

Religion in a Godless Age: The Question of Religion in the Later Nishida

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Preamble

It is well-known that Nishida Kitarō 西田幾多郎 described religion as “a spiritual fact.” But of course the “fact” of which he is here speaking is not a so-called objective fact obtained by observing an object. For Nishida, religion “does not refer to an idea based simply on the demands of emotion and will, and it is religion because it is truly the fundamental fact of the establishment of the self” (10: 47).¹ Instead of observing objects, religion becomes a fact through deep reflection on the foundations of one’s own person. Therefore, Nishida writes: “I am opposed both to those who discuss religion in terms of the logic of objects and merely in terms of knowledge, which goes without saying, and also to those who think of religion through the medium of moral demands” (11: 134). It is not possible to discuss religion by means of the “logic of objects,” which observes and describes objects. Nor can one speak of religion in terms of a god demanded as an extension of morality.

However, these arguments of Nishida’s, founded on the fact of the religious establishment of the self, were later criticized for representing a contemplative position that lacked in historical inquiry. But Nishida did not simply treat religion as a premise. The fact of the religious establishment of the self simultaneously encompasses the fact that this self is established in a historical world. Therefore, Nishida was not thinking of a situation divorced from history. Further, even though he may have been basing himself on the religious establishment of the self, this was not a form of thinking that subordinated the self to religion or God. Rather, he saw the essence of man in a freedom in which man went so far as to turn his back on God. “But the more man would make himself utterly free, the more he dashes up against an absolute iron wall” (9: 56).² Nishida considered humans to be utterly free, but he also turned his attention to their limitations. Using Dostoevsky’s novels as a lead, he described the impasses that supposedly free human beings come up against. On this basis he then proposed the “self-identity of absolute contradictories” as a more fundamental mode of being for the self than the modern rational subjective agent. In an age of nihilism in which it had been declared that “God is dead,” this would also become an attempt to restore once again a circuit connecting with the absolute plane. This could be considered to have been informed with earnest thinking that, responding sincerely to the crisis of the times, attempted to recover our true being.

In past discussions of Nishida’s views on religion, it has been common to discuss connections with the absolute, and the question of how the religious establishment of the self is given concrete form as the historical self has often been neglected. Furthermore, many scholars have discussed connections with specific religions.³ But insofar that the establishment of the self, the most fundamental fact for us, is a religious fact, the question of how it plays out in the historical world also needs to be considered. Of course, the subject that concerned Nishida was not something like nihilism as the final outcome of the history of modern metaphysics. Rather, the issue concerned our fundamental mode of being, in which even nihilism becomes possible.

Based on the above concerns, I shall in the following clarify the question of religion in the later Nishida together with his awareness of the age in which he lived. First, drawing on Dostoevsky and Nietzsche, I clarify Nishida's understanding of the modern age (section 1). Then, as grounds making possible this diagnosis of the age, I discuss how he thought of humankind and the world (section 2). On this basis, I then show how Nishida considered the possibilities that essentially drive human beings into danger to be contained in the character of reason, man, and the world (section 3). Lastly, I examine the religious mode of being whereby people can gain new life (section 4).

1. Existence in Crisis: With Reference to Dostoevsky and Others

First, let us begin by throwing into relief Nishida's awareness of the age in which he lived, using as a lead his references to Dostoevsky and others.⁴ Towards the end of "The World as Dialectical Universal" ("Benshōhōteki ippansha to shite no sekai" 弁証法的な一般者としての世界 [1934]), an essay in which the philosophy of the later Nishida is said to have been brought to completion,⁵ Nishida gives the following diagnosis of the age in which he lived while also touching on the religious world.

Consideration of the religious world may be thought to be a direct return to the Middle Ages. But the evils of the Middle Ages did not consist in considering the world religious. It was rather because that age was superstitious. It was, on the contrary, because it was not truly religious. It is not just that modern scientific culture consists in having taught us the means of material desires; it can rather be said to give us true religion by causing us to know the ultimate limits of man.⁶ (7: 426)

According to Nishida, the Middle Ages were an age when religion was institutionalized and objectified, and it was not a time in which religious self-awareness was pursued on the basis of self-establishment. In this sense it could be said to have been an age of superstition. It was rather with the advent of the age of modern scientific civilization, when the ultimate limits of man were exposed, that there arose the opportunity for reflecting on the basis of self-establishment. It is for this reason that it is said that the modern age paradoxically confers true religion. Regarding the limitations of man in the modern age, Nishida continues:

The man from Dostoevsky's *Notes from the Underground* says that he cannot become a hero, but neither can he become vermin, and that the nineteenth century man must be impersonal in the true sense of the word. This must be the new point of departure for religion. Man faces an absolute wall. As he says, the natural man has run into a wall, and he merely is acquiescing to its existence. This is foolishness. The man of culture only acquiesces to it by seeing his self as a mere mouse. Herein lies the new religious question.⁷ (7: 426)

In the material civilization of the modern age, human beings, with an exceedingly oversized self-consciousness, and no longer able to become "someone," can be no more than "impersonal" people who face an absolute wall or barrier and can do nothing but run into it. It is only in such hopeless circumstances that essential questions about religion can be asked for the first time. In his essay "The Forms of Culture of the Classical Periods of East and West from a Metaphysical Position" ("Keijijōgakuteki tachiba kara mita tōzai kodai no bunka keitai" 形而上学的立場から見た東西古代の文化形態 [1934]), Nishida writes of the Russia of Dostoevsky, who described people who could no longer believe in reason or nature: "It may be said to have an Eastern quality, i.e. to possess the significance of being a culture of nothingness. It is a culture of the negation of *logos*."⁸ (7: 440)

Nishida realized that “a culture of the negation of *logos*” had arisen at the ultimate limit of the modern age, which could be said to be centred on *logos*.

Further, in “Human Existence” (“Ningenteki sonzai” 人間の存在 [1938]), Nishida discusses Dostoevsky in greater detail. Let us consider the following quotation, rather lengthy though it is.

His problem was the question of what sort of thing man is. He pursued the problem seriously and exhaustively. As the hero of *Notes from the Underground* says, the impulsive person, like a mad bull, immediately lowers his horns and rams into a wall. But where there is no freedom, there man is not. Science says there is nothing of what is called free will or the like, but if man is not a mathematical formula, neither is he an organ stop. The hero of *Crime and Punishment* killed a usurious old woman. But he did so neither in order to take her money nor for the sake of saving someone. Rather, it was to test his freedom, to see whether all is permitted, like Napoleon, to the powerful. Yet it became clear that he was no more than a single louse. Even the famous discourse of the Grand Inquisitor in *The Brothers Karamazov* says nothing other than this. Dostoevsky saw man at the ultimate limit; he saw man in relation to his “vanishing point.”⁹ (9: 54–55)

According to Nishida, Dostoevsky saw man at his ultimate limit, at the vanishing point where the modern ego reaches an impasse.¹⁰ Nishida further refers to another thinker who also saw man at his ultimate limit: “Nietzsche, too, saw man at his ultimate limit. But he saw him from the exactly opposite standpoint from that of Dostoevsky” (9: 55). Writing that at this limit “only two paths” are available to man, Nishida continues: “Either one could, like Raskolnikov, bow one’s head to the prostitute Sonja, who asked whether one can live without God, and enter upon a new life, or else there is the path to the man-god advocated by Kirilov in *Demons*” (9: 55). But in connection with the idea of the *Übermensch* Nishida writes as follows:

But in my view, is it not the case that his idea of the eternal return shows that, from the standpoint of the *Übermensch*, he himself faced a deep ravine that he could cross on his own? The dwarf [in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*] says, “All that is straight lies; all truth is crooked; time itself is a circle.” From the standpoint of the eternal return, even the *Übermensch* will at some time have to become a dwarf. The dogs bark when the moon is high (*Vom Gesicht und Rätsel*). (9: 55)

Setting aside the question of the validity of Nishida’s interpretation, he positioned Nietzsche’s *Übermensch* at the ultimate limit of the ego-consciousness that had expanded in modern times, and he understood this *Übermensch* as someone who would fall into the dead end of the eternal return. Meanwhile, in addition to this path leading to the idea of the *Übermensch*, there is, according to Nietzsche, another path that leads to religion, as in the case of Raskolnikov in *Crime and Punishment*. Nishida saw in the dead end of the modern age the possibilities of new life and the possibilities of religion. He summarizes this view of man in the following terms:

Where there is no freedom, there man is not. But the more man would make himself utterly free, the more he dashes up against an absolute iron wall. The more man would be truly man, the more he stands in crisis. Man that has not yet reached that crisis has not, strictly speaking, escaped the animal realm of idling his life away. One can therefore also say that when man has turned furthest from God he has approached nearest to God. It is in man negating man himself that there truly lies the path for man to live. Here I consider there to be true reason. (9: 56)

Let us briefly summarize Nishida’s awareness of the age in which he lived. The modern age was a period in

which not only did science and technology grow, but people also experienced expansion of their egos as well as a dead end and ran up against “an absolute iron wall.” It was a period in which God was rejected, but it could also be regarded as a period that was drawing closer to God.

Why, then, did Nishida come to espouse such an awareness of the age in which he lived? On the basis of what grounds did this diagnosis of his times become possible? In the next section, focusing on “human beings” and “reason,” I shall clarify what made Nishida’s diagnosis possible.

2. The Meaning of Reason in the Historical World

Nishida considered man’s mode of being to be that of a creative self which, while defined by historical conditions, created at the same time new historical conditions, and he positioned reason in this creative mode of being.¹¹ Let us briefly examine this creative mode of being with reference to Nishida’s own words.

Nishida wrote that “in the historical world the subject determines the milieu and the milieu determines the subject” (9: 50–51). Here “milieu” (*kankyō* 環境) does not mean only the natural environment, but signifies the historical context as a whole, including the natural world to which human beings belong. “Subject” (*shutai* 主体) refers to human beings. The statement “the milieu determines the subject” means that human beings are defined by the historical conditions in which they find themselves, while the statement “the subject determines the milieu” means that at the same time human beings create new conditions. Nishida continues: “While subject and milieu are in utter mutual conflict, the subject determines the milieu by individualistically negating its self, and the milieu determines the subject by individualistically negating its self” (9: 51). While being defined by historical conditions, human beings, by exercising their own individuality, negate the self that is merely defined by historical conditions and create a new self. This creation of a new self leads to the changing of the milieu too. At the same time, historical conditions, while having been created by human endeavours, go on to define human beings living in that period on account of the fact that the created conditions turn into the individuality of that historical period. For example, the Edo period was a new period created by people living in Japan at the time, but through the development of the individuality of this period, it came to define the behaviour and norms of people living in the Edo period. In this fashion, by exercising their respective individualities, both human beings and their milieu come to define each other while negating the given mode of being of their respective selves. Nishida therefore concludes that “subject and milieu, through their individuality, determine each other through mutual negation; moving from the created to the creating, the world continues to determine itself individualistically” (9: 51). By mutually exercising their individuality, human beings as subjects and the milieu as historical conditions determine each other. In this way, the world moves from created historical conditions to that which creates new historical conditions. Furthermore, these historical conditions, as something possessing an individuality that cannot be reduced to the past or the future, become a locus for new creation.

Nishida characterizes this movement of history as something that is “mediated by absolute negation, mediated by the absolutely transcendental, by absolute nothingness” (9: 51). Why does he use the expression “mediated by absolute negation” ? This is because he neither thinks of the movement of history as something causal that results from past causes nor thinks of it as something teleological that is defined by a future goal. Not being defined by causes or goals, the given reality is negated and a new reality is created. This world is not something that is completely defined by causes and goals. Rather, it is a locus for unrestricted, free creation in which the given reality of the past is negated and a new reality is created. It was this aspect of the negation of reality that Nishida expressed as being “mediated by absolute negation.” If this were not the case, our actions would be defined by the past or the future and it would be impossible for us to become free and responsible subjects. Insofar that we are free and responsible subjects, this world must be mediated by absolute negation.¹²

But why is the character of this negation rephrased as “absolutely transcendental... absolute nothingness”? This is because the power to negate this reality does not lie in the given reality. If the power to negate reality lay within the given reality, be it a past cause or a future goal, one would end up positing some form of continuous current of history rather than new creation that negated reality. Consequently, the world would become subject to either the past or the future and could not become a locus for new creation. It is precisely because the mediating agency of negation cannot be discovered within the given reality that it turns into the power to renew the given reality. Therefore, it is called “absolutely transcendental,” and because it never manifests itself in reality, it is also called “absolute nothingness.”

It is in this mode of being of the world that Nishida situates reason. Nishida writes: “Because it is mediated by absolute negation, the world moves with self-awareness. This is to say that it is characterized by reason” (9: 51). He also refers to “the centre of the individual structure whereby the world determines itself, that is, reason” (9: 51). Being mediated by absolute negation, the present, defined by neither past nor future, is created as a unique present possessing its own individuality. It is in this creating of something possessing its own individuality that Nishida sees the workings of reason. For Nishida, reason signifies the power that, through the mediation of absolute negation, creates history. Nishida also says of reason that it “moves with self-awareness.” It is here said to act with self-awareness because by individualistically creating the world one becomes cognizant of one’s own individuality.¹³ By being mediated by absolute negation one discovers one’s own individual possibilities instead of being defined by other possibilities of the past or the future. Therefore, reason is the act of being self-aware while creating history.

It is on account of the nature of reason as characterized above that Nishida’s diagnosis of the period in which he lived becomes possible. In the next section, I wish to examine in a little more detail the relationship between reason and a particular period in history.

3. The Future of Reason

As we saw in the previous section, the historical world, with absolute negation as a mediating agency, constitutes a movement that negates itself to create a new reality. But this world comes to possess the characteristic of “always transcending the self itself; the historical present is always vacillating” (9: 57). In other words, because it possesses the power to negate reality, it transcends the given reality and, not having any fixed orientation, it vacillates between various possibilities. Consequently,

[t] herein is the subjectivity of the world. Therefore, as the apex of that which is created and creates, man is always wilful. Where reason steps over reason in the direction of reason is where the world of abstract logic is established. To see the world from such a position is subjectivism. (9: 57)

To transcend the given reality means to produce a subjectivistic position that views reality from a position that is removed from reality. Moreover, on account of not being constrained by reality it also becomes possible for man to behave in a wilful or arbitrary manner. Further, reason, which creates a new reality while negating reality, goes on to create the world of abstract logic on account of being completely removed from reality. In other words, the historical world is intrinsically endowed with the possibility of removing itself from reality and moving to a wilful and abstract position.¹⁴

But Nishida continues:

However, that man steps over the self itself in the direction of wilfulness is the degeneration of man; that

reason steps over the self itself in the direction of abstraction is to lose the objectivity of reason (that technics steps over technics in the direction of technics is intentional action)... The world of the historical present that is always transcending the self itself persistently proceeds in the direction of transcending the self itself. It is the direction of individualization and progress, and it is also the direction of degeneration, the furthest point of which is decadence. A single historical tendency cannot go beyond this. (9: 58)

To be wilful is the essence of a human being, but to merely behave wilfully as one pleases means that one's humanity is lost and one becomes degenerate. Again, to take abstract reason to extreme lengths results in thoroughgoing subjectivism removed from reality and in the loss of objectivity. The transcending of reality by reality means progress, but it also means the loss of humanity and the loss of objectivity through the aggrandizement of subjectivity, namely, that man intrinsically contains within himself a disposition towards decadence. As a result, he reaches an impasse beyond which he cannot go. This is, moreover, a possibility with which reason and man are intrinsically endowed.

This possibility has become a reality in the impasse reached by man in the modern age. Let us next consider Nishida's observations on how this impasse of the modern age arose.

After having briefly touched on Greek culture, Nishida writes of European culture in the Middle Ages:

God and man were opposed; the immanent and the transcendental were in utter opposition. So it sought man's source in the transcendental; that is to say, it was a religious culture.... However, one can say that in one aspect God was made human. And that is the secularization of the Church.... On the contrary, anything truly religious was lost. (9: 60)

As we saw in section 1, Nishida considered the Middle Ages to have not been a truly religious culture. It was a society in which the Church had become a centre of power and had been secularized, and it was a world ruled by a God made human.

As for the Renaissance that arose after the Middle Ages,

[it] was not merely the restoration of ancient culture but the fact, it is said, that man discovered man. Man returned to the creative self and wrested sovereignty from God. This was humanism. And one can probably say that it was there that the modern culture of anthropocentrism began. (9: 60-61)

As a movement that restored sovereignty from God to man, the Renaissance set the direction of the anthropocentrism of the modern age.

In this fashion, the modern age shaped a magnificent culture, "but the development of anthropocentrism had of its own accord to progress in the direction of subjectivism and individualism. Reason stepped over reason in the direction of reason. There man conversely lost man himself" (9: 61). The anthropocentrism of the modern age ended up progressing in the direction of subjectivism and individualism, as a result of which reason became abstract and lost its objectivity, and humanity too is lost. Nishida described this process of the loss of humanity in terms of a conflict between nature and man. During the Middle Ages God and man had been in conflict, but the modern age became a period of conflict between man and nature. According to Nishida, "Nature, being milieu, was even something to be used, but nature-as-object must essentially be something that negates man. ... Man, at his beginning and at his end, has no choice but to be negated by nature" (9: 61). For subjectivized human beings, nature has become an object to be observed and to be utilized as a resource. But as is indicated by the statement that "[m]an, at his beginning and at his end, has no choice but to be negated by nature,"

human beings can control neither their birth nor their death. Birth and death, as examples of the providence of nature, repudiate man seeking to control everything. Furthermore, “even though we speak of conquering nature, it is only because we conform to nature that we conquer nature. Our hands and feet alike are things. Even that which may be considered to be inner desire negates the ego” (9: 61–62). In other words, though we may say that man conquers nature, this is possible only by obeying the laws of nature, and even our hands and feet are no more than “things” that obey the laws of nature. For subjective human beings, even their hands and feet have elements that reject human control. Again, even the inner desires of human beings arise as natural instincts and reject control by subjective human beings. It is thus concluded that “there is no way of discovering the self in nature-as-object. Therein there is only death. It is for this reason that I say that anthropocentrism conversely leads to the negation of the human” (9: 62). One can find oneself neither in nature outside oneself, nor in one’s body, and not even in one’s desires. Everywhere there is only that which negates the self, and wherever one looks, there is only death of the self.

In this fashion, subjectivism *qua* anthropocentrism reaches a dead end and experiences its own negation. In the next section, I wish to show what Nishida considered necessary for the restoration of the creative self from the subjectivistic dead end of the modern age.

4. Immanent Transcendence: A Passageway to God at a Time of Crisis

As we saw in the previous section, our life has reached a dead end in the modern age. Nishida writes that in order to break free from this impasse, “we must again return to the bosom of creative nature. From there we come to regain a new creative power, and new life is born in us” (9: 58). Through the creative power lying at the foundations of our self we will break free from our impasse and gain new life. Furthermore, this creative power, with absolute negation as its mediating agency, is something transcendental. Nishida thus also writes:

What is called our true self exists in being productive and creative as a creative element of the creative world. Therefore, man exists in the fact that what is truly immanent in the self itself is mediated by the transcendental and what is mediated by the transcendental is truly immanent in the self itself. (9: 62)

In order to gain new life as a creative self, transcendental creative power must simultaneously become power that is immanent in ourselves. In the “contradictory self-identity” in which that which is transcendental for us is simultaneously immanent in us it becomes possible for us to live a new life. Nishida thus concludes:

But when I speak of returning to the transcendental, I am not speaking of merely returning to an abstract absolute being that is the negation of man. It is to take up the position of truly individual historical reality; it is to take up the position of historical reason. It is to return to the position of the self-identity of absolute contradictories that establishes a world that, because it is transcendental, is truly immanent. (9: 65–66)

Nishida says of this contradictory self-identity that “from the position of the man of religion this contradictory self-identity will be what is conceived of as God” (9: 66). In other words, from the position of a man of religion, to return to the position of contradictory self-identity means to return to God. But it does not mean to return to an absolute being conceived of in abstract terms. It means, rather, to take up the position of individual historical reality. How, then, does it become possible to take this position? Let us consider “The Logic of Place and a Religious World View” (“Bashoteki ronri to shūkyōteki sekaikan” 場所の論理と宗教の世界観), an essay written by Nishida in his final year.

In this essay Nishida writes as follows in connection with the historical world as a world transcending ethnic society:

When the global world is formed, it might be thought that the world loses all its various traditions and becomes non-individual, abstract, universal, antireligious, and scientific. This was the direction of modern Europe's progress. As the self-negation *qua* affirmation of absolute being, such a negative aspect must be contained from the outset in the direction of the self-formation of the global world. An aspect of negation of the human is contained in the historical world. (11: 457)

Here too Nishida states that the inevitable outcome of modern Europe will be negation of the human. But this negation of the human as the future of modern culture cannot be overcome by simply negating the modern age, for, as we have already seen, culmination in negation of the human is an inevitable consequence of history. Therefore, although "people concerned about the future of European culture often advocate a return to the Middle Ages (like Dawson)," Nishida is critical of this viewpoint: "Modern culture has developed through historical inevitability from the culture of the Middle Ages. Not only is it impossible to return to the position of the culture of the Middle Ages, but nor is it a means to save modern culture" (11: 460). We can now understand Nishida's following criticism too.

While I am by and large in agreement with Berdyaev's "meaning of history," his philosophy does not go beyond Böhman mysticism. The new age must above all be scientific. Tillich's "*kairos* and *logos*" also have points in common with my epistemology, but his logic is unclear. Today these new trends must be given a thoroughly logical foundation. (11: 463)

Proceeding in a reactionary manner towards mystical, unscientific and illogical discourse will not save the current age from its crisis.

How, then, can humankind be rescued from this path of negation of the human? Nishida, referring to Ivan Karamazov's prose poem in *The Brothers Karamazov*, here puts forward the idea of "immanent transcendence" as a new circuit to the absolute. Ivan's prose poem is a parable set in Seville, Spain, in the sixteenth century when the Inquisition was raging.¹⁵ In response to those who have been praying, "Oh Lord our God, appear unto us," Christ returns to earth, but he is arrested by the Grand Inquisitor and thrown into prison. The Grand Inquisitor tells Christ that the freedom that Christ had upheld so strongly has been offered up to the Church by the people, who have now become happy. According to the Grand Inquisitor, for man there is nothing as unbearable as freedom, but Christ, saying, "Man does not live by bread alone," spurned Satan's overtures and so rejected the sole method whereby mankind could become happy. The Grand Inquisitor maintains that the Church has conquered people's freedom, saved them, and made them happy, and telling Christ not to meddle, he declares, "Tomorrow I shall burn you." Having thus given a rough outline of the prose poem, Nishida continues: "In response, Christ says not a word from start to finish. He is just like a shadow. When he was freed the following day, he suddenly approached the old inquisitor wordlessly and kissed him. The old man gave a start. The wordless Christ, like a shadow from start to finish, is the Christ of what I call immanent transcendence" (11: 462).

This mode of being is one in which "we see the true God in a Godless place, with naturalness and spontaneity (*jinen hōni* 自然法爾)" (11: 462). This is also rephrased as "seeing God in self-negation" (11: 461). One sees God where God does not exist through the mediation of negation. This mediating agency of negation was also referred to as the transcendental. One cannot directly see the transcendental. If one claims to have seen it, it

would be mere idolatry. Christ does not say anything even to the Grand Inquisitor who declared that he would kill him. Instead of loudly asserting his own existence, Christ, like a shadow, stayed close to the Grand Inquisitor from first to last and left only a benedictory kiss. It was this sort of mode of being that would have represented for Nishida the God of immanent transcendence. A passageway to God is not opened by seeking God as an object of idolatrous worship. Wherever one searches, God cannot be seen. It is rather at the root of a situation in which one denies God and loses one's humanity that one discovers a God who makes even this sort of situation possible. At the root of a state in which God can nowhere be seen the transcendental is seen immanently.

Concluding Remarks

In the above I have clarified the mode of religious existence, the most concrete and fundamental form of our self, with a focus on Nishida's view of religion. But Nishida's position was not simplistically premised on religion or God. In section 1, I accordingly showed, with a focus on his references to Dostoevsky, how Nishida clearly saw the way in which our being had plunged into a modern-day crisis. Along with Dostoevsky and Nietzsche, Nishida saw that mankind was living in an age that had reached a dead end. But instead of simply lapsing into nihilism, he there saw the possibilities of a new religion. As the ultimate limit of the impasse reached by mankind becomes clear, there simultaneously emerges the possibility of a truly religious mode of being.

In section 2, I outlined Nishida's treatment of reason. I discussed with reference to the relationship between the milieu and the subject how the mediation of absolute negation serves to establish a relationship of mutual negation between subject and milieu. Through the mediation of this absolute negation, our self is able to live creatively as a free self unconstrained by either the past or the future and possessing individuality. It is within this functioning that reason is positioned. Reason signified the power of creation that moulds the world individually.

In section 3, we saw how this functioning of reason inevitably contains the possibilities of abstraction and loss of humanity. Because negation acts as the mediating agency, by negating reality one becomes separated from reality. As a result, one lapses into subjectivism and, unable to find anywhere a locus for the subjective self, one plunges into the danger of losing one's humanity.

In section 4, we considered the question of immanent transcendence as a way to recover a passageway to God. This was, as it were, a way of discovering a silent and unspeaking God in the midst of the self's nothingness, in the midst of the self's quality of negation. In this fashion, the mode of our self's religious being was clarified, together with observations on its extreme circumstances and the state of the current age, while going back to the most fundamental relationship between our self and the absolute that makes these circumstances possible.

In this fashion, the original mode of being of our self became clear. While being established as a thoroughly subjective self, our self is simultaneously compelled to live a life of freedom that thoroughly denies God. Our self there experiences a dead end, but at the same time it goes on to find there where its life has reached a dead end a silent and unspeaking God.

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Notes

- 1 Here and below, quotations from Nishida’s works are based on the following edition: Shimomura Toratarō 下村寅太郎 et al., eds., *Nishida Kitarō zenshū* 西田幾多郎全集 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten 岩波書店, 1965–66). The location of a quotation is indicated by the volume number followed by the page number.
- 2 English translation adapted from William Haver, *Ontology of Production: Three Essays* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), p. 176.
- 3 For discussions of Nishida’s views on religion with reference to particular religions, see Kawamura 1988 and Asami 2000 in connection with Christianity, Takeda 1991 and Ōmine 1994 in connection with the Jōdo Shin sect, and Mori 1996 in connection with Zen Buddhism.
- 4 On Nishida’s reception of Dostoevsky, see Ishii 2013. Ishii clarifies the influence of Dostoevsky on Nishida’s philosophy with reference to his diaries and correspondence. In addition, references by Nishida to Dostoevsky in the context of dialogue with Christians are taken up in Asami 2000. Further, in Onodera 2001 Dostoevsky and Nietzsche are discussed in terms of the key concept of “earth,” and in this connection reference is also made to Nishida.
- 5 This essay deals with the question of religion in Nishida’s later philosophy, but for a critical examination of his treatment of religion around the time when he wrote *Zen no kenkyū* 善の研究 (*An Inquiry into the Good*), see Rie-

senhuber 2005, and for a critical examination of his treatment of religion around the time when he was developing his ideas on the world of “place” and wisdom, see Tanaka 1993, especially chapter 6, “Shūkyōteki sekai no hihan to basho no ronri” 宗教的世界の批判と場所の論理 [Criticism of the religious world and the logic of place]. In addition, for an overview of the relationship between Nishida’s philosophy and religion from his early period until his final years, see Kosaka 1994.

- 6 English translation adapted from David A. Dilworth, *Nishida Kitaro’s Fundamental Problems of Philosophy: The World of Action and The Dialectical World* (Tokyo: Sophia University, 1970), p. 234.
- 7 English translation by Dilworth, *ibid.*
- 8 English translation by Dilworth, *op. cit.*, pp. 245-246.
- 9 Here and below passages from “Ningenteki sonzai” have been translated with reference to Haver, *op. cit.*, pp. 173-183.
- 10 For a treatment of the intersection between Whitehead and Nishida with a focus on the term “vanishing point,” see Murata 2005.
- 11 Nishida referred to this creative mode of being of the historical world as “action-oriented intuition” (*kōiteki chokkan* 行為の直観), which is discussed in detail in Shirai 2013. For an outline of action-oriented intuition, see also Kosaka 1995.
- 12 For reasons of space, I am unable to discuss the question of negation in detail. For further details, see Shirai 2007 & 2008.
- 13 “Self-awareness” (*jikaku* 自覚) is an important term in Nishida’s philosophy. Self-awareness in the later Nishida is discussed in Shirai 2013. See also Ōhashi 1995, which discusses Nishida’s “self-awareness” in relation to set theory and group theory.
- 14 For reasons of space, I am unable to deal with the questions of wilfulness, freedom, and inevitability in Nishida’s philosophy. For a discussion of these questions, see Itabashi 2008. For Nishida, freedom and inevitability are inseparable, and inevitability and freedom are established in the acceptance of historical inevitability within freedom. In this sense it is said that “freedom is no different from inevitability, and inevitability is no different from freedom.”
- 15 Nishida explains that Ivan Karamazov’s prose poem was set in the fifteenth century (11: 461). But in the Japanese translation of *The Brothers Karamazov* by Hara Takuya 原卓也 (Shinchō bunko 新潮文庫; Tokyo: Shinchōsha 新潮社, 2004 [1971]) it is stated that it was set in the sixteenth century (vol. 1, p. 620). Likewise, in the Japanese translation by Yonekawa Masao 米川正夫 (Sekai bungaku zenshū 世界文学全集 19; Tokyo: Kawade Shobō Shinsha 河出書房新社, 1968) it is similarly stated that it was set in the sixteenth century (p. 335). In view of the fact that it says in Hara’s translation (vol. 1, p. 622ff.) that “already fifteenth centuries had passed” since Christ ascended to heaven, it is to be surmised that Nishida mistakenly wrote that the poem was set in the fifteenth century. If the poem is about the Inquisition that followed the Reformation, it must be the sixteenth century, and if fifteenth centuries had passed since Christ died in the first century, it again means that it was set in the sixteenth century.