Chapter 2
What is Existence?
Earlier we talked about the question, “where exactly does the past exist?”

and ever since then I’ve been wondering...

what exactly does “exist” mean?

That’s a good question!!

What is “existence”? 
Here there is a flower. Here there is no flower.

What is the difference?

When there is a flower we can see a flower, but when there is no flower we cannot see a flower.

That makes sense.
So does “to exist” mean “to be visible”? Is that what you think?

Ummm…
Umm…

What can be seen at this moment exists, right?

Right

So, what cannot be seen right now does not exist?

…. 😯

Right now we cannot see Antarctica from here, but does Antarctica not exist?

?! :

Antarctica exists on the other side of the Earth.

How can you say that Antarctica exists even though you can’t see it right now?
I can say it like this!

If I got in a jet and flew to the South Pole, I’d be able to see that Antarctica exists.

A live video stream would also work.

But right now we don’t have a jet or a live video stream, so we can’t look and see whether or not Antarctica exists at this very instant.

Therefore, it is completely impossible for me to know whether or not Antarctica exists right at this moment.

I can neither say that it exists nor that it doesn’t exist.

Not this again!

And you’re changing the subject…
Antarctica must exist even if it isn’t in front of our eyes right now!!
It’s crazy to say that only what we see in front of us really exists!!

Alright then, let’s think about it like this.

Consider three kinds of “existing.”

Really exists.
Must be assumed to exist.
Might exist.
Does not exist.

exists

Like this.
To begin with, “really exists” means I can actually confirm that the thing in question exists.

There is a flower right in front of my eyes.

Second, “might exist” means I cannot say there is no possibility that the thing exists.

Aliens from outer space might have set up a secret base somewhere on Earth.

Third, “must be assumed to exist” means I cannot actually confirm whether or not the thing in question exists right now, but I cannot help but assume that it does.

I cannot help but think that Antarctica exists.
Strictly speaking we cannot say whether Antartica exists or not, but in practice we cannot help but believe that it does.

It’s a very strange thing.

The existence of God to people who believe in monotheism is another very similar example.

It is impossible to directly confirm the existence of God.

So we can presumably say neither that God exists nor that God does not exist...

but for people who believe deeply in monotheism, no matter how they think about it they cannot shake the conviction that God does actually exist.
Of course, there are differences between Antarctica and God.

If you go to the South Pole you can confirm whether or not Antarctica exists, but in the case of God no method of direct confirmation exists.

Let me give you another example. What will happen to this world after you die?

It will go on existing just as it is.

And will you exist in this world after you’ve died?

I won’t exist any more.
You say that this world will go on existing even after you have died.

Why is that?

I don’t understand what you mean…

When I die, at the same time this entire world might cease to exist!!

No way! Of course this world will go on existing even if I disappear! It’s crazy to say this entire world will cease to exist as well!!
Yes, that’s true. So “this world after I die” is something we “cannot help but think exists.”

Though we cannot say it “really exists” because we cannot confirm it.

Alright then, if this world will disappear when I die, what I am living for?

I want to leave proof that I have lived in this world.
I see. Perhaps this is where the secret of “existing” is to be found.

My being able to believe that this world will continue to exist even after I’m gone is perhaps a result of my believing that by leaving something in this world when I die my having lived in it will be given meaning.
In this way the longing for our lives to have meaning supports existence.

I really don’t understand what “existing” is, but a flower in front of my eyes exists, right?

Why do the things I see in front of me “exist”?
Alright, let’s think about this.

There is a flower here.

But eventually it will wither and there won’t be a flower here any more.

We can also say, however, that there is a withered flower.

Eventually a mushroom begins to grow.

Now there is a mushroom.

In other words, the existing things I see in front of me undergo changes,

\[
\text{"exists"} \rightarrow \text{"exists"} \rightarrow \text{"exists"} \rightarrow \text{"exists"} \rightarrow \]

but the fact that they exist continues endlessly, completely unchanged.
In other words, various things emerge and disappear in the unending arena of 
“(something) exists,” and this process is repeated over and over again.

It’s like the arena of “now.”

That’s right. “Exists” and “now” are very similar.

When we think about it like this, the foundation becomes “exists” rather than “emerges and disappears.”
I don’t know. "(something) exists" too may have an end.

It could be like this:

Emerges → "(Something) exists" ← Disappears

If so, then where does this "exists" emerge from, and where does it disappear to?

"Exists" emerges from "nothing" and disappears back into "nothing."
Isn’t “nothing” just a pseudo-religious concept?

Not at all. What I just said holds true as a matter of reason, since the negation of “existence” is “nothing.”

Emerges

Disappears

Emerges

Disappears

“(Something) exists”

Individual existing things.

The working or mechanism that causes existing things to exist.

Where there is no working or mechanism causing existing things to exist.

What is “nothing”?

What is the place “where there is no working or mechanism causing existing things to exist”?
That’s a difficult question.

Working that causes existing things to exist.

Where there is no working that causes existing things to exist.

Rationally this is what follows, but...

we cannot clearly picture what "nothing" is,

nor can we express it directly in words.

We can’t say that “nothing” exists, can we?

This goes beyond the power of our imagination and the capacity of language, so we can only hint at it indirectly through poetic methods of expression.

* “Absolute contradictory self-identity” and “the place of nothing” are poetic expressions used by Kitarō Nishida.
Philosophy takes its investigations right up to the edge of this limit of language, so we must think very carefully about what is being indirectly implied by its key terms.

Assuming the working that causes existing things to exist has a source from which it springs,

since this is a place where there is no working that causes existing things to exist

it is a foundation that supports existence from below.

In other words, it is a “place of nothing” that supports existence from the very bottom.

What an agonizing effort!

Trying desperately to say something in this way.

Poetic language makes its entrance.
Alright then, next let's consider the working that causes existing things to exist from a different angle.

OK

There is an existing thing called “a flower” here now.

Can we say that the working that causes this existing thing called “a flower” to exist here and now “exists?”

Sure.

In fact, the working that causes the existing thing called “a flower” to exist cannot be said to “exist,” nor can it be said to “not exist.”
It cannot be said to exist because if we say that the working that causes existing things to exist “exists,” then this working itself becomes an “existing thing” and is no longer the working that causes existing things to exist.

But if we say that the working that causes existing things to exist “does not exist,” it can no longer explain why existing things exist.

Here we must give up on using language like “exists” and “does not exist,” and try to convey what we want to say using words like “hide” or “reveal.”
The working that causes existence can neither be said to “exist” nor to “not exist.”

In other words, it tries to hide in the shadow of existing things and conceal its own form.

But in front of someone who knows this system of concealment well, by its display of hiding its own form it is actually attempting to reveal itself.

In this way, poetic language like “the working that causes existing things to exist is trying to reveal itself in the form of hiding itself” comes to be used.

* “Geheimnis” and “Ereignis” are poetic expressions used by Martin Heidegger.
Is poetic language really philosophy?

At its outer limits, philosophy cannot avoid using such language.

Any other questions?

Why does the world “exist” to begin with?

So your question is, “Why does the world exist, even though it could just as easily not have existed?”*

*This is called the “fundamental question of metaphysics.”

**ある means “exists.”
Even though this world could just as easily have been a perfect “nothing” in which no things exist at all, why do all sorts of things now exist?

Nothing

Why has the working that causes existing things to exist now arisen in this world? The more you think about this the stranger it gets.

It’s such a difficult question that there are people who have been driven out of their minds by thinking about it too much.
Why does the world exist? ...

Because it is “necessary” that the world exist now.

“Necessity” is the key word.

To say that something is “necessary” is to say that “no other possibilities exist.”

For example, right now I’m wearing a striped shirt.

Wow!

In fact, there is a possibility that I might have been wearing all sorts of clothes.
While there was a possibility that I might have worn something different,
I chose this striped shirt.

As a result, my having chosen to wear stripes was not “necessary.”

So what about the world existing right now?

“Necessary” = there is no other possibility

Is there a different possibility, other than “the world exists now?”

If there were such a possibility, it would amount to “the world does not exist now.”
But a state in which “the world does not exist now” is not one I can ever actually experience.

Because if “the world does not exist now,” then neither do I who am experiencing it.

Hey, the world doesn’t exist now!

In other words, this sort of scenario is self-contradictory.

↑ Inconceivable

This is the only conceivable way it could be.

It’s different from choosing clothes.
Manga Introduction to Philosophy
An Exploration of Time, Existence, the Self, and the Meaning of Life

Masahiro Morioka

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Chapter 4 What Is Life?
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