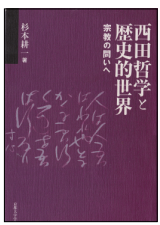

Sugimoto Kōichi 杉本耕一『西田幾多郎と歴史的世界：宗教の問いへ』[Nishida Kitarō and the Historical World: Questioning Religion]

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Sugimoto Kōichi's *Nishida Kitarō and the Historical World* is a revised version of the author's doctoral thesis submitted to the Department of the History of Japanese Philosophy at Kyoto University. What distinguishes it from previous research is its emphasis on the differences between the middle and late periods of Nishida's thought. Eschewing the more orthodox view of tracing a single line of development from the early writing, Sugimoto rejects the tendency toward mysticism especially evident in his first writings but highlights Nishida's later discussion of religion. In

contrast earlier thinking criticized by several philosophers as an escape from reality, his late writings are marked by radical observations on the structure of human reality and ground religion in human finitude.

The first of the volume's two parts lays out the author's analysis of the how the concept of "history" took shape in Nishida's later thought. The second part seeks to elucidate the main concepts of Nishida's later work with particular attention to what he has to say about religion.

In an opening chapter, Sugimoto sheds light on the influence of other eminent Kyoto-school philosophers on Nishida, especially Tanabe Hajime and Miki Kiyoshi. In his view, these influences were crucial in the formation of an idea pivotal to Nishida's later period, namely, "the irrationality of history" (歴史の非合理性). The second chapter describes the structuring of Nishida's metaphysics in 1930. By highlighting the development of the notion of "the place of absolute nothingness" (絶対無の場所), the author is able to clear up much of the complexity of Nishida's metaphysics.

The third chapter traces the development of Nishida's concept of history from 1932 (『無の自覚的限定』) to 1935 (『哲学の根本問題 続編』). Sugimoto shows how Nishida's notion of "absolute nothingness" was radically transformed by Tanabe's criticism of the use of contemplation to bridge the gap between the absolute and the individual on the grounds that it is not possible to clarify human existence without taking into account the historicity and irrationality that often drive human action. As Sugimoto explains, in response to Tanabe's critique, Nishida turned his attention to human sociality by introducing the concept of "proto-history" (原歴史).

In highly metaphysical terms, "proto-history" bolstered Nishida's overall discussion of the formation of the present as a primary principle at work in history. For Nishida the present takes precedence over the past and the future. The ongoing process of producing a focal point of experience in the "now" generates both the linear movement of time from past to future and the reflective self. In this connection, Sugimoto centers in on Nishida's remark about proto-history that "history is established by the encounter of I and thou," which he paraphrases as the continued production of a novel present as "encounter." In other words, the production of the present is the moment of encounter for us and at the same time enables the axis of time to emerge. But, as the author notes, proto-history is restricted to two-person relationships, but as Nishida developed the idea further he was able to concretize it as a "historical world" (歴史的世界) in which the mediation of multiple individuals in social relations takes place.

In Part Two, Sugimoto points out a paradox of human existence. When we engage in bodily activity, we relate to external objects and an external world that

is "not-me" and yet surrounds me and constitutes my immediate environment. In other words, the field of action entails both directness and indirectness.

The first chapter opens with a paraphrase of Nishida's concept of "production" as "creating something in the external world," which he explains it through the aforementioned paradox. Nishida viewed production as the general structure of human knowing and acting. For Sugimoto production includes an "I and Thou," face-to-face relationship with the external world. The external world negates the self at its first appearance as a "thing." In the case of the autonomous self, however, this negation of the self as thing grounds the possibility for an objectification that sets up the directionality of time we call the future. At the same time, external nature relates directly to us as part of the wider environment of action. This is what sets up a tension between directness and indirectness in production.

The second chapter takes up the question of "active intuition" in relation to the paradox and the dialectic relationship between human beings and their environment. Nishida includes *seeing* as a part of all human action, not as the passive reception of data. Seeing cannot be distinguished simply as active or passive. Instead, activity and passivity coexist in one and the same action, and this is what Nishida calls "active intuition." Sugimoto relates it to the mutual relationship between directness and indirectness. When faced with an object as an alter ego, the individual seeks to maintain its independence. Through the environment, such an indirect object can directly affects us by evoking "appetite" (欲求). Sugimoto argues that action is condition on this dialectical relationship between individuality and appetition. Moreover, insofar as appetition is bound not only to a particular object but also to the wider environment, the environment readily takes on the appearance of a mechanical prolongation of past events. In other words, as it preserves the past as non-existent, it strives automatically to reproduce it forwards. but this negation secretly maintains the structure for objectification and reversion. To uncover the structures of objectification and conversion, an autonomous response by the individual is required to confirm the distinction of the self from the external world that tries to absorb it.

The third chapter of Part Two discusses "absolute contradictory self-identity." I find Sugimoto's take on Nishida here most stimulating. In his view, the characteristics of Nishida's later period is marked by the search for a philosophy without entities. Any stable entity only exists as the result of a mutual limitation of individual development on the one hand and a world in constant change on the other. All things are in flux. All transformation involves a reciprocal relationship between individual and individual or between an individual and the mediating world. Structurally, we have relationships without entities, a kind of "absolute contradictory

self-identity." In radicalizing Nishida's thinking, Sugimoto's reading opens up new possibilities for further reflection.

The fourth chapter focuses on the differences between the concept of "place" in Nishida's middle and late periods. In so doing, Sugimoto seems to challenge orthodox interpretations of "absolute nothingness." Consistent with his rejection of the mystical, Sugimoto rather seeks to demystify the the notion of that absolute nothingness by presenting it as "appearance as it is." In his words, "it means seeing present phenomena as they are, without presupposition as to the potential status of 'things' (物) behind phenomenal appearances" (page 225). Additionally, since there is no "being" but only "pure qualities" like as "redness" or "shrillness," there is no separation between the neutral act of seeing and the world itself. This, of course, is only one possible interpretation of Nishida. The closing last chapter of his essay on "The Intelligible World" (「叡智的世界」, 1930), as Sugimoto notes, offers a different point of view, according to which the place of "absolute nothingness" manifests itself in the world as a mediator of relations between individuals.

In conclusion, a few words regarding Sugimoto's treatment of religion. The analysis of "production" suggests a way to view religion in terms of observation through paradox. "Active intuition" allows for the possibility of understanding the absolute in terms of seeing things as an expression of the formless ground of nothingness. "Absolute contradictory self-identity" may be seen as expressing the posture of individuals come face-to-face with the absolute. As for "place," the dual nature of "absolute being" as constituting both otherness and the place in which self and other are subsumed provides a framework for treating bewilderment and conversion.

Unfortunately, this was the last book the author published before his untimely death in 2016 at age thirty-nine. In reviewing this book I am reminded of the same seriousness and sincerity I experienced in my brief encounters with him.

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