

Binghamton University

The Open Repository @ Binghamton (The ORB)

Comparative Literature Faculty Scholarship

Comparative Literature

9-19-2023

Japanese-English Translation: Miki Kiyoshi –Thinking with Master Nishida (First Published in Fujin Kōron, August 1941) Complete Draft; Translated, Edited, and Revised by Christopher Southward, October 2022-September 2023 「西田先生のことども」、三木清著〔初発 婦人公論、昭和十六年八月〕

Christopher Southward

Binghamton University–SUNY, csouthw1@binghamton.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://orb.binghamton.edu/comparative_literature_fac



Part of the [Comparative Literature Commons](#), [Comparative Philosophy Commons](#), [Epistemology Commons](#), [Ethics and Political Philosophy Commons](#), [German Language and Literature Commons](#), [History of Philosophy Commons](#), [Japanese Studies Commons](#), [Language Interpretation and Translation Commons](#), [Logic and Foundations of Mathematics Commons](#), [Metaphysics Commons](#), [Philosophy of Mind Commons](#), and the [Philosophy of Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Southward, Christopher, "Japanese-English Translation: Miki Kiyoshi –Thinking with Master Nishida (First Published in Fujin Kōron, August 1941) Complete Draft; Translated, Edited, and Revised by Christopher Southward, October 2022-September 2023 「西田先生のことども」、三木清著〔初発 婦人公論、昭和十六年八月〕" (2023). *Comparative Literature Faculty Scholarship*. 44. https://orb.binghamton.edu/comparative_literature_fac/44

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Comparative Literature at The Open Repository @ Binghamton (The ORB). It has been accepted for inclusion in Comparative Literature Faculty Scholarship by an authorized administrator of The Open Repository @ Binghamton (The ORB). For more information, please contact ORB@binghamton.edu.

1

It was April 1917, and Master Nishida was in Tokyo to speak at a philosophy conference organized around the theme of *The Multiplicity of Worlds*. I was a student at the First Higher School then, so this would be the first time that I saw the Master in person, and even though his presentation was far beyond my understanding, it made a deep and lasting impression on me. He entered the stage dressed in formal Japanese robes and, adding to his mystique, paced the stage while speaking in fits and starts, gazing at the floor while he warmed up his topic. Rather than directly addressing the audience from script, he appeared as though he were arranging his thoughts and presenting them underway as he analyzed and resynthesized their many parts. Now and then, he'd stop in his tracks, pick up a piece of chalk, and trace circles and lines across the blackboard, doing this not as much for our benefit as in search of a method properly suited to the expression of his ideas. What I saw there was not a university professor in the process of delivering a lecture but *a man directly engaged in the act of philosophizing*. It was as though I were witnessing nothing less than the agonistic unfolding of his thinking, and I now realize that this presentation happened during what was perhaps the most prolific period of Master Nishida's life in letters. Having debuted in *The Journal of Philosophy*,³ the study that he presented that day appeared in the fall of 1917 as the postscript to his monumental *Intuition and Reflection within Consciousness*,⁴ and if we were to read this text as an indictment of philosophical excess, then Master Nishida would stand as that movement's most apt representative.

In fall that year, I enrolled in the Department of Philosophy at Kyoto Imperial University as an apprentice to Master Nishida, and I made this decision after reading his *Inquiry into the Good*⁵ ahead of its republication by Iwanami,⁶ having dug up an out-of-print copy at a used bookstore. Though already a peerless figure within Japanese philosophy, the Master was as yet rather unknown to the world at large, but his name soon began to spread as the result of the publication of Kurata Hyakuzō's *Origins of Love and Understanding*,⁷ which was currently popular among the youth and where, as I recall, he introduced Master Nishida to a larger reading public. In fact, *An Inquiry into the Good* jumpstarted my own career in letters, as it was this book that gave me direction when I was at the peak of indecision over what path to take in life. *If this is what philosophy is all about, I thought, then philosophy is what I will do!* While every student of the humanities dreamed in those days of being admitted to Tokyo Imperial University, I was determined to enter the philosophy department at Kyoto in order to study under Master Nishida. Having so decided, I consulted and gained the support of Professor Hayami Hiroshi,⁸ who'd patiently mentored me throughout my youth. I thus struck out on my own and left my friends behind for Kyoto—a familiar experience, as I'd been a loner since my high school freshman year and felt certain that I was

¹ 三木清 (Japan, 1897-1945); Nishida protégé and Kyoto School of Philosophy correspondent

² 西田幾多郎: Nishida Kitarō (Japan, 1870-1945); progenitor of the Kyoto School of Philosophy

³ 『哲学雑誌』

⁴ 『自覚に於ける直観と反省』

⁵ 『善の研究』

⁶ 岩波書店: Iwanami Shoten, est. 1913 by Iwanami Shigeo (Japan, 1881-1946)

⁷ 『愛と認識との出発』、倉田百三著 (Japan, 1891-1943)

⁸ 速水滉 (Japan, 1876-1943)

destined to lead a life of utter solitude. Even so, these formative years were the backdrop against which I would fulfill my dreams. Having left home for Tokyo with only a vague notion of what I would do there, I now found myself leaving the capital for Kyoto with a clear objective in mind, and this gave me the courage that I needed to persevere.

September marked the beginning of the school year then and, on my way home in early July, I paid a visit to Master Nishida at his home in Rakuoku, in Tanaka Village, Kyoto with my recommendation letter from Professor Hayami in hand. No sooner had I knocked on the door as I struggled to compose myself than Master Nishida opened it and greeted me. *Ah, yes!*, he said, *I've been expecting you since your visit with Hayami in Tokyo this spring!*, and he then began discussing with me all manner of things, including his upcoming lectures and course assignments. When I asked him where I should begin my studies in philosophy, he recommended Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* and retrieved a copy of the text from a shelf, handing it to me on the condition that I duly return it. The combination of Japan's political climate and an American trade embargo on our nation during WWII made it nearly impossible to get hold of German books here, but one of my high school pals had discovered a tattered copy of a Reclam⁹ edition of *The First Critique* at a used bookstore, and all the boys watched him with great envy as he walked around flaunting it.

Master Nishida treated me kindly from the moment we first met, so I visited him two or three times a month while I was studying at Kyoto, and we always managed to speak with each other candidly and carefree. Even so, he seldom broached a topic of conversation of his own accord, and we'd often spend half an hour or so sitting in complete silence while I squandered time wondering what questions to ask so that, finally unable any longer to bear the tension, I'd announce my departure and get up to leave. *As you wish*, he'd say, leaving me to decide whether to stay or to go. A classmate told me that this was his common reply and, now that I think about it, I realize that this was the busiest time of his career, when he was living and breathing philosophy, so to speak, and it's certain that he had no time to entertain the passing whims of half-witted students like me.

I often caught glimpses of Master Nishida out for walks while on my way to school. Wearing a wide *heko obi* tied loosely around his robed waist, he always moved in long, brisk strides as though driven by an unseen force. He appeared enchanted at such moments, and it seems to me that his philosophy is suffused with something of the same intensity that I glimpsed in his morning strolls.

2

Master Nishida always held his seminars in the evening, and his Saturday lectures on special topics were perennial campus favorites—standing-room-only affairs that saw students from the humanities and other departments jostling for space alongside Kyoto Imperial University alumni. During the five-year period between my initial enrollment at the University and my departure for research abroad,¹⁰ I faithfully attended his lectures, never missing a session. The Master always arrived dressed in Japanese robes, and he always spoke in fits and starts while pacing the platform, stopping now and then to trace lines and circles across the blackboard in exposition of his ideas; everything about him was just as I remembered it from first the time I heard him speak at the philosophy conference in Tokyo. Now and then, he'd pause behind the rostrum and fall contemplatively silent. Then, suddenly, as if struck by the solution to a problem and then redirecting his thinking, he'd resume speaking with renewed vigor. He always stared at the floor while pacing it in speech, but he'd sometimes stop mid-

⁹ Reclam Publishers, est. 1828 by Anton Philipp Reclam (1807-1896)

¹⁰ See Yusa Michiko's [遊佐美智子] consideration of Miki's European research period in "Philosophy and Inflation: Miki Kiyoshi in Weimar Germany, 1922-1924." *Monumenta Nipponica*, Vol. 53, No. 1, Spring 1998, pp. 45-71.

thought and gaze long and myopically at the audience—his signal that it was time either to take a break or to end the session. While his lectures were always scheduled for two hours, there were times when he'd finish his presentation in one, whereupon he'd say something along the lines of, *I'm exhausted today, so let's wrap it up here*. Something about these words always warmed the hearts of those gathered, as we all immediately understood that the Master probably had sat up studying late into the night in preparation for the evening seminar.

Master Nishida's lectures were free of the pretensions that one might expect of conventional approaches to teaching. Instead of obliging an audience to endure drawn-out explanations of this or that concept, he invited us to join him in meandering quests of truth grounded in rigorous philosophical speculation. While the average reader struggles to understand his work, one discovers with patience that, out of the deep spiritual-textual interstices that explicate his intricate logic, a revelatory phrase can suddenly appear as though bursting forth to illuminate an entire passage. As such, readers who until such moments might have been disheartened by the density of his work suddenly find their efforts rewarded and discover the wherewithal to continue. The situation was the same with his lectures. Students arrived having prepared by reading the Master's work, and he would begin by exploring the assigned texts, addressing confusing and challenging points along the way so that the utterance of a simple word or phrase could suddenly reveal the depth of his meaning. Now that I consider it, my private meetings with him unfolded in the same way. During our conversations, he often seemed to discover lines of thinking that hadn't occurred to him while, say, writing, lecturing, or consulting with other students and colleagues. In the years following the publication of *Intuition and Reflection Within Consciousness*, he further developed as a logician in the purest sense of the word, and I feel fortunate to have been his student during this period. When I think about the distinctive style of his lectures, what I most vividly recall is their structure. For Master Nishida, teaching was not a matter of explaining and describing things but of risking the making and unmaking of sense in the interest of building a philosophical system.

Never one to interfere with our research, Master Nishida left his students to our own devices to trace the trajectories of our thinking. In this respect, he was so lenient as to appear utterly indifferent to our efforts, but the fact of the matter is that he is a nonconformist at heart, and since he always encouraged each of us to develop our own voice, it must have pained him to find us trying to mimic his style instead. When we approached him with research proposals, his reply was always the same: *Yes, that sounds like an interesting project!*, he'd say, and he'd then proceed to offer suggestions on methodology and texts we might consider. He and I had a natural rapport from the start, and such moments always made me feel as though I were confiding in an attentive father-figure. While he could be rather intimidating, he always warmly welcomed everyone he met, including students who came to him with nothing to say; in my opinion, this was a mark of his greatness as a teacher. He never dictated our thinking or made unreasonable demands of us, and he never turned anyone away. It goes without saying, then, that those fortunate enough to have studied under him lavishly praised him, and this tendency extended to his many general readers. While the respect that he garnered certainly had much to do with his authority as a philosopher, we can also attribute it to his gracefulness as a human being.

The development of Master Nishida's philosophical system is the result of more than genius; rather, it's at least equally due to the fact that he's tireless in his studies. Even now, when he is already well into his seventies, he continues to research and learn new things, and he has taught me that constant study is the hallmark of a true thinker. While it is precisely this commitment to scholarship that keeps him from falling into the meditative quietism that we commonly find among would-be philosophers, we glean from his work the difficulty of translating one's meditative experience into thinking and, through its textual representation, of conveying to the reader insights gained through the silence of sitting. As a voracious reader who's always on the lookout for new developments in world philosophy, he consumes the latest work on all manner of topics. No sooner had Western philosophy

entered Japanese minds than he incorporated it into a unique system of thought, and it was through this that our nation discovered its many possibilities. From Henri-Louis Bergson's¹¹ meditations on time and duration to the neo-Kantianism¹² of Heinrich Rickert¹³ and Hermann Cohen¹⁴ or, say, from the work of Franz Brentano,¹⁵ Alexius Meinong¹⁶ and the German-Austrian traditions to Edmund Husserl's¹⁷ phenomenology and the dialectical theology of Karl Barth,¹⁸ Master Nishida was their most vocal proponent. Beginning with Leibniz,¹⁹ he popularized Western philosophers here by discovering new approaches to their work, but his research was so wide-ranging that even Cohen and others must certainly have greatly influenced him, as it seems he was always deeply studying mathematics while I was a student in Kyoto. Perhaps this is what compelled him to invite the mathematician Dr. Sono Masazō²⁰ to the department for talks on such topics as set and group theory, but what's notable here is that he enthusiastically attended these sessions right alongside his students. He began shortly thereafter to study Marx²¹ and a constellation of related thinkers, and we find him in recent years deeply engrossed in history, including the works of Leopold von Ranke.²² He certainly has a unique approach to reading, and I witnessed this first-hand while studying with him. Rather than scientifically analyzing each theoretical detail of a treatise, Master Nishida reads intuitively, gleaning the general movement of a writer's logic by immersing himself in their world, and this remarkable ability to grasp a text's most salient features speaks to his intellectual sensibility. Not only this, but he also has an uncannily refined way of discerning the merits of a wide range of texts, easily classifying them in terms of the good, the useful, and the absolutely indispensable. And how accurate this sense of his is! It's marked by genius, yes, but he must have cultivated it by sustaining a far-reaching reading practice. Kyoto University's philosophy department now has what is arguably the most revered library in all of Japan, and this is largely due to the fact that the Master strategically and lovingly curated the collection during his professorship; in fact, I often found him browsing the stacks during my research visits there.

Master Nishida can also be rather meanspirited. There were times during our conversations at his home or office when he would mention a well-known philosopher, ask me what I thought of their work, and immediately condemn them. *It's garbage!*, he might exclaim, interrupting me just as I began to speak, but the truth is that even his harsh criticisms were usually well warranted. He appears here to be led by a unique combination of heightened intuition and unshakable courage, and I can think of no one who rivals him in this respect. Then again, given his reading practice, this much is to be expected. When I visit him at his home, I often find books lying open on his desk alongside slips of paper onto which he'll either have copied one or two important passages or jotted down thoughts that might have struck him while reading; what's more, he always takes notes in German.

Master Nishida is as critical of people as he is of books and, here too, he has an uncommon ability to condense into pithy statements his observations of a person's character, even if what are off-putting traits for him might be inconsequential for someone else. While he's certainly both daring and unforgiving in this respect, he's also rather kindhearted and sentimental. During seminar one day, he called upon a student whose turn it was to contribute to the discussion only to find them unprepared to

¹¹ Henri-Louis Bergson (France, 1859-1941)

¹² Immanuel Kant (Germany, 1724-1804)

¹³ Heinrich Rickert (Germany, 1863-1936)

¹⁴ Hermann Cohen (Germany, 1842-1918)

¹⁵ Franz Brentano (Germany, 1838-1917)

¹⁶ Alexius Meinong (Ukraine; Austria, 1853-1920)

¹⁷ Edmund Gustav Albrecht Husserl (Austria; Germany, 1859-1938)

¹⁸ Karl Barth (Switzerland, 1886-1968)

¹⁹ Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (Germany, 1646-1716)

²⁰ 園正造博士 (Japan, 1886-1969)

²¹ Karl Marx (Germany, 1818-1883)

²² Leopold von Ranke (Germany, 1795-1886)

speak. So angered by this was the Master that, eyes now visibly watering, he abruptly reprimanded the student, shouting, *Knuckleheads like you should drop out of school!* This outburst at once brought me to tears and confirmed his deep commitment to his craft, and while he always seeks balance in judgement and temperament, there are times in fact when I think he's much too forgiving. Whenever I visited him after long absences, he always made sure to ask about his apprentices: *How is So-and-So?*, say. At other times, he might passingly greet me in the way of, *How are things? Have you been studying?*, and should I happen to have been idling, then his question always hit me with a special sting. And yet, because I knew that he was genuinely interested in my intellectual development, I always returned home determined to work even harder.

I remember this as though it were only yesterday, but it must have happened around the time that I was in graduate school. I was visiting the now late Professor Fukuda Yasukazu,²³ and as was fairly common with him then, he was drinking and already a little tipsy when I arrived at his office. When conversation turned to Master Nishida, Professor Fukuda said, *That Nishida is full of the animal spirits,²⁴ isn't he?* In fact, I just happened recently to have published in *Bungei Shunjū*²⁵ a paper on Descartes' notion of *the animal spirits*, and I must say that I too have often sensed something of this at work in him. Indeed, we might fairly say that this "subtle wind" and "flame"²⁶ are at the very core of his being. Even now, when he's well into his seventies and thinning with age, the Master is as sprightly as ever, and he can down sweets, fruit, and tea with the best of them. Something tells me that there's an element to his thinking that is so radically animalistic as to reveal the unwavering power of his spirit, radiant as it is with this ineffable force. He seldom shows it publicly, but Master Nishida appears to be more empathetic than the average person, or we might say that an infinite darkness seems to lurk in the deepest recesses of his mind. While he often speaks of "that which is demonic,"²⁷ he deploys this not as a philosophical concept but in view of material-corporeal experience itself—the very basis of human subjectivity.²⁸ There must indeed lie deep within him some sort of evil that always gives him to thinking

²³ 深田康算 (Japan, 1878-1928)

²⁴ 動物精気: See René Descartes' (France, 1596-1650) notion of *les esprits animaux* [*the animal spirits*] in *Discourse on Method*: "And finally what in all this is most remarkable of all, is the generation of the animal spirits, which resemble a very subtle wind, or rather a flame which is very pure and very vivid, and which, continually rising up in great abundance from the heart to the brain, thence proceeds through the nerves to the muscles, thereby giving the power of motion to all the members" (*The Philosophical Works of Descartes*, Vol. 1. Translated by Elizabeth S. Haldane and G.R.T. Ross. London: Cambridge University Press, 1973, p. 115).

²⁵ 文藝春秋: Japanese periodical and press est. 1923 by Kikuchi Kan [菊池寛] (Japan, 1888-1948)

²⁶ Op. Cit., p. 115.

²⁷ Miki uses the German *dämonische* here. Regarding Nishida's usage on this point, see the above-referenced *Inquiry into the Good*, where he frequently uses the term 悪 [*evil, sin, ill, malice*] along with several of its nominal cognates as well as verbal and adjectival conjugates in exposition of his moral philosophy. These include 悪む [to hate; to detest], 善悪・[道德]の標準 [standards of good and evil/morality], 好悪 [love and hate], 悪しき意志 [nefarious intentions; ill will], and 絶対的偽醜悪 [absolute evil], the latter being exemplified in the following specimen of his stock-in-trade negative-dialectical construction: 「深く考えて見れば絶対的真善美という者もなければ、絶対的偽醜悪という者もない」 [If we were to consider the matter thoroughly, then we would realize that if it is the case that no one on Earth is absolutely good then neither is anyone absolutely evil]. While adverbial conjugations of this term do not appear in that text, let us note that it takes the form 悪く, as in 悪く思う [to think ill of – ; to dislike]. (『善の研究』 [An *Inquiry into the Good*]: Aozora Bunko [青空文庫] non-paginated transcript of the text referenced March 27, 2023, <https://www.aozora.gr.jp/cards/000182/card946.html> (General website: <https://www.aozora.gr.jp>)

²⁸ My rendering here of Miki's treatment of the question of experience in Nishida's work is informed by William Haver's explication of the *taiken/keiken* [体験・経験] distinction as it appears in Nishida's work (*Ontology of*

even though he most profoundly understands that thinking is the original sin. His philosophy is an attempt to illuminate that darkness—in fact, it’s the very light that shines forth from it—and the deeper the darkness, the stricter its demands upon rationality. If his philosophy resists classification as pure irrationalism, then neither can we think it as simple intuitionism, so that, in final analysis, we can say that Master Nishida works in tireless quest of both reason and sense. Nothing surpasses the splendor of light that pierces the pitch of night, and both the allure of his thought and his personal appeal lie in the fact that they emerge from that abysmal pit. I hear that the Master was an avid reader of Russian literature during his tenure as a teacher at the Fourth Higher School. Even now, he’s quite fond of Dostoyevsky,²⁹ and I think that there are points of mutual resonance in their work. Going beyond mere mysticism, this resonance responds to the problem of what he calls “historical substance.”³⁰

3

When writing, Master Nishida makes a point of drafting two to three pages of text every morning, his work regimen being comparable to that of an epic-form novelist. In fact, I get the impression that he composes his theses with the same sort of enthusiasm that one finds in a fledgling writer, their incremental progression serving as something of a journal of his thinking whose circular logic absolutely defies restriction to such linear chapter sequencing as we tend to encounter in the average treatise. Master Nishida has never to date written the standard sort of text that might have allowed for ready division into easily discernible sections; rather, he pens dissertations that he compiles into tomes. And these are no regular theses. I gather of his process that as soon as he’s brought a text to a stage of relative completion, he then sets to working out ideas that he feels need more development, and this always leads to yet another project. But his texts have no “end” as such. The Master often makes reference to Fiedler’s³¹ notion that the work of art is never complete, and it is precisely incompleteness that I believe characterizes his work. Master Nishida works in such a way as to compose a single long-form thesis in the course of writing several essays in fragments. But, even here, his work is never done. He strikes me as the figure of the novelist who, having spent his life writing shorter works, eventually discovers his efforts to have culminated in nothing less than one great saga. Although he writes on a wide range of topics, Master Nishida’s body of work represents his singular quest, unparalleled in its rigor and consistency, for the essence of a unified foundational principle. Of course, his recent *Inquiry into the Good* shows development of this search throughout, and while it is crucial that we pay attention to what he does there in this respect, let us also note that this text offers its own series of fundamental principles that we must not overlook. While he is an extremely perceptive thinker of his epoch, the Master also stands out for his ability to generate new epistemological trends, such that we might even say that he has the sensibilities of a world-class journalist. And even this fails to capture the truth of his gift, for no other thinker rivals him in either his keenness and sensitivity for the movements of an era or his tireless pursuit of an ideal, and it is precisely these elements that are the sources of the novelty and depth of his philosophy. Seers tend either to vacillate between any of the vain pursuits that define an era or to fixate upon a single one that suits them with such narrow vision that, in the end, they find themselves stagnating and accomplishing nothing; neither is the case with Master Nishida. That ways of living are determined by their environments and, conversely, that environments are determined by ways of living is a point that he is adamant about lately, and this

Production: Three Essays by Nishida Kitarō. Translated by William Haver. Durham: Duke University Press, 2012, p. 196).

²⁹ Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoyevsky (Russia, 1821-1881)

³⁰ 歴史の物質

³¹ Friedrich Kurt Fiedler (Germany, 1894-1950)

dialectic just about sums up his philosophical style. Suffice it to say that the Master's unique writing style is integral to his philosophy; we cannot separate them. Just as Hegel³² thought through his distinctive writing style, so too does Master Nishida through his own. For Master Nishida, style is itself a philosophy, and it would be nearly impossible for him to express the one without the other.

Master Nishida's philosophy is imbued with Eastern intuition, and while he might have developed this sense through his *zen* practice, we can assume that other contributing factors must also be at play. One actually hears echoes of Gutoku Shinran³³ throughout his work, and while it even resonates with the ideas of Motoori Norinaga³⁴ and others, I think it would be more accurate to say that the markedly "oriental" elements of the Master's thought could only have emerged from direct, lived experience; in fact, life itself is the source of all that is new in his philosophical perspective. While this aspect of his work places it in dialogue with thinkers like Goethe,³⁵ Master Nishida must be quite appalled by recent popular trends in *zen*, as he aims only to develop a uniquely Japanese philosophy. In fact, he always says that he must *pass through Western logic in order to attain the essence of a Japanese philosophical sensibility*, and he offers the following advice to the youth: *Read the Eastern classics for personal growth and enrichment, but you'll have to turn to the West if you plan to study philosophy*. I gather from this that he means that while deep study of Western philosophy is indispensable to the work of becoming an academic philosopher, to the degree that the discipline transcends the academy and has practical implications for life, it is incumbent upon the student to learn the many lessons offered by Eastern literary and spiritual traditions. I believe that philosophical depth derives from human greatness, which is to say that it is neither acquired through imitation nor learned through study. The depth of Master Nishida's philosophy is grounded in his personal greatness. Even if we were to consider his character apart from his philosophy, we would have to concede that he is rare in his time. In fact, one of my acquaintances once noted that Master Nishida and Master Rōhan³⁶ are the world's preeminent Japanese writers today.

When I was a student at Kyoto Imperial University, Master Nishida always arrived to campus dressed in a *kimono* and work boots, and I always thought that this gave him the appearance of something between a village elder and a schoolmaster. Covering topics ranging from Meinong's notion of *the object* to Husserl's phenomenological method, his seminars were filled with lectures on the latest developments in Western philosophy yet largely unknown in Japan. In this way, the Master presented a figure that combined the best characteristics of the country bumpkin and the *avant-garde* scholar. Max Wundt³⁷ has argued that Socrates³⁸ represented the ethical traditions of the Attican farmer. But let us note that even Socrates incorporated into his philosophy elements that resembled sophist teachings that were then new to Greek thought and widely circulated throughout Athens from abroad, and we can say that, within Japan, Master Nishida's philosophy holds a position similar to that which Socrates' thinking held in Greece in his day. Promoting neither moral orthodoxy nor pure sophism, Socrates instead developed a method unsurpassed in his time for its novelty and originality and thereby established the ancient Greek philosophical tradition. So too with Master Nishida who, by bridging the gap between East and West, has developed a completely new Japanese philosophy.

³² Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (Germany, 1770-1831)

³³ 愚禿親鸞 (Japan, 1173-1263)

³⁴ 本居宣長 (Japan, 1730-1801)

³⁵ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (Germany, 1749-1832)

³⁶ 幸田露伴 [幸田成行] (Japan, 1867-1947)

³⁷ Wilhelm Maximilian Wundt (Germany, 1832-1920)

³⁸ Socrates (Greece, 469-399 B.C.E.)

Master Nishida is always well-informed about worldly affairs, and I often find myself amazed by the depth and breadth of his understanding of the human condition. Especially since his retirement from Kyoto Imperial University, during which time his teaching and administrative responsibilities must have drastically decreased, he has become more outspoken about social and economic problems, the political climate, and other areas of interest. He's recently acquired a villa in Kamakura and regularly spends winter and summer months there, and our conversations always begin with an overview of current affairs when I go to visit him. It follows to reason that he should want to enjoy the limited time that he allows himself in the company of others discussing mundane topics, as he spends the majority of his time alone grappling with philosophical problems. Even so, Master Nishida never approaches the news with the disengaged attitude of the passive consumer; rather, he grows more heated with each passing moment that we spend in debate. At such times, it's as though he were rolling up his sleeves, so to speak, and preparing to stake his life on a worthy cause. Call him chivalrous or romantic, but I certainly sense in him the best of the Meiji-era gentleman, and while he can be rather exacting in his observations and criticisms of social conditions, I find that he usually hits his mark with well-formed arguments. This could have something to do with his experience of mentoring the likes of Konoe Fumimaro³⁹ and Kido Kōichi⁴⁰ during his tenure at Gakushūin University. Following their promotions to high governmental positions, Master Nishida has become even more interested in the affairs of the State. I would certainly like to know whether he has directly criticized Konoe, Kido, and other officials, but the fact of the matter is that, even as he ages, the Master has grown more outraged by our nation's political direction. It's as though he's regained an adolescent spirit in this respect, and we can only commend him for his patriotic enthusiasm. His wide-ranging interests and knowledge notwithstanding, Master Nishida has remained throughout his career committed to a single goal, and he's never taken a moment's rest from this pursuit. While he's amassed an exemplary body of work, we can expect his abilities to have allowed him to create nothing less. Every time we meet, he says, *My work has only begun*, and it is with such dogged persistence that he keeps his objective in view. His is a single-mindedness that puts the rest of us to shame.

Master Nishida once gave me a scroll upon which he'd penned a poem which reads as follows:

*Red like the rising sun
over the peaks of Mt. Atago:
Such is the becoming of life
whose embers never die*

What better words to capture the essence of the Master?

³⁹ 近衛文麿 [In text as 近衛公] (Japan, 1891-1945; Prime Minister of Japan 1937-1939; 1940-1941)

⁴⁰ 木戸幸一 [In text as 木戸候] (Japan, 1889-1977; Lord Keeper of the Privy Seal of Japan, 1940-1945)