

Crossing Paths with Maraldo's Nishida

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John Maraldo's Crossing Paths with Nishida assembles the life's work of one of the leading voices in Nishida scholarship. Spanning over three decades, this brilliant collection of essays charts the path not just of Nishida's philosophy, but also the path of deep inquiry of one of his most incisive commentators. In thirteen insightful essays, each reprinted with a new introduction by the author, Maraldo delves into the most critical issues in Nishida scholarship while rendering his philosophy germane to a host of contemporary issues, such as environmentalism, nationalism, cognitive science, and phenomenology. A variety of systematic topics are explored, ranging from Nishida's notions of "absolute nothingness" (zettai mu) and "enactive intuition" (kōiteki chokkan) to questions of religion, politics, and Nishida's relation to Heidegger. This volume is essential reading for the specialist and for any reader with an interest in the most important thinker of the Kyoto School of Japanese philosophy.

Key words: Maraldo; Nishida; Kyoto School; east-west comparative philosophy; intercultural philosophy; Heidegger and the east

John Maraldo's *Crossing Paths with Nishida*, the first volume in the *Japanese Philosophy in the Making* series, assembles the life's work of one of the leading voices in Nishida scholarship. Spanning over three decades, this brilliant collection of essays charts the path not just of Nishida's philosophy, but also the path of deep inquiry of one of his most incisive commentators. In thirteen insightful essays, each reprinted here with a new introduction by the author, Maraldo delves into the most critical issues in Nishida scholarship while rendering his philosophy germane to a host of contemporary issues, such as environmentalism, nationalism, cognitive science, and phenomenology. An ambassador of the Kyoto School for the English-speaking world, Maraldo is at once insightful and critical. He explores a variety of topics, ranging from Nishida's notions of "absolute nothingness" (*zettai mu*) and "enactive intuition" (*kōiteki chokkan*) to questions of religion, politics, and Nishida's relation to Heidegger. Methodical, comprehensive, remarkably rich in detail and scope, this volume is essential reading for the specialist or for any reader with an interest in the most important thinker of the Kyoto School of Japanese philosophy.

The volume is divided into two sections, the first of which, *Pathways to Nishida*, comprises three essays meditating on Nishida's relation to western philosophy. Beginning with "Japanese Philosophy as a Lens on Greco-European Thought" (21-56), Maraldo displaces Greek philosophy as the standard against which we ask, "Is there philosophy in Japan?" Instead, he tests how the European tradition might appear if Japanese philosophy were that standard. This intercultural inversion unearths various inconsistencies in western philosophy's self-conception, a corrective which Maraldo bases upon Pierre Hadot's re-evaluation of Greek philosophy. Maraldo proposes a delineation broad enough to encompass eastern and western philosophy, embracing the Greek tradition and the thought of Kūkai, Dōgen, Hōnen, and Shinran by following Hadot in construing

philosophy as a way of life and practice of death. This intercultural experiment is, however, not without remainder: a disparity persists because of a lack of recognition in western philosophy for the self-defeating nature of the will. A further highlight of this piece is a detailed outline of the history of exclusion of non-western thought from western definitions of philosophy.

The essay “How Meiji-Era Japan Appropriated Philosophy from Europe” (57-100) considers in more detail several of the major precursors to Nishida’s philosophy. Maraldo explores how the Japanese language was transformed by numerous encounters with the philosophical world beyond its shores. The focus is on those early intellectuals who struggled with their native tongue as well as their Confucian and Buddhist inheritance as they assimilated the Chinese writing system, Dutch learning, and western science, forging an idiom that would later pave the way for Japanese philosophy. Maraldo considers the Meiji Six society (a group of Japanese intellectuals who promoted western ethics and civilization), including Nishimura Shigeki, Nishi Amane, Fukuzawa Yukichi, Katō Hiroyuki, as well as Inoue Tetsujirō and Inoue Enryō. Of particular interest is the debate Maraldo details between Tetsujirō and Enryō regarding the former’s severe stance towards Christianity and the latter’s more charitable view of religion, which motivated his attempts to systematize various strands of Buddhism by casting them according to their philosophical elements.

In “Framing the Place and Significance of Nishida’s Philosophy in Europe and North America” (101-23), Maraldo charts what he takes to be the five major interpretive contexts for reading Nishida outside of Japan, with the critical proviso that the ultimate frame is the one that avoids the dangers of all five. We are disabused of the too-easy propensity to label Nishida as Japan’s “first philosopher,” lest we exclude all of his predecessors as simply footnotes to his impulse: a move, Maraldo points out, that would be in direct contravention of Nishida’s own principle of “continuity of discontinuity” (*hirenzoku no renzoku*). Likewise, the title “founder of the Kyoto School,” risks a similar exclusion. Maraldo further cautions that taking Nishida as a “philosopher of the east” or a “philosopher of Zen” is problematic, since these titles ignore his substantial and persistent engagement with western philosophy. Furthermore, both estimations rely on an autobiographical determination that Nishida explicitly countered in his efforts to develop a philosophy irreducible to individual consciousness. Most poignantly, for those who (mis-)read Nishida as a nationalist ideologue by virtue of his ostensible complicity with Japanese state propaganda during the Pacific War, Maraldo proposes a “hermeneutics for reading texts composed under threat of punishment for non-compliance with state ideologies” (119).

In the ten essays of the second section, *Pathways through Nishida* (not considered here in the order they appear in the volume), Maraldo engages with a broad range of historical and systematic issues. Nishida’s relation to Heidegger is explored in three essays. Maraldo also ponders how his thinking can expand and challenge contemporary western thought in the arenas of environmentalism, phenomenology, cognitive science, and politics. Three essays approach the question of religion, beginning with “How Nishida Individualized Religion” (125-58), in which the author grapples with the difficult question of what religion could mean for a philosopher who claimed that it is “as universal as it is individual” (149). Beginning with a gloss of Nishida’s own religious background, Maraldo sets out Nishida’s challenge of thinking of religion neither exclusively according to its historical or social manifestations (according to a “logic of object”), nor as revealed to the individual (“logic of subject”). We are guided through Nishida’s attempts to meet this challenge by way of his concepts of “self-identity of contradiction” (*mujun no jikodōitsu*), his “predicate logic” (*justugoteki ronri*), and ultimately with his “logic of place” (*basho no ronri*), which seeks to explain a field of encounter where religious experience obtains as a multi-stable relation between the individual and universal. Religion is, thus, not a feature of a subject, but the negation of the

subject, and the knowledge of one's own death, not in the sense of an event at the end of life but in the very present moment. While this rings of existential phenomenological approaches to death, Maraldo is careful to tease out the subtle differences between Nishida's and Heidegger's positions. Those distinctions are further refined in the later essay, "Heidegger and Nishida: Nothingness, God, and Onto-Theology" (351-86), in which he reflects upon the two philosophers' notions of God and nothingness. Nishida's concept of God, Maraldo claims, is not onto-theological and is therefore amenable to dialogue with Heidegger. The identity of God is only possible as self-contradiction in a space where God and self are related through self-negation. As God, God is not-God, and only thereupon can he be, or *be open* for encounter. Nishida invents new concepts, such as "inverse response" (*gyaku-taiō*), in an attempt to describe the relation between God and individual. Maraldo likens Nishida's grammatical inventions to Heidegger, who uses verbs (*die Welt weltet*) and grammatical infinitives such as *welten* ("to world") in the place of nominatives ("the world"). The key difference, Maraldo incisively points out, is that Nishida follows verbals ("doing") with self-reflexive negations ("non-doing"): thus, "the world worlds in that it does not world itself" (369). Heidegger's God does not involve self-negation: "God has disappeared in Heidegger's meditation on Nothing" (378). The German philosopher thinks of Nothing only as the other side of Being, and not as the ground where the two inter-determine through self-negation. Thus, even Heidegger's "last gods," Maraldo claims, are there "only to remind us of Be-ing and leave out the possibility of a God not bound to Be-ing" (385).

The themes of religion and negation resurface in the essay "Nothing Gives: Marion and Nishida on Gift-giving and God" (387-412), where Nishida is included alongside Derrida and Marion in a debate concerning the concept of the gift. All three attempt to construe the "givenness" of God in such a way that avoids Heidegger's critique of onto-theology. Maraldo invokes the Buddhist concept *Dāna*, a gift that is simultaneously a giving and receiving, where there is a mutual co-arising of donor and recipient. Marion also attempts to go beyond the ontology of "radically independent beings," while Derrida remains tied to an account of God as gift not grounded in Being (to evade onto-theology) and an account of gift as a paradigm of "givenness" (to recuperate phenomenology). Maraldo explains that the French philosopher's god as love (*agape*), as neither being nor not-being, is at once the giver, the giving, and the given. What is needed, Maraldo posits, is Nishida's idea of "inverse response" (*gyaku-taiō*) through self-negation (*jiko hitei*). For Marion, God has no need for those for whom he negates, whereas for Nishida—just as donor and recipient co-arise in the act of giving—*God* is given the gift of being by individuals through inverse response. Contrary to Marion, for Nishida there can be no giver, given, or giving without mutual self-negation. As Maraldo claims, "nothing gives: nothingness allows the total self-negation that defines the kind of love we call God" (411). His finishes with the decisive point, counter Marion, that in Nishida's conception, "nothing [also] receives."

Four essays of the volume glean important insights from Nishida's work regarding contemporary issues in environmentalism, phenomenology, cognitive science, and politics. In "The Many Senses of the One World: Nishida's and Heidegger's Thought in the 1930's and the Environmental Crisis of Today" (413-35), a new way is highlighted in Nishida's thought for understanding our current environmental predicament and our attempts to deal with these according to the "naturalist" conception of world epitomized by Peter Singer. Both Nishida and Heidegger counter naturalism by bringing into relief the world's negative valence and its attendant creative potential. For Nishida, the creative relation is between the "historical body" (*rekishiteki shintai*) and "historical world" (*rekishiteki seka*), where "what is ascribed to the body is co-ascribed to the world [...]. World is historical, expressive, enactive-intuitive, and creative, just as is the bodily self" (426).

Heidegger likewise sees a co-creative tension between what is posited, “world,” and its concealing negative aspect, “earth.” He comes to grasp the meaning-bestowing locus beyond Dasein in the “worlding of the world.” Maraldo closes this provocative work by re-appraising our environmental crisis as a symptom of naturalism, asking whether it might be our inability to see nature’s negative and creative aspect that endangers us most.

In “Enaction in Cognitive Science and Nishida’s Turn of Intuition into Action” (199-226), Maraldo places Nishida in dialogue with contemporary cognitive science and re-translates his concept *kōiteki chokkan* as “enactive intuition” to facilitate that encounter. He begins by laying out the etymology of the concept and carefully distinguishing it from traditional ideas of action and intuition in Fichte, Kant, Bergson, Plotinus, and Husserl. Nishida’s concept suggests a reciprocal determination between a body and world as “making-made.” Maraldo considers both artistic and scientific practices as instances of this reciprocal form of determination, siding with the former as exemplary, because “art making and world-making occur not so much in a causative, temporal process as in a dynamic and dialectical space” (209). Maraldo connects with recent trends in cognitive science and invokes neuro-biologist Francisco Varela’s theory of “enaction,” which construes cognition as a body-world determinative loop. He considers how Varela’s approach might expand Nishida’s notion of intuition and how it could solve the problem regarding propositional knowledge and judgment, as well as the questions of interaction and “absorption” in Nishida’s philosophy. Maraldo points out how Varela contradicts his own Buddhist commitments by speaking of cognition within a third-person, empirical sense of self, rather than the “performative” non-self of Nishida.

In an indispensable essay for any reader seeking to know more about Nishida’s relation to phenomenology, “What Phenomenologists can Learn from Nishida about Self-Awareness” (299-350), Maraldo scrutinizes the Japanese philosopher’s concepts of “self-awareness” (*jikaku*) and “reflection” (*hansei*) to assess their proximity to phenomenological tenets. He summarizes Nishida’s mistaken evaluations of Husserl regarding his lack of attention to pre-reflective experience and seeks to minimize the distance between the two by arguing that Nishida rarely uses Buddhist terminology of the “non-self” and in many cases (“true self,” “historical self,” the self as “that which acts,” “true subjectivity”), ascribes a reality to the self, particularly with his notion of a self that “reflects itself within itself.” Importantly, Maraldo points out that the concept of reflection has ambiguities that must be sorted out to appraise Nishida’s relation to phenomenology. For any dialogue to proceed, we must address the crucial issue that phenomenology also faces, which is the question of how reflective awareness of the self arises out of the pre-reflective. Considering Nishida’s notion of “reflexivity,” Maraldo proposes a cunning way around the impasse where the debate is stuck: framing self-awareness as arising either exclusively out of reflection or pre-reflection. The self-mirroring of Nishida’s “place” (*basho*) encompasses both, thus allowing for reflection to develop from out of the pre-reflective without a substantial agent. Far from a move to the interior of the self, reflecting the self within itself is an event between a mutually determinative self and world. As such, Nishida’s paradigm of “unification” or “becoming the thing” neither erases nor reifies the self, but proposes an awareness where one is reflected in the world and things, and they are in turn reflected in the self.

In his “The Problem of World Culture: Appropriating Nishida’s Philosophy of Nation and Culture” (159-78), Maraldo takes a novel and careful approach to a long-standing question plaguing Nishida scholarship, that is, his association with wartime nationalism. Rather than over- or de-politicizing Nishida, Maraldo seeks to recast several aspects of his philosophy of culture by re-translating concepts to show their relevance for contemporary social-political issues. He elaborates

three features that lead to the politicization of Nishida's philosophy: 1) his response to the critiques of Tanabe and Tosaka, 2) his use of nationalist terminology when co-opted by the government's propaganda efforts, and 3) the re-reading of his writings prompted by his association with Heidegger. Crucially, Maraldo does not hesitate to point out where Nishida's "reverse orientalism" is blameworthy. Nevertheless, he proposes that the Japanese philosopher's framework for intercultural encounter can be redeemed insofar as he construes it as obtaining according to the same mutual-negotiation structure as the I-thou relation. Furthermore, Maraldo proposes that Nishida's idea of Japan as the cultural center of Asia can also be re-thought by reading it according to its features that resonate with the political philosophy of Charles Taylor, who understands the nation's primary goal as protecting non-dominant cultures, while maintaining the dominant.

The remaining three essays, those which are of the most systematic concern, are essential reading for the specialist, but are still so masterfully composed that anyone new to Nishida's writings will profit greatly from these works. In "Self, World, and the Nothingness Underlying Distinctions" (179-98), Maraldo proposes Nishida's theory of "absolute nothingness" as an alternative approach to the internalist/externalist debate regarding how philosophic distinctions are drawn. This concept reconciles a commitment held in common by both competing positions, which is that distinction arises in a mind defined over-against a world. For Nishida, the self-reflexive mind is not merely one side of a self-world relation, but embraces the act's object, the distinguishing judgment, and the mind itself. Maraldo implores us to approach the question from a more fundamental level of Nishida's philosophy, the ground of "absolute nothingness," which is prior to and enables all encounter and distinction. Nishida agrees with both the internalist and externalist that the "world" is the "broadest existing context for differentiations," yet he takes a step neither of them will: he posits the ground for distinction as the historical world. Maraldo distinguishes this position from panpsychism and also reads it counter to Sokolowsky, who fathoms the self as solicited to distinction making. He is careful to delineate the way in which Sokolowsky remains tied to the idea that obscurity must be overcome by clarifying distinctions, whereas with Nishida (as well as in Zen and Zhuangzi), this obscurity is irreducible, and philosophy should "clarify [this] obscurity without eliminating it" (197).

In his "Nishida's Ontology of History" (227-72), Maraldo considers the responsibility of academics in the face of war, with a particular emphasis on Nishida's alleged complicity in Japanese nationalism. He traces the genesis of Nishida's notions of history and action as the Kyoto School thinker responds to his students Tosaka Jun and Tanabe Hajime, who criticized his having grounded philosophy in consciousness ("pure experience," *junsui keiken*) and trans-historic time ("eternal now," *eien no ima no jikogentei*). Maraldo outlines Nishida's evolution from his ontology of history based on the "eternal now" (*eien no ima*) towards his concept of the "absolute present" (*zettai genzai*) and explains how he pushes beyond the I-thou relation to the ground of encounter as a third-person position encompassing self and other/world. The result is a self whose realization is one aspect of the self-determination of a historical world not governed by a trans-historic principle, but, decisively, insofar as it is expressive. Maraldo places these ideas of Nishida's in a broader context by distinguishing them from similar inclinations in Hegel, Ranke, and Marx. Without letting Nishida off the hook for speaking of the "absolute present" and the emperor in the same breath, Maraldo questions whether for him the "emperor" and "nation" might not be read as general designations referring to the absolute present as a moment of the self-determination of all nations. The essay ends by considering the possible mutual mis-readings between Tosaka and Nishida, and the ways in which the notion of "absolute present" was taken up by his followers, namely Hisamatsu Shin'ichi, Abe Masao, and Nishitani.

In one of the most thrilling and illuminative works of the volume, “Self-Mirroring and Self-Awareness: Dedekind, Royce and Nishida” (273-98), Maraldo reflects on Nishida’s concept of self-awareness and the associated notion of self-reflection. To counter charges that his early work was a philosophy of the subject, Nishida develops a logical grounding for self-awareness with the idea of a “self-representative system,” but needs a concept of infinity leading him to the German mathematician Richard Dedekind. Here, Nishida finds a concept that can explain reflective thought as an infinite system where the whole is mirrored in every part. A problem arises, however, with Royce’s appeal to a map that includes a depiction of itself as a model of such reflection. For the map to be complete, Maraldo relays, it must include a representation of the place from which the mapmaker draws the map, but the “problem of exclusion” arises, since depicting that area creates another position that must be mapped *ad infinitum*. As our commentator points out, “this problem of exclusion reappears whatever the metaphor—be that of mapping or that of mirroring—and whatever the nature of the self that thinks” (286). Nishida shifts to Fichte, yet is plagued by circularity, prompting him to develop his idea of “contradictory self-identity.” Maraldo closes by considering challenges to Nishida’s theory of self-awareness from Radermacher and Tugendhat.

Taken together, these thirteen works evoke from Nishida’s philosophy a powerful argument for the necessity of intercultural thinking and stand as proof that such work can be carried out in a rigorous, insightful, and imaginative fashion. When the earliest of these essays were published, few would have seen the necessity for philosophy to expand through comparative and intercultural inquiry. By way of the efforts represented in this collection, for the first time we discern the prospect that it could soon become legitimately questionable to confine one’s research to a single culture or tradition. Yet, while it might appear that Nishida’s project of east-west synthesis could be on the horizon, if recent trends tell us anything, it is that progress towards sound global thinking is by no means secure. For philosophy to keep pace with multiculturalism, globalization, and cosmopolitanism, what is needed is a model for intercultural exploration of the highest caliber. In this sense, Maraldo’s life’s work is exemplary, and together with Nishida’s original impulse, this volume brings us a step closer to his vision of a world philosophy.

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