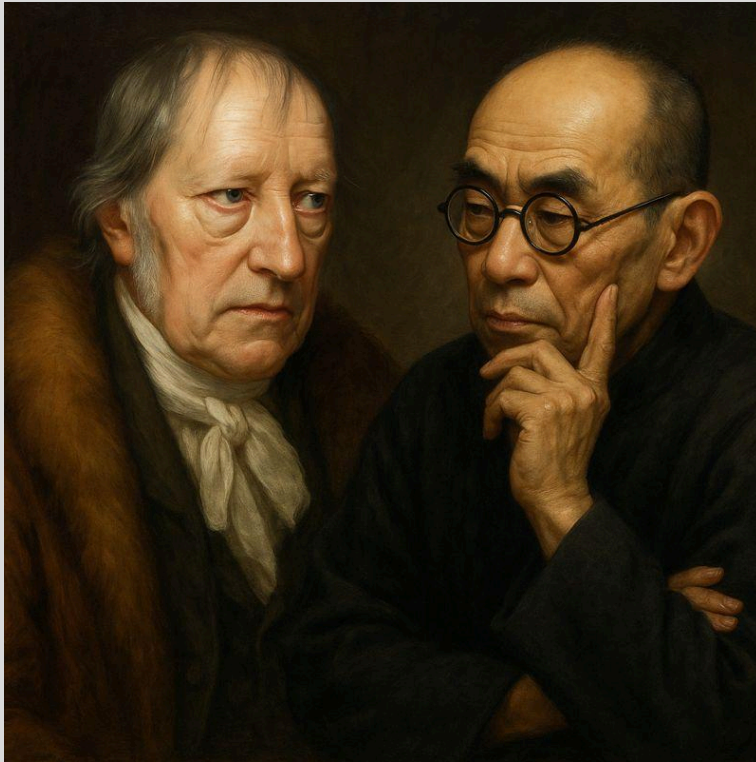


Japanese Philosophy Network #15



Nishida's Dialectical Realism: An Encounter with Hegel

by Christian Halstead

15:10-16:40, 19 Dec 2025

Room 24, Building 101, Komaba
Campus, The University of
Tokyo

Co-organized by UTCP and EAA

Abstract:

Anglophone scholars often contrast Nishida Kitarō's emphasis on tension, division, and process against G.W.F. Hegel's alleged, 'all-encompassing, conceptual totality.' However, this overlooks Hegel's privileging of contradiction over identity. To identify Nishida's true departure, I turn to his underexamined essay, "Hegel's Dialectic as Seen from My Perspective" (1931). I reconstruct Nishida's critique as a three-part dialogue with Hegel: first, on methodology, then, on philosophy's beginning without presuppositions, and finally, on the nature of contradiction. Methodologically, Nishida identifies the site of non-dual epistemic unity with the world as experience, not Hegel's conceptual thought. He 'begins' with what I call 'meontological vacuity,' not Hegel's 'indeterminate immediacy.' Finally, Nishida restructures contradiction as internal self-negation, not Hegel's unity of opposites.

This analysis reveals Nishida's novel contribution as a 'dialectical realism,' which overcomes the association between realism and positivism. Typically, realism and dialectics are considered mutually exclusive: either the world exists outside the mind, fully constituted – positively – in itself, or the world emerges through an ongoing process of construction, dependent upon our active intervention. However, Nishida overcomes this false choice: the Absolute, absolute nothingness, is contradictory, and so dialectical, in itself, independent of mind. The process of determinate negation typically reserved for subjectivity occurs as an intrinsic feature of the world in itself: with or without us, absolute nothingness self-determines itself through its individuation qua entities. Nishida's dialectical realism favorably reconciles realism – reflecting scientific evidence – with freedom – since the mind-independent world's inner negativity renders it innately transformative and open-ended.