

Nishida's *Auseinandersetzung* with Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*: Infinity, Bottomless Time, the Historical World, and Ethical life

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Abstract:

Along with *The Position of the Individual in the Historical World* 「歴史的世界に於ける個物の立場」(1938), *Absolute Contradictory Self-Identity* 「絶対矛盾的自己同一」(1939) is arguably one of Nishida's most important texts in which we find the essential framework of his mature philosophy presented in a concise manner. Throughout this text, Nishida repeatedly refers to Hegel in defining his own position and many of the references to Hegel focus on his *Philosophy of Right*. This paper provides a reading of *Absolute Contradictory Self-Identity* from the perspective of Nishida's *Auseinandersetzung* with Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*. In the Western tradition, time and thus history is understood in terms of eternity which stands outside of time. For Plato, for example, the cosmos is the "moving image of eternity." God too is understood to be the infinite and eternal standing outside of world-time. For Hegel, world history is also understood in terms of the infinite. However, the infinite for Hegel is necessarily contradictory in that it cannot exclude the finite and therefore history. Hegel's conception of the infinite ultimately leads, however, to the end of history and the sublation of the finite individual (singular). History is thus the history of the true infinite and not an infinite history. For Hegel, such an endless infinite world history would amount to a bad infinity. However, the infinite or absolute nothingness for Nishida does not form an infinite "substance" as in the case of Hegel's Absolute; the finite is infinite finitude situated on a truly bottomless time, to speak with Nishitani. Thus, while history is still the history of the infinite it is an infinite history without end. Nishida's *Auseinandersetzung* with Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* draws out the consequences of this alternative view of the infinite and of the historical world for our understanding of the individual and ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*): that is, the family, society, and the state which are very much present throughout *Absolute Contradictory Self-Identity*. The paper focuses on Nishida's *Auseinandersetzung* with Hegel in this 1939 text. Section one situates the text in Nishida's work.

Section two contrasts Nishida's account of the historical world and that of Hegel in terms of their respective accounts of the transhistorical ground of history. Section three brings out the consequences of these different positions in their respective accounts of ethical life and existence of the free will in the world. The paper concludes by considering the importance of Nishida's *Auseinandersetzung* with Hegel for our understanding of Nishida's political views during the war period.