

## Is Dialectical Philosophy Tenable? Revisiting Hegel, Nishida, and Takahashi

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Gottfried Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel invented the modern form of dialectics as a philosophical method to suggest a way out of the Kantian dualism between the realm of *noumena* and that of *phenomena* as well as the epistemological dilemma it causes; in other words, Hegel attempted to solve the problem of how, in the light of the subjectivity of the epistemic subject, any kind of objective or public knowledge is possible. Nishida Kitarō<sup>1</sup> developed Hegel's dialectical philosophy further to find a solution to what Robert J. J. Wargo terms the “completeness problem,”<sup>2</sup> that is, the question of how knowledge of the ground of knowledge is possible without resulting in a “bad infinity” (Ger.: *schlechte Unendlichkeit*). While both Hegel and Nishida have been similarly accused of, among other, absolutism, unbridled optimism, and simplification of complex historical processes,<sup>3</sup> there seems to be a significant divergence in their philosophical systems: Hegel conceives of the dialectical process as a self-expression of the “absolute spirit” (Ger.: *absoluter Geist*), while Nishida suggests a “dialectics of nothingness” (Jap.: *mu no benshōhō*), which refuses to privilege either *yu*, “being,” nor *mu*, “non-being.” It also refuses to resolve or sublimate the tensions between opposites into an absolute; to the contrary, he defines the absolute (Jap.: *zettai*) as an eternally deepening relationship between opposites. While traditional interpreters, critics and adherents alike, have argued that Nishida resolves these tensions in the “eternal” (Jap.: *eien*) since “absolute present,” (Jap.: *zettai genzai*), I think it is possible to propose a second reading of Nishida's *bashō* and *zettai* along the lines of Jacques Derrida's *khora*<sup>4</sup> and Takahashi Satomi's interpretation of Nishida's *zettai*.<sup>5</sup> In this paper, I would like to present this interpretation by focusing on Nishida's dialectics and read it through the eyes of Takahashi's method of *hōbenshōhō*, “inclusive dialectics,” which turns the dialectical method against itself. I believe that such a reading introduces a dialectical philosophy, which preserves the strength of dialectics without succumbing to the above-mentioned criticisms. I will present my argument in four steps, discussing, first, the problem dialectics seeks to remedy, then, my interpretation of Nishida's dialectics as infinite process, third, Takahashi's “dialectics of dialectics” (Jap.: *benshōhō no benshōhō*), and, fourth, possible implications of such a revised dialectical philosophy.

### (1) What is dialectics?

As is well-known, Hegel and, similarly, Nishida conceived of dialectics as a philosophical method that could remedy Kant's dichotomy of *noumena* and *phenomena* and its main implication, namely the impossibility of knowing the *Ding-an-sich*, the “thing-in-itself.” In addition, both believed that Kant's dualism relegated metaphysics and morality to two different realms, the realms of *phenomena* and that of *noumena* respectively. Kant's distinction implies further two separate realms of knowledge, empirical knowledge and transcendental knowledge, as well as two selves, the empirical self and the transcendental subject. Both Hegel and Nishida reject this dualism on three grounds: (i) The distinction between *noumena* and *phenomena* renders knowledge of the self-qua-subject and, thus, self-awareness impossible. To be exact, as a result of the “Transcendental Deduction,” the only property of the cogito that<sup>6</sup> is knowable is its facticity—the cogito necessarily exists—“the how of its existence,” that is, “die Art wie ich existiere,”<sup>7</sup> is indeterminate. Kant explains elsewhere, “we have no knowledge of what underlies the subject and all thoughts as substratum apart from this logical significance of the I.”<sup>8</sup> Since the self we know empirically is posited in consciousness,<sup>9</sup> Kant vehemently rejects the identification of the self-qua-object and the self-qua-subject as a “formal error.” (ii) While Kant's system accommodates two kinds of knowledge, empirical and transcendental, it fails to provide for the unity of knowledge. This means, practically speaking, that, to Kant, metaphysics and morality occupy separate realms. While this arrangement might aid the commitment of one person to diverse and even contradicting *Weltanschauungen*, it reinforces the schizoid conception of the human subject and challenges not only grand unified systems of knowledge à la Hegel's *Phänomenologie* but also the very belief that a person's moral and metaphysical conceptions could or even should be consistent. For example, his dual epistemology allows Kant to question the notion of personal identity on conceptual grounds in the “Paralogisms” of the *Kritik Der Reinen Vernunft* (*Critique Of Pure*

*Reason*), on the one side, and to assert its existence on moral grounds in his *Kritik Der Praktischen Vernunft* (*Critique Of Practical Reason*), on the other. More importantly, given Hegel's definition of "true knowledge" as correspondence of one's cognition with the *Ding-an-sich*, this dualism prevents the grasp of "absolute truth" (Ger.: *Absolute Wahrheit*). (iii) Thirdly, Hegel and, to some degree, Nishida argue that Kant did not sufficiently develop his epistemology. The crux of Kant's epistemology, so Hegel, lies in Kant's preconception of knowledge as *Werkzeug*, tool. This presupposition has two fundamental consequences. It entails a circular argument, in Hegel's words, an argument "that returns us to where we were before"<sup>10</sup> in that it implies the above-mentioned dualism without evidencing it. Hegel proposes that Kant's method assumes the preconception of cognition as a tool as well as the difference between this very cognition and the self. Kant's methodology thus implies that the absolute stands on one side and cognition on the other; thus conceived, cognition is simultaneously separated from the absolute yet something real.<sup>11</sup> However, if knowledge is a "medium" or a "tool," Hegel argues, knowledge and reality, consciousness and existence are, by definition, irrevocably separate; this separation, then, is grounded not in an argument but in Kant's preconceptions and thus reveals a circular character. Dialectics, Hegel argues, erases the distinction between method and content and, thus, in some sense, the dualism of subject and object.

Salomon's observation that Hegel criticizes Kant's argument as "circular" points to a more fundamental conundrum within Kant's system, which Wargo calls the "completeness problem." While Wargo frames the "completeness problem" with regard to Nishida's philosophy, I believe it applies to Hegel's philosophy at least to some degree as well. According to Wargo, dialectical philosophy is not only interested in resolving the dichotomy between the empirical and the transcendental by clarifying the method and the ground of knowledge but also examines the epistemic foundation of this ground. In his dissertation Wargo<sup>12</sup> illustrates the completeness problem with Immanuel Kant's search for *a priori* forms of intuition:

The question, stated simply, is, "If Kant's theory were correct, how could we ever know it to be so?" The theory accounts for how it is we constitute the objects of experience, but not for how it is we know that this is how we constitute them. ... The point simply is that the mechanism which Kant displays to account for the structuring of experience does not account for our capacity to become aware of this mechanism."<sup>13</sup>

Wargo's terminology unveils the multi-layered nature of the Nishida's epistemology, which a mere focus on the subject-object relationship would conceal. First, there is the plane in which the object of knowledge is constituted; second, there is the ground of experience which constitutes the objects of knowledge such as Kant's transcendental subjectivity or Husserl's transcendental ego;<sup>14</sup> third, and this is where Nishida's interest lies, there is the "ground of the ground" from which philosophers theorize the transcendental structures of human experience, his "world of intelligibility" (Jap.: *eichiteki sekai*). Thus, it is possible to argue that, with regards to the problem of self-awareness, Nishida is not only interested in the knowledge of the self-qua-object as it is constituted by the subject (first layer) or even the self's knowledge of itself qua subject in the "unity of subject and object," identified by Nishida as the "unity of subjectivity and objectivity" (Jap.: *shukyaku tōitsu*) (second layer), but, rather, in the "self-understanding" (Jap.: *jirikai*) of "self-awareness" (Jap.: *jikaku*) itself qua "unity of subject and object" located within the "unity of subject and object" (third layer). Consequently, Nishida is not predominantly interested in the knowledge of objects (first layer) or the knowledge of its transcendental structure (second layer), but in the "self-understanding" of the transcendental structure qua transcendental structure itself (third layer).<sup>15</sup> Similarly, Hegel strives to overcome what Salomon identifies as Kant's circularity in developing a method, which illustrates the "'becoming' of Absolute knowledge"<sup>16</sup> and discloses the self-knowledge of the "absolute spirit." In either case, however, knowledge displays three fundamental features: (i) it possesses a process character, (ii) is self-reflective, and, thus, (iii) entails a contradiction. These three fundamental features have become the primary characteristics of dialectical philosophy.

## (2) The infinite deepening of dialectics?

To remedy the perceived shortcomings of Kant's philosophy, the enigma of self-awareness, the two-world hypothesis, and the lack of grounding, Hegel and Nishida suggest a developmental model of knowledge,

which includes as its three steps the knowledge of objects, self-awareness, and the self-reflexivity of the ground. In order to avoid what he perceived to be the fundamental mistake of Kant, Hegel commences his investigations with a conception of knowledge, which is, simultaneously, flexible and self-reflective. This is necessary since out of all philosophical investigations, epistemology is unique in that its method and subject are identical: after all, epistemology constitutes the self-reflexive investigation of knowledge by means of knowledge. In Salomon's words, knowledge changes in kind when we turn to focus on or faculties of knowledge, when we question not so much our knowledge of the world, but ourselves,"<sup>17</sup> and I would like to add, the knowledge of our knowledge. Hegel explains the process of philosophy, which is born out of this paradox with following words:

The test consists of the application of a presupposed standard to what is tested and the correspondence between both or the lack thereof it reveals. The decision of whether it is right or wrong lies with the standard. The standard in general ... is hereby presumed to constitute the essence and the in-itself.<sup>18</sup>

Hegel argues that since, in the case of Kant, the method of inquiry is presupposed, so is the result of his investigation. To suggest that the "standard" (Ger.: *der Massstab*) be the in-itself (Ger.: *das An-sich*) is equivalent to demanding that the method of investigation itself be subjected to the investigation and, subsequently, to change and transformation. Hegel thus maintains that an investigation of knowledge is primarily directed at the method of inquiry and, in the same way in which knowledge has to be verified by reality, the principles and standards of one's investigation have to be verified by this very investigation. This demand constitutes not only a subtle critique of Kant but also a commitment to a self-critical investigation of knowledge as method. To be fruitful, then, any epistemological investigation has to change its method along with its discoveries. These changes are reflected in the tripart system of epistemic modalities in the philosophies of Hegel and Nishida.

Having defined his method, Hegel now turns his interest to the starting point of his inquiry. Both Hegel and Nishida identify as the primary and most basic form of knowledge the knowledge of objects, the *Bewusstsein*, consciousness, in the case of Hegel and the "world of judgment" (Jap.: *handanteki sekai*) in the case of Nishida. Even though Hegel focuses on the perceptual process and Nishida on the construction of logic, both identify the knowledge of an individual object in its simplicity, *das Einzelne*, the singular, and *das Unmittelbare*, the immediate, which is given in the *sinnlichen Gewissheit*, sense certainty, in Hegel and the *kokobutsu*, individual, qua *shugo*, subject, in the subsumptive judgment (Jap.: *hōsetsuteki handan*) as conceived of by Nishida. While both Hegel and Nishida believe that knowledge requires a synthesis and constitutes a process of progressive *universalization*, Nishida explicitly defines knowledge (Jap.: *chishiki*) as the "unifying activity" (Jap.: *sayō tōitsu*) and identifies the layer of knowledge alternatively as universals (Jap.: *ippansha*) and as *basho*, place.<sup>19</sup> For Nishida, the act of knowledge always either unifies the predicate and the subject or facilitates some kind of "unity of subjectivity and objectivity" (Jap.: *shukyakuteki tōitsu*) and constitutes the place where individual objects of knowledge are located. In a second step, both, Hegel and Nishida, locate, to use Nishida's terminology, the knowledge of objects within self-awareness, that is, within the awareness of the knowing subject of itself qua knowing subject. While this self-awareness discloses a twofold contradiction as knowledge of itself and as recognition of itself in the face of its negation by the other in the intersubjective relationship,<sup>20</sup> both Hegel and Nishida characterize its primary function as antithesis, "difference" (German: *Unterschied*), "negation" (Japanese: *hitei*), and the "opposition" (Japanese: *tairitsu*) of consciousness and its object. Consciousness opposes its object in two ways: It constitutes (a) itself as the constituting and knowing agency and, at the same time, (b) is unknowable. As the unknowable it also constitutes the antithesis and the "negation" of that what-is and can-be-known. The ultimate synthesis of objectivity and subjectivity, particularity and universality, however, can be found only in the manifestation of the *Vernunft*, reason, in Hegel and what Nishida calls the "universal of intelligibility" (Jap.: *eichiteki ippansha*). Despite apparent differences in their terminologies, both philosophers maintain that knowledge is realized in science, morality, and, ultimately, in religion, which unites all of knowledge-and-reality. In both systems, knowledge is not something abstract and merely cognitive, but is inherently social, public, and intersubjective in nature and has to be realized in communal and cultural activity. Hegel and Nishida identify public knowledge, morality, and religion as, to use Nishida's term, expressions (Jap.: *hyōgen*) of "reason"

and the “world of intelligibility” respectively. In his not so well known essay “*Shukyō to gakumon oyobi dōtoku*” (“The Relationship Between Religion And Scholarship And Morality”) from his lectures on Religion, Nishida defines scholarship (Jap.: *gakumon*) as “expression” of objectivity, morality (Jap.: *dōtoku*) as “expression” of subjectivity, and religion as “expression” of “the unity of subjectivity and objectivity.” In short, each of these epistemological categories refers to an “expression” of a specific modality of knowledge. Finally, both Hegel and Nishida argue that development of knowledge is necessarily historical and do not shy away from identifying, albeit not very convincingly, historical manifestations of the various stages of knowledge. For Hegel, “absolute spirit” is actualized in the political entity of the Prussian state, while, for Nishida, “absolute nothingness” is completely expressed in the culture of Shōwa Japan.<sup>21</sup>

Finally, both Hegel and Nishida postulate an absolute, absolute spirit and absolute nothingness respectively. While this terminology has been interpreted to disclose the absolutism and teleologism inherent in dialectical philosophy, I think such an argument is much more difficult to make in the case of Nishida. Nishida chooses the terminology of “nothingness” deliberately to indicate that, contrary to “being,” “nothingness” implies openness, indeterminacy, and, in some sense, an infinite deferral of the final sublation of the opposition of objectivity and subjectivity, positivity and negativity. The more, Nishida accuses Hegel of privileging being over nothingness and, thus, of destroying the fragile balance between being and non-being. In my reading of their disagreement, Hegel privileges the closure and “transparency”<sup>22</sup> of the “absolute spirit” while Nishida champions openness and, as I have argued elsewhere,<sup>23</sup> something like Derrida’s<sup>24</sup> “infinite deferral.”

Thus understood, Nishida’s dialectics is characterized by three fundamental features. First, Nishida introduces an idiosyncratic notion of *zettai*. Nishida explains that

[w]hen the absolute opposes nothing, it is truly absolute. Opposing absolute nothing, it is absolute. There is nothing, which opposes the self objectively from the outside. To say that the self opposes absolute nothing means that it opposes itself as self-contradiction. It constitutes a contradictory self-identity.<sup>25</sup>

To Nishida, the absolute is essentially non-relative in character. This means that it does not oppose anything. It further does not resolve everything into a oneness, but, on the contrary, Nishida’s conception of *zettai* contains its own negation, its own difference inside itself. The reason for Nishida’s interpretation of the absolute as internal negation and internalized difference is twofold: (i) the postulate of an external negation would leave Nishida in the Kantian dilemma, he and Hegel set out to remedy; (ii) the resolution of negation and difference would result in the uniformity of a monism. Such an internal negation implies, however, that, and this is my second point, difference is omnipresent and ubiquitous.<sup>26</sup> Starting with his very first book, *Zen no kenkyū, Inquiry Into The Good*, Nishida resisted monistic and pantheistic interpretations of his “unifying activity” and tirelessly emphasized the importance of what he calls *bunka hatten*, the “process of differentiation.” In his “*Bashō no ronri to shukyōteki sekaikan*” (“The Logic Of Bashō And The Religious World View”), Nishida argues that the absolute must transcend transcendence qua the “one” insofar as it contains immanence qua the “many.” In other words, Nishida emphasizes that the absolute necessarily entails and is expressed in the “historical world” and the self-negation of god. To express this paradoxical situation provided by the “self-negation of the absolute” (Jap.: *zettai no jikohitei*), Nishida cites the Buddhist terminology of “birth-and-death-qua-nirvāṇa” (Jap.: *shōji soku nehan*), the *Zen dictum* that “the mind is the Buddha” (Jap.: *shin sokuze butsu*), and Dōgen’s paradoxical observation “to study the self is to forget the self.”<sup>27</sup> This ambiguity of unity and difference, actualization and deferral is brilliantly expressed in Nishida’s term “eternal present” (Jap.: *eien genzai*), which illustrates the simultaneous presence and absence of the “expression” of the “absolute.” This ubiquity of difference and negation in Nishida’s system adds a new spin to his interpretation of the dialectical process. Thus defined, the dialectical process does not evolve in three steps from thesis to synthesis but, in Nishida’s hands, has become an eternal (Jap.: *eienteki*) process, which “deepens” (Jap.: *shinka*) itself continuously: Nishida suggests, therefore, not only that the dialectics of object and subject implies the synthesis of the subject-object relationship, but also that the dialectics of subject-object duality and subject-object unity implies the synthesis of a subject-object non-duality. However, as the graph below exemplifies, the dialectics of the duality of duality and non-duality and the non-duality of duality and non-duality, in turn, implies an even further synthesis *ad infinitum*.

Graph:

- 1: immanence: object <-----> subject  
 2: transcendence: subject-object duality<-----> subject-object non-duality  
 3. absolute: dualism <----->non-dualism

I have argued elsewhere,<sup>28</sup> that this version of dialectical philosophy suggests why we can have knowledge even knowledge of the self and of the conditions of our knowledge while, simultaneously, acknowledging the epistemic limitations of human existence. Takahashi not only takes up the notion of dialectics as an infinite process but goes one step further to apply the dialectical principle to the very method of dialectics itself.

### (3) The dialectics of dialectics

Takahashi seems to apply Hegel's above mentioned *dictum* and indictment of Kant, which demanded a "test" (Ger.: *Prüfung*) of "an presupposed standard" by taking this "standard ... as the in-itself" to the dialectical method and suggests to investigate the tenability of dialectics itself. Before I begin with the examination of Takahashi's dialectics, however, a brief comment is necessary. As Kosaka Kunitsugu has already noted,<sup>29</sup> there is sharp tension between Takahashi's dialectics and his philosophy of history, on the one side, and his "standpoint of totality" (Jap.: *zentai no tachiba*), on the other. For the most part, Takahashi privileges the standpoint of totality or, at least, suggests a dualism between totality and the realm of history. Since my current interest is to rethink dialectics rather than to explore Takahashi's system on the whole, I will focus on his criticism of and contribution to Hegel's and Nishida's dialectics in this essay.

In some sense, Takahashi's dialectical philosophy echoes various themes characteristic of the philosophies of Hegel and, especially, Nishida, namely the tripart structure of affirmation, negation, and "affirmation-qua-negation" (Jap.: *kotei soku hitei*) as well as their claim that morality and religion constitute the highest expressions of the dialectical process. Further, like Nishida,<sup>30</sup> Takahashi emphasizes the moment of continuity, the self-reflective nature of self-awareness, and the need for a synthesis. The point where Takahashi departs significantly from the philosophies of Hegel and Nishida, however, lies in his creation of a "dialectics of dialectics" (Jap.: *benshōhō no benshōhō*) through the application of dialectics to dialectical philosophy itself. Takahashi pushes the idea of dialectics to an extreme and suggests that dialectics, if applied to itself, necessitates its own negation and a method of anti-dialectics (Jap.: *hibenshōhō*); or as he says elsewhere, "dialectics transforms itself dialectically into anti-dialectics."<sup>31</sup> His goal is develop a dialectically sublated dialectics. This is Takahashi's test of dialectics: To be consistent, dialectics has to be applied to itself, negated by itself, and sublated to an "inclusive dialectics" (Jap.: *hōbenshōhō*). Takahashi even sublates the act of sublation (Jap.: *shiyo*) itself. To be exact, he replaces Hegel's "sublation" (Ger.: *Aufhebung*) with the act of *hōetsu*, literally "including-and-transcending"; "hōetsu" combines the Japanese characters of *tsutsumi* ("inclusion") and *chōetsu* ("transcendence").<sup>32</sup> Takahashi's terminology explicates that the opposition of and tension between internality and externality characteristic of the dialectical process are irrevocable. In addition, the term "*hōetsu*" seems to reverberate Nishida's ambiguous notion of "internal negation" insofar as Nishida's internal negation and Takahashi's "including-and-transcending" transcend what Hegel would call the *An-sich*; *hōetsu* does not oppose and negate the starting point of the dialectical process but includes its within itself.

Takahashi's application of the dialectical method to dialectical philosophy itself results in a tri-level conception of dialectics. In the course of his essay "*Rekishī ni okeru benshōhō*" ("Dialectics Within History"), he distinguishes three different kinds of dialectics: "dialectics of becoming" (Jap.: *seiseiteki benshōhō*), the "dialectics of contradiction" (Jap.: *mujun no benshōhō*), and the "dialectics of love" (Jap.: *ai no benshōhō*); the former indicates the realm of history, the second the realm of morality, and the highest form of dialectics the realm of religion. Elsewhere, Takahashi refers to these three modalities of dialectics as "dialectics of process" (Jap.: *kateiteki benshōhō*), "dialectics of *basho*" (Jap.: *basho no benshōhō*), and "inclusive dialectics" (Jap.: *hōbenshōhō*).<sup>33</sup> This system is driven by Takahashi's commitment to three fundamental

principles: continuity, contradiction, and the self-reflexive nature of dialectics. The starting point of all of Takahashi's thought is the irreducibility of what Nishida calls the "the direction of objectivity" (Jap.: *kyakkan no hōmen*), that is the notion of continuity. Takahashi consistently insists on the "gradual becoming" (Jap.: *zenjiteki seise*) of history and openly rejects any notion of "disconnected jumps" (Jap.: *danzetsuteki hiyakuteki*). In addition, Takahashi maintains not unlike Nishida that, in the discourse of selfhood and morality, the principle of contradiction is important: "It is from a struggle that the ability to have a self is brought forth"<sup>34</sup> and "moral life is mainly understood as struggle between good and evil."<sup>35</sup> Finally, since every opposition requires a unity, the "dialectic of contradiction" necessitates the "dialectic of love."

What is important to the current essay, however, is not a detailed analysis of Takahashi's system but rather an exposition of his insight into the mechanics of dialectics, which he describes as "dialectic of dialectics." Takahashi identifies as the key to the nature of dialectics three terms, namely "totality" (Jap.: *zentai*), inclusive dialectics, and *hōetsu*. He introduces the term "*zentai*" to replace Nishida's "*zettai*," absolute. The "absolute" is inconceivable for two reasons: First, it suggests closure and complete transparency. Such a closure, which is caused by transparency, would, so Takahashi, put a rather drastic end to the dialectical process of self-actualization of the "spirit." Once the "absolute" is manifested, the dialectical process collapses. Thus, the notion of the "absolute" is in the conflict with the very conception of dialectics itself. Second, the notion of complete transparency or closure contradicts our existential predicament of *shoji*, birth-and-death, which is characterized by our epistemic limitations and the unstoppable continuity of historical temporality. To Takahashi, "the absolute and the relative" are incompatible and "must be differentiated."<sup>36</sup> Even the notion of "absolute nothingness" (Jap.: *zettai mu*) fails to unify the absolute and the relative; on the contrary, Takahashi maintains that "absolute nothingness truly is the negation of the absolute."<sup>37</sup> Thus, Takahashi suggests the term "totality" instead. "Totality includes-and-transcends its parts"<sup>38</sup> (Jap.: *bubun*) and can be comprehended only insofar as it is actualized in individual parts. In addition, "totality" constitutes the system (Jap.: *taikei*) in which individual parts are located. In fact, it is the relationship between "totality" and "parts" which makes dialectical philosophy as the dialectics of, in Nishida's terms, the "one" (Jap.: *itsu*) and the "many" (Jap.: *ta*) necessary.

As second key term Takahashi introduces the notion of "*hōbenshōhō*." As mentioned above, this term emerges from the Takahashi's "dialectics of dialectics," that is, the application of dialectics to itself. Its purpose is threefold. First, it takes into account the existence of a manifold of particulars and the complex relationships among themselves as well as to the "totality." Takahashi, thus, provides a plethora of dialectical methods, which I mentioned above. Second, Takahashi's terminology implies that dialectics has to be applied to itself and, thus, identifies dialectics as a method of self-verification and self-authentication in the sense of Hegel's "test." This renders the "totality" of *hōbenshōhō* as that which sublates dialectics itself and includes dialectics within "dialectics." Its self-reflexive dimension makes *hōbenshōhō* the illustration and reflection of the self-reflective nature of knowledge qua self-awareness. To describe the modality of *hōbenshōhō*, Takahashi introduces his notion of "including-and-transcending," which sublates, in the threefold sense of its German original *aufheben* as negation, conservation, and elevation, sublation itself. It is this act of, as one might say, "sublation of sublation" through which the method of "including-and-transcending" is performed.

On the one hand, this dialectics of dialectics seems to indulge in word games, on the other hand, it discloses some exciting implications: First, Takahashi's refusal to submit dialectics to an absolutism or transcendentalism is revealed in his commitment to the temporality of immanence to the degree that he bases religion exclusively in the realm of "birth-and-death." Even religious salvation, if at all relevant has to occur in the here-and-now.<sup>39</sup> Second, Takahashi acknowledges that concepts such as "absolute" and "totality" refer to what is beyond the epistemic limitations of humans and function at best as limit concepts. Third, in substituting "totality" for the "absolute," Takahashi, indicates that these limit concepts are designed to designate the totality of all particulars across space and time as well as their necessary yet elusive unity. Fourth, at the same time, dialectical philosophy does not render obsolete the phenomenon of particularity, but, to the contrary, emphasizes the importance of individual events, persons, cultures, time periods, and the

*Zeitgeist*. Fifth, the plurality of irreducible aspects and individuals implies and even necessitates a diversity of methodologies and forms of dialectics. Ultimately, Takahashi, despite his rhetoric, or the even stronger rhetoric of his disciple Tøyø Nobechei, who completes his chapter on Nishida's philosophy with a section titled "*Benshōhō wa sayonara*,"<sup>40</sup> "good-bye dialectics," does not discard dialectical philosophy but sublates it, or better "includes-and-transcends" it. This means that Takahashi acknowledges the accomplishments of the philosophies of Hegel and Nishida and suggests that, if taken seriously, dialectics cannot be the last word, but must be re-assessed and further developed. In other words, while the philosophies of Hegel and Nishida may be called "philosophies of the absolute," by no means do they constitute the "absolute of philosophy."

#### (4) The Future of Dialectics

Finally, I would like to return to the three themes raised at the beginning of this essay, self-awareness, the two-realms theory, and the search for the epistemic ground and explore what a dialectical philosophy can contribute to the solution of these three riddles. In short, dialectics provides a theory of self-awareness, that follows the criteria set up by Hegel and Nishida, a structure, which can account for multiple discourses of knowledge, and a philosophical method that takes into account the epistemic predicament of human existence. (i) Self-awareness requires a self-reflexivity and, given Kantian terminology, a contradiction. All three of the thinkers discussed in this essay provide such a structure. (ii) Hegel, Nishida, and Takahashi provide the model for a multi-discourse philosophy. However, while Hegel implies a clear hierarchy and the manifestation of the absolute in history, Takahashi rejects both; Nishida's philosophy occupies an uneasy middle position, which seems to privilege the "absolute," but which, at the same time, is incapable of dissolving the notions of difference and continuity characteristic of the realm of objectivity.<sup>41</sup> (iii) In analogy to Derrida's critique of Kant in "An Apocalyptic Tone Recently Adopted in Philosophy,"<sup>42</sup> Takahashi applies Hegel's critique of Kant to Hegel's philosophy itself as well as to Nishida's philosophy and, thus, fulfills Hegel's own methodology. Takahashi, thus, does not abolish, but rather continues the dialectical project envisioned and commenced by Hegel and Nishida and develops their approach into a self-critical method, which applies the insights of dialectics to a philosophical hermeneutics and reaps its benefits without falling into an absolutism. Finally, Takahashi's reflections uncover the tragic nature of the dialectical project itself, whose self-negation, however, does not spell the end of dialectics, as Nobechei would have it, but rather discloses that philosophy and all human cognition can approach the truth only asymptotically but will never reach it.

#### Notes

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- <sup>1</sup> In this essay, I have adopted the Japanese convention with regards to Japanese names to write the family name first and the given name last.
  - <sup>2</sup> See Robert J.J. Wargo, *The Logic Of Basho And The Concept Of Nothingness In The Philosophy Of Nishida Kitarō* (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1972), 208.
  - <sup>3</sup> Wong Sung Huh, "The Philosophy of History of the Later Nishida Kitarō," *Philosophy East and West*, 14.3 (1990), 343-347.
  - <sup>4</sup> Derrida defines "*khora*" as that which "is neither this nor that (neither intelligible nor sensible), one may speak as if it were a joint participant in both. Neither/nor easily becomes both ... and, both this and that." Jacques Derrida, "How To Avoid Speaking: Denials," *Derrida And Negative Theology*, Harold Coward and Toby Foshay, ed. (Albany, SUNY Press, 1992), 107.
  - <sup>5</sup> To Takahashi the pure absolute (Jap.: *jun naru zettai*), if existent, retreats infinitely into the future, while every conception of the "absolute" cannot but be relative (Jap.: *sōtairitsu*), temporal (Jap.: *jikanteki*), and determined (Jap.: *genteiteki*).
  - <sup>6</sup> Immanuel Kant. *Kritik Der Reinen Vernunft* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp Taschenbuch der Wissenschaft., 1956), 1: B116-B169; A96-A130.

- 7 Kant, 2: B 420.
- 8 Kant, 1: A 350.
- 9 Kant, 1: A363.
- 10 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phänomenologie Des Geistes* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp Taschenbuch der Wissenschaft.,1970), 68.
- 11 Hegel, 70.
- 12 Since I completed the manuscript, Wargo's dissertation has been published as Robert J. J. Wargo, *The Logic of Nothingness: A Study of Nishida Kitarō* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2005). However, in this essay all subsequent notes will refer to his dissertation.
- 13 Wargo, 208.
- 14 I have argued elsewhere that Nishida's "universal of self-awareness" functions as transcendental non-ego. Gereon Kopf, "Towards Transcendental Relativism: Reading Buddhist Non-Dualism As Phenomenology," *The Empirical And The Transcendental: A Fusion of Horizons*, Bina Gupta, ed. (Rowman & Littlefield, June 2000), 119-138).
- 15 Nishida refers to the first layer as the "world of the judgment" (Jap.: *handanteki sekai*) to the second layer the "world of self-awareness" (Jap.: *jikakuteki sekai*), and the third layer "the world of intelligibility" (Jap.: *eichiteki sekai*).
- 16 Robert C. Solomon, "Hegel's Phenomenology Of Spirit," *The Age Of German Idealism*, Robert C. Saolomon and Kathleen Marie Higgins, ed., (New York, Routledge, 1993), 194.
- 17 Salomon, 193.
- 18 Hegel, 75.
- 19 According to Nishida, The basic tenet of Nishida's "logic of *basho*" is summarized in the dictum that every "thing that exists" (Jap.: *aru mono*) has to be located in a "place" (Jap.: *basho*): "individual objects" (Jap.: *kobutsu*) are located in physical space (Jap.: *butsuriteki kukan*), "when we know things ... we have to first assume a field of consciousness." Kitarō Nishida, *Nishida kitarō zenshū* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1988), 4: 210.
- 20 Hegel discusses the necessity of intersubjectivity for the development of consciousness in his so-called "master-slave narrative," Nishida in his dialectic of the "I and Thou" (Jap.: *watakushi to nanji*).
- 21 For a more detailed discussion see James Heisig and John Maraldo, ed., *Rude Awakenings* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994).
- 22 I owe this observation to a private conversation with Curt Nasser during the 2002 conference of the International Institute of Field-Being in Xi'an.
- 23 Gereon Kopf, "Between Foundationalism and Relativism: Locating Nishida's 'Logic of Basho' on the Ideological Landscape," *Bulletin of the Nanzan Institute for Religion Culture*, 27 (Spring 2003), 24-45.
- 24 Nakamura Yuichirō suggests an affinity between Nishida philosophy and "contemporary philosophy" (Jap.: *gendai tetsugaku*), that is, with "postmodernism" and "French philosophy." He argues that both Nishida philosophy and "contemporary philosophy" strive to "fundamentally critique the knowledge in traditional (Western) philosophy" and, thus, may be called "anti-philosophy" (Jap.: *hantetsugaku*). Yuichirō Nakamura, *Nishida tetsugaku no datsukōchiku* (The Deconstruction of Nishida Philosophy) (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1987), 15-17.
- 25 Nishida, 11: 397.
- 26 Nakaoka Narifumi goes so far as to claim that "[I]t is possible to call Nishida's logic of nothingness a thought which gently recognizes difference when it thoroughly opposes ... the Western logic of being," which Nakaoka characterizes as a philosophy of "identity" (Japanese: *dōitsu*). Narifumi Nakaoka, *Watakushi to Deau tame no Nishida Kitarō* (Reading Nishida for the Purpose of Self-Realization) (Tōkyō, Kabushiki Kaisha Shussōsha, 1999).
- 27 Nishida, 11: 424.
- 28 See footnote 24.
- 29 Kunitsugu Kosaka, *Nishida kitarō o meguru tetsugakusha gunzō* (The Philosophers Responding to Nishida Kitarō) (Tokyo: Minerva Shobō: 1997), 192-214.

- <sup>30</sup> In Nishida's own words, "time cannot return to what was prior to the individual moment." Nishida, 6: 183, 234, 240. For a more detailed argument see Gereon Kopf, "Temporality And Personal Identity in the Thought Of Nishida Kitarø," *Philosophy East and West*, 52, 2 (2002).
- <sup>31</sup> Takahashi, 3: 292.
- <sup>32</sup> "Interestingly enough, the two characters of *høetsu*" constitute, if read individually, the two terms Nakamura uses to describe the modality by means of which Nishida's dialectics sublates Hegel's philosophy, namely, "*tsutsumu*" and "*koeru*" (Nakamura, 238).
- <sup>33</sup> Of course Takahashi identifies Hegel's dialectics as "dialectics of process" and Nishida's as "dialectics of *basho*." Interestingly enough, Nakamura uses the very same terminology when he refers to Hegel's dialectics as "dialectics of process" (Jap.: *kateiteki beshøhø*) (Nakamura, 237); he further describes Nishida's dialectics as "meta-dialectics" (Jap.: *meta beshøhø*) (Nakamura, 239), which "transcends" (Jap.: *koeru*) and "includes" (Jap.: *tsutsumu*) the "dialectics of process" (Nakamura, 238).
- <sup>34</sup> Takahashi, 3: 142.
- <sup>35</sup> Takahashi, 3: 143.
- <sup>36</sup> Takahashi, 3: 304.
- <sup>37</sup> Takahashi, 3: 292.
- <sup>38</sup> Takahashi, 3: 291.
- <sup>39</sup> Takahashi, 5: 9.
- <sup>40</sup> Tøyø Nobechi, *Nishida tetsugaku hihan* (A Critique Of Nishida Philosophy) (Tøyø: Ømeidø, 1997).
- <sup>41</sup> Despite an almost mantric repetition of the observation that "the *noema* sinks into the *noesis*, Nishida nevertheless maintains that "[e]ven though, in artistic intuition, the *noema* of consciousness sinks into the *noesis* of intelligibility, the *noema* of intelligibility is not lost; to the contrary, the juxtaposition is retained in that the *noesis* is bound to the *noema*." In the end, Nishida strives to maintain a balance between the asymmetric emphasis on the *noesis* and the symmetry between *noesis* and *noema*. The same holds true for the notions of unity, which Nishida identifies as "noetic direction," and difference, "noematic direction." Nishida, 5: 159.
- <sup>42</sup> Jacques Derrida, "On An Apocalyptic Tone Recently Adopted In Philosophy," *Derrida And Negative Theology*, Harold Coward and Toby Foshay, ed., (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992).