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### Japanese-English Translation: Nishida Kitarō--“Self-Determination of the Eternal Now” 「永遠の今の自己限定」、西田幾多郎著〔昭和六年七月〕 (July 1931) §1 of 4; Complete Draft (Supersedes Draft of 2 Jan 19); Translated by Christopher Southward; Revision and Expansion Underway

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1

When St. Augustine questioned the meaning of the notion of the fullness of time in response to St. Paul’s statement, *But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth his Son*, he concluded that this must mean that time ceases to exist. Divine Nativity must require that something like that which we call time comes to an end. But, according to Meister Eckhart, yet another meaning applies to the so-called end of time. If we could retrieve and draw into the present moment all that has occurred and is likely to recur in a span of time—say, several millennia—then this would count for what is known as the fullness of time. As the eternal now, this is the situation within which, for example, I see things and hear sounds; it is that situation within which we can say that we know all things clearly and anew through God (Meister Eckhart, *Von der Vollendung der Zeit [On the Fullness of Time]*). Plato suggests in *Timaeus* that, instead of endowing Creation with eternity, the Creator created *a moving image of eternity* and that this image is time. It seems that Plato has in mind here *eternity* as that which can be neither created nor destroyed, which is to say that which transcends time and which, enduring and unchanging, *is* at both the beginning and the end of time. We might even go so far as to say that, in the eternal, there is neither past nor future but only the present, and that past and future follow from the present, so that anything that transcends something like what we call time should not be thought in terms of the temporal. What is thought as the eternal now (*nunc aeternum*) must be thinkable as something like what Eckhart described as the result of the elimination, at a point within the present, of infinite past and infinite future. This must mean that, as on the first day of Creation, God is creating the world even now and that time is always beginning anew.

But what is the true nature of time, and how are we to think it? We can think time as an endless passage of infinite past into infinite future; we can think it as linear progression. But while the future is that which has yet to come and the past is that which has already appeared, because it is that which has already passed, it becomes all the more thoroughly impossible for us to know the past *of* the past. It is only by focusing on the singular present that we have recourse to knowing past and future. Perhaps when we integrate past with memory by taking the present as our focus and foresee that which has yet to come, there arises the relation, past-present-future. So it could be thinkable that, within the present, there is both that which has already passed and that which has not yet ended *as* the past, that there is that which has yet to come and yet is already showing its edge, that there is that which is present but already in decline, and that that which we call the relations of time result from the non-present itself being a passage of past into future. But in order for us to know that which changes, there must be that which does not change; in order for us to think something like infinite past and infinite future from the standpoint of the present, there must be that which informs infinite past and infinite future. With Augustine, we can reject the idea that anything like what we call past, present, and future exist; rather, what exist are past-present, present-present, and future-present, so we can say that the present is structured as past-present-future. But to say that time is situated in the present must be to negate time itself; when time is thinkable as obtaining in several senses, this must be what time *is*. Time must be an infinite flow and its vector must be that of the movement of eternity, which infinitely approaches the absolute while never touching it; it must be thinkable as that within which we are unable to return to even the previous moment, so that when we think the infinitely distant goal of time as being embedded

in several senses of the temporal, time must become that which is retrievable. In no way is time a simple series with uniform direction. Rather, the goal of time must be to get outside that which it includes; time must find a way to get outside that which is determined as the cognitive epistemological object. The edge of time must be that which vanishes moment by moment, and therein lies the sense of the impossibility of a return of time to eternity; therein lies the meaning of the impossibility of grasping the present. We must think with Augustine that time is embedded in the present, but we add that when we think time in this sense, that which we call time ceases to exist; time is a matter of contradiction in and of itself. How, then, can we say that this manner of time determines itself?

We can say that everything that exists somehow exists universally, which is to say that it has its meaning as an extension of the universal idea. This quality of extension is the condition of possibility for judging the quiddity of things, which is to say that judgment arises from the self-determination of the universal. As for that which we call the singularity, we note that no more is it thinkable as becoming-predicate by virtue of its becoming-subject than it can be thought as having existence as an attribute of the predicative universal. And yet the very condition of possibility for thinking the singularity lies in the universal; the singularity is thinkable *as* the self-determination of the universal. I call this the self-determination of the *place* of the universal, and determination so conceived propagates infinitely. But even if we can now rightfully say that the singularity becomes subject, it seems unlikely that its subjective determination should involve transformation. Perhaps we can say that, being situated within the infinitely propagated universal, the singularity is infinitely bound to the chorological determination of being. In order to think that which we call time, we must get outside something like that which we call the self-determination of the universal. The condition of possibility for thinking something like that which we call time lies in the chorological determination of nothingness *as* the self-determination of that for which self-determination occurs as the determination of the self-itself even in its own becoming-nothingness. Although we can think time as that which proceeds through infinite movement, we understand that it changes, so that even if we were to assign it a certain vector, we would find that infinite movement alone does not account for that which we call time. To construe time as constant everywhere prevents us from grasping that which we call the present. And as we recognized above that it is our apprehension of the present that allows us to think past and future, we must also recognize that the present isn't determined by the past; rather, past and future are determined by virtue of the determination of the present by the present itself; without the present, neither is there that which we call time. This is not to say that just because we can think that which infinitely changes at the heart of the determined universal we can also think the so-called self-determination of the present by the present itself; we mean instead that it then becomes possible to think the self-determination of that which determines the self-itself without that which determines, which follows from our understanding that time generates contradiction within the self-itself. We cannot think that which we call contradiction as an attribute of the determined universal; the only way to think contradiction is in terms of that which lies in the depths of that which, *as nothingness*, conceals *being*. Time apprehended as the present is not yet the present; we can think the present as ungraspable and contradiction as unthinkable. But as for the self-knowing of the self-itself, which is to say for that which we call becoming-conscious, we can say that it is that which, as nothingness, determines being; we can say that it is that situation wherein the present always determines the present-itself. Even Augustine would agree that past, present, and future pass through the mind's eye. Where the self knows the self-itself, there is the present; where the present determines the present-itself, there is the self. Self has no basis; to think that not-self determines self would be to think away that which we call self. The present has no basis; to think that it does would be to think that past determines present and thereby do away with that which we call time. Earlier, we said that everything that exists exists through the universal and that rational knowledge arises through the self-determination of the universal, but we could also have said that that which we call the self-determination of the universal is grounded in rational knowledge and

that this is where the whole meaning of consciousness lies. To say that becoming-noematic is at once a becoming-subject and that rationality co-arises with the self-determination of the universal can only mean that the self sees the self from a standpoint within the self. But as the noematic consciousness of that which determines the self-itself as nothingness, becoming-subject must be objective. And let us also note that that which is thinkable as the chorological horizon of the singularity must be that whose meaning lies in the conscious determination of nothingness; human consciousness must be the condition of possibility for thinking something like the singularity, and individual judgment must always find grounding in intuition. We then claim with Aristotle that we cannot ground truth in the idea of the singularity whose becoming-subject isn't at once a becoming-predicate; to do so would leave the establishment of truth to the consciousness of nothingness. The defining moment of Aristotle's analysis of truth is the idea that it is the conscious content of *logos*. If time arises from the determination by the present of the present-itself, then the determination of the present-itself by the present would have to co-arise with the determination by nothingness of nothingness-itself, and it must be in this co-arising that we discover the significance of consciousness. We can think that which we call time as the self-determination of the universal that determines the self-itself as nothingness; in other words, we can think it as the conscious determination of absolute nothingness. Everything pertaining to the self-determination of the universal is grounded in the conscious determination of absolute nothingness, and while this self-determination tends to cloak itself, we see that that which determines self-itself as nothingness, which is to say the present in its determination of self-itself, is grounded in the conscious determination of absolute nothingness. And because that which we call the actual determination of self-itself by the present is the same as that which we call the ungraspable instant, also determined then is something like the so-called instant that establishes the self-itself as the conscious determination of absolute nothingness; freedom lies in inhabiting the space of that instant. Because the determination of that which we call freedom happens as the chorological determination of absolute nothingness, we can say that each embodied self bears time within itself and that, as such, we each have our own time. Absolute time is usually thought as something that flows from eternal past to eternal future—it is thought as the absolute horizon of our existence. But as noted above, this perspective prevents us from thinking that which we would call true time. Time arises from the determination of self by self; it begins with the determination of the present by the present. Where there is the individual self, there too is that which we call individual time. We do not belong to time; time belongs to us, and so-called absolute time is nothing but a notion. What is first determined then is that which determines the self-itself as nothingness, which is to say that which is determined as the noetic determination of the consciousness of absolute nothingness; it is that which is determined as chorological determination. We might even go so far as to say that that person who actually determines the self-itself as nothingness is one who is free. One who is determined by the nothingness of the absolute must be free, and this is why that which determines the self-itself as nothingness appears to us as something like an infinite circle that hides infinite dialectical movement in the depths of the self; we can now say that freedom is a circular determination that secrets time away to the self-itself. Pascale speaks metaphorically when he says that *God is an infinite sphere whose center is everywhere and circumference nowhere*, but we can also think that which we call the conscious determination of absolute nothingness as an infinite circle whose center is everywhere and circumference nowhere (Pascale's sphere seems appropriate, but I'll deal with the circle for now). The determination of the circle that infinitely determines the self-itself as nothingness is thinkable as an attribute of God's spherical omnipresence, so that even the self of absolute nothingness exists within this circle, which fact leads to the diversification of our species in its determination and makes us marvel at the infinite coming-into-existence of time as a multiverse of authentic presents. If to say that the present determines the present is to say that it bears all time within itself, then we should also be able to think that which we call the absolute-present, which determines all time; we would then be able to think the conscious determination of absolute

nothingness, whose center is everywhere and circumference nowhere. From this it follows that that which we are trying to think as the absolute present begins everywhere as the rupture of the instant; it is that which we call the eternal now, or the drawing-in of infinite past and infinite future to a single point in the present, and it is on this basis that we are able to think time as co-arising with the self-determination of the eternal now. Being nothing like that which Plato thought in terms of immutable form, we find worthy to be called the eternal now only that which can eliminate infinite past and infinite future from a standpoint situated within every single point in the present; it must be thinkable as something like that which we call the consciousness of absolute nothingness—the condition of possibility for the beginning of time instantaneously and at all points. Even Plato's so-called world of immutable forms is determined by and within the eternal now. Being unbound yet centered at all points, that which we call the conscious aspect of absolute nothingness must be thinkable as the condition of possibility for both the beginning and the end of time instantaneously and at all points; as the absolute, it must be thinkable as that which bears life and death in one and the same face. That is, if the self-determination of absolute nothingness is thinkable as the noetic determination by which it conceals infinite time, then so too is it thinkable as the noematic determination by which it both gives rise to infinite time and completely negates it. It turns out that time is completely negated by being hidden in that which we call the present of the determined absolute, and we can now think the self-determination of the unbound circle whose center is everywhere and circumference nowhere as the self-determination of an infinite circle that encompasses all. There is neither movement nor life there; in fact, we should no longer even call it the present, for that which we call time ceases to exist there. We can only think that which we call absolute time if, for that which we are calling an infinite circle, the self-determining aspect of singular-absolute nothingness is an aspect of that which we are thinking as our world of cognitive epistemological objects; we can think absolute time as the flow of eternal past into eternal future only because we understand it as the present of eternity determined by the eternal now, which is to say that we can think it in terms of both the self-determination of that which determines the self-itself by absolutely nullifying time and that which is determined by the eternal now as the eternal present. But as stated above, that which we call time cannot be thought as the self-determination of the determined universal, which is to say that we cannot think time as the self-determination of the world of cognitive epistemological objects. Rather, time must be thought as the self-determination of the universal that determines the self-itself as nothingness. In claiming that we can now think that which we call absolute time as determined, we find ourselves in search of an instant even deeper than the instant; to think absolute time is necessarily to grasp the ungraspable instant, and this must imply that the center of the infinite circle has come to a point, all of which is impossible except through the mind of God. On the other hand, what is determined is something like the circle that determines the self-itself as nothingness; determined then is the self-determination of the infinite circle, which is to say that which we call the present that determines the self-itself. Where we manage to grasp the ungraspable present there arises that which we call time. Each of us, by determining the self-itself as nothingness, can finally think the encounter with true time at the horizon of the instant, which is to say that we can think the experience of absolute time, and this means that, here, at the outer limits of the ego, we encounter God, and it is through God that we discover that that which is *inner* is already that which is *outer*. But if we can think a present that once and for all determines the present itself, then we can also think a present that endures everywhere it goes; we can then think the self-determination of the enduring present as the noematic consciousness of nothingness, which means that we can think something like the conscious determination of the universal self. The self-determination of that which determines the self-itself as nothingness must be thought as the self-determination of the fleeting instant; it is here that we can think something like the self-determination of the determined present; here, we can think the so-called eternity of Plato's forms. Somewhere along this path, we might even stumble upon an extreme limit-point from which to think the atemporal.