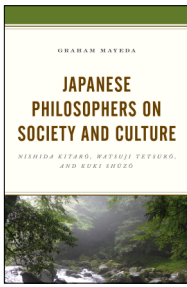Book Symposium

Graham Mayeda, *Japanese Philosophers on Society and Culture: Nishida Kitaro, Watsuji Tetsuro, and Kuki Shuzo*

Ellie Palmer

Self and Other in Nishida Kitarō

Mayeda's *Japanese Philosophers on Society and Culture* opens with a canonical, yet deceptively simple question which provides insight into the underlying theme of the book: "Who am I?" This is swiftly followed by Mayeda's observation that "part of the answer to this question usually involves a second question, 'Who are we?,'" thus demanding an exploration into the ontological nature of "self and other." Mayeda's book sets out to analyze these questions through the sociocultural philosophical lens of three twentieth-century Japanese philosophers: Nishida Kitarō 西田幾多郎, Watsuji Tetsurō 和辻哲郎, and Kuki Shūzō 九鬼周造. In particular, Mayeda focuses on their adoption and criticism of European sociocultural philosophies and methodologies, which they ultimately adapted in accordance with the essential values they assert under their respective, and in places radically different, characterizations of Japanese culture. One major angle through which Mayeda examines this is with respect to cultural essentialism and "Japanese chauvinism," flaws which, referencing the critiques of Maraldo and others, he argues these characterizations of Japanese culture and emphasis on its "uniqueness" are susceptible to.[1] Mayeda's efforts to situate these philosophies amongst their political and historical contexts are greatly appreciated, even essential, to understanding his central claims about the vulnerabilities of these philosophies to claims of promoting "Japanese aggression" and "a problematic form of nationalism."[2] Contextualizing the shift in much of their ideologies in the years leading up to the Second World War helps to elucidate why, despite his focus on these problematic sentiments, Mayeda still considers many elements of their philosophies useful and undeserving of total dismissal. I will not engage in this dialogue throughout the main body of this article however, as the primary emphasis of my study defers from somewhat and instead lies in the secondary undercurrent of *Japanese Philosophers on Society and Culture*, which

1. Maraldo 2017.
2. Mayeda 2020, 117.

concerns the relation between Nishida, Watsuji, and Kuki's understanding of society and culture and their notions of self and other.

As Mayeda makes clear through his definition of social philosophy in his first chapter: "By 'social philosophy,' I mean their views about the nature of the social relation: the relationship between myself and other people," there is a fundamental need to first understand this self/other notion—and not as a distinction, but as a relation—before engaging further in the respective social philosophies of Nishida, Watsuji, and Kuki.[3] As Mayeda states, "In reading Nishida, Kuki, and Watsuji together, one comes to appreciate Nishida's genius" and "the profundity of his philosophy, which aimed at expressing a very simple but therefore radical truth about human existence" through his answer to the questions "Who am I?" and "Who are we?"[4] My paper has therefore adopted a specific concentration on Nishida, and how his views of self and other are central to his social philosophy. Many of the points I will make below have their basis in issues surrounding the clarity of specific terminology which I have found that particularly in the context of Nishida I believe warranted further explication in order to fully elucidate the dialectic of self and other. Specifically, I focus on Nishida's use of *ware* (我) and *jiko* (自己), and how some exploration into their nuanced differences provides a highly relevant, alternative angle to the central themes in Mayeda's book.

In terms of content, the scope of Mayeda's book has been carefully established such that he is able to cover the essential content pertaining to his central and focused socio-cultural theme in reference to three of the most prominent Japanese philosophers. He manages this all within less than three hundred pages, though he does not deny that there is more to be said and his book is by no means an exhaustive account of the vast and complex explorations of society and culture in the philosophies of Nishida, Watsuji, and Kuki. Whilst dedicating less than one hundred pages to summarize and evaluate the theories of each thinker, Mayeda has, overall, achieved a successful and sufficiently broad, yet deep, account of each philosophy through generally choosing to focus upon one key text per thinker, whilst situating this text in its wider context through reference to other works.

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3. Mayeda 2020, 1.
4. Mayeda 2020, 4.

On the other hand, the reason why I focus here on Nishida is due in part to the fact that Nishida's section of the book is the shortest, despite Mayeda referring to Nishida's entire body of work. For this reason, there are parts which may need some further exploration, which I will draw attention to in this paper. Mayeda appears to read Nishida's texts as maintaining a consistent aim, and does not draw on much of a distinction between his early, middle and late philosophy. Whilst Nishida did express that he aimed at the same project throughout his career, it is up for discussion whether or not there is merit to taking his entire philosophical career as a monolith. There is, for example, evidence in favour of the argument that Nishida's view on otherness experienced some substantial evolution that could make Mayeda's approach problematic.[5] Despite this, for the purpose of this review I will follow Mayeda's reading of Nishida's views of self and other as consistent over the course of his writing.

Elucidating nishida's conceptions of self

Whilst Mayeda writes in depth about Nishida's "I" and "Thou" dialectic, in addition to the relationship between self and other developed in his later philosophy of the "historical world," these chapters would have benefitted from further clarification on Nishida's terminology and some of the issues encountered as a result of translating such nuanced notions of "I" and "self" from their original Japanese source. This difference could have

5. See, for example, differences in Nishida's views of the self's relation to the other in Inquiry in contrast to in "I and Thou" (私と汝). He states in *Inquiry*, "In the same way that an individual's consciousness constitutes a single reality in which yesterday's and today's consciousnesses are united, consciousness that spans a lifetime can likewise be regarded as singular. Taking this farther, we see that this is not limited to the scope of just one individual, for a person can likewise link his or her own consciousness with that of another and regard them as a single consciousness. Just as a principle is the same no matter who thinks about it, at the base of our consciousness there is something universal. By means of it we are able to communicate with and understand one another." (Nishida 1990: 62; emphasis added) Note the change in "I and Thou": "In addition to knowing what I think, what I feel [思う; think, feel, believe] in the present, I can also immediately recall know what I thought, what I believed yesterday. The 'I' of yesterday and the 'I' of today are directly connected. In opposition to this, I cannot know what other people think, what other people feel. Myself [私] and others understand one another through so-called expressions [表現] like [spoken] language and [written] letters." (nkz 6: 341; emphasis added)

been more explicitly explored by Mayeda considering its significance to the questions of "Who am I?" and "Who are we?" that he aims to address. In Nishida's philosophy, terms such as *ware* (我) and *jiko* (自己) are used to refer to aspects of individual identity, and though to the best of my knowledge he does not explicitly express any distinction between the two, I want to illustrate the possibility that they carry slightly different meanings and occupy different functions within his philosophical framework. Firstly, *jiko* typically refers to the more introspective experience of individual consciousness, or, as it is sometimes translated, "ego." Both *jiko* and *ware* are also translated as "self," however this subtle distinction in kinds of self could impact our understanding of how we perceive the world according to Nishida's phenomenological framework.

A possible way to consider *ware* is as a part of *jiko*, but not synonymous with it—it is a distinct aspect of the self that engages in outward acts of perception and cognition, or as I refer to it as, "seeing," that is separate from other aspects of the self such as *jiko*. From here on, I shall refer to *jiko* as the "ego-self" and *ware* as the "seeing-self," or "I," for the ego-self (*jiko*) can be associated with the perception of things from a more self-centred viewpoint, whilst the seeing-self (*ware*) is defined by reflexivity, and is a manifestation of the interconnectedness of the self with the world. To summarize this distinction succinctly: "I," *ware*, is the seeing-self who peers out into the world, and the ego-self, *jiko*, peers inward, "enveloped" within *basho*. It is within *basho* that the meeting of self and reality takes place, where the self encounters itself, and the result is the self-experience of "I" which we call ego. This encounter is continuous, thus we can describe the self as a dynamic and constantly fluctuating process of self-awareness, not a fixed identity but a process of becoming, continually shaped and transformed by its interactions with and reflections of the world.

Ware is frequently, though not exclusively, used to refer to self in terms of "I." However, most notably distinct in Nishida's philosophy from the likes of Kant, he holds that awareness in the form of "pure experience" requires no seer, no "I." Pure experience is the direct experience of an object, such as a red flower, which therefore bypasses the associations of "red" and "flower" built into the preexisting conceptual or epistemic framework of the seer, and the sense of "I" as the seer. The red flower is therefore able to be experienced directly and unmediated, "before there is either an object that is known (the

red flower) or a subject that knows (the "I")," thus making it "an activity that preexists the division into subject and object."[6] Pure experience is then understood to be the activity of this immediate, non-conceptual nature which allows the self to encounter phenomena as they are, not as "I" perceive them to be.

One of the instances Mayeda touches on this connection between the various aspects of self and pure experience is in the following passage:

> In *The System of Self-Consciousness of the Universal*, Nishida writes that this kind of self-consciousness is a consciousness in which "a self… sees without a seer." (Nishida 2005, 197; see also 207) What he means by this is that seeing as one's true self, *shinga*, (真我) is seeing without the self-consciousness of the "I" that accompanies the "seeing."[7]

The self-consciousness of the "I" is the ego-self. It is the negation of self in which this seer, the "I" is removed, as well as the ego-self, thus a third "self" is now introduced, "true self" or *shinjiko*, in order to draw a distinction between the seeing- and ego-self, and the self which is able to participate in pure experience which, as illustrated, inherently demands the absence of the seer and of ego. For Nishida, answering the question "Who am I?" requires understanding of the concept of an "absolutely contradictory self-identity" (絶対矛盾的自己同一), a notion which we begin to understand precisely through these distinctions. Self exists in this absolutely contradictory state characterized by the dynamic process of this self-affirmation and self-negation.

The independence of "i"

Though, as mentioned, Nishida does not establish a strict dichotomy between the two terms *ware* and *jiko*, there are several instances which illustrate the importance of highlighting the nuanced distinction in understanding this causal relation in the self-other dialectic. There still exists an "I" that can be distinguished from the other, which sees and interacts with the world, even in the absence of something we might consider the self. Disregarding for a moment the notion of a "true self," and Dōgen's "no self"

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6. Mayeda 2020, 205–6.
7. Mayeda 2020, 209.

which influences Nishida's work, and which he does distinguish from other references to "self," I argue this distinction between "I" and "self" can be seen even in regards to *jiko* and our arguably false perception of the true essence of self. In the moments where we are not "self-aware," or in instances where one's sense of self may be damaged or absent due to the presence of certain mental illnesses such as schizophrenia, this does not negate the presence of the "I." This is possible because it is the realization of *ware* that is the foundation of *jiko*, thus the realization of the individual is what results in its inherent interconnectedness with the other. We can then understand the self as *jiko* as a broader concept that encompasses a more expansive understanding of identity: one which is relational, contextual, and dynamic, yet grounded in this self-realization of the individual experience. True self-awareness transcends the egoistic consciousness, *jiko*, and reaches a deeper realization of the self, *ware*, as interconnected with the world. This deeper self-awareness is not merely an individualistic consciousness but an awareness of one's place within the larger context of existence. Simultaneously, in this self-awareness, *jiko* acknowledges the perspective of the individual as well as that "our self [*jiko*] does not have its origin in the individual... rather, its origin is communal consciousness (共同意識)," hence, "The individual is born from society."[8] Thus, again in an attempt to distinguish the seeing-self from the ego-self, we should consider it to extend beyond the individual to encompass a broader understanding of identity that is necessarily relational and contextual. Though my consciousness is mine alone, there is much more to who "I" am than my individual mental faculties. The self is thus not a self-contained entity, rather it is interconnected with the world around it; self emerges through the dialectical and dynamic interplay between the individual, "I," and the totality of existence, including other individuals, society, objects, and the natural world.

The self-other dialectic

One commonality in the notions of self and other in Nishida, Watsuji, and Kuki is the idea of self and other existing in a dialectic relationship to one another. This dialectic exists not only in the absolute contra-

8. NKZ 6: 348.

diction of self-identity mentioned above, but also in the assertions of both individuality and the recognition of the interconnectedness and interdependence of all things. Mayeda quotes Maraldo to highlight the sense in which Nishida views selves as individuals, writing: "As Maraldo explains, 'Awareness is not a property belonging to an individual self, not a property belonging to a greater whole,'"[9] however, as Nishida states, "the consciousness of "I" and the consciousness of the other are absolutely separate,"[10] for even though I might, in some sense, "know" the thoughts or feelings of others, I can never experience this; their consciousness can never become my own consciousness. It is only in this sense that "I" is individuated and distinct from "other," in that it is a token experience of the world that is a consciousness belonging only to me, and influenced by my self; "we are the individual self-expressions of the world."[11]

Mayeda later develops this through noting another important distinction when he states, "Nishida's exploration of who "I" am is meant to disrupt everyday notions of who I think I am," namely in attempting to refute the "belief that there is an 'I' that is ultimately separate from society" through the misattribution of these "private" internal cognitions as the fundamental basis of the true self.[12] Instead, precisely in its separateness is the self interconnected with the other: an absolute contradiction. A person expresses individuality through the negation of their group, be it extrication of the individual "self" from their social circle, the attempt to situate one's personal identity in something beyond one's societal role as, for example, a parent or worker, or a rebellion against their culture in general. Affirmation of one's individuality ostensibly demands this emphasis of the separation or division of self from other. However, as Nishida tries to demonstrate, instead there exists a dialectic of self and other in which the individual self forms the basis of our relations with others, and they exist in a dynamic and intertwining relationship. In order to individuate myself from others, to distinguish something that I can call "I," there must exist something that is "not-I," that is "other." Thus, in this division exists the unity and mutuality

9. NKZ 6: 206; MARALDO 2017, 335.

10. NKZ 6: 393

11. NISHIDA 1998: 54–72

12. MAYEDA 2020, 209, 197

of self and other, for the existence of one is necessary for identifying the existence of the other: the self is defined by and constituted by the other.

Ultimately, true self should thus be viewed in terms of absolute nothingness: as a reflection of a world that too is an absolute contradiction, and absolute nothingness. This stems from one of Nishida's fundamental claims about the self which involves the premise that "The self knows by determining and reflecting its content within itself."[13] Thus, to know one's own self—true self within the self—, it must be empty of reflections, and in order to empty the self of its own reflection, it must make itself nothing. We must forget the everyday sense of self in order to make space for the emergence of the realization of true self. Understanding that the self is utter nothingness with respect to things, that I am merely reflecting them, then necessarily requires the negation of self: what I know as the self must have been determined by myself, and must

> be immanent in me; I must be the topos [*basho*] in which these things are situated. In this sense then I am utter nothingness with respect to things and merely reflect them.... The self knows by determining and reflecting its content within itself. One can say that by making itself nothing it determines being. This is the sense in which self-consciousness can be said to be the self seeing its own content in itself.[14]

Therefore, as Mayeda writes, "Who I truly am is a space or place (*basho*) in which the world experiences itself."[15] Thus, to return to the book's most fundamental questions, Mayeda might have said that "Who am I?" can be answered in this Nishidean way as simply *basho*; I am an expression or mirroring of the world, where it experiences itself.

On the other hand, I am not convinced how helpful it is to speak of "I" and *basho* in this way, as without a sufficient preunderstanding of *basho*— and Mayeda's concise writing style and contextualization is attractive to those seeking an introduction to Japanese philosophy—may unintentionally imply that we can equate the two. Mayeda does mention in the footnotes that there are multiple opposing interpretations of *basho*'s precise ontological nature, such as existing as a conceptual framework or "tool"

13. Nishida 2005, 194; nkz 5:431
14. Nishida 2005, 194; nkz 5:431
15. Mayeda 2020, 209.

to make possible Nishida's social, phenomenological, epistemic and metaphysical theories. Mayeda also includes a quotation from Krummel that sees *basho* as "a place transcending and enveloping the self, as that wherein the self knows its own self-mirroring."[16] Whilst Mayeda establishes in the earlier quotation that Nishida views who I truly am as *basho*, he has chosen not to emphasise that the reverse is not true: *basho* is not "I." In this discussion of one of the most fundamental dialectics, I feel it is important to stress that the relationship between "I" and *basho*, though demonstrably interconnected, is not mutual or what we might call equal in this sense. As Krummel describes, whilst "enveloping" it, *basho* transcends the self; it is beyond all being, it must be thought of as something more, whilst simultaneously is a place of absolute nothingness.[17]

Individuation and unity

In Chapter 8 on Nishida, Mayeda states that his "primary purpose in this chapter is to understand who the others are."[18] He explores this through both Nishida's early work on the concepts of "I" and "you," as well as his later exploration of otherness as in terms of the "historical body" where the others are "loci of the productive activity of the social and cultural world."[19] Our earlier discussion begins to elucidate much of who the others are, but another important concept Mayeda references is the "call and answer" of self-identities in which the mutual relationship between the self and others is fundamental and constitutive of who we each are.[20] We can delve into the particulars of this further. Mayeda states that according to Nishida, "we are each a 'space' (*basho*) where the world can express itself dynamically," as "each individual is fundamentally an expression of the dynamic activity of the world as a whole."[21] As discussed, according to Nishida we are distinct entities in that we are quantitatively different representations or reflections of the world, but selves are not fixed stagnant

16. Krummel 2015
17. Krummel 2015
18. Mayeda 2020, 211
19. Mayeda 2020, 217
20. Mayeda 2020, 213–8
21. Mayeda 2020, 20.

identities, neither are we "separate" from one another in the sense that we often perceive ourselves to be; each "I" is simultaneously a constituent and manifestation of a larger whole, the same whole, each contributing to and being constantly influenced by the collective fabric of existence. Nishida's *basho* thus further underscores the idea that selves are individuals but are never separate; they are situated within a larger context of relationality, where the boundaries between self and other are fluid and permeable. This is evidenced by statements from Nishida such as "Just as we can say that the objective world is a reflection of the self, the self is a reflection of the objective world."[22] This relation is not unique to my own self, but of all selves. The world determines who I am, thus who I am determines the world. The world constitutes who you are, and who you are determines the world. Both you and I are manifestations of this world, and so I am in turn a manifestation of you, and vice versa. Nishida presents a dialectical conception of the social too, in which "the social forms the individual, but likewise, individuals form the social."[23] This is what Mayeda refers to as "call and answer," translated from *ōtō* 応答 (answer); this is an extremely interesting notion Mayeda calls attention to, and not one that I have seen others put a name to in Nishida's work so I would encourage further exploration into this as a central notion in Nishida's phenomenology of self.

"Call and answer" functions as a paradigm that both affirms individuality and rejects it: "the others whom I encounter in the world are other "I's" separate from me (Nishida 2003b, 414–415), although they are also I's with whom I can interact and whose answers I can experience myself," demonstrating that the individuation of self does not entail a complete separation of self and other.[24] Further, we encounter this "call and answer" in our experience of the other, which is what solidifies our understanding of the other as a part of the self, "because when I hear the answer of another, I am conscious of them—I experience their response. Thus in some sense, the other is within me (NKZ 6:394). The relationship of "I" to "you" is thus dialectic: when "I" experience "you," I experience within me the possibility of some-

22. NKZ 1: 156
23. NKZ 1: 198
24. NKZ 1: 213

thing completely different than me."[25] A true understanding of self is in this realization of its absolute contradiction of individuation and togetherness.

"We" and collective selves

The question "Who are we?," too, requires further clarification in the context of Nishida's terminology. In my attempts to elucidate the nuanced differences between "I" and "self," I described *ware* as typically referencing the "seer" through which the world is made manifest. "We" might be translated as *wareware* (我々) which in one interpretation can refer to a community of individuals, the plural of *ware* or multiple "I"s rather than a collective entity. It could be possible to read Nishida in such away that overemphasizes the uniqueness and individuality of the self, suggesting that while interconnectedness exists, there is a definitive line drawn between self and others in which individuals maintain their distinctiveness within the relational context, referring to *wareware* as corroboration of this denial of any real unity between individual selves in society. However, more accurately I think the use of *wareware* as "we" functions as a justification of the dialectical relation between self and other that Nishida describes, and the view that "we" are not isolated individuals but interconnected beings whose identities are collectively shaped by our relationships with others and with the world around us. Individuals are always situated within this relational context, in a community of other individuals, and necessarily so due to the role of the other in the existence of the self, and that is represented by the constitutive role of *ware* in *wareware*. The way in which we interpret *ware* therefore ultimately has implications for how we understand who "we" are. These linguistic significances are also noted by Raud, who too follows this interpretation of *wareware*. He writes, "One should also note the use of first-person pronouns in Nishida's text. To designate himself as the person whose thoughts he relates, he uses *watakushi* or *watashi*, but to refer to a community of individuals, to which he himself also belongs together with the reader, he uses *wareware*. *Watakushi* has the connotation of a separate "subject," as in *shiritsu*, "private," which is written with the same character, whereas *ware* has the additional meaning of "self" and can be used of per-

sons other than the first in idiomatic expressions such as *ware wo wasureru*, "to forget oneself."[26] This explanation substantiates the idea that Nishida's use of terminology must be carefully examined, for these terms to describe the self are not used incidentally, but carefully selected with all their nuances and associations to portray specific elements of selfhood that are not easily translated into English, and the significance of their subtle differences must not be overlooked in our analysis of his philosophy.

Conclusion

To lead into some concluding remarks, I would first like to acknowledge that Mayeda's book provides an excellent insight into the complexities of Nishida's self and other dialectic. My comments throughout this review are generally a reflection of this notoriously complex notion rather than a critique of Mayeda's own philosophy, however, as my paper has attempted to elucidate, some further attempt could have been made to alleviate at least some of these complexities through discussion of the semantic nuances in Nishida's terminology. I feel Mayeda's project would have been a good place to explore this. Whilst this does not seem to be an obvious priority in Mayeda's work and some may argue that it is perhaps beyond the scope of what this book aimed at, I feel that when addressing texts that have been translated to English from their original source the significance of the original associations of a philosopher's chosen terminology is not something that should be brushed over. This is particularly apparent in the case of Nishida and the foundational role of his unique understanding of self to his philosophy, as Mayeda illustrates throughout; to first understand his social philosophy, we must first understand who I am, and who we are. Given the importance Mayeda places on this understanding of self to the rest of the themes of his book, I feel the text would have benefitted significantly from some investigation into the subtle distinctions between words used to describe the self. If, on the other hand, Mayeda disagrees with the claim that there exists this subtle distinction, I still hold that his work would benefit from some acknowledgement of the decision to consider Nishida's original

26. Raud 2004: 29–51

terms, *ware* and *jiko*, as the same concept, translated into a single unified notion of self.

Aside from semantic contentions, I would like to have seen Mayeda's contribution to the discourse on Japanese socio-cultural philosophy attempt some exploration into Nishida's notion of persons as opposed to focusing only on selves, which, as Kopf puts nicely, "are neither exclusively individual nor do they dissolve into a group identity or the universality of humanity, but rather exist in the tension of the independent self and the social self."[27] The roles of these different factions of self in personhood would have complimented Mayeda's investigation into society and culture. Mayeda engages in some discussion about the role of "the social" in determining the individual in Chapter 8, but here some dialogue with Kopf's investigation of Nishida on persons would be particularly complimentary.

Furthermore, towards the end of my paper, I have briefly drawn attention to some of the other potential consequences of not first fully establishing the understanding of *ware*, by mentioning its role in the term "we." This was in an attempt to illustrate the domino effect on Nishida's account of society and culture that falls as a result of certain ambiguities surrounding his notion of self and the greater role it plays in his philosophical framework. Alongside Mayeda's opening statement, that part of the answer to the question "Who am I?" involves a second question, "Who are we?," and the discussion of the other as an integral part of the "I," mention of this semantic relation between *ware* and *wareware* where the self is constitutive of the collective identity of a society would further establish the idea of the dialectic relation and absolutely contradictory identity of self and other that is so fundamental not only to Nishida's philosophy but runs as a common thread throughout the writing of Nishida, Kuki, and Watsuji.

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