The Passion for Philosophy
in a Post-Hiroshima Age

Rethinking Nishida's Philosophy of History

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In "The Principle for the New World Order" written in 1943, Nishida Kitarō interpreted the world-historical significance of the war Japan was fighting as the self-alleged leader of East Asia in analogy to the war that ancient Greece waged against Persia:

> Just as long ago the victory of Greece in the Persian War was said to have determined the direction of European culture up to this day, the present-day war in East Asia may determine a direction for world history to come. (NKZ 11: 455; Arisaka 1966)

In his final essay, "The Logic of Place and the Religious World-View," written about two years later when the signs of Japan's defeat were becoming more and more evident by the day, Nishida's point of reference changed. As Andrew Feenberg has acutely pointed out (1995, 172), Nishida was trying to envision the path Japan ought to take after the coming defeat by drawing implicitly on the model of Jews who "did not lose their spiritual confidence… even when they were deprived of their homeland during the Babylonian captivity" (NKZ 11: 455). Needless to say, this change of model represents a drastic change in Nishida's perception of the state of affairs. It is not hard to imagine that, had Nishida

survived the end of the war and come to know what Japan had actually been up to in the war, still more drastic changes would have shown up at the core of his philosophy.

"The Logic of Place and the Religious World-View" ends with a sentence that reads like a heart-rending supplication: "The state must be what reflects the Pure Land in this world."[1] After the war Tanabe Hajime criticized his own philosophy's failure to discern that "just as radical evil backs up individual freedom, radical evil lies latent at the bottom of the state" (THZ 7: 253–4). Surely Nishida, too, would have come to remorse over the unrealistic nature of his overly moralistic and religious view of the state, which regarded " the government as a world containing a self-expression of the absolute in itself" (NKZ 11: 463).

Logos and strife

But what we who live in the "post-Hiroshima" age need critically to rethink at this time is Nishida's Heraclitean view of "strife and war," which sustained, and was sustained by, his view of the state:

> I think that when the world becomes concretely *poietic*, races must emerge on the stage of history…. The world of the species is the world of strife. (NKZ 9: 144)

> A historical present, namely an epoch, as a dialectical identity of "what-is-made-makes-the-maker," can take another directions… It must be a tendency of the Heraclitean world where the absolute many is the One and all things are born from strife. An epoch changes into an epoch, not in simple continuity but in absolutely dialectically way. Each epoch always has the character of one world…. I call it a metamorphosis. (NKZ 8: 515–17)

"Antagonism and conflict, " regarded by Heraclitus as the Logos that generates "harmonious unity," do not necessarily entail warfare. Given the circumstances at the time Nishida was writing, there is no doubt

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1. NKZ 11: 463. Dilworth renders the sentence: "The nation is the mirror image of the Pure Land in this world"(1987, 123).

that "strife" implied "war" in these texts. Of course, philosophical views that affirm war as a principle of creativity are far from rare in the history of philosophy, as witnessed in the solid line of thought represented by Hegel and Nietzsche. In the case of Nishida—as we can see, for example, from his essay on "The Identity and the Continuity of the World," which includes lengthy citations in German from the writings of Leopold von Rank—real-world politics seem in large measure to constitute a faithful assimilation of Ranke's view of history, according to which "world-historical moments emerge, not in peaceful, smooth developments, but in perpetual clashes and strife, for fighting belongs to the original nature of human beings" (NKZ 8: 94–5).

Ranke's philosophy of history maintained, as Nishida was fond of repeating, that "each epoch is in direct contact with God; the value of each epoch does not consist in what issues from it, but in the very being of the epoch itself" (NKZ 12: 61). In a word, he was engaged in a critique of Hegel's unilinear and evolutionist view of history which regarded world history as an unfolding of Absolute Spirit, a view that opened up new perspectives. But Ranke was "under the strong constraints of the restoration taking place in nineteenth-century Europe where his thinking on history took shape" (HAYASHI 1980). Indeed, his representative work was entitled *The Great Powers*. Nishida accepted almost without question the underlying assumption of Ranke's view of history with its focus on the struggles going on in modern Europe. Along this line he considered "the present age, which can be regarded as the most nationalistic epoch in history, to be also the most global (*sekaishugiteki* 世界主義的] epoch" (NKZ 8: 250). Thus, despite his harsh criticism of imperialistic Japanism, Nishida's basic frame of historical understanding was itself bound to the nation-based system of his day.

While Nishida watched Japan's defeat and his own death approach as if competing with one other, he wrote: "The world war must be a world war that aims to negate world war and to contribute to an everlasting peace" (NKZ 11: 439). Now our post-Hiroshima Age is one in which world history is tied irrevocably to the "impossibility of a world war" in the sense that a nuclear war could take place without ending in the destruction of human species as such. It is an age in which humankind has, for the first time, come face to face with the fact that "struggle" accompanied by a

mutual escalation of armed forces would lead not to a higher level of Heraclitean "harmonious unity" but to mutual annihilation, or what has come to be called MAD: Mutually Assured Destruction.

"Strife," in the broader sense of the term would seem to be an indispensable ingredient of cultural creativity. But ours is an age that needs, perhaps more than anything else, what William James called a "moral equivalent of war"(1941, 265–96). That is to say, an absolute priority must be placed on enlarging the domains of a "strenuous life" in which the human species can manifest its drive to combativeness in culturally sublimated forms so as to bring about more extensive and deeper coexistence through "cooperation."

WONDER, SORROW, AND FEAR AS MOTIVES FOR PHILOSOPHIZING

"Our motivation for philosophizing must be not wonder, but the deep sorrow of life." These words of Nishida's are often cited as characteristic of his philosophy. Human beings die. The unadorned sorrowfulness of this fact is what drives us to question the meaning of life and leads us to a profound self-awareness of existing in the here-and-now. Nishida's meta-philosophical assertion was meant as a fundamental critique of the penchant of Western philosophy to objectify being, reflected already in the fact that philosophy is said to have begun in wonder.

In contrast, for a post-Hiroshima age, "philosophy in search of peace" may be said to begin from "fear"—the fear of nuclear war.[2] This is not merely one more motivation to philosophize, but a recognition that the fundamentally fearful mood or *Befindlichkeit* of our age has become so pressing as to overwhelm those timeless sentiments about the "wonder of being" and the "sorrow of life." Indeed, the very scope of philosophy's traditional questions have come up for question within the "historical horizon" of the nuclear age.

By their nature, philosophical questions are not easily harmonized with

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2. It was Dorf Sternberger who brought into focus *Erschrecken* as the motivation for a philosophy of peace in our time (see STERNBERGER 1984).

everyday life. Already among the Greeks, the dissociation of philosophy from everyday life was a serious issue.[3] In the post-Hiroshima age, philosophy's position and role in the actual world of historical and political affairs are being questioned anew and in a much more acute manner. Consequently, Nishida's claims for the origins of philosophical thinking may be called into question just as seriously as Heidegger's approach to the question of being was by Levinas's ethical philosophy through its focus on particular, historical alterity.

Ours is an age in which the concrete "possibility of the end of human history" weighs so heavily on us as to all but eclipse the supra-historical problem of "life and death of the self." It is simply no longer acceptable to be unconditionally satisfied with the philosophical realization that "Life-and-death is, as it is, nirvana" (NKZ 11: 421), or to extol the value of absolute freedom in claims that "the self consists in breaking laws."[4]

What the earth as a whole faces at present is, to use Nishida's expression, a problematic situation where, as never before, "what has been made" is capable of becoming "what destroys." Nuclear weapons and environmental hormones are too real to be discarded as secondary concerns. Simply put, we face a situation in which a "decisive termination in discontinuity" can take an eschatological turn from "what-has-been-made" to "what-has-been-destroyed," displacing the dialectical "continuity of discontinuity" from "what-has-been-made" to "what-makes." Our age is post-Nanjing, post-Auschwitz, and post-Minamata, too, each tragedy haunting history with a host of unseen memories of "those who

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3. The famous parable of the cave in Plato's *The Republic* is a classical allegory of this problem. Discussing Plato's parable, Hannah Arendt remarks:

> The beginning of all philosophy is θαυμαζεῖν, the surprised wonder at everything that is as it is. More than anything else, Greek 'theory' is the prolongation and Greek philosophy the articulation and conceptualization of this initial wonder. To be capable of it is what separates the few from the many, and to remain devoted to it is what alienates them from the affairs of men. (ARENDT (1968, 115)

4. "The practical self is not mere reason. The self consists in possessing the possibility of breaking laws. The voluntary, personal being of our self must be a self-contradictory being through and through" (NKZ 11: 401). "Human beings are born as belonging to the species, human beings consist in negating the species as an individual of the world" (NKZ 12: 322).

have been destroyed." Can there be any doubt that Nishida's optimism in speaking so long and so often about the dialectics of "from-what-has-been-made" to "what-makes" is no longer warrantable?

Nishida's positive outlook on the dialectics of "continuity of discontinuity" (NKZ 8: 70) may be said to derive ultimately from his trust—or to be more correct, his belief—in the "*basho* of absolute nothingness" (7: 425). In the preface to the second edition of *An Inquiry into the Good* he writes:

> What I called in the present book the world of direct or pure experience I have now come to think of as the world of historical reality. The world of action-intuition—the world of *poiesis*—is none other than the world of pure experience. (NISHIDA 1992, XXXIII)

Nishida's inquiry into the "phenomenology of the world of historical reality" through an analyses of the body led him finally to a "return to the life-world" (see KAZASHI 1999). This world, as Nishida came to see, was not confined to a world of individuals freely encountering and determining one another. It was also a world where countless independent individuals, each existing disjunctively from the others with no direct connection, determine each other expressively through *poiesis* (that is, through the production of things). Alternatively, from the perspective of Nishida's philosophy of place or *basho*, the life-world is one in which a multi-layered relationship of expressive mutual determinations among "countless individuals" is taken to be ultimate reality under the rubric of a "dialectical universal." Couched in his own terms, we would say that Nishida envisioned a dialectical world of "historical reality" in which independent and "unique individuals"—namely, the "unmediated" which determine themselves—come to be mediated expressively.

But, as Nishitani Keiji has pointed out, when we regard the "world of historical reality" as the "world of pure experience" without reservation, we are likely to lose sight of our

> natural tendency to think of things in terms of the conscious self. One of the great facts of life is that we usually position ourselves on a standpoint of "discrimination," far from the true facts of things. The delusion that results from this is also a great fact of life. (NISHITANI 1991, 185; trans. adjusted)

In other words, when human beings, caught in delusion and driven by their own desires, exert themselves in producing weapons and overproducing commodities, the result is that the world can actually find itself driven to the brink of extinction. The undeniable relationship between delusions and their real consequences are likely to be overlooked or underestimated from an idealized, "enlightened" view of the world.

The logic of place and the fallacy of misplaced concreteness

Alfred N. Whitehead once observed, summarizing the gist of his philosophy:

> The philosophy of organism is the inversion of Kant's philosophy.... For Kant, the world emerges from the subject; for the philosophy of organism, the subject emerges from the world—a "superject" rather than a "subject." (WHITEHEAD 1978, 88)

Whitehead, who sought a "topological (*bashoronteki* 場所論的) turn" not unlike Nishida's, located the one element to be criticized first of all in the "scheme of scientific ideas which has dominated thought" since the seventeenth century as the "concept of simple location." This concept proposes that

> in expressing the spatio-temporal relations of a bit of matter, it is adequate to state that it is where it is, in a definite finite region of space, and throughout a definite duration of time, apart from any essential reference of the relations of that bit of matter to other regions of space and to other durations of time. (WHITEHEAD 1925, 58)

The ultimate importance of the Whiteheadian "topological turn" lay in rectifying the "fallacy of simple location," which he later subsumed under the more general category of the "fallacy of misplaced concreteness."

For Nishida, however, a "place" is sometimes characterized as a "place with an infinite circumference" without any concrete, relative determinations. For example:

> It is like the self-determination of an infinite Pascalian sphere whose

circumference is nowhere and whose center is everywhere. Thus we can consider the real world as a cross-section of the subjective and the objective, infinitely determined by both its radius and its circumference. (NKZ 7: 320)

Here we see how the idea of "place" itself risks leading us into the fallacy of "misplaced concreteness." Is it not the case that at certain critical junctures, Nishida's "logic of *basho*" fell victim to that very fallacy?

Toward a philosophy of multiple-historicity

The theoretical tendency to one-sided thinking considered above can entail serious consequences in the concrete. When it came to the actual historical reality of the situation, Nishida's philosophy turned out to be all but powerless in its attempt to reorient the spirit of the age that placed a higher priority on race and nation than on the individual, on obligation and tradition rather than on personal freedom. No doubt this was due in the main to powerful movements at work outside of Nishida, but when we compare his views on nation and race to those, say, of George Herbert Mead's, his social philosophy comes up for serious question.[5]

5. Steve Odin (1996) has argued this persuasively in a wide-ranging work comparing the notion of the "social self" in modern Japanese thought to that of American pragmatism. Still, one may suppose that Nishida's notion of the "he" would give sociologists pause to reconsider or at least register surprise at its striking similarity to the notion of "taking the attitude of the generalized other," one of the key concepts in Mead's social philosophy. What is more, in Mead as well as in Nishida, the focus was not on the "mediation by generality" itself as an indispensable phase in the formation of the self, but on the dialectical relationship between such a "social, typified" aspect and the "individual, creative" aspect that makes an individual a unique, creative individual. Nishida explain his notion of the "he" in these terms::

> To negate the conscious self, and to take the stance of the acting self means that I take his standpoint. Such significance must be present when we objectify our subjectivity. "He" is not only the principle of separation between "I" and "thou," but also a principle of objectification. We see things in a subjective-objective way from the standpoint of the "he." Taking "his" stance means that I am at work. It is likewise for the "thou" that is at work when it assumes "his" standpoint. Thus, it can be thought that the "I" and the "thou" interact

As a general principle of social life, Nishida proposes a "dialectics of life-and-death" based on the alternatives of a social life and an individual life. The problematic character of this approach to society may be ultimately attributed to his conception of "place" itself (KAZASHI 2000).

Meantime, Mead is clear that "sociality is the capacity of being several things at once" (MEAD, 1980, 49). From such a view of the "multiple-self," it is not possible to derive the general principle of a "dialectics of life-and-death" like that characterizing the foundations of Nishida's logic of "social activity" and enabling him to conclude that "to live socially is to die individually." On the contrary, the plurality of social relationships is the very thing that makes it possible for individuals to weave the unique tapestry of their own lives through the mediation of diverse social lives, while at the same time maintaining a relative distance from particular relationships

More than a century ago, Nietzsche rejected those "preachers of death" who "see only one aspect of existence" and are quick to assert that "life has been refuted!" at the first sight of death and disease (NIETZSCHE 1961, 72). The history of the twentieth century is replete with examples of the "refutation of the human" in forms that even Nietzsche would have found unimaginable. The question of the meaning of human exis-

> with each other through the world of the "he." They determine each other through that which mediates a "continuity of discontinuity." They determine each other in the subject-object world of things. The world of things is the world of the "he." (NKZ 8: 56–7)

As is well known, Mead established his "social behaviorism" by centering on the analysis of the dynamic, complementary relationship between the pole of the "I" or subjective self and the "me" or objective self. In particular, the "I" came to be referred to as the "emergent self" because of its spontaneity and creativity. In contrast, what Nishida tried to capture in the notion of a "contradictory identity of individual determination and general determination" was the dialectical relationship between the "social, typified" dimension and the "individual, creative" dimension. The name Nishida used to designate the "acting self" that lived the dynamics of such a dialectical relationship was the "unique individual" (*yuiitsu naru kobutsu* 唯一なる個物). His construction of a logic of "place" may leave the impression that Nishida's philosophy placed particular stress on the communal. But in fact he claimed that "the self consists in the potential for breaking laws," at the same time as he insisted that "such things as law and morality" must "face me as a thou." Thus, Nishida's "unique individual" was no less radical, at least conceptually, than Mead's "emergent self."

tence has been stretched taut between the memories of a wounded past and the future prospects of an end to human history. This question, which evokes the sorrows and terrors of life and at the same time elicits a sense of the unfathomable mystery of human existence, is a metaphysical one for which there can be no final answer. Yet it is only by asking this question for oneself and cultivating the requisite inner strengths that we can enable ourselves to conceive and construct a new paradigm for civilized society, a "system of peace" not driven by war and violence.

To conceive such a new paradigm means to create a new philosophy of history. Requisite to the task is a concrete appreciation of the characteristics of, and the relationships between, the historicities of various "dimensions of reality" without concealing the disjunctions that exist in the manifold of reality, among them that between the standpoints of the "conscious self" and "pure experience." Only these guiding questions, coupled with the wonders, sorrows, and fears of human life, can provide a fitting framework for restructuring the manifold of human existence in all its complex reality.

If we are to understand our own time and to imagine our own future, it is not enough to see history as simply the creative self-formation of an "eternal present." We need continually to face the fundamental but mutually irreconcilable questions thrown up to us by the fact that we live a "simultaneous existence of diverse time-spans": repetitive routines that bestow a rhythm to everyday life and at the same time the once-and-for-all quality of individual existence; not only the longevity of customs and social institutions or the ethical and political stories transmitted through "memory communities," but also the valuation of time as a measurable labor resource and medium of exchange; the acceleration of global "synchronization" as well as the abiding impact of radioactivity and contaminated materials that continue across generations (see ADAM 1990).

Along this line, perhaps one way to make good use of the rich philosophic ore that Nishida mined is to transform his meditations on the "acting self" into an idea of "multiple selves" acting in the "multiple loci of reality." One thinks, for example, of the stimulus that might be drawn from the theory of social action developed by Alfred Schutz in his sociological phenomenology, of William James's idea of a "pluralistic

universe," or of Mead's theory of "social self."[6] Such a transformation would mean nothing less than a radical overhaul of Nishida's ideal of the "worldly world" (*sekaiteki sekai* 世界的世界, NKZ 12: 427) as the "place of unifying synthesis" of "diverse tendencies" (NKZ 8: 92) into an ideal of the "global civil society" aimed at the harmonious realization of plural values (see NAKAMURA 1996, 17).

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Abbreviation

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THZ 『田辺元全集』[Complete works of Tanabe Hajime] (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1963–1964), 15 volumes.

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6. One such possibility can be recognized in Nishida's realization that the "world of everydayness" is the "world of misgivings" where, "in every act, we verge more or less on a crisis" because, "in every *poiesis*, it is not only that I change things, but things change me" (NKZ 8: 70). Such a view could be developed into a notion of the self as always open to a manifold of possibilities grounded in the various *basho* of reality.

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