

contribution to a topic in Tendai Buddhism that had been unclear for a long time. Anyone interested in the innovative ways in which the Buddhist precepts developed in Japan will find much that is fascinating in this book.

La Détermination du néant marquée par l'autoéveil. By Nishida Kitarō. Translated from Japanese to French by Jacynthe Tremblay. Nagoya: Chisokudō Publications, 2019. 449 pages. Paperback: ISBN 978-1-0724-2060-6.

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Nishida Kitarō 西田幾多郎 (1870–1945) is without any doubt the most famous Japanese philosopher of the twentieth century. A major component of current research on modern Japanese philosophy concerns his works. Not only is he considered to be the founder of the Kyoto school, he was also willing to challenge Western philosophy on its own ground and produce something new. Although Nishida's essays are well known, they are not easy to read. Even with good Japanese-language skills and a strong knowledge of the history of philosophy, understanding his thought can be challenging, and this is why translating Nishida's writings requires bilingual ability and a deep understanding of what Nishida is revealing philosophically. Jacynthe Tremblay has proven her ability to understand, explain, and disseminate Nishida's thought. More than a simple expression of her skills, her work represents a precious example of serious academic work for younger researchers.

Tremblay, who specializes in both the philosophy of religion and Japanese philosophy, is a well-known scholar who has written many commentaries on Nishida's philosophy, and is the author of the majority of Nishida's translations into French. She has also directed various interesting edited volumes on modern Japanese philosophy. In 2018, she won the Canada-Japan Literary Award for her book titled *Je suis un lieu* (I Am a Place), in which she explains how she first encountered Nishida's philosophy, the way she understands his work, and how it has changed the way she thinks and sees the world.¹

¹ Jacynthe Tremblay, *Je suis un lieu* (Montréal: Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 2016). The French and Japanese expressions in this review were translated into English by the author.

In her 2007 monograph, she distinguishes three periods in Nishida's philosophy.² The first period (1911–1926) begins with *Zen no kenkyū* 善の研究 (*An Inquiry into the Good*, 1911). Nishida appears, here, to be the first Japanese philosopher willing not only to introduce Western philosophy into Japan, but also to create something philosophically original and to discuss this with Western philosophers. This essay is famous for using the concept of “pure experience” (*junsui keiken* 純粹経験). The second period (1926–1930) of Nishida's philosophy starts with an essay entitled “Basho” 場所 (Place).³ It represents the beginning of his thought about logic and an attempt to elaborate a more systematic philosophy. It is also the starting point of his work to elaborate a “logic of place” (*basho-teki ronri* 場所的論理). The last period (1930–1945) is characterized by considerations about the historical world, as well as the importance given to dialectics in his understanding of reality. What may be the most original concept of this period is Nishida's “absolutely contradictory self-identity” (*zettai mujun jiko dōitsu* 絶対矛盾自己同一).

In the introduction to *La Détermination du néant marquée par l'autoéveil* (The Self-Aware Determination of Nothingness), the volume here under review, Tremblay suggests that the second period in Nishida's philosophy started in 1923 (no longer 1926) with the writing of the first essay of the book *Hataraku mono kara miru mono e* 働くものから見るものへ (*From That Which Acts to That Which Sees*, 1927). It continued with *Ippansha no jikaku-teki taikei* 一般者の自覚的体系 (*The Self-Aware System of Universals*, 1930) and ended with the publication of *Mu no jikaku-teki gentei* 無の自覚的限定 (*The Self-Aware Determination of Nothingness*, 1932). Tremblay translated the first two volumes into French in 2015 and 2017 respectively.⁴ *La Détermination du néant marquée par l'autoéveil* is the French translation of this third volume.

This volume, which starts with a preface, contains nine essays that are known predominantly by specialists and readers of Nishida's work: (1) “L'autodétermination du soi expressif” (Hyōgen-teki jiko no jiko gentei

² Jacynthe Tremblay, *Introduction à la philosophie de Nishida* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2007), pp. 9–11.

³ As Tremblay explains, *lieu* (place) is not a perfect translation of what Nishida means by *basho*. According to Tremblay, a good translation would be *le ce en quoi* (“the that in which”).

⁴ Nishida Kitarō, *De ce qui agit à ce qui voit*, translated from Japanese to French by Jacynthe Tremblay (Montréal: Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 2015); Nishida Kitarō, *Autoéveil: le système des universels*. Translated from Japanese to French by Jacynthe Tremblay (Nagoya: Chisokudō Publications, 2017).

表現的自己の自己限定, The Self-Determination of the Expressive Self); (2) “Les actes de conscience comme autodétermination du lieu” (Basho no jiko gentei toshite no ishiki sayō 場所の自己限定としての意識作用, The Acts of Consciousness as Self-Determination of the Place); (3) “La détermination du néant absolu marquée par l’autoéveil” (Watashi no zettai mu no jikaku-teki gentei to iu mono 私の絶対無の自覚的限定といふもの, The Determination of Absolute Nothingness by the Self-Awareness); (4) “L’autodétermination du maintenant éternel” (Eien no ima no jiko gentei 永遠の今の自己限定, The Self-Determination of the Eternal Now); (5) “Le temporel et l’intemporel” (Jikan-teki naru mono oyobi hijikan-teki naru mono 時間的なるもの及び非時間的なるもの, The Temporal and the Non-Temporal); (6) “Amour de soi, amour de l’autre et dialectique” (Jiai to taai oyobi benshōhō 自愛と他愛及び弁証法; Self-Love, Other-Love, and Dialectics); (7) “La volonté libre” (Jiyū ishi 自由意志, The Free Willingness); (8) “Je et tu” (Watashi to nanji 私と汝, I and Thou); and (9) “À propos de la philosophie de la vie” (Sei no tetsugaku ni tsuite 生の哲学について, About the Philosophy of Life).⁵

The volume also includes a bibliography and an index. The index lists Nishida’s Japanese philosophical terminology, as well as its French equivalent according to Tremblay, and is an excellent tool to study Nishida’s vocabulary and appreciate Tremblay’s translation. More philosophically important is her introduction, in which she proposes a reading of Nishida’s book through the scope of the concept of *détermination* (*gentei* 限定, determination). According to Tremblay, it is necessary to explain the multiple aspects of this concept to understand the positions expressed within the work (p. 8). As this is more than just a simple presentation of Nishida’s philosophy, I will give an overview of her focus here.

She begins her explanation of the idea of *détermination* by showing the importance of this concept in the book (pp. 8–9). According to her calculations, there is an average of thirteen occurrences per page pertaining to this theme that are used in different forms such as nouns, verbs, and adjectives, amounting to a total of 4,460 occurrences in the whole book (p. 9).⁶ Next, she highlights the fact that even though this theme was present in *Hataraku*

⁵ The French translations and the original Japanese titles are found on p. 5 of the book under review.

⁶ This includes different concepts such as self-determination (*autodétermination*), determination (*détermination*), the determining (*le déterminant*), the determined (*le déterminé*), to determine (*déterminer*), to determine oneself (*se déterminer*), self-determined (*autodéterminé*), determinable (*déterminable*), undeterminable (*indéterminable*), and undetermined (*indéterminé*).

mono kara miru mono e and *Ippansha no jikaku-teki taikai*, both contain fewer occurrences. Also, there is a progressive increase in the number of the occurrences of the word “determination” between *Hataraku mono kara miru mono e* and *Ippansha no jikaku-teki taikai*, and finally *Mu no jikaku-teki gentei*.

Tremblay continues her introduction by analyzing the theme of “*la détermination du néant*” (the determination of nothingness; pp. 9–15). She presents it as paradoxical, since we could legitimately ask ourselves, “How can a thing that does not exist determine itself?”⁷ She then adds that this question was one of the philosophical elements that distinguished Nishida from Tanabe Hajime 田辺元 (1885–1962).

Nishida considered Tanabe’s understanding of his notion of “nothingness” and “determination of nothingness” to be inaccurate.⁸ For Nishida, “nothingness” does not mean that there is nothing; it is synonymous with “absolute nothingness” which has the meaning of both “absolute nothingness” and “absolute being” (p. 13). According to Nishida, nothingness does not refer to a simple ontological absence (p. 13). This point is crucial as for a long time very few commentators on his philosophy highlighted this originality.

Tremblay also argues that for Nishida the concepts of “determination of nothingness,” “self-awareness of nothingness,” and “self-aware determination of nothingness” do not relate fundamentally to religion or mysticism, but rather to the ideas of mind and self. To support her position, Tremblay argues that what he called “self-aware nothingness” refers to the fact that the self, in the sense of nothingness, determines itself in an absolute way.

Moreover, Tremblay considers that Tanabe’s critiques of Nishida’s position are mistakes resulting from a number of misunderstandings of his philosophy. She also explains that other commentators on Nishida’s thought do not demonstrate the inaccuracies of Tanabe’s critiques. According to Tremblay, commentators rarely present Nishida’s philosophical position on nothingness and its determination clearly.

She gives four different definitions of the word “determination” according to Nishida’s work. She devotes an important part of her introduction to explaining these meanings: (1) “determination from the position of the determining” (*détermination depuis la position du déterminant*), (2) “determination

⁷ Stated in the original text as: “Comment une chose qui n’existe pas peut-elle se déterminer?” (p. 10).

⁸ Tremblay refers to Nishida’s correspondence as well as extracts from *The Self-Aware Determination of Nothingness*.

from the position of the determined” (*détermination depuis la position du déterminé*), (3) “determination as the acting of the determining to the determined” (*détermination en tant qu’agir du déterminant sur le déterminé*), and (4) “reciprocal determination” (*détermination réciproque*). The explanation given by Tremblay in this introduction alone is sufficient to justify the reading of this book for those who wish to study Nishida’s philosophy.

Overall, *La Détermination du néant marquée par l’autoéveil* offers an excellent opportunity to encounter Nishida’s thought and arguments through a precise French translation. And where Tremblay considers that an explanation could be useful, she adds footnotes.

In conclusion, this book is representative of Tremblay’s work: it is conscientious and well-documented. While not absolutely essential, a prior reading of Tremblay’s previous two volumes of translation would, of course, help the reader to appreciate this volume all the more.

If Nishida’s comprehension of philosophy may sometimes appear contentious, we can only welcome positively his attempt to elaborate a new philosophical standpoint and to give, to a certain extent, a response to European philosophy. His willingness is clearly expressed in the incipit of *La Détermination du néant marquée par l’autoéveil*: “There has to be something absolutely irrational in the foundation of reality” (p. 41). Even if Nishida’s comprehension of Hegel was not perfectly accurate, such an assertion reflects an implicit opposition to the German philosopher. It also appears as a response to Tanabe’s doubts.