Finding a Common Ground: Löwith and Nishida

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ABSTRACT: Karl Löwith moved to Japan in 1936 where he became acquainted with the founder of the School of Kyôto, Nishida Kitarô. Löwith was unable to appreciate the meaning of Nishida's philosophy and maintained, until the late 1940s, a Eurocentric point of view regarding Japanese culture. Nonetheless, beyond this missed historical encounter between Löwith and Nishida lies a space of philosophical common ground located in a shared understanding of time and history that puts much emphasis on the eternal present and the impossibility of thinking history as a linear progression bringing salvation, as some philosophies of history have attempted to prove.

RÉSUMÉ : Karl Löwith quitte pour le Japon en 1936 et y rencontre le fondateur de l'École de Kyôto, Nishida Kitarô. Incapable de saisir la philosophie de Nishida, Löwith maintiendra, jusqu'à la fin des années 1940, un point de vue eurocentrique sur la culture japonaise. Cependant, au-delà de cette rencontre manquée entre Löwith et Nishida, il est possible d'apercevoir un terrain d'entente dans leur façon d'approcher le temps et l'histoire. Tous deux, en effet, insistent sur le présent éternel et l'impossibilité de penser l'histoire comme une progression linéaire vers le salut, contrairement à ce que certaines philosophies de l'histoire ont tenté de démontrer.

Keywords: Karl Löwith, Nishida Kitarô, history, eternal present, Nature/*physis*, nothingness

Introduction

Intent upon fleeing Germany's Nazi regime, Karl Löwith (1897-1973), who had first unsuccessfully attempted to obtain a position in Istanbul and then at the newly relocated Institut für Sozialforschung in New York, decided in 1936

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to move to Japan, where Kuki Shûzô, a former fellow student of Heidegger's in Marburg and now professor in Kyôto, had intervened to help secure him a Chair at the Imperial University Tôhoku in Sendai. Löwith maintained this position until 1941, when Nazi influence in public life made his stay in Japan too dangerous.

While in Japan, Löwith met, among others, the founder of the School of Kyôto, Nishida Kitarô (1870-1945). Nishida, who knew German, English, and French, had studied Western philosophy intensely, mainly German Idealism and Neo-Kantianism, and had attempted to create linkages between it and Japanese philosophy. Löwith had several encounters with Nishida and had sufficient respect for him to write the following: "The Japanese have today only one original thinker, Nishida, who is comparable to any of the living philosophers of the West in depth of thought and subtlety." As unstinting as this praise was, however, Löwith immediately qualified it by a further comment: "Yet he is by no means Western. … this man's work is no more than an adaptation of Western methodology, the use of it for a logical clarification of the fundamental Japanese intuitions about the world."[1] Even though the two were very courteous to each other—when he left Japan, Nishida even gave Löwith a *kakemono* with characters written by him—Löwith never saw in Nishida anything more than a thinker who had found a new Westernized way to prove ancient Buddhist beliefs, without questioning those beliefs and while remaining ignorant of the true meaning of Western philosophy.[2] According to Löwith, Nishida adapted Western methodology to celebrate an undifferentiated conception of his culture in a form of argumentation that resembled Heidegger's grounding of German nationalism in the light of Being, a position that had led Löwith to part ways with his former teacher before leaving for Japan.[3]

More precisely, Löwith insists that the Japanese appropriation of occidental thought has no firm foundation, since it rests on nothingness and feeling. "Since Japanese culture is inspired neither by Plato's 'eros,' nor by the faith of the Jewish prophets, nor by the Chinese teaching of manners and habits," writes Löwith, "one might ask whether it has a principle at all. Nishida would answer that it is based on sensitiveness and feeling and is therefore indefinable

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1 *SS* 2, 560. *SS* here, and in the following, refers to Löwith's *Sämtliche Schriften* followed by the volume number.

2 *SS* 2, 537; (1995), 232. For Löwith, Japanese thinkers as a whole "live as if on two levels: a lower, more fundamental one, on which they feel and think in a Japanese way; and a higher one, on which the European sciences from Plato to Heidegger are lined up. And the European teacher asks himself: where is the step on which they pass from the one level to the other?"

3 On this last meeting of Löwith with Heidegger in Rome in 1936, see Löwith (1994), 59-61. Heidegger and Löwith would talk to each other again only in the 1950s.

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and hardly intelligible for Western intellects."[4] On this view, there is no desire in Japanese culture, no freedom or individuality, and thus no creativity or history. There is only a 'momentariness' grounded in nothingness. In this momentariness, experienced through meditation, appears nationalism, or a preparation to sacrifice oneself to protect the Emperor, who embodies Japan as an emotional concentration of the just order of the world.[5] Momentariness is "a reverberation of something highly indefinite,"[6] because it acts as an appreciation of nothingness. This nothingness that Löwith recognizes as the distinct trait of Nishida's thinking is therefore understood by him as a rational vacuity, something of an aesthetic experience without true philosophical meaning.[7] Löwith thinks that Nishida, like other Japanese thinkers, lacked the spirit of self-criticism that he identified as one of the distinctive traits of European thought.[8] Any modernization of Japan is thus doomed to failure because, by inviting European culture into the metaphysical void of nothingness, the Japanese would be inviting European nihilism without any critical instruments to counter it. Löwith firmly believes that what is modern is European, whereas Japanese culture is secular, and thus the appropriation of this modern European civilization is not a garment that can be worn without deeply altering the ancient customs of the secular civilization that decides to wear it.[9]

Bernard Stevens, a specialist of the School of Kyôto, is correct in stating that the encounter between Löwith and Nishida was a missed opportunity to bridge the immense gap between European and Japanese cultures. Löwith, stuck in his Eurocentrism[10] and almost certainly acquainted only with a single 15 page article by Nishida,[11] failed to grasp the complete scope of the Nishidian project,

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4 *SS* 2, 561.

5 *SS* 2, 561-563.

6 *SS* 2, 562.

7 *SS* 2, 560: "genuine Japanese 'philosophy,' [Löwith's quotation marks] or better, their genuine way of thinking, has never been built up from logical concepts. Rather it has been a direct, intuitive grasp, expressed in paradoxical images."

8 *SS* 2, 534; (1995), 229: "Japan came to know us only after it was too late, after we ourselves lost faith in our civilization and the best we had to offer was a self-critique of which Japan took no notice."

9 *SS* 2, 535; (1995), 230. Löwith's reflections on the Europeanization of the world and its nihilistic impact on Japan, had not been considered by Nishida, but was subsequently dealt with by one of his students, Nishitani Keiji (1990), 173-181.

10 This Eurocentrism is well described by Davis, 38: "Löwith went to Japan as a visiting professor, in order to 'disseminate through writing and teaching' what he thought was valuable in European philosophy and culture, and not primarily as a student of Japanese culture or even as a partner in dialogue."

11 This was a 1939 German translation of "The Forms of Culture of the Classical Periods of East and West Seen from a Metaphysical Perspective," the last chapter of the book *Fundamental Problems of Philosophy*.

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a project that is certainly more than an empty valorization of feeling and momentariness to justify Japanese nationalism. "Bound to the self-limitative circle of occidental-Hegelian *logos*," writes Stevens, Löwith "could not hear the Japanese 'logos' (or, if one prefers, its *koto* …)."[12] Löwith retained some sense of frustration regarding his stay in Japan, as he was never able to "elaborate a convincing theory to decipher the Japanese enigma."[13] It seems, though, that he never clearly saw that, in order to understand it, he would have to break from his own occidental-Hegelian bias.[14] This, in itself, is very surprising, especially if one reads Löwith's later texts, in particular *Meaning in History* from 1949, where he "sought to demonstrate the impossibility of a *philosophy* of history"[15] by consciously breaking from the Hegelian *logos*, or from any European eschatological *logos* that he believed had led to the atrocious events of the 20th century. Why then was Löwith unreceptive to Nishida's message, since in Japan he could finally find a world untouched for the most part by any European eschatological *logos*? Why did Löwith diminish Japanese culture for its supposed lack of creative historic European individuality, while he himself criticized European thought for being overly rational in its appreciation of history and allowing nihilism to impose itself on the West?

The answer to these questions cannot be clearly given other than by advancing conjectures. However, this missed encounter between Löwith and Nishida is not a reason for ignoring possible philosophical common ground and thus for embarking on Nishida's intercultural project of connecting Japanese and

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12 Stevens, 36. My translation. See also Donaggio, 162, and Davis, 40-44.

13 Donaggio, 161. My translation.

14 This bias can be clearly seen here: "They [the Japanese thinkers] do not come from others back to themselves; they are not free, or—to put it as Hegel does—they are not with themselves in Being-other." (*SS* 2, 537; (1995), 232). For Löwith, following Hegel, the Japanese are living in a naive and natural unity with themselves and cannot truly be free: "In principle they [the Japanese] love themselves as they are; they have not yet eaten from the (Christian!) tree of knowledge and lost their innocence, a loss which places human beings beyond themselves and makes them critical of themselves." (*SS* 2, 537; (1995), 232). This explains why Löwith wrote in 1937 on a postcard to Gentile: "I have the impression that there is a chasm separating us from the Japanese because they lack the presupposition of Christianity!" (cited in Donaggio, 162. My translation). Oriental (non-)freedom needs to be negated throughout world history so that humanity can attain true (Christian) universal freedom just as Hegel wrote that "World history is the discipline of the wildness of the natural will to that which is general and to subjective freedom." (*W* 12, 134; (2011), 95. *W* here, and in the following, refers to Hegel's *Werke in zwanzing Bänden* followed by the volume number).

15 Löwith (1994), 164.

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European philosophical traditions.[16] Thus, this paper will take up this endeavour by indicating what Löwith and Nishida, respectively, attempted to show philosophically in regards to time and history, their main topics of interest, in order to present the common ground between their worldviews that Löwith did not, and perhaps in the historical context could not, see.

Löwith: Nature and the Present

What did Löwith try to show philosophically? To answer this, we must first consider Löwith's way of philosophizing, which has been called by Hans-Georg Gadamer "the method of perspectives."[17] This method leads Gadamer rightly to emphasize scepticism to explain Löwith's thought: in letting different philosophers speak out of different contexts and against other philosophers, Löwith points to contradictory ideas that matter for an understanding of the world.[18] Scepticism for him is not a silent activity of negation but rather a multiplying of positions to appreciate the richness of the world, as well as the mind's inability to grasp it completely in a dogmatic system. This is evident in his 1941 book, *From Hegel to Nietzsche,* where this method is used consciously throughout in an attempt to historically reconstruct in different lights those philosophical controversies beginning with Hegel and ending with Nietzsche that he saw as perpetuating and deepening European nihilism. But at the heart of this sceptical experience lies, as Gadamer puts it, Nature: "Löwith seeks to bring nature to bear as the constant of reality, the granite that bears all. According to content, what comes to words with the theme of nature and naturalness is the oldest motif of Western philosophy—*physis*—admittedly in polemical form and directed against the reflectiveness of philosophy and against the spirit of the technological thinking of the modern period."[19] Thus, Löwith evaluates different philosophies concerning the extent to which they succeed in capturing Nature in its contradictory complexity. Furthermore, he criticizes those philosophers who failed to grasp it because of their isolation in their own epistemological systems.

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16 Davis, 46: "Nishida and the other members of the Kyoto School were 'philosophers *of* interculturality' in both senses of the genitive in this phrase: They thought *from out of* their experience of the meeting of Eastern and Western cultures in modern Japan; and they thought *about* what a cross-cultural encounter does and should entail."

17 Gadamer, 172: "The method of perspectives is not arbitrarily applied; rather, every perspective raises a strand out of the network of being that is there and is real."

18 Donaggio, 86, speaks here of an 'hermeneutical scepticism' that places Löwith in the position of a director who did not write the replicas of the characters (who are here philosophers) but creates nonetheless an interesting play by means of the ways he makes the characters interact with each other.

19 Gadamer, 174.

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The overriding issue in this sceptical appreciation of Nature is time, the primary being of Nature that gives rise to its contradictory existence. Time is the eternal affirmation of the present that exists only as the negation of past and future. Like time, Nature is at its core a contradictory existence that is constantly deployed by the emergence of beings that will soon pass to be replaced by other beings. Human beings are part of Nature's self-contradictory continuation and cannot alter this constant contradictory movement of time. However, philosophies of history have tried erroneously, according to Löwith, to secularize ideas of theology to give time a precise *telos* that is, more or less, realized by human action.

His attacks on Hegel exemplify his views on this matter. Löwith understands the Hegelian conception of the eternal as an attempt to break from the eternal Nature:

> The true crux in Hegel's analysis of time is not that he thought of eternity, but that—in spite of his study of Aristotle's *Physics*—he no longer saw it as it was primitively seen by the Greeks, in the circling constellations of the heavens and the real 'ether,' but rather ascribed it to a spirit, in the notion of which the Greek and Christian traditions are inexplicably entangled. As philosopher of the Christian-Germanic world, Hegel understood the spirit as will and freedom. For this reason, the relationship of the spirit to time, which he views in the Greek fashion as an everlasting present and recurrent cycle, remains in fact a contradiction and a riddle, solved only by Hegel's pupils in favor of freedom of the will, for which the future is primary.[20]

Löwith here suggests that Hegel cannot maintain, as the Greeks did, that time is a natural recurrent cycle. To do so is to engage in the paradoxical effort of attempting to understand how Spirit, which progresses by negating itself, can find its eternal absoluteness in the future, when time itself is the eternal return of the same, the spurious infinite.[21] Thus, Löwith thinks that, for Hegel and other philosophers of history, there are two irreconcilable worlds, the world of Nature and the world of history; the world of history—the world modern humans feel they can control—has an unjustified precedence over Nature since it gives Nature—the world from which modern humans feel alienated—an equivocal rational meaning.[22] For Löwith, there is only one world: the world of Nature. Therefore, human actions are only more kindling for igniting the

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20 *SS* 4, 266; (1964), 210.

21 The spurious infinite means, for Hegel, that the negation of the finite only leads to something finite that must again be negated *ad infinitum*. See *W* 8, § 93-95, 198-203. Time's movement from *now* to *now* is a good example of the spurious infinite. Spirit, on the other hand, entails true infinity for Hegel because what it negates is sublated and serves its end.

22 *SS* 2, 240.

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eternal fire, something that can be understood in an Heraclitean way: "The totality of things, is an exchange for fire, and fire an exchange for all things, in the way goods are an exchange for gold, and gold for goods."[23] Trying to impose a *telos* on time, as philosophies of history have tried to do, is an error that a sceptic is sure to fault because time and Nature have precedence over humanity and reveal themselves only partially while they unfold infinitely. The ever living fire Heraclitus speaks of burns without human beings being able to predict what will be burnt to insure its combustion, and this fire will never provide the solid ground upon which human beings may build historical meaning.

Löwith's position here, which I have coupled with the Heraclitean, is reaffirmed in his *Meaning in History*. Löwith directly cites passages from Hegel's Introduction to his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* wherein he proposes that, at first glance, history seems to be monstrous, as in it everything is sacrificed and nothing seems to justify these sacrifices.[24] Löwith then asks the following question: "And why not stop here, instead of asking Hegel's question: To what final purpose are these enormous sacrifices offered time and again?"[25] Why can we not accept the Heraclitean *polemos* insuring the eternal balancing of life and death, why can we not accept the *fatum* that is enforced by *Dikè*, and why do we have to resort to philosophies of history? Löwith answers: "Hegel thinks that this question [What is the *telos* of the historical sacrifices?] arises 'necessarily' in our thinking. The implication is, however, that it arises in our occidental thinking, which is not satisfied with the pagan acceptance of fate."[26] Occidental thinking, signified mainly by Christianity, cannot be satisfied with Nature's spurious infinite and must find a meaning that will break the cycle of time so that a linear time spreading from past to future can offer a progression towards salvation. Löwith leans on Goethe's view of history to attack Hegel: history for Goethe "is a tremendous view of streams and rivers which, with natural necessity, rush together from many heights and valleys; at least they cause the overflowing of a great river and an inundation in which both perish, those who foresaw it and those who had no inkling of it. In this tremendous empirical process you see nothing but nature and nothing of what philosophers would so much like to call freedom."[27] By using Goethe's words, Löwith

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23 DK B 90; Heraclitus, 55. DK here, and in the following, refers to the standard system for referencing the works of the Presocratic philosophers, based on the collection of quotations *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker* (*The Fragments of the Presocratics*) established by H.A. Diels and W. Kranz.

24 *W* 12, 34-35; (2011), 19-20.

25 *SS* 2, 63; (1949), 53.

26 *SS* 2, 63-64; (1949), 53. Interestingly enough, Löwith, against Hegel, seems to point to the oriental thinking to find something of a cyclical understanding of Nature (see *SS* 2, 64; (1949), 53-54).

27 *SS* 2, 63; (1949), 53.

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points to the necessity of an everlasting Nature that has precedence over human freedom. There is only necessity in the present, there is no necessity in the progress of time: "the empirical process, without principle, and therefore also without epochs, goes on infinitely, without beginning or end."[28]

With this conception of time and (non-)history, Löwith was naturally drawn to Jacob Burckhardt because—and even if in a way Burckhardt "continued to contain his thinking within the circumference of Hegel's view of history"[29]—Löwith sees him as the historian who "dismissed the theological, philosophical, and socialistic interpretations of history and thereby reduces the meaning of history to mere continuity, without beginning, progress or end."[30] It is precisely from this link to Burckhardt, and to Nietzsche and his theory of the eternal return, that Jürgen Habermas is able to see Löwith not only as a Sceptic but also as a Stoic: "It is not by chance that Löwith links up with the Stoics, especially with the Stoic lament over the loss of a self-evident view of the cosmos,"[31] because the idea of the cosmos, the whole given in the here and now, is precisely what is lost when entering any philosophy of history that is grounded in seeing the past as origin and the future as advent. It is clear that, in order to speak of Löwith's own view of the world, we must go back to ancient appellations (Stoic, Sceptic, Heraclitean) in order to point to an understanding of Nature that was not overwritten by Judeo-Christian categories. This is not to say that Löwith's thought is emptied of any religious concepts, but that the religious will become Greek: a pagan respect for and acceptance of *physis*.

Habermas, however, also goes on to reveal a real and important problem in Löwith's philosophy that we must now consider: because Löwith is always evaluating and comparing different philosophies of history, his own distinctiveness would be that "by means of the claim to have grasped history rationally, to disempower the claim of historical comprehension itself."[32] But Habermas has "to admit that even Löwith has not been able to persuade me that the fundamentally historical character of the dialectical mediation of nature and the human world, however this dialectics is conceived, can be cogently disputed—least of all by way of a logic of the history of the ontological understanding of the world."[33] Habermas suggests here that, in having explained rationally how Judeo-Christian categories had been historically interpreted and applied to history by different philosophers of history, Löwith still failed to show how the dialectical character of the relationship between Nature and human actions is not to be understood as historical. We are confronted here with a great difficulty:

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28 *SS* 4, 51; (1964), 35.

29 *SS* 4, 51; (1964), 35.

30 *SS* 2, 207; (1949), 192.

31 Habermas, 83.

32 Habermas, 86.

33 Habermas, 87-88.

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how can it be logical that, in order to break from the historical character of the dialectical mediation of Nature and the human world, we must first and foremost resort to history by reconstructing it, even backwards or in a different, sceptic, light? In the Preface of the first edition of *From Hegel to Nietzsche*,[34] Löwith clearly states, as a Young Hegelian would do, that he wants to stay on historical grounds to reconstruct the European understanding of the world. And yet, later, in *Meaning in History*, he attacks those philosophies of history that sought to give a rational meaning to time within history. Thus, there is a contradiction in Löwith's thinking: is it possible to break from history and return to Nature's unity *by* thinking historically?

Perhaps it is possible, in a sceptical way, to weaken philosophies of history by reconstructing history in so many ways that any attempt to give it clear meaning is doomed to failure. Or perhaps we could take Habermas' critique seriously and ask ourselves if it is possible to criticize philosophies of history by staying on the same ground as them. Löwith's work on its own does not seem to provide a clear answer here. Turning to Nishida will be of great use in order to find a different ground, one that is able to make way for a critique of philosophies of history while still expressing an appreciation for historical events. This is not to say that Löwith had always been Nishidian in his contradictory understanding of history without being conscious of it; rather I wish to show that Löwith and Nishida share a common ground from which Nishida could establish perhaps a more coherent meaning of history. Before we are able to come to that conclusion, however, I must first offer a presentation of Nishida's philosophy.

Nishida: History and the Eternal Present

Löwith finds Nishida in Japan engaged (since around 1934) in a philosophy of history, after he grew dissatisfied with his logic of *basho*.[35] The logic of *basho* was brought forth by Nishida to ground judgements, conceived as acts of self-consciousness in 'pure experience,' a concept he first discovered reading William James. Pure experience is a state of consciousness that can be called 'absolute nothingness,' as there is nothing that can be determined in it; it is a state of pure duration, the true reality that we then divide for our own purpose in being conscious of different aspect of reality.[36] The *basho* (place, ground, field) of nothingness is that out of which the self can see itself as a self in its purest form, and out of which every act of the self emerges. But for these acts to emerge in the self itself, there are other *bashos* that exist that are self-forming

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34 *SS* 4, 3; (1964), XV.

35 To be precise, and following J.W. Krummel, there are at least four stages in Nishida's lifework and the logic of *basho* corresponds to the third period, immediately after his voluntaristic period and his first period, the psychologistic period. (Krummel, 6-7).

36 Carter, 14.

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and provide different grounds to these different acts of consciousness. The logic of *basho* is a system of concentric levels of fields out of which the self, from itself and in itself, is able to judge. A *basho* is said to be a predicate by Nishida—not a grammatical predicate, but a predicate set forth for the grammatical subject-predicate judgement to happen, so that the copulative function is placed somewhere.[37] Every *basho* is a relative universal nothingness, since it cannot be said to be what it is encompassing. For example, the *basho* of numbers, which self-forms in the self to make sense of numbers, is not a number in itself; it is nothing prior to its determination in different numbers. And yet, because every *basho* is universal and to exist must determine itself into individuals—an individual that a *basho* can never be—it can be said to be concrete as a contradictory self-identity.

However, Nishida was to abandon, as Robert Carter calls it, this "'gothic architectonic' of the universals,"[38] grounded in Neo-Kantianism reflections, to bring into focus directly this idea of self-contradictory identity or, as he calls it himself, "the self-identity of absolute contradiction."[39] And Nishida had come to the conclusion that this self-identity of absolute contradiction can be clearly seen in the world of historical reality and that a logic of *basho*, which had proved to be much too internalized and which had prevented the self from entering the real world, had now to be resituated in this newly discovered *basho* of historical reality. The dialectics needed in the understanding of this self-identity of absolute contradiction is the same that is found in the logic of *basho*, meaning that to understand something we must always think of it in its interconnection with its opposite, and this unity of opposites serves to establish a more universal identity in which the opposition is never to be resolved. However, this dialectics is now used to express how this one historical world is determined by the relationship between, horizontally, the individual's creativity and relationship to the Thou, the Thou that is any real thing facing the I and seen by the I, and, vertically, the individual's creativity and its species, the species that is, in the historical world, a nation or, more precisely, a culture.[40] This one and only

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37 Krummel, 16: "The copulative *is* thus signifies implacement: everything that *is* (*arumo*), whether physical or mental, is implaced (*oitearu*) in some place (*basho*). The 'predicate' for Nishida then, more than its grammatical significance, is basho as this pre-objective environing background for determining acts and determined content, the plane of potentials (predicates) allowing for the foreground emergence of being qua objects or qua grammatical subjects."

38 Carter, 57.

39 Nishida, (1987b), XXV.

40 Krummel, 37: "For Nishida then dialectics involves both vertical and horizontal dimensions. On the vertical level, each individual creatively expresses the world's own self-creation. Thereby the one world disperses itself into a multiplicity of individual points, each expressing that world from different angles. … At the same time,

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historical world maintains its identity by letting individuals oppose each other horizontally in their creative process, while the individuals—who think they are autonomous in this horizontal oppositional creative process—are in fact vertically building cultures that constitute the identity of the world. The historical world is a self-identity of absolute contradiction because as a *basho* of historical events it exists through the unity of opposites that are, horizontally, subject and object, and vertically, individuality and universality. And the historical world as a whole—i.e., Being—takes place out of the *basho* of nothingness that circumscribes Being through the oppositional unity of time and space.[41] By explaining these contradictions in more detail while revealing how the historical world only exists through them, I will show what Nishida means by this one self-contradicting historical world.

This world of historical reality is the true reality, according to Nishida, since every conscious standpoint on the world begins with historical human activity. Consciousness, the main concern of Nishida's earlier philosophy, can still be a starting point of reality, but if consciousness is separated from objectivity, as it is in the rationalistic Cartesian philosophy, there is nothing but a dream. "Thus the real world is the world in which we are actively involved—the concrete world in which we are living in that active involvement."[42] Descartes' *cogito* presupposes the *act* of thinking,[43] and so Nishida thinks that "the *noesis* must always include the *noema*"[44] because the I is the acting self seeing the Thou and seeing itself in the Thou. As a social and historical self, the I is a creative body, which means that through the body, the I is *poiesis* and entails that "the real world is the world of production. It is a world in which we are made by making."[45] The I as a creative body acts on the world by creating, while its creations make the I in return, so that "the world is a continuing creative process."[46] Subjectivity and objectivity are constantly opposing each other, yet, they exist only in regard to their mutual determination or, as Nishida writes,

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individuals on the horizontal dimension of the dialectic are codependent with one another in their mutual interactions. … the many individuals' self- and codetermination is simultaneously the universal's self-determination qua world."

41 Nishida, (1970), 254: "Historical reality is both spatial and temporal, both objective and subjective, both being and nothingness."

42 Nishida, (1998a), 40.

43 Nishida, (1970), 91: "That the self was thus defined in purely individual terms was because the self was not truly observed from the standpoint of action. Thus, 'I think, therefore I am' may be changed to 'I act, therefore I am'. To think the former case, 'I think, therefore I am' implies that thinking is already an action. Thus the acting self must be social and historical."

44 Nishida, (1970), 91.

45 Nishida, (1998a), 41.

46 Nishida, (1998a), 48.

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their "productive transaction."[47] The I always faces the Thou as the I creates the Thou and exists as such an activity, but the Thou in return creates the I, so that the I can "see itself in things" and can "act from the things seen."[48] This 'inter-expressive activity of the monads,' this self-contradiction of the one and the many takes place in time—the linear impossibility of the repetition of the same moment that moves from the one to the many—but also in space—the circular simultaneous existence of things as a seeing of many in one. It is thus time and space that form the contradictory parameters of the historical reality through which subjectivity and objectivity, individuals and species, can coexist as contradictions. The world exists due to *poiesis*, and this *poiesis* is a contradictory process that affirms the world's unity.

Humanity, as comprised of individual monads, is thus capable not only of intuition—as the early Nishida would have said—but also of what Nishida calls "active intuition": "active intuition means to see things in the form of *poiesis*."[49] Active intuition means that to see things is to already be acting on them and by acting on them to see them: "we are *both* passively determined by the environment [the seeing] *and* actively working upon it [the acting]."[50] As monads see things, they create according to them and they see themselves in things, but in return, monads are created and acted upon by what they see, and this whole process is the self-identity of the historical world as an absolute contradiction.[51] In other words, Being *is* active intuition since the historical world only exists through the oppositional activity of individual creative bodies.

Of importance here to us is that all of this takes place in the present as it is the knot of all contradictions: "Historical formations are the changes in the simultaneous space of history, as it were. The process of historical formation has no meaning apart from this 'historical space.'"[52] This historical space is something eternal and can be justly called "the absolute present in which past,

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47 Nishida, (1998a), 41.

48 Nishida, (1998b), 57. The 'Thou' here refers, not only to other individuals, but to things in general: "the true historical world, the world of true objectivity, must be one in which the direction towards things and the direction towards the Thou have become one." (Nishida, (1970), 95).

49 Nishida, (1998b), 66.

50 Krummel, 32.

51 Nishida, (1987a), 52: "The world creates its own space-time character by taking each monadic act of consciousness as a unique position in the calculus of its own existential transformation. Conversely, the historical act is, in its space-time character, a self-forming vector of the world. To bring this out I say that the temporal-spatial (that is, conscious-spatial) reflects itself within itself as a contradictory identity."

52 Nishida, (1998b), 67.

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present, and future interpenetrate."[53] The eternal present is a circle, "as if a circle, wherein periphery and center are incompatible, continues moving endlessly in self contradiction. What I mean by the present is not something like a point on a linear line, moving from past to future, as in the instant. The present must rather be the world of acting-intuition."[54] As the present is the world of acting intuition, this eternal now is a geographical space from which history, or a specific monadic I, exists and creates; furthermore, it is also the coexistence and co-presence of all active intuitions in the spatiality of time that takes history as a whole that is always lived in the present of creation. The world is comprised of the totality of the horizontal acting intuitions and this creates, vertically, the universal: "The world in which we live as acting selves is one which determines itself in the form of Platonic Ideas. To see the Ideas does not mean that we enter into a world of tranquil contemplation, but a world of true action, a world from which new action is born."[55] A culture is a Platonic Idea, which is defined by Nishida as "the archetype of our rational moral practice,"[56] a universal and eternal value created by the activity of individuals constituting a nation.[57] The nation is the temporal-historical body of a culture, its individualization. History needs nations as its creative individuals, "just as a species of biological life, as a sphere of self-determining forms, proceeds to form itself from generation to generation;"[58] but as nations pass, culture, the affirmation of the nation's individual creations, is eternal and never passes. Culture is an eternal value lived and incarnated through a nation that can coexist with other cultures in the absolute present of the historical space. This means that cultures, or epochs, do not have any distinct duration, because what matters is the Platonic Idea that is affirmed in the eternal present.[59] As a realization of Platonic Ideas, every culture is self-determining; in this sense, there is no relationship from

53 Nishida, (1998b), 57.

54 Nishida, (2012), 160.

55 Nishida, (1970), 121.

56 Nishida, (1998d), 92.

57 Nishida, (1998d), 91: "a nation is firmly established by the various heroic efforts of both a people and its leaders." As Huh, 353, puts it: "there is an almost perfect harmony between individuals and state, in a way similar to Hegel's argument in *Reason in History*. Hence, the state becomes the divine Idea as it exists on earth." There is a unity of individuals and state for Nishida, as the individuals created the state affecting in return their own activity, but contrary to Hegel and what Huh affirms, what matters most for Nishida are the acts made by individuals in the present, rather than the Platonic Idea incarnated in the state.

58 Nishida, (1998d), 92.

59 Huh, 357: "The duration of each epoch does not seem to matter for Nishida, insofar as each and every epoch is conceived as an ontological event or unit. No matter how long it is, each epoch has the same ontological value."

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one epoch to another: time, in its essence, is a "continuity of discontinuity,"[60] i.e., an eternal present that self-negates past and future but, as present shows a different possibility of history, forces past and future to coexist with this present, as past and present represent the infinite possibilities that form the present.[61] This means that there is no law underlying the temporal revelation of different cultures, and there is no real progression of history: "History does not have laws. The universal has no meaning in history. I think that history … is aesthetic rather than scientific."[62] The universal is never to be found in the historical world, yet it is always created through active intuition and serves as an archetypal value that gives meaning to our own individual activity, just as art's meaning is a creation of human activity and does not exist in the world but through its signification in return ceaselessly affects human activity.[63]

Nishida sees in those two eternally present and simultaneous movements—the horizontal movement of the I and the Thou and the vertical movement of the individual and its species—a profound religious significance. Following Leopold von Ranke, who wrote that "Every epoch is immediate to God,"[64] Nishida says that "Every historical epoch is religious in its ground,"[65] since every epoch reveals the absolute in the form of its creations that create moral meaning. For Nishida, God "must be absolutely nothing" but, by being absolutely nothing, God "possesses absolute negation within itself. It is by negating its own nothingness that it is infinitely self-affirming, infinitely creative, and is historical reality itself."[66] God is therefore Being *and* nothingness and neither

60 Nishida, (2012), 165.

61 Nishida, (1998b), 56: "In this historical present, the world as an identity of absolute contradiction enfolds the infinite past and the infinite future in an order of simultaneity." Krummel, 41: "Nishida thus characterizes the present as an 'eternal now' (*eien no ima*) that contains, despite the finitude of the moment, an infinity of other possibilities to be actualized in self-negation. Nishida's point seems to be that the present as implying innumerable possibilities for determining past and future is the very horizontal medium or basho for their determinations. In the self-negating present, past and future are thus also co-present and interrelated in their mutual self-negations."

62 Nishida, (1970), 218-219.

63 Nishida, (1970), 121: "The Ideas are not reality. Nor do we act from the Ideas. Aesthetic life is not real life. We must always be individual, physical, and living beings. … The Ideas are nothing but the content of the self-determination of social and historical reality." In other words: "History is not the movement of the *ideas*. And yet historical life goes on seeing *ideas* through acting-intuition." (Nishida, (2012), 162).

64 von Ranke, 53.

65 Nishida, (1987a), 98.

66 Nishida, (1987a), 70, 71.

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of the two specifically because it "must be self-contradictory one—that is, an identity of absolute contradictions."[67] This means that the historical world as a whole rests on nothingness and is the expression of nothingness. This is where the logic of *basho* again comes into play: as to talk about numbers, we had to reflect on the *basho* of numbers that is not a number in itself, so too to state that the world of history is a self-contradictory identity requires seeing it from another contradictory standpoint than that of the world itself, and this standpoint is nothingness. The historical world is thus the form of the formless, and the one God is this whole contradictory process between form and formlessness. There is nothing other than historical reality since historical reality reveals all the contradictions that form nothingness (the formless) as a *basho* of self-contradictory identity. Logic, as a science, must express the self-contradictory identity of the world,[68] meaning that logic must explain that Being, the actual world, a foreground, exists as the self-determination of nothingness, the background. This is why logic, for Nishida, serves to explain active intuition: the individual's activity exists as he sees things that he or other individuals have created, but active intuition, as a creative process, is always a movement that emerges from nothingness. To understand active intuition in itself is to understand it from its own contradiction: "having the form of an absolutely contradictory identity of the one and the many, the world is bottomlessly self-contradictory. As individuals of such a world we are always bottomlessly self-contradictory, too."[69] With the nothingness from which our own creative process arises, we can approach God in ourselves, but human beings cannot fully grasp rationally the immensity of God as a unity between the historical world and nothingness since "there is no path from man to God."[70] Human beings, however, can understand that every historical epoch is an expression of God as a form created from their own active intuition: God creates itself through the individuals following the individual's own free will. Nishida goes on to say that: "each of our actions is historical, and *eschatologisch*, as the self-determination of the absolute present."[71] The problem then becomes how to explain what eschatology means here. Nishida specifies it by turning to *kairos*: "Truth is revelation. The truth is known as *kairos*: it is *timely* in the sense of being the determination of the absolute present."[72] The absolute present is the end of time, but also and always at the same time the beginning of time; it is the only time that we know and live in, and every human action, as *kairos*, shapes the eternal present in

67 Nishida, (1998b), 71.

68 Nishida, (2012), 105: "It would seem that the deep root of logic lies within the *logos*-bearing unchangeability of the endlessly changing."

69 Nishida, (1998b), 70.

70 Nishida, (1998b), 72.

71 Nishida, (1987a), 110.

72 Nishida, (1987a), 110.

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creating a culture and expressing God, but without being able to read any moral progress in this creative process. *Kairos* is not to be understood as something in the past or in the future to which we compare our own epoch in order to understand where we stand in the line of history. Rather *kairos* is every monadic event in the present that freely creates aesthetic Platonic Ideas.

And Nishida believes that his epoch, the Japanese *kairos*, is one that is able to see and to unite co-present cultures without losing their contradictions, while also ceasing to focus unilaterally on nations, in order to begin a global self-awakening. Every nation has "its own world mission, [however] we must be able to construct a single world-historical world, that is, a 'world-of-worlds' world."[73] This "'world-of-worlds' world" is the emergence of a culture in which the Platonic Ideas can coexist or, in more specific terms, the emergence of a culture in which every culture is appreciated for itself and appreciated with its distinction and contradiction in comparison to other cultures. Nishida feels that the Japanese nation is well suited to initiate this global self-awakening since Japanese culture "lies in its own form of contradictory identity of immanence and transcendence."[74] Japanese culture is thus able to see the universal in the individual and the individual in the universal, so that "the essence of morality itself can truly be clarified."[75]

It is clear from what I have shown earlier that Löwith did not think that the Japanese culture was capable of being the site of a global-awakening, as he thought that it lacked any true principle and only sought to validate its own nationalism. However, there is something very interesting in the fact that Löwith used history to show that no definite meaning can be ascribed to it, and that Nishida insisted on the historical world to show that there is no historical progression, as every historical action is of equal value as a form of the formless. It is from here that a common ground emerges.

Finding Common Ground

In order to render his dialectical understanding of the world as a self-contradictory identity, Nishida turns explicitly to Heraclitus, the thinker who understood that the world is one through the many (time) and many through one

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73 Nishida, (1998c), 73.

74 Nishida, (1998d), 86.

75 Nishida, (1998d), 84. This does not mean that the Japanese culture would reign over others; rather, it means that Japanese culture would be the *basho* of a dialogue between cultures and their Platonic Idea: "A culture would develop, not dissipate itself, by opening up to dialogical engagement with others. In this way Nishida attempts to resolve the tension between maintaining a fluid sense of cultural identity and bringing about a cooperative exchange between cultures." (Davis, 45).

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(space).[76] Heraclitus' *logos* bears the meaning of the spatialization of time and temporalization of space,[77] for space synchronically holds together a totality of beings and species that live in contradiction with each other, just as time permits the passing of beings that act on each other and reveal the contradictory determinations of the world. To spatialize time is to fixate the flux of becoming in the absolute present and, in doing so, to insist on the intuitive side of acting intuition, while to temporalize space is to fluidify the present so that it can perpetuate itself eternally as a self-contradiction and, in doing so, to insist on the acting side of acting intuition. Neither the spatialization of time nor the temporalization of space, moreover, may ever be erased by one another and are not to be sublated in a third affirmative term. Without mentioning Heraclitus, this is what Löwith expressed when trying to sum up Nishida's historical thinking in the following comment from 1943: "The whole movement of history is like the motionless movement of a waterfall, which has the clear-cut shape of a ribbon and yet is totally shapeless, changing at every moment and yet always the same."[78] It was precisely this description of history, understood in terms of Nature's temporality, that Löwith was then to recognize in what Goethe described as history and what Löwith followed in attacking Hegel in *Meaning in History*. It thus seems that Nishida's thinking, and Japanese philosophy as a whole, acted upon him in his later philosophy.[79]

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76 Nishida, (2012), 114: "Heraclitus, who advocated *panta rei*, said that strife is the father of all. He states that what are mutually opposed in turn are mutually unified as one, the most beautiful harmony is born of what are different, and all things are established through strife. In order for what flows away to stand in co-relation time would have to entail synchronistic existence. Burnet states that the truth Heraclitus discovered was that one is many and many is one. As a consequence he Heraclitus became the father of the dialectical method. This is where we must search for the *logos* of the world of historical reality."

77 Nishida, (2012), 120: "As Heraclitus stated, the most beautiful harmony is born out of opposites. Active form is that in which the spatial is temporal and the temporal is spatial. The self-determination of the eternal now, wherein time is space and space is time, is through formative acts."

78 *SS* 2, 561.

79 Without making a clear reference to Nishida, Löwith writes in 1959: "It is impossible to elucidate fully in a few words how I, despite my sticking to the path taken in Marburg, did not remain untouched by the experience of the no longer Far East …. What appeals to a European person is not the advancing modernization of the old Japan, of course, but rather the continuation of the Oriental tradition and the native Shintoistic paganism. In the face of the popular consecration of all natural and everyday things …—I have for the first time understood something about the religious paganism and political religion of the Greeks and the Roman." (Löwith, (1994), 162-163). Löwith seems to have abandoned his occidental-Hegelian bias towards Japan while the paganism he recognizes in Japan is very similar to Greek *physis* paganism.

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It is necessary to recognize this in order to say that Löwith and Nishida share common ground in what we could call a *Heraclitean contradictory understanding of time and space*. Heraclitus appears here to be a philosopher who bears true interculturality. But we must note that Nishida and Löwith came to this same ground in seemingly reverse paths. In first putting much emphasis on history, Löwith was unable to depart completely from the positivity of the philosophies of history and thus ultimately resorted to Goethe and the Heraclitean standpoint to better point to the historical reasons of European nihilism that he perceived as something going 'towards nothingness'—that is moving from the ruining of the linear and rationally determined understanding of time towards the eternal return of the same.[80] Conversely, in putting so much emphasis on the nothingness of consciousness, Nishida realized that he had forgotten the real and incarnated world and thereby came to his philosophy of history as a self-contradiction through Heraclitus' *logos*, something as moving 'from nothingness'—that is moving from the pure duration of consciousness towards the nothingness of the world itself. This Heraclitean understanding of time and space is thus the expression of nothingness for both thinkers, but it expresses, for Löwith, the natural counterpart of the European nihilistic rationalization of time, and, for Nishida, the contradictory form of the formless.

It is only from this Heraclitean understanding of time that Löwith can criticize the false hopefulness that philosophies of history imposed on the world through some kind of secularized theodicy. It is of course a problem to compare Löwith and Nishida on that matter since Nishida still holds that a culture is a realization of a Platonic Idea or, stated bluntly, a realization of God.[81] But the God Nishida speaks of is not a Christian one: "It is discovered in the direction, not of the objectively transcendent, but of what I have called the immanently transcendent."[82] This entails that the absolute cannot be understood in a dualistic manner with the created since the created, the individual, creates the

[80] Following Nietzsche (*KSA* 12, 213; *KSA* here, and in the following, refers to Nietzsche's *Kritische Studienausgabe* followed by the volume number), Löwith suggests that the eternal return of the same may be witnessed in the carrying of European nihilism to its final conclusions (*SS* 6, 170). More precisely, in pointing out how Nietzsche was torn between the cosmic eternal return of the same and the anthropological will to return eternally (*SS* 6, 175), Löwith indicates that he himself understands the eternal return of the same from the cosmological standpoint, because the anthropological standpoint inherited from Christianity is necessarily oriented towards the future and commands historicity (*SS* 6, 256).

[81] In an earlier period of his thought, Nishida writes that "History is the biography of the spirit of the universe." (Nishida, (1987b), 158). This is still true in the later period, but this God's self-biography cannot be read as a linear narrative, rather it must be grasped in the creative circle of the eternal present.

[82] Nishida, (1987a), 110.

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absolute in a self-contradictory manner. The absolute is always already there as the historical world, while the world, in turn, is being created by *poesis* in the eternal present, as the absolute is always in a self-negating position to itself. In other words, God is not more or less nothingness in the forms of his formlessness; God, in this self-contradictory, non-substantial metaphysics, is nothingness *and* Being, and, at the same time, is neither nothingness nor Being. This means that there cannot be here any traces of a progressive Christian salvation applied to world events of the kind that Löwith tried to track down in philosophies of history: good and evil are only relative to this nothingness[83] and what we find to be good is only from our own individualistic positions, just as Hegel, according to Nietzsche,[84] forgot to separate his own Berliner existence from the end of the universal process of history. Nishida writes: "God as the true absolute must be Satan too. Only then can God be said to be truly omniscient and omnipotent."[85] Good and evil are never to be sublated,[86] meaning that the individual's activity never prepares the way for a greater good to be savoured by the next generation. "The ultimate victory of moral good over moral evil would involve the negation of morality itself,"[87] and the negation of morality would involve the negation of the historical world as a world of the self-contradictory realization of Platonic Ideas. Therefore, Nishida's "theology of the absolute present is neither theistic nor deistic—a theology neither of mere spirit nor of mere nature. It is the theology of the existential matrix of history itself."[88] This matrix of history can be seen in Löwith's respect for *physis* since Nature does not seem to exist without human activity, but human activity has no precedence over Nature; human activity only insures the eternal return of the present without ascribing to Nature a direction towards salvation.

This is because history, for Nishida, and thought out of the eternal present of the creative process of the individual, is emptied of *archè* and *telos*: Nishida's non-substantial metaphysics "replaces the hegemony of one center with the democracy of an infinity of centers. … In the end, a non-substantial a/theology that locates history in the present ruptures the assumed linearity of history which deceives us into believing in an *archè* and which promises us a *telos*."[89]

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83 Carter, 129: "The distinction between good and bad is but relative, and so from a higher perspective they would be equal, or at least one would collapse into the other."

84 *KSA*, 1, 308.

85 Nishida, (1987a), 74.

86 (1987b), 163: "Error, or evil, arises from a confusion of the different positions which the intelligible self freely assumes. While error shows the incompleteness of things, it also indicates their concreteness, for only abundant and profound reality can fall into error, and light is emitted only from that which burns: '*Unde ardet inde lucet*.'"

87 Nishida, (1987a), 66.

88 Nishida, (1987a), 76.

89 Kopf, 170.

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It is uncertain whether we can say of Löwith's view of history that it is non-substantial, as *physis* seems to be a persisting metaphysical entity, but Löwith surely shares with Nishida this insistence on the present that reveals an infinity of possibility, an "infinity of centers" that fuels the existence of the now, and that prevents any eschatological thinking outside of this eternal present, because the world only moves from present to present—it moves and does not move. For Löwith, 'histories' are those centres that insure the everlasting present: "The *world* is too wide, and life is too rich to be compartmentalized into a 'before' and 'after' anything. Only *history* knows such turning points, but all histories survive beyond them, and the only thing that remains constant is that which knows neither a before nor after, because it is always like this, as it has been and will be in the future."[90] Histories, as *kairoi*, are turning points, or events, of history that carry the present to the present, in this cyclic returning of the now, insuring the eternal presence of *physis* as a self-evident cosmos: "only at those moments in which eternity appears as the truth of being are we able to prove the temporal schema of progress and decline to be a historical illusion."[91] Nishida, in a text Löwith never read, said that a true philosopher must be a prophet and that "it is said that the word *prophet* may originally have had the sense of 'one who speaks' rather than one who predicts the future. … The philosopher must be one who speaks the mission of history."[92] This mission of history is nothing more than the continuity of the discontinuity of the present world in its self-contradictory identity realized through acting intuition, which is already given in a general form in the Heraclitean *logos*. This metaphysical standpoint explains why we can be interested in history but also why it is impossible to be optimistic about it and to ascribe a definite meaning to it, as some philosophies of history have tried to do, since there is never anything more than this self-contradictory creative process situated in the present. There is thus no coincidence that the 'weeping philosopher'[93] would offer a correct rendering of the historical world since "What is creative is what is self-contradictory. This is why pessimistic philosophers think of life as suffering."[94] Philosophies of history have tried to erase this suffering by giving humanity a false sense of hopefulness that history could carry an eschatological meaning through a secularized theodicy; instead, Nishida and Löwith would agree that such philosophers of history are "fabricators of falsehoods"[95] whom *Dikè*

[90] Löwith, (1994), 144.

[91] Löwith, (1994), 146.

[92] Nishida, (2012), 157.

[93] This designation of Heraclitus was already used in Antiquity to depict his way of seeing the world and the life of human beings, in opposition to Democritus, the laughing philosopher.

[94] Nishida, (2012), 146.

[95] DK B 28b; Heraclitus, 25.

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would necessarily catch up with, meaning that they would not resist their own burning and passing for the sake of the eternal present.

Conclusion

Heraclitus' strife cosmos in itself does not directly entail an understanding of human activity. This is what Nishida and Löwith tried to give to Heraclitus' *logos*, and yet Nishida has an advantage over Löwith because he could explain history out of a nothingness that was not only situated on an ontic level.

Nishida distinguishes Orient and Occident by the fact that the Orient is placed in nothingness and Occident in Being. Löwith, situated in the West, thus has Being as a point of reference. Even if Being shows itself in an infinite succession of nows, it is still Being, which is already a substantial form, which demands determination and demands a succession of formed events to understand it. That is why, if we follow Nishida, a thinking of Being always entails some kind of philosophy of history that strives to read the story of Being. For Nishida, Heraclitus, as profound as his thought is, is also bound to Being, just as the other Presocratics are: Heraclitus' *logos* is a determination, a form of Being,[96] and calls for a process to proceed to its precise determination. Thus it is no coincidence that Hegel, for instance, could appropriate Heraclitus' becoming as a means of grounding his philosophy of history. And this is why both Heraclitus and Löwith face the same problem as thinkers of the West: in Apollonian culture, it is very difficult to express a pure infinity, a pure nothingness, and not just a spurious infinite that still has a direction by the forms it creates. But Nishida, situated in the East, has nothingness as a point of reference and every form it takes is arbitrary—and therefore resistant to narration in a successive order—since nothingness is absolute infinity that transcends historical factuality but transcends it from the immanence of historical factuality, in the eternal now. From the perspective of nothingness, every possible culture is the expression of the self-contradictory identity of a universal as a form of the formless, and since "time is the mirror surface of infinity"[97] there is no end to how many cultures the world can create via the individual. Nothingness then serves as fertile ground for the expression of the eternal now, as, regarding nothingness, every historical form is equal and is, in itself, a contingent reminder of nothingness. Time here is not a pure flux since it reveals necessary Platonic Ideas, but those Ideas appear in a creative and contingent way, something similar to the way that Heraclitus says that fire, "whenever it is mixed with spices, gets

[96] Nishida, (1970), 238: "In Greek culture, the idea of taking absolute infinity, something which absolutely transcends actuality, as true reality, was not entertained. The One of Parmenides was not non-being, but the ultimate of being. The Flux of Heraclitus was also *logos*. Even the Unbounded of Anaximander possessed the meaning of a self-contained circle."

[97] Nishida, (1970), 249.

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called by the name that accords with the bouquet of each spice."[98] Platonic Ideas are the bouquet that have emerged from the spices that individuals have thrown into the fire, but the fire burns in no specific order, and the fire, as a whole, is every spice it burnt, every bouquet it took, and no spice or bouquet in particular. Simply put, "Time must be considered to be the self-determination of absolute nothingness."[99] Every human action counts as a self-determining expression of the world in the eternal present, but no human action has precedence over another one, and no action is a landmark gesture, since nothingness does not progress in any way in its contradictory historical self-expression.

Löwith never did come back to his Japanese experience to affirm his affinity with Nishida and the Heraclitean understanding of time that I have outlined in this paper, but had he been more receptive to Nishida's thinking during his stay in Japan, he could have avoided the critique by Habermas I noted earlier. Ueda Shizuteru, a more recent member of the School of Kyôto, puts it as follows: "While moving solely in the direction of 'towards nothingness' may lead to a negative questioning that persists in problematizing everything, moving in the direction of 'from nothingness' harbors the possibility of discovering creative responses."[100] On the ground of Being, Habermas is right in criticizing Löwith who tried to break from history in immersing himself in it. As Habermas noted, Löwith's critique of the philosophies of history is offered simply by replacing this determination of time with another, which necessarily becomes problematic, just as the sceptical principle of doubting everything becomes a problem since it must be doubted also. But on the ground of nothingness, it is justifiable to consider history as a means of breaking with Westernized eschatological views of history that read time as a bridge stretching from *archè* to *telos*; absolute nothingness is the *basho* of historical acts that can never be signs of a progression of Being nor the definitive expression of nothingness. Nothingness shows that the necessity of time and present exists from the contingency of individual actions, and those individual actions in return become necessary as they reveal Platonic Ideas that make history. Those Platonic Ideas, however, are never to be created again nor do they permit a reading of time in a precise direction; time thus burns contingently in no specific order in the eternal present and we, as human beings, will forever be burnt by creating the present.

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98 DK B 67; Heraclitus, 45.

99 Nishida, (1970), 250.

100 Ueda, 29.

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