



Nishida Kitarō, *L'Éveil à soi*. Traduction, introduction et notes de Jacynthe Tremblay. Préface de Matsumaru Hisao

Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2003. 298 pp. € 24 paper, ISBN 2-271-06185-7.

COMPARED TO THE steady stream of German and English translations of the philosophical works of Nishida Kitarō over the past seventy years, French translations began to appear only in 1991 and are still few and far between. Jacynthe Tremblay has been doing her best to change that. Following up on a substantial sampling of some 125 pages of Nishida's writings on logic in an appendix to her doctoral dissertation *Nishida Kitarō: Le jeu de l'individuel et de l'universel* (Paris: CNRS Éditions), she has now provided the French-reading public with a new volume of Nishida's writings. The selection of material, helpful introductions, an exhaustive glossary of technical terms, and a detailed index make her work a welcome contribution to the understanding of Nishida's thought in the West.

The collection is devoted to later, more mature writings of Nishida dating from the years 1931 to 1944. They represent some of his most important essays and together give a good idea of how he thought and wrote. The first two essays, “Le temporel et l’intemporel” and “Amour de soi, amour de l’autre et dialectique” have yet to appear in translation in any language. They are followed by “Je et tu,” a work that has been attracting attention of late through German and Italian translations.

A second group of translations tackle two key but difficult essays, “L’auto-identité absolument contradictoire” and “À propos de l’éveil à soi” (also never before translated into a Western language), and are followed by the longest piece Nishida ever wrote on a single philosopher, “À propos de la philosophie de Descartes.”

The single most important thread running through the selection, more explicitly in the latter half of the book, is Nishida’s concept of self-awakening (*jikaku* 自覚), the pivotal point of his thinking during the period in question. Tremblay’s aim is clearly to focus attention on the core of Nishida’s philosophical thinking without being sidetracked by his political, ideological, and religious views.

Tremblay renders *jikaku* as *l’éveil à soi*, a particularly appropriate choice. For Nishida, the self is not in any sense to be understood as a substance or substratum—after the manner, say of Descartes’ *res cogitans*—but as the focus of awakening in the indeterminate field (or *basho* 場所) of the cosmos. The “self” of “self-awakening” is not a subject acting on itself, but neither is it an object being acted on by another. It is an awakening to a self that lies beyond that dichotomy of subject and object. It is, therefore, an *l’éveil à soi*.

It is worth mentioning that Tremblay leaves the Japanese word *basho* untranslated, finding the normal French equivalents like *lieu*, *champ*, and *topos* as misleading. Since Nishida sometimes qualifies *basho* as the *basho* of nothingness (or, perhaps we might say, as a “place of no place”), the term refers to what is at one and the same time everywhere and nowhere. For my part, I understand the contradiction as a deliberate attempt to express the mutual interpenetration among persons and things in the world or of *basho* and the world of persons and things of the world as a whole. In any case, the notion of *basho* is developed through a third notion key to Nishida’s mature thought which Tremblay renders as *l’auto-identité absolument contradictoire*. Though a notoriously difficult concept for Nishida commentators, it may help to approach it as a negation of the law of excluded middle. This, in fact, if I understand her correctly, is how Tremblay approaches it, and seems to be behind her choice to translate a fourth and related key concept, that of *soku* 即, as *est/n’est pas*. In her detailed introduction, she traces the development of this notion back to early Mahāyāna Buddhism.

An example of this logic at work appears in the essay “Je et tu,” where Nishida describes the interpenetration (or, we might say, chiasm) of “I” and “you.” Here is how Tremblay puts it in French:

Donc, le ‘je’ connaît le ‘tu’ par l’écho de son agir personnel, tandis que le ‘tu’ connaît le ‘je’ par l’écho de son agir personnel. Le fait que nous reconnaissons

l'autre absolu au fond de chacun de nous et que nous passions réciproquement dans l'autre depuis l'intérieur de chacun de nous, tel est l'agir personnel vraiment auto-éveillé. C'est au sein de cet agir que le 'je' et le 'tu' entrent en contact l'un avec l'autre (124).

"I" and "you" touch each other in this co-echoing, without any intermediary third. This is the sense in which a self-identity of absolute contradictories is set up between I and non-I.

Nishida went to great pains to steer a course of philosophical thought between East and West. As Tremblay notes in her introduction, it is mainly due to this struggle that he felt compelled at times to do violence to the Japanese language. What Tremblay attempts in her translations is to reinforce the bridge that Nishida was trying to build and thus to clear the way to a universal foundation of philosophical thinking.

Sakabe Megumi
Obirin University