

Cultural Experience as Concrete Self-Awakening

Gerald CIPRIANI

The aim of this essay is to reflect on what I see as a fundamental aspect of cultural experience, which, in the era of 'technocratisation' in the service of global economic fluxes, is fading at an alarming pace. I shall call this fundamental, *concrete self-awakening*.

We are nowadays increasingly experiencing what might be called a casual formalism of the *here and now* whereby meaning becomes *un-earthed*, making issues such as authorship and historical context look like irrelevant. This might even constitute, in the West, the *postmodern condition*. Perceptual experiences seem to be more and more akin to those of the such-ness of things, which have traditionally always been associated with Oriental culture and Zen Buddhism in particular. At first glance the similarities are striking. However, what in Western postmodernity can be interpreted as the overcoming of the metaphysics of being and origin has, at an ethical level, a radically different significance in the Eastern world. The source of this matter of fact comes from the different cultural traditions within which this ethos of *disinterestedness* springs.

This latter and key notion needs to be clarified. In the context of this essay postmodern disinterestedness is a perceptual attitude that correlates with the subversion of traditional Western metaphysics, in the sense that it corresponds to the subject's disbelief in his or her ability to determine meaning in a grounded way. Disinterestedness, in this particular sense, is therefore essentially nihilistic and should not be understood in the way Immanuel Kant defines it in his *Kritik der Urteilskraft*¹ - the Kantian conception being akin in some regard to the idea of aesthetic perception that Nishida Kitarô described as a form of 'emptied self' in the Zen Buddhist sense of the term, initially in *美の説明* and then in a more elaborate way in his *芸術と道徳*².

Postmodern disinterestedness, as far as cultural experiences are concerned, has therefore more to do with what French philosopher Gabriel Marcel called 'unavailability' or 'un-handiness' (*indisponibilité*), which, far from being a form of kenotic experience, is on the contrary 'un-ethical'.

¹ See the way Kant defines the 'disinterested' nature of 'aesthetic judgement' (First Moment, Second Paragraph) in *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, (1790). The present edition is dated 1986, Ditzingen: Reclam, 'Erster Teil. Kritik der ästhetischen Urteilskraft, Erster Abschnitt, Analytik der ästhetischen Urteilskraft, Erstes Buch, Analytik des Schönen: 1. Moment des Geschmacksurteils der Qualität nach (§ 2) das Wohlgefallen, welches das Geschmacksurteil bestimmt, ist ohne alles Interesse.' (The delight, which determines the judgement of taste is without any interest). This is the way Kant defines 'disinterestedness' in relation to the judgement of taste (or 'aesthetic judgement', or 'judgement of beauty'): 'Interesse wird das Wohlgefallen genannt, was wir mit der Vorstellung der Existenz eines Gegenstandes verbinden. Ein solches hat daher immer zugleich Beziehung auf das Begehungsvermögen, entweder als Bestimmungsgrund desselben, oder doch als mit dem Bestimmungsgrunde desselben notwendig zusammenhängend. Nun will man aber, wenn die Frage ist, ob etwas schön sei, nicht wissen, ob uns oder irgend jemand, an der Existenz der Sache irgend etwas gelegen sei, oder auch nur gelegen sein könne; sondern, wie wir sie in der bloßen Betrachtung ...' (The delight that we connect with the representation of the existence of an object is called interest. Such a delight is always at the same time related to the faculty of desire, either as its determining ground, or else as necessarily connected with its determining ground. Now, we do not want to know, when the question is whether something is beautiful, if we or anyone else are concerned, or even only could be concerned, with the existence of the thing; rather, the way we estimate it is in pure contemplation ...)

² See 西田幾多郎全, *NKZ*, 19 vols., Nishida, K. (1979), Tôkyô: Iwanami Shoten; For *美の説明* see Nishida (1900), *NKZ* 13, pp. 52-54. For *芸術と道徳*, see Nishida (1923), *NKZ* 3, pp. 237-545.

Thus, the Christian conception of *kenosis*, which transcribes in Marcel's philosophy in terms of 'availability' or 'handiness' (*disponibilité*), seems at first glance to share common aspirations with the Zen Buddhist conception of the 'emptied self' cherished by the Kyôto School. At the same time they are of course bound to hide profound differences, only to mention their different emphases on transcendence and immanence, respectively. This applies not only to when it comes to understanding religious experience from a Hebraic perspective and spiritual practice from a Zen Buddhist one, but also to a different but equally vital extent to cultural experiences. Indeed, if contemporary Japan is clearly not in the process of overcoming metaphysics in the way Western postmodernity is, there is no doubt that on both sides of the world the disunity of the 'self' triggered by the impacts that abuses of technologies of all kinds in pare with particular socio-economic systems have had on human being, has not permitted the vital ethical dimension of relationships to be fully preserved.

Interestingly, for matters of survival of a different kind, that is to say 'physical', it is now certain that the global community will seek to show restraint or at least good sense with its usage of technology, ironically not for the sake of preserving nature but essentially for its own self-preservation. This ecological turn may well be what will enable the return of the ethical, or, to put it differently, technology may well be used in a way that the self will recover an environment where it will have time to shine in the light of the emptying Other, and thus to reconstruct its unity. It is this cultural experience that I shall now attempt to work out from a brief dialogical reflection on Nishida's ethical thought and Marcel's catholic 'kenoticism'.

For Nishida 'religious' experience, more than aesthetic or moral ones, comes close to pure *self-awakening* (自覚). What I shall then define in terms of *concrete self-awakening* corresponds to those meaningful cultural experiences whose fundamentals equally rest on the Nishidean notions of dialectical relationship (弁証法的関係), place (場所), negation (否定), and love (愛).³ Nishida provides us with a profound analysis of the degrees to which these 'facets' relate to each other. Let us first of all recall relevant key points in Nishida's philosophy of *self-awakening* with particular references to the notion of 'love'. We will then be in a position to grasp what such a philosophy shares with Western Christian kenotic conceptions of the formation of the self, and this in order to subsequently elaborate on the idea of *concrete self-awakening* as a fundamental for cultural experiences.⁴

³ See in particular 私と汝 in NKZ 6, 1932, pp.341-427; 哲学の根本問題 - 弁証法的世界 in NKZ 7, 1934, pp.201-453; 自愛と他愛弁証法 in NKZ 6, pp. 260-299; 場所 in 働くものから見るものへ in NKZ 4,1927, p.208-289; and 場所的論理と宗教的世界観 in NKZ 11, pp.371-464.

⁴ As a matter of fact several 'members' of the Kyôto School came strongly under the influence of Christian philosophy, directly or indirectly. Some took it on board to elaborate systems of thought of a syncretic tendencies. For instance, Tanabe Hajime (1885-1962) who was critical of Nishida's use of Zen Buddhism, which he saw as a mystical way of understanding perceptual experience by stressing its unmediated and therefore inefable nature, suggested an alternative to the kind of disinterestedness that went with Nishida's concept of 'pure experience' by bringing together various aspects of Shan Buddhism, Christianity and Marxism in his analyses. Miki Kiyoshi (1897-1945), also a student of Nishida and who was initially deeply influenced by the religious humanism of Blaise Pascal (1623-1662), took the path of Marxism until he came back to a more liberal type of thought toward the end. Kuki Shûzô (1888-1943) brought into Japanese aesthetic theory much of Martin Heidegger's onto-theological imageries, and the same type of influence characterises the thought of Watsuji Tetsurô (1889-1960), the author of 風土。人間学的考察 (Tôkyô, Iwanami shoten, 1935). As a matter of fact, Augustin Berque gave a quasi-literal French translation of it by using a neologism: *Milieux. Étude humanologique*. The English version of the book appeared initially as *Climate: A philosophical study* (1960), then followed by *Climate and culture: A philosophical study* (1988), New York:

Love and Self-awakening

The origins of the ethical dimension of Nishida's thought comes as much from Zen Buddhism as from the reading of the works of Josiah Royce, who had as a matter of fact also deeply influenced Marcel. We have to stress here that aspects of these look-like similarities can equally have very different roots. Such is the case for dialectics, which plays a crucial role in both thinkers' ethics. For instance, the dialectical dimension in Marcel's thought may well have its source in the overwhelming influence Hegelianism had at the time on French intellectual life. At the same time, if Nishida's dialectical approach to ethics owed much to Hegel and German idealism, it was subsequently the Buddhist conception of 'soku' (即) as expounded by Nāgārjuna and according to which something 'is' through its own negation that played the most significant role.⁵

In Nishidean philosophy the awakening of the self through its absolute emptying (絶対無の自覚) is an affirmation of the self by means of its self-retraction. In other words, the absolute emptying of selfhood in the light of the Thou at the same time enables the shaping of the I. This means that the self acquires its unity in an act of 'loving' that is also an act of self-negation, and one's own discovery consists in 'dying' in the light of the Thou. The process is reciprocal in the sense that the Thou acquires its unity in the light of the I. This is why the self finds its unified 'continuity of discontinuity' (非連続の連続).⁶

Thus, in 'The I and the Thou' (私と汝) Nishida considers two traditionally separated poles through the reciprocity of their self-determinacy. This applies to the personal and the outer worlds, that is, the I and the Thou. Importantly, they are mutually self-determined within a particular location, or place, that brings them together. On the one hand, the place of the formation of the I is the Thou that one

Greenwood Press. Rendering the original idea in a different 'cultural milieu' is indeed a difficult task if one wants to avoid the apparent meaninglessness of neologisms deprived of cultural texture inducing thus formalistic readings, as well as if one is wary not to depart from what is at stake by using irrelevant idioms. The English word 'milieu' can have the same resonance as its equivalence in French and can therefore be kept for 風土. As for 人間学的考察, perhaps then, 'a study in human ontology' would be more faithful to what Berque sees indeed as the ontological concern of the book and would avoid the misled determinist interpretation of the relationship between 'climate' and 'culture' in the common sense of the words. The title *Milieux. A study in human ontology* would also have the benefit to avoid unnecessary technical 'universalising' jargon invented for the sole purpose of a particular circumstance.

⁵ Several translations of Nāgārjuna's 'philosophy of the middle way' obviously exist, such as by D.J. Kalupahana, Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1986. The following poem is from the *Root verses of the middle way* (Skt. *Mūlamadhyamikakārikā*, Tib. *dbu ma rtsa ba shes rab*), trans. A. Pearcey, Pharping, Kathmandu, Nepal, 2004. It illustrates perfectly well the dialectics of *soku* at work, in this instance between 'emptiness' and 'being':

gāng phyir rten 'byung ma yin pa'i
 chos 'ga' yod pa ma yin pa
 de phyir stong pa ma yin pa'i
 chos 'ga' yod pa ma yin no

There is not a single thing
 That does not arise interdependently.
 Therefore there is not a single thing
 That is not emptiness.
Root Verses of the Middle Way, XXIV, 19

⁶ NKZ 6, p. 236.

loves through self-negation, and on the other hand, the very relationship between the I and the Thou can only be against a common ground, or universal, which might be called the invisible place of its occurrence. This is to say that the shared relationship is founded on the mutual acts of absolute self-negation (絶対自己否定).

By evoking the self-awakening of the I in the light of the Thou, and the self-awakening of the Thou in the light of the I, Nishida suggests that the affirmation of the personal and independent character of the self lies within an act of mutual consideration. The I becomes the I by emptying itself in the light of the Thou – a relationship whose reciprocal dimension is the very advent of an inter-personal relationship between free individuals. The awakening of the self is an absolute self-retraction with regard to the absolute Thou and which, when mutually experienced, constitutes the very substance of a responsible and creative relationship between the two. As a matter of fact, the seemingly paradoxical combining between availability and freedom is equally a central theme in Marcel's thought, which is his conception of 'fidélité créatrice'.

To understand Nishida's ethical concerns it is important to stress its two folds, made apparent in 'Self-love, love of the Thou, and dialectics' (自愛と他愛弁証法).⁷ The emergence of the self's life lies on its very well-disposability to die as an act of self-love (自愛) as much as love of the Thou (他愛), both of which must therefore be understood in their dialectical relationship. The way Nishida, in a difficult first section,⁸ defines self-love is by initially removing any ambiguity with the mere satisfaction of desire (欲求),⁹ although he acknowledges at the same time that there is no possible formation of the self (我) without relating to desires in one way or another.¹⁰

What is perceived in an unmediated fashion, directly, cannot be an abstraction, and therefore attracts a certain form of personal 'interest'. However, to the latter does not correspond the realisation of desire itself, but its 'expression' (表現).¹¹ What exists directly for us is neither a 'thing' (物), nor a 'feeling' (感情), nor a 'representation' (表象) that would lead to the satisfaction of 'realised' desires, but is the 'expression' of such desires.¹² Thus, the perception of 'expressed contents', that is to say of things and representations *as such*, or equally the experience of feelings *as such*, are the perceptual experiences of self-determinations (自己限定), which are that of expressed desires. These quasi-selfless forms of perceptual experiences are therefore not about the realisation of desires, but their expression in the self-emptying acts of both self-love and love of the Thou.

It goes without saying that the 'realisation' of desires involves the 'body' (身體).¹³ At the same time, Nishida, faithful to his dialectics of *soku*, suggests that there is a complementary mutual relationship between the 'realisation' and the 'expression' of desires. One doesn't go without the other, from which we can safely deduce that different degrees of emphasis characterise, let us say, the experience of the agreeable in the Kantian sense of the word (for instance the 'realisation' of desires when we drink a glass of wine that delights our pallet); or the perceptual experience of the beautiful

⁷ Ibid., pp. 260-299.

⁸ Ibid., pp. 260-272, 'Relationships between self and desires'.

⁹ Ibid., p. 261-262.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 260.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 261.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid., p. 263.

(when we look at the ‘expression’ of a content *as such*, without purpose).

The experience of the expression of desires is not for Nishida confined to the aesthetic, but also typifies thinking itself, which is clearly not about the bodily realisation of desires, although it relates to it in a complementary differential way. Thus, the body can function as a *basho* for the realisation of what is expressed, as in Nishida’s own words ‘[w]hat is expressed realises itself in the body, that is to say awakens to itself’,¹⁴ and ‘[o]ur desires must be the content of the body The body is the *hypokeimenon* [i.e. individual substance] of desires, ...’. And just as the ‘realisation’ and ‘expression’ of desires are mutually self-determining, such are desires and the body: ‘.... conversely, desires create the body. There is no desire without body. There is no body without desires.’¹⁵ So, from one angle, the body acts as a *basho* for the expression of desires to be realised, in other words, for the formation of a self-identity (自己同一) to take *place*. This self-identity can only be expressed and therefore perceived in an immediate and direct manner, that is to say *as such*, if one relinquishes his or her bodily desires in an act of self-love and love of the Thou. Thus, it is not either possible to conceive love without desire, and desire without love, but, once again, insofar as we conceive them in terms of mutual complementary differentials.

It is really in ‘Genuine love as a negating discovery of the self’¹⁶ that Nishida addresses the issue of the meaning of ‘genuine love’. Following Benedict de Spinoza in ‘Concerning the Origin and Nature of Emotions’, the joy that accompanies desires is that of a passage ‘from a lesser to a greater perfection’ (Part III, Proposition 2 of his *Ethics*, 1677).¹⁷ In other words, to the joy triggered by the satisfaction of desires corresponds a transcendent movement. This, for Nishida, cannot apply to genuine or ‘pure’ love, whose joy is to be found in the very negation of the self.¹⁸ He tells us that unlike desires, such a love can only be of persons as we do not become self-awakened in the light of objects,¹⁹ or more literally, ‘we do not discover ourselves in mere things’.²⁰ It is therefore truly ‘agape’ as opposed to ‘eros’.²¹

Genuine love between persons is equally to be distinguished from the experience of the beautiful. If the kind of pleasure triggered by the latter is not about the satisfaction of desires - and here the kinship with Kant’s conception of aesthetic judgement *in distinctio* from the ‘judgement of the agreeable’ (Urteil über das Angenehme) is striking,²² it does not lead either to *pure self-awakening*. We have here to

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 262. Nishida ascribes to expression and realisation of desires different temporal natures - the former is ‘atemporal’ (非時間的) whereas the latter is ‘temporal’ (時間的).

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 262-263. ‘欲求なくして身体というものはない’.

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 272-282.

¹⁷ Part III of Spinoza’s *Ethics* (1677) incorporates several definitions of various forms of emotions, running from desire, love, and hatred, to humility, hope, and despair, amongst others. Trans. G.H.R. Parkinson (2005), Oxford: Oxford University Press.

¹⁸ Nishida NKZ 6, op. cit., p. 272.

¹⁹ Ibid..

²⁰ Ibid. p. 273.

²¹ Ibid.. From ἀγάπη, in the Christian sense of ‘charity’ as opposed to the ἔρως of sexual or earthly love.

²² See Kant’s First Moment in his *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, Part I, First Section, First Book, Paragraphs 3 & 5, (1986), Ditzingen: Reclam, ‘Erster Teil. Kritik der ästhetischen Urteilskraft, Erster Abschnitt, Analytik der ästhetischen Urteilskraft, Erstes Buch, Analytik des Schönen: 1. Moment des Geschmacksurteils der Qualität nach: (§ 3) Das Wohlgefallen am Angenehmen ist mit Interesse verbunden. Angenehm ist das, was den Sinnen in der Empfindung gefällt. (...) Daß nun mein Urteil über einen Gegenstand, wodurch ich ihn für angenehm erkläre, ein Interesse an demselben ausdrücke, ist daraus schon klar, daß es durch Empfindung eine Begierde nach dergleichen Gegenständen regt, ...’ (Delight in the agreeable is bound to be with interest. The agreeable is that which the senses find

understand that Nishida sees the experience of the beautiful as being directed toward an 'object of pleasure'. Although the self remains 'disinterested' in the Kantian sense of the word (*ohne Interesse*), during such an experience there is always a *concrete* external element to which it lends itself and that prevents it from self-awakening through absolute emptying. This is presumably why Nishida writes that on such occasions 'the self gets lost'.²³

The unity of the self cannot be achieved by seeking to satisfy one's desires, which are always stimulated by their objects. The awakening of the self through its absolute emptying is precisely about relinquishing its condition as a subject that relates to something or somebody as an object. Self-love (自愛), which is one of the conditions for the possibility of self-awakening, is about making one's self available to the Thou. At the same time the negation of the self cannot be confused with an obligation to be subsumed to, or fascinated by the Thou. The emptying of the self in the light of the Thou is its very affirmation. When self-love is at the core of the determination of the person in a free and responsible world, the love of the Thou is the necessary place of the social world's self-determination (自己限定). Even more, at one level, love is the *basho* (場所) of the mutual self-determination of the personal and the social worlds.

Love for Nishida becomes once again the occasion of a dialectical relationship, or mutual inclusiveness between two poles, which are the I and the Thou. As he puts it, '[t]here is no love of the Thou without self-love. But there is no genuine self-love without genuine love of the Thou. We usually think of love as a mere union between the self and the other, but it is however consideration that must be its core. The mere union between the self and the other is only a kind of impulsive drive and not love.'²⁴ This is a very important sentence, as it shows a meeting point between what grounds Nishida's ethical conception of self-awakening and Marcel's kenotic conception of the creative self, that is to say 'consideration'.²⁵ At the same time, the general mood of their writings as a whole cannot but betray two diametrically opposed backgrounds of tradition. The former's standpoint is 'emptiness' when the latter's is 'being'.

pleasing in sensation. (...) Now, the fact that my judgement on an object, which I hold to be agreeable, expresses an interest in it is already clear as it triggers a desire for similar objects); (§ 5): 'Vergleichung der drei spezifisch verschiedenen Arten des Wohlgefallens. Das Angenehme und Gute haben beide eine Beziehung auf das Begehungsvermögen, (...) Angenehm heißt jemandem das, was ihn vergnügt; schön, was ihm bloß gefällt; gut, was geschätzt, gebilligt,' (Comparison between the three specifically different kinds of delight. The agreeable and the good both relate to the faculty of desire, What one calls agreeable is what gratifies one; beautiful, what simply pleases one; good, what is esteemed, approved of,)

²³ Nishida, NKZ 6, *op. cit.*, p. 273. These quasi-selfless forms of perceptual experiences are therefore not about the realisation of desires, but their expression in the self-emptying acts of both self-love and love of the Thou, which he compares interestingly with the content of art and the content of thought. This is not to say that the 'expression' (表現) and the 'realisation' (実現) of desires are the same (*ibid.* p. 262), but they are both necessary. In the case of the 'sign' (符号) and the 'symbol' (象徴) we have something that is 'expressed', but in a way that is separated from what conveys the 'expression'. In the case of the work of art (作品), the 'conveyance' and the 'conveyed' are brought together, but we remain at the level of 'appearance' (仮相). In other words, we are certainly dealing with 'expressed' matter, but not with the 'realisation' of matter.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 278. It seems to be here more appropriate to use 'the other' rather than 'the Thou' for the expression 自己合一, as Thou invokes indeed the notion of 'consideration' which precludes 'union'.

²⁵ Nishida uses rather the word 'respect' (敬): 'Genuine love must include respect. Otherwise, it would be desire and not love'. *Ibid.*, p. 277.

Kenotic Love

Love as the source of the formation of the self is thus central to Nishida's ethical thought, and is something that bears striking similarities with some aspects of Marcel's catholic kenoticism. Just like Nishida, Marcel evokes a conception of love that is seen as being distinguished from the notion of 'realisation' of desires as previously explained. But there isn't in Marcel the same *logic of the Basho* that underlines much of Nishida's philosophy. The French philosopher does not highlight the complementary differential relationship between love and desires (whether in their 'realisation' or 'expression'). His conception of love is presented as being unrelated not only to bodily desire, but also to what drives one towards an 'object'. Genuine love is therefore strictly not for Marcel about relating to a 'loved object', whereby the loving relationship between the subject and the object would depend on whether the latter corresponds to the former's idealisation. On the contrary, love appears as a proper renunciation of such a desire to see in the other one's idealisation, that is to say the image of the omnipotent self. Moreover, the Marcellian conception of love as it is developed in *Homo Viator* is pored with that of 'hoping'.²⁶ Genuine love involves the experience of hoping that the loved one will go beyond what the one who loves finds disappointing in the Other, and this in the light of the one who loves. Loving implies therefore a certain degree of 'fidelity', and it is noteworthy to mention that its kinship with 'hoping' is actually a conception that we can retrieve in the Aryan etymology of the word 'believe', which did at some stage relate to 'love'.²⁷

At the same time, it is fundamental to bear in mind the necessary reciprocal nature of a loving relationship in Marcel's philosophy, if the idea of renunciation of the desiring self is not to be confused with either submission or subjectivism. To love is not to blindly accept what one finds unacceptable in the other, but to hope that this other will equally find the hopeful will to empty itself in the light of myself. As for subjectivism, if it is true that the first section of one of Marcel's early works - the *Journal Métaphysique*,²⁸ strongly emphasises the notion of self-creation through love, there is no doubt that what comes afterwards eradicates any symptom of such a 'subjectivism' by focusing on, once again, hope and reciprocity. In fact, Marcel is so wary to defuse any trace of subjectivism that such a conception of human love becomes that of a kenotic experience of divine love, whereby, as suggested by

²⁶ See Marcel, G. (1945) 'Prolégomène à une métaphysique de l'espérance' in *Homo viator*, Paris: Aubier, pp. 29-67. The complementary relationship between hope and love is made apparent in the following quotes: 'To love somebody is to expect something from him, something that can neither be determined nor predicted. At the same time it makes it somehow possible for him to fulfill this expectation. Indeed, as paradoxical as it might seem, to expect is in some way to give. However, the opposite is equally true. (...) Everything seems to be as though it is only possible to speak of hope between the one who gives and the one who receives, where there is that exchange that is the stamp of all spiritual life.', pp. 49-50. And: '... we are led to notice the indissoluble relationship that binds together hope and love. (...) the nearer [love] comes to genuine charity, the more the significance of its sayings is inflected and aspires at becoming full of an inexorable quality, which is the sign of a presence. This presence is incarnated in the 'us' for whom 'I hope in Thou', that is to say in a communion of which I proclaim the indestructibility', p. 66.

²⁷ The 1989 Second Edition of the *Oxford English dictionary* provides the following etymology: 'Early ME. *bilieven*, f. *bi-*, BE- + *leven*:OE., Anglian *lēfan*, short. f. *elēfan*, WSax. *eliefan*, *elyfan*, a Common Teut. vb. (in OS. *gilōian*, Du. *gelooven*, OHG. *gilouben*, MHG. *gelouben*, *glōuben*, mod.G. *glauben* (earlier *glouben*, Gothic *galaubjan*):OTeut. **galauian* to believe, probably, 'to hold estimable, valuable, pleasing, or satisfactory, to be satisfied with,' f. *galaub-* 'dear, pleasing'; cf. Goth. *liuban*, *lauf*, *lubum*, *lubans*, Teut. root **lu-*, Aryan *lubh-*, to hold dear, to like, whence also LOVE, LIEF.' Oxford: Oxford University Press.

²⁸ Marcel, G. (1927) *Journal métaphysique*, Paris: Gallimard.

theologian Walter Kasper, eternity, self-love, love of the Thou, and God are brought together in diversity and unity.²⁹

There is no doubt that, at first glance, Nishida's conception of 'genuine love' in terms of 'negating discovery of the self' smacks of the early Marcel's conception of creative self through renunciation. At the same time, the ethical dialectics that Nishida deploys removes any possibility for his description of the fundamental function of love to be interpreted in terms of subjectivism. What subsequently differs between the two thinkers' conceptions of 'genuine love' is not their content but their form, or, more precisely, it is not their function but their axial direction. Genuine love for Marcel involves, or rather is textured by hope, which makes it thus transcendent towards the Thou, whereas for Nishida genuine love is a negating movement whereby the self is awakened by emptying itself. The self tends towards absolute nothingness in a movement that makes the act of loving immanent in the light of the Thou. Tiziano Tosolini equally pointed to the transcendent character of the experience of 'Goodness' in the face of the Other's 'infinity' in his study on Emmanuel Levinas *in dialogue with Nishida*.³⁰

It might be argued that the dialectics at work in both Marcel's and Levinas' works overcomes the seemingly unidirectional transcendent character of the relationship between the I and, respectively, the Thou and the Other. It might equally be sustained that Nishida's dialectics of *soku* enables him to conceive such a relationship as being vitally reciprocal. In fact, there is a fundamental aspect of Nishida's philosophy of I/Thou that, at one level, differentiates it significantly from those of Marcel and Levinas for that matter. Nishida's logic of the inclusive *basho* makes it possible for immanent love to become transcendent, depending precisely on the standpoint of the *basho*. (Transcendence can act as an inclusive *place* for immanence, and vice versa). As Nishida puts it in *哲学論文集第七*,

Religion must be through and through immanently transcendent, and, conversely, it must be through and through transcendently immanent. Religion is given in the standpoint of the self-identity of contradictories: of the dialectical circular reciprocity of immanence = transcendence and of transcendence = immanence.

(Nishida, NKZ 11, p. 459)³¹

²⁹ See Bishop Walter Kasper's address to the 2000 International Missionary Congress in Rome, in *Origins* (November 2000), Catholic News Service, Vol. 30, No. 21: 'The most profound reason that profession of faith in the one God does not prescind from diversity but rather includes it to a certain extent lies in the Trinitarian confession of one God in three persons. It is the interpretation of the biblical expression "God is love" (1 Jn. 4:16). It means that the one and only God is not a solitary God, but from eternity is self-giving love in which the Father communicates with the Son and the Father, and the Son with the Holy Spirit. Each of the three persons is fully God, totally eternal, and each gives the others room in which they can communicate themselves and renounce them-selves. In this kenotic way God is unity in diversity.', p. 326.

³⁰ See Tiziano Tosolini in 'Infinity or nothingness? An encounter between Nishida Kitarô and Emmanuel Levinas', *Social identities*, eds. Cosimo Zene & Arvind-Pal Mandai Vol. 11, No. 3, May 2005, pp. 209-228: 'Could Nishida agree with Levinas that the self who is emptied of its own being recovers its true identity not so much from an impersonal Absolute Nothingness but from a Goodness and Infinity invisibly present in the Other that makes the self's world so different and so much better from the one the self left before its solitary pursuits? (...) The Other, for Levinas, is an absolute that no concepts or words can ever articulate into ontological or phenomenological discourse. And, with respect to Nishida, the Other is the absolute Other whose gaze, even though avoided, is eternally focused on me as I struggle to reach the abysmal depths of my truest being and, once there, I finally contemplate everything and everyone with a translucent and transparent mind.', pp. 226-227.

³¹ See Nishida in NKZ 11, *哲学論文集第七*, 1945, p. 459, trans. D. A. Dilworth & V. H. Viglielmo, with A. Jacinto

Nishida goes as far as to suggest that a religion of the future should be thought in terms of 'immanent transcendence'.³² Even further, Nishida evokes the possibility of a new order, where the different cultural identities would be determined in a self-contradictory and therefore mutual way within the *basho* of the world. And whether it is Buddhism or Christianity, such religions should be thought as complementary differentials and not in incompatible terms of either immanence or transcendence, respectively. This is where the scope of Nishida's philosophy goes perhaps beyond that of Marcel together with any form of transcendent kenoticism. This is also where the axiological conception of immanence in Buddhism is presented in a new light, that makes it indeed open to dialogue.³³

Beside studies on the phenomenon of inculturation in Japan such as *日本とイエスの顔* (1982) by Inoue Yoji,³⁴ or numerous more encompassing ones on Asian religions, the ethical confluence between Christian kenoticism and the Kyôto School Zen Buddhist conception of the experience of emptiness was explored by Hans Waldenfels in *Absolutes Nichts. Zur Grundlegung des Dialogs zwischen Buddhismus und Christentum* (1976),³⁵ as well as *Faszination des Buddhismus. Zum christlich-buddhistischen Dialog* (1982).³⁶ Waldenfels moves beyond the archetypical dualistic separation between the Western Christian conception of 'being' and the Buddhist notion of 'nothingness'. In *Absolutes Nichts* in particular, he seeks to establish a point of contact via Saint Paul's kenoticism and in the light of the thought of one of the most important figures of the Kyôto School, that is to say Nishitani Keiji. It is clear from the passage on Christian kenotic thought and Waldenfels' interpretation

Zavala., in the *Sourcebook for Modern Japanese Philosophy*, 1998, London: Greenwood Press.

³² Ibid., NKZ 11, p. 463.

³³ Dilworth, Viglielmo, and Jacinto Zavala, provide in the *Sourcebook for Japanese philosophy* (op. cit., pp. 9-10) a useful synopsis of Nishida's conceptions of religious experience, whose most important points can be summarised as follows: Religions complement each other in the sense that they each contribute in their own way to accessing religious experience; Christianity is a transcendent religion as opposed to Buddhism, which is immanent; The salvation begotten by ethical absolute negation can be found in Buddhism ('*upaya*'), as well as Christianity ('*kenosis*'); The manifestation of the absolute is in the True Pure Land Buddhism '*nembutsu*' to which corresponds Amida Buddha's grace; in Christianity it is 'the Word of God' to which corresponds 'divine love'; For Buddhism, to reach the absolute is to experience 'Wisdom, Great Compassion and Saving Means'; in Christianity the absolute 'God is love and saves man through Christ' (p. 10); religions, as any, relate to the issue of salvation. In Zen and Pure Land Buddhism the Merciful Vow of the Buddha ascribes a state of grace to the self in the light of the absolute Other. In Christianity, the Christ is the one who mediates the absolute Other's rendering of grace for salvation; Self-power is in Buddhism 'ignorance and denial' with regard to existence; in Christianity it is the 'original sin'. One has to give up this state of identity by means of negation with regard to the absolute Other. Such a negating relationship in the light of the Other must be mutual to be at the same time mutually affirmative; The means by which such an enriching act of self-transformation can take place is the perceptual experience of the '*koan*', the practice of '*zazen*' or the 'non-duality of samsara and nirvana in the ordinary modes of leaving, and faith in the grace of Amida' (ibid.); in Christianity, such means are provided in the imitation of Christ; In each religion one recovers the inherent conflicting nature of life: God and evil.

³⁴ There is an English translation of *日本とイエスの顔* by Hisako Akamatsu, (1994) *The face of Jesus in Japan*, Tôkyô: Kindai Bungeisha.

³⁵ Hans Waldenfels (1976) *Absolutes Nichts, zur Grundlegung des Dialogs zwischen Buddhismus und Christentum*, Freiburg: Herder. An English translation by J.W. Heisig exists in the title *Absolute nothingness, foundations for a Buddhist-Christian dialog*, New York: Paulist Press, 1980. As far as 'kenoticism' and 'emptiness' are concerned, see in particular the passage 'Jesus and the "emptiness" of God',

³⁶ Hans Waldenfels (1982) *Faszination des Buddhismus. Zum christlich-buddhistischen Dialog*, Mainz: Matthias-Grünwald-Verlag.

of Karl Rahner's study on the subject,³⁷ that genuine love is both that of a transcendent God and aimed at a transcendent God. Christianity has it that Jesus Christ is, if I dare use Maurice Merleau-Ponty's image in such a case, the *chiasm* between the self-emptying of God and the self-emptying of human being. The self-determinations of the former and the latter therefore only take place in a dialectical kenotic relationship, but which is always nonetheless and ultimately depending on the will of God. For Saint Paul, human beings should adopt the same attitude as Jesus Christ, who in spite of his divine nature, emptied himself to the point of 'assuming the condition of a slave'.³⁸ And for Rahner, human being is 'the self-utterance [Selbstäußerung] of God in his self-emptying [Selbstentäußerung], because God expresses *himself* when he empties himself'; And, '[i]f God wills to become non-God, man comes to be, that and nothing else, we might say.'³⁹

Concrete Self-awakening and Culture

The disappearance of the kenotic attitude in the West,⁴⁰ which at the beginning of the essay was defined in terms of *disinterested postmodern condition*, (once again 'disinterestedness' is not here to be understood in the Kantian sense) is obviously an extremely complex phenomenon, but it might well be attributed to the culture of transcendence. Such a culture might well have prepared a favourable ground for the rejection of the kenotic attitude in the West, albeit unconsciously, as its transcendent nature makes it look like an act of submission, which, coupled with a blind belief in the Enlightened ideal of *reason*, could only ultimately lead to its rejection in the form of unethical nihilism. At the same time the impact, abuses, and misuses of technology have without doubt exacerbated this cultural phenomenon, which Heidegger foresaw, if not at an ethical level, at least at an existential one, in his *Die Frage nach der Technik*.⁴¹

At a cultural level, what can be defined in terms of self-centered perceptual passivity is without doubt a form of unavailability with regard to the other. Paradoxically such an attitude also contains at another level a certain reactive dimension. This is the case for example when such a perceptual attitude refuses to lend itself to what the person who is thought to be behind the artwork intends to communicate; or when it listens only reluctantly to the historical voice of such or such a cultural

³⁷ See Waldenfels (1976), op.cit. pp. 157-159. Waldenfels refers to Karl Rahner (1971), *Theological investigations*, New York: Seabury, Vol. 4, pp. 105-120.

³⁸ Saint Paul in Waldenfels 1980, op. cit. p. 157, in Philippians, 2:5-8: 'In your minds you must be the same as Jesus Christ. his state was divine, yet he did not cling to his equality with God but emptied himself to assume the condition of a slave, and became as men are; and being as all men are, he was humbler yet, even to accepting death, death on a cross.' (The translation is by James Heisig).

³⁹ Ibid., p. 158. (The translation is by James Heisig).

⁴⁰ For an overview on the way the relationship between kenosis and emptiness has been thought, see Takayanagi Shunichi, in *Supplément églises d'Asie* No 411, janvier 2005, Cahier de documents, Document No 1 D/2005, pp.6-7, 'La théologie catholique au Japon: Aperçu, réflexions et perspectives: Le néant, l'esprit et la pratique'; as well as 'Kenosis and Emptiness', in *Buddhist emptiness and Christian trinity*, 1990, New York: Orbis, pp. 5-25; H. H. Häring & K.-J. Kuschel in "'Leuchtende Finsternis" Zum Verständnis von "letzer Wirklichkeit" im Buddhismus und Christentum", ed. Hans Küng (1993) *Neue Horizonte des Glaubens und Denkens*, München: Piper, 1993, pp. 623-650.

⁴¹ See Martin Heidegger (1954) 'Die Frage nach der Technik' in *Vorträge und Aufsätze*, Pfullingen: Verlag Günter Neske, pp. 13-70. Heidegger asserts that technology affects how we think 'being' to the point where we are less and less attentive to the 'appeal of its presencing'.

configuration. This is to say that the kind of perceptual passivity that has developed in Western postmodernity, due to technological consumerism, also encompasses a deliberate and therefore reactive form of unavailability justified in the name of the on-going need to overcome metaphysics. This latter point is, once again, what might distinguish this phenomenon from the cultural side effects of the impact of technology in contemporary Japan.

What technology has done in the West at a cultural level is to contribute to a large-scale reaction against traditional metaphysics, whose conceptual paradigm includes amongst others notions of category, origin, imitation, essence, presence, object, subject, and authorship. It is therefore the combination between the impact of technology and Western bad conscience about its metaphysical past, be it that of transcendence or logocentricism, which has entailed ethical problems of the order previously mentioned. The fact that technology is responsible for ethical mutations at an existential level is of course a universal phenomenon, but whose symptoms and effects vary depending not only on the geographical location, but also on the economic, historical, and cultural circumstances.

The reason why it is important to understand the relationship between the *I and the Thou* as conceived by Nishida (私と汝), is that it is a particular instance of the relationship between the self and its place, whereby the Thou can be understood as the cultural world. It is a proper exchange whose dialectical nature makes it akin to what characterises the experience of meaning, especially when it is artistic. This is where the ethical thought of Nishida is so relevant in the context of the relative crisis of meaning in contemporary culture. In many ways, such a culture both reflects and embodies a new type of subjectivity, which hardly calls anymore for the *self-negation* (in Nishida's words 自己否定) of the *I* in its relation to the *Thou*. Thus, self-awakening in the light of the *concrete* Thou such as the historical world, the social world, or the art world, has become a rarity in the technological world. Nishida's conception of 'love', which as we saw goes into two complementary directions that are 'self love' (自愛) and 'love of the other' (他愛), is a prerequisite for such a *concrete self-awakening* and therefore for the meaningful formations of culture.

However, cultural experiences understood as *concrete* forms of ethical self-awakening, must involve genuine love with the Thou as a *soku*-type of complementary differential in order to avoid any form of hierarchy that would betray its nature. In fact, the transcendent character of much of Christian kenotic thought has maintained such a hierarchy. For Nishida all meaningful cultural experience must involve the active dynamics of creative expression and a dialectical but non-hierarchical relationship between entities and vacuity. Arguably, his main axis of thought was to highlight the complementary character between a certain form of nothingness, the creative formation of the self, and ethics. There is no meaningful cultural experience if not in the form of *concrete self-awakening*. And as Nishida saw it, selflessness is the common root not only for such experiences, but also for religious and moral ones to take place at all.

Gerald Cipriani, PhD
 Professor of Philosophy of Culture
 School of Global Studies
 Tama University
 802 Engyo
 Fujisawa
 Kanagawa 256-0805
 Japan

Tel: (81) (0) 466 21 7734
 Fax: (81) (0) 466 82 5070
 Email: cipriani@tama.ac.jp

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