

Nishida Kitarō's Philosophy of Time: With a Focus on Self-Determination of Eternal Now

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Abstract: *This paper examines Nishida Kitarō's philosophy of time, with a focus on his notion, "self-determination of eternal now" posited in The Self-Aware Determination of Nothingness (1932). While influenced by several European philosophers, the uniqueness of Nishida's philosophy of time should not be overlooked.*

The originality of Nishida's theory of time can be summarized in two points. Firstly, it expounds the nature of time in the existentially deepest ("true" in Nishida's usage) "pure experience", which is synonymous with "fact". According to Nishida, it is a kind of Zen experience to which he also refers with the term "moment" that stands for "the true self-determination of the eternal now". It is the point of present that concentrates past knowledge and future predictions into itself, thereby eradicating our ideas and concepts that are constructed by the past and the future. This allows us to contact things or oneself "anew". Nishida highlights the "present" because he regards pure experience as the deepest experience of our existence.

Secondly, Nishida's theory of time explains our personal continuity or self-identity with the concept "continuity of discontinuities". Nishida refers to the otherness of past and future, personal others with the term "thou", that is "discontinuous" to the present I. Self-identity can be regarded as an internal dialogue between the past I and the present I, and as the present I's leap into the future I. This self-configuration is of course mediated by a multitude of personal others. Nishida expresses self-identity (continuity) as it is mediated by various "discontinuities". Nishida highlights the present, due to the temporal nature of our encounter with various kinds of "thou", which renews ourselves in the "present".

Nishida's emphasis on the "present" stands in contrast to Heidegger's emphasis on the future. Nishida highlights the "present" in order to establish the ontology of the renewing and regenerating self, which is mediated by various kinds of others.

Introduction

This paper examines Nishida Kitarō's philosophy of time, focusing on his notion "self-determination of the eternal now (永遠の今の自己限定 *eien-no-ima-no-jikogentei*)" as seen in his collection of nine essays in *The Self-Aware Determination of Nothingness* (1932). Nishida undoubtedly changed some aspects of his philosophy of time after the publication of the said collection. However, the further evolution of Nishida's thought will demand a separate treatise. For the purposes of this paper I will focus on *The Self-Aware Determination of Nothingness*, since it is here that we find Nishida's earliest and most explicit views that form the core of his philosophy of time.

Nishida explicates time from the ontology of self. Even though his theory of time was influenced by several European philosophers, especially by St. Augustine, Eckhart and Kierkegaard, the uniqueness of his original philosophy of time should not be overlooked. Unlike Heidegger, who emphasize the future, Nishida highlights the importance of the present.

In section 1, I will elaborate on Nishida's fundamental notion of "the self-determination of now" in reference to his interest in the philosophy of St. Augustine. Nishida refers to the deepest existential ("true" 真の *shin-no* in Nishida's usage) state with the term "moment (瞬間 *shunkan*)" or "fact (事実 *jijitsu*)". In section 2, I will clarify the meaning of the deepest existential state by interpreting the relationship between Eckhart's philosophy and Nishida's notion "pure experience" in his maiden work *An Inquiry into Good* (1911). In section 3, I will explain Nishida's remark about self-identity on the basis of his theory of time, which he characterizes with the phrase "continuity of discontinuities (非連続の連続 *hirenzoku-no-renzoku*)". Based on the above considerations, in section 4, I will attempt at shedding light on Nishida's criticism of Heidegger's immensely significant temporal theory of the self. In the concluding section, I will explain why and how Nishida emphasizes the present moment.

Thus far, researchers of Nishida's philosophy have already focused on the concepts of "the eternal now" and "moment",¹ and there is also comparative

¹ See Kobayashi, *Open the Way for Nishida's Philosophy: On the "Eternal Now"* and Leonardi, "Time and Eternal Now in the Philosophy of Nishida Kitarō".

literature on Nishida and Heidegger.² However, it has remained somewhat of a mystery as to what relates Nishida's concepts of "moment" and "fact", and how the two correspond to another key concept in Nishida's philosophy, *i.e.* "continuity of discontinuities". This paper attempts to augment Nishida scholarship on these two accounts by reexamining Nishida philosophy of time in comparison to that of Heidegger's.

1 The Basic Notion of "the Self-determination of eternal now"

The seeds of Nishida's notion of the "self-determination of eternal now" were already sown in *An Inquiry into Good*. In this book, Nishida follows St. Augustine by referring to the "unifying force" of various conscious phenomena with the term "eternal now". "As St. Augustine said, because God created time and transcends it, God is in the eternal now". (1, 147³) In a celebrated passage of the *Confessions*, St. Augustine writes:

What is by now evident and clear is that neither future nor past exists, and it is inexact language to speak of three times—past, present, and future. Perhaps it would be exact to say: there are three times, a present of things past, a present of things present, a present of things to come. In the soul there are three aspects of time, and I do not see them anywhere else. The present considering the past is the memory, the present considering the present is immediate awareness, the present considering the future is expectation.⁴

Although the "now" is flowing we are conscious of its flow. The "now" that sees this flow can be regarded as eternity. However, this eternity is not to be confused with the casual sense of eternity that merely transcends time; it is an eternity that remains ever present. Nishida refers to the "unified force" with the term "God". "God—the foundation of reality as discussed above—must be the foundation of the

² See Ohashi, Section 3–2 "Nishida and Heidegger" in *The World of Nishida's Philosophy: Or the Turn of Philosophy*.

³ All references to Nishida are from *the Complete Works of Kitarō Nishida* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2002–2009). The references are given in the text in brackets with the volume number, followed by the page number. I used Masao Abe and Christopher Ives' translation of *An Inquiry into Good*, with some modifications.

⁴ Augustine, *Confessions*, 235.

facts of direct experience, the foundation of our phenomena of consciousness.” (1, 144)

Nishida revisits St. Augustine’s views in *The Self-aware Determination of Nothingness*, which was published 11 years after that of *An Inquiry into Good*. In the third essay of this book (“Regarding my notion of the self-aware determination of absolute nothingness”) Nishida writes:

As St. Augustine said, the past is the present of the past, the future is the present of the future, the present is the present of the present. . . . In this way, the present determines the present and the future as the self-determination of eternal now. (5, 105)

In this text, Nishida rephrases the “unifying force” with one of his most important concepts “the place of absolute nothing (絶対無の場所 *zettai-mu-no-basho*)”, a concept that he started to use since *From That Which Acts to That Which Sees* (1927). The concept does not juxtapose subjective consciousness with its object but refers to the entire “field of consciousness”, which contains every instance of the phenomena of consciousness that are bifurcated into subject and object. “Absolute nothingness”, in turn, is another expression for the temporal concept of “eternal present”. Thus, in the eighth essay (“I and Thou”) he writes:

All realities [all beings すべて実在的なるもの *subete-jitsuzaitekina-mono*] are located within time. Time should be considered the fundamental form of realities [beings 実在 *jitsuzai*]. The inner world as well as the outer world should be considered within the form of time, insofar as they are real. Time can be regarded as the self-determination of the present, *i.e.* the self-determination of eternal now. (5, 267)

To paraphrase the above, Nishida's “self-determination of eternal now” acts as the form that contains all cognitions about realities (*i.e.* beings), which should be considered from the perspective of the present self (*i.e.* the eternal now).

2 “Moment” or “Fact” as the existentially deepest “pure experience”

Nishida uses the term “moment” for discussing about the existentially deepest “self-determination of eternal now”. This term comes from Kierkegaard’s works *The*

Concept of Anxiety (1844) and *Philosophical Fragment* (1844). Like Kierkegaard, it bears the meaning of existential “decision” from the perspective of time. In the sixth essay (“Self-love, other-love and dialectics”) he writes:

We are always in contact with the past, not with the moment, and, as such, are washed away by causation. It is only when we decide to put our whole self at stake that we can touch upon the authentic moment. (5, 228)

For Nishida, the “moment” refers not only to an instance (*i.e.* a fleeting moment as often seen in usual Japanese usage) but to a *decisive* moment, in which we are not washed away by causation and can determine our action with free will. Within the “moment”, “paradoxically, it is the future that determines the past”. (5, 228)

However, the moment is not limited to instances of existential decision. Nishida contemplates on the concept of “moment” in reference to the phrase “fullness of time” as seen in Meister Eckhart’s sermons. In his fourth essay (“Self-Determination of Eternal Now”) Nishida writes:

St. Paul said that “in the fullness of time, God sent his son into the world.” (Galatian Letter 4.4) When someone asked Augustine what is the fullness of time, he answered that it is extinction of time. . . . However, Meister Eckhart said that “there is another meaning of the fullness of time. It is also the moment that can draw the affairs already occurred (the past) and the affairs that will occur (the future) in thousands of years into itself.” The fullness of time is [the authentic determination of] the eternal now, within which we can presently see and hear things, we can know all things within God [*i.e.* eternal now in Nishida’s philosophy]. (Meister Eckhart, “The Fullness of Time” [Von der Vollendung der Zeit]⁵) The eternal now (*nunc aeternum*) refers to the point of present in which infinite past and infinite future vanishes. God is creating the world now like on the days of genesis. In the eternal now, time constantly begins anew. (5, 143–144)

⁵ I believe that the correct title of Eckhart’s work that Nishida mentioned is “Von der Erfüllung”, given that he mentions it in another passage of the essay. I searched for the book in Nishida’s archive in the library of Department of Letters in Kyoto University. The book that Nishida most probably referenced is *Meister Eckeharts Schriften und Predigten Bd. I.*

This “moment” as “the fullness of time” refers to the point of present that draws all instances of the past and future into itself, that is, towards a concentration of past knowledge and future prediction. Furthermore, it is the moment in which our preconceptions or frameworks that we construct regarding the past and future vanish, allowing us to get in touch with things or with oneself “anew”. “God sent his son into the world” is the mythologized metaphor of this moment.

Nishida refers to the “content of moment” with the term “fact”. In his third essay, Nishida writes:

The fact exists here as the self-determination of moment. . . . For example, it does not mean that “the bird” flies but that the fact “the bird flies” exists. . . . What I call the “fact” itself exists. Not in the sense of existing within the subject or in the object, but as the content of the self-determination of eternal now by seeing itself directly and by expressing itself in words. . . . In my philosophy, the now that determines itself is . . . the now in which time begins eternally anew. (5, 132–3)

Nishida illustrates this “fact” with the phrase “the bird flies”. This phrase does not mean that “the bird” is the agent that flies, but rather that there is a totality of the fact prior to the subject-object bifurcation. According to Nishida, “the real intention of Mahayana Buddhism is to experience the ground of this fact radically, to contact the true-fact [真実 *shinjitsu*] step by step”. (5, 122) This expression is reminiscent of the famous 13th century Japanese monk Dōgen’s phrase “the edge of sky is infinite no matter how far birds fly” (鳥そらをとぶに、とぶといへどもそらのきはなし *tori sora wo tobuni tobu toiedomo sorano kiwa nashi*) in *Shōbōgenzō* (*Treasury of the True Dharma Eye*). Because of Nishida’s allusion to Mahayana Buddhism and this supporting evidence, we might arrive at an interpretation where Nishida expresses this simple perception as a kind of Zen experience, which breaks one’s preconceptions and “worldly desires” (煩惱 *bon-nou*), i.e. one’s distorted egoism.

The expressions “moment”, “fact” and “[to] presently see and hear things” are highly reminiscent of “pure experience”, a core concept in Nishida’s *An Inquiry into Good*, which he used synonymously with the expressions “moment (刹那 *setsuna*: a synonym of *shun-kan*)” and “a fact just as it is”:

To experience means to know a fact just as it is, to know in accordance with a fact by completely relinquishing one's own fabrications. What we usually refer to as experience is adulterated with some sort of thought, so by pure I am referring to the state of experience just as it is without the least addition of deliberative discrimination. The moment of seeing a color or hearing a sound, for example, is prior not only to the thought that the color or sound is the activity of an external object or that one is sensing it, but also, to the judgement of what the color or sound might be. . . . When one directly experiences one's own state of consciousness, there is not yet a subject or an object, and knowing and its object are completely united. This is the most refined type of experience. . . . A truly pure experience has no meaning whatsoever; it is simply a present consciousness of a fact just as it is. (1, 9)

Pure experience refers to a "fact just as it is" in the form of experience that transcends the subject-object bifurcation. It is not a usual experience that "is adulterated with some sort of thought." Since it is "prior to judgement", it seems to be a vague and unconscious kind of experience. However, as Nishida insists, the "purity of pure experience" derives not from such vagueness nor from "the experience's being simple, unanalyzable, or instantaneous but from the strict unity of concrete consciousness". (1, 11) Thus, we can interpret this concept as standing for an experience that breaks the totality of "meaning[s]" constructed by one's past experiences as it converges into a present activity. According to Nishida, we are said to be in a state of pure experience when we are completely immersed in listening to or playing music, or, for instance, when we lose ourselves in a painting. For this reason, Nishida also characterizes this kind of experience as "the union of subject and object".

This characterization bears religious connotations. Nishida claims that when we "exterminate our false self and, upon dying of our worldly desires, gain new life", "we can we truly reach the realm of the union of subject and object, which is the ultimate meaning of religion, morality, and art. Christianity calls this event rebirth, and Buddhism calls it enlightenment [見性 *kensho*"]". (1, 134) It is above all in religious experience that we go through a "transformation of the self and the reformation of life" while "perceiving our relativity and finitude" and yearning "to attain eternal, true life". (1, 135) In short, our preconceived framework breaks down in the ultimate mode of experience as we attain "the deepest internal rebirth (die innerste Geburt)". (1, 141) Nishida illustrates this point with St. Paul's expression

“It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me”. (Galatians 2:20.) Moreover, Nishida insists that his notion of “God” (*i.e.* “unifying force”) is like Eckhart’s “Godhead (Gottheit)”. (1, 148)

Let us return to Nishida’s passage on Eckhart in *The Self-aware Determination of Nothingness*: “the fullness of time is [the “true” (most existentially deepest) determination of] the eternal now, within which we can presently see and hear things, we can know all things within God”. Should we look up the contemporary German rendition of Eckhart’s original text it reads: “in the eternal now, the soul feels all things anew and fresh at the present (Jetzt der Ewigkeit, wo die Seele in Gott alle Dinge neu und frisch und gegenwärtig gewahrt⁶)”. Thus, the expression “we can presently see and hear things” is Nishida’s original supplement, which we cannot find in the original text. On the one hand, Nishida interpretation of Eckhart’s “fullness of time” is influenced by his earlier writings on pure experience as the ultimate form of experience, which presupposes the existential decision. In this ultimate form, we grasp reality in its depths and experience “the deepest internal birth” in which “time begins eternally anew”. On the other hand, Nishida’s usage of the term “fact” is no longer characteristic of “the union of subject and object” as it was in *An Inquiry into Good*. In *Self-aware Determination of Nothingness* Nishida starts to emphasize the otherness of “fact” by referring to it with the term “thou”. In his eighth essay, he writes:

We cannot think of the fact as the self-determination of the mere one individual. Radical solipsism, when pursued to its extreme, does not present us with the true fact [真の事実 *shin-no-jijitsu*]. . . . Thus, in the ground of one’s personal self, there should be a “thou”. The world of fact begins with the encountering and conversation between I and thou. (5, 317)

“Thou” does not only mean “the other” in the sense of *other person* but includes everything that one encounters in “fact” or “moment”. “Thou” is defined as the absolute other that cannot be subsumed under concepts: “I and thou are the absolutely other for one another. There are no universals subsuming both”. (5, 297) It is also “the absolute other that makes I as I possible”. (5, 323) Thus, in his next book *The Fundamental Problem of Philosophy: The World of Action* (1934), Nishida writes that “when have an encounter by way of absolute negation, everything including mountains, rivers, trees and stones come to bear the meaning of

⁶ Eckhart, *op. cit.*, 52.

thou". (6, 46) He refers to the self-awareness that mediates "thou" with the terms "action" or "dialectic", which stand for the encountering and conversation between "I and thou". In *The Self-aware Determination of Nothingness*, "self-awareness" does not express "the union of self and other" (5, 307) but rather a way of "seeing the absolute other within the self [*i.e.* absolute nothingness or eternal now]" and "seeing the self within absolute otherness" (5, 308)

Thus, we can conclude that Nishida refers to the existentially deepest "pure experience" with the term "fact", which translates into "moment" (*i.e.* the ultimate "self-determination of eternal now") in his theory of time.

3 Continuity of discontinuities

Nishida's concept of "fact" certainly refers to "religious experience in the deepest sense". (5, 122) It would thus seem that Nishida's "self-determination of eternal now" is a kind of theory of time that pertains exclusively to the experience of enlightenment in Zen practice. Yet, Nishida insists that his theory of time ranges over all kinds of experiences. In particular, it accounts for personal continuity, *i.e.* self-identity.

Time is considered from the present, from the perspective of the eternal now. As we have already seen, the past is the past of the present and the future is the future of the present. However, on the other hand, time consists in an irreversible flow, as it "vanishes and regenerates in each instance". (5, 267) In this sense, the absence of past and future from the present constitutes the other for the present. Remarkably, with the term "thou" Nishida refers not only to the otherness of human beings and entities as encountered in the "fact", but also to temporal notions of past and future. This line of thought is exemplified in the ninth essay ("On the Philosophy of Life"):

The life of our true personal self is not an internal duration but the continuity of discontinuities. Each moment in time is independent and free from the other. . . . Therefore, from the perspective of the present 'I', the 'I' of yesterday and the 'I' of tomorrow are also 'thou'. Nay, every moment must be regarded as such. (5, 339)

Nishida criticized the idea that human identity can be regarded as an “internal duration” or mere continuity. “The present self does not determine the present self completely, and vice versa”. (5, 171) Thus, the past self and the present self are “discontinuous” even though they constitute continuity. The past is the absolute other for the present insofar as it remains unchangeable. Although events of the past have borne an unconscious influence on us, we are unable to recollect the past in its entirety. Some joyous or distressful events may well be marked as significant for our lives, but most of the others are neglected and forgotten. Thus, for Nishida, our personal continuity or identity should be regarded as a “meaningful union” (5, 268), which is constituted by a “dialogue with oneself within the soul (*ibid.* this phrase comes from Plato, *Sophist* 263E)”. Strictly speaking, when we recall of past events, the past does not exist as the present, but as the present of the past. Recollections of the past cannot be the repetition of past as it is, but a new formulation of the past. We recall the past from the present perspective and by doing so become aware of ourselves. Thus, even though past events cannot be altered once they have occurred, we have the ability to change the “meaning” of the past. “The continuity of discontinuities” entails the transformation of one’s identity through a dialogue between the person who I am and the person who I used to be within the recesses of the present self (*i.e.* within the place of absolute nothingness).

One of the most important aspects about the transformation of the past's meaning is the relationship between my present and future selves. In *Intuition and Reflection within Self-awareness* (1917; published 15 years prior to *The Self-aware determination of Nothingness*) Nishida writes:

In teleological causation, past is the means of present and future. We can change the meaning of past by progressing into the future. . . . [In *De Profundis*,] Oscar Wilde said that although the Greeks believed that gods could not alter the past, Christ taught that even a sinner could do so with ease. When the prodigal son dropped to his knees and cried before his father, he turned the sins and anguish of his past into the most beautiful and sacred thing. (2, 199)

In general, it is said that even our mistakes could become the springboard to success when our lives have a goal, but in despair our lives will collapse. However, the ability to change the meaning of the past can, at times, lead us to conceal and

suppress past troubles due to our desire to justify ourselves. In any case, the consciousness of future configures the meaning of past and present.

Furthermore, for Nishida, even future bears the meaning of “thou”. Ordinarily we do not see the future as the other. However, in cases of an examination for a job, a bet, a financial investment etc., the future could appear as the unpredictable other. When we put our lives at stake, we take all the knowledge and information gained throughout the past into consideration and plunge into the “future”. Nishida expresses such an experience as “plunging from point to point”. This experience “bears the meaning of a leap (飛躍 *hiyaku*) that we can see in volitional activity”. (5, 209) Therefore, we become aware of our personal continuities by leaping into who we will be, while remaining in a dialogue between who we are and who we used to be.

However, personal continuity or self-identity cannot be maintained internally in our minds; the perspectives of an actual other person (the “thou”) play an important role in the constitution of self-identity. No matter how much we can secure our identities internally, either by repenting in solitude or by simply changing the meaning of the past in our minds, we cannot change the way the other perceives our past. The other's perspective can intervene and reject our private attempts at maintaining “teleological” continuity. Therefore, personal identity is constituted not only by an inner but also by a social dialogue.

Thus, Nishida rejects any attempts to regard personal identity as a mere actualization of inner potential, which is arguably the case in the development of biological organisms. On the one hand, our human personality could be regarded as the development of our potential innate characteristics and skills. In *An Inquiry into Good*, Nishida does regard consciousness as the development of “potential power” and likens it “the seed of a plant”. (1, 22) On the other hand, however, this development should be determined *through* dialogue with the other persons. Because of that, Nishida agrees with Aristotle in that for human beings, “actuality (*energeia*) is prior to potentiality (*dynamis*); only man generates man” (5, 251 This phrase comes from Aristotle's *Metaphysics* 1049b20–) According to Nishida's interpretation, this expression means that the self is generated from its potentiality *by* the present actuality of “I and thou”. For example, someone becomes “cultured by the cultured [in education]”. (Aristotle *Metaphysics* 1049b26) Our personality is configured from its potential through conversation and action with other persons. We become aware of ourselves in “the eternal now (the direct present of self)” by

narrating ourselves to others as well as to ourselves in a manner that is characteristic of the “continuity of discontinuities”.

In short, Nishida’s theory of time, which is based on the concept of “the self-determination of the eternal now”, is a concrete theory that captures the transformation of self-identity as “the continuity of discontinuities”.

4 Nishida’s Criticism of Heidegger

To clarify Nishida’s uniqueness, I want to compare his theory of time with that of Heidegger’s, since Nishida explicates his thought by a critique of Heidegger. Both philosophers are similar in that they construct an ontology of the self and think of time as the fundamental problem. Moreover, Nishida’s concept of “the self-determination of the eternal now” can arguably be expressed by Heidegger’s concept of “temporality (Zeitlichkeit)”.

Unfortunately, Nishida’s understanding of Heidegger is somewhat inadequate, since he does not realize that Heidegger’s most important topic is “the question of Being in general.” What’s more, in contrast to Heidegger who avoids to usage of Hegelian logic due to its formality and its unsuitability for analyzing human existence, Nishida makes explicit use of Hegelian logic without understanding the significance of Heidegger’s position. However, should we try to understand Nishida’s intention carefully, we could discover that Nishida’s criticism of Heidegger is valid.

In *Time and Being [Sein und Zeit]* (1926), Heidegger discusses the priority of “future” in human time. According to Heidegger, human being (Dasein) is unique in relation to its own “possibility”. Moreover “possibility” is understood in the *future-tense*. “Dasein is always its possibility”. (SZ42⁷) There are two reasons why Dasein’s prioritizes the “future”.

Firstly, human beings construct the possible “horizons” of cognition. Dasein encounters various beings in the world, namely “innerworldly beings” (innerweltliches Seiende). In daily life, these beings are understood as useful things, that is “things at hand” (Zuhandenes). For example, a hammer is usually understood as a tool to be used “in order to” (um-zu) strike nails “in order to” build a house.

⁷ The references to Heidegger are given in the text in brackets followed by the page number of the original text (Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1963). Italics are in the original.

There is no single useful thing, since the usefulness of a thing belongs to a “referential totality” (Verweisungsganzheit). When we understand beings, we always “disclose” or “open” the “world” or “horizon” as a “referential totality”. This disclosure of “horizons” is based on Dasein’s relationship to its “possibility”. The world is the possible “horizon” of understanding something.

Secondly, as Heidegger argued, human beings can live in the mode of “authenticity” by attaining or choosing themselves in awareness of their own death, which is “the own most, nonrelational, certain, and, as such, indefinite and insuperable possibility of Dasein”. (SZ263) Dasein understands itself in terms of its world. We always live in the mode of inauthenticity that is imbedded in “they (das Man)”. However, when we become aware of ourselves in “anticipation (Vorlaufen)” of this possibility of death, it is possible for us to become authentic. Thus, it is evident why Heidegger prioritizes the future in terms of “anticipation”.

In reference to Kierkegaard, Heidegger refers to the authentic present in “anticipation” with the term “moment (Augenblick)”. Heidegger shares the concept of “moment” with Nishida. However, unlike Nishida, Heidegger says:

In enumerating the ecstasies [past, present, future] we have always mentioned the future first. . . . Primordial and authentic temporality temporalizes itself out of the authentic future, and in such a way that, futurally having-been, it first arouses the present. *The primary phenomenon of primordial and authentic temporality is the future.* (SZ329)

On the one hand, Nishida agrees with Heidegger’s notion of the “anticipation for death”. Nishida writes in his *System of Universals in Self-awareness* (1930), where he refers to Heidegger for the first time: “We have our own goal within the boundary of death. We live towards death”. (4, 233–4) However, on the other hand, Nishida criticizes Heidegger for overemphasizing the aspect of future. In the third essay of *The Self-Aware Determination of Nothingness*, Nishida writes:

The world of understanding (Verstehen) in Heidegger’s philosophy is the mere world of possible time without present. (5,130)

Although [my usage of the word] “fact” can be deemed similar to Heidegger’s Being in the sense that both refer to a state that transcends

subject-object dichotomy, Heidegger's Being [here, it refers to Dasein] does not see itself factually. (5,132)

For Nishida, Heidegger's world is "the mere world of possible time without present" and Dasein "does not see itself factually". This is because the "fact" is not only the determined present in future tense, but in connection with "thou", which lies beyond meaning and preconceived framework, or the "horizon" of "understanding" in Heidegger's terminology. According to Nishida, Heidegger does not discuss reality beyond the horizon. For him, the self (Dasein) does not consist in a mere relation to its own future-tensed "possibility", but in that which fundamentally mediates the "the absolute other". Dasein can avoid "falling" to "them" through "anticipation", whereby one can become aware of oneself "futurally". In contrast, through the experience of "fact", the self can become aware of itself anew and ultimately experiences "the deepest internal rebirth". Nishida criticizes Heidegger in his letter to Watsuji Tetsurō on 8th February in 1930 with the following: "In Heidegger's philosophy, there is a place where one dies, but not the place where one will be [re]born". (20,382)

Furthermore, Nishida also criticizes Heidegger in reference to "thou" and "the continuity of discontinuities". In the eighth essay, Nishida writes:

[Heidegger's] (the) notion of the "accessible (zugänglich)" [beings] and "understanding (Verstehen)" [of beings] could be considered from the standpoint of the personal self-awareness, which sees the absolute other within the recesses of the self. I am I as I see thou, thou is thou as thou sees me. From this we can conceive of conversation as the continuity of absolute discontinuities (5,316)

The above passage is difficult to understand. The word "accessible (zugänglich)" is a term that Heidegger uses in *Being and Time*, for example in the passage: "If we say that beings 'have meaning', this signifies that they have become accessible *in their being*". (SZ324). However, we can comprehend Nishida's criticism if we consider the "understanding" of beings or the "accessible" way to beings not from Heidegger's standpoint, which overemphasizes "possibility" or "future", but from Nishida's standpoint of "the eternal now", which mediates various kinds of "thou".

Heidegger refers to our continuity with the term “the stretches [Erstreckung] of Dasein between birth and death” (SZ374) or “the constancy [Ständigkeit] of the self”. (SZ375) Dasein undertakes “having-been (Gewesenheit)” as past from the “future (Zukunft)”. “Dasein can *be* authentically having-been only because it is futural. In a certain sense, having-been arises from the future”. (SZ326) However, for Nishida, Heidegger misses the otherness of past and future, namely the incomprehensibility of the past and the unpredictability of the future. Although Heidegger explicates the being with other in “they”, he does not discuss personal others as the essential condition for the constitution of the self. Should we take the otherness of past, future and personal others into consideration, we could express the constancy of the self with the term “continuity of discontinuities”. The self becomes aware of itself anew through “action” by mediating the personal “thou”.

In short, Nishida criticizes Heidegger for ignoring the other beyond horizon of understanding and thereby misses the significance of the present. Since Nishida admits the significance of future in human existence, his philosophy is not incompatible with Heidegger's. However, from Nishida's standpoint, the authentic way of Dasein does not arise from the future but also from the present dialogue between I and thou.

Conclusion

Nishida refers to the time of the self with the term “self-determination of eternal now”, *i.e.* direct and present consciousness. The originality of Nishida's theory of time can be summarized in two points.

Firstly, Nishida's theory of time expounds the nature of time in the existentially deepest “pure experience”, which is synonymous with “fact”. According to Nishida, it is a kind of Zen experience to which he also refers with the term “moment” that stands for the true self-determination of the eternal now. It is the point of present that concentrates past knowledge and future predictions into itself, thereby eradicating our ideas and concepts that are constructed by the past and the future. This allows us to contact things or oneself “anew”. Nishida highlights the “present” because he regards pure experience as the deepest experience of our existence.

Secondly, Nishida's theory of time explains our personal continuity or self-identity. Nishida refers to the otherness of past and future, personal others with the

term “thou”, that is “discontinuous” to the present I. Self-identity can be regarded as an internal dialogue between the past I and the present I, and as the present I’s leap into the future I. This self-configuration is of course mediated by a multitude of personal others. Nishida expresses self-identity (continuity) as it is mediated by various “discontinuities” with the concept “continuity of discontinuities”. Nishida highlights the present, due to the temporal nature of our encounter with various kinds of “thou”, which renews ourselves in the “present”.

Nishida’s emphasis on the “present” stands in contrast to Heidegger’s emphasis on the future. Nishida highlights the “present” in order to establish the ontology of the renewing and regenerating self, which is mediated by various kinds of others. This is revealed in his criticism of Heidegger. He criticizes Heidegger for overemphasizing the future and for not taking pure experience (i.e. “fact”) or others (i.e. “thou”) that are beyond the horizon of understanding into consideration.

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