from God’s perspective, this does not leave only a scientific approach as the alternative. Thus for Kuki, the phenomenon of contingency cannot be reduced to logical contingency. The contingent is manifest in our life as more than simple logical contingency. Where has Windelband gone wrong, according to Kuki? He has overlooked the fact that contingency is not just a scientific phenomenon—it is also an experiential one. The contingent is not simply the limit of human knowledge. We can know things about this limit because we experience it every day—when, for instance, we are surprised by a chance event or encounter. Windelband has overlooked the ecstatic dimensions to human experience that give us glimpses of the limits of human knowledge. Moreover, this experience of the limits of conceptual knowledge can tell us something about the nature of human experience itself. Thus a further contribution of Windelband’s approach to Kuki’s theory of contingency is that it demonstrates the failure of a scientific approach, and underlines the importance of employing a phenomenological methodology to understand the role of contingency in our experience.

It is because of his adoption of a phenomenological approach that Kuki seems to proceed in the opposite direction from Windelband. Windelband begins with metaphysical concepts and demonstrates that these reduce to a false application of a logical concept to metaphysics. In contrast, Kuki begins with logical and epistemological concepts and ends

up explaining their metaphysical significance. We see here the profound difference in the application of Kuki and Windelband's methodologies.

Heinrich Rickert

Heinrich Rickert developed the ideas of his teacher, Windelband, with the goal of grounding history as a science. He extends Windelband's work in a direction that brings him closer to Kuki's purpose and method of studying contingency, and yet still differs from Kuki due to his rationalist approach. Rickert chooses an object of study that is much closer to that chosen by Kuki. Kuki is interested in concrete encounters between individuals; history, Rickert's object of study, is precisely the study of particular historical events and encounters. As well, Kuki sees the encounter as having ethical significance. Similarly, Rickert sees history as the study of values. Natural scientific study requires the removal of all values from the object of study. However, history is precisely about the selection of historically significant events and individuals. It is thus a value-laden form of investigation. However, Rickert and Kuki part company when it comes to method of inquiry. While Rickert seeks to understand the relationship between a particular historical event and cultural values from a scientific point of view—i.e., from a purely conceptual point of view in which concepts are applied to individual instances—Kuki proceeds phenomenologically by beginning from the actual concrete encounter itself.

In *Die Grenzen der naturwissenschaftlichen Begriffsbildung* [The Limits of Concept Formation in Natural Science, 1921], Rickert studies the limits of natural scientific methodology and explains why it is unsuitable for application to the study of history. The method of the natural sciences involves developing concepts by abstracting from particular events. However, history is the study of particular, concrete events. Thus if history aspires to be a science, it cannot use the same method of abstraction, since this would divorce it from its object of study. In order to develop such a scientific historical methodology, Rickert articulates a theory of historical concept-formation that takes as its starting point the object of historical study, *viz.* particular historically significant individuals, or particular historically significant events. Rickert develops this

methodology by demonstrating the limits of natural scientific inquiry: “we undertake an investigation of the *limits of natural science* in order to achieve clarity concerning the nature and the philosophical significance of the historical sciences” (RICKERT 1986, 17). The purpose of Rickert’s inquiry is not to undermine the scientific way of viewing the world, but rather to question whether it can be used as a model for scientific inquiry in all areas of study (RICKERT 1986, 17–18).

According to Rickert, science takes nature as its object of study, while history makes culture its object (RICKERT 1986, 36). In creating its concepts, science distances itself from specific natural phenomena. According to Rickert, the purpose of natural science is “to establish an opposition between the content of *concepts* and the *reality* of sense perception that is as rigorous as possible” (RICKERT 1986, 37). This is because the more general natural scientific concepts become, the less of the individual phenomenon they contain. The result of this is that although nature is science’s object of study, it never grasps the concrete reality of everyday life.⁸ Rickert thus concludes that what limits the process of concept formation in the natural sciences are the actual, concrete experiences of life:

What fixes the limits of natural scientific concept formation, and which the natural sciences can never surmount, is nothing but unique empirical reality itself; just as we directly experience it in sense perception, in its concrete actuality and individuality. (RICKERT 1986, 40, emphasis in original)

Of course, this seems paradoxical, because it appears as if science is never able to describe its object (RICKERT 1986, 40). However, Rickert explains that the fault is not with the sciences, but with the correspondence theory of truth. We may think that scientific concepts are determined to be true to the degree that they correspond to actual, observed phenomena, but in fact, the purpose of scientific concept formation is to “transform” the content of reality in a “generally valid fashion and

8. “The more completely we develop our natural scientific theories and representations, the further we depart from reality as unique, perceptual, and individual—in other words, from the real as such” (RICKERT 1986, 39).

on the basis of specific perspectives” (RICKERT 1986, 46). “Nature,” the object of science, is not concrete reality, but rather reality depicted with reference to the general (RICKERT 1986, 54). Science is thus one-sided, because it deals with the formation of concepts that are universal and essential, and which do not make reference to a specific space and time.⁹ Rickert explains that if we are interested in reality at a specific point in time, as is the case with history, natural scientific concepts will not help us:

This does not mean that a representation of unique and distinctive objects by means of natural science is impossible, nor does it diminish the significance of representation in natural science. On the contrary, it only clarifies its definitive character and, of course, its one-sidedness as well. This point should make the following explicit: Regardless of its significance for knowledge of nature, a science concerned with whatever has no spatiotemporal reference but is generally—and therefore universally and invariably—valid can have nothing to say about what exists at a specific point in space and time, and what really and uniquely holds true here or there, now or then. (RICKERT 1986, 46–7)

To fully understand spatial and temporal reality, one must look to history. The methodology of history cannot be the same as that of science if it wishes to access concrete phenomena. But the challenge is that if history has a rational method, it may fail to capture the irrationality of reality (RICKERT 1986, 53). Rickert goes on to contrast history with science in the following way:

When reality is to be comprehended in its individuality and distinctiveness, the intention of bringing it under general concepts or establishing laws of the historical—laws that, as we know, are necessarily general concepts—is simply a *logical absurdity*. Like all the concepts of natural science, nomological concepts of this sort would only result in what is no longer unique and individual. Thus the historical sciences would fail to realize their purpose—knowledge of reality in its individuality—all the more certainly the more successful they became

9. For Kuki’s discussion of the difference between science and history, see KUKI 1966, 103–5.

in discovering the laws of the real material whose “history” we want to know. (RICKERT 1986, 56)

What is the historical equivalent of the process of scientific concept formation? Historical inquiry, Rickert says, is about the relationship of values to objects. However, it is not the study of particular value judgments (RICKERT 1986, 88). Rather, it deals with values that are valid for everyone (RICKERT 1986, 89). For instance, Goethe’s status as an individual is valued by everyone, but this is not the case for historically insignificant figures (RICKERT 1986, 89). The general value is not, however, general in the sense of a concept, which is an abstraction of the essence from a series of particulars. Historical investigation does not aim at creating generalized values. Rather, history as a scientific inquiry must explain the process of assigning value to a particular event or person. But what does it mean to relate a value to a thing theoretically, as opposed to studying specific valuations? A specific valuation involves a specific judgment about whether a historical event or person was good or bad. At this level, historians could never agree. But a theoretical valuation recognizes that, whether historians consider him good or bad, a particular person is of historical significance. In Rickert’s words:

...positive or negative valuation is in principle different from the theoretical relation of objects to values. Valuation is always positive or negative, and the value judgment declares that its object is either good or bad. The purely theoretical relation to values, on the other hand, stands aloof from such an alternative. If an object is essential to this relation, that does not mean we have to consider the character of the object good or bad. (RICKERT 1986, 93)

This does not mean that theoretical value is the actual agreement of all individuals as to the significance of a specific person. Rather, as I mentioned, theoretical value is abstracted from any concrete valuations.

As we have discovered, history according to Rickert is the study of particular events or particular individuals. It differs from science, which abstracts from these particulars (RICKERT 1986, 111). These particulars need not be individual people or points in time. Every individual historical figure is part of a historical nexus—for instance, the Renaissance or the Baroque. The relationship between the individual and this nexus

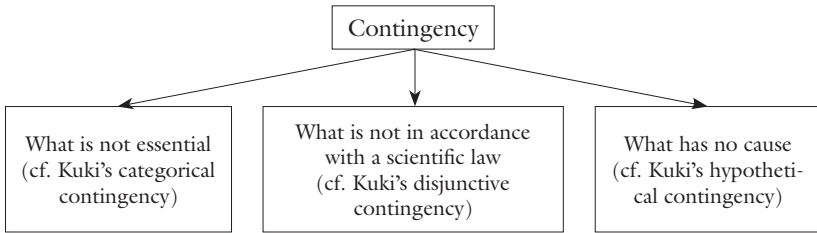
is not that of instance to concept, but rather of individual to a group (RICKERT 1986, 107–11). And the group of which the individual is the part—the Renaissance—is itself an individual, since it is part of a culture, which is itself part of human history as a whole. Thus even if it studies a historical period, history as science is about individuals, not instances of abstract concepts (RICKERT 1986, 107–11). As Rickert states, “historical science, even when it links its objects to the ‘most general’—that is, most comprehensive—cosmic nexuses, still does not cease to be a science of the individual, the unique, and the specific” (RICKERT 1986, 111). This contrasts with the sciences, for which the nexus is not a group, but a system of general concepts (RICKERT 1921, 278).¹⁰ And whereas a scientific nexus becomes more “empty” the more general it becomes, since concepts are devoid of inessential characteristics of the instances they describe, in contrast a historical nexus becomes more “full” in the sense of “richer in content,” since it encompasses, at its most general, the whole of human history (RICKERT 1921, 281).

Because history deals with particular events, its concept of “causation” is different from that used in the sciences (RICKERT 1921, 284–5). History deals with individual material causal chains—e.g., the circumstances that lead to Wilhelm IV giving up the throne (RICKERT 1921, 285). Scientific causation, by contrast, deals with conceptual causation, because it explains why a particular effect is the necessary result of a causal law, which is purely conceptual. To put this differently, science deals with causally determined events, while history deals with the actions of free individuals (RICKERT 1921, 286). But the different conceptions of causation used in the natural and historical sciences have led some to say that if science deals with free individuals rather than causal laws, it must be a science of contingency, which is impossible (RICKERT 1921, 286).

In order to demonstrate that this is not an objection to the possibility of historical science, Rickert identifies the various categories of contingency and necessity. Contingency can have three meanings: first, something can be contingent if it does not act in accordance with a necessary

10. Oakes does not translate all of Rickert’s text. References to the 1921 text are thus references to portions not translated by Oakes. Where translations are provided, they are my own.

law. Second, the contingent can be that which has no cause. Finally, something is contingent if it is not part of the essence of a thing (RICKERT 1921, 286). Again, as we have seen with Windelband, contingency is defined in relation to necessity, rather than being investigated as a phenomenon in itself.



Rickert points out that if history deals with contingency in any of these senses, there is nothing that prevents it from being a scientific study. If contingency is understood as that which does not fall within a causal law, then everything that occurs in the real world is purely contingent. For example, it is pure chance that it is Saturn and not the Earth that has rings (RICKERT 1921, 286). There is no scientific law that determined this. Thus the natural sciences and the historical sciences are on the same footing—both study a purely contingent world. If contingency is understood as that which has no cause, then again, nothing in the world is contingent, because every state of affairs is caused by a previous one (RICKERT 1921, 286), and neither the natural sciences nor the historical sciences is at an advantage. Finally, if necessity is that which is essential and contingency the inessential, then history is once again just as scientific as the natural sciences. There is a historical principle by means of which we determine what is essential for a historical inquiry, just as there is a scientific principle by means of which the essential is abstracted from particular instances (RICKERT 1921, 287).

Rickert thus demonstrates that the view that history deals with contingency rather than necessity is simply due to false usage of the word “cause.” Proponents of this view argue that scientific laws such as the law of gravity are the “cause” of an object falling in a purely conceptual sense (RICKERT 1921, 290). They go on to say that there are no general histor-

ical laws by means of which we can explain why some contingent events take place rather than others. Thus history cannot be a science in the same sense as the natural sciences. However, according to Rickert, this is a misuse of the term “cause.” Something can be the necessary result of a causal law from a conceptual point of view. But in the real world, scientific concepts have no causal efficacy. Thus to say that science deals with necessary events, while history deals with contingent events, is a terminological mistake. Science deals with events that are *conceptually* necessary, but it does not deal with events that are *materially* necessary. In contrast, history deals with what is *materially* necessary—it tries to explain why a particular series of events came about and why they have historical significance (RICKERT 1921, 290).

Having examined the way in which Rickert contrasts the scientific with the historical, we learn that history, insofar as it is the study of events that occur at a particular time and place, is in fact the study of contingency. It is the study of the concrete world, the unfolding of which can be explained as necessary by means of natural scientific rules, and historically, as the necessary result of concrete antecedent causes, which, however, are not conceptually necessary in the scientific sense.

Furthermore, Rickert has explained that this study of contingency is a study of values. It thus has a necessarily ethical character, and this links Rickert’s study quite closely to Kuki’s project of articulating the ethical significance of contingency. However, as we will see, where Rickert and Kuki differ fundamentally is in the methodology they adopt. For Kuki, Rickert’s attempt to make a science of the study of the contingent by establishing a logical and formal concept of history fails to capture the meaning of contingency in our lives—i.e., it does not explain how it is that we actually experience contingency. Instead, Rickert has reduced contingency to a scientific category—that which occurs at a specific place and time.

KUKI’S THEORY OF CONTINGENCY

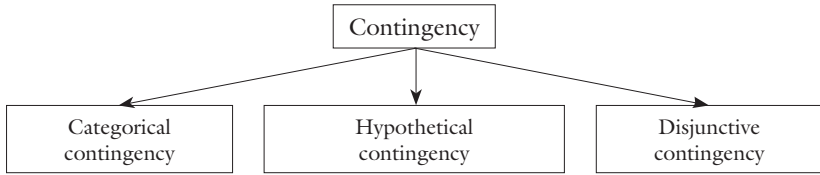
Kuki’s study of contingency both takes its cue from the studies of his contemporaries and differs in surprising and fascinating ways.

Kuki considers a particular event—the crossing of two causal paths or the meeting of two individuals—as the true locus of contingency. This is similar to the view of Windelband. Recall that for him, the concrete world is a world of purely contingent events that lie outside of the realm of a scientific concept of contingency. However, because he is seeking a scientific concept of contingency, rather than investigating the truly contingent, Windelband is forced to investigate the contingency of a particular event in relation to its general concept, since only this relation is capable of being studied rationally—i.e., scientifically.

For Rickert too, history deals with contingency, because it deals not with concepts but with particular events that are ascribed historical importance. Where Kuki differs from his contemporaries is in his goal and his methodology. Unlike Windelband and Rickert, Kuki is not interested in achieving a scientific understanding of contingency. Windelband sought a concept of contingency that was open to rational explanation. Metaphysical concepts of contingency led back to an unknowable God. Science was unable to completely explain the contingent event because it is impossible to know all of the circumstances in which a particular event transpires, and which thus act on it in order to bring it about. Rickert set out to examine the limits of scientific knowledge. He found that the natural sciences were, for the reasons given by Windelband, unable to be a science of the actual nature of our experience. Only history could be such a science, and it was his goal to develop a concept of history as the science of the particular, and to see it as the theoretical study of the relationship of objects to values (RICKERT 1986, 92).

In contrast, Kuki's goal is not to set out a science of contingency or establish a concept of contingency amenable to scientific understanding. As such, his methodology is not scientific in the neo-Kantian sense, but rather phenomenological, and his goal is not to understand contingency conceptually, but rather phenomenologically as the condition for the possibility of ethical obligation.

In *The Problem of Contingency*, Kuki begins his study with categorical contingency (the relationship between a concept and an exemplar). He then progresses to hypothetical contingency (the relationship between experience and reason), and ends with disjunctive contingency (the relationship between being and non-being).



Kuki characterizes the various stages of this progression as follows:

In sum, the fundamental meaning of categorical contingency is individuality and individual phenomenality; the fundamental meaning of hypothetical contingency is as the encounter of one series and another; the fundamental meaning of disjunctive contingency is to be a possible nothingness. (KUKI 1966, 191)

The progression begins with epistemological conceptions, then moves on to existential conceptions, and ends finally with a metaphysical conception of contingency. Interestingly, it is the reverse of the progression that Windelband uses. This is likely due to the scientific methodology that Windelband employs. In his search for a scientific concept of contingency, Windelband begins with metaphysical conceptions of contingency, which he rejects in an effort to articulate a purely logical and hence scientific conception. In contrast, Kuki's phenomenological methodology leads us to uncover the conditions for the possibility of our experience by examining the existential structures of this experience. Kuki thus progresses from the fact of individuality pointed to by categorical experience to the impossibility of using reason to understand the individual, finally ending in the metaphysical structures of this understanding, which reveal the nothingness that is the possibility of the individual's existence. This interpretation is justified by the gloss that Kuki gives on his characterization of the progression of his study:

The contingent, because it is individual and an individual phenomenon, possesses contingent characteristics in relation to the general concept; because it is the encounter of an independent series, it finds itself outside of the necessary relation of the conclusion to reason; and because it is a possible nothingness, it is a setting-aside of the necessity represented by the totality of all possibilities. (KUKI 1966, 191–2)

What is interesting about Kuki's theory of contingency is that, while he uses categories substantially similar to those of the neo-Kantians, unlike in both Windelband and Rickert's typologies, Kuki's three types of contingency are not completely separate. Rather, they are all moments of our experience—conditions for the possibility of the phenomenon of contingency:

These three meanings are absolutely inseparable, and they harmonize in a single whole. The fundamental meaning of *individuality and individual phenomenality* is the fact of the *encounter of one series with another*, and the possibility of there being no encounter which accompanies the profound meaning of the encounter and is contained in it is *possible nothingness*. (KUKI 1966, 192, emphasis in original)

Each of the three types of contingency is a progressive unfolding of the meaning of the phenomenon of contingency. Interestingly, unlike either Rickert or Windelband, Kuki does not simply focus on chance events, but on the crossing of two causal series, or more concretely, the meeting of two people. And the phenomenological meaning of this encounter is derived from disjunctive contingency—the possibility that the encounter could have not occurred. As Kuki explains:

The origin of individuality leads back to the dualist position of the other face-to-face with the same. The encounter is nothing other than the encounter of two independent principles. The possibility of nothingness, as if founded on the choice of one or the other, is the condition for the possibility of this duality. (KUKI 1966, 192)

Kuki's study of contingency leads him to unfold the meaning of the contingent face-to-face meeting with another. It is for this reason that contingency has a profoundly ethical significance for Kuki.¹¹

In terms of methodology, Kuki speaks little in *The Problem of Contingency* about the phenomenological methodology that he employs. In the introduction to the text, Kuki contrasts a natural scientific investigation with a metaphysical investigation. The former, he says, investigates particular regions of being, or in Kuki's words, "fragments of being," since

11. On the importance of the face-to-face for ethics, see LEVINAS 1961, 50–1.

it does not take into account the relationship between being and non-being (KUKI 1966, 3). According to Kuki, a study of contingency cannot proceed unless we investigate it in terms of its relationship to non-being. This somewhat obscure comment can, I think, be best understood if we read it in light of a passage from Lev Shestov quoted by Kuki. The passage is used to admonish us to be the kind of people “who do not want to give up the hope of discovering in the world something other than statistics and necessity” (SHESTOV 1926, xv; quoted in KUKI 1966, 5). This passage seems to indicate that in order to understand contingency, we must investigate it from the point of view of the conditions for the possibility of this understanding, and this means investigating it from the point of view of the hopes and expectations that animate human existence. It is for this reason that Kuki advocates uncovering the ontological structures of contingency (KUKI 1966, 5).

In order to discover what the process of uncovering the ontological structures of contingency involves, one can look to the similarities between Kuki’s text on contingency and his most famous work, *Iki no kōzō* [いきの構造] [The Structure of *Iki*, 1981]. Both the latter work and *The Problem of Contingency* share the fact that they take a concept—in the first case, the aesthetic term *iki*, and in the second case, contingency—and create a complicated system of classification for both. In the case of *iki*, Kuki elucidates the intensional structures of *iki* (its structures as a phenomenon of consciousness) in order to develop its meaning as a system of Japanese taste (MAYEDA 2006, 140). In the case of contingency, he again uses this technique, exposing the structures of contingency as a phenomenon of consciousness, and then using these to point to the meaning of contingency as an ethical experience.

Kuki begins with concrete experiences, providing examples of contingency as it occurs in our daily life. It is for this reason that he discusses concrete phenomena such as the rarity of the four-leaf clover, the tile that fortuitously falls from a roof, and the contingent relationship between two people’s names due to their being written with the same number of brush strokes. The technique is similar to that used in *The Structure of Iki*, in which Kuki lists endless concrete expressions of *iki*. He then turns to the intensional structures of these everyday phenomena. These are the manifestations of contingency as “phenomena of consciousness.” He

brackets the everyday assumptions associated with these experiences—that is, he performs a sort of epoché (MAYEDA 2006, 141–2)—which allows him to expose the conditions for the possibility of these experiences of contingency, namely: individuality, the encounter of one series with another, and the possibility of nothingness. Finally, he turns to the “extensional” structures of contingency by giving contingency as a *system* its metaphysical meaning. The last step involves demonstrating the unity of the three main types of contingency—categorical, hypothetical and disjunctive—and explaining how, by means of its intensional structures, the everyday experience of contingency points outside of the individual’s everyday existence to the metaphysical, ecstatic dimensions of this existence, which have ethical significance, and call us to take responsibility for our encounters with others.

We thus see that Kuki’s methodology is equally as rigorous as the scientific methodologies employed by his contemporaries Windelband and Rickert. And yet its goal of uncovering the meaning of contingency in our lives is fundamentally different from the goal of achieving a rational understanding of contingency as a science. Having discussed the nature of Kuki’s methodology, I turn in the last section to a short overview of the ethical consequences of Kuki’s study of contingency.

KUKI’S ETHICS

Although a full investigation of the nature of Kuki’s ethical thought is not possible in this essay, a few brief words about the results of Kuki’s application of his phenomenological methodology are appropriate. There are two possible interpretations of the ethics that Kuki sets out in *The Problem of Contingency*. Omodaka Hisayuki identifies Kuki’s ethics with that of *bushidō*, which he likens to the Nietzschean *amor fati*. Nitobe Inazō describes the ethics of *bushidō* as providing “a sense of calm trust in Fate, a quiet submission to the inevitable, that stoic composure in sight of danger or calamity, that disdain of life and friendliness with death” (NITOBE 2005, 8). If we accept Omodaka’s characterization of Kuki’s ethics, then the role of the contingent encounter is to

initiate and reaffirm the fulfillment of the individual's fate—i.e., to set into motion once more the fruitless wheel of human existence.

I do not think that this description of the ethics of *bushidō* corresponds with Kuki's understanding of ethics and its relationship to contingency. Admittedly, both *bushidō* and Kuki's ethics appear to share one feature—acceptance of one's destiny is the opportunity for original contingency, which Kuki also identifies with absolute nothingness, to manifest itself. The manifestation of destiny is the acceptance of the ultimate nothingness of human existence and the vanity of human plans and goals that end in the realization of this nothingness in death.¹² And yet, while *bushidō* sees redemption as individual—it can be obtained through the fulfillment of Heaven's will (NITOBE 2000, 94)—for Kuki, redemption is possible through the relationship between oneself and another. Relationality, as I have already explained, thus has a principal role in Kuki's ethics.¹³ Ethical behavior does not just involve embracing of the individual's fate. Rather, the ethical moment occurs through the contingent encounter with another. Ethics is thus not individual, but relational.

Furthermore, for Kuki, ethics cannot be scientific. A scientific ethics would attempt to make moral laws similar to natural laws, just as Rickert attempts to make the science of experience—history—the science of the theoretical relation of value to objects. According to Kuki, a scientific concept of ethics “ends in a ‘will that no longer wills anything’” (KUKI 1966, 194). Instead, Kuki advocates that ethics take as its starting point an understanding of the relationship of the contingent event to “the whole,” i.e., the fact that each contingent encounter bears within it the surpassing of the limit of such an encounter:

The interiorization of contingency at the level of practice is nothing other than the consciousness of the correlations between the innumerable parts that form the concrete totality. It must be that which

12. “Contingency as not conceptualized, it is without correlations, without rules, arrangements, interests or preoccupations. Contingency has no goal. It has no intentions. It has no affinities. It rests on nothing. It is blind and has no eyes” (KUKI 1966, 197).

13. Contingency, Kuki reminds us, “exists primarily where there is a duality of the same and the other” (KUKI 1966, 192).

joins the joys and sorrows of all of existence in the profound interiorization of the *you* external to the *I* in every isolated instant in which the same and the other meet by chance. (KUKI 1966, 194)

The only way to do this is to see the contingent event—the meeting which seemed unlikely or even impossible—as opening up future possibilities.¹⁴ However, these possibilities are not just the possibilities of the individual, as is the case in the philosophy of Heidegger.¹⁵ Rather, the possibilities are responsibilities, whereby one has a responsibility to ensure that contingent encounters are “not in vain” (KUKI 1966, 196). Responsibility involves ensuring that chance encounters affect the way one conducts oneself in the future.

CONCLUSION

In developing the ethical implications of Kuki’s theory of contingency, it is instructive to compare Kuki’s theory with that of his European contemporaries, Wilhelm Windelband and Heinrich Rickert, because Kuki develops his ethics in dialogue with them. He adopts their categories, but rejects their methodologies in favor of a phenomenological methodology. It is because of this methodology that Kuki is able to develop contingency as an ethical concept.

Kuki accepts Windelband’s view that all human activity is contingent—it cannot be understood as the consequence of particular laws (causal contingency) or of particular goals (purposive contingency). He also accepts two of Rickert’s insights. First, he accepts that a scientific method of inquiry never reaches the phenomena themselves. This is implicit in Rickert’s view that the process of concept formation in the natural sciences is unable to capture what is essential in historical inquiry. However, Kuki rejects Rickert’s alternative scientific approach, which seeks to identify the type of concept formation at work in his-

14. Kuki reminds us that contingency is the “tendency of the possible toward the possible” (KUKI 1966, 195).

15. For a full discussion of Heidegger’s philosophy in this regard, see MAYEDA 2006.

torical inquiry, and to demonstrate its scientific qualities. Instead, Kuki begins not with the process of concept formation but with the encounter with phenomena themselves—the actual face-to-face meeting of one person and another. The second insight that Kuki adopts from Rickert is that investigating human relations involves contextual factors such as culture and the ascription of values to concrete phenomena. Kuki's acceptance of this approach is most evident in works such as *The Structure of Iki*. However, unlike Rickert, he does not want to create a science of the context. Rather, he investigates how this context gives meaning to the concrete and contingent encounter itself. In the end, the meaning of these encounters is ethical. Ethics is about the individual's unique responsibility, arising from crossing paths with another, that limits his possibilities.

Kuki's understanding of ethics is not modeled on the ethics of *bushidō*. The ethical imperative does not demand stoic acceptance of the fate that draws inexorably closer as concrete encounters engender human emotional responses. Rather, the meeting with another is the opportunity to take responsibility for the one we meet and any failures to live up to this responsibility.

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