

Tetsugaku Companions to Japanese Philosophy 4

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Lucy Christine SCHULTZ *Editors*

Tetsugaku Companion to Nishida Kitarō



Springer

Tetsugaku Companions to Japanese Philosophy

Volume 4

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Tetsugaku Companion to Nishida Kitarō

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Introduction

NISHIDA Kitarō, considered the “father of modern Japanese philosophy”, was born in 1870 in Unoke near Kanazawa, in the northwestern part of Japan. He lived through the most turbulent period of post-Meiji modernization that began in 1868, the Shino- and Russo-Japan Wars (1894, 1904-5), and the Second World War. He was a professor of philosophy at Kyoto University from 1910 to 1928, and his students came to be known as the “Kyoto School”. He died in Kamakura, south of Tokyo, in June 1945 without knowing the end of the Pacific War and the Japanese surrender. His first published *Collected Works* encompass 18 volumes.

In the following, an overview of Nishida’s philosophy is provided, as well as an introduction to this book and the chapters.

Overview of Nishida’s Thought: From Pure Experience to Self-Identity of Contradictories

As mentioned by many contributors in this volume, one of the most fundamental concepts in the philosophy of Nishida is “pure experience (純粹經驗 *junsui keiken*)”, which leads us to explore the potential of a *different* nature of knowledge and ontology from that which is based on what is called the dichotomy of subject and object. Nishida says that it is pure experience itself that intuits and “knows *immediately*” (without any medium) the reality and the truth of a thing, not a human being or a “subject”. This drastic change in the experience and knowledge of things characterizes pure experience. This notion of “pure experience” underlies all the stages of the development of his philosophy.

“*Jikaku*” (自覚: self-awareness or self-awakening) is another way of grasping pure experience. According to Nishida, *jikaku* consists of intuition and reflection. Intuition manifests itself when an intuiting subject and an intuited object are realized as one in the original fact of awareness, while, at the same time, this duality-in-unity is grasped in reflection. Self-awareness, or self-awakening, can be grasped as

a *self-identical* state of experience. As for reflection, a *contradiction* is formed between subject and object, since the reflection is realized on the basis of the opposition between the reflecting subject and reflected object. This entire state can be regarded as a unity between the identity of intuition and the difference of reflection, or between a reflecting agent (subject) and reflected things (object) from a higher perspective. This kind of unity is what constitutes the state of pure experience.

The complex relationships involved in *jikaku*, which are the states of pure experience, evolve into Nishida's signature ideas such as *basho* (場所, place), acting intuition (行為的直観, *kōi teki chokkan*), self-identity of contradictories (矛盾的自己同一 *mujun teki jiko dōitsu*), the dialectical universal (弁証法的一般者, *benshōhō teki ippansha*), and so on.

Let us begin with the idea of the “self-identity of contradictories” in connection with “*basho*”, one of Nishida's most well-known concepts. The concept of self-identity is essentially connected with a *basho*, or “place”. The “self-identity of things in a place (*basho*)” means that “things”, in their self-identity, are found within a unified field of experience. Each thing, being distinct from all other things, exists through a contradictory relationship with these others. In other words, each thing is what it is in virtue of *not* being all others; it is “contradictory” to all others in this sense. All things occupying the same *basho* exist as they are by maintaining their own self-identity through the contradictory relationship with other things. Each thing is identical with itself by way of “negating” all other things, in order to maintain its self-identity. Although each thing appears as an entity with its own independent existence opposed to others, they are able to relate (though in contradictory terms) because all are contextualized in terms of the oneness of their common *basho*. To use a very simple example, the color “red” is what it is by virtue of not being all other colors; in this sense the color red “contradicts” all other colors. But all colors are what they are in the *basho* of a color scheme, which provides the context and terms of the contradictions. The color red cannot be said to “contradict” a number, for instance. For every being, there is the *basho* that provides the “that by which” the beings can have their intelligibility in identity-in-contradiction, and depending on the context, the scope of the *basho* expands. Its ultimate form is “boundless”; it is the ultimate “*basho* as absolute nothingness” in which all reality shows itself as identity-in-contradiction.

Pure experience, as immediacy, is this ultimate *basho* in which all things appear as they are. In this way, the notion of pure experience in Nishida's philosophy was evolving through his quest for direct knowledge of reality in the long course of his philosophizing. From the perspective of the development and evolution of Nishida's thought, we can understand that the first idea of “pure experience” in *An Inquiry into the Good* contained some early formulations of his later, more elaborate theories.

Moreover, if pure experience is unified immediacy, then it is also prior to the analytical distinctions of the various types of experience. It, therefore, encompasses the following types of experience as well: artistic intuition as direct expression of nature, wisdom of religious experience in the sense of direct correspondence of human being with something transcendent, and knowledge of the actual being of things as such.

When the unified immediacy of pure experience is “analyzed” in reflection and divided into categories such as artistic intuition, scientific knowledge, religious experience, etc., or in terms of the subjective and objective states, these types of knowledge can be said to encompass something both transcendent and immanent. Some of the contents could also be represented in terms of “objective knowledge” such as that in the natural sciences. Such comprehensive knowledge and its range of epistemic truth and ontological reality is always founded on grasping the whole in pure experience. It is developed out of pure experience.

In conclusion, we can say that many important concepts that are developed in the later stages of Nishida’s philosophy derive their origin from pure experience. Pure experience is what you might call an embryo in which other important stages of Nishida’s philosophy have come to develop fruitfully. Originating with the notion of pure experience, many aspects of Nishida’s thought are brought to light and crystalized into the unique concepts of his philosophy.

The Chapters of the Book

This volume, *Tetsugaku Companion to Nishida Kitarō*, is a collection of academic papers written by scholars who speak multiple languages and reside in different countries across multiple continents. Most of the Japanese contributors are Nishida scholars currently active in Japan, whose works have been translated for the first time for this volume. In reading these essays, we would like to emphasize the fact that academic authors in countries other than the English-speaking Anglo-American regions *write differently* to express their ideas. Differences in perspective, convention, and style may challenge readers in the U.S., Canada, or Great Britain to contend with ideas and forms of expression different from the norms of academic writing with which they are accustomed. For example, the much-criticized and perhaps outdated terms “East” or “Eastern” and “Western” have been retained, as they are still in use in Japan among the Nishida scholars. Authors all over the world express themselves in diverse styles anchored in various academic traditions. Thus, the stylistic differences and unfamiliar philosophical content in some essays have been retained.

The book consists of two parts. In the first part, each contributor tries principally to clarify one key concept in Nishida’s philosophy while developing his or her own thought based on his or her own research. We have chosen the list of principal concepts according to the remarks of Nishida himself in one of three prefaces to his maiden work, *An Inquiry into the Good* (『善の研究』 *Zen no Kenkyū*). In the preface of 1936, Nishida looks back at the evolution of his own thought over twenty-five years and traces the major turning points in his struggle to build up new conceptions appropriate for “reality” in the following way:

As I look at it now, the standpoint of this book is that of consciousness, which might be thought of as a kind of psychologism. Yet even if people criticize it as being too psychological, there is little I can do now. I do think, however, that what lay deep in my thought when I wrote it was not something that is merely psychological. In *Intuition and Reflection in Self-consciousness*, through the mediation of Fichte’s *Tathandlung*, I developed the

standpoint of pure experience into the standpoint of absolute will. Then, in the second half of *From the Actor to the Seer*, through the mediation of Greek Philosophy, I further developed it, this time into the idea of *place*. In this way I began to lay a logical base for my ideas. I next concretized the idea of place as a *dialectical universal* and gave that standpoint a direct expression in terms of *acting intuition*. That which I called in the present book the world of direct or pure experience I have now come to think of as the world of historical reality. The world of acting intuition—the world of *poiesis*—is none other than the world of pure experience.¹

In accordance with the above-cited retrospective preface to *An Inquiry into the Good*, we have chosen the following seven principal concepts: “pure experience (純粹經驗 *junsui keiken*)”, “absolute will (絶対意志 *zettai ishi*)”, “self-awareness” or “self-awakening (自覚, *jikaku*)”, “place (場所 *basho*)”, “dialectical universal (弁証法的一般者, *benshōhō teki ippansha*)”, “acting intuition” (行為的直観 *kōi teki chokkan*), and “the world of historical reality” (歴史的事実の世界 *rekishi teki jitsuzai no sekai*). Seven specialists have agreed to address these key concepts in Part I.

In Part II, “Significance and Positioning of Nishida’s philosophy”, the papers connect Nishida’s thought to wider debates in other important fields such as religion, science, and art, as well as considering the relevance of Nishida’s thought in the present as well as in the future.

Part I

In Chap. 1, 中島優太 NAKAJIMA Yuta tackles the notion of “*Pure Experience*” (純粹經驗). This concept is the foundation of more polished ways of thinking in Nishida’s later philosophy, as Nishida himself puts it. Nakajima suggests that this kind of development originates in the self-developing structure of “consciousness” within Nishida’s thought. According to Nishida, experience is an originally unified system, wherein experiences attain meaning through their relations in increasingly complex systems of consciousness.

As the second contributor to the first part, 板橋勇仁 ITABASHI Yūjin grapples with the second principal concept, “absolute free will” (絶対自由の意志 *zettai jiyū no ishi*), in his chapter “The Epistemology of the Absolute Free Will: Nishida’s Notion of Self-Determination in Relation to Cohen and Schopenhauer”. He brings together the meaning and function of Nishida’s conception of “absolute free will” to shed light on the correspondence of “absolute will” in the philosophies of Hermann Cohen and Arthur Schopenhauer.

In the third chapter, “Self-Awareness: A Pervasive Concept in Nishida’s Philosophy”, 岡田勝明 OKADA Katsuaki analyzes the notion of “self-awareness”, one of Nishida’s central philosophical concepts. Beginning with the analysis of some usages of Japanese expressions like “*yama ga mieru*” (山が見える “the mountain is

¹ Nishida Kitarō “*An Inquiry into the Good*” (1911), translated by M. Abe and C. Ives in 1990, Yale University Press, p. xxxi–xxxiii.

seen”), Okada elaborates on the idea of the unified state between subject and object. This means that the “*jikaku*” is a sort of metamorphosis of “pure experience” in Nishida’s thought. After examining some similarities of “self-consciousness” among J. G. Fichte, M. Heidegger, and Nishida, he refers to the “self-awareness (*jikaku*)” of Nishida as follows: When the world becomes self-aware, our selves become self-aware. When our selves become self-aware, the world becomes self-aware. Each of our self-aware selves is a perspective focal point of the world.

In Chap. 4, 秋富克哉 AKITOMI Katsuya examines the notion of “Place” (*basho* 場所) under the title “The Development of the Concept of *Basho* (Place)”. “Place” is a possible translation of the Japanese concept “*basho*”. The author begins by dealing with Nishida’s “path to the turn” from “pure experience” to “absolute will”, and then through “self-awareness” to “*basho*”. He then addresses the “standpoint of *basho*” and emphasizes the important role of the “logic of *basho*” in the middle and later period of Nishida’s thought. Referring to that time, the author explains that Nishida “continued to expand and deepen the philosophy of *basho* itself”. This means that the logic of *basho* is decisive for the later development of Nishida’s philosophy and continues to be at the core of his thought.

In the fifth chapter, “*Dialectical Universal*”, 美濃部仁 MINOBE Hitoshi analyzes the notion of the historical “universal” and the meaning of “dialectic” in the philosophy of Nishida. He points out that human experience should not be explained in terms of objectified things nor by the “subjectified” mind. Rather, it should be explained in terms of the world in which we live. Minobe provides an account of how the dialectical universal marks the structure of the world in which our experience arises.

In Chap. 6, 嶺秀樹 MINE Hideki offers an explanation of “*Acting Intuition*” in his thesis under the same title. The concept of “acting intuition” was introduced in order to bring Nishida’s notion of the dialectical universal back to the standpoint of “immediate” experience. It is quite difficult to understand precisely what the notion of “immediate” experience means, but for the present, it is sufficient to understand two things: (1) the dialectical universal is what explains the logical structure of the world of historical reality in which we exist, and (2) acting intuition is what indicates how the human subject works within it. The two notions mutually implicate one another. The section in this paper, “*the origin of time in the syllogistic universal*”, provides an especially rigorous account of these notions.

In the last chapter in the first part, 嘉指信雄 KAZASHI Nobuo discusses “the world of historical reality” in his contribution, “Between the Sea and the World of Historical Reality: Reconsideration for a Philosophy of Multiple-Historicity”. The author elaborates on Nishida’s notion of “the historical reality”; however, he considers it against Nishida’s way of understanding and tries to reinterpret it in the contemporary context from a critical viewpoint. This is done historically in light of facts and ideas in the contemporary world. As a result, Kazashi’s thesis can be regarded as one of the new critical attempts to place Nishida’s philosophy in today’s contexts.

Part II

In Chap. 8, “Significance and Positioning of Nishida Philosophy in History”, 大橋良介 ŌHASHI Ryosuke attempts to find grounds for the possibility of positioning Nishida’s thought in the history of philosophy under the title “*Placing Nishida within the History of Philosophy*”. He calls our attention to the usual conception of the history of philosophy, questioning if it means the “Western history of philosophy”, and urges us to “rethink the range and meaning of the history of philosophy”. This rethinking could deal with worldwide fields of thought. Toward the end of his thesis, Ōhashi concludes by saying that if “nothingness” is declared as the ground of “being”, one can say “Nishida’s philosophy of absolute nothingness came from outside of philosophy into its inside”, first in its history, then into its “deep ground”. In this deep ground of philosophy, rethinking the range and meaning of the history of philosophy is inevitable. With this rethinking, not only Nishida’s philosophy but also all of non-European intercultural philosophy could be brought into a new dialogue.

In Chap. 9, “*The Place and Significance of Nishida’s Philosophy in Europe and North America*”, John C. MARALDO contextualizes Nishida’s philosophy in the Western philosophical tradition and beyond. He analyzes the overlapping frames of reference for discussing Nishida. For example, he takes up Nishida as a Zen philosopher, Nishida as the founder of modern Japanese philosophy, Nishida as a nationalist thinker, and so on. Maraldo’s conclusion is that Nishida’s philosophy ought to go beyond the confinement of frameworks from the past, and it should be “reframed and refocused” in today’s living philosophical discussions from a global perspective.

In Chap. 10, “Significance and Positioning of Nishida Philosophy in the Eastern World”, 張政遠 CHEUNG Ching-yuen considers the problematic under the title: “*Is Nishida Kitarō an Eastern Philosopher?*”? Cheung advises us not to confine ourselves to interpret the philosophy of Nishida from a dichotomous perspective saying that “Westernizing” Nishida’s philosophy may ignore the richness of its thoughts and insights, while “Japanizing” Nishida’s philosophy may also obscure the possibilities in Nishida’s philosophy. Therefore, it is necessary to avoid both the Orientalism or Occidentalism in Nishida’s philosophy. Referring to the position of Nishida’s philosophy in the history of philosophy, Cheung states: “If I have to answer whether Nishida Kitarō is a Japanese philosopher, I shall point out that he is a Japanese philosopher, but his philosophy is not ‘Japanistic’”. To wrap things up, he says: “Rather, Japanese philosophy is a project to find a third position beyond East and West. Japanese philosophy in this sense is not a finished product, but in a process of making”.

Gereon KOPF explains the relevant background between “Nishida Philosophy and Religion” in the eleventh chapter, “*The Face of the Absolute Other: Nishida’s Conception of Religion*”. He analyzes Nishida’s conception of religion and his vision for the relationship between religion, morality, and scholarship. According to

Kopf, Nishida rejects the traditional understanding of “transcendence”. He closes his paper by referring to Nishida’s “non-essentialist” conception of religion.

In Chap. 12, “*Science and Religion in Nishida Philosophy*”, 松丸壽雄 MATSUMARU Hisao claims that the significance and position of natural science in Nishida’s philosophy would be fully intelligible only alongside a close examination of his theory of religion. He asserts that science is a body of knowledge based on objectified knowledge gained by the activity of intellect, which is founded upon religious wisdom which, for Nishida, refers to the unified activity of intellect, emotion, and volition as a whole. He concludes by referring to a letter Nishida wrote to one of his disciples that lays emphasis on religion in his philosophy: “My dearest wish and my final goal is to unite Buddhist thought and modern scientific mentality through the medium of my logic of *basho*”.

小林信之 KOBAYASHI Nobuyuki elaborates on “*Nishida Philosophy and Art*” in Chap. 13. Providing an overview of the whole span of Nishida’s thought, Kobayashi examines the essence of beauty and what distinguishes the arts, especially poetic art that consists of conceptual operation. This form of art usually aims at the universal expression of essence. He concludes by pointing out an important issue that highlights the tensions between philosophy and the arts. As a philosopher, Nishida must use thoughts and words which are universal in nature, though he wants to express the singular character of experiences-cum-moments. However, through writing poetry, Nishida seems to have understood the specificity by which poetic language can touch upon deep feelings.

有坂陽子 ARISAKA Yoko discusses the “*Significance and Positioning of Nishida Philosophy in the Contemporary World*” in Chap. 14. She argues that Nishida’s theory of pure experience should be read as articulating what she calls the “first-person perspective”, by which she means the existential standpoint—a concrete perspectival center that is a meaning-giving subject that cannot be an object. Her interpretation is that Nishida never abandoned this fundamental insight throughout his later work. This “existentially involved ‘I’ as subject” becomes the historical agent in his later writings; and, therefore, it is a co-creator of history through the dialectical process with others and the environment. Because of the unity of thought, will, morality, and concretely intentional actions, the self is *always already* a moral-political agent. It is in this sense that Nishida has relevance in the contemporary world. Thus, Nishida’s theories are not “theoretical”, but refer directly to our actions in the here and now.

In Chap. 15, 林永強 LAM Wing-Keung considers the role of Nishida’s philosophy in the future in his “*Nishida Kitarō and Virtue Ethics: With a Focus on Zen no Kenkyū*”. Lam finds ways to rearticulate Nishida’s moral philosophy and rethink his position in the development of Nishida’s thought by elucidating the elements of virtue ethics in Nishida’s philosophy. Lam puts emphasis on the importance of the function of feeling and agent-centeredness in Nishida’s philosophy. Virtue ethics in the context of Nishida should be considered as a way of life and cultivation, rather than being confined to theoretical moral philosophy.

Concerning Designation of NKZa and NKZb

There are five editions of the *Complete Works of Nishida Kitarō* (jap: *Nishida Kitarō Zenshū* = NKZ): The first edition was published in 18 volumes in 1947–53, the second edition appeared in 1965–66, the third edition from 1978 to 1980, and the fourth edition in 1987–90. The editions from the second to the fourth were published in 19 volumes. The first four editions are referred to as “NKZa” in this book because there are no great differences among them with regard to the numbering of the pages and contents. The fifth edition, produced between 2002 and 2009 in 24 volumes, is designated “NKZb”, because there are significant differences between the first four editions and the latest edition concerning the page numbers, as well as the fact that the newest edition contains new entries of recently found essays, correspondences, and so on. All the editions are published by Iwanami Shoten in Tokyo.

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A Note on the Texts

Studying Nishida requires one to swim in the variegated conceptual and linguistic waters that define Japanese philosophy. When I began to grapple with a few volumes of the *Complete Works of Nishida Kitarō* (*Nishida Kitarō Zenshū*) in its original Japanese, the text was formidably foreign to me. Each volume opens in what I considered “the back” of the book. The lines of text, written vertically, progress from right to left. The script itself brings together numerous languages. Kanji compounds (of Chinese origin) dense with brushstrokes, and, thus, layered with meaning, are connected with hiragana, one of the two Japanese syllabaries. The names of European philosophers written in katakana, the other syllabary reserved for transliterating non-Japanese words, pepper the pages. Occasionally a word written in Greek or romaji (the Roman script) would appear. Adding to the complexity, Nishida sometimes incorporates German grammatical structures to express certain ideas, which makes his writing notoriously difficult even for native Japanese speakers. The convolutions involved in studying Nishida’s philosophy are both overwhelming and inspiring. Each page of his writing is richly textured with words, concepts, and forms of writing from different continents and historical periods. When coupled with the profundity of the ideas expressed by his language, Nishida’s work shines forth as a true world-philosophical tour de force.

The linguistic complexity and transcontinental nature of Nishida’s philosophy have given rise to the multilingual and cross-cultural responses that make up this handbook. It has been my privilege to collaborate with Nishida scholars from around the world to adapt their subtle understandings of Nishida’s abstruse philosophy into the conventions of English expression and academic writing. Finding the right words to express our ideas is a challenge integral to all writing, no matter one’s language. However, that challenge becomes intensely amplified when rendering philosophical ideas in a language in which one is less “at home”. When editing the chapters of this volume written by non-native English speakers, I have done my best to change as little as possible in order to preserve the original authors’ voices and the specificity of their ideas. Readers from English-speaking Anglo-American regions may struggle with some authors’ forms of expression. However, in many cases the nuance of ideas is tied to their particular formulations in language; and

more general differences in academic style also convey tones suitable for varying philosophical attitudes. Attention to these variations can broaden one's philosophical knowledge and sensibility in ways that are essential to work in the field of world philosophy. This volume aims to offer a bridge between Nishida scholars working in various languages while providing a well-rounded introduction to those who wish to acquaint themselves with ongoing debates surrounding his work.

February 16, 2021

Lucy Christine SCHULTZ

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Chapter 1

Pure Experience



NAKAJIMA Yuta

1 Introduction

Nishida (1911) *An Inquiry into the Good*¹ is considered the first original system of Japanese philosophy. For example, SHIMOMURA Torataro described Nishida as a typical person whose original thoughts were based on a strict understanding of the methodology and concepts of Western philosophy: *An Inquiry into the Good* “is a monumental work that signifies the independence of Japanese philosophical thought” (Shimomura 1977: 201). The work could be best characterized as a systematic treatise on the topics of ethics and religion founded on an ontology of directly experienced facts. Nishida states his main purpose quite boldly in the first passage of the introduction to the *Inquiry*:

I wanted to explain all things on the basis of pure experience as the sole reality (Nishida 1990: xxx; NKZa 1: 4).

The *Inquiry* adopts an empiricist position regarding ontology that treats experience as an existential foundation of phenomena of consciousness. However, in another regard, Nishida reconsiders the very notion of experience in question. This

¹We abbreviate *An Inquiry into the Good* hereafter simply as “*Inquiry*”.

Nishida’s writings in *Nishida Kitarō Zenshu* [Complete works of Nishida Kitarō] are cited as NKZa, followed by volume and page numbers. NKZa = Nishida Kitarō. *Nishida Kitarō Zenshu* [Complete works of Nishida Kitarō]. 19 vols. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, second ed. (1965–1966).

Translated from Japanese into English by Miikael-Adam Lotman.

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involves a critical reevaluation of empiricism itself. Our understanding of the world tends to be premised on a dualism that juxtaposes two kinds of substances (subjects and objects, minds and things, etc.), thereby deeming experience and consciousness as subjective phenomena that are mere residues of objective, material processes. Nishida attempts to reach the facts of reality as we actually experience them before they become distorted within such a dualistic framework. Nishida uses the adjectives “pure” and “immediate” to prevent such dogmatic hypotheses from becoming intertwined with the notion of experience.

Nishida’s choice of the terms “pure experience” (*junsui-keiken* 純粹經驗) and “immediate experience” reflect the influence of contemporary psychologists of his time such as W. Wundt (1832–1920) and W. James (1842–1910), which provides a clue for understanding the *Inquiry*’s academic background. In the nineteenth century, psychologists established a branch of scientific psychology that was independent of traditional philosophy; or conversely, they attempted to create a new scientific philosophy that was cleansed of all metaphysical elements. During the late Meiji era, a movement also arose in Japan that sought to establish the foundations for philosophy and ethics in psychology. One of Nishida’s disciples, NISHITANI Keiji, pointed out that the philosophical attitude of the psychologists was “utterly distrustful of all directions of traditional philosophy” (Nishitani 1985: 111). This crisis of philosophy, which prompted a turn to experience as its sole foundation, was what arguably formed the setting for the *Inquiry*.

Nishida shared this attitude with the psychologists of his day, using it as a vehicle to develop his own original ideas. By reexamining the notion of experience as understood by psychologists, he established a philosophy that could treat issues that are traditionally related to metaphysics. In this paper, I will clarify the background and characteristics of Nishida’s philosophy of pure experience by using Wundtian psychology and philosophy as a frame of reference.

2 The Core Idea of an Inquiry into the Good

Although the *Inquiry* was published in 1911 by Kōdōkan press, the book itself is composed of four articles that were written between 1906 and 1909. The second part, “Reality”, was written the earliest and is based on a lecture manuscript that Nishida drafted while teaching in the Fourth Senior High School in Kanazawa. The four parts of the *Inquiry* were published in the following chronological order (see: Fujita 2012: 346–353):

1. “Reality” (Part 2): drafted in the summer of 1906, issued in December 1906 as a lecture printout with the title “Realism”.
2. “Good” (Part 3): drafted in the spring of 1907, issued in April 1907 as a lecture printout with the title “Ethics”.
3. “Pure experience” (Part 1): drafted in the spring of 1908, published in June 1908 as an article with the title “Pure experience, thinking and will” in the journal *Hokushinkai-zasshi*.

4. The first four chapters of “Religion” (Part 4) were drafted between October 1908 and April 1909, published as articles with the titles “On the theory of religion” (in May 1909) and “God and the World” (in July 1909) in *the proceedings of Teiyū Association for Ethical Studies*.²

Of the above, Nishida describes the article, “Reality”, as the “marrow” of the *Inquiry* in which he expounds his own “philosophical thought”. One of the key-words of the second part, “phenomena of consciousness”, is paraphrased and analyzed in the first part with the term “pure experience”. In this paper, I will mainly treat the first two parts, since they form the basis of the third and fourth parts where Nishida expresses his philosophical ideas on ethics and religion.

The central assertion of the second part is that “phenomena of consciousness constitute the sole reality”. According to the terminology of the *Inquiry*, the phrase “phenomena of consciousness” is used synonymously with “immediate experience”, and “pure experience” is used in reference to “experience” in general. This assertion may strike us as odd given that experience is usually conceived as a subjective phenomenon that arises through contact with objects that lie external to our minds. In other words, things and minds should enjoy a higher degree of “reality” than “experience”, since their mutual relation is the cause of our having experience in the first place. However, Nishida is suspicious of hypothetical thinking itself, which postulates the causal relation between things and minds, or ideas about experience being necessarily subjected to an agent. We cannot have knowledge of “minds” or “things” apart from, say, a given color or emotion of experience. The two substances are mere hypotheticals used as an explanation of the causes of experience. He writes:

From the perspective of common sense, we think that things exist in the external world apart from consciousness and that in the back of consciousness there is something called the mind, which performs various functions. [...] But, our assumption that mind and matter exist independently [from consciousness] is based on the demands posed by our thinking. Therefore, this assumption leaves room for doubt (Nishida 1990: 38; NKZa 1: 47).

As seen in the above passage, Nishida is skeptical of both the existence of things and minds. Thus, his ontology is equally distant from materialist and idealist theories. We should pay particular attention to his skepticism regarding the existence of minds. Although he argues that “phenomena of consciousness” (i.e. “experience”) constitute the sole reality, his concept of experience is not premised on the existence of minds as the subjects of experience. Rather, it is a concept that renounces all hypotheses, including those that regard the world as consisting of two entities: objective things and subjective minds. The *Inquiry* could be characterized, in a sense, as a radical system of philosophy that is devised on the ontological grounds of the experience of subject-object unity. In what follows, I will take a closer look at how Nishida reconsidered the notion of experience with reference to Wundtian psychology and philosophy.

²The last chapter of the fourth part “Knowledge and love” was published already in July 1907 as an article with the identical title in the journal *Seishin-kai*.

3 Psychology and Philosophy

Before moving on to the more original aspects of Nishida's theory of pure experience, I will briefly describe the prevalent currents of empiricist philosophies in the late Meiji period when the *Inquiry* was being drafted.

In the lecture notes, "Philosophy of Idealism in the Modern Period", written in 1916 (the fifth year of the Taishō era), Nishida points to a common trend in the ontological theories of his day, which he identifies as the "philosophy of pure experience" (Nishida 1917: 156; NKZa 14: 72). According to Nishida, this trend is represented by empirico-critical philosophers like Ernst Mach and Richard Avenarius, the radical empiricism of William James, and the philosophy of Henri Bergson. Nishida believed that these philosophers all agree in "viewing reality as pure experience". Therefore, Nishida's central thesis that the "phenomena of consciousness constitute the sole reality" did not suddenly spring out of nowhere. Rather, he devised and advocated his own version of pure experience by reinterpreting a current of ideas that was already globally pervasive.

This is also evidenced by KIHIRA Tadayoshi's (1874–1949) appraisal of Nishida's article in the *Journal of Philosophy* that would later become the second part of the *Inquiry*:

Nishida's realism has been best able to harmonize [...] Hegel with the nowadays ubiquitous theory of pure experience (Kihira 1907: 439).

The above citation should clearly indicate that "the theory of pure experience" was indeed an understandable phrase even before the publication of the *Inquiry*. The theory was, in fact, related to psychological foundationalism in Meiji period Japan. For example, MOTORA Yūjiro (1858–1912), whose lectures in the Imperial University of Tokyo were also attended by Nishida, wrote a book titled *Ethics*, in which he attempted to "settle the criteria for good and evil on the foundations of psychology" (Matora 1900: 429). Nishida himself did not seek to establish the foundations of philosophy on empirical psychology, but rather attempted to reconsider the notions of experience, or the phenomena of consciousness that psychology was premised upon. However, even while reexamining such concepts, Nishida was enticed by some of the psychologists' contentions. In order to understand the originality of Nishida's theory of pure experience, we must first distinguish between the psychologists' assertions that Nishida agreed with and those that he opposed.

4 Subject-Object Unity

As already mentioned, the basic thesis of Nishida's philosophy of pure experience can be summarized with the slogan "the phenomena of consciousness constitute the sole reality". This thesis treats the phenomena of consciousness and experience as a fundamental form of existence. He rejects the ontological dualism between the

cognizing mind and the cognized matter, which deems the phenomena of consciousness as mere side effects of the interaction between the two. What we experience immediately are colors, sounds, shapes and conscious states of pleasure and emotion. However, traditional philosophy tends to regard the material substances, rather than their properties, as true reality. Or oppositely, it deems minds or souls to be the real substances of consciousness. It is important to restate that Nishida's theory is not an idealism, for he regards experience as a state of subject-object unity that precedes our understanding of the world as mediated through notions like minds and material things. In this section, I will show how this idea partly originated from Wundt's concept of "immediate experience".

It is not by mere chance that Nishida was inspired by Wundt's psychology. Motora, who established Japan's first experimental psychology laboratory in the Imperial University of Tokyo, was trained by Stanley Hall, who in turn was one of Wundt's disciples. Moreover, while Nishida was writing the *Inquiry* he also lectured on ethics and psychology in the Fourth Senior High School by using Wundt's *Grundriss der Psychologie (Outlines of Psychology)* as a sourcebook (Mutai 1966: 672-677). As to why Nishida chose Wundt's treatise is an open question, which is most probably explained by Wundt's predominance in Japan and the fact that Nishida attended Motora's psychology courses.³ Nevertheless, it is evident that Nishida was familiar enough with Wundt's works to give lectures on his psychological theories.

So, how did Nishida make use of Wundt's ideas? Nishida wrote the first part of the *Inquiry* in order to clarify the nature of experience and conscious phenomena, which were already used as keywords in the second and third parts of the *Inquiry*. The first part is titled "Pure Experience", and it reexamines experience by asking what accounts for its "purity". In the first paragraph, Nishida states that "pure experience is identical with immediate experience" (Nishida 1990: 3, translation modified), indicating a connection with Wundt's technical term. This assertion appears in the following context:

[B]y *pure* I am referring to the state of experience just as it is, without the least addition of deliberative discrimination. The moment of seeing a color or hearing a sound, for example, is prior not only to the thought that the color or sound is the activity of an external object or that one is sensing it, but also to the judgment of what the color or sound might be. In this regard, pure experience is identical with immediate experience. When one directly experiences one's own state of consciousness, there is not yet a subject or an object, and knowing and its object are completely unified (Nishida 1990: 3-4, translation modified; NKZa 1: 9).

Although the *Inquiry* is ripe with paraphrases and the term "immediate experience" is often used synonymously with Nishida's original idea of "pure experience", the above passage clearly indicates that Nishida is referring to Wundt's notion of "immediate experience". So, how is Nishida's concept of "pure

³The Ishikawa Nishida Kitarō Museum of Philosophy exhibits Nishida's graduation certificate of the courses he finished in the Imperial University of Tokyo. The document shows that Nishida completed an elective course in psychology as evidenced by Motora's signature.

experience”, which should stand for a state without “a subject or an object”, associated with Wundt’s “immediate experience”?⁴

Wundt used the term “immediate experience” in reference to the distinct subject matter of psychology. He first criticized the idea that psychology is the science of internal experiences, as opposed to those of external experiences, arguing that the two are not separate kinds of experience, but rather different viewpoints of an “experience that is unified in itself” (*der an sich einheitlichen Erfahrung*; Wundt 1896: 3). Next, he distinguished the subject matter of physics from that of psychology. Physicists dismiss all experiential elements that fall under subjective criteria, extracting only objective elements from experience. According to Wundt, such objective elements constitute the subject matter of physics. He refers to these elements with the label “mediated experience” because they are “mediated” by the elimination of subjective elements (*ibid*: 3). In contrast, he captures the subject matter of psychology with the term “immediate experience”, referring to experience that contains both subjective and objective elements prior to such abstractions. What is important here is that Wundt’s “immediate experience” does not refer exclusively to subjective psychological elements, but rather to the entire experience before this distinction is drawn.

Wundt’s distinction between “mediated” and “immediate experience” is an attempt to establish psychology as an autonomous scientific discipline by salvaging the proper subject matter of empirical psychology from both the specific soul-substance (*eine spezifische Seelensubstanz*; *ibid*.: 8) that pertains to traditional spiritualistic psychology (*spiritualistische Psychologie*; *ibid*) and the subject matter of natural sciences, which had superseded the development of psychology of his day. Like Nishida, he adopted a critical attitude towards the ontological difference between soul and material substances.

Thus, Wundt’s “immediate experience” could be characterized in terms of subject-object unity, which is why Nishida paid special attention to the phrase. Wundt and other empirical psychologists inspired Nishida to regard experience as a state of subject-object unity that is impartial to the metaphysical divide between things and minds.

5 Criticism of Psychology

Even though Nishida shared Wundt’s skepticism regarding the metaphysical distinction between material and spiritual substances, he was not fully satisfied with empirical psychology either. The major point of disagreement between the two thinkers is that while Nishida emphasized the unified character of experience, Wundt’s understanding of conscious phenomena had elementalistic tendencies.

⁴W. Wundt defined psychology in his *Grundriss der Psychologie* (1896) with the term “immediate experience”.

First, let us look into Wundt's position. Wundt's psychological descriptions are founded on two kinds of irreducible mental elements. The first kind consists in sensorial elements such as an experience of constant sound, temperature, or light. The second kind consists in simple feelings. Representations and emotions are explained as compound mental states that are composed of irreducible elements, whereas higher-order phenomena of consciousness are explained as associations of compound mental states. On the one hand, Wundt paid special attention to the holistic nature of phenomena of consciousness by claiming that they are originally complex states and that the two kinds of mental elements are mere results of analytical abstractions. On the other hand, Wundt's explanations of conscious phenomena are premised on irreducible mental elements, which are foundational, albeit *ex post facto*, constructions. In the latter regard, his psychology can be considered elementalistic.

Nishida emphasizes the unified character of the conscious phenomena, by insisting that "the immediacy and purity of pure experience derive [...] from the strict unity of concrete consciousness" (Nishida 1990: 6, translation modified; NKZa 1: 12). It is here that Nishida finds fault with empirical psychology:

[P]ure experience is not necessarily limited to simple sensations. In the strict sense of the expression as used by psychologists, a simple sensation is actually a hypothetical entity resulting from scholarly analysis, not an immediate, concrete experience.

The immediacy and purity of pure experience derive not from the experience's being simple, unanalyzable, or instantaneous, but from the strict unity of concrete consciousness. Consciousness does not arise from the consolidation of what psychologists call simple mental elements; it constitutes a single system from the start (ibid).

The main point of criticism is that Nishida regards the foundational elements in Wundtian psychology as mere virtual abstractions of the primordial systematic unity of experience. For example, the feeling of the color "red" can never be experienced in isolation because we cannot see "redness" without its extensions. The color must be tied to the consciousness of a certain "form" at the very least. But its existence as a distinct "color" is always experienced in contrast with other colors such as "blue" or "yellow". Moreover, colors can also cause us to remember instances of our past. Single experiences always emerge as meaningful and relevant phenomena within larger systems of experience.

In relation to Nishida's emphasis on the unified character of experience, I would like to pay closer attention to the issue of "meaning", which has not yet been fully problematized. In a later paper titled "Sensations", which was compiled into a collection of essays called *Problem of Consciousness*, Nishida calls the position of Wundtian empirical psychology into question in the following passage:

Nowadays psychology regards mental phenomena exactly in the same manner that natural scientists treat natural phenomena. Therefore, in psychological research, we must abandon all perspectives related to values and all inclinations to substantiate concepts. [...] However, is it altogether possible to attain a deeper understanding of mental phenomena by abandoning the semantic relations that apparently form their essence? (NKZa 3: 28–29).

Nishida believes that semantic relations are essential for understanding mental phenomena. This can be considered a crucial difference between Nishida's philosophy and Wundtian psychology. In the *Inquiry*, Nishida explains that "meaning" is the position that a given experience occupies within a system of consciousness. In other words, "identical consciousnesses yield different meanings by virtue of the different systems in which they participate" (Nishida 1990: 15; NKZa 1: 15). For example, an experience of a traffic signal can mean "do not cross", provided that the "redness" of the color code corresponds to the "roundness" of the lamp's shape and that the traffic lamp functions according to certain traffic regulation laws. According to Nishida, our experiences are established within the framework of various overlapping systems and are, therefore, not mere sets of simple sensations.

So, what is it that accounts for the unity of experience by establishing meaningful relations between partial experiences? In the *Inquiry*, Nishida refers to this "certain unifying something" with the terms "ideal element" and "ideal unifying power". Nishida chose the word "ideal" because the unity of our experience is enduring, not instantaneous, and develops of its own accord. However, it would be misleading to interpret the "ideal" as an element that exists apart from experience, thereby unifying the phenomena of consciousness. Were this the case, then Nishida's criticism of metaphysical assumptions about dualistic substances would be self-defeating. Nishida's thoughts on the "ideal" can be found in the following passage of the *Inquiry*:

Ordinary perception is never purely simple, for it contains ideal elements and is compositional. Though I am presently looking at something, I do not see it just as it is in the present; I see it as mediated in an explanatory manner through the force of past experience (Nishida 1990: 30–31; NKZa 1: 41).

Here, Nishida equates the ideal elements that constitute experience with the unifying power of past experiences. He does not assume that the "ideal" exists separately from phenomena of consciousness. Rather, he regards consciousness as a thoroughly self-developing system wherein past experiences give meaning to new experiences. Terms such as "ideal element" or "ideal unifying power" are expressions of the unifying development of the flow of consciousness.

6 Language and Experience

As we saw in the last section, the conflict between Nishida's understanding of the phenomena of consciousness with that of psychologists' is whether we view experience as a holistic and unified flow of conscious development or as something that is founded on hypothetical and irreducible elements. Another difference lies in that while psychologists ground phenomena of consciousness on feelings and elements of sensations that are without meaning, Nishida treats experience as a holistic flow where various background systems attribute meaning to separate phenomena of consciousness.

Nonetheless, Nishida has an ambiguous attitude towards the meaning of experience. As we have seen, the *Inquiry* explains all phenomena in terms of experience, rendering “meaning” an aspect of pure experience. However, in the same text, experiences of intuitive unity are deemed “pure” in the original sense, and there are quite a few passages where meaning and judgment are discussed in contrast to pure experience. For example, Nishida claims that “truly pure experience has no meaning whatsoever; it is merely the present consciousness of facts just as they are” (Nishida 1990: 4; NKZa 1: 10).

This assertion can be easily misunderstood. Although Nishida expounds the systematic unity of experience, he does not advocate the psychologist position that experience is based on mental elements that have no meaning. But why does he, then, amongst all other phenomena of consciousness, place a particular emphasis on intuitive experiences that have not yet been attributed with meaning? The reason is that Nishida is worried about experience getting distorted when we try to capture it in words and express it in the form of judgement. According to Nishida, pre-semantic intuitive experience is important exactly because it cannot be expressed verbally: “the true state of this reality is something that must be realized by us alone, not something to be reflected on, analyzed or expressed in words” (Nishida 1990: 51, translation modified; NKZa 1: 63).

The metaphysical distinctions between things and minds, as discussed in the third section, are so deeply rooted in our linguistic understanding that they seem to reemerge whenever we express our experiences. For example, let’s say we see a flower and experience its redness. When we express it with the sentence “I saw the redness of a flower”, the sentence implies that “redness” is the property of the external object “flower”, and that it was “I” who experienced it. This leads to the metaphysical conclusion that the world is made up of two substances: the subjective “I” and the objective “flower”.

In addition to our linguistic understanding being tied to these metaphysical assumptions, experiences are distorted by verbal expressions even when we try to avoid their metaphysical implications. What happens when we say “*x* is red”? As already stated, Nishida thought that experiences constitute a systematic unity and the meaning of parts is dependent on their position in the system of consciousness. The fact that “*x*” signifies “red” means that it participates in a color scheme where it is distinguished from other colors such as “blue” or “yellow”. This expression hardly captures our experience of redness. Firstly, even while the expression captures the meaning of redness in the abstract, it fails to convey the uniqueness of a given experience at a given time, since there are various kinds of particular reds, such as that of a tomato or that of a sunset. Secondly, the word “red” is understood exclusively through the color scheme, but an experience of “*x*” can be meaningful in possibly infinite ways when it is related to other systems, such as those of shape or color. Language imposes a limit on such possibilities by fixing the semantic framework of words in advance.

Nishida’s views on pure experience are presented in a condensed form in the first paragraph of the first part, where he expresses concerns regarding the metaphysical and limiting nature of language:

[B]y pure I am referring to the state of experience just as it is without the least addition of deliberative discrimination. The moment of seeing a color or hearing a sound, for example, is prior not only to the [metaphysically discerning] thought that the color or sound is the activity of an external object or that one is sensing it, but also to the judgment of what the color or sound might be (Nishida 1990: 3; NKZa 1: 9).

In summary, Nishida emphasized intuitive experiences before they are expressed in words, but his intention was different from the idea of a psychologists who grounded all phenomena of consciousness on meaningless mental elements. The mental elements of empirical psychology are meaningless entities because they are abstracted from the concrete totality of experience and, as such, are not supported by any systems of meaning. Nishida maintains that concrete experiences are always backed by a holistic system, which consists in numerous overlapping systems. Concrete experiences bear equivocal meanings since they are never attached to a single fixed system.

7 Conclusion

In this paper, I clarified the historical background and characteristics of Nishida's theory of pure experience, as seen in the *Inquiry*, by comparing Nishida's views with Wundtian psychology. Both Wundt and Nishida worked in a period of philosophical crisis, when distrust of the Western philosophical tradition was heightened by the rise of empirical sciences that were founded exclusively on experience. The two thinkers attempted to return to experience as it is, before it is distorted by metaphysical assumptions. In particular, they both shared a skepticism towards the assumption that the world consists of two kinds of substances (minds and things) and that experience is a mere secondary effect of their interaction. In contrast, Nishida and Wundt asserted the primacy of experience and the reality of metaphysically impartial phenomena of consciousness.

However, Nishida is critical of Wundtian psychologists because he places an even greater emphasis on the primacy of metaphysically impartial experience. Wundt establishes the foundation of psychology on irreducible mental elements, which he uses to explain mental phenomena as compounds. According to Nishida, experience is an originally unified system, wherein distinct experiences attain meaning through their relations in increasingly greater systems of consciousness. This is why he insists that the mental elements in Wundtian psychology are merely the abstract results of analysis.

While criticizing the psychologists, Nishida expounds on the fact that experience consists in a systematic unity that contains meaning; but on the other hand, he pays particular attention to intuitive experience, which cannot be expressed in words. As discussed in section five of this paper, Nishida focused on such intuitive experiences because he was concerned about language distorting the contents and fixing the framework of experience. In brief, the psychological notion of "mental elements" is "meaningless" because the elements have been disassociated from the system of

experience, whereas, for Nishida, experiences participate in a manifold of systems, which can never be fixed in a uniform system of meaning.

Such considerations have revealed two important aspects of Nishida's early philosophy. Firstly, a critical engagement with his contemporary psychologists played an important role for Nishida in the *Inquiry*. In fact, such engagement continued even after the publication of the *Inquiry* in works such as *The Problem of Consciousness* Nishida (1920). Secondly, Nishida's basic attitude towards the problem of "fact versus meaning", which he set out to resolve after his arrival at Kyoto, can already be seen in the *Inquiry*. After he was appointed assistant professor in Kyoto Imperial University, Nishida analyzed the relations between fact, meaning, and value, in reference to the philosophies of W. Windelband, H. Rickert, H. Cohen and others. Although Nishida thought that the semantic relations are at the heart of phenomena of consciousness, he focused on the experiential dimension, where words and meanings are no longer applicable, exactly because he wanted to capture the inherent abundance and developmental character of experience.

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Chapter 2

Epistemology of Absolute Free Will: Nishida's Notion of Self-Determination in Relation to Cohen and Schopenhauer



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1 Introduction

In *Jikaku ni okeru chokkan to hansei* (自覚に於ける直観と反省 *Intuition and Reflection in Self-Awareness*, Nishida 1917), the work following his maiden book *Zen no Kenkyū* (善の研究 *An Inquiry into the Good*, Nishida 1911), Nishida intends to address how thinking (*shii* 思惟) or reflection (*hansei* 反省) can be united with immediate experience (*chokusetu keiken* 直接経験) or intuition (*chokkan* 直観), and how one can verify the epistemological validity of reflective knowledge (*chi-shiki* 知識) on such immediate experience. *Intuition and Reflection in Self-Awareness* finally draws the conclusion that reflective thinking and immediate experience are two different aspects of absolute free will (*zettai jiyū no ishi* 絶対自由の意志), which is an act of self-determination (*jikogentei* 自己限定) or self-mirroring.

Commentators have overlooked the significance of this conclusion, perhaps because Nishida formulated it while in transition to his middle period when he established his own philosophical standpoint. In this transitional period, Nishida seems to have joined two different aspects, somewhat obscurely and dogmatically. It is certainly true that Nishida attempted to synthesize two kinds of theories. One, influenced by Neo-Kantians and especially by Hermann Cohen, is an epistemological theory regarding an act of self-determination. And the other, influenced by Arthur Schopenhauer, is an existential theory of free will that emphasizes bringing about our authentic “life (*sei* 生)”. Nevertheless, when we carefully consider Cohen’s influence along with that of Schopenhauer, Nishida has indeed accomplished an epistemologically radical consideration of “will (*ishi* 意志)”. Nishida’s

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understanding of “consciousness (*ishiki* 意識)” or knowing (in a general sense that includes immediate experience, thinking, and reflection) is notable in that it lies, originally, in self-determination. This self-determination is an act of self-mirroring performed by the will, in which any self-grounded identity in subjective knowledge, objective “reality (*jitsuzai* 実在)”—and even the interaction between these two—is negated.

In my view, prior to understanding Nishida’s later thought concerning the interaction of the environment and the individual in the actual world, we should consider the significance of such a radical notion of “knowing” as annihilation of any ground. Based upon this, we should regard Nishida’s epistemological thinking in *Intuition and Reflection in Self-Awareness* as an indispensable basis of sufficient interpretation, not only of his middle-period thought, but also of his later thought. Therefore, in this paper I outline the indispensable philosophical importance of the epistemological standpoint he developed in *Intuition and Reflection in Self-Awareness*.

2 The Epistemological Starting Point in *Zen no Kenkyū*

Nishida’s epistemological starting point is stated in *Zen no Kenkyū* where he writes, “The assumption that mind and matter exist independently [...] leaves much room for doubt” (NKZa 1: 47).¹ One should not believe that the mind (subject) and matter (object) first existed independently and only later became related. Rather, their existence is correlative.² In manuscripts for his lectures regarding *Zen no Kenkyū*, Nishida writes, “Essentially a distinction between the subject and object is never fundamental. [...] Originally there is no distinction between objects and the self, but there is one field of experience” (NKZa 15: 190). “One field of experience” is original, immediate experience, and nothing exists prior to this field in which subject and object are open to each other.

As Nishida insists, “Just as the objective world can be said to be a reflection of the self, the self is a reflection of the objective world” (NKZa 1: 156). In other words, in “one field of experience”, each being represents the other as well as the whole. This field is the whole that contains differences. “The fundamental form of reality (*jitsuzai* 実在) is such that reality is one while it is many, and many while it is one; in the midst of equality, it maintains differences, and in the midst of differences, it maintains equality. Because these two sides cannot be separated, we can say that reality is the self-development of a single entity” (NKZa 1: 69). This “one

¹All references to Nishida’s text are based on the second edition of *The Complete Works of Nishida Kitarō* (*Nishida Kitarō Zenshū* 西田幾多郎全集), 19 vols., Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten (1965–1966), which will hereafter be abbreviated as NKZa, followed by volume number, a colon, and page number. English translations are all mine, though I occasionally benefited from existing English translations indicated in the bibliography.

²For more details regarding Nishida’s epistemological starting point in *Zen no Kenkyū*, see Ueda 2007: 47-92 and Itabashi 2004: 22-28.

field of experience” is an activity that presents and develops itself, and there is nothing preceding this activity. Nishida says, “We usually hold that there is some agent [a substance or substratum] of activity by which activity arises. But in terms of immediate experience, it is the activity in itself that is reality” (NKZa 1: 71). Consequently, reality is the self-presenting activity of unification with the field of experience; it is the unification of differentiation and unification. Nishida designates the experience of an activity that realizes such unification as “intellectual intuition (*chiteki chokkan* 知的直観)”.

Furthermore, Nishida claims, “We cannot explain the intuitive principles [intellectual intuition] at the ground of reason. To explain [by reasoning] is to be able to include other systems in one system. That which is the axis of unification cannot be explained” (NKZa 1: 40). The activity of intellectual intuition is essentially unexplainable or beyond any determination. Nishida states, “Division (*bunretsu* 分裂) or reflection is not an independent activity [from the sole activity], for it is only the development of the activity of differentiation (*bunkasayō* 分化作用) that constitutes one facet of unification” (NKZa 1: 192). However, the question still remains: How can this activity, which is beyond determination, be understood as intuition? Moreover, how can reflective thought take on the task of explaining this notion? Nishida addresses these questions in *Intuition and Reflection in Self-Awareness* in order to validate reflective knowing’s ability to grasp the immediate experience of the self-presenting activity of intuition. Nishida illustrates the experience of this knowledge by outlining one’s activity of self-awareness (*jikaku* 自覚; self-realization).³ Nishida asserts:

That the self reflects on itself, or mirrors itself, means that [...] the self (*jiko* 自己) mirrors itself, not apart from the self, but within the self. [This] reflection [on the self] is an event within the self, by which the self adds something to the self, a knowledge of the self as well as an act of self-development (NKZa 2: 16).

One’s self-reflection brings about self-knowledge, that is, some self-determination, which is, at the same time, one’s “being aware of” something about oneself. Thus, self-reflection develops a new self that is somehow qualitatively different or changed from a former self. In short, in *jikaku* (self-awareness), self-development is self-reflection and self-determination.⁴ Referring to Hermann Cohen and Arthur Schopenhauer, as we will see, Nishida suggests that this self-determination is the experience of the one sole beyond-determinate, self-presenting reality, and this determination can bestow epistemological validity onto an indeterminable reality.

³The relationship between Nishida’s notions of “pure experience” and “*jikaku*” receives illuminating interpretation in Ueda 1991, 261-291.

⁴For an analysis of the influence of Josiah Royce on Nishida’s notion of self-reflection, see Maraldo 2010.

3 Nishida's Notion of Self-Determination in Relation to Cohen⁵

In "*Logic of Pure Knowledge (Logik der reinen Erkenntnis)*", which mainly aims to provide reasons for the validity of scientific thinking (*das Denken der Wissenschaft*), Cohen claims that what is sensuously given can be realized only through thinking it as it is. It is not true that the sensuous manifold is given prior to the determination and unification of thinking. That which is "given" arises within the conceptual unification of thinking. As Cohen puts it, "Only what thinking itself is able to find is allowed to be valid as given for thought" (LE: 82).⁶ That which is sensually given is always mediated by concepts. Although the sensually given is essentially different from thought, and cannot be totally comprehended or included by thought, it nonetheless "claims" to be determined or unified by the activity of thinking. In other words, the sensuous is given through thought's "answer (*Antwort*)" to its claim, namely, thought's solution to the "problem (*Aufgabe*)" or "question (*Frage*)" of how to unify or conceptualize it.

Moreover, because the conceptual unification of the sensuously given cannot be completed, each conceptual unification is just a "hypothesis" that should be grounded on a more unific, systematic, and comprehensive answer to the sensuous claim. Cohen states, "The answer that the concept contains has to be a new question (or arouse one)" (LE: 378). Accordingly, one should not consider thinking and sensation to first exist independently of each other, and only to become related later. Rather, there is only "interaction (*Wechselwirkung*) between the question [or claim of sensation] and the answer [of thinking]" (*ibid.*).

While Cohen discusses the interaction between the answer of thought and the question, or the claim of sensation, he also insists that the claim of sensation can come into existence in "the claim of pure thinking" (LE: 493). As we have seen before, the validity of the claim of sensation can be realized only through the thinking that responds to this claim. Thinking constitutes or "produces" the givenness (objectivity) of sensation (but not manifold content itself). In short, the interaction between thinking and sensation is no more than the dynamic self-determination or self-unification of transcendental pure thinking, and nothing exists prior to and independent from it. As Cohen states, in thinking, "Production is in itself product" (*ibid.*), and "Thinking is in itself a goal and an object of its activity" (LE: 29).

Accordingly, pure thinking is self-producing activity as self-determination "originating" in its own activity. Regarding mathematical thinking of the "infinitesimal", Cohen claims that the "origin (*Ursprung*)" of thinking is not in itself comprehended or determined by others because nothing exists prior to the self-determination of pure thinking. The origin is not an object that can be differentiated from the dynamic

⁵For a close examination of Nishida's interpretation of such Neo Kantians as Hermann Cohen, Heinrich Rickert, and Emil Lask, see Itabashi 2004: 58-72, 105-122, 131-146.

⁶Passages from *Logik der reinen Erkenntnis* are my own English translations from the German edition. The work is abbreviated as LE, followed by a colon and page number.

whole that infinitely and continuously determines itself. Cohen designates this “origin” as “origin-nothingness (*Ursprungs-Nichts*)”. In other words, it is the “ $\mu\eta\ \delta\nu$ (non-being)”, or “the relative nothingness (*das relative Nichts*)”, since it is not determined as being in itself. However, it is also not separate from the determinate being; rather, it infinitely determines and produces each being within itself (though it lacks its own independent existence).

In short, nothing exists independently from the interaction between thinking and sensation, and this interaction cannot be recognized as a determinate existence, but as a dynamic self-determination of pure thinking. This recognition comes through our performing or becoming this dynamic activity itself, which is producing or determining itself in each being. There exists the sole self-producing or self-determining activity that can be only negatively determined as *non-being through the determinate being*. In this sense, each determination continuously includes and represents the whole *non-determinate* activity of pure thinking. For Cohen, the self-determination of pure thinking can validate determinate knowledge of the dynamic activity of pure thought that is, in itself, a *non-determinate* activity.

In *Intuition and Reflection in Self-Awareness*, we see that Nishida borrowed Cohen's notion that the interaction between thinking and sensation consists in the non-determinable activity of the self-determination. Nevertheless, Nishida criticized Cohen's notion of the “production of thinking”. Nishida says, “I think there is still an inconsistency in the notion of creative thinking expressed in Cohen's fundamental thought, as ‘production is product’, thus the true significance of the opposition and relationship of subject and object is unclear. [...] How can the one [that is, unification of thinking] produce the many [that is, unified sensual manifold], how can the production be the product?” (NKZa 2: 106). As considered, Cohen insists that pure thinking constitutes or “produces” the givenness of sensation, but not the manifold content itself (see Kutsuna 1989: 99). However, this means that thinking cannot be the dynamic, whole “origin”, in which sensation, or the relationship between sensation (objective manifold) and thinking (subjective unification) originates. Therefore, thinking cannot be authentic, dynamic self-determination or self-production.

Thus, Nishida refutes that self-determination is recognized only as an activity of thinking, that is, as Cohen says, a “claim of pure thinking”. Nishida argues: “Cohen says that what is given is what is claimed by thinking. [...] But what truly claims must be neither reason [thinking] nor non-reason, rather, pure activity, in which reason and non-reason are one, as well as $\delta\nu$ [determinate being] and $\mu\eta\ \delta\nu$ [non-determinate being], experience and thinking are one” (NKZ2: 181–182). For Nishida, authentic, dynamic self-determination and self-production cannot be only of thought. It must be also of sensation; or better, it must be of the one whole activity in which thought and sensation are sides viewed from different angles. Nishida recognizes this activity as “will” when he writes: “Cohen says that what is given is what is claimed, and being in opposition to nothingness is not mere nothingness; however, as I have said before, $\mu\eta\ \delta\nu$, the standpoint of “ $\delta\nu + \mu\eta\ \delta\nu$ ” [that is, the whole activity in which $\delta\nu$ and $\mu\eta\ \delta\nu$ are one], is will” (NKZa 2: 270). For Nishida, the will is the immediate experience of the whole activity of self-production and

self-determination; and it will be shown that the will is what validates reflective knowledge concerning this immediate and intuitive activity. Still, why does Nishida regard this one whole activity as will?

1 *Zen no Kenkyū* and Schopenhauer's Notion of "Will"

In *Zen no Kenkyū* we find Schopenhauer's strong influence on Nishida's thought.⁷ Here Nishida develops the notion of "pure experience" that signifies the becoming of the activity of self-development, or self-unification as sole reality. Nishida designates this whole activity as will: "The pure experience is the state in which the will is most freely and lively activated, and there is no interval between the claim of the will and its realization" (NKZa 1: 14). Concerning this claim, Nishida refers to Schopenhauer's notion of the will and its blindness: "Some people draw a distinction between the will and reason (*risei* 理性) because the will is blind. [...]. We cannot explain the intuitive principles (*chokkaku teki genri* 直覚の原理) on the ground of reason. To explain [by reason] is to be able to include other systems in one system. That which is the axis of unification cannot be explained; thus it is blind (*mōmoku* 盲目)" (NKZ1: 40). The blindness or un-includability (groundlessness *Grundlosigkeit*) of this activity is one of the main reasons Nishida recognizes the experience of the whole self-unifying activity as will, which, as we shall see, Schopenhauer also claims.

Naturally, Nishida's view of will in *Intuition and Reflection in Self-Awareness* is based on this thought in *Zen no Kenkyū*. Although there is no obvious mention of Schopenhauer's name, the statement "absolute free will, which is our most immediate and concrete true reality, is that which is to be said as Kantian thing-in-itself" (NKZa 2: 300) can give proof for his reference to Schopenhauer's famous notion of "will as thing-in-itself". In light of this, let us consider Schopenhauer's thought on will and its relationship to Nishida's remarks.

According to Schopenhauer's consideration of the will in *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* (*The World as Will and Presentation*), our own body is not only an object among other objects in relation to myself as a subject, but it is also one and the same with myself as a subject, unlike any other object. One's own body is conscious not merely as an object, but, at the same time, in an entirely different way. This is what Schopenhauer designates by the word "will" when he writes: "The will's act and the action of the body are not two distinct objectively cognized states connected by causality [...] but are rather one and the same, only given in two entirely distinct manners" (WI: 119).⁸ Will announces itself "in an immediate manner in which one does not quite clearly distinguish the subject and object" (WI: 130).

⁷I offer more specific comparative analyses between Schopenhauer's *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* and Nishida's *Zen no kenkyū* in Itabashi 2014: 265-276 and Itabashi 2016: 95-118.

⁸Passages from *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* are my own English translations from the German edition, though at I occasionally benefited from existing English translations indicated in

Thus, will is beyond any division (subject–object, cause–effect, one–many, and so on). Therefore, not only the body, but also the entire world that is presented in the form of subject–object, is the phenomenon of objectified will or the objectivity of the will. Schopenhauer calls the phenomenon, “presentation (*Vorstellung*)”, and the will, the “thing-in-itself (*Ding an sich*)”.⁹

As Schopenhauer also insists, every act of will has a motive, but the act is merely an occasion for the will to present itself (see WI: 127). “That one wills at all, that out of a number of motives exactly this and no other moves one’s will, for that no ground can be given” (WI: 148). This means that the entire existence of the will has no ground¹⁰ or is “groundless (*grundlos*)” (WI: 127). Because of such groundlessness (*Grundlosigkeit*), Schopenhauer states, “Every individual act of will has a purpose, the whole willing has none” (WI: 196).

In Schopenhauer’s view, in the “life (*Leben*)” of every individual human being, the will is “will to live (*Wille zum Leben*)”, which is the blind and endless willing for its ground that, indeed, is nonexistent. To human beings, it appears that there is a purpose, that is, an end and goal of willing (reason for living) in the world; and grounded on that, one has the will to unify one’s own life. Will, however, never knows what it wills. There is no ultimate goal, no ultimate ground for willing. Satisfaction, the “achievement of the goal” (WI: 196), is not enduring. Therefore, there is “no measure or goal for the suffering”. Suffering is essential to life.

Nevertheless, in the life of each human being, for whom suffering is essential, “through great misfortune and pain, cognizance of the self-contradiction of the will to live can urge itself forcibly upon us and nullity (*Nichtigkeit*) of all striving can be seen” (WI: 466). This change is a “denial of will (*Verneinung des Willens*)”, which cannot be intentionally forced; it comes suddenly as the effect of “grace (*Gnade*)” (WI: 479). Thus, denial of the will, which is attached to willing for its own ground, proceeds from the self-cognizance that the will to live is nullity or groundlessness in general.

This denial cannot be regarded as reaching to an ultimate, fundamental state or essence (which would be a ground for the will) because the will itself is groundless. Schopenhauer says, with the denial of the will to live, “We see the world retain (*behalten*) only empty nothingness” (*das leere Nichts*) (WI: 487). Such empty nothingness is, for Schopenhauer, “*nihil privativum*” (WI: 484), which means nothingness as a lack of ground, but not in an ultimate religious essence or state prior to the will. Through denial of the will to live, the will realizes that there is “nothingness” or “nihil” (as nonexistence of ground) behind the will itself. Finally, denial of the will to live, of willing for a ground, is “turning (*Wendung*)” from the will that wills for its ground toward the will in itself that acts not for, nor on, any ground.

the bibliography. The work is abbreviated as WI, followed by a colon and page number.

⁹What Schopenhauer meant by “thing-in-itself” should not be considered the same as what “substance” tends to signify today. See Kamata 1988.

¹⁰*Grund*: this should have various meanings: reason, cause, and motive.

In addition, Schopenhauer claims that the denial of the will is the actual emergence of “true and actual freedom of will as thing-in-itself” or “true, actual, and unique immediate expression of the freedom of will in itself” (WI: 355). According to him, “freedom (*Freiheit*)” means “independence of the Principle of Ground”, that is, groundless willing without willing for its cause or ground. In this case, denial of the will to live is turning from the will to live to the will in itself, which essentially acts freely, that is, groundlessly. This denial is “nullification (*Aufhebung*)” of the will to live, but not of the will in itself. Rather, it is realization of the will in itself.

As Schopenhauer insists, this denial of the will for ground leads will to religious “blessedness (*Seligkeit*)” and “incontestable repose (*unanfechtbare Ruhe*)” (WI: 464. See Aquila’s translation: 456) in the life of each person in the appearance and vanishing of each single being in the world. Schopenhauer states, “Freedom nullifies the essence lying at the ground (*zum Grunde*) of the phenomenon, while the phenomenon yet continues to exist in time” (WI: 339). The will is at peace and free from the suffering within its life.¹¹

5 The Absolute Will

Now, we return to the question of why Nishida regards the whole activity of self-determination, in which thinking and sensation are one, as will. When Nishida refers to “will”, especially in the last half of *Intuition and Reflection in Self-Awareness*, he takes the Schopenhauerian notion of will into consideration. “Without will’s-acting-consciousness (*Ishitekikōi no ishiki* 意志的行為の意識), one could not distinguish one’s own body from any other natural objects, and there would be no reason to think that one’s own body and spirit are closely related in particular” (NKZa 2: 235–236). This statement clearly suggests Schopenhauer’s thought, as we have seen, although Nishida does not directly mention Schopenhauer’s name.

Nishida describes the whole activity as will in a Schopenhauerian manner. “Standing on the immediate and concrete whole, at the basis of various acts as thinking or sensation, one has to recognize the sole unity of the will, the sole unity of the personality. Both thinking and sensation are the parts of our will, our personality” (NKZa 2: 292). The will realizes itself in an immediate manner in which spirit and body, or thinking and sensation, are one. For Nishida, will itself is not subjected to the dualities of subject and object, cause and effect, or the one and many. The will never has a cause or ground. Accordingly, as in Schopenhauer, the entire world, which is presented in the form of subject–object and causation, is constituted by the will. Nishida says, “Will is not ordered, but constitutes the order”, and “will is not subjected to the causation, since it constitutes the causation” (NKZa 2: 275).

¹¹ For a consideration of the freedom of groundless will compared with that of such philosophers as Jacob Böhme, F. W. J. Schelling, and Friedrich Nietzsche, see Itabashi 2016.

In this respect, Nishida says, “to produce being from nothing (*Mu yori u wo shōzuru toiukoto* 無より有を生ずるといふこと) is the most immediate and undoubtable fact” (NKZa 2: 281). This “nothing” or “nothingness (*Mu* 無)” is not some state that exists prior to production as an act of the will. Rather, as we have seen in Schopenhauer’s thought, it signifies negation, that is, *nothingness* or *nihil*, of any ground behind the will itself. Such will exists as “absolute free will” (*Zettai jiyū no ishi* 絶対自由の意志) independent of causation or any ground. There is *nothing* other than such will as the act of production of being; there is *nothing* prior to this act.

In his many statements, Nishida emphasizes that the act of “absolute free will” transcends any thinking, conceptual determination, or explanation (see NKZa 2: 281, 299, 300, etc.) because this will is not grounded on anything. In other words, it is not included in and determined by any ground, any reason, or any principle. Nevertheless, it cannot exclude any thinking or determination from itself, since that which excludes them must be thought and determined as such only in opposition to and in distinction from them. Absolute free will transcends the distinction of determination and non-determination, and it exists only as the act of self-determination that produces or creates determinate beings within itself, while its whole activity is not determined at all.

In short, as we have seen, *nothing* other than “absolute free will” produces or creates being from nothing, and no substance or essential state prior to this act or event of self-determination that establishes all the being within itself. As in Nishida’s statement “Will mirrors a shadow of itself within itself (*Onorejisihin no nakani onorejishin wo eizite miru* 己自身の中に己自身の影を映じて見る)” (NKZa 2: 301), we can say that absolute free will as self-determination is the act of self-mirroring. In this case, “It is true that there is no shadow of the thing separate from the thing; however, it is also true that there is no thing separate from its shadow” (ibid.). No substance, or no subject of will, is behind each mirroring or determining.

Nishida states: “As the whole life of an artist is within every cut of the chisel, or every stroke of the brush, the whole reality is within every determination itself. We must not ask how the act of determination arises [from the will], but say that the determination itself, as will, is immediately the concrete whole reality (*Genteisonomono ga ishitoshite tadachini gutaitekijitssuzai dearu* 限定其者が意志として直ちに具体的全実在である)” (NKZa 2: 299). Although every determination is only a shadow of the whole will, there is no will as true reality apart from such a shadow. Each “shadow” determines or mirrors—expresses and includes—the whole absolute free will that is itself beyond expression and determination. As “in immediate experience of will, the finite is immediately infinite” (ibid.), one experiences the beyond-determinate absolute free will (which is the act of self-determination), not negatively, but positively, through each determination and expression as a “shadow” of this will.¹²

¹²Nishida calls infinite absolute free will “God’s will” (NKZa 2: 281). For more details regarding the relationship between absolute free will and individual will, see NKZa 2: 296 and Itabashi 2004: 76.

Finally, for Nishida, authentic, dynamic self-production or self-determination exists immediately through enacting the absolute free will that has no ground. Thought, or reflective knowledge, and immediate experience are two sides of this will viewed from different directions. As Nishida says, “Will is *egressus* and *regressus*, and knowledge expresses the side of return [*regressus*] of the will” (NKZa 2: 300); and then, “Our immediate experience that can be described as the absolute free will includes a possibility of [self-]reflection at every point” (NKZa 2: 330). Therefore, because each determination expresses and includes absolute free will, even if these determinations are still shadows of the whole will, absolute free will can validate the self-reflective and self-determinate knowledge of the will that is beyond-determinate.

Furthermore, according to Nishida, absolute free will can be fundamentally realized as a religious experience, and it brings about our authentic whole life (see NKZa 2: 311). For Nishida, as well as for Schopenhauer as we have seen, authentic free will can be brought about in an individual’s life through the radical denial of the “will to live” that establishes and relies upon a ground. Nevertheless, there are important differences between Nishida and Schopenhauer on this account. Whereas Schopenhauer did not provide sufficient epistemological validation of reflective knowledge regarding the free will, for Nishida, the religious denial of will not only existentially realizes our authentic life, it also opens the epistemological possibility of reflecting on the will. As we have seen, there is no ground at the basis of absolute free will. If, however, one validates one’s own reflective knowledge on the will, one establishes a subjective self as the ground or basis of the epistemological verification. Thus, absolute free will without any ground can be realized only through the negation of the subjective self as ground, which is the negation of one’s subjective self, in general, as the desire to follow one’s own way of life. That is to say, the radical denial of any subjective self as ground, which can be understood as an experience of religious conversion, can bring about the immediate experience of absolute will. This experience does not deny the epistemological validity of reflective determination, knowledge, or thought. To the contrary, these are opened since absolute free will is a self-determining activity in which each determination expresses and includes the whole beyond-determinate absolute will itself.

Here, this absolute free will is the activity that determines and expresses itself as itself. Therefore, Nishida designates this activity of absolute free will as that of “*jikaku* (self-awareness or self-realization)”, which is the self-realization of this self-determination or self-mirroring. In other words, the immediate experience of absolute free will can be actualized by the radicalization of “*jikaku*” as self-determination, which involves the denial of the self as a ground.

6 Closing Remarks

In *Intuition and Reflection in Self-Awareness*, Nishida intends to address how one can verify the epistemological validity of reflective knowledge on the whole ungraspable, beyond-determinate immediate experience. In short, with Cohen and Schopenhauer's influence, Nishida concludes that reflective thinking and immediate experience are two different aspects of absolute free will, which is the one and only reality, self-producing, self-mirroring, and self-determining without any ground. In this activity, each self-determination can have validity as reflective knowledge because each expresses and includes the whole. Although self-determinations are still shadows of the whole will, these shadows appear only where the whole absolute free will exists.

While referring to Cohen's epistemological thought, Nishida still intends to go beyond Cohen's notion of the self-determination of pure thinking and claims that the concept of the self-determination of absolute free will creates a determinate being "from nothing" without any ground. In Nishida, as influenced by Schopenhauer, experiencing this will realizes our authentic, actual life that cannot be entirely thought and determined by any ground. Nevertheless, this standpoint as a kind of "philosophy of life" is insisted upon as a radicalization of epistemological verification of reflective thinking, which is *not* the case for Schopenhauer. Nishida's stance is more radical in that it annihilates any ground throughout at the basis of self-determining activity, whether determinate or non-determinate.

Here, we should consider Nishida's notable thought on the relationship between reality and "consciousness (*ishiki* 意識)", or knowing in a general sense, that includes immediate experience, thinking, and reflection. One could not know or say anything about the reality independently of consciousness or knowing. Nevertheless, because knowledge is only some image or figure of reality, consciousness is originally distinguished from known reality. In other words, even in immediate experience (living through the whole activity as sole reality, which, like Schopenhauer, Nishida regarded as will), one can experience or know an image, that is, make some determination of reality. As we have seen, Nishida posits that reflection and immediate experience are different sides of absolute free will, and this is the sole reality, which is self-determination or self-expression itself with nothing as ground existing prior to it. This claim signifies that reality cannot be separated from knowing, and also that knowing can affirm that knowledge is the image or determination of reality that is itself beyond any determination (and thus distinguished from knowing).

Furthermore, as for the oneness or identity of knowing and reality, Nishida states: "The absolute free will, which is the most immediate actuality for us, is '*creans et non creata*' and '*nec creata nec creans*'. It always includes denial of itself" (NKZa 2: 350). This shows that absolute free will should not be identified only with "*creans et not creata* (creating and not created)", that is, self- or auto-activity that has its own ground in itself. Absolute free will acts in a manner to negate any self-grounded identity, whether in "*creans et not creata*" or in "*nec creata et nec creans* (neither created nor creating)". Thus, nothing is that which is self-grounded, self-completed,

and self-immanent in itself. Absolute free will is certainly a self-producing, self-mirroring, and self-determining activity, and it is so only without having its own ground. In short, oneness of knowing and reality in absolute free will is *non*-self-grounded or *non*-self-immanent identity, which the later Nishida named “contradictory self-identity (*mujunteki jikodōitsu* 矛盾的自己同一)”.

Consequently, in its authentic sense, knowing is that which negates any self-grounded identity, or simply, any ground (since ground is always self-grounded) whether in knowledge or reality, or in their interaction. We should consider this epistemological thinking as a basis of Nishida’s later thought concerning the “contradictory self-identity” of the interaction between the environment and the individual in the actual world. When one considers Nishida’s notion of “contradictory self-identity” in the actual world, one should not start directly with an analysis of the actual world. To grasp Nishida’s insight, one’s epistemological standpoint must be deepened or transformed to bring about the realization of this authentic *non*-self-grounded identity. It is true that in *Intuition and Reflection in Self-Awareness*, Nishida still lacks considerations of nothingness as “place (*basho* 場所)”, the “discontinuous continuity (*hirenzoku no renzoku* 非連続の連続)” among the self and others, and the absolute in “historical reality (*rekishiteki genjitsu* 歴史的現実)”.¹³ Nevertheless, in *Intuition and Reflection in Self-Awareness*, we should understand Nishida’s epistemological thinking about self-determination as will to be a significant and indispensable basis for his later thought.

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¹³This point and related issues are discussed further in light of Nishida’s late philosophy in Itabashi 2008.

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Chapter 3

“Self-Awareness”: A Pervasive Concept in Nishida’s Philosophy



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One of the pervasive problems in Nishida philosophy can be rephrased with the following question: “How is it possible to explicate the nature of ‘the self’ in a logical manner given that this notion cannot be objectified”? “Self-awareness” is a keyword for solving this problem.

Although Nishida addresses this problem throughout his philosophy, his thought underwent a series of developments. What started as an existentialist stance on “experience” was followed by the epistemological principle of “self-awareness”, which further evolved into an ontological elucidation of “reality” that was drawn from his conception of “place”. From there on, he devised a detailed system of philosophy founded on “the logic of place”, while also taking up broad philosophical questions in a grand surge of thought that covered various aspects of problems regarding existential realities that cannot be dealt with in a systematic manner.

Therefore, it could be said that the problem of “self-awareness” sheds a distinctive light on different aspects of these various problems. In this paper I will pursue the meaning of “self-awareness” as it reflects the above focal points.

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1 Self-Awareness of Experience

Nishida's philosophy begins with the sentence: "To experience means to know by the facts just as they are" (NKZa 1: 9).¹ Even though his student NISHITANI Keiji (西谷啓治) has said that Nishida's philosophy is developed from this single sentence at the beginning of *An Inquiry into the Good* (*Zen no Kenkyū*, 善の研究 1911) it could also be said that its content summarizes the entire development of Nishida's thought.

The fundamental problem of philosophy and its solution are displayed in this sentence. An answer to the question of how "facts" (as something "objective") can agree with "knowledge" (something "subjective") is provided by stating that the unity of the two is retained within "facts just as they are". The essence of experience lies in such "unity", which is named "pure experience". *An Inquiry into the Good* is a work that attempts to "explain everything" through the notion of pure experience. In the 1911 preface to his maiden work, Nishida writes that "it is not experience that follows from individuals, but individuals that follow from experience", implying that experience is not only the agreement between the subject and the object, but also the foundation that establishes the relation between the self and the other.

In brief, both the subject-object relation, as well as the self-other relation, are enabled by the constituents of "pure experience" (i.e. experience, facts, and knowledge). I would like to go over two issues concerning this matter.

1.1 *A Japanese Grasp of Experience as Indicated by its Subjectless Language*

Firstly, how is it possible to maintain the notion of "knowing facts just as they are"? This notion is maintained by a worldview that underlies the language of Japanese thought and allows for sentences without a subject.

Some of Nishida's sentences are also devoid of subjects. For example, after stating in the first paragraph of *An Inquiry into the Good* that "pure experience is identical with direct experience", he continues with the sentence: "When one's conscious states are experienced directly, there is yet neither a subject nor an object, and knowledge and its object are in complete unity" (ibid). There is no subject in this sentence. For who is the one "directly experiencing their conscious states"? The answer is that we cannot say *who*, since "there is yet neither a subject nor an object" to speak of. "Knowledge and its object are in complete unity" at the very heart of subjectless experience. Or, in other words, the understanding that facts and

¹This paper is based on a presentation I gave at the Nishida Philosophy Association meeting in July, 2006 (See Okada 2006). I wish to thank Miikael-Aadam Lotman for translating the essay into English.

knowledge are retained in “unity” lurks in the background of this sentence without a subject.

One can often hear announcements on the platforms of Japanese railway stations cautioning passengers to “be careful, because the doors are closing”.² It could be argued that since the conductor is, in fact, the person in charge of closing the doors, this announcement should be rephrased as “I (the conductor) will now close the doors, so please stand clear”. However, the prior expression is more natural for Japanese speakers, who grasp the train’s motion as a natural event. This is rooted in the idea that the doors open and close as one scene of the event, and that the conductor who announces this scene is also included in the train’s motion.

Japanese language uses the auxiliary verbs “れる *reru*” and “られる *rareru*” to express spontaneity (or natural occurrence), possibility, passivity or reverence. However, the Japanese sentence “山が見える *yama ga mieru*”, which can be roughly translated as “the mountain comes into view” or “the mountain looms”, cannot be fully rendered into English, because the four aspects are employed in overlapping senses. “山が見える *yama ga mieru*” doesn’t merely express possibility (e.g. “the mountain can be seen”) or passivity (e.g. “the mountain is seen”). Rather, it is understood as a multifaceted event, where the action of “seeing” occurs naturally from within the self. That is, the mountain as something passively seen, stems from the very sight of the mountain that renders the action of seeing possible. This, in turn, expresses an attitude of reverence by drawing us away from the seen object, since we hesitate to approach the awe-inspiring sight.

The sentence “please be careful, because the doors are closing”, doesn’t sound unnatural, since the closing of the doors is seen as a naturally occurring event. In a similar vein, my action of “seeing” is entailed in the sentence “山が見える *yama ga mieru*” as a natural occurrence. Events like those expressed by the verb “見える” *mieru* (to see, to be seen, to be in sight) are formed when the actions from within the self overlap with the actions of nature from without the self. It could be argued that the notion that human action as it emerges from the workings of nature supports the factual grounds for subject-object unity. I would also like to point out that the unity of subject and object, as maintained in Nishida’s notion of pure experience, is founded on the view of experience as natural occurrence.

The Japanese way of thinking, which allows for sentences without subjects, establishes events on the basis of spontaneous natural occurrences. The differences in meaning between the sentences “assembly at 10 p.m. tomorrow” and “we will assemble at 10 p.m. tomorrow” (e.g. as in contrast with another group of people who will assemble at 9 p.m.) cannot be explained by merely claiming that the prior sentence has an omitted subject. The Japanese way of thinking and Nishida’s philosophy share a common perspective regarding the constitution of “experience”.

² Actually, the German phrase “Schliessen, Achtung!” is quite similar to the Japanese expression. Even though I used this example as a characteristic of Japanese language, there is nothing exclusively Japanese about it. Perhaps the real issue at hand is the difference between pre- and post-modern attitudes, rather than a divergence between the East and the West.

1.2 *Self-Awareness As Already Embedded in the Fabric of Experience*

Now, let us return to the phrase “when one’s conscious states are experienced directly”. In the original Japanese, this reads “自己の意識状態を直下に経験した時 *jiko no ishiki jotai wo jikige ni keiken shita toki*” and is notable for the particular usage of “*shita toki*”. In contemporary Japanese, the “*た ta*” of “*した shita*” expresses the past; however this usage first came about during the Meiji era as a translational equivalent to the English past tense. As a matter of fact, there is no perfect tense in the contemporary Japanese spoken language. The concept of “tense”, or the idea that the speaker can express temporal change by means of verb conjugation, was originally alien to the Japanese. Of course, the understanding of time as consisting of past, present and future may be shared universally, but the concept of grammatical tense is not. In Chinese, time is expressed with adverbs instead of tenses. The Japanese language is basically similar in that respect.

The meaning of “*た ta*” in “*した時 shita toki*” is not an expression of past or present perfect tense, but an expression of “presence in the very midst of the present”. For example, most of the Japanese exclaim “あった、あった!*atta,atta*!” (lit: [There it] is!) when finally recovering a hopelessly lost item. In this case, “*た ta*” emphasizes the speaker’s affirmative recognition of the lost item “being here now”.

Therefore, the phrase “自己の意識状態を直下に経験した時 *jiko no ishiki jotai wo jikige ni keiken shita toki*” refers to a distinct recognition of one’s conscious states within the present experience itself. Thus, “直下 *jikige*” implies that the division between subjectivity and objectivity is yet to take place “within plain experience where experience is directly experienced”. As such, the plain unity of subjectivity and objectivity becomes the “existential beginning” at the very heart of experience that occurs alongside the “realization of existence (i.e. experience)”.

In brief, “the experience of experience within experience”—that is, the self-awareness of experience—is already contained within the phrase “経験した *keiken shita*”. The self-awareness of experience lurks implicitly within its emerging structure. However, it is yet devoid of a subject. Thus, Nishida’s first attempt to explain experience is undertaken by positing experience as its own subject in the form “experience experiences experience”.

2 The Development of Self-Awareness

In a sense, the attempt to explain everything from the roots of pure experience, in terms of existence and knowledge, already entails “the self-awareness of existence”, since it attempts to elucidate reality from its own basis. This makes for a powerful philosophy insofar as it is rooted in the foundations of reality. However, if such a philosophy does not treat its own foundation critically, it cannot be deemed a rigorous philosophy as a way of thinking that isn’t tied down to its own premises.

Nishida proceeds to elucidate the philosophy of self as “knowledge of facts just as they are” by focusing on the concept of self-awareness.

2.1 From Experience to Self-Awareness

In *An Inquiry into the Good*, Nishida describes self-awareness with the following:

Self-awareness is a phenomenon that accompanies the integration of a partial conscious system into the center of the conscious whole. Self-awareness arises through reflection, and the reflection of the self is an activity that thus strives for the center of consciousness. The self is none other than the unifying activity of consciousness [...] The unity itself cannot become the object of knowledge; our actions can embody it, but we cannot know of it. True self-awareness is derived from the act of willing, not from intellectual reflection (NKZa 1: 183).

In brief, self-awareness (the center of consciousness that preconditions the emergence of consciousness *qua* consciousness) can be viewed as the unifying activity of the self. Furthermore, the activity of unification cannot itself become the object of consciousness, which is to say, it is conceived as the imperceptible act of willing.

Nishida’s initial grasp of the term “self-awareness”, which became a keyword in his philosophy after *An Inquiry into the Good*, can be found in his lecture notes for a presentation on Fichte’s philosophy, which he gave for the Shinano Philosophical Association in 1924. There he speaks of “our self-awareness, *Selbstbewußtsein*” evidently as a synonym for “self-consciousness” (NKZa 14: 91–92). Kant referred to the unifying activity of consciousness (an idea that began with the Cartesian *cogito* that underlies the cognition of objects) as “apperception” (*Apperzeption*), while Fichte coined the term “fact-act” (*Tathandlung*) to express the activity that synthesizes and unifies conscious content in self-consciousness.

With this neologism, Fichte tried to convey the idea that that which is posited (the objective) and that which posits (the subjective) are identical. This term is interchangeable with “self-consciousness”, as we will see with the following.

There is a type of consciousness in which what is subjective and what is objective cannot be separated from each other at all, but are absolutely one and the same. The consciousness in question is our consciousness of our own thinking.— Hence you are immediately conscious of your own thinking. Self-consciousness is therefore immediate; what is subjective and what is objective are inseparably united within self-consciousness and are absolutely one and the same. Instead of “intellect”, I prefer to use the term “I-hood”, because, for anyone capable of the least bit of attentiveness, this term indicates, in the most direct way, the self-reverting of activity (Fichte 1990: 113).³

³Nishida wrote that the “I is self-awareness, i.e. fact-act” (NKZa 14: 118) and, in his later period, acknowledged Fichte’s philosophy with the following: “I must agree with Fichte in that fact-act lies at the recesses of all consciousness. However, instead of conceiving fact-act as a self-determination of the emptied seeing self, he conceived of the self directly from the noematic direction, and thus lapsed into metaphysics. [...] Nonetheless, the self-aware determination of nothingness must

“I-hood” is another plain Fichtean expression for “self-consciousness”. However, it is namely the idea of “consciousness in which what is subjective and what is objective cannot be separated from each other at all, but are absolutely one and the same” that Nishida adopted from Fichte as a philosophical principle that can elucidate the structure of direct experience. He referred to Fichte’s notion of direct self-consciousness with the term self-awareness.

2.2 “Fact-Act” and Will

Nishida was not satisfied with Fichte’s self-consciousness as “fact-act” because, for him, will is the essence of self-awareness, as we already saw in the passage from *An Inquiry into the Good*. Fichte, too, founded theoretical reason on practical reason since the activity that assigns an object to the faculty of reason is given in conduct as an act of will. However, for Nishida, will is not exclusively moral. Will, at its purest, aims at willing itself. For this reason, it can reach the depths of religious space as a spontaneously self-developing form.

Nishida followed Fichte’s and Schelling’s dictum that “the eye cannot see itself” when he stated that “an act remains unreflected during its activity; the eye cannot see the eye itself” (NKZa 3: 291). An activity cannot itself become the object of representation. Hence, an activity, as something unobjectifiable, corresponds to the nature of selfhood, insofar as the self’s defining feature is that it cannot be treated as an object. The self is “that which cannot see itself”; the phenomenon of self is enabled by its own imperceptible workings.

The problem of acquiring knowledge of the very activity of knowing is, in principle, similar to the problem of elucidating selfhood. Nishida’s philosophy can be characterized by his view of “knowing” as an activity embedded in experience, and by his resolve to found knowledge on the will to know. Problems pertaining to self, will, and knowing fall under the same domain. However, when viewed as such, the essence of self-awareness is better expressed by will than by “fact-act”.

The will to know lies at the heart of knowledge. The Latin *conscientia* means both conscience and consciousness. The original use of *conscientia* as conscience is due to Christian influences and is believed to express knowledge of things in union with God. The emergence of knowledge is, of course, accompanied by the desire to reach happiness, since knowledge is the prerequisite of attaining a goal. It is futile to attempt to obtain something without knowledge of the desired object or of the proper means. However, insofar as humans are essentially social beings, we strive to coexist. This is to say that knowledge also arises from the question of how we ought to conduct ourselves morally, for society cannot stand without a common sense for the good. Desires, morality, and even religion are established on the act of

remain a mere noematic metaphysical substance, until the true meaning of self-awareness is clarified”(NKZa 6: 171–174).

willing. Even the wise Socrates could not acquire knowledge higher than the “knowledge of ignorance”, as he taught that God is the true sage whose voice reaches us in the form of an invitation to knowledge. Or, simply put, the will to establish a foundation for knowledge leads us to expose the religious problems of sin and evil. It is here that we are led to ultimate contradictions (i.e. the *aporia* regarding God and evil or life and death) that become fundamentally problematic for us, since they cannot be resolved from the standpoint of mere reason alone. Nishida sought to establish a philosophical logic that can grapple with such ultimate problems.⁴ The “standpoint of place” became the principle of this logic. He writes:

Reality, as it is conceived, must include the fundamentally irrational at its basis. [...] However irrational though it may be, we must clarify what it means to conceive of it, insofar as it is something conceivable. [...] I believe that this contradiction can be resolved by treating the self as something that cannot itself be objectified, and moreover, by treating our self-aware determinations that are thought to objectify the self within itself as a universal (NKZa 3: 3).

Self-awareness as self-determination that “sees itself within itself” is deemed “a universal”, which he later comes to think of as “place”: “I call the universal that determines itself ‘place’” (NKZa 5: 387).

2.3 *Self-Awareness as “Place”*

Nishida writes that “our self-awareness is the consciousness of a direct bond between activities” (NKZa 4: 305). Or in other words: “All independent objects are activities, whose mutual internal relation (i.e. that which makes them stand in opposition) is the activity of activities. [...] It can be considered a single activity when its unity is pure, i.e. when it is bound internally” (NKZa 3: 291). This means that self-awareness is the unity of activity in itself, which cannot itself be seen, similar to the eye that cannot see itself. However, by focusing on the activity of self-awareness as a kind of expression, the contradiction of seeing the impossibility of our own sight reaches its own limit and transitions⁵ to the standpoint where “the eye sees itself” (NKZa 5: 375). Thus, the relation where the “knower is the known” becomes the relation where “that which expresses is the expressed”. Next, let us look at self-awareness as a kind of reflection while considering its expressive nature.

Nishida describes expressive consciousness with the following:

⁴There are several different layers of self-awareness that Nishida addressed respectively; however, after reaching the “the self-aware determination of nothingness”, he explicated their relations with the following: “Action can be conceived in terms of the self-aware determination of nothingness; self-aware determinations can be conceived as active determinations, and by conceiving of self-aware determinations we can conceive of knowing” (NKZa 6: 136).

⁵“Metamorphosis [...] is the essence of the historical life of contradictory self-identity. The world of contradictory self-identity must develop metamorphically as the self-determination of the absolute present. [...] The limit is in transition as a self-determination of such kind” (NKZa 10: 389).

A consciousness of expressive acts is the field where we are seeing without being subjectively conscious. It must be a consciousness that subsumes subjectivity. [...] My philosophy isn't founded on an intuition of subject-object unity, but on seeing everything that exists and acts as a reflection of that which reflects itself within the emptied self. I would like to propose a way of seeing without a seer (NKZa 4: 5–6).

Thus, he doesn't regard "self-aware knowledge" as an intuition of subject-object unity, but as a "reflection" or an "expression". The actual body of activity becomes phenomenal by means of self-determination, and the phenomenal form of such an unobjectifiable activity is referred to as its expression or reflection.

To ask, "How is it that one can see the unobjectifiable"?, is essentially similar to asking, "How can internally enclosed independent entities understand one another"? In the latter case, "the internally enclosed self" is to be regarded as a self that sees itself within a "place of self-enclosure". Nishida treats consciousness as a "place" when he writes that "That which lies 'within itself' can be thought of as plane of conscious representation" (NKZa 5: 433). As the self sees itself within the workings of the self as place, both the seer and the seen become determinations from within the self. Moreover, since the "seeing self" is at the same time "the seen self", both the subject-object relation (the self that sees itself) and its converse (the self that is seen by the seen self) emerge as one. Such twofold relation is expressed by Nishida's idiosyncratic phrase: "seeing without a seer" (見るものなくして見る *mirumono nakushite miru*), for it is neither a merely subjective nor a merely objective relation.

"Seeing without a seer" can also be rephrased as "reflecting without that which reflects". However, the Japanese verb "to reflect" (映る *utsuru*) also connotes the verb "to move" (移る *utsuru*). Thus, it is not a relation between reality and its "copy", but rather a movement of reality within an "image", where the phenomenal image and reality coincide. In this case, we can also conceive a reverse direction, in which reality reflects the phenomenal imagery of actual existence. Thus, while the distinction between reality and its image are maintained in this relation, the image is the expression of reality; but, at the same time, the expression of the image converts to reality.

Expression is one's reflection in another. Therefore, even though it can be referred to as an image, it is in fact the "self-portrayal of the self", that is, an image that portrays the "identity of reality and phenomena" as a relation between "the substantive self" (自己が *jiko ga*), the *I*, and "its objectified self" (自己を *jiko wo*). The typically emerging internal structure of "self-awareness" (*jiko ga*) is best captured by the formula "the self sees itself within itself". The self as an unobjectifiable activity (i.e. *noesis*) becomes itself as an objectified image of the self (i.e. *noema*). This shift is enabled by the expressive activity of the self as a place within itself. Thus, Nishida started to view self-awareness as a function of "the self as a place" that enables the self to see itself.

One of the defining features of the self-awareness of place is that it allows us to see that which cannot be objectified. This is possible due to the expressive activity that "reflects itself within itself by emptying itself". The self-awareness of place is thus a consciousness that goes beyond the subjective, since it "empties itself". Nishida explains this idea with the phrase "seeing without a seer". Though it may

seem dubious to conceive of consciousness without subjectivity, there is no subjective consciousness within the conscious state of pure experience. However, this should not be confused with a mere absence or lack of consciousness. On the contrary, non-subjective consciousness refers to a “lively consciousness”, for it works vigorously within the unconscious.

Nishida’s first insight into self-awareness as an act of reflection can already be seen in the sentence: “To experience means to know by the facts just as they are”. The wording is important here, because he does not use the phrase “to know the facts just as they are” — as if the facts were viewed as objects of “knowledge” — but “to know *by* the facts just as they are”. With this, Nishida meant to say that knowledge follows by, unifies with, and reproduces the facts within the self. The notion of self-awareness as place developed as Nishida’s understanding of pure experience grew increasingly profound.⁶

The passage “knowledge [of cognition] is possible as a determination of place that subsumes [cognitive] activity, that is, by the self-determination of place itself” (NKZa 6: 6) denotes the point where the concept of self-awareness developed into the self-determination of place. However, this does not mean that he abandoned the standpoint of “self-awareness as will” altogether. The standpoint of self-awareness as place is only reached through the self-negation of will, since he also notes that “the self-determinations of the self that regard nothingness must be in constant self-negation” (NKZa 5: 390). Negation, in this context, is the negation of will. Thus, while it seems that his thought underwent an about-face, he, in fact, acquired a more thorough insight into the workings of will that lie at the depths of pure experience.

2.4 *Self-Awareness as it Unfolds from Nothingness*

It could be argued that his core principle of “contradictory self-identity” was structured after the notion of reflection as the self-awareness of expression, which consists in the identity relation between “that which reflects” and “that which is reflected”. “Self-aware intuition (reflection) is constantly at play where the unbound (that which reflects) is bound together (is reflected)” (NKZa 10: 563; parentheses

⁶“Self-awareness is a consciousness of directly bound activities. Thus, judgement and perception can be said to merge directly within self-awareness. But if so, then how can we determine that the principle of [conscious] data is exclusive to perceptual consciousness, when viewed from the standpoint of self-aware consciousness? The consciousness of will as an activity is as direct as that of perception”(NKZa 4: 305).

NISHITANI Keiji interpreted Nishida’s description of “the consciousness of the direct merging of activities” with the following: “There is a ‘self-awareness of will’ beyond the mere ‘subjectivity of judgement’; a more profound standpoint of knowledge that goes beyond the kind of knowledge that is commonly seen in opposition to will. It is the standpoint of ‘the self-reflection of knowledge itself’. It is by starting from the standpoint of ‘self-awareness of will’ that even the so-called ‘self-awareness of knowledge’ is established. Furthermore, it is there that we can begin to conceive of problems regarding the concept of individuality, history and culture” (Nishitani 1990: 171, vol. 14).

mine). Thus, Nishida's thought develops from the problem of "intuition and reflection in self-awareness" to that of "the expressive activity of contradictory self-identity in self-awareness". This development owes to the unfolding of self-awareness from nothingness. Therefore, I would like to focus on how the logic of place coincides with the workings of nothingness.

According to Nishida, the self-aware act of seeing entails "subsumption":

Something must lie at the base of conscious activity that constantly sees the activity of consciousness itself while signifying its subsumption. Such a seer is conceivable as the self-aware self. [...] The fact that the self becomes self-aware implies, in the above sense, that the transcendent is immanently present in the self as our consciousness returns to the origins of the infinite process. As our consciousness becomes more self-aware, the process subsides (NKZa 5: 432–433).

The infinite process of directly merging with the immediacy of pure experience can be understood in terms of "subsumption" (i.e. "reflecting the self within itself"). Nishida came to regard conscious activity as something that "subsumes" by realizing that it works according to the logic of place. Acts related to the notion of place, such as seeing, knowing, and subsuming, played a decisive role in convincing Nishida to regard "direct experience" as self-awareness. This holds Nishida's thought together as a coherent philosophy.

Subsumption as a function of place is possible only because the concept of place refers to the "a place of nothingness". "Seeing without a seer" is an aspect of direct experience that unfolds within the self, signifying a return to the origins of subject-object unity or a regress of self-progress. In other words, self-aware determination is established by the act of negation: "Truth as an activity of thinking is seen where [...] the self comes in contact with negative nothingness, which signifies the self-determination of nothingness" (NKZa 6: 141). The experience of will, which is characterized by spontaneous self-development, reveals the nature of knowledge as a function of self-negation by returning to nothingness, which, in turn, subsumes the origins of its spontaneity. "The place of nothingness" doesn't signify a place "where nothing exists". Neither is it a "nothing" that stands in opposition to "something". "Nothingness", in the proper sense, refers to the "self-determination of nothingness" that subsumes everything in itself.

3 Self-Awareness as it Intercrosses with History

It is a well-known fact that Nishida engaged in self-criticism in the mid-1930s. He writes:

In "I and Thou" I mostly argued on the basis of individual or noetic determinations. Therefore, I couldn't help but view the world from the standpoint of an individual self. When viewed from the standpoint of a separate individual, the mediator M, which stands between entities as the continuity of discontinuity, must first be conceived in terms of the I-and-Thou relation. [...] However, such a perspective is inevitably one-sided when we think of the historical world; there must be something at the base of history that negates

even the individual. Moreover, the notion of continuity of discontinuity isn’t really conceivable as a mere I-and-Thou relation. To truly conceive of the continuity of discontinuity, we would have to account for the third person (NKZa 7: 210).

“The self-determining workings of nothingness” must be thoroughly subjected to the workings of nothingness itself. Since “nihility” is essentially vacuous in that it rejects all meaning, it must also negate any adherence to “the standpoint of nihilism”. Such thorough negativity is characteristic of the workings of nothingness, for even the self is swept away by it.

Acts of love that mediate I and Thou are established through the “self-determination that is accompanied by the other’s mediation” (NKZa 7: 207). That is, the other is structurally integrated into self-determination for acts of love to hold. However, the true nature of negation is realized when even the standpoint of love is negated. Nishida came to realize that the continuity of discontinuity isn’t a mere I-and-Thou relation; a third party must ultimately come into play for it to hold, a third party that exposes the I-and-Thou relation to worldliness, as it were.

However, this leads us to the following problem: The “self-determination of place” was supposed to overcome noesis by “seeing” through its depths, transcend the self-other or the subject-object relation, and assume a presence in the world. That is to say, the self-determination of place was already supposed to entail a view from within the world. Therefore, the problems that Nishida described in the above citation should have already been resolved. Given this, we can assume that the “standpoint of individual self-determination” became a new problematic for Nishida.

As we already saw in the previous section, “the world’s infinite process that determines itself dialectically” (ibid: 208) is subsumed, reflected, and returned to direct experience, which is located within self-awareness. However, this dialectical process that takes place within self-awareness is “conceived from the self-determinations of the actual world”. Nishida insists that his “standpoint directly grasps the facts of our self-awareness as the facts of absolutely contradictory self-identity, and thence conceives of conscious activities” (NKZa 10: 510). Similarly, he asserts, “thought progresses from facts to reason. [Therefore,] I try to conceive of knowledge from the standpoint of self-awareness of the world” (ibid: 535). He doesn’t address self-awareness without taking its “facts” into account first.

On these grounds, he reconsidered the standpoint of love, which sees the self within the other and vice versa, by re-grounding it in facts. There is a hidden God that transcends the brute facts of “gain and loss”, for God is the God of love who “gives and takes away”. It is plausible that such an awareness of the negation of noetic determinations could account for the problematic that Nishida was facing in his self-criticism. Incidentally, “giving and taking away” is etymologically related to the German verb “*ereignen*”.⁷ The world of *ereignen* is an evanescent world of life and death. The very fact that we are living towards death is fundamental for the

⁷I believe that the German word “*ereignen*” is most appropriate in this context. In contemporary usage, the verb “*ereignen*” means “to happen” and its nominal form “*Ereignis*” means “event”. However, it was originally synonymous with the phrase “*vor Augen stellen*” (lit: “to place before one’s eyes”) while its Heideggerian connotations to “natural occurrence” go without saying.

emergence of the historical world, which consists in the facts of life and death. Therefore, we could say that the problem of life and death emerges from the cross-roads where self-awareness clashes with the historical world and entangles the individual self.

Nishida used the term “self” as a noun in a substantive sense, even though he used it, of course, as a personal pronoun as well. The term stands in relation to “the one” or to “the Self as substantial reality”, whether it is used in the context of pure experience, place, or individual self. However, the nature of the self becomes exhaustive within the individual when it is negated by the substantial reality. This is because the self-negation of the individual self basically signifies its annihilation in death and exposes the utter finitude of the mortal self. Therefore, it is within the annihilation of the individual self that the frontiers of history are embodied through the emergence of mortality.

In Christianity, for example, God “empties himself” (Philippians 2: 7), and by doing so, subsumes mankind in his love. And yet, there is a sense of utter despair within mankind, a sense that “hell is our destined abode”,⁸ which expresses the true character of individual self-negation. Self-negation involves two aspects: “affirmation of negation” (i.e. God’s love) that subsumes the individual and “negation of negation” (i.e. the fact of human finitude). Human finitude, as it appears through the “negation of negation”, is where the negation of God becomes an exhaustive fact. Thus, the negation of negation becomes the diametrical opposite of the absolute’s (God’s) affirmation of negation. This is reflected as a fact of inverse correspondence (逆対応 *gyaku taio*) when the opposition between affirmation and negation occurs in reciprocity by undergoing a dimensional transformation.

Noetic determinations that constitute the individual self must be negated, but this negation is not to be affirmed, for it is through an exhaustive negation (a negation whereby the individual self is surmounted and its finitude becomes exhaustive) that the world of “affairs” emerges (*ereignet*). Here “affirmation of negation” intercrosses with “negation of negation”, and the intercrossing parties become self-aware⁹ of their contradictory self-identity.

Nishida’s ultimate definition of self-awareness is arguably found in the sentence: “The world reflects itself within itself, i.e. becomes self-aware as an absolutely contradictory self-identity of that which expresses and that which is expressed” (NKZA 10: 495). The contradictory self-identity of “that which expresses” and “that which

Moreover, it has the etymological sense of “seeing” while further relating to “selfhood” (in the sense of “appropriation”: or “making one’s own”).

⁸This is a famous quotation from Shinran’s *Tannishō*, in which he laments the ineffectiveness of attaining Buddhahood through any self-reliant religious practice. Nishida cited Shinran already in his maiden work *An Inquiry into the Good*: “If even the virtuous can be reborn in Pure Land, then how much more likely is it for the non-virtuous?”

⁹Were they to intercross by remaining unchanged, then it wouldn’t be a true intercross but a mere intersection. For example, in biology the “crossing-over” signifies an exchange of genetic material resulting in the emergence of a new entity. The self intermingles with the other and begets the “third person”, as it were. Such is the self-awareness of the world as an expression of the self-awareness of the *I*.

is expressed” is the form of self-awareness. The essence of self-awareness is characterized by the following. “When the world becomes self-aware, our selves become self-aware. When our selves become self-aware, the world becomes self-aware. Each of our self-aware selves is a perspective focal point of the world” (ibid: 559). The sentence “When the world becomes self-aware, our selves become self-aware” is to be understood as an intercross of history and self-awareness.

“Self-awareness that intercrosses with history” is, at the same time, “the self-awareness of mortality”. Therefore, Nishida’s notion of self-awareness is also rooted in a religious awareness. The Japanese term for “self-awareness” (自覚 *jikaku*) is probably a translational equivalent for “consciousness” that was derived from the Buddhist notion of “leading oneself and others to enlightenment” (自覚覚他 *jikaku kakuta*) during the late Edo period. It could be argued that Nishida’s interpretation of “consciousness” was deeply influenced by this religious sense of “awakening” (覚 *kaku*).

In the preface to *An Inquiry into the Good*, Nishida writes that for a long time he has deemed “religion a culmination of philosophy” (NKZa 1: 3) and, in the latter half of the same paragraph, that “the problem of life forms the core and culmination” (ibid: 4) of his philosophical inquiry. Nishida uses the word “culmination” (終結 *shuketsu*) twice in reference to philosophy, allowing us to infer that for him “religion” is “the problem of life”. His notion of “the self-awareness of mortality” arrived at this culmination as a philosophy. Therefore, it could be said that Nishida’s philosophy consists in the problem of self-awareness, and that even the concept of place was intended as a device for elucidating the structure of self-awareness.

The emergence of experience is always accompanied by a certain awakening or self-awareness. This is what guided Nishida in his pursuit of a viable path between Eastern and Western philosophies and led him to accomplish his own thought as a philosophy of self-awareness through a creative metamorphosis.

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Chapter 4

The Development of the Concept of *Basho* (Place) in Nishida's Philosophy



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Preface Shortly after Nishida's essay, "*Basho*" ("Place"), was published in June, 1926, the philosopher and economist SŌDA Kiichirō published "On the Method of Nishida's Philosophy: Learning from Professor Nishida" in *Tetsugaku Kenkyū*, no. 127 (*The Journal of Philosophical Studies*), 1926.¹ Sōda's essay was based on Nishida's "*Basho*", as well as his previous essay, "*Hataraku Mono*" ("That Which Acts"), of 1925.² The essay by Sōda is said to be the first one in which the now standard term "Nishida Philosophy" was used. This reflects the fact that an established scholar independently recognized that since his first work, *Zen no kenkyū* (*An Inquiry into the Good*, 1911, hereafter *An Inquiry*), Nishida's thought matured and developed in an original way, reaching an epochal point in the "*Basho*" essay. Nishida himself was acutely aware of the fact that the ideas expressed in the "*Basho*" essay were decisive for the development of his own philosophy. Since its publication, one could say that for the remaining 20 years of his life, Nishida continued to expand and deepen his philosophy of *basho*. Nishida's last completed essay was titled "*Basho-teki ronri to shūkyō-teki sekai kan*" ("The Logic of Basho and the Religious Worldview"), published in 1946.³

What, then, is the theory of *basho*? How was it established, and why was it necessary? In this chapter, I will discuss how the theory came to be established and try to clarify its content.

To begin our investigation, let us cite Nishida's own words on the notions of "that which acts" and "*basho*" in the preface of the collection of essays, *Hataraku mono*

¹ *Nishida Kitarō Zenshū* [*The Complete Works of Nishida Kitarō*, 1978-1980, abbreviated as NKZa, followed by the volume number]. NKZa 4: 290-323.

² *ibid.* 175-207.

³ Nishida completed this essay shortly before his death in 1945, and it was first published the following year in *Tetsugaku Ronbunshū*, vol. 7 (Collection of Essays, vol. 7). NKZa 11: 371-464.

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kara miru mono e (*From That Which Acts to That Which Sees*, 1927, hereafter *That Which Acts*) which contains the “*Basho*” essay:

In the essay “That Which Acts”, I think through what this phrase can mean, by considering “that which is predicate-like” becoming the grammatical subject. In “*Basho*”, I attempt to clarify the starting point of the Logic of *Basho*, by considering how the transcendental field of the predicates can be thought of as the field of consciousness. I believe I have thus shed light on what was lying at the bottom of my thought for some time—facilitating a *turn* from a voluntarism similar to Fichte’s, to a kind of intuitionism” (NKZa 4: 5. Emphasis by Akitomi).

From this passage it is clear that Nishida believes the essay “*Basho*” offers a logical foundation that indicates a shift, or “turn”, from voluntarism to intuitionism. Nishida reflects on this “turn” and addresses the issue 10 years later in 1936 in the new preface to the new edition of *An Inquiry*:

The standpoint of Pure Experience has developed into the standpoint of Absolute Will through a consideration of the Fichtean Tathandlung in *Intuition and Reflection in Self-Awareness*. In the latter half of *From That Which Acts to That Which Sees*, I then go through a *turn* and take the standpoint of *basho*, mediated by Greek philosophy. I believe I have thus clarified the starting point of logicalization of my own thinking (NKZa 1: 6. Emphasis by Akitomi).

Here, in addition to the aforementioned “logicalization” and “turn”, Nishida also mentions that his thought was mediated “through Greek Philosophy”. The “latter half of *From That Which Acts*” refers to part two of the collection, which is comprised of four essays, including “*Basho*”. The important point is that the “mediation through Greek Philosophy”, the “turn from voluntarism to intuitionism”, and the “logicalization” serve as the three main sources that come to be distinctly combined to produce the theory of *basho*.

Of the three sources, however, perhaps the most significant is the “turn from voluntarism to intuitionism”. The “mediation through Greek Philosophy” gave impetus to the turn, and the “logicalization” is the possibility brought about by the turn. In comparison, since “voluntarism” and “intuitionism” both describe the standpoints Nishida had taken up this time, “the turn from voluntarism to intuitionism” reflects the very process he followed in order to reach the standpoint of *basho*. Moreover, through this process, one can also see that the meanings of voluntarism and intuitionism are not unified. Thus, an examination of the turn clarifies Nishida’s own grounds and the steps through which he developed the theory of *basho*. Our examination attempts to elucidate both the steps of the turn and the standpoint of *basho*, while remaining faithful to the internal meanings of Nishida’s terms throughout the process.

1 The Path to the Turn

1.1 *Its Origins in the Theory of Pure Experience*

To begin, let us examine voluntarism, the first element through which the key notion of the “*Basho*” essay originated. As judged from the second quote above, the concept of voluntarism stems from the notion of “absolute will”, or “absolutely free will”, as described in *Intuition and Reflection in Self-Awareness* (1917, here after *Intuition*). At the very outset of the preface of *That Which Acts*, Nishida mentions his own standpoint as a “type of voluntarism similar to that of Fichte” in the 1917 work (NKZa 4: 3). He continues, “However, from the time I wrote *Intuition and Reflection in Self-Awareness*, I had thought of intuition at the foundation of the will; ‘that which acts’ must mean ‘that which sees’, as in Plotinus” (ibid.). This is an important point that we will elaborate later. For now, we may note that the turn from voluntarism to intuitionism did not occur for the first time in *That Which Acts*. Moreover, Nishida’s expression, “intuition at the foundation of the will”, indicates that we cannot grasp the shift from voluntarism to intuitionism as a horizontal kind of shift.

As Nishida mentions in the preface to *That Which Acts*, the turn “shed light on what [had been] lying at the bottom” of his thought for a while. This long dormant thought most likely goes back beyond *Intuition*, to the very starting point of Nishida’s philosophy in *An Inquiry* of 1911. This is likely because the connection between voluntarism and intuitionism was already treated as an issue in that work, and *Intuition* was itself conceived as re-capturing the problematic that arose in the first work. Beginning with the notion of “pure experience” in *An Inquiry*, through “self-awareness” in *Intuition*, along with “absolute free will” as its background, the standpoint of “*Basho*” was reached. As UEDA Shizuteru clarifies, what was articulated in the theory of pure experience finds its full articulation in the establishment of the theory of *basho*; the standpoint of *basho* should be seen as an internal relation among “pure experience/self-awareness/*basho*”.⁴ In order to highlight the uniqueness and necessity of the standpoint of *basho*, then, we need to sketch the necessary aspects of its development from pure experience to self-awareness.

The main text of *An Inquiry* begins with the sentence, “To experience means to know reality as it is” (NKZa 1: 9). The expression, “as it is”, connecting “reality as it is” and “know as it is”, indicates the original starting point where reality and knowing are undivided, yet beginning to develop into their separation. It captures the characteristic of being “prior to subject and object” or a “unity of subject and object”. The following phrase indicates this unity: “When the self experiences its state of consciousness immediately, there is not yet a subject nor an object”. *An Inquiry* articulates this initial development from the original starting point as the “self-development of pure experience”. As such, this was a systematic attempt that

⁴See Ueda, Shizuteru (2002), *Collection of Essays. Vol. 2*, 263–292 and Ueda (2003), *Collection of Essays. Vol. 3*, 1–180.

tried to “explain all things on the basis of pure experience as the sole reality” (NKZa 1: 4).

As a concept which refuses all philosophical explanation and even linguistic articulation, as the foundation of philosophy, articulating pure experience could have meant a radical alteration of the foundation of philosophy itself. The gap that lay between the simple, original reality of pure experience and philosophical explanation remained a problem that could not be contained within *An Inquiry*.

The standpoint that begins from the original unity of subject and object (or that which is prior to subject and object) clearly indicates intuitionism. The notion of “intellectual intuition” expresses this fact. The first section of the work, “Pure Experience”, explains conscious phenomena as the self-development of pure experience; it is further divided into three chapters, “Thought”, “Will”, and “Intellectual Intuition”. Intellectual intuition is said to lie at the foundation of thought and will, situating it at the most fundamental level. This is also related to the fact that religion, as paired with intellectual intuition, is grasped as more fundamental than the pairing of will and morality. Religion is called the “end of philosophy” (NKZa 1: 3). Religion, in this case, too, indicates a “mystical union”, again referring to the unity of subject and object as the foundation.

On the other hand, this work contains the phrase “knowledge-emotion-will”, where emotion and will are prioritized over knowledge. Will is the unifying force of the self-development of pure experience; as such, it remains central to the unifying function of the self. For instance, “will is the fundamental unifying function of consciousness; it is also immediately the expression of the fundamental unifying force of reality” (NKZa 1: 143). Numerous references are made to situate will at the center of the activity of pure experience. It is, therefore, not an exaggeration to name the standpoint of *An Inquiry* “voluntarism”.

Thus, in the standpoint of pure experience, the relation between the will and intellectual intuition is not unequivocal. The book suggests an intimate link between voluntarism and intuitionism. In addition, this issue demonstrates the fundamental problematic of the book: If emotion is more fundamental than knowledge, and within the realm of emotion, religion is considered more fundamental than art and morality, and if religion is the end of philosophy, where or what is the standpoint of knowledge—the philosophical knowledge which comprehends all of this? Insofar as it refers to the “intellect”, intellectual intuition can be distinguished from sensible intuition. But as it is the immediate, intuitive knowledge that gets expressed in the unity of subject and object, it is not the philosophical knowledge that operates within logic and reflection. The problem of the standpoint of knowledge that explains all becomes more forceful the more one decisively situates the origin of knowledge in the unity of subject and object in pure experience. This is the standpoint of knowledge established in *An Inquiry*. The book treats pure experience as the only reality and tries to explain everything from that reality, and, as a result, situating the explanation for it became the unresolved issue.

1.2 *Self-Awareness and Absolute Free Will*

After *An Inquiry*, Nishida grappled with phenomenology and the Neo-Kantianism that were current at the time, and he was confronted with their precise, logical mode of philosophical knowledge. It challenged him to thematize the problem of how the unity of subject and object in pure experience could relate to such sophisticated forms of reflective knowledge. In contrast to such forms of “reflection”, the standpoint of pure experience was recast as “intuition” following Bergson, and Nishida sought the possibility of connecting “intuition” and “reflection” in “self-awareness”. This attempt was his second book, *Intuition and Reflection in Self-awareness* (1917). The reason for analyzing “self-awareness” rests in the fact that in self-awareness, reflection and intuition are linked together. In reflection, the self has its own self as its object, and in intuition, the operation of this reflection unfolds. Their unity is self-awareness, or the self knowing itself. As mentioned earlier, this work is “mediated through Fichte”. This means that the “self” is understood as “the self that works through itself”, that is, the unity of the activity and its result, a “*Tathandlung*” as the essence of the self. In this way Nishida came to regard self-awareness as the immediate, mutual influence of intuition and reflection. In addition, Royce’s “self-representative system” also played a decisive role. This system grasped self-awareness as the “self reflecting itself onto itself, developing an infinite series” (NKZa 2: 16); Royce’s example was to “draw a complete map of England from within England”. For example, if we are outside England and draw a map of England, it is possible to draw a complete map, and the act of drawing comes to its completion. However, if we are in England and draw a complete map of England, according to Nishida, the act of drawing adds a new element to the map. In order for the map to be complete, the act of drawing taking place within England must be added to the completed map. In other words, when we draw the map in England itself, we must draw ourselves in the act of drawing England. This means that there exists an infinite series of activities depicted in the map. This picture represents the structure of the *Tathandlung* through which the act of producing and the product are one, or the structure of self-awareness in which the knowing self and the known self are identical. The final drawing that includes the self drawing itself would never be drawn, though it is a necessary vantage point that gets infinitely reproduced in the act of drawing. Nishida grasps this example of Royce, together with Fichte’s *Tathandlung*, as the structure of self-awareness; but I note here that there is a vantage point that does not get exhausted in the infinite series. This is an opening that would later be developed as the standpoint of *basho*. In contrast to the “self drawing itself” (when one draws England while being in England), from another vantage point we could say that England envelops the self that draws England, thereby opening up the realm that hints at *basho*. I shall elaborate on this point later.

Nishida’s thinking developed, step by step, according to how he understood the structure of self-awareness’s own internal development. This development bridges the gap between two heterogeneous elements—intuition and reflection—in order to explain the gap between fact and meaning, existence and value. As Nishida himself

later recalled, *Intuition and Reflection in Self-awareness* was a “documentary of struggle”; the path was quite difficult. Nevertheless, at the end of this book Nishida reaches the standpoint of “absolute free will”. “I considered all reality as the system of self-awareness, but behind such self-awareness must be absolute free will. In order to grasp the concrete whole of reality, behind the knowing self, there must be the practical self” (NKZa 2: 285). The meandering path seeking the internal connection between intuition and reflection in self-awareness reaches the “absolute free will” behind “self-awareness”. It is not that absolute free will appears separately from self-awareness, but by reinterpreting the movement of self-awareness, it is recast as self-awareness-as-will.

We should note that where absolute free will is presented as true reality, “true reality is infinite development—*egressus*, as well as infinite regress—*regressus*. From one angle, it appears as the infinite development of acting-qua-reality, but from another angle, it is the ‘infinite present’ to which everything freely returns to itself” (NKZa 2: 284). We should note the particular significance of the expression, “freely returns to itself”. At the outset of the book, the internal connection of intuition and reflection is grasped as self-awareness, and this process of self-awareness is the unity of both acts. It is the “act of acts” whereby the self reflects on itself, and this act is itself the self-development of the self. At this point, against the act of objectifying the process of thought, reflection is highlighted as the negation of the will, that is, as an instance of regression. The whole that unifies these contradictory acts is recast as a totality of the functioning of the absolute free will. That is to say, the self reflects upon itself within itself, and this process is the developmental will that freely returns to itself in negating itself.

The absolute free will, thus understood, is indeed a more developed version of the will as the unifying force of pure experience in *An Inquiry*. In its activity of pure experience, the unifying power of the will was infinite, expanding into the universe. But the freedom of the absolute free will must be understood not only in the affirmative direction, but also in its possibility for self-negation. The absoluteness of the “absolute free will” is its fundamental freedom for self-negation. Even though the same term, voluntarism, is used throughout, in these two books the range and depth of the theorizing of the will has gone through a notable transformation. This absolute freedom, moreover, is related to a notion of “creation” that is unique. This recognizes, again, the workings of intuition at the foundation of the will; and, to anticipate what follows, it is also the opening for the theory in the “*Basho*” essay.

1.3 *Returning to Intuition at the Foundation*

Nishida affirms the creativity of the free will. “At the standpoint of will, we can freely create reality; that is, we have the world of free will” (NKZa 2: 269). He then comments on the various theories of “creativity” in Western philosophy, discussing Henri Bergson’s “creative evolution” and Max Stirner’s notion of “creative nothing” in *The unique Individual and his own (Der Einzige und sein Eigentum)* (1845). “The

depth where thought cannot reach, beyond the unity of the system of thought, that is, the self-sufficient, proactive reality itself, that is the will. The will that arises out of creative nothing and returns to it, is reality, consciousness" (NKZa 2: 275). What is significant here is that Nishida renamed the ultimate, absolutely free will "creative will", which is also referred to as "creative nothing" from which the will arises and returns. That is, "nothingness" is at the foundation of the will that freely creates reality. From such descriptions, it is perhaps easy to conjure up the idea of "creation out of nothingness" in Judaism. In fact, Nishida compares such creative will to God's absolute will. For Nishida, however, "creation out of nothingness" is simply our existential condition prior to any religious teaching. "Nothing is more immediately certain to us than the fact that nothing gives rise to being. In our reality nothing is constantly producing being [...] the creative point at which nothing creates being, the immediate place or point where thought is absent, there is absolutely free will. There we come into contact with the infinite reality; that is, we unite with God's will" (NKZa 2: 281).

As the creation out of nothingness corresponds to the creation of the world, Nishida explains that the "various worlds" are established according to the absolute free will that is "negation qua affirmation, affirmation qua negation". As mentioned already, the negation of the will is thought, and when one reflects on the whole of experience from the standpoint of thought, so-called reality is established. When this reality is grasped objectively, the world of natural science is produced, and when grasped concretely, we have the world of history. In between we have differentiated scientific worlds such as that of physics, biology, or psychology. When the absolute will negates its own negation, then we reach the world of possibilities, the world of imagination, beyond actual reality. That is, when the negation of negation refers to particular content, it produces the standpoint of art; and when it is grasped as the absolute affirmation of the whole, it is the standpoint of religion. The world of moral will arises at the point at which this negation turns into absolute affirmation. Various worlds are organized according to their own a priori forms, and absolute free will unifies these a priori forms. As such, it is no other than the "*a priori*". Since we are intertwined with absolute free will as a meeting point of all the various worlds, we can freely enter into these worlds.

So far, we have given an overview of the standpoint of absolute free will. At this point, let us recall the quotation from the preface to *That Which Acts* where Nishida says that from the time he wrote *Intuition*, he already considered "intuition at the foundation of the will". Although the formulation of the notion of *basho* is not yet present here, we can begin to see the opening in which intuition that unfolds as *basho* is at work in absolute free will as true existence. As mentioned, free will is will that is free precisely because it functions freely between affirmation and negation, while continuously unifying itself. However, absolute free will, reflecting the whole in its self-negation while negating this negation and thereby affirming the whole, cannot itself be reflected. As negation-qua-affirmation, affirmation-qua-negation, *regressus-qua-egressus*, or *egressus-qua-regressus*, the will is infinite activity. At its foundation, both directions are enabled while remaining unchanged. This is the "qua"—the immediacy—which unites the opposites *as* opposites. This

“qua” itself has the character of intuition, but it is not intuition in relation to reflection where these terms are on the same level. Absolute free will is at the foundation of the self-awareness that unites intuition and reflection. Intuition in the above sense works as its foundation. One could say that intuition was introduced as that which carries on pure experience. It developed into that which unites pure experience and reflection, and now it is theorized at a deeper level at its foundation. This deeper sense of intuition corresponds to the notion of “creative nothing” at the foundation of will, as articulated by Stirner.

This development is clearly seen when Nishida repeatedly refers to Scotus Eriugena’s distinction between “the creative that is itself not created” and “the non-creative that is itself likewise not created”. Nishida was highly impressed by the fact that Eriugena distinguished these two aspects in God, and he borrows this distinction in his theory of absolute free will. The former (“the creative that is itself not created”) refers to affirmation as *egresssus*, and the latter refers to negation as *regresssus*. However, the “noncreative that is itself also not created” (the nothing that is absolute negation) is not what correspondingly negates “the creative that is itself not created” (which is usually understood as absolute creation by God). Rather, what enables absolute creation can, at the same time, enact the negation of such creation. It is probably for the same reason that Nishida also refers to Boehme’s notion of the “Bottomless”. The turn from self-awareness to the notion of *basho* becomes plausible via the notion of an infinite stillness discerned behind the infinite movement of the absolute free will.

2 The Standpoint of *basho*

2.1 The Basho-like Character of Self-Awareness

When we read *That Which Acts* carefully, we can recognize that after *Intuition*, the notion of the will gained depth through *The Problem of Consciousness (Ishiki no mondai)* (1920) and *Art and Morality (Geijutsu to doutoku)* (1923). In these works, “intuition”, which became enacted at the foundation of the absolute free will, assumed concrete form as “artistic intuition”. Nishida elaborated analyses of the relation between will and intuition, and we can recognize a turn from the “will” to “intuition”, that is, from “that which acts” to “that which sees”.

Let us continue to carefully follow the development of Nishida’s turn in the work of 1927. In its very first essay, “That Which is Immediately Given”, which thematizes the notion of the “self-awareness of the free will”, Nishida writes, “The true self is not a knowing self. It is an enacting self. To know must also be understood as a form of this enaction” (NKZa 4: 19). Acting is at the foundation, and knowing is considered one such action. But in part two of the essay, “That Which Acts”, Nishida ponders: “Knowing is a form of acting or enaction; we then normally think of knowing within the conceptual framework of enaction. However, would it also be possible to think of the latter in terms of the former”? (NKZa 4: 175). Nishida now

considers the reverse direction and attempts to grasp enaction from the standpoint of knowing. "That which knows" and "that which sees" are used synonymously. Thus, the first half of the book thematizes the turn from "that which knows" or "that which sees" to the notion of "that which acts". And the second half considers the reverse: from "that which acts" to "that which sees". Here a new form of intuitionism becomes established as the theory of *basho*.

With this direction in mind, the essay "*Basho*" discusses various epistemological theories current at the time and recognizes at the outset that there exists an opposition between epistemological operations and their transcendent objects. Now, in order for such objects to be brought into relation to form a system, Nishida proposes that there must be "that in which" such a system can be constructed. "For something to exist, there must be that in which it exists" (NKZa 4: 208).⁵ This statement becomes Nishida's fundamental thesis in this work, and it remains the most basic meaning of *basho*. The same can be observed with respect to activities like judging. In order for the self to be considered the unity of the activities, such a self must be contrasted to a not-self, and this opposition between self and not-self must be grasped within the realm of consciousness. This corresponds to the "field of consciousness" in phenomenology, a type of "place in which", which Nishida terms "*basho* (place)". For anything to be made conscious, there must be a background-like place in which an object appears. This place allows phenomena that flow in time to become distinct from the field of consciousness, which itself does not change. Even in materialism, where the object is supposed to exist outside of consciousness, the recognition of this sort of existence must be established in the field of consciousness.

Insofar as the starting point of Nishida's discussion here is epistemology, it remains within the theory of consciousness developed since *An Inquiry*. But the theory of *basho* cannot be limited to a theory of consciousness. The theory of *basho* encompasses ontology as well as epistemology—the two pillars of philosophy. Moreover, it serves as the foundation of logic. In the essay "On Internal Cognition" (*Naibuchikaku ni tsuite*) (1924), in which the term *basho* appears for the first time, Nishida had asked, "what is the relation between the logical subject, the ontological substance, and epistemological subjectivity"? (NKZa 4: 94–95). As if to anticipate his "*Basho*" essay written two years later, he seeks the mutual relation among logic, existence, and cognition. Since *An Inquiry*, Nishida's thought had focused on both ontology and epistemology, but what is new in the standpoint of *basho* is his active exploration of the area of logic.

The term "*basho*" can be traced back to Greek philosophy, in particular Plato and Aristotle. Nishida first borrowed the term "*basho*" from the term *chōrā* in Plato's *Timaeus*. At the outset of his essay, in the context of the phenomena of consciousness through which the opposition of self and not-self is established, Nishida comments: "Following Plato's *Timaeus*, I call that which functions as the receptacle of

⁵The translation of the "*Basho*" essay is included in Krummel, J. and Nagatomo S. (2012), *Place & Dialectic* NAGATOMO Shigenori. However, all the quotes here are translated by the author (Akitomi).

ideas '*basho*' (place). Of course, this does not mean that *basho* is the same as 'Platonic Space' or is Plato's 'receptacle'" (NKZa 4: 209). Nishida criticizes the view that the Platonic Ideas constitute true reality and are what is most universal and objective. Plato does not thematize the place that contains all this. Such a place would have to be cast as non-reality, a nothing that is a "lack". According to Nishida, even ideas like the highest good are determined or conceptualized entities. In order for them to be intuited, there must be the place within which such intuition is enacted.

Nishida presents his own standpoint regarding place in the statement, "it itself is nothingness but it contains infinite being" (NKZa 4: 213), and this is the "true self". Then, referring to Aristotle, he writes, "The true Form of Forms must be the Place of Forms. In Aristotle's *De Anima*, the soul is, 'following the Academics', defined as the 'place of Forms (*ideas*)'. This can be thought of as a mirror that reflects itself, and it is the Place in which not only knowledge is established, but also emotion and will" (ibid). Aristotle's word for "place" here is "*topos*", so his term differs from Plato's. But in Nishida's understanding of the notion of *basho*, we can still recognize the role that Aristotle's arguments in *De Anima* apply.

Here we cannot go into the details of the philosophical relation between *chōrā* and *topos* as they are used by these two great ancient philosophers. Nishida refers to both terms, and he translates both as *basho* to capture the sense of "that which receives the ideas" or serves as "the place of forms" that they evoke. Apart from the interpretation of the terms, we can discern a strain of thought that contributed to Nishida's own theory of *basho*. To establish knowledge, it is not sufficient to refer to the idea or form; there must also be that in which the structure of forms can be enacted, as its background, so that the forms can appear as they are. Such a "place" must have the characteristic of "enveloping" the forms. The following quote shows how Nishida inherited the philosophical theories of the West while highlighting the uniqueness of the standpoint of *basho*.

Traditional epistemology starts from the opposition of subject and object, and knowing is understood as form organizing matter. In contrast, I would like to start from the standpoint of self-awareness in which the self reflects itself in itself. The fundamental meaning of knowing consists in this self-reflection within itself. From knowing within the self, one can know what lies outside the self (NKZa 4: 215).

In contrast to the conventional epistemology at the time, Nishida goes beyond a clarification of the foundation of "knowing" and develops an ontology and a theory of the self. This shows clearly that knowing is firmly rooted in the standpoint of self-awareness. "*Basho*" is inseparably linked with "self-awareness".

As we have seen previously in *Intuition*, Nishida describes the movement of self-awareness as "the self reflecting itself within itself" or "the self seeing itself in itself" in terms similar to those of Fichte and Royce. In expressions such as "within the self" or "in the place of the self", one can clearly discern the place-like nature of the self. However, this does not mean that the "self as such" functions as a *basho*. That the self is *basho*-like, means rather that the self can never be a "thing".

In this context, it is helpful to recall Royce's example of "drawing the perfect map of England while being in England", an example Nishida uses to explain the structure of self-awareness. Nishida says that in order to carry out this project, every time the map is drawn, one must once again draw England so that the map once again contains the drawn map in it, thereby enacting an infinite regress. This move, he notes, is the infinite movement of self-awareness through which the self comes to know itself. In this example, the one that draws must also be drawn into the map of England, but this is the drawn self and not the self that is drawing. Thus, the reason the map can never be completed is twofold. First, England must be re-drawn anew each time it is drawn in order to depict the previous act of drawing, but the present act of drawing cannot be depicted; it remains forever outside. Second, the self that draws can never appear on the map. Yet these two elements are from the beginning not two separate elements. If we conceive of the operation of the self that draws versus what is drawn, that is, if we conceive of a drawer outside what is drawn, we do not depart from the analysis of conventional epistemology. However, in our example, England "envelops" the map of England as well as the self that draws it. So long as the self or drawer stays within England, its activity of drawing is simultaneously the "development" of England itself. This developing England can itself never appear as object; yet this England as a whole gets reflected each time one draws. In this sense, the self and England are one. Thus, in the movement of self-awareness, I reflect upon myself, all that is related to me (the whole of England); although this is constituted within as knowledge of my self-awareness, it does not appear as an object. If we want to depict England itself as such, then the self as the *subject* of the activity must be negated. England can "appear as such" only when I am grasped as nothingness. Here, one could say that the act of drawing England while being in England can be expressed as England expressing itself as England through me as nothingness, and that this can be understood as the "whole" of England. That is to say, the whole of England itself that envelops me gets reflected in my drawing England. Furthermore, this means that the whole of England develops in unison with my self-awareness. In other words, I reflect England. That I open up in the *basho* of England, can, thus, be described as the "self reflecting itself within itself". It is in this sense that Nishida's adaptation of Royce expresses the *basho*-like nature of self-awareness.⁶

2.2 Interpretation of Intuition

The essay "*Basho*" clearly brings into relief the standpoint of *basho* that was implied in the structure of self-awareness. We have also seen that the establishment of the standpoint of *basho* is a turn from voluntarism to intuitionism. We must, however,

⁶I have learned much on the interpretation of Royce's example as a form of *basho* from the following: Ueda Shizuteru (2003), *Collection of Essays Vol. 3*, 75–80.

note that this intuitionism is radically different from the intuitionism that defined pure experience as prior to subject and object or as a unity of them. Nishida says at one point that as long as intuition is also consciousness, there must be a “place in which” such intuition takes place, and “if intuition means simply that there is no subject and object, then such an intuition is simply an object” (NKZa 4: 222). From the standpoint of *basho*: “That which knows must envelop that which is known. Nay, that which knows must reflect that which is known within itself, that is the unity of subject and object. Or rather, that there is no subject and object must mean that the *basho* must itself be true nothingness. It is simply the mirror that reflects” (NKZa 4: 223). Similarly, in the preface to *That Which Acts*, Nishida states:

I believe what I call intuition differs from the term used in conventional intuitionism. It is not the intuition as the unity of subject and object that I want to use as the foundation, but rather intuition as the “shadow”, in itself nothing but reflecting everything within itself, including all that exists and all that acts. It is “to see without the seer” at the foundation of all (NKZa 4: 5–6).

The theme common to these two quotations is what Nishida calls “true intuition”, as it entails not the unity of subject and object, but rather “that which reflects” and “envelops or contains”. This must itself be “true nothingness”. But why must the unity of subject and object, or a state prior to both, now be denied? As long as we presuppose the categories of subject and object, our analysis stays within that framework regardless of the unity or state of non-division. That is, the intuition situated within this framework remains a “thing” that is seen, a “mere object”. As long as it is seen as an object, the act of the seeing subject remains hidden.

On the other hand, as already noted, in the standpoint of self-awareness, Nishida developed the theory of absolute free will through a more detailed analysis of the unity of subject and object. This revealed the infinite movement that gets generated through self-negation within itself. Intuition at the foundation of this movement is one level deeper than the standpoint of pure experience. But insofar as it is a will, one cannot avoid seeing it as the enactment of a particular action. Nishida does recognize intuition at the foundation of such will, but this recognition comes not from analyzing the will but rather from shifting the standpoint to the meta-level, in which the act of the will itself can be seen, a turning of the will itself to see its own foundation.

When Nishida writes of “all that exists and all that acts”, he presupposes a distinction between the object and the act, as seen at the outset of the “*Basho*” essay. That is to say, “all that exists” is grasped as the object of subjectivity, something like a substantial being; and “all that acts” refers to the “self-transformative thing” that moves itself as act in the subjective realm. In the case of knowledge as judgment, it is established through an act of objectification by a subjectivity. But when the condition for the possibility of the act of objectification is examined, it becomes evident that the standpoint of will at the conditional, meta-level is what enables the cognition of the object. Thus, “all that exists” and “all that acts” refer to the two-tiered grasp of everything that is seen. In contrast to the establishment of knowledge by the structuring act of subjectivity, Nishida’s interest focused on that which enabled such

act in order to produce knowledge. This meta-level below the act of judgment contains the standpoint of will.

This focus allows us to see the condition of the absolute free will that already showed up in *Intuition* as the “act of acts”. But that is not to say that one takes a standpoint external to this act. Rather, it should be understood as returning to the place of creative nothing—the ultimate origin of the will itself. This place “envelops” the will, reflecting itself within itself. And when one says that the act itself becomes known, that means that seeing or knowing is immediate. Rather than understanding it as the self-awareness of the subject of the will, such a subject of the act disappears, and the act is known immediately as such. This is immediate knowing qua act. In Nishida's words, “we are conscious of free will through the immediate act of consciousness that acts in relative nothingness. When we go beyond this standpoint and stand at the *basho* of true nothingness, the free will itself disappears” (NKZa 4: 250). When we see a conscious act occurring in the place of relative nothingness, the standpoint that sees this act must be that which transcends such relative nothingness—the “*basho* of true nothingness”. To “reach the place of true nothingness” means to seek the condition of the act, but this is not accomplished by yet another act. “The standpoint of the act of acts must be the *basho* of true nothingness” (NKZa 4: 252).

The standpoint that presents the will as “that which acts” becomes possible when “that which sees”, is grasped as nothingness. We have thus tracked the turn “from that which acts to that which sees”, the very title of this collection of essays. To clarify a possible misunderstanding, it would be too simple to understand the “will” as “that which acts”, and “intuition” as “that which sees” or “that which knows”, as if there were a binary correspondence. Nishida's question throughout has been to clarify “knowing” and to seek the condition for its possibility. Even placing the absolute free will at the foundation or background of self-awareness was part of the search for the condition of knowledge. But as long as the will has the character of an act or activity, the standpoint from which such activity can be known must be sought. Here, the act of self-negation that belongs to the will intuits itself as a turn to nothingness at its own foundation. This is the process that is grasped as “that which sees”, and this is the true sense of the “turn”.

2.3 *The Beginning of Logic*

We have now examined the meaning of *basho* through examining the axis of the turn from voluntarism to intuitionism. Its originality, as mentioned, lies in connecting the theory of consciousness to ontology, and presenting this connection as a way to establish logic. Such a standpoint of logic became refined as a “predicate logic”, further developed as the “logic of place”, in contrast to traditional Western “propositional logic”. We now turn to the first steps of this endeavor.

According to Nishida, the immediate and most basic form of knowledge is judgment. This refers to subsumptive judgments consisting of a subject and a predicate

in the form of “S is P”, whereby a particular subject becomes determined by a general predicate. In other words, such judgments subsume a particular term under a general term. Nishida says of this form of judgment, “the subject exists *by virtue of* the predicate”, by virtue of “that in which it exists”. In contrast to the usual understanding whereby the subject is connected to the predicate through the copula “is”, Nishida understands this relation as one where the subject is “enveloped” by the predicate. The judgment is established when that which is general determines itself as a particular.

For Nishida, however, the particular does not mean the individual. One might think of specific subjects as various “individuals”. According to Aristotle’s well-known definition that Nishida often quotes, the individual is “that which is a subject and cannot be a predicate”. Yet even if we are to make a judgment about an individual object, this individual cannot be arrived at via judgmental knowledge. The individual is an individual precisely as it transcends judgment. Grasping such an individual is done by a fundamental intuition, a seeing that sees its own activity. This is why it is said that at the foundation of judgment is an intuition. That which corresponds to the individual, as transcending the subjective term in judgment, is the *basho* that transcends the very operation of predication. Nishida reverses Aristotle’s definition by calling the individual “that which is predicate and cannot be subject”.

Nishida then overlays the logical problem of a subsumptive relation between the grammatical subject and predicate onto the problem of consciousness with the object of consciousness on the side of the grammatical subject, and the field of consciousness on the side of the predicate. In the conventional view of the operation of judgment, the object is placed as the grammatical subject, and something general is then predicated of it. Nishida’s interpretation sees the object transcending the judgment reflected in the field of the grammatical subject. This is, in turn, subsumed in the field of the predicate that modifies the subject of consciousness. The predicate field that establishes judgmental cognition is the field of consciousness in general; but as explained above, what reflects the operations themselves is the place of true nothingness that transcends the field of consciousness in general.

Nishida’s statement: “For something to exist, there must be that in which it exists”, is the basic standpoint of *basho* that articulates what enables “the being of a being”. In this way, nothingness, in contrast to being, is highlighted as an element of *basho*. However, nothingness in relation to being is merely a contrastive nothingness, not true nothingness. True nothingness is “that in which” such a contrast between being and nothing can be established. In other words, true nothingness is that in which such an opposition is “enveloped”. In this way, Nishida’s standpoint of *basho* as the “place of true nothingness” is developed as that which envelopes infinite being and establishes various levels of knowledge through the subsumption of grammatical subjects by predicates. This contrasts with the Western logic and ontology that bases being in substances that are individuals that transcend the field of grammatical subjects. “True nothingness must transcend all forms of the opposition between being and nothing, yet it must establish such opposition within. True consciousness is seen where it transcends all forms of generic concepts” (NKZa 4: 220). The consciousness that is thematized here, as discussed in the “Remaining

Problems of Consciousness (*Torinokosaretaru Ishiki no Mondai*)" (1927) written immediately after the essay, "*Basho*", is not "consciousness as an object of consciousness" (consciousness-as-seen), but "consciousness that is conscious". The standpoint of "consciousness that is conscious" is that which immediately grasps consciousness in action; it is a seeing without consciousness, a seeing without a seer. This is the *basho* of true nothingness.

To emphasize, again, this "basho of true nothingness", which is the foundation of ontology and the starting point of logic, is not separate from the problem of the self (the self-awareness of the self). "The field of consciousness, by emptying itself, reflects objects as they are" (NKZa 4: 221). One could say that throughout his effort to reach the thought of *basho*, Nishida sought to show how consciousness, in emptying itself, serves as the foundation for establishing being as its object. Such an effort can be discerned from Nishida's commentary, "Answering Professor Sōda" (1927): "The self is not the unity of the subject, but a unity of the predicate; it is not a point but rather a circle. It is not a thing but a *basho*" (NKZa 4: 279).

Conclusion

"To experience means to know reality as it is". This sentence, which opens *An Inquiry*, anticipates the entire development of Nishida Philosophy in the following thirty some years. The "knowing" that began in the unity of the subject and object in pure experience became self-awareness as "the self-knowing itself in the self", which required absolute free will as its background. The self-awareness of the will as "that which acts" functions as the foundation of self-awareness and then turns to "that which sees" at its foundation. This is how the standpoint of *basho* emerges. In its seeing qua seeing, "that which acts" itself disappears. It is "seeing without a seer".

In the essay, "*Basho*", consciousness in general is presented as the "*basho* of relative nothingness", in contrast to the "*basho* of true nothingness" in which the opposition of being and non-being is contained. In this essay, however, all the arguments are based in one way or another on consciousness, and the distinction between the "*basho* of consciousness" and the "*basho* in which the consciousness itself is" remains unclear. As quoted earlier, "the field of consciousness projects its objects as they are, by emptying itself" (NKZa 4: 221). Consciousness "emptying itself" means that consciousness "deepens itself" within itself. In fact, "the deepest sense of consciousness is the true *basho* of nothingness" (ibid). But consciousness, insofar as it is an activity, presupposes a place from which to see the operations. In other words, the *basho* in which consciousness exists must be thought. For example, "in the place of determined beings, that which acts can be seen; this is to say that in the *basho* of relative nothingness, the operations of consciousness can be seen. In the *basho* of absolute nothingness, true freedom can be seen" (NKZa 4: 232). Nishida clarifies the layers of *basho* in subsequent years in this way. Moreover, regarding the

background of consciousness, he writes, “In the background of consciousness there must be an absolute nothingness” (ibid).

Continually deepening and refining his philosophy, Nishida came to name the various aspects of *basho* as “the *basho* of being”, “the *basho* of relative nothingness”, and “the *basho* of absolute nothingness”. He continued to clarify the internal relations among them. The philosophy of *basho*, ever expanding in range and generating further problems, remains one of Nishida’s crowning achievements.

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Chapter 5

The Dialectical Universal



MINOBE Hitoshi

1 Introduction

This chapter attempts to clarify the concept of “the dialectical universal”, taking into account the process of its formation in the development of Nishida’s thought. The dialectical universal is a term that Nishida placed at the center of his philosophy in the 1930s, at the time when his system of thought was gradually being brought to completion. Nishida thinks that our experience can be explained neither from matter nor from mind, but from our existence in the world, which is to be characterized by the concept of the dialectical universal.

The concept “universal” already plays an important role in Nishida’s first book, *An Inquiry Into the Good (Zen no Kenkyū)*. 1911).¹ There he refers mainly to “the universal” of Hegel. He has a particular affinity for Hegel’s idea of “the concrete universal”. During the writing of the book, *From That Which Acts to That Which Sees (hatarakumono kara mirumono e)*. 1927, NKZa 4: 1–378), Nishida’s philosophy entered a new period with the introduction of the term “place (*basho*)”. Accordingly, the concept of the universal was also examined anew. In the course of this reexamination, Nishida came to the realization that the universal carries the character of “nothingness” in its deepest foundation, and that our experience arises as “self-awakening of absolute nothingness (*zettai mu no jikaku*)”. With this insight he found that his understanding of the universal does not completely coincide with that of Hegel. During the writing of the book, *The Self-awakening Determination of*

¹*Nishida Kitarō zenshū* (Complete Works of Nishida Kitarō), fourth edition in 19 vols., 1987–89 Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten = NKZa 1: 1–200.

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Nothingness (*mu no jikakuteki gentei*. 1932, NKZa 6: 1–451), Nishida directed his attention to the fact that the experience of the self-awakening of absolute nothingness is “my” experience. Likewise, he observed that the “I”, as an individual, always faces others. On the basis of this observation, the universal becomes more clearly defined in his next book, *Fundamental Problems of Philosophy: The World of Action* (*Tetsugaku no konponmondai. Kōi no sekai*. 1933, NKZa 7: 3–200). The universal is the medium of the mutual determination of individuals which are independent of one another. Nishida calls this universal, which includes the individuals within itself, “the actual world”, or simply “the world (*sekai*)” (see NKZa 7: 57ff.). On the one hand, the world is the condition of the possibility of the “I”, in that the “I” can determine itself only in the world. On the other hand, the world is conditioned by the “I”, in that it is formed only through the self-determination of the “I”. The world is formed by the “I”, which negates its universality. The dynamic between the self and the world has a dialectical character. Thus, Nishida describes the world as “the dialectical universal”.

Below, in part two I will outline what inspired Nishida to give attention to the concept of the universal at the time of *An Inquiry into the Good*. In part three, I shall turn to the concept of “place” in *From That Which Acts to That Which Sees* and consider how the universal there takes the character of “absolute nothingness”. In part four, I survey the constellation of the essential components of “the world as the dialectical universal” and sketch their peculiarities.

2 “The Universal” in *An Inquiry into the Good*.

The basic concept of Nishida’s first book, *An Inquiry into the Good* (1911), is “pure experience”. In this book he tries to “explain everything with pure experience as the only reality” (NKZa 1: 4). For Nishida, pure experience means the immediate experience which consists in the inseparability of subject and object. He writes:

Our common sense assumes that things exist in an external world separated from consciousness, and that in the background of consciousness, mind operates in various ways. This view is the basis of the behavior of all human beings. However, that the things and the mind are independent existences is but a hypothesis resulting from the needs of our thought which leaves much room for doubt (NKZa 1: 47).

Nishida takes neither the materialistic standpoint where only the things opposed to the mind are considered real, nor the spiritualistic standpoint where, in turn, only the mind opposed to the things is considered real. Instead, he directs his attention to the immediacy of experience before the division into things and the mind. Here he refers to William James with great sympathy. In a letter of (presumably) 1907 to his old friend D. T. Suzuki, who was in the United States, he writes: “At present, I find the doctrine of the pure experience of Mr. W. James very interesting. I’ve heard he’s writing a metaphysics. Is it not completed yet?”²

²NKZa 18: 76. Cf. also *Nishida Kitarō Zenshu* (Complete Works of Nishida Kitarō), new edition in 24 vols., 2002–09 Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten = NKZb 19: 107.

In his essays of 1904–05, James develops the doctrine of pure experience. There, he criticizes the previous thinkers, who distinguish objects of knowledge from knowledge itself, and regard the latter under the name of “consciousness” as independent of the former. According to James, the assumption that the objects of knowledge are objective, while the relations between objects of knowledge subjective, does not correspond to our experience. He writes: “To be radical, an empiricism must neither admit into its constructions any element that is not directly experienced, nor exclude from them any element that is directly experienced” (James 1912, *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, New York 1912, p. 42). He thinks that the experience contains not only the objects, but also “the relations that connect experiences” of the objects, and regards the experience as a “stream” or a “flux” in which the objects are in an inseparable relationship. According to him, “pure experience” as the basis of all experience is “sensation” in which the experience is not yet articulated as objects. He writes: “‘Pure experience’ is the name which I gave to the immediate flux of life which furnishes the material to our later reflection with its conceptual categories” (ibid., p. 93).

Nishida has so much sympathy for this view of James that he adopts James’s concept of pure experience as his own basic concept. He does not think, however, that only the sensation before the articulation is pure experience. He is of the opinion that the experience should be regarded as pure as long as it has a “strict unity” even if it contains the articulated objects. In *An Inquiry into the Good* he writes: “The reason why pure experience is immediate and pure is not that it is simple and unanalyzable or momentary, but rather that it has a strict unity as a concrete consciousness” (NKZa 1: 12). The articulation with a strict unity forms a system. So, according to Nishida, the experience is pure when “systematically developed” with a strict unity. “Consciousness is originally a systematic development, so that as long as consciousness develops by itself with strict unity, we do not step out of the realm of pure experience” (NKZa 1: 13).

While James regards sensation alone as pure experience and thus the articulation by intelligence as a deviation from pure experience, Nishida thinks that “all spiritual phenomena appear in this form [i. e. in the form of pure experience]” (NKZa 1: 10). According to Nishida, sensation is a fundamental but not the only form of pure experience. In his 1909 lecture “On the Relationship and the Connection between Pure Experiences”, in which he holds James in high regard on the one hand, he criticizes him on the other hand as follows: “Mr. James presumably thinks that the various experiences that are independent of one another are connected from the outside through the experience of the relationship [...]. In my opinion, the relationship between the experiences of Mr. James is external” (NKZa 13: 97). Nishida questions James’ opinion that the objects that appear through the articulation of intelligence in the experience can no longer have an inner relationship to one another. In the same lecture, Nishida expresses his own opinion as follows:

Each of the different experiences is an activity that forms a system. The self-development of a unity is, in my opinion, the type of all experiences. [...] In the background of the experience there is always something universal. [...] All experiences result from the self-development of this universal (NKZa 13: 98).

When Nishida speaks of the self-development of a universal, he thinks of Hegel's "concrete universal".

Hegel divides the universal into the abstract and the concrete. The abstract universal means something "common", which one finds out in various particular things that exist for themselves. Although this abstract universal is normally understood under the concept of the universal, it is, according to Hegel, a mere "shadow" of a particular that is in itself "hollow and empty". In contrast to this, the concrete universal is "that which makes itself particular", which stays "in its other in unclouded clarity with itself". According to Hegel this is "truly" universal.³

According to Hegel, something particular does not exist for itself but always as a self-particularizing universal or as a concretization of the universal. For example, a tree is made up of branches, leaves, roots, etc. No tree can be without branches, leaves and roots. However, these do not exist for themselves, but are only parts of a tree. No tree as a whole is possible without branches, leaves, roots etc. as components and vice versa: Without a whole tree, no components of the tree are possible. In this case, the whole and the parts, the universal and the particular, are inseparably united. Hegel describes this state with the concept of the concrete universal.

Nishida agrees with Hegel's position and regards pure experience as the concrete universal. In *An Inquiry into the Good* he writes: "If, for example, red were the only color, then red could never appear; for red to appear there must be other colors. [...] If in this way all things are constituted in opposites, they must be based on something unifying" (NKZa I, 68). Here Nishida thinks with Hegel that red as a particular color does not exist for itself but in relation to the other particular colors, in that it is a concretization of the color as a whole, which he describes as "something unifying". According to Nishida, the widespread view of seeing red as an objective thing independent of the subject is based on the misunderstanding that red exists without any relation to the color as a whole. Anyone who regards a particular as existing in isolation comes to the conclusion that it is exclusively "objective" and that the relations to the others, which are originally inseparable from the particular, are merely "subjective". And on the basis of this view he assumes an independent subject, from which the experience of the relations can be explained. This leads to the assumption that subject and object are opposed to each other, which, according to Nishida, is an "artificial hypothesis".

As can be seen, Nishida shares James' view that subject and object are not opposed in the original experience. In Nishida's philosophy, however, this view is based on the recognition that experience is the concrete universal. Here he differs significantly from James. In this way, the concept of "the universal" characterizes Nishida's thinking already at the time of *An Inquiry into the Good*.

³Cf. G. W. F. Hegel, *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften* §163, Zusatz 1; *Werke in zwanzig Bänden* 8, 311 f.

3 “The Universal” in the Essay “Place”

In his essay “Place” (*Basho*. 1926, NKZa 4: 208–289), Nishida introduces the new concept “*basho*”, which will play a decisive role in the development of his philosophy. The concept of the universal also gets reexamined here. In the beginning of this work, he writes: “In order for objects to relate to one another, constitute a single system, and maintain themselves, we ought to consider not only what maintains that system but also what establishes the system within itself and wherein the system is implaced. That which is must be implaced in something”.⁴ In the last section it was seen that at the time of *An Inquiry into the Good*, Nishida regarded experience as a system. Here, he further refers to “wherein the system is implaced”, i.e. the “*basho*”. This is probably due to the fact that, at this time, he is directing his attention to the actual being of things. All possible properties or determinations of things can be explained from the system of knowledge, but the actual being of things cannot be explained in this way. The experience of the actual thing contains something which goes beyond the system of knowledge. In an essay written shortly before “Place”, Nishida writes: “When we see the color of red and think of a red thing, this thing does not mean representation in itself, let alone concept of red. The red thing is to be understood as something that goes beyond the sensuous property of red and possesses it” (NKZa 4: 175). In order to clarify the status of the thing beyond the system of knowledge, Nishida characterizes the structure of experience as a system of knowledge and elucidates its relation to the thing which goes beyond it.

First, Nishida describes the system of knowledge in the following way. The basic form of knowledge is judgment. He writes: “It is the knowledge of judgment which is to be regarded as knowledge in the strictest sense” (NKZa 4: 177). In judging, we subsume the concept in the position of subject under that in the position of predicate. Judgment expresses the system of concepts which consists in subsumption. This judgment system, which is based on the above-mentioned system of the concrete universal, constitutes the system of knowledge. However, the system of knowledge does not include all of experience, because this system only deals with how experience can be determined. It only relates to the possible determinations of experience, but does not reach the actual being. In order to represent the actual experience, the relationship between the system of knowledge and the actual being has to be clarified. Nishida turns his attention to this relationship.

In order to consider this relationship, Nishida refers to Aristotelian reflections on the “singular thing (*kobutsu*)”. According to Nishida’s interpretation, Aristotle regards the singular thing as truly real. He characterizes it as that which is predicated by others as a subject in judgment, but which cannot itself be a predicate of others.⁵ That it cannot be a predicate of others means that it cannot be resolved into the system of knowledge. Aristotle is of the opinion that the singular thing is beyond

⁴NKZa 4: 208: *Place and Dialectic. Two Essays by Nishida Kitarō*. Translated by John W. M. Krummel and Shigenori Nagatomo, Oxford University Press, New York 2012, p. 49.

⁵See Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Book VII, Chap. 3.

the system of knowledge. At the same time, however, he says that as a subject it constructs the judgment, and, therefore, the system of knowledge. The real knowledge arises, according to him, by the fact that the singular thing, which goes beyond the system of knowledge, enters the system of knowledge as the subject of a judgment. Nishida is interested in this view and asks how it is possible that the singular thing enters the system of knowledge.

Insofar as one regards the system of knowledge as belonging to a subject and the singular thing as an object independent of the subject, one cannot understand how subject and object touch. In other words, if one presupposes the mutual independence of subject and object, one cannot explain the relationship between knowledge and actual being. Nishida tries to explain this relationship by expanding the concept of the concrete universal. In the last section, the concrete universal was characterized by the fact that it consists in the inseparability of the particular from the universal, and that the particular therefore cannot exist for itself but always as a systematic concretization of the universal. This characterization can explain the system of knowledge, but not the actual experience that is being discussed here. During this time, Nishida came up with the idea that not only particular determinations of knowledge, but also singular things should be seen as a concretization of the universal. He thinks that by concretization of the universal, not only the particular, but also the individual thing as its outermost limit emerges. He then asks what kind of universal is concretized in the individual.

While the universal, which is concretized in particular knowledge determinations, is a universal term, the universal, which is concretized in a singular thing, is "the reality" according to Nishida. For example, red as a particular color concretizes the color as a universal. In this case, the universal relates to the particular like a generic term to a sub-term. A generic term is certainly more universal for its sub-terms, but there are even more universal terms for it. Therefore, another generic term is still conceivable for a generic term. With regard to color, for example, sensation is a generic term for color because color is a kind of sensation. It is the same with the sub-term. For a sub-term, a more concrete one is still conceivable. In contrast to this, there is nothing more concrete for the singular thing as the outermost limit of concretization. Accordingly, for the universal concretized in the singular thing there is no more universal one, but rather, according to Nishida, the universal is reality itself in this case. Each singular thing thus concretizes the reality as a whole in an irreplaceable way. In an essay shortly after "Place" Nishida writes, "If you say: This table is made of oak, the true subject is not this table but 'the Reality' [...]. The synthesizing whole is the substratum (*hypokeimenon*) in Aristotle" (NKZA 7: 13 f.). Nishida is of the opinion that "this table" as the subject of the sentence does not designate an object that exists in itself, but rather a singular thing that concretizes the reality as a whole.

In this way Nishida expands the concept of the concrete universal. He not only thinks that singular things are concretizations of the universal as the whole of reality, but also that the system of knowledge is a moment of this concretization of the reality in the singular thing. For he regards the reality as the extreme universal, which includes all systems of knowledge, and the singular things as the extreme

limit of the concretization of the universal in knowledge. According to him, knowledge is inseparable from both the reality and the singular things. A singular thing is by no means something that, as it often seems, exists independently of the system of knowledge, but rather the point of contact between knowledge and the reality. It is something that the system of knowledge is aimed at. In this way he explains all experience, including that of the actual being of singular things, as the concretization of the universal.

Nishida calls this universal in the broader sense, i.e. the universal, which includes systems of knowledge as well as singular things, “place” and explains all experience as the self-determination of place. He writes: “The universal is now not merely the predicative, but the place which includes all that is in the position of the subject” (NKZa 4: 186). In this context, Nishida characterizes place, as it goes beyond knowledge, with the term “nothingness”. This, of course, does not mean that place has no reality. Rather, it is the reality as a whole, as we have seen above. It is characterized as nothingness because it is a reality that cannot be grasped by knowledge. The word “nothingness” can mean a definition of beings, but Nishida does not mean that. In order to show this clearly, Nishida uses a term “absolute nothingness (*zettai mu*)”. For example, the nothingness which stands in opposition to being, is not the intended nothingness. For it is something definite, and not absolute nothingness, insofar as it is determined to be opposed to being. Absolute nothingness goes beyond the opposition of being and nothingness. However, absolute nothingness is also not the potential which can pass to being as well as to nothingness. For the potential, in a sense, goes beyond the opposition of being and nothingness, but always presupposes a generic concept that renders the transition possible. According to Nishida, absolute nothingness is the place in which a thing “mirrors (*utsusu*)” itself.

That a thing mirrors itself in the place means that it is concretized in the place and thus becomes real. It was mentioned above that “this table” concretizes the reality. This is exactly an example of the mirroring of thing as a concretization of the reality. For Nishida, mirroring does not mean making a copy of something that already exists for itself, but rather giving a concrete form to the reality, which in itself is indeterminable and formless. This is why Nishida calls the mirroring of the reality in a singular thing “self-awakening of absolute nothingness”. Through the self-awakening of absolute nothingness, a singular thing arises as a “mirror image of the formless (*katachi naki mono no kage*)” (NKZa 4: 226 and others). According to Nishida, this mirror image of the formless, which “as it is and at the same time is nothing” (*arugamamani mu*) (NKZa 4: 247 f.), is real, but not something that exists for itself.

In his essay “Place” of 1926, Nishida no longer sees the universal as something that develops systematically, but as the “place of absolute nothingness” that includes the self-developing knowledge system. According to him, the experience of an actual thing is nothing but the self-awakening of absolute nothingness.

4 The Absolute Nothingness and “the Dialectical Universal”

4.1 *The Singular Thing and “Our Self”*

The above-mentioned insight – that experience arises from the self-awakening of absolute nothingness – directed Nishida’s philosophy until his last years of life. In this sense, we can say that he had already reached his firm standpoint in the second half of the 1920’s. He then continued to work on clarifying the structure of experience as the self-awakening of absolute nothingness and came up with the concept of “the dialectical universal” in the 1930’s. During this time, the reflections on “our self (*wareware no jiko*)” are especially important for the development of his thought. So, I will first turn to the term “our self” before going into the consideration of the dialectical universal.

In the last section it was stated that through the self-awakening of absolute nothingness the experience of a singular thing arises. In experiencing such a singular thing, one leaves the realm of knowledge as merely possible determinations and touches the actual being of the thing. So, in Nishida, the experience of a singular thing is the true revelation of the reality. With regard to the experience of a singular thing, Nishida now points out that it is at the same time the experience of “our self”. Our self here means the “I” as an individual because “it is not a self if it is not individual” (NKZa 6: 301). Nishida believes that the reality is truly revealed only in our individual experience of a singular thing.

Here, however, individual experience does not undoubtedly mean a relationship between a knowing “I” as an individual and a singular thing that exists independently of it. As already mentioned several times, experience cannot be explained in terms of the external relationship between subject and object, which exist independently of one another. The individuality of our experience of a singular thing consists rather in its uniqueness or irreplaceability. When the reality is concretized as a particular concept, this, as a possible definition of the reality, is separated from our actual experience. But when it is concretized as a singular thing, it is irreplaceably united with our actual experience. Individuality lies in this irreplaceability. Nishida is of the opinion that an irreplaceable singular thing can only be experienced by our irreplaceable self and, conversely, that the experience of our irreplaceable self is originally only that of a singular thing. This experience of the irreplaceable thing by our irreplaceable self is, according to Nishida, the true revelation of the reality as the self-awakening of absolute nothingness. Nishida writes: “The singular thing is originally only conceivable from our self-awakening determination. Where a self is, there is ‘this’. ‘This’ is not something determined from over there. It is always determined from here” (NKZa 6: 283).

According to traditional understanding, however, the individuality of our experience means that our experience is sensuous and, therefore, has no universal validity. Here again the question arises of how the reality as the universal is concretized in the individual experience or how the individuality of our self relates to the universality.

4.2 “I and Thou”

Taking this question into account, Nishida now directs attention to the relationship between our self, i.e. the “I”, and the others. The “I” exists as irreplaceable independent of all the others. This does not mean that everything is in the “I” and that this exists alone, but rather that the “I” exists with the others, who in turn exist independently of “I”. Nishida calls the other “Thou (*nanji*)” and writes as follows: “I am I only insofar as I face (*taisuru*) Thee, and Thou are Thou insofar as Thou face Me” (NKZa 6: 321).

By “Thou” Nishida understands “something with which I cannot do anything” (NKZa 6: 198). He writes: “That which stands as object in opposition to me is still in me. Something unreasonable that stands in opposition to reason is still reasonable, since it is something which is to be grasped with reason. Otherwise it would be impossible to regard it as opposed to reason. What truly stands outside of me for me, and what is truly unreasonable for reason, must be a Thou for me” (NKZa 6: 235 f.). The “Thou” is something that is incompatible with the “I”. It is the true “I” that faces such a “Thee”. Neither the subject which recognizes an object, nor the reason which gives form to matter, are the true “I”. For I find myself and become aware of my independence only when I face the negation of my independence. Neither the subject of recognition nor reason encounter anything which truly negates them. They are, therefore, not truly aware of their independence; thus, they are not a true self. Only the “I”, which is totally negated by the “Thou”, is the true “I”. And vice versa: Only the truly independent “I” can meet the “Thou” who negates his independence. Nishida writes: “By knowing Thy person, I am I, and by knowing My person, Thou are Thou. What makes Thee the Thou and lets Thee as the Thou be, is I, and what makes Me the I and lets Me as the I be, is Thou” (NKZa 6: 415). Our self is therefore a truly irreplaceable individual only insofar as it exists with the others by facing them, but not insofar as it excludes them.

4.3 *The World as the Dialectical Universal*

In this way the “I” is only a true “I” insofar as it faces the others. This not only means that the “I” always exists alongside the others, but also that the “I” is not possible without the others. The others are the condition under which the “I” can be. It follows that the experience of the “I” cannot be explained solely by the “I”. In order to explain the experience of the “I”, one has to take up the standpoint where one can speak not only of the “I”, but also of the others who are independent of it. Nishida calls the place where individuals are independent of one another and related to one another “the world (*sekai*)” and says that experience should be explained from the world. In this explanation, both the “I” and the “Thou” are described as elements of the world. However, of course, the “I” is not to be dissolved into the world. It is always independent of the others in the world and of the world itself. The “I”

determines itself by negating the world in which the “I” and the others stand side by side. The world includes the “I”, which negates it, as a component of it. Above, we saw that the “I” can only be the “I” through the “Thou”, which negates its independence, and vice versa. Here we find the same relationship between the “I” and the world. The world can only be the world through the “I” which negates it, and the “I” can only be the “I” through the world which negates it. The universality of the world, which negates the individuality of the “I”, and the individuality of the “I”, which negates the universality of the world, are inseparable. Nishida formulates this inseparability with the phrase “The individual determination is *at the same time* (*soku*) the universal determination, and the universal determination is *at the same time* the individual determination” (NKZa 7: 205 and others). He describes such a world as “dialectical”, as it includes the contradictory elements within itself, and explains experience with the concept of the world as “the dialectical universal”.

In this way Nishida explains experience as self-determination of the world as the dialectical universal. This self-determination of the world can be regarded as the form of the above-mentioned self-awakening of absolute nothingness. As seen above, with the term “self-awakening of absolute nothingness” Nishida has pointed out a peculiar reality which is not based on substance. Many, however, have misunderstood him and thought that absolute nothingness means lack of reality. In the face of this misunderstanding he wrote in the introduction of *The Self-awakening Determination of Nothingness*: “What I call, for example, the determination of nothingness does not mean that there is nothing, or that a nothing determines. It means the determination, which, unlike the determination of a determined universal, determines without that which determines. It is the form of existence” (NKZa 6: 10). According to Nishida, the self-determination of absolute nothingness is not void but nothing other than formation of existence in the world.

Every experience is irreplaceable because it is a self-awakening of absolute nothingness. In the experience of irreplaceability one also experiences the others, each of whom exists irreplaceably. Therefore, in the experience of the self-awakening of absolute nothingness there are not only the irreplaceable “I” and irreplaceable singular things for it, but also the others who cannot enter into this experience. This is a contradiction, but it is precisely in this contradiction, or in this dialectical character, that the reality of experience consists. One cannot reach this reality if one starts from a substantial singular thing, or from a substantial “I”. One has to start from the world in which independent, irreplaceable single things and individuals are nevertheless related to one another. Only from the standpoint of such a dialectical world does experience become real. Nishida has shown that the standpoint of nothingness is nothing other than that of the world, and has brought into light that the experience of nothingness is not void, but rather the revelation of the reality of the world. After taking the standpoint of the world as the dialectical universal in the 1930s, Nishida worked tirelessly to further discover and clarify the various elements of the world.

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Chapter 6

Acting Intuition



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Along with the “dialectical universal” (*benshōhōtekiippansha* 弁証法的一般者) and the “self identity of absolute contradiction” (*zettaimujuntekijikodōitsu* 絶対矛盾の自己同一), “acting intuition” (*kōitekichokkan* 行為の直観) is a keyword that characterizes the thought of the later Nishida. According to him, the thought of the dialectical universal was worked out in order to “embody” the concept of the “place” (*basho* 場所) of absolute nothingness that was central for the middle period of his thinking. The concept of acting intuition was introduced in order to take this thought of the dialectical universal back to the standpoint of “immediate” experience (see NKZb 1: 3). In these contexts, it is quite difficult to grasp exactly what the notions of “embodying” or “immediate” experience mean, but for the present, it is sufficient to understand two things: (1) the dialectical universal is what explains the logical structure of the world of historical reality in which we exist, and (2) acting intuition is what indicates how the human subject works within it. In any case, the two ideas are mutually implicating so that we must understand them as a pair.

Since the start of his career with *An Inquiry into the Good* (*Zen no Kenkyū* 善の研究) of 1911, the fundamental character of Nishida’s philosophy lies in “seeing and thinking things from the thoroughly immediate, the most fundamental standpoint” (NKZb 8: 255). This intention leads him to the suspicion that philosophical thinking, including his own philosophy, has yet to grasp “the self-determining actual world from which we are born and into which we perish” (NKZb 6: 136). It is the reason why he went so far as to say in the general remarks of his anthology *Fundamental Problems of Philosophy* (*Tetsugakuno konponmondai* 哲学の根本問題) that “it seemed to him that philosophy had never been thought before from the true standpoint of the acting self” (NKZb 6: 135). “The true acting self” of which

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Nishida speaks is initially that which conforms to the socio-historical facts. Even so, in his anthologies *The Self-aware System of Universals* (*Ippansha no jikaku-teki taikai* 一般者の自覚的体系) and *the Self-aware Determination of Nothingness* (*Mu no jikaku-teki gentei* 無の自覚的限定) his ideas of the self-determination of universals and the self-awareness of absolute nothingness still seemed to be entangled in the standpoint of the individual self. Insofar as these ideas are established only through the phenomena of our consciousness, it is unable to grasp the self-awareness of historical life, that is, the realization that “the fact ‘I think’ is already a fact of the world in which we exist” (NKZb 10: 293). Viewing the dialectical universal as a “universal determination qua individual determination and individual determination qua universal determination” is the first step toward understanding “the world of the socio-historical formation” (NKZb 8: 257). In this context, acting intuition is nothing less than the core of the acting self that is self-reflectively aware of its productive activity as an individual determination of the world of historical reality.

Nishida characterized acting intuition with the slogan: “seeing is working and working is seeing”, and he often refers to the works of artists and artisans as exemplars of this type of production. Usually intuition is regarded as a passive cognitive faculty which receives images directly through eyes or ears, the way Kant regards sensual perception. Insofar as we adopt the standpoint of an epistemology which presupposes subject-object separation, it seems that the idea of an acting intuition is self-contradictory because acting (which is thought to be active) and seeing (which is thought to be passive) are opposed to each other. But Nishida criticized this standpoint from the perspective of the acting self. This enabled him to grasp intuition in its initial activity, thus overcoming the prevailing epistemological presupposition that separates subject and object.

Nishida describes acting intuition in various ways. He describes it, for instance, as a character of seeing in the species as a whole, the kind of action that comes to the fore in totemism. This is a fundamental way of life so deeply rooted in bodies that it can be regarded as the instinctive act that humans in the primitive world share with other animals. A second example he gives is the way of seeing from the standpoint of knowing that serves as the base for all empirical knowledge (see NKZb 8: 215). Here, what he has in mind is like neither Plotinus’s intuition nor Bergson’s pure duration. With this characterization Nishida emphasizes that acting intuition is not a special mystic way of seeing, but the natural function of seeing in our ordinary life. Third, it is the intuition of seeing things in the process of historical formation, that is, acting in such a way that “things mirror themselves – no, things see themselves” (NKZb 7: 120). In this sense Nishida also speaks of “seeing things with the historical body”. This characterization shows that acting intuition is an action peculiar to humans. Extending beyond the instinctive acts of animals, it culminates in cultural and artistic expression and in other productions in the world of historical reality. Such an intuition has the meaning of “an individual self-formation of the world” wherein each individual is acting as “a creative element of the creative world” (NKZb 8: 117). Lastly, acting intuition is regarded as seeing from the standpoint of the true self, so thoroughly transcending the conscious self that one “sees

by becoming nothing”. In this sense it can be taken to be “a dialectical process mediated through self-negation” (see NKZb 10: 331). Thus, it has the meaning of a copula in the dialectical universal (the meaning of the middle term in the syllogistic universal) so that it becomes the ground of dialectical logic. This characterization touches the logical structure of the historical reality to which acting intuition belongs. It is based on the way the individual achieves determination in the historical world.

From the descriptions mentioned above, we will understand that acting intuition is working in various dimensions of historical life that range from the instinctive acts of animals to the higher cultural and artistic productions of humans. Now, we shall give a detailed explanation of the fundamental structure of acting intuition and show what it means to have an immediate grasp of the world by acting in it. For this purpose, we must, first, place Nishida’s understanding of acting intuition in the context of his earlier conception of the self-determination of nothingness. By comparing the standpoint of acting intuition with the thought of the “self-determination of eternal now” and the “syllogistic universal”, we can clarify the character of “immediate” experience as it relates to these concepts. We shall then attempt to elucidate the nature of artistic intuition. Because it serves as the best model of acting intuition, artistic intuition enables us to bring to light the concrete figure of Nishida’s standpoint of the acting self.

1 The Fundamental Structure of Consciousness in the Self-Aware Self

We begin our inquiry by examining Nishida’s view of consciousness in the context of his philosophy of “*basho* (place)”. Nishida realized that the essence of our self-awareness consists in the way “the self sees (mirrors) itself within itself”.¹ Most important in this characterization of self-awareness is the “within itself”, which already implies the meaning of “*basho*”. While Nishida finds the essence of our consciousness in the self-awareness with which the self knows itself, like Kant or Fichte do, he attempts, in oppositions to them, to think the foundation of consciousness, not from the act, but from the *basho* that includes the act. Instead of thinking of the act as an accomplishment of a subject facing an object, he regards it from the perspective of the *basho*, which always already contains the entire relation between subject and object within itself. When the self mirrors itself within itself, the mirroring self is further mirrored within itself. The formula for self-awareness must

¹ The formula of self-awareness (*jikaku* 自覚) is in Japanese: “*jiko ga jiko ni oite jiko wo miru* (*utsusu*) 己が己に於て自己を見る(映す)”. “*jiko ga*” corresponds to the subject of the sentence in English “the self”, “*jiko wo*” to the object “itself” and “*jiko ni oite*” to “within itself”. If “*jiko ga*” or “*jiko wo*” appears separated from the formula, I translate them into “self-qua-subject” and “self-qua-object” respectively.

contain the infinite movement of self-awareness that this implies. It is this movement that constitutes the fundamental structure of the self.

The seeing self and the seen object are usually considered as separate things. According to Nishida, the representation-plane and the self-awareness-plane are themselves products of the movement of self-awareness. He claims, further, that this opposition of the two planes is the essential moment of ordinary consciousness. To clarify what he has in mind, more should be said about what is meant by the representation-plane and the self-awareness-plane.

The representation-plane is the plane of the self-qua-object, within which the content of the self is mirrored. To use the phenomenological term, it is the plane of noematic determination. The self-awareness-plane, in contrast, is the plane of the self-qua-subject, within which the act of the self, itself, is mirrored (not the content that is the object of our normal sight). This can also be called the plane of noetic determination.

The initial plane of consciousness is the intuition-plane, within which the self mirrors its act and its content in one. This form of the movement of self-awareness was previously called “pure experience” because it is carried out without separation between subject and object. This “pure experience” should now be regarded as the intuition-plane. This intuition-plane comes to being when the representation-plane and the self-awareness-plane approach each other and become one. In the intuition-plane both the plane of self-qua-subject and the plane of self-qua-object are eclipsed. What remains is the “place” of the intuition-plane as such. Because the intuition-plane contains no discrete subject that acts, Nishida says that “*basho* determines *basho* itself”. He means the same thing when he says that “the self sees by becoming nothing” or “the self sees without a seer”.

In short, the movement of self-awareness is the infinite development of the seeing self which, in the way of mirroring, includes itself as the seeing and as the seen (e.g. the noetic and noematic moments). Because the self mirrors this seeing self with the seen within itself again, the process of self-awareness becomes infinite. When such a self-awareness is deepened, it is lost in the act of mirroring so that the self-qua-subject, as the act of seeing, is completely unified with the encompassing *basho*. This is the self-awareness of a true self that Nishida calls “self-awareness of nothingness”.

2 The Origin of Time in the Syllogistic Universal

Now, we shall turn our attention to the time-structure of self-aware consciousness. Acting intuition can unfold only within time, whose structure is notoriously elusive.

Time has been conceived in many different ways: the natural time flowing linearly from past through present to future, the objective time measured with a watch, the subjective time experienced in our daily life, and so on. And yet, as Augustine says, time is an unsolvable riddle. While it is self-evident when we don't ask about it, once we start to think about what it is, we cannot help realizing that we don't

understand it. In the history of philosophy since Plato and Aristotle, time has always remained a central problem. With regard to modern philosophy, remarkable attempts to illuminate the problem can be found in the time-theory of Kant's transcendental philosophy, Husserl's phenomenology of internal time-consciousness, and Heidegger's discussion of time in light of his existential analytic of "Dasein". Nishida, in dialogue with these contemporary philosophers, discusses time in conjunction with the thought of the "syllogistic universal", which in turn plays an important role in the self-aware process of consciousness.

Nishida devised the idea of the syllogistic universal to clarify the function of judgments and inferences in establishing a concrete connection between our empirical cognition and self-aware consciousness. Like Hegel's concrete universal, Nishida's syllogistic universal should be regarded as the dynamic instance in which multilayered planes of consciousness combine, making possible the self-determination of "concrete concepts" that span the multifold relations between the universal and the particular.

It is well-known that the form of syllogistic inference includes as its moments the major term, the minor term, and the middle term. For example, consider a syllogism such as: "all humans are mortal (major premise), and Socrates is a human (minor premise); therefore, Socrates is mortal (conclusion)". The predicate of the major premise, "mortal", is the major term, and the subject of the minor premise, "Socrates", is the minor term. "Human" is the middle term, which is both the subject of the major premise and the predicate of the minor premise. The middle term plays the role of mediating the subject and predicate of the conclusion. According to Nishida, the act of unifying each judgment in the syllogism is carried out on the representation-plane of consciousness by respectively corresponding to the major premise, the minor premise, and the conclusion. Nishida calls the representation-plane of the major premise the "major-term-plane", that of the minor premise the "minor-term-plane" and that of the conclusion the "middle-term-plane". By combining these planes with the those developed in the formula of self-awareness (as the intuition-, representation-, or self-awareness-planes), he seeks to elucidate the characters and dimensions of cognition, as well as the practical actions and aesthetic experiences.

The fundamental structure of the syllogistic universal consists in the opposition of the minor-term-plane and the major-term-plane, joined with a middle-term-plane that, self-identically, combines the major-term-plane and the minor-term-plane. Here it is important to see how the syllogistic universal is related to the form of time. According to Nishida, the content of the sensuous experience is mirrored within the representation-plane first. But the present contents of representation, whether intuition, perception, memory, or expectation, are free-flowing and change one after another. In the course of time, multifold representative contents come into being, becoming the contents in the minor-term-plane of the syllogistic universal. Then, the minor-term-plane can be considered as the place wherein the present contents are mirrored. Its time-character is, therefore, the "present". However, it is in the middle-term-plane that the representative contents mirrored within the minor-term-plane are mediated with each other. Therefore, the time-character of "infinite

transition” must be attached to the middle-term-plane. By way of the mediation of this plane, it becomes possible to extract a universal representation out of various individual contents in the minor-term-plane and to define it as a universal concept in the major-term-plane. The major-term-plane is the consciousness-plane within which universal concepts are implaced. Therefore, its time-character can be determined as “past” or “future”. The major-term-plane whose general representations are not definitive enough to form a universal concept stands for “future”. The same plane, whose contents have already been defined as universal concepts, gets the time-character “past”. If universal concepts come into being in this way, the major-term-plane succeeds in controlling the movement of the middle-term-plane and, further, in determining the representative contents of the minor-term-plane. This is how judgments or reasoning are formed in the syllogistic universal.

Nishida’s thought of the syllogistic universal contributes not only to clarifying the dimension of empirical cognitions, but also the dimension of aesthetic experiences. By means of this thought we shall be able to better understand, for example, Kant’s distinction between the “reflecting judgment” (*reflektierende Urteilskraft*) and the “determining judgment” (*bestimmende Urteilskraft*). As we know, in the determining judgment the particular is subsumed under a universal that is already given, while in the reflecting judgment no universal concept of the understanding is presupposed. Instead, one starts with the particular and searches for the universal. In the former case the imagination (*Einbildungskraft*) plays only a secondary role, as it must submit itself to the understanding (*Verstand*). But in the latter case, the imagination can develop its original ability because there are no presupposed concepts that restrict its free activity.

With the help of Nishida’s syllogistic universal, the relationship of the cognitive powers of imagination and understanding could be described as follows: The understanding, as the power of concepts, works in the major-term-plane, while the imagination, which mediates the sensually given with concepts of understanding, works in the middle-term-plane. In the determining judgment, the understanding gets the upper hand over the imagination because the middle-term-plane, in which the imagination is moving, is embraced by the major-term-plane that has already come into existence. Thus, the movement of the imagination is controlled by the understanding and led in a predetermined direction. But in the case of the reflecting judgment, the imagination’s movement in the middle-term-plane is not restricted by the understanding because the major-term-plane, in which the understanding can work, has not yet come into being. When the middle-term-plane liberates itself from the compelling force of the major-term-plane to move freely, the imagination enters into a new tension with the understanding. It refuses to be fixed in the past major-term-plane by a concept offered by the understanding. Instead, it tries to determine its own noematic content by helping the understanding to form a new universal concept, thus orienting itself toward the future major-term-plane. In this “free play of the imagination and the understanding” that takes place in the middle-term-plane, the major-term-plane and the minor-term-plane are mediated. Through such a dynamic relationship between the middle-term-plane and the major-term-plane, the middle-term-plane is unified with the minor-term-plane to embrace and distinguish

the major-term-plane. In so doing, the noetic self-determination of the imagination is purified, so to speak. At that time, the intuition-plane, including the syllogistic universal, comes into being. This act of the imagination moving in the intuition-plane is nothing else than the acting intuition, which was previously regarded as the self-determination of nothingness that sees by becoming nothing. Nishida called this deep horizon of consciousness the “intelligible universal”. It is the intuition-plane opened by the truly aware self. Nishida understood it as the dimension in which one can speak of the “idea” of beauty.

The relation between the determining and the reflecting judgment must be conceived dialectically. The determining judgment can be regarded as a unity of general concepts within the major-term-plane because it presupposes the universal already given in the major-term-plane while subsuming each particular under it. It, therefore, corresponds to the “universal determination” of the “dialectical universal”. The reflecting judgment, which starts with the given individual and goes through the medium of the particular to enter into the universal, corresponds to the “individual determination” of “the dialectical universal”. But, to the degree that this reflecting judgment is simply an individual determination going toward the minor-term-plane, it is not the same as acting intuition. Neither of these is dialectical; neither the unity of general concepts (the determining judgment), which goes from the universal implaced within the major-term-plane to the individual, nor the individual unity (the reflecting judgment), which goes from the individual implaced within the minor-term-planes to the universal. As such, both are structurally different from acting intuition. The “dialectical self-identity”, that Nishida considered as the structure of acting intuition in the syllogistic universal, has the meaning of the “self-identity of the middle-term” (NKZb 8: 117). This contrasts with Kant’s judgment, which is defined by going one-sidedly toward the minor-term-plane or the major-term-plane. From Nishida’s point of view, Kant’s aesthetic judgment of taste as the “free play of the imagination and the understanding” should have the same structure with the “self-identity of the middle term” that corresponds to the individual determination of the dialectical universal. The aesthetic judgment of taste is only possible once the determining and reflecting judgments are negatively mediated with each other. Describing Kant’s reflecting judgment in these terms clears a way toward understanding Nishida’s “acting intuition”.

3 The Structure of the Self-Determination of the Eternal Now

Above we saw how empirical knowledge and aesthetic experience could be viewed from Nishida’s standpoint of self-awareness. Turning our attention to the time-structure of the dialectical universal, we showed how the relationship between conceptual cognition and time-consciousness could be thought. Next, focusing on the thought of the “eternal now”, developed from the standpoint of the

self-determination of nothingness, we shall explore the time-structure of acting intuition. The problem of “time” in self-aware consciousness is the key to understanding the thought of acting intuition.

As mentioned above, when we see things from the ordinary standpoint of empirical knowledge, the representation-plane and the self-awareness-plane are opposed to each other. As a result, the minor-term-plane and the major-term-plane are also standing face to face. If something is mirrored within the present minor-term-plane, it will be either determined in the frame of already given concepts, or generalized toward the concepts that are to be formed in the future. In any case, the present can be implied in consciousness only in relation with the past or the future. Therefore, from the standpoint of the representative consciousness where subject and object are separated, the seeing self can never be directly seen. If the self is seen as something, it has just become the “already seen” self. It is no longer the “seeing” self.

This fact is closely related to the contradiction of time. Thinking of time must occur in the present, but the present, itself, can never be caught. As Augustine said, we connect the present with the past through memory, or with the future by expecting something coming. But the present, itself, that makes these relationships possible, disappears immediately if we begin to think about it. The contradiction of time and that of the self are two sides of the same coin. Both are rooted in the essence of self-awareness.

For Nishida, time originally comes into being as the self-determination of absolute nothingness, just as the self-awareness of the true self is the self-awareness of the self that sees by becoming nothing. If applied to the syllogistic universal, this self-aware determination of the self can be considered a movement wherein the major-term-plane becomes nothing so that the middle-term and minor-term planes can be liberated from it. Then, the minor-term planes, that have become discontinuous with each other, are reconnected through the middle-term-plane, so that inner perceptions are continuously developed within the intuition-plane. Here, authentic time comes into view in which the present determines itself. This is why Nishida said, “where the true self that sees without a seer knows itself, there is the present, and where the present determines the present itself, there is the true self”. (NKZb 5: 146, NKZb 5: 148). According to Nishida, there is ultimately nothing under the ground of the self. If something determines the self, it is no longer the true self.

Nishida says:

The absolute present, which includes all times within itself and determines them in the sense that the present determines the present itself, can be regarded as the self-aware determination of the absolute nothingness whose circle has its centers everywhere without any periphery. The absolute present thought like this is considered as the eternal now that begins in each place and can draw in each moment the infinite past and the infinite future up to the one point of the present. Thus, time is thought to come to being as the self-determination of the eternal now.¹⁴

This self-determination of absolute nothingness, which brings about time, has two sides (see NKZb 5: 157). The one side is that of “absolute life”. It is absolute insofar as the self-determination of absolute nothingness brings about innumerable noetic determinations. Conceived temporally, the noetic plane of the self-awareness of

absolute nothingness determines in each moment an infinitely large circle whose center is everywhere. According to this “circular determination”, the center of the circle is nothing else than the moment of “now” at which self-awareness determines itself. This moment, touching eternity, is called the “eternal now”. In the infinitely large circle, whose center everywhere, each moment is “now”. This eternal now is innumerable brought about. It is the moment in which acting intuition both “sees by becoming things and acts by becoming things”.

The other side of the self-awareness of absolute nothingness is “absolute death”. As a noematic determination, it opens the objective world in which facts are determined as such, and in this natural world-space all times are negated and extinguished. Returning to the image of the place of absolute nothingness as a circle without any peripheries, we said that the noetic determination has everywhere as its center. On the noematic plane, on the other hand, all centers are negated. This negative side can be regarded as the discontinuous plane of the self-determination of the present. Undergoing negation, each definite moment is open, allowing the natural objective world of multifold things to come into being.

These are the two sides of the self-aware determination of absolute nothingness that negate each other to constitute the eternal now. The eternal now extinguishes the infinite past and future in each place and in each moment thereby letting time renew itself. Because the self-determination of the absolute present, as “affirmation of negation” and “continuity of discontinuity”, is carried out within the negating plane that cuts apart “before” and “after”, it can always bring about a renewed present and preserve the irreplaceable uniqueness of each present. This moment of the eternal now is considered from Nishida’s standpoint of the self-aware acting self that sees and acts by becoming nothing. It shows the possibility of acting intuition as a form of embodied excellence in our productive and practical activities.

4 Fiedler’s “Pure Visual Sense” and Acting Intuition

In previous sections we attempted to bring ourselves back to Nishida’s standpoint of the self-aware determination of nothingness. By taking up the thoughts of the “syllogistic universal” and the “eternal now”, we have attempted to discern the fundamental time-structure of acting intuition. The problem we are left with is the essential relationship between acting intuition and bodily acting.

Nishida has always emphasized that his philosophy adopts the standpoint of the acting self. But the language of the self-determination of nothingness did not fully clarify how this is so. We are living and acting with others in a shared socio-historical reality. This way of existing in the world cannot be clearly conceived from the standpoint of the self-aware consciousness with which Nishida’s earlier philosophy started. He has now realized that the actual world should not be thought from out of the “I”, but conversely, the “I” should be thought from out of the actual world. After such a reflection he tried to get to the bottom of the acting self by disclosing the standpoint of the “dialectical universal” that facilitates “acting intuition”. In this

spirit, the time-structure of the acting self, revealed with the help of the thought of the “syllogistic universal” or “eternal now”, needs to be reconsidered from the standpoint of the acting self as it lives and works with its body in the world of socio-historical reality. Artistic experience provides an important clue to solve this problem.

It is for this reason that we now turn our attention to the study of Konrad Fiedler, who attempted to bring the characteristics of artistic activity to light from the point of view of creative, expressive movement. Nishida had a high opinion of Fiedler and referred to his studies often in order to shed light on the essential relationship of artistic creation and acting intuition. The point is to understand the relation of the visual sense (or the sense of hearing) to the body with the help of artistic expression. This is important because the world of pure visual sense differs from the formation of concepts.

According to Fiedler, the actual world is not the world “outside of us”, but that with which we are actively engaged in the process of expressive formation. In artistic activity, intuition is originally natural and free, serving no purposes external to it. When perception serves an external purpose, it becomes a kind of means. It is no longer needed once this purpose is fulfilled. However, the artist is focused on what is captured by pure intuitions—the forms which come to being only through his activity as something else withdraws behind his consciousness. Ordinary perceptions and representations stand under the rule of the will that has to control the outside world. In artistic perception, however, the artist isolates the visibility of things and comes to concentrate on it; and the objective consciousness that sees things as existing outside of itself passes away so that visibility itself emerges as “an independent form”.²

This visibility that has now attained independence must be understood through its relation to the body. When we transfer our total personality into our visual faculty, the world of visibility may freely develop itself in infinite ways. When this happens, the visual faculty is combined directly with the movement of the body. The usual employment of our visual faculty does not fully develop its potential. Only artistic activity leads to the perfection of the visual faculty. The relationship between the eyes and hands is the key to this process.

Normally, we think that prior to drawing something with our hands, we must first see it. However, in the expressive movement of the artist, the activities of the hands and eyes become unified. What is seen with the eyes isn’t something standing outside waiting to be depicted. Instead, what is seen is realized in collaboration with the hands. The hands further the eye’s act of seeing, picking up where the eyes have left off. In short, the process which begins with the eyes and continues with the hands should be considered the same consistent movement. This skill opens a new track for the development of the artist’s actual consciousness in which the objective perceptions before him cease to be important. Now, the only task that remains for the artist is to reveal and express the visible actuality as it appears.

² See Fiedler (1991), p.28.

According to Fiedler, artistic activity doesn't have its result outside of it; it is itself the result. This activity is "the continual movement that moves without interruption which arises continuously, and in the artistic individual his activity reaches a high point in each moment".³ The movement of artistic expression finds completion and renewal in each moment. Once completed, the movement begins again renewed. Each moment of artistic activity is the creative time of a great leap. And yet, what has been acquired therein has no guarantee of permanence. Rather, each moment in this activity disappears without persistence in order to give rise to the following moment. This is why Fiedler told us that "humans own something that they strive to gain only while their spirit is acting".⁴

With this reference to the activity of spirit, we can easily discern the influence of W. Humboldt on Fiedler's thought about artistic activity. The subjectivist tendency of his understanding of art cannot be overlooked. This is also why Nishida criticizes his view. For Nishida, artistic production should not be considered solely from the standpoint of the conscious self of individual artists, which would be one-sided. Rather, artistic production should be understood from the standpoint of the self-formative historical world, as "a creative element of the creative world". And yet, it is certain that there are common features shared by Fiedler and Nishida. It is possible to read Fiedler's descriptions about artistic activity as parallel to Nishida's explanation of acting intuition and the self-determination of the eternal now. In particular, Nishida agrees with Fiedler in his understanding of the expressive movement of the visual faculty.

Fiedler's understanding of the pure visible sense in the "here and now" of the acting expressive self resonates with Nishida's view of acting intuition. Fiedler's account provides us with insight into artistic activity, which Nishida describes as seeing by becoming nothing. From this perspective, the original self-determination of the eternal now can be seen in the work of art. To the degree that this is true, artistic activity can, in turn, lead to deeper insights into the nature of acting intuition.

The activities of knowing and willing that control our daily life are always in relation to the objective noematic determination of our world. But our feeling, if it is sufficiently disinterested in the world's external existence, directs itself to the noetic plane of the acting expressive self. By transcending knowing and willing, feeling includes them within itself. As a result, the activity of pure feeling, expressed in the judgment of taste or in artistic production, is able to negate the demand for the absoluteness of intellectual and intentional action, countering their dominance within daily life. In contrast, artistic play in the form of pure expressive activity holds open the creative world in which intellectual and intentional activities retain their proper measure and are kept from becoming dominant. It is for this reason that Kant and Schiller regarded the aesthetic judgment of taste, or the impulse of artistic play, as constituting a bridge between the intellectual and the willing self. As Schiller said, a human is "only then a total human, when he or she is playing".⁵

³ Konrad Fiedler, *Schriften zur Kunst*, vol. 1, p. 34–35.

⁴ Konrad Fiedler, *Schriften zur Kunst*, vol. 1, p. 34.

⁵ See Schiller (1965).

5 The Temporal-Spatial Structure of Acting Intuition as Historical Expressive Formation

Considering Fiedler's understanding of the expressive movement of artistic activity has clarified the possibility of acting intuition. The acting intuition of artists like painters or sculptors is regarded as an open process in which form, so to speak, sees and produces form. Next, we shall attempt to elucidate the dialectical structure of the historical-bodily world that was opened up by artistic activity by relating this expressive movement to Nishida's thought of the "dialectical universal" and the "self-identity of absolute contradiction". The point is that the truly authentic self-awareness of the self is a "creative element of the creative world", which arises only through the historical-bodily action of acting intuition.

The productive activity of the arts is liable to be understood only as the individual activity of the individual artist, but it should not be understood in this limited way. The artist is brought up in a historical tradition and works in cooperation with others. No creative works have ever been produced without the influence of tradition. Determined and brought up by a tradition while seeking to negate it, artists produce creative works that constitute a new tradition. In other words, artists learn from others while differentiating themselves from them at the same time. Describing this situation, Nishida writes: "in the present, the past and the future are simultaneous, and the present moves over the present itself" (NKZb 8: 157) or "the present is always thoroughly determined, and yet, as this fact itself is self-contradictory, negates itself to form itself further". (NKZb 8: 149). In this sense, the self-producing historical reality is always fluctuating.

Imagine a scene in which a sculptor creates a marble statue. At first, he will draw the outline of a piece of work before cutting the marble. In his head a lot of things may appear, e.g. traditional styles, problems or methods of producing that he himself mastered by training for many years, and so on. With all of this in mind, he makes a preparatory sketch for the working process. He must also take into account the wishes of his customer and how to realize the theme in the material that has been entrusted to him. And yet, once he begins working to carve the marble with his chisel, the gap is closed between his prepared concepts and his moving hands. By chiseling the marble, various forms come to appear one after another. One form calls for another to come out, as one movement of the hands is led to another spontaneously. Each degree of hardness of the marble surface decides the strength of chiseling. The sculptor listens to any subtle sound the chisel makes, which immediately and automatically guides the process of how to carve the stone. While working, he always remains attentive to the light and shade on the stone. Even so, he is not conscious of this whole movement. New problems may crowd in upon him, but he won't stop the movement of his hands. It shall be stopped, only if unsolved obstacles appear and compel him to change his way of working. It is always possible that he is forced by the produced forms to give up the first plan and to take up another. It happens often that the marble stone refuses the intention of the artist. In the production of artistic works the threat of failure is inescapable. But the sculptor

struggles to overcome his frustration and despair and to take hold of his chisel. When he concentrates sufficiently and becomes absorbed in his work, his spirit is distracted no more. Then, the atmosphere around him becomes taut once again, and the time is fulfilled as if the work were accomplished by itself. This situation in which the present determines itself is what Nishida means by the “self-determination of the eternal now”. Here, the production is not bound for a goal that has been previously determined. In artistic activity the teleological process is never decisive. The production of a work of art is at any time, so to speak, in “incomplete completeness”. In this sense one can say, with M. Kimura, that “the artistic activity is aimed at the infinite future, nevertheless always in the eternal present”.⁶

This productive activity of the artist can be considered as a dynamic movement in which the activity of the eyes and the body as a whole correspond to each other as in the self-identity of contradiction. It is as if things work on things themselves. It is an unconscious activity in the ordinary sense, and yet, if it is seen from the viewpoint of the expressive activity that mirrors itself within itself, it stands under the clear consciousness of the truly self-aware self—seeing without a seer. Here, it is not a matter of reproducing within consciousness a thing standing outside it, nor is it a matter of projecting something seen within oneself into the outside world. The important point is that nothing other than the sensory bodily activity (acting intuition) produces the actuality and creates history. The actuality is nothing else than the creative action of the artist who becomes aware of his true self in the created work as such. Or, to put it in an extreme way, the creation of the work is the self-awareness of the artist. As Paul Klee has said: “the color has me. [...] The color and I are one”.⁷ The same can be said about music. Conductor Sergiu Celibidache said once in a TV program: “music is that which exists beyond us. The music becomes possible when the tone and the inner world correspond to each other. This correspondence takes place, just when that which moves our heart structures itself”.⁸ Similarly, “music is beyond time. If one speaks of a short or long movement, one stands outside the music. When something begins to flow in music, there is no time in the ordinary sense”. According to Celibidache, in music one can do nothing but watch something wonderful be born. When that happens, “the highest activity is at the same time the highest passivity”. When seen through the lens of Nishida, this testimony reveals the acting intuition of the self as a creative element of the creative world.

We shall attempt to summarize the fundamental structure of acting intuition by contrasting the purpose-orientation of artisans with the artistic activity of the pure aural and visual senses joined to the body. First, with regard to its temporal character, the flow of artistic activity in which the present determines itself is what Nishida calls “the continuity of discontinuity”. Each moment of it is original and unique. Though, in the productions of artisans one moment of the process moves into

⁶ Kimura (2000), p.44.

⁷ Klee (1998), p. 350

⁸ Stefan Piedl/Thomas Otto (Hg.) (2002), p. 31.

another as a means to an end so that the purpose to be attained controls and gives meaning to all moments of the productive activity. In artistic activity, where seeing and bodily movement are one, the process is so open that each moment can be considered as the time of the work's realization. In contrast, production controlled by the will and subordinated to a purpose has no openness. To the degree that an aim of each process remains, we cannot speak of a self-determination of the eternal now. If we are presented with an impression of a kind of pure duration, we cannot speak of freedom as that which divides the before and after of movement. In this sense, the production of artisans, despite being based on acting intuition, only looks like the self-determination of the continuity of discontinuity in the absolute present. Because the temporality of the artisan's purpose-oriented production is continuous, it lacks the decisive feature that constitutes the creative activity of art.

Second, with regard to spatiality, the difference of both activities is obvious. Nishida metaphorically depicted acting intuition as an infinitely large circle whose center is everywhere. As such, it sees by becoming nothing, breaking open any fixed framework by concentrating attention on the demands of eyes and ears to seeing and listening. It arranges the body's movement and opens the space in which things belong, calling and responding to each other. In genuinely artistic activity, there is no privileged center. Each thing appears as "thing" and discloses an open realm where things can "play", relating to each other and mirroring within each other in the manner of the self-identity of absolute contradiction. But where each moment is determined by a purpose, it is impossible to open up such a realm for play. Even when skilled artisans give themselves over to the movement of production so that, without consciousness of each thing they do, they enter into a state akin to acting intuition, they still remain determined by the goals they have in mind. This prevents them from breaking with the privileged center. Here, the last aim of existence continues to regulate the process of their movement, even if unconsciously. It prevents them from letting things appear as they are. If the self is not decentralized enough to see and listen to the demands of things, it neither opens a space for free play nor does this space become the "true self" within which things mirror each other self-contradictorily.

By way of conclusion, let us characterize the meaning that acting intuition has for scientific cognition and moral praxis, and for political action. According to Nishida, the essential meaning of acting intuition is "to see things as individual elements of a world that constitutes itself individually" and, in this sense, "to see things respectively as a result of the mediating act of the individual" (NKZb 8: 226). Nishida speaks often of "thinking by becoming things and acting by becoming things" (e.g. NKZb 10: 333), in order to express the creative moment of individual acts. He never restricts his thought to artistic production, but applies it also to technical and scientific knowledge. The reason he uses artistic activity as the model for how acting intuition shapes historical formations in general, is that we cannot speak of our individuality or personality without considering the production of things that have socio-historical meanings. Without experiences where the "I" is called on from the world of things, expressive self-formation in society is impossible. If we fail to look at these experiences, we will not understand actions that communicate with

others, the attempt to establish laws and arrange institutions, and the general effort to reform society.

As Nishida said, in all dimensions of the world of historical life, “ideas” seen through acting intuition play a leading role. So, in all regions of the empirical sciences, artistic production, and moral-political action, it is not too much to say that our individual activities are based on acting intuition that “sees by becoming things and acts by becoming things”. For Nishida, the true “ideas” are those that can become the “constituent powers” of “historical nature” (see NKZb 8: 329). He says that in the mutual determinations among individuals that take place through the mediation of productive “ideas”, true individuals come into existence who then join together to establish the state as a “moral-specific formation” (NKZb 8: 333). Nishida sought to understand the most original form of historical life by uncovering acting intuition as the basis for the engagement of the historical body in all dimensions of socio-historical actuality.

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Chapter 7

Between the Sea and the World of Historical Reality: Reconsideration for a Philosophy of Multiple-Historicity



KAZASHI Nobuo

1 Introduction

In the 1930s Nishida turned to the question of the historical world. This turn can be considered a natural, centrifugal development for Nishida's philosophical inquiry, which had centered mainly on the question of the self ever since *An Inquiry into the Good*. But there were some external factors of critical urgency, as well. Marxist philosophy of history had become influential in Japan in the late 1920s, even among his students, and so Nishida was obliged to tackle it head on. By the 1930s, Marxism was severely suppressed in Japan, while Japan-centric nationalism gained power as the country sank deeper into a quagmire of self-aggravating war in East Asia. Under these circumstances Nishida was to reconsider the role of individuals and Japan in the truly globalizing world [*sekai-teki sekai*] in light of such seminal terms as “acting-intuition [*kōi-teki chokkan*]”, “historical body [*rekishi-tekishintai*]”, and “from what-has-been-made to what-makes [*tsukuraretamono kara tsukurumono e*]”. His meditations were unfolded in the major articles written one after another under the titles, “The World as the Dialectical Universal [*Benshōhō-teki ippansha toshitenosekai*]” in 1934, “The Standpoint of Acting-Intuition [*Kōi-teki chokkan no tachiba*]” in 1935, “Logic and Life [*Ronri to seimei*]” in 1936, “Acting-Intuition [*Kōi-teki chokkan*]” in 1937, and “Human Existence [*Ningen-teki sonzai*]” in 1938, etc.

In Nishida's own understanding, the notion of place [*basho*] was now made “concrete” in terms of the dialectical mutual determination of individuals and the world, and further made “direct” in terms of acting-intuition. Such fundamental reorientations of his stance were clearly manifested in the “Introduction to

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Metaphysics [*Keijijōgaku joron*]” in 1933 and “The Logical Structure of the Real World [*Genjitsu no sekai no ronri-teki kōzō*]” in 1934, as follows:

What can be considered the most concrete reality [*shinzitsuzai* 真実在] is the real world [*genjitsu no sekai* 現実の世界] in which individuals determine each other. [...] What can be thought to be the world of our personal [*jinkakuteki* 人格的] actions can be considered the most concrete reality-world [*jitsuzaikai* 実在界] (NKZb 6: 50).

What is the real world like? The real world must not merely stand against us, but it also must be the world in which we are born, in which we work, and in which we are going to die. [...] The true, real world must be the world that envelops us. It must be the world in which we work. It must be the world of actions (NKZb 6: 171).¹

This represented a radical and historical transformation of Nishida’s kernel visions of “pure experience” and “place”. On the one hand, it brought about the expansion of the field of philosophical questioning for both Nishida and his disciples; now it was their mission to respond to historical reality. On the other hand, however, such expansive transformation of the notions of “pure experience” and “place” raised questions of philosophical adequacy. Thus, in the double sense, the question over the “historical world”, together with the “body” and “expression”, became the main battlefield for the Kyoto School philosophers,² particularly for MIKI Kiyoshi [三木清] and KŌYAMA Iwao [高山岩男], who endeavored critically to carry forward Nishida’s inquiry in terms of “logic of imagination [*kōsōryoku no ronri*]” and the “principles of antiphony [*koō no genri*]” respectively.³

2 The “Problematic World” and the Philosophy of Sea⁴

In his mid-twenties, when Nishida was teaching at a junior high school in Nanao near his hometown in the *Noto* Peninsula, he used to go to the nearby seashore almost every day and stand for long stretches watching the sea. It is said that an old woman, wondering at the figure of this young man, asked him what he was doing, and Nishida responded: “I’m thinking about the world. The sea is a mysterious thing”. UEDA Shizuteru regards this story about the young Nishida—immersed in

¹For a detailed exposition with reference to these quotes, see Fujita 2011: esp. 169–192.

²See Kumano 2009: 83.

³“Antiphony” is a term coined by James W. Heisig. See Heisig, Kasulis, and Maraldo 2011: 738–743. Japanese term “*ko-ō*” literally means “calling-responding”.

⁴This paper is based on the following works of mine: an explication attached to *Rekishī-tetsugaku ronbunshū: Nishida tetsugaku senshū*, Vol. 5 (Toeisha, 1998), “Passion for Philosophy in a Post-Hiroshima Age: Reconsideration of Nishida’s Philosophy of History” included in *Frontiers of Japanese Philosophy*, Vol.6, *Confluences and Cross-Currents*, Raquel Bouso and James W. Heisig, eds. (Nazan Institute for Religion and Culture, 2009). The author would like to thank the editors and the publishers for permission to reprint their modified versions in this volume. Finally, my deepest gratitude goes to Joseph T. Scarry, a friend from my graduate years in the U.S.A., who proofread the last draft with encouraging interest and care.

thinking about the “world”, facing the ungraspable sea—as an “episode indicating the provenance of Nishida philosophy”. With regard to the images of “the sea and the world” for Nishida, Ueda writes:

For Nishida the “sea” was a concrete image of the double opening as humans’ residing place: the world and “what overflows the world” [*sekai ni amareru mono*] (the world’s infinite margin and the bottomless “between-the-lines”). The sense of the mysteriousness one experiences facing the “sea” can be called a kind of “*Dasein* sense”. The world—that is, what exceeds the “problematic world [*mondai-teki sekai*]”—rolls into the inside of the world. Getting in contact with this infinity lapping against the “world”, the infinite opening that surpasses and envelops the finite sense-space of the “world”, we can “be in the world”. The interaction of the infinite and the finite is being felt by Nishida inside the “world” at the place where the “sea” laps against the “world” (Ueda 1997: 20–31; my translation).

After moving to Kamakura (not far from Tokyo, facing the Pacific Ocean) to spend his last years, Nishida wrote: “I love the sea. I feel that something infinite is moving (NKZa 7: 350)”. The mysteriousness and the unboundedness that Nishida felt in the sea within the world is also the mysteriousness and the unboundedness of the life within the self. KōSAKA Masaaki, one of Nishida’s disciples, states about Nishida’s philosophy: “If we can use a metaphor, it was a philosophy of the sea (Kōsaka 1971: 15)”. We can say, at least tentatively, that the philosophical exploration of Nishida who aimed to “become an inquirer of life” (NKZa 17: 148) was started as an attempt to cast a plumb of thinking, unflinching and boldly, down to the bottom of the sea of the self. The “logic of place” established in *From the Actor to the Seer* [*Hataraku mono kara mirumono e*] (1927) was, so to speak, an echogram of the self’s internal sea where multi-layered places swirl over one another. Contained within this internal sea are the place of “judging universals [*Handan-teki ippansha*]” that makes the experience of the objective world possible; the place of “self-awakening universals” that makes the self-comprehension of individual consciousness possible; and the place of “intelligible universals (*eichiteki-ippansha*)”, which is the transcendental consciousness making the intuition of the “ideas” of truth, beauty, and the good possible. In *The Self-Awakening System of Universals* [*Ippansha no jikaku-teki taikei*] (1930), however, Nishida’s descent hits against the self-contradiction of the intelligible self [*eichiteki-jiko*], which finds itself “gone astray”, with its essence lying in the absolute freedom to commit evil, contrary to its intuition of the “ideas” of values. The place of absolute nothingness, where “the self negates itself absolutely and comes to see without a seer and hear without a hearer”, was the bottomless bottom to which Nishida’s “echogram of consciousness” points ultimately; “it is the place where the awareness of the existing self is realized, not like the sea spreading out below the sky, but as floating in the emptiness or as the emptiness itself”.

Certainly, we may recognize an undeniable mark of “romanticism” in the symbol of “life as one’s internal sea”, and such perspective would be of great significance in considering political implications of Nishida philosophy.⁵ But we need to

⁵Though the “romanticist” character of Nishida philosophy was pointed out by TOSAKA Jun in “Is the ‘logic of nothingness’ a logic?” (1933), recently KOBAYASHI Toshiaki clarified it from a different viewpoint in relation to Goethe and Novalis. Cf. Kobayashi 1998.

remember here that, because “pure experience” was, for Nishida, a “centrifugal notion of the mind as directed toward its outside” (Noe 1996: 13), life was always an ambiguous being for Nishida, not closed up inside individuals, but open toward the world such that “outside is inside, and inside is outside”. Indeed, having confirmed the “place of absolute nothingness” as the ontologically ultimate dimension, Nishida turns to explore the dialectical structure of the historical world and the acting self in it from the viewpoint of the “place of absolute nothingness” (cf. Fujita 1996). A condensed expression of this turning’s consequences can be found in the oft-quoted passage from the preface to the second edition (1936) of *An Inquiry into the Good* [*Zen no Kenkyū*]:

The idea of “place” has been made concrete as “dialectical universal”, and the stand of “dialectical universal” has been made immediate as the standpoint of “acting-intuition”. What I called in the present book the world of direct or pure experience I have now come to think of as the world of historical reality. The world of acting-intuition—the world of *poiesis*—is none other than the world of pure experience” (Nishida 1992: xxxiii; my translation).

Therefore, if we regard Nishida’s early thinking as its “going phase [ōsō]” that led to the place of absolute nothingness, it was through its “returning phase [gensō]” that Nishida tried to capture the actual “historical world” from the perspective of the place of absolute nothingness.⁶ And it was through such tenacious process of reflexive questioning that Nishida came to his unique thematization of the “historical body that is made and makes”, while developing his understanding of the ambiguous body that “sees and is seen”, anticipating Merleau-Ponty by a couple of decades (Noe 1994: 91–92). This development was one of the most concrete and seminal results of the later Nishida’s philosophy, a philosophy that aspired to be, in his own words, a dialectical “phenomenology of the historical reality” [*rekishi-teki jitsuzai*], a “truly concrete phenomenology” dealing with the “world of historical reality in which we are born, work, and go to die” (NKZa 8: 4).

However, despite Nishida’s retrospective characterization of “the world of historical reality” as “the world of pure experience”, the relationship between the “problematic world” and the “life as one’s internal sea” seemed to retain unresolvable tensions in “the world of historical reality”. For example, in “The Intelligible World [*Eichi-teki sekai*]” (1928), an article he wrote before he began working wholeheartedly on his “phenomenology of historical reality”, Nishida said:

Our true self does not live or die in the world of history. What lives and dies in history is the so-called conscious self, merely the shadow-image of the intelligible self. Our true self dwells in the intelligible world conceivable at the bottom of general consciousness after deepening the meaning of self-awareness (NKZa 5: 163).

Should we consider that this sort of view was overcome or forgotten by the later Nishida’s history-immanentist standpoint? The later Nishida would write: “the world of reality must be the world in which we are born, work, and die” (cf. NKZa 7: 217); “everything must be reconsidered from the standpoint of philosophy of

⁶For Nishida’s logic of place, see Krummel 2015.

history” (NKZa 12: 414). A similar tension remains even in “The World of the Dialectical Universal [*Benshōhōteki-ippansha no sekai*]” (1934), in which Nishida philosophy is said to have more or less reached its completion. It is the tension between the standpoint of the voluntary self, not to be subsumed merely in the acting self, but to be considered endowed with “the significance exceeding [...] the world of reality [*genjitsu no sekai*]” (NKZa 7: 422), and the view that “we have nothing other than this world of reality as what we should will” (NKZa 7: 427).

Nishida was focused on an ever-unstable relationship between the “world of historical reality” and the place of absolute nothingness (that is, the “intelligible world conceivable at the bottom of general consciousness”). Nishida detected a “deep self-contradiction” (NKZa 7: 422) in the “place where the infinite and the finite interact with each other”, and this is reflected in the words of Nishida’s most-quoted *tanka* [short poem], written in 1923: “In my heart / is a profound depth / that the waves of joys and sorrow / do not stir”.⁷ It is perhaps from this focus on instability and contradiction that the creativity of Nishida philosophy derives—and its ultimate difficulties.⁸

This problem is not a problem limited only to Nishida philosophy, but a problem every human being is bound to face. It is the problem of how to build the “living relations between the logic of objectivity and the dimension of non-objectivity” (Nitta 1995: 37). For example, when Emmanuel Levinas states: “The non-reference to the common time of history means that mortal existence unfolds in a dimension that does not run parallel to the time of history and is not situated with respect to this time as to an absolute” (Levinas 1969: 49; 56). Here, a similar problem is being seen from a different angle in a different tradition.⁹

⁷Translation by YUSA Michiko. Cf. Yusa 2002: 189.

⁸For Nishida’s views on the relationships between the historical reality and the religious dimension, see Itabashi 2008 and Sugimoto 2013.

⁹Actually, Nishida’s career had been involved in the world of historical reality from its very beginning, although it may not be so apparent from *An Inquiry into the Good* published in 1911. As is well-known, Nishida and his close friends protested against the standardization of education that was started at their high school in Kanazawa and eventually ended up withdrawing from it. Because of this “youthful revolt”, Nishida’s life was to deviate widely from the elite course for aspiring young scholars (Cf. Yusa 2002).

After the collapse of the Tokugawa Shogunate in 1868, Japan hurried itself in building a “modern” nation-state. As early as around the turn of the century, its emperor-centered national polity was in place, and its totalitarian and imperialistic nature was beginning to clearly show its problematic aspects. Internally, it is symbolized by the 1910–1911 High Treason Affair (*Taigyaku jiken*), in which many socialists were arrested on the false grounds that they were implicated in the attempt to assassinate the Meiji Emperor. Twelve of them, including Kōtoku Shūsui, were executed without trial. Externally, the same tendency came to the fore as the Japan-Korea Annexation Treaty was concluded in 1910. It is imperative for us to keep in mind that Nishida’s 1911 maiden work, *An Inquiry into the Good*, was published amidst these historical circumstances.

3 Nishida Philosophy in the Times of War

In “The Principle for the New World Order” written in 1943, Nishida used an analogy to the war ancient Greece fought against Persia in order to highlight the world-historical significance of the war Japan was fighting as the self-proclaimed leader of East Asia. Nishida wrote: “As it is said that long ago the victory of Greece in the Persian War determined the direction of European culture up to this day, the present-day war in East Asia would determine a direction for world history to come” (NKZa 11: 455).¹⁰ However, in his last completed article, “The Logic of Place and the Religious Worldview”, written in 1945 just before his death, when signs of Japan’s defeat were becoming increasingly evident day by day, Nishida turned to a different comparison. As Andrew Feenberg has pointed out in his article, “The Problem of Modernity in the Philosophy of Nishida” (Maraldo and Heisig 1995: 172), now Nishida attempted to envision the path Japan ought to take after the anticipated defeat implicitly on the model of Jews who “did not lose their spiritual confidence [...] even while they were deprived of their land in Babylonian captivity” (NKZa 11: 455). Needless to say, this change of model for Japan reflected a drastic change in Nishida’s perception of the state of affairs.

However, if he had lived beyond the end of the war to learn the extent of Japanese forces’ actual actions during the war, his thinking would have undergone even more drastic changes. Nishida’s final manuscript, posthumously published as “The Logic of Place and the Religious Worldview”¹¹ [*bashoteki-ronri to shūkyōteki-sekaikan* 場所の論理と宗教の世界観], ends with his heart-rending supplication: “The state must be what reflects the Pure Land in this world” (NKZa 11: 463). For Nishida, the government had to be “a world containing a self-expression of the Absolute in itself respectively” (Ibid). Given that Nishida had such a moralistic and religious view of the state, one may imagine changes going to the very core of his philosophy. Perhaps he would have echoed TANABE Hajime who, after the war, criticized his own failure to discern that “just as radical evil backs up individual freedom, radical evil lies latent at the bottom of the state”.¹²

3.1 *Logos and Strife*

Now, in the “post-Hiroshima age”, we must critically reconsider Nishida’s view of strife, which sustains, and is sustained by, his view of the state. In the late 1930s, Nishida maintained:

¹⁰Cf. “The Principle of the New World Order” translated by ARISAKA Yoko in her article “The Nishida Enigma: ‘The Principle of the New World Order’” in *Monumenta Nipponica*, vol. 51, Number 1, spring 1996.

¹¹In the English translation the title has been rendered “The Logic of the Place of Nothingness and the Religious Worldview”. See Nishida 1993.

¹²Tanabe’s preface to “The Logic of the Dialectics of Species” (Tanabe 1963: 253–254; my translation).

I think that, when the world becomes *poietic* concretely, races must emerge onto the stage of history [...]. The world of species is the world of strife (“The Viewpoint of the Individual in the Historical World”; NKZa 9: 144).

A historical present, namely an epoch, has, as a dialectical identity of “what-is-made-makes-the-maker”, alternative directions [...]. It must be a tendency of the Heraclitean world where the absolute many is the One, and all things are born from strife. An epoch changes into an epoch, not simply continuously, but absolute-dialectically. One epoch always has a character of one world [...]. I call it a metamorphosis (“The Problem of the Genesis and Development of Species”; NKZa 8: 515–517).

“Antagonism and conflict” do not necessarily mean “war”; but, judging from the circumstances of the age, it is undeniable that “strife” implies “war” as used here by Nishida. Of course, Heraclitean views that affirm strife as a principle of generation are far from rare in the history of philosophy, forming a stout lineage represented by Hegel and Nietzsche.

More specifically, Nishida’s understanding of real politics in the world can be taken, to a large measure, as a faithful assimilation of Leopold von Ranke’s view of history, according to which “world-historical moments emerge, not in peaceful, smooth developments, but in perpetual clashes and strife because to fight is man’s original nature” (NKZa 8: 94–95).¹³ Considering the circumstances of Nishida’s age, it is unsurprising that he leaned toward Ranke, and toward the importance of war as the primary, species-determining form of strife.¹⁴

When Japan’s defeat and his own death approached, as if competing with each other, Nishida wrote: “The world war must be a world war which aims to negate a world war and to contribute to eternal peace” (NKZa 11: 439). But our “post-Hiroshima age” is an age in which world history is hemmed in by the “impossibility of a world war” in the sense that a nuclear war cannot occur without resulting in the downfall of the human species as a whole. It is an age in which the human species has come, for the first time, face-to-face with the fact that “struggles” accompanied by mutual escalation of armed forces promise, not a higher level of Heraclitean

¹³Nishida quotes long passages (in the original German) from Ranke’s work, for instance, in “The Self-Identity and the Continuity of the World”.

¹⁴Ranke’s philosophy of history maintained, as Nishida was fond of quoting it, that “each epoch is in direct contact with God; the value of each epoch does not consist in what issues from it, but in the very being of the epoch itself” (NKZa 12: 61). In a word, it was conceived as a critique of Hegel’s unilinear-evolutionist view of history that regarded world history as an unfolding process of the Absolute Spirit. In this sense, it has a great pioneering value. But Ranke was “under the strong constraints of the Restoration Period of nineteenth century Europe when his history scholarship was formed”, and indeed his representative work is entitled *The Great Powers*. (Cf. Kentaro Hayashi, “The Person and the Work of Ranke” in *Ranke*, the 47th volume of *The Great Works of the World*, *Chūō-kōron-sha*, 1980, 28–31.)

However, Nishida accepted almost uncritically the presuppositions of Ranke’s view of history, which was focused on the struggle-relationship in modern Europe, and Nishida considered “the present age, which can be regarded as the most nationalistic epoch in history, to be the most globalist [*sekai-shugi-teki*] epoch” (NKZa 8: 520). Consequently, in spite of his harsh criticism of imperialistic Japanism, Nishida’s basic frame of historical understanding was itself constrained in the nation-based system of his time.

“harmonious unity”, but mutual destruction, as expressed by the acronym MAD (“Mutually Assured Destruction”).

“Strife” in the broader sense of the term would be indispensable to cultural creativity. But our time is an age which is in need, above all things, of what William James called “the moral equivalent of war” (James 1941: 265–296); that is to say, our absolute priority must be placed on enlarging the domains of “strenuous life” where the human species can manifest its active combativeness in culturally sublimated forms, thereby realizing more extensive and deeper co-existence through “co-operation”.

4 Motivations to Philosophize: Wonder, Sorrow, and Fear

Nishida’s admonition that “[o]ur motivation for philosophizing must not be wonder, but the deep sorrow of life” is often quoted as characteristic of his philosophy. Humans die; it is nothing but the sorrow of this straightforward fact which drives humans toward the question of the meaning of life, and leads humans toward the deep self-awakening of existing here and now. This meta-philosophical prescription of Nishida’s was meant to be a fundamental critique of Western philosophy’s penchant to objectify Being, noticeable already in its alleged beginnings in wonder.

Complicating matters, it is said that the “philosophy in search of peace” in the “post-Hiroshima age” started with *fear*—specifically, with the fear of nuclear war.¹⁵ Not only had another motivation for humans to philosophize been added, but the fundamental mood, or *Befindlichkeit* of our age—namely, the fear of nuclear war—now contended with, or even overwhelmed, those ageless sentiments of the “wonder at Being” and the “sorrow of life”. It would also mean that the ranges of philosophy’s traditional questions have come to be called into question in the “historical horizon” of the nuclear age.

Philosophical questions, by their nature, are not easily harmonized with everyday life. Already in Greek philosophy the very dissociation between philosophy and everyday life posed a great problem for philosophy.¹⁶ But, in the post-Hiroshima age, philosophy’s position and role in the actual world of historical and political affairs are being questioned afresh and in a much more acute manner. Consequently, Nishida’s meta-philosophical view may be called into question, for example, in

¹⁵ It was Dorf Sternberger who brought into focus “*Erschrecken*” (fear/fright) as the motivation for the philosophy of peace in our time. Cf. *Über den verschiedenen Begriffe des Friedens*, Stuttgart: F. Steiner Verlag Wiesbaden, 1984.

¹⁶ The famous parable of the cave in Plato’s *The Republic* is a classical allegory for this problem. Discussing Plato’s parable of the cave, Hannah Arendt states: “[T]he beginning of all philosophy is *thaumazein*, the wondering amazement at everything that is as it is. More than anything else, Greek ‘theory’ is the prolongation, and Greek philosophy the articulation and conceptualization of this initial wonder. To be capable of it is what separates the few from the many, and to remain devoted to it is what alienates them from the affairs of men” (Arendt 1968: 115).

much the same way as Heidegger's thinking on the question of Being was called into question by Levinas's ethical philosophy focused on the particular, historical alterity of others.

1 “From What-has-been-made” to What-makes” as a Category of the Ultimate

As mentioned in our introduction, Nishida wrote in the preface to the second edition of *An Inquiry into the Good*: “What I called in the present book the world of direct or pure experience I have now come to think of as the world of historical reality. The world of action-intuition—the world of *poiesis*—is none other than the world of pure experience” (Nishida 1992: p.xxxiii).

Nishida's inquiry into the “phenomenology of the world of historical reality” through the analyses of the body compelled him to accomplish his own “return to the life-world”. And the life-world Nishida discovered was not confined to the world where individuals, who determine each other voluntarily, stand directly face-to-face with each other. It was also the world where innumerable independent individuals, who exist disjunctively and cannot be connected directly, determine each other expressively through *poiesis* (production of things). Alternately, viewed from the perspective of Nishida's philosophy of *basho* (place), it was the way the world should appear when the multi-layered relationship of expressive mutual determination between “innumerable individuals” is grasped afresh as the ultimate reality under the name of the “dialectical universal”. In Nishida's terminology, this world was the dialectical world of “historical reality”, in which the independent “unique individuals” (namely, those that are “unmediatable”, which go on determining themselves individually) come to be mediated expressively.

However, if we regard the world of historical reality as the world of pure experience without reservation, we may fail, as Nishitani suggested, in adequately grasping the simple and grave fact that one is usually taking, as a conscious self, “the viewpoint of ‘*hunbetsu*’ [ego-centered judgment] removed from real facts”, and that “illusory falsity [kyomō 虚妄] is one grave fact here” (Nishitani 1987: 48; my translation). In other words, human beings—seized with illusory falsities and driven by desires—exert themselves in producing self-destructive weapons and commodities; in consequence, the world comes to the brink of extinction. However, such inversion of falsity and reality can be overlooked or underestimated under a veil of philosophic idealistic vision.

Nishida emphasized repeatedly the creative nature of human existence: “The historical world is the world of formation, the world of creation”; “Our true self consists in being the creative elements of the creative world”.¹⁷ Thus, to apply a

¹⁷Nishida, “*Ningenteki Sonzai*” [The Human Existence], NKZa: 9.

Whiteheadian term, the “category of the ultimate”¹⁸ in Nishida philosophy may be expressed as the “creative transformation from what-has-been-made to what-makes”. And Nishida’s emphatic portrayal of human beings as creative may be considered to derive, not to a small degree, from the fact that Nishida’s time was nothing less than the time of continual wars and crises.

Today, however, we are facing the unprecedented global crises where a “decisive termination in discontinuity” can occur instead of a dialectical “continuity of discontinuity” from “what-has-been-made” to “what-makes”. We are faced with the situation where “what-has-been-made” has turned to “what-can-destroy” par excellence, as in the form of nuclear war or environmental destruction.

Moreover, our time is the “post-Nanjing”, “post-Auschwitz”, “post-Minamata” age, haunted by a host of invisible memories of “those who have been destroyed”. Although Nietzsche rejected, more than a century ago, as “preachers of death” those who “see only one aspect of existence” and are quick to declare that “life has been refuted”! at the glance of death and disease (Nietzsche 1961: 72), the contemporary time has brought about more examples of “the refutations of man” than Nietzsche could have imagined.

Thus, in our time the question over the meaning of human existence is stretched tight between memories of the past, with its lacerating traumata, and the looming possibility of the termination of human history. This state of affairs can evoke the sorrow of life and the fear of total collapse of the environment, but it may also invoke, notwithstanding, the unfathomable mystery of human existence as a metaphysical question, for which there would be no ultimate answer. However, only by asking such a question on one’s own, and only by fostering in oneself the power which this very question engenders, shall we be able to obtain the enduring power—one may call it “negative capability”—to conceive and construct new forms of life for the co-existence of human society and nature.

6 Toward a Philosophy of Multiple-Historicity: Our Task in the Anthropocene

In his final writing, “The Logic of Place and the Religious Worldview”, Nishida made the point: “The historical world always has its problems or issues [kadai 課題] and “the true tasks [ninmu 任務] for philosophers is to grasp its problems” (NKZa 11: 441–4420). One may say that Nishida’s earnest endeavors to respond to the problems of his era by reorienting Japan’s imperialist tendencies turned out all but powerless. Certainly, such powerlessness was not only Nishida’s, and it was mostly due to the overwhelming movement of the historical reality. Apart from

¹⁸Whitehead explicates his notion of the “category of the ultimate” in *Process and Reality* as follows: “‘Creativity’ is the universal of universals characterizing ultimate matter of fact. [...] The ultimate metaphysical principle is the advance from disjunction to conjunction, creating a novel entity other than the entities given in disjunction” (Whitehead 1978: 21).

Nishida's position in his times, however, we would need to call into question the main features of Nishida's views on society as well as nation and race.

The later Nishida continued to develop his view of socio-historical reality, not to a small extent, in response to the unsparing criticisms posed particularly by Tanabe and Tosaka. Notably Nishida propounded his notion of "he" in his 1935 article, "The Self-Identity and the Continuity of the World (世界の自己同一と連続)" as follows:

To negate the conscious self, and to take the stand of the acting self—it means for me to take his stand. There must be such significance when we objectify our subjectivity; "He" is not only the principle of separation between "I" and "thou", but also the principle of objectification. We see things in a subjective-objective way in the standpoint of "he". It means for me to take his standpoint that "I" work. It is likewise that "thou" works; it means for "thou" to take his stand that "thou" work. Thus, it can be thought that "I" and "thou" interact with each other through the world of "he"; they determine each other by the mediator of "continuity of discontinuity"; they determine each other in the world of things that are subjective-objective. The world of things is the world of "he" (NKZa 8:56–57).

When sociologists come to know about Nishida's concept of "he" as shown in the quotation, many of them would be surprised at its striking similarity to the notion of "taking the attitude of the generalized other", a key concept in the social philosophy of George H. Mead (1863–1931). And what is more, in Mead as well as in Nishida, the focus of interest was not on the "mediation by generality" itself as an indispensable phase in the formation of the self, but on the dialectical relationship between such "social, typified" aspect and the "individual, creative" aspect that makes an individual a unique, creative individual.

Mead established his "social behaviorism" by developing William James' view of the dynamic, complementary relationship between the pole of "I (the subjective self)" and the pole of "me" (the objective self). The "I (the subjective self)" came to be called the "emergent self" because of its spontaneity and creativity. As for Nishida, what he tried to capture by the notion of "contradictory identity of individual determination and general determination" was a dialectical relationship between the "social, typified" aspect and the "individual, creative" aspect. And, the "unique individual (*yuiitsunaru-kobutsu*)" was the name Nishida gave to the "acting self" living the dynamics of this dialectical relationship. Due to the name of "logic of place", one might imagine Nishida philosophy as putting a one-sided emphasis on communality. According to Nishida, however, "[t]he self consists in having the possibility of breaking laws" although "such things as law and morality" must be "what faces me as a thou". Nishida's "unique individual" was no less thoroughgoing in its radicalism, at least conceptually, than Mead's "emergent self".¹⁹

¹⁹It is very noteworthy that Nishida's writing on "he" began to appear in 1934, when Mead's lectures were posthumously published under the title *Mind, Self, Society*.

Regarding Nishida's introduction of "he", Tanabe was quick to respond and criticized, in "Logic of Social Existence (1934–35)", the theoretical inadequacy he recognized in Nishida's reciprocal logic of "I and thou" even after Nishida's incorporation of the perspective of "he". However, Tanabe seems to have failed in grasping fully the coordinating function of "he" as immanent in the "I and thou" correlation because of his own commitment to seek a logic that could treat

At bottom, nonetheless, Nishida's view of "society" seems to posit, as the general principle of social life, the "dialectics of life-and-death" based on the alternative between social life and individual life. According to Mead, "[s]ociality is the capacity of being several things at once" (Mead 1980: 49). From such a view of the "multiple-self", one cannot derive, as a general principle, the "dialectics of life-and-death". Mead's formulation precludes the logic whereby Nishida declares that "to live socially is to die individually" (NKZa12 42–43). On the contrary, the plurality of social relationships is nothing but what makes it possible for individuals to weave unique textures of their own beings through the mediation of diverse aspects of socio-historical reality, while maintaining relative distance from particular relationships.²⁰

Therefore, in order to create a new philosophy of historical reality, it would be necessary, first of all, to comprehend concretely the diverse relationships between the various dimensions of human reality without underestimating their disjunctive aspects such as the rift between the viewpoint of "*humbetsu*" (the conscious self) and that of "pure experience".

In a similar vein we would also need to take a fresh look at Nishida's ultimate vision of "from what-has-been-made to what-makes". Tanabe commented in the last chapter of *Philosophy as Metanoetics*: "this very turnaround of "from ... to ..." is the crisis where one should stake the life of one's political praxis. If one expresses it by such a facile wording, it is nothing but to characterize the culturalism of its vital-artistic standpoint [*seiteki-geijututeki naru tachiba* 生の芸術的なる立場]" (Tanabe 2010b: 420). Leaving aside the adequacy of the stereotyped characterization of Nishida's standpoint as being "vital-artistic", Tanabe's critique highlights the need to explicitly thematize this very moment of "turnaround" as the place of collective deliberation and political strife over technological reorientation of the world.

As already seen above, it is nothing but those cardinal questions—engendered by wonder, sorrow, and fear—that can bring into light the principal dimensions structuring the multiplicity of historical reality.²¹ In order to understand our own time, and to conceive our future, it would be insufficient to view history as the creative self-formation of the "eternal present". Rather, it is essential for us to keep facing those cardinal questions—questions that compete with each other and call each other into question—so that we can take into consideration the "simultaneous existence of diverse time-spans" in the present age. To be concrete, what we have to consider are, for example: "repetition of routines" which bestow rhythms upon everyday life; the unrepeatability of individual existence; the "*longue durée*" of social institutions and communal memories; and the geological impacts of the

the moments of "real confrontation of mutual exclusion" (Tanabe 2010a: 27–33; cf. an editorial note on 451).

²⁰This is what Steve Odin emphasizes in *The Social Self in Zen and American Pragmatism*, a comprehensive work on the comparison between the notion of the "social self" in modern Japanese thought and that in American pragmatism (Odin 1996).

²¹Cf. Adam 1990.

Anthropocene manifested now as the climate crisis, biodiversity loss, and radiation contamination.²²

Indeed, the later Nishida highlighted that the world of everydayness is the world of misgivings where “we verge more or less on a crisis in every act” because, “in every *poiesis*, not only I change things, but also things change me” (NKZa 8: 70). In our view such realization would lead, not only to conceiving the self as always open toward multiple possibilities grounded in various places of reality,²³ but also to reformulating Nishida’s vision of the “*sekai-teki sekai* (global world)” (NKZa 12: 427) accordingly. This vision of the “global civil society”, as a “place of unifying synthesis” combining “diverse tendencies” (NKZa 8: 92), shall seek an optimal coordination of plural values that are often in competition with each other.

The modern notion of “global civil society” originates, as is well-known, mainly from the Kantian notion of “*Weltbürger*” (world citizen). However, Nishida concludes in his final writing as follows:

Kant’s morality is for citizens. Historical-formative morality must be grounded in “*higan*” [悲願 Buddha’s vow to save all beings]. There was not “*higan*” at the foundation of Western culture (Suzuki Daisetsu). I think there lies a fundamental difference between Eastern culture and Western culture (NKZa 11: 445).

While Nishida’s comprehensive remark can bring into question Western moral thinking from the ground up, it may also be taken as suggesting that we regasp the ideal of “global citizen society” as grounded in and driven by our “*higan*” to reorient our world so that we can endure and overcome somehow, together with all beings and the earth, the unprecedented crises of our times.²⁴

²² See Kazashi 2017 for the postwar Kyoto School thinkers’ engagement with the nuclear age.

²³ In this vein, it would be worthwhile to relate Nishida’s meditations to those by Alfred Schutz who incorporated James’s theory of multiple-reality and Mead’s theory of social self into his phenomenological theory of social action. In particular, although “work” and “act” are treated in their broad senses in Nishida, the aspects of “play”, individual and social, will also have to be thematized in order to bring the multiple nature of human reality fully into view.

²⁴ As mentioned in the Introduction, the world of historical reality became an axial question, or the most urgent question, not only philosophically but also politically, for members of the Kyoto School. This was true for the central figures of the school, such as TANABE Hajime (1885–1962), KŌYAMA Iwao (1905–1993), and NISHITANI Keiji (1900–1990), but it was even more true for Nishida’s Marxist-oriented students. MIKI Kiyoshi (1897–1945) and TOSAKA Jun (1900–1945), both of whom engaged head-on with the historical reality of their times and ended up dying as political prisoners just before (Tosaka) and after (Miki) the end of the World War II. Tosaka became a leading Marxist thinker and presented a straightforward critique of Nishida’s “logic of absolute nothingness”. Miki endeavored to overcome what he considered still lacking in Nishida’s “standpoint of the acting self” to address historical reality (Tosaka 1933; Akamatsu 1994). In this sense, the significance of Nishida’s philosophical engagement with the world of historical reality would not be fully appreciated without taking into consideration the various forms of development it brought out among both his followers and those who turned critical toward Nishida’s philosophy of history, who formed a unique “community of inquirers” together.

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Chapter 8

Placing Nishida Within the History of Philosophy



ŌHASHI Ryosuke

1 History of Philosophy in Distress

What place does NISHIDA Kitarō (1870–1945) occupy in the history of philosophy? This question is justified since his work, which encompasses twenty-four volumes,¹ has been engaged by many scholars, not only in Japan, but also across Europe and America for more than 70 years after his death.² In fact, one could reasonably claim that examining the importance of his work for the history of philosophy is an urgent task.

However, to fulfill this task, the concept of the “history of philosophy” must also be questioned. It cannot be regarded as self-evident, especially when it means, as is often the usual case, the “Western history of philosophy”. Nishida’s philosophy may

¹ There are two, “old” and “new”, editions of the complete works of NISHIDA Kitarō (jap: *Nishida Kitarō Zenshū*): The old one has four editions and was published in 18 volumes in 1947–53, and the second appeared in 1965/66, the third from 1978 to 1980, and the fourth in 1987–90 in 19 volumes. These four editions are designated with “NKZa” in the following, because there are no great differences among the first four editions concerning the numbering of pages and contents. The new edition in 24 volumes is designated with “NKZb” in contrast to “NKZa”, because there are many differences between the former and the latter concerning the numbering of pages and new entries of some newly found essays, correspondences and so on. “NKZb” was published between 2002–2009. All editions were printed and published by Iwanami Shoten. The citations of this paper refer to NKZa.

² See John C. Maraldo, “Nishida Kitarō”, 2005/10, in: *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/nishida-kitaro/>> ; cf. Ryosuke Ohashi, ed., *Die Philosophie der Kyōto-Schule* (Philosophy of the Kyoto-School), Freiburg, 1990, revised 3. edition with a bibliography about Nishida’s works in European languages, 2014.

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indeed have certain similarities with what is commonly defined as Western philosophy. However, his work is rooted in the philosophies of Laozi, Zhuangzi, Confucianism, and Buddhism as well. These philosophical positions are currently placed at the margins of Western philosophy. Thus, any attempt at placing Nishida's philosophy solely within the Western history of philosophy would be an affront both to his philosophy and to the standard concept of the history of philosophy.

One may argue that the concept of the history of philosophy is always in a process of becoming. In its continual development, the influence of the non-European world cannot be excluded. In this respect one could include within its fold Buddhism, Confucianism, Islam, etc. But as teachings pertaining to daily life, these "*Weltanschauungen*" do not necessarily need the term "philosophy". In his thinking, Nishida has consciously tried to adopt a Western style of doing philosophy, which can historically be regarded as the womb of modern science and universality as we know them today. Therefore, on the one hand, it is correct to find a place for Nishida in the history of Western philosophy. On the other hand, the concept of philosophy in general, as well as that of the history of philosophy, must be problematized if the spiritual traditions of the Far East are to be introduced in Western philosophy.

In his "*Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie*", Hegel rightly asked how the *history* of philosophy and *philosophy itself* should be combined with each other.³ Hegel believed he had reached the solution to this problem. But Hegel's own understanding, according to which his own philosophy was the most-accomplished stage in the development of philosophy, was contested in the post-Hegelian era.

Historians of philosophy like Eduard Erdmann,⁴ Kuno Fischer,⁵ Albert Schwegler,⁶ Eduard Zeller,⁷ and others have tried to revise Hegel's systematic understanding of philosophy. In their rather empirical interpretation, they abandoned the premise of Absolute Spirit and rightly underscored historical materiality.

³ See Hegel 1959: 35 f.

⁴ Edmann 1896 (1865): 67. It would suffice to point out that Erdmann, on the one hand, basically inherits Hegel's "history of philosophy". On the other hand, however, he endeavors to take a further step regarding description and historic materials. He compares himself with a landscape painter (see *ibid.*, VII), and in this respect takes himself to be a historian rather than a philosopher like Hegel.

⁵ Fischer 1897 (1852–77). Fischer remarks that the concept of the "history of philosophy" is generally not quite easy to understand and asks how it can be a "science". However, in the end he follows the view of Hegel (see Fischer 1897: 8).

⁶ Schwegler 1882 (1859).

⁷ Zeller 1919 (1844–52). With Schwegler, Zeller criticized the a priori constitution in the Hegelian history of philosophy and proposes a history of philosophy "from below" 1919 (1844–52): 8 f. This can be regarded as an evidence of his empiristic attitude and a sign of the tendency of a post-Hegelian epoch.

Hegel had also revised his lecture notes on the philosophy of history and aesthetics several times, but he remained committed to his systematic approach. Meanwhile, the historians above rejected Hegel's notion of Absolute Spirit and denied the inner relation between philosophy itself and the history of philosophy. Neither Fischer's nor Schweigler's attempts at understanding the history of philosophy as the process of the self-cognition of the human spirit, nor Ueberweg's attempt at reducing it to "philological research", nor Windelband's casting it as "the history of problems", could offer a new and persuasive perspective. Windelband and Ueberweg's effort to understand the idea of history in terms of positive science brought about no essential change within the field.⁸ Other theories had their limitations as well. For example, Frederick Copleston's and Kurt Schilling's descriptions, which were based on profound historical knowledge, were poor in their conception of history itself.⁹ Attempting to find a way out of this impasse, lexical descriptions of individual philosophical thoughts were offered without an overarching system.¹⁰ Thus, the history of philosophy became an assorted line-up of different philosophical thoughts, which did not make assertions about the necessity of their development. The historical development of philosophy could no longer highlight its own necessity, neither in terms of its content nor in terms of its sociohistorical context.

Within the scope of this paper, the exact relation between philosophy and the history of philosophy cannot be dealt with directly. Nevertheless, this relation will be problematized indirectly when the "outside", "inside", and "deep ground" of the history of philosophy are considered. Nishida's philosophy has its roots partly "outside" of philosophy, but it also can be said to step "inside" of it, going further into its "deep ground". If the European account of the history of philosophy was developed partly by introducing certain non-European spiritual elements, then Nishida's inclusion within this account reveals a new stage since his work also includes some elements hitherto unknown in this history of philosophy.

⁸As for Ueberweg see Ueberweg 1862–66. His work was supplemented in three (R. Reicke, fourth edition, M. Heinz, 5th–ninth edition, K. Praechter, 10th–12th edition). In the last edition, it is emphasized that the history of philosophy is a discipline of the "philological and historical science" (see Ueberweg 1926:6). In Windelband's opinion, the history of philosophy should be the "history of the problems" of philosophy; see Windelband 1892: §3–5. The question as to whether he succeeded in developing this opinion in his *Geschichte der neueren Philosophie* (History of the New Philosophy) should be left open (see Windelband 1878–80).

⁹The catholic priest Frederick Copleston declares in his book *History of Philosophy* (see Copleston 1946:6) that he takes the scholastic philosophy as the criterion of his reflection. Kurt Schilling attempts in *Geschichte der Philosophie* (History of Philosophy) to develop a systematic history of philosophy (see Schilling 1951–53). In his analysis of human frailty, he leans on Dilthey and Heidegger to underscore the limitedness and historicity of human beings (see Schilling 1951–53). Nevertheless, it can be asked whether it could be right to attribute systematicity to Heidegger's thought since Heidegger took "system" to be a metaphysical term, which he sought to overcome.

¹⁰An example in the positive sense is *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie* (Historical Dictionary of Philosophy) (see Ritter 1971–2005). His old forerunner is to be found, of course, in the nineteenth century (see Noak 1879). The introduction still attempts to describe the overview of the history of philosophy as a whole (see Noak 1879: X – XX).

2 From “Outside” of the History of Philosophy into its “Inside”

More than 300 Western philosophers and Eastern sages are cited in Nishida’s complete works. This fact alone indicates that Nishida’s philosophy contains all philosophical themes commonly found in European and North American philosophy. In addition, its references to Buddhism, Confucianism, Daoism, Zhuangzi, etc. point to its roots “outside” of philosophy. Nishida brought what was marginal in philosophy into its core. This important move leads us to turn to the character of “knowing”.

If philosophy is literally taken to mean “philo-sophia”, the search (*philo-*) for knowing” (*sophia*), the philosophical way of knowing is philosophy in its own right. The fundamental and supreme philosophical knowing in Greek philosophy was that of “being”, the Greek “*on*”. “Ontology” in form of the “first philosophy” (read: metaphysics) was regarded as the supreme discipline. Philosophy in the nineteenth century intended to discard this metaphysical bent and acquire a transcendental or epistemic method, which would allow one to study the preconditions of human cognition itself. In both ancient and modern philosophy, the fundamental presumption was that “knowing” is an achievement of a solitary “I”, the “I-think” that accompanies every act of knowing.¹¹ But is this “I-think” a thoroughly rational achievement? Many philosophers had long noticed that rational knowledge was based on a will or instinct, which did not operate completely rationally. Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* begins, for example, with the sentence: “All people intend to know following their nature”. This will, as the dark ground of knowing, was propounded by the voluntaristic direction of Western philosophy (as in Schopenhauer or Nietzsche). But compared to the perspectives found in the quasi-philosophical and religious teachings of the East, it must be said that they, too, failed to adequately clarify its essence.

For example, the teachings of Laozi, Zhuangzi, Confucius, or Buddha have remarkable similarities. All of them believe that in the ultimate stage of knowing, the “I” and/or the instinctive will are negated. Thus, knowing itself acquires the character of an “I-less” knowing; it becomes a “non-knowing”. This is not to be confused with Socrates’ claim that he knows that he does *not yet* know certain things. He did not mean that the “idea” of anything cannot ever be known. In contrast, Eastern philosophies “annihilate” knowledge at the end. Nothing is left at the end of the process of knowing. The sayings of Laozi, “Stop the sagacity, abandon wisdom” (絶聖棄智 *zessei kichi*) or “Stop learning, and there will be no anxiety” (絶学無憂 *zetsugaku muyū*),¹² ultimately negate Socratic wisdom. Unlike Socrates, these philosophies do not regard knowing as the last goal of their intellectual effort. Rather, they suggest that the last stage of knowing is “non-knowing”.

¹¹ See Kant 1787: B 132.

¹² See Laozi (老子) 2009, chap. 62 and 64 (orig. 19 and 20). I would translate the word “絶 *zetsu*” not with “separate (trennen)”, but with “annihilate (zunichte machen)”, also in case of the expression “絶学 *zetsugaku*”.

Zhuangzi describes dreaming that he was a butterfly. After awakening and becoming himself, again, he ponders the nature of the dream. He states that he “does not know” if he, Zhuangzi, became a butterfly in his dream, or if he was the butterfly dreaming that he was Zhuangzi.¹³ Zhuangzi’s non-knowing is not an unsatisfied state of knowing; rather, it is the view that this real world is a kind of dream. This dream cannot be grasped in the form of intellectual knowledge, even if this knowledge were to be exact. But Zhuangzi was not a skeptic. He was sure of this world as a dream and of his experience of the non-knowing. In spite of all his differences with Zhuangzi regarding political philosophy, the moralistic and realist thinker, Confucius, also affirms a kind of “non-knowing”. In answering a question about how he thinks about life “after death”, he answered: “I do not know yet about life, not to mention about death”.¹⁴ This “non-knowing” is radically deepened and spiritualized in Buddhism, which developed a detailed theory of cognition and consciousness.¹⁵ Without going into the details of Mahayana Buddhist thought, it will suffice to point out the fundamental phrase of Mahayana-Buddhism: “A phenomenon is empty, and at the same time emptiness is the phenomenon”.¹⁶ The sagacity of *prajñā* (般若) is to be “practiced” (行), and it cannot be understood merely through the intellect. Knowing must be undone, or “un-known”, in this praxis.

Nishida’s “knowing” resembles the non-knowing of Laozi, Zhuangzi, Confucius, and Buddhism. The key concept of *An Inquiry into the Good* (*Zen no Kenkyū*, 1911)¹⁷ is pure experience, which means direct experience before the separation into subject and object (a separation on the basis of which a judgement is formed). Knowing formulates itself as a judgement. But as a subject-object unity, pure experience takes place before a judgement. It, thus, does not entail a subjective consciousness of some objective matter. It is, one could say, the knowing of *nothingness*. The last stage in its development is called “intellectual intuition”, an idea taken from German Idealism. This stage is, for Nishida, nothing but the “deepened and widened pure experience”.¹⁸ It is the state in which the usual intelligence (*Verstand*) becomes aware of its own origin, which does not form any judgement.

The typical example of this pure experience could be found in the practice of “zazen” (sitting-meditation of Zen Buddhism). In “Zen”, the non-knowing does not remain an intellectual thinking, but becomes a concrete experience of life. In the collection of “Kōan” (the exercise in form of “question and response”) entitled

¹³ See Zhuangzi (莊子), chap. II: “On the equality of things” (齊物論篇 *seibutsuron-hen*), 14 (see Zhuangzi 1998: 86).

¹⁴ Lúnyü (論語) 2008: 332 f.

¹⁵ See above all the teaching of Yogācāra-School, whose flowering time was the fourth century. See Sutton 1991.

¹⁶ The well-known formula in the Heart-Sutra (*Prajñā-pāramitā-hrdaya*, 般若心經) in the Chinese translation: 色即是空空即是色 *shiki soku ze ku ku soku ze shiki*.

¹⁷ As for the German translation see Pörtner 1989.

¹⁸ Pörtner 1989: 65; NKZa 1:42.

“*Bi-Yän-Lu*” (碧巖錄) the first kôan-question is taken from the conversation between the Chinese emperor Butei (chin.: Liang Wu Di, 武帝) of Liang (梁) Dynasty and the first Patriarch of Zen Buddhism, Dharma (達磨). The emperor, who understood himself as a patron and connoisseur of Buddhism, asked Dharma: “Who is sitting in front of me”? Dharma answered: “I don’t know”.¹⁹ The ultimate sense and the content of this “I don’t know”, uttered by Dharama, is an expression of *his* buddha-nature, and this answer is quoted today as a kôan-question in the praxis of the Rinzai school of Zen in Japan.

In Western philosophy, there are some examples of a positive non-knowing close to the Eastern forms. The “*docta ignorantia*” of Cusanus says that although the subordinated reason (*ratio*) knows nothing about the infiniteness of God, the non-knowing of the higher reason (*intellectus*) is awakened.²⁰ But even in this case, one element of the non-knowing is not expressed, namely the praxis with the body. The answer of Dharma was the expression of his whole existence, which was informed by having practiced zazen for 6 years alone on a mountain.

As its own type of non-knowing resembling these various Eastern philosophies, Nishida’s “pure experience” gives us a clue as to how his philosophy should be placed within the history of philosophy. As mentioned above, knowing has always had an affirmative “I-character” in mainstream Western philosophy. The “I” intends to comprehend the object existing before him. In so doing, the thing’s existence is dominated by the knowing subject. An object is that which is objectified. It is not that which is as it is. If there is a philosophy which negates this I-character at the beginning and the end, and experiences the thing as it is, this philosophy must have a specific place in the history of philosophy. For this philosophy, the act of knowing is always the main element.

Nishida’s philosophy is, so long as it has the character of non-knowing in the Far Eastern sense, alien to the history of philosophy. However, this alien philosophy has stepped “inside” this history from the “outside”. This should be explained further.

3 The Situation of the History of Philosophy in 1911

Nishida’s first work, *An Inquiry into the Good*, was published in 1911.²¹ The situation of the history of philosophy at that time can be distinguished by four streams. One of them was New Kantianism. Emil Lask’s book, *Die Logik der Philosophie und die Kategorienlehre*, came out in 1911 and was followed in the next year with his book *Lehre vom Urteil*. If he, a disciple of Heinrich Rickert, were not killed in action in World War I, New Kantianism would have had a further and new life. The work of Hermann Cohen *Ästhetik des reinen Gefühls* also appeared in 1912 as the

¹⁹ As for the German Translation see Gundert 1980.

²⁰ See Nicolai de Cusa 1979:1: “Et tanto quis doctior erit, quanto se sciverit magis ignorantem”.

²¹ As for the English translation see Nishida 1990.

completion of his trilogy: *Logik der reinen Erkenntnis* (1902) and *Ethik des reinen Willens* (1904).

A second important stream of philosophy around 1911 is the “philosophy of life”. In this year, the posthumous manuscripts of William James were published under the title *Some Problems of Philosophy*. James, the founder of pragmatism, died in 1910. While New Kantianism is keen on the philosophical explanation of the ground of natural sciences, philosophy of life tries to discover life as an area of research which cannot be reduced to the fields of the natural sciences. The “pure experience”, which William James developed in his “radical empiricism”, was a forerunner of the “pure experience” of Nishida. Philosophy of life formed no school in a narrow sense, but many of its elements could be found in France at that time. Henri Bergson’s book *L’évolution créatrice* appeared in 1907. If seen from today’s perspective, the influence of this philosophical stream on the philosophy of the twentieth century was profounder than that of New Kantianism, which was soon forgotten. In Nishida’s *An Inquiry into the Good*, the name Henri Bergson is found only once. But in his short essay “On French Philosophy” (“*Furansu tetsugaku ni suite no kansō*”), Nishida reminiscences as follows:

As I came to Kyoto, I had a deep sympathy with Bergson. As I noticed his name for the first time, I was in the fourth class of High School [in the sense of the educational system before the World War II, corresponding approximately to the “studium generale” at a university in Japan today]. At that time, the name Bergson was quite unknown among the intellectuals, and I also did not know who he was. Since I was engaged at that time in the thoughts of pure experience, I paid notice to the title of his book: *Sur les données immédiates de la conscience*.²²

This book was published in 1899, but Bergson’s later work was published, as is said above, 4 years after Nishida’s *An Inquiry into the Good*.

Another representative of the philosophy of life, Wilhelm Dilthey, had spoken of his understanding of this philosophy only in his lectures. Thus, his philosophical view of life became known only after the publication of his complete works.²³ The first volume appeared in 1914. Heinrich Rickert, a representative of New Kantianism, criticized this work. His criticism hit one weak point of the philosophy of life: the lack of the stringency regarding methodological reflections.²⁴ But in spite of this criticism, Rickert himself could not give any new impulse to further philosophical thinking. The new impulse came from Husserl’s phenomenology, which, on the one hand, fulfilled a stringent “scientific” method; but, on the other hand, it also possessed concrete interests in “life”. Also, Husserl’s *Philosophie als strenge Wissenschaft* appeared in 1911, the same year as *An Inquiry into the Good*. One of his most influential works, *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie* came out in 1913, 2 years after *An Inquiry into the Good*. This third stream, which already began with Brentano, but was developed in a decisive

²²NKZa 12: 128.

²³Dilthey’s philosophy of the life can be mainly found in Dilthey 1924 vol. 5 as well as in Dilthey 1927 vol. 7.

²⁴See Rickert 1920.

way by Husserl, was further developed through Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty and continues its influence today in various directions.

Husserl's phenomenological method aimed for stringency, but it was not as "exact" as the natural sciences. Around 1911, a fourth stream of philosophy took the mathematical sciences as its model. The foundation for this direction was provided by the three volumes of *Principia Mathematica*, compiled by Alfred North Whitehead and Bertrand Russell, and published in 1910, 1912 and 1913. They strove to study the logical premises of mathematics as a problem of logic, and to reconstruct traditional logic mathematically. They are considered a source of analytic philosophy, which developed within the logical positivism of the Vienna School, and spread further to the United States.

This short overview shows that the years shortly before and after 1911 separated the philosophy of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Perhaps the publication of *An Inquiry into the Good* in this very time period was not a mere accident. As a whole, this period marked a turning point in the cultural history of the modern age. In this regard, it also should be remembered that in the world of art almost all new movements in the twentieth century appeared during this period: Fauvism (1905), Futurism (1909), der Blaue Reiter (1911), Cubism (1908–1918), Dadaism, etc. The turning point in modern art and in contemporary philosophy is almost simultaneous. That was the beginning of modernism. It also heralded in the era in which Japan began to build its own modern time. Through the war against China (1894/5) and Russia (1904/5), Japan strove to catch up with developed Western countries and to present itself as the first non-European military power for colonialism in Asia. This path ended in 1945 with the capitulation at the end of World War II, the year in which Nishida died.

But let us go back to the philosophical situation around 1911. With the uncommon concept of pure experience, Nishida's philosophy sprang up from the "outside" and made its way into the "inside" of twentieth century philosophy. In the following section, let us follow the development of this philosophy through its confrontation and engagement with Western philosophy.

4 Philosophical Development Between 1911 and 1945

Nishida's essay, "On French philosophy", closes with the following remarks:

Though I am not informed about the situation in the beginning of the Meiji-era, one could say that until about the twentieth year of the Meiji era, the influence of the English philosophy was perceptible. After the twentieth year, the influence of German philosophy took over. I do not doubt the excellence of German philosophy, but as is said above, French philosophy has its own peculiarity which is not to be found in German philosophy. Often, an intuitive approach has more merit than one with conceptual leanings but is poor in content. It seems to me that Greek philosophy possesses a deep speculative conceptuality as

well as aesthetic, artistic and intuitive clarity. Could we not say that the Germans have taken over the former and the French the latter?²⁵

In this passage, Nishida's own acceptance of Western philosophy is obvious. Nishida's *An Inquiry into the Good* sought to build up a system of pure experience which had both the intuitive character of French philosophy and the conceptuality found in speculative German philosophy. The influence of English utilitarianism is scarcely to be found in this work. *An Inquiry into the Good* sought to unite the intuitive and reflective elements of philosophy, but Nishida was not quite satisfied with the result. The standpoint of pure experience had some difficulties. It remained unclear if and how "reflection" should go through the division in subject and object without losing the immediateness of pure experience. If pure experience should be reflected upon, it would remain outside of pure experience in which subject and object are not separated. The attempt to explain all of what *is* from the standpoint of the pure experience, as Nishida intended, involves internal conflict. Just as the relation between intuitive and reflection was unresolved, the question of how the separation, or contrast, between subject and object comes to be, remained unclear. Nishida often used the term "grade of difference" to explain how pure experience differentiates itself from the various modes of the world, but he did not fully succeed in explaining this.²⁶

Nishida struggled to solve this problem. A result of his struggle was his collected papers, *Intuition and Reflection in Self-awareness* (*Jikaku ni okeru chokkan to hansei*), which appeared in 1916.²⁷ According to Nishida, this book was "a document of desperate combat".²⁸ Here, the influence of German philosophy is obvious. The topics which were not dealt with in *An Inquiry into the Good*, but much discussed in New Kantianism (like "the origin of consciousness", "value and being", "sense and fact", "thinking and reality", etc.) are all found in this second work. It is important to point out that this work was not a duplication of the philosophy of New Kantianism, but a philosophical development of "self-awareness" (*jikaku*, 自覚). The original Japanese term is not easy to translate fully.²⁹ Nishida identified it sometimes with Fichte's "*Tathandlung*" (literally: "deed-action"), and sometimes with Hegel's "self-consciousness". He also tried to find help in some thoughts of New Kantianism. His engagement in this regard can be found throughout *Intuition and Reflection in Self-awareness*. For example, Nishida drew upon Hermann Cohen's notion of the "principle of infinitesimal". Nishida borrowed this principle, like

²⁵ NKZa, 12: 130.

²⁶ This criticism was expressed at first by TAKAHASHI Satomi. See Takahashi 1973: 53. Nishida's answer to this criticism is found in NKZa 1: 299–304.

²⁷ See NKZa 2.

²⁸ This is the expression of Nishida himself. See NKZa 2: 11.

²⁹ The Japanese word translated here as "self-awareness" could also be translated as "self-awakening" or "self-consciousness". The word is used also for religious experience. In the philosophy of the Kyoto school, the word also has an ethico-moral sense.

Cohen, from mathematics, in order to solve the new Kantian dualism of intuition and intellect, or Shall (*Sollen*) and Being (*Sein*).³⁰ With the image of the infinitesimal calculation, one tried to unify the two divided fields at the “boundary” between them. Nishida abided by the standpoint of pure experience in his metaphysical understanding of this boundary. He attempted to grasp the idea of the “boundary” in a “spiritualized” sense of pure experience, that is, from the viewpoint of the absolute will. As is known, this absolute will was Fichte’s view, which Nishida at that time regarded as a possible expression of his own view. Nishida writes:

Seen from the system of thinking, the will is the immeasurable infinite. If one wants to grasp it in a rational way, one had to regard it as something which is incidental for thinking. But one cannot reflect on the will; it transcends reflection in order to enable the reflection. Rather: reflection itself is a kind of will.³¹

Nishida thought that reflection can be integrated into the philosophy of pure experience only through the standpoint of this will. Does this mean that Nishida’s philosophy retreats into the metaphysics of German Idealism?

To address this question, it is important to remember the fourth stream mentioned above: the new realism of logical positivism. In the same year as *An Inquiry into the Good*, Nishida wrote the article “The logical and mathematical understanding”. This article, which tried to represent the basic identity of the logic and mathematics, did not lean upon logical positivism but on Heinrich Rickert. Logical positivism did not appeal to Nishida. In an essay “Russell as a scholar”, Nishida expressed his criticism: “As for the mathematical philosophy of Mr. Russell, his thoughts and its fundament may be deeper and bigger”.³² This wish suggests his own direction of thinking, in which “self-awareness” as the unity of intuition and reflection, is to be realized not in the way of mathematico-theoretical logic, but as a religious experience.

Setting aside Nishida’s estimation of Russell, the historical influence of logical positivism on the contemporary situation cannot be ignored. This stream radically rejects “metaphysics”. The post-Hegelian, anti-metaphysical tendency of philosophy is represented quite starkly by the school of logical positivism, which stood for “positive experience”. In this regard, it is understandable that the psychologistic philosophy of Wilhelm Wundt could occupy a section of the philosophical world at that time.³³ Like his contemporaries, Nishida chose to reject (or only accept with

³⁰For the concept of the “boundary” and the principle of the infinitesimal calculation see also Cohen 1883. Main publication “*Das Princip der Infinitesimal Methode und seine Geschichte*” (The Principle of the Infinitesimal Method and its History). Cohen describes the essential points as well as the historical background of this principle, and says that the “boundary” is proposed instead of the “intuition-evidence” (see Cohen 1883:31).

³¹NKZa 2: 275.

³²This essay of Nishida’s was discovered by the author accidentally and is now printed in NKZb 11: 132–135.

³³See Wundt 1889; Wundt 1913. The latter publication distinguishes between philosophical and psychological reflection but testifies more expressively the development of positive science. This was to be seen during the years between the times of the publication of these two books (see Heidegger GA 21: §6, §7, 34–53).

reservations) those metaphysical theses which were not corroborated by experience. But Nishida's philosophy differs from logical positivism in that it strives to grasp the real world not as an "object", but as something unseparated from our own "self", as something in which this self belongs. The self-awareness of this self was the last topic of this philosophy.

The fundamental intuition, which should lead to this self-awareness, overlaps with the egoless "non-knowing" found in Zen Buddhist self-awareness. The conclusion could be briefly summarized as follows: This "self" is experienced as "absolute nothingness" because it is never a being which can be objectified. This "nothingness" is the subject of the philosophy of Nishida and the Kyoto school. The experience of this nothingness cannot easily be included in philosophical thinking, although it was handed down and proved in the Far Eastern spiritual traditions in various ways since ancient times. However, this nothingness can be described as something which drives philosophical thinking. It can articulate itself within this thinking, too. Nishida found a clue for this in Greek philosophy. Nishida's view possesses "deep speculative conceptuality as well as aesthetic, artistic and intuitive clarity".

In the collected papers, *From That Which Acts to That Which Sees (Hataraku mono kara miru mono e)*, which were published in 1927, Nishida began to think about "place (*basho*)". The word "place" became the fundamental term for Nishida, who acquired it in reversing the definition of "*ousia*" formed by Aristotle: "[*ousia* is] that which remains subject without becoming predicate".³⁴ In Nishida's sense, place should be that which "remains a predicate without becoming a subject". Because it cannot be set as the subject of a sentence, it is no object; it is, therefore, the "place of nothingness". Nishida's thoughts about place were informed both by Aristotle's "*ousia*" and Plato's "*chōrā*" ("place") in the dialogue *Timaeus*.³⁵

A proper presentation of Nishida's thought about place would require more discussion than can be given in the present paper.³⁶ Only one suggestion must suffice: Greek philosophy was a decisive touchstone for placing Nishida's philosophy in the history of philosophy. Through Greek philosophy, he finds a common ground with European philosophy. It also allowed him to find a way to develop a philosophical account of self-awareness without losing the immediateness of pure experience.

The "inside" and "outside" position, which Nishida's philosophy takes in the European philosophical tradition, is not quite an exception. Another parallel phenomenon in the philosophy of the twentieth century can be pointed out here. In 1927, both Nishida's collected papers, *From That Which Acts to That Which Sees*, and Heidegger's *Being and Time (Sein und Zeit)* were published. The latter was an epochal exposition of the question of Being from *within* Western metaphysics into

³⁴ See NKZa 4: 95, 112, 186 f. This definition of the "individual", which Nishida formulates for the substance, is not to be found with the same formula in Aristotelian texts. As for a similar formulation see Meth. V 1917b13–14; b23–24.

³⁵ See NKZa 4: 153, 209. In Plato's *Timaeus*, the following passages deal with "place" (*chōrā*): see Tim. 48e4, 49a5–6, 50d3, 52a8, 52b1, f.

³⁶ See Ōhashi 1995 which attempts to present and explain the "thought of place".

its deep ground, whose depth can be regarded as “outside” of metaphysics. Both Heidegger and Nishida embarked upon a new philosophical enterprise.

After his thoughts on “place”, Nishida began to develop his own ideas without borrowing and adapting concepts found in Western philosophy. His philosophy, which came from the margins of the history of philosophy, began to build a place within this history.

Naturally, Nishida’s philosophy reflects, not only the situation of the history of philosophy, but that of modern Japanese history as well. One example can be found in the philosophical confrontation of philosophers with Marxism, which posed social and political questions and attracted the young generation. Nishida’s philosophy of self-awareness, which was deepened through the spiritual inwardness of individuals and, therefore, had a religious connotation, did not suffice in the face of social, political, and historical problems. His 1933 collected papers, *Fundamental Problems of Philosophy (Tetsugaku no konpon mondai)* became a further turning point in his late philosophy. In this work, a turn can be observed from seeing the world in light of individual self-awareness, to seeing the world “from the world itself”. Here, self-awareness was conceived with a place-logic as the “self-determination of the world”, while retaining the essential, immediate experience of life.³⁷

This turn was motivated partly because of a severe criticism of TANABE Hajime, a colleague and philosophical rival. Tanabe, who also confronted Marxism philosophically, developed the “logic of species”. As a logical category, Tanabe’s “species” corresponded to the “particular” (*das Besondere*) as distinguished from the “general” (*das Allgemeine*) and the “individual” (*das Einzelne*). Regarding the structure of the real world, species meant the “folk”, which should mediate between individuals (particular beings) and the state (the universal being). Tanabe criticized Nishida’s philosophy because it was said to lack the “species” perspective, which bound individuals to the state. On this count, Tanabe claimed that Nishida’s intuition may be genuine and deep, but without a logical foundation.³⁸

In its later period, Nishida’s philosophy developed partly in confrontation with Tanabe’s criticism; and Tanabe, another prominent figure of the Kyoto school, went on to develop the thought of absolute nothingness in his own way. During this time, Nishida developed his “place-logic” further. His last article, entitled “On my logic”, was interrupted by his sudden death 2 months before the end of World War II.

³⁷In Ōhashi 1995 the author attempted to elucidate this “turn” as the “place-logical turn” and compared it with the so-called “linguistic turn” in linguistic philosophy, especially in the United States.

³⁸see Tanabe 1963–64 vol 7. Nishida did not respond to this criticism. But there is an article of his, “The problem of the genesis of the species” (*Shu no seisei-hatten no mondai*), which is obviously related to the argument made by Tanabe against Nishida. See NKZa 8: 500–540.

5 From the “Inside” to the “Deep Ground” of the History of Philosophy

Like all influential philosophies, Nishida’s philosophy is contingent. This contingency makes the historical place of his philosophy visible. To see this place, we followed the development of Nishida’s understanding of “self-awareness” in the 1930’s and the first half of the 1940’s.

The fundamental formula which Nishida often used for self-awareness was: “The self sees the self in the self”.³⁹ Although this formula was apt for capturing individual self-awareness, it was not quite sufficient for his philosophy after his further “turn” mentioned above, in which the world should be seen from the standpoint of the world itself, and not from the standpoint of an individual “I”. Thus, Nishida began to adopt another formula: “The world becomes aware of itself”, or “The world knows itself”.⁴⁰

This “self-awareness of the world” should not be mystified because it must be realized by a direct experience. Thus, Nishida often applied the formula “immanent transcendence”, which could be clarified as follows: “In the deep ground of Me exists You, and in the deep ground of You, I exist. I go to You through the deep ground in Me, and You come to Me through the deep ground in You”.⁴¹ Although this formula continues to show individual self-awareness according to which I come to myself only through my relation with others, the influence of Martin Buber’s “*I and Thou*”⁴² is obvious. But this was not Nishida’s final position. If, through immanent transcendence, not only You (as the other in the second person), but also numerous He’s and She’s (in the third person, they) are caught sight of, immanent transcendence opens a world in which numerous others exist. Individuals and their activities are now understood as the “self-determination of the world”, and no longer from the perspective of individual subjects.

From the observations above, it is clear that Nishida’s philosophy has many aspects in common with contemporary philosophy, as represented by the philosophy of life, phenomenology, existential philosophy, etc. But through this comparative sketch, Nishida’s own position becomes visible, too. As was said, Nishida’s philosophy in the 1930s and the first half of the 1940s was designated as the philosophy of “absolute nothingness”. This “nothingness” could already be glimpsed in the “non-knowing” of pure experience, which characterizes Nishida’s position.

The fundamental character of philosophy since Aristotle was the science of the “*on*” (being)—ontology—which is the first philosophy according to him. The question of the highest being—God—has been the fundamental subject of Western

³⁹ See NKZa, 5: 433. This formula is used by Nishida not only here but also on other occasions.

⁴⁰ NKZa 10: 559.

⁴¹ As for the translation of Nishida’s, *watashi to nanji* see Nishida 1999: 178 f.

⁴² See Buber 1983 (1923).

metaphysics. In the tradition of this metaphysics as ontology, “nothingness” was sometimes envisaged like lightning (for example in German mysticism). It was not a continuous topic in ontology as the philosophy of “being”. Perhaps the reason that philosophy was developed as “ontology” lies in the Indo-German language. The structure of the sentence requires from the beginning that all things to be expressed should be made the subject of a sentence, that is, as an object. The basic predicate of a sentence is a copula, the “be-saying” (*Ist-sagen*).

The form of asking a question in Greek, “*ti estin*” (what is it?), was fundamental for Socrates, who sought the essence of a phenomenon—goodness for good things, beauty for beautiful things, virtue for virtuous things, etc. With the form of questioning, “*ti estin*”, the perspective of the essence “what” is given. The “what” (“*ti*”), as the “essence”, is conceived as the “idea”, that which is “seen” with the eye of the soul. In this European language, which forms the base for Platonic idealism, “being” is always given as the predicable. In this way of thinking, only the predicable is recognized as that which *is*. Parmenides’ thesis, “thinking and being are the same”,⁴³ can be taken as a Presocratic expression of Platonic idealism. In this tradition of “on-tology”, “nothingness” was not taken to be worthy of reflection precisely because it disappears in the perspective of “is-saying”. To know about “nothingness”, means to know nothing, and the knowing in this case is a negative “non-knowing”. This means that the philosophy of nothingness is nothing but a non-philosophy in a negative sense.

However, Nishida’s thoughts about the “place of nothingness”, which were drawn out through reversing the Aristotelian formula of “*ousía*”, also reversed the Platonic-idealistic way of thinking “being”. This thought of “nothingness” was not a solo attempt or an exceptional case in the philosophy of the twentieth century. Nietzsche’s philosophy of nihilism in the end of the nineteenth century, Max Scheler’s thoughts about “absolute nothingness”,⁴⁴ Heidegger’s nihilism as the thought of being in an epochal dimension, were, of course, not the same as Nishida’s thought of the “absolute nothingness”. But they are more or less comparable to it. If “nothingness” is declared as the deep ground of “being” (as was thought by the young Hegel in his work on difference,⁴⁵ and by Schelling with his thought of the “*Ungrund*” in the book on freedom),⁴⁶ one may say that Nishida’s philosophy of absolute nothingness came from “outside” of philosophy into its “inside”. It founds its place in this history and went into its “deep ground”. This philosophy was not a solo attempt; in a certain way, he was accompanied by several of his European and American contemporaries. In this deep ground of philosophy, rethinking the range and meaning of the history of philosophy are inevitable. With this re-thinking, Nishida’s philosophy and the entire non-European intercultural thought perspective could be explored in a new dialogue.

⁴³ See Diels/Kranz 1964: 231 (Parmenides Fr. 28 B 5): “*τὸ γὰρ αὐτὸ νοεῖν ἐστὶν τε καὶ εἶναι*”, Diels/Kranz, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, vol. 1, Zürich / Berlin 1964, 231, Fr. 28 B 5.

⁴⁴ See Scheler 1976: 34 f.

⁴⁵ See Hegel 1970: 16 f.

⁴⁶ See Schelling 1860: 408 f.

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Chapter 9

The Place and Significance of Nishida's Philosophy in Europe and North America



John C. MARALDO

1 Introduction: Frames for Presenting Nishida's Philosophy

We can sketch the place that Nishida's philosophy has taken in the history of thought by describing the ways that its interpreters and translators have framed it. These frames have tended to define its significance for philosophy worldwide, because they have served as a means to relate Nishida to other philosophers and movements and thus to contextualize his thought and often give it meaning beyond his intentions. In surveying the literature on Nishida's philosophy in European languages, five such frames, more overlapping than discrete, are discernible. They assume, plausibly enough I think, that Nishida's philosophy can be identified with his person, and so we can portray the five frames simply by referring to the name *Nishida*. In the end I will suggest that the significance of his philosophy for the future—the possibilities it can open to philosophical thinking to come—will depend on expanding and even breaking out of these defining, confining, and overlapping frames.

Nishida's name first became known outside Japan in the Germany of the 1920s, when a number of Japanese philosophers, including former students like MIKI Kiyoshi and colleagues like TANABE Hajime, studied with Rickert, Husserl and Heidegger and presumably reported something of Nishida's thought to the German professors. In the absence of translations, they had no access to his writings, and could at best take note of his reputation as an original thinker in Japan.

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1.1 *Frame 1: Japan's First (Modern) Philosopher*

The young Japanese philosophers in Europe in the 1920s followed in the footsteps of NISHI Amane, who had gone to the Netherlands half a century before. Nishi returned to Japan, helped inaugurate the Meiji Era (1868–1912) and wrote books about jurisprudence and *tetsugaku*, the term he coined for *philosophy*, the “Western” discipline he deemed sufficiently different from Asian traditions to deserve a new name. *Tetsugaku*, in the sense of the study of the thinkers of Europe and European America, became a major field in the academies of Japan, chiefly Tokyo and Kyoto Imperial Universities. This discipline, dependent upon facility in European languages and translations that transformed the Japanese language, enabled the generation of the Japanese travelers to study in Germany and France alongside European colleagues and fellow students. The news they brought of Nishida proclaimed him as Japan’s first original philosopher, the first to create something new out of the “Western” import, so new that it deserved a name of its own, *Nishida-tetsugaku*, “Nishida-philosophy”.¹ Later scholars toned down this accolade by noting the pioneering achievements of earlier Meiji-era philosophers and recognizing still earlier Japanese intellectual traditions as “philosophy”. That recognition has come largely at the urging of European and North American scholars. But early on, in the 1930s and 40s, European translators like Robert Schinzinger presented Nishida as *the* representative philosopher of Japan, an estimation that has continued to frame presentations of Nishida, even where the description is qualified as Japan’s foremost *modern* philosopher.²

The unequaled amount of studies and translations of Nishida’s philosophy, and his reputation outside Japan as well as inside its borders, would seem to justify this accolade. Yet “Nishida as Japan’s first or foremost (modern) philosopher” is a frame that sets two boundaries that have become questionable.

First it sets a historical boundary on two ends, past and future. If Nishida opened Japan to the possibility of philosophizing in a new way, his reputation as the first original and most representative *Japanese* philosopher implied a double closure. It excluded past, that is, pre-modern or pre-Meiji-era Japanese (and East Asian) thought from the title of philosophy strictly speaking, and it bound later

¹* This chapter was previously published in John C. Maraldo, *Japanese Philosophy in the Making I: Crossing Paths with Nishida* (Nagoya: Chisokudō Publications, 2017), 103–22. Reprinted with permission.

Heisig, Kasulis & Maraldo 2011: 573–575 documents this reputation, propagated first by Takahashi Satomi in 1912.

²To give but a small sample, “Japan’s foremost modern philosopher” was David Dilworth’s depiction (Nishida 1970:vii), and it was repeated in a brochure announcing the third edition of Nishida’s Complete Works (NKZ), edited by his disciple Shimomura Toratarō in 1987. Robert Wargo (2005: 1) calls Nishida “the best known and most influential philosopher that Japan has produced in the past hundred years”. Peter Pörtner, the translator of Nishida’s first work into German, calls him “the founder of modern Japanese philosophy” (Nishida 1989: 9). For Ōhashi Ryōsuke, writing in German, Nishida is “the ‘patriarch’ of modern Japanese philosophy” (Ōhashi 1990:4), and for Rolf Elberfeld he is “the most significant Japanese philosopher of the twentieth century” (Elberfeld 2014:13).

philosophers, insofar as they spoke as *Japanese* thinkers, to take a stance toward him, be it emulation, inspiration, outspoken criticism or silent rejection.³ The qualifying adjective *modern* in this frame only serves to qualify pre-modern Japanese thought as another kind of thinking altogether. In one respect there was a basic difference, for the introduction and appropriation of European philosophy in the Meiji-era fundamentally changed the language and manner of treating philosophical issues in Japan.⁴ On the other hand, it might be possible to appropriate Nishida's own notion of a continuity of discontinuities and to recognize alternative confluences and breaks in the intellectual history of Japan. These might include the confluences and breaks among Buddhism, Confucianism, Shintō, and European religious and philosophical traditions present in Japan. Relatively few treatments of Nishida's philosophy have related it to its East Asian precedents, affinities and contrasts. Linguistic differences and fusions, between Chinese, Japanese, and European languages in Japan, have also structured the flows and ruptures of the history of ideas, including Nishida's distinctive vocabulary. And on the other end, rather than bind the future of Japanese philosophy to reactions to Nishida, one can place Nishida in a more expansive, global context and read him over against both European and Asian philosophers who take up themes that were close to his heart.

Studies in European languages have run the gamut from presentations of Nishida's philosophy in his own terms to comparative and critical analyses that view him from the outside. Too numerous to catalogue here, they include early studies by David Dilworth and Robert Wargo in the 1970s that exposed the European and Japanese roots of Nishida's thought, and later book-length treatments in English by Robert Carter, James Heisig, Gereon Kopf and John Krummel, in German by Rolf Elberfeld, Paul Maffli and Toshiaki Kobayashi, in French by Michel Dalissier and Jacynthe Tremblay, and in Italian by Matteo Cestari and Marcello Ghilardi. Agustín Jacinto Zavala of Mexico has produced more than a dozen Spanish-language volumes on Nishida's thought. These authors and many others have also contributed perceptive articles and added to the growing list of translations, which to date represent only a third or so of Nishida's collected works. In content and style, some of this scholarship stays close to a straightforward exposition or a more literal translation of Nishida. Other work ventures out to place his thought in philosophical discussions close in theme if foreign in heritage and terminology. Themes include the contingency and fallibility of knowledge, the possibility and limits of intercultural dialogue, the notion of enaction in cognitive science, alterity in post-modern thought, and differences from Hegelian dialectics, Husserl's and Heidegger's phenomenology, and Whitehead's process philosophy—to name but a few.⁵

³Nakamura Yūjirō quotes the prophecy of Miki Kiyoshi, uttered in the year of Nishida's death: "I do not think that Japanese philosophy can arise in the future unless it fundamentally confronts Nishida-philosophy" (Nakamura 1983:5).

⁴I give an account of how this transformation happened in Maraldo 2017: 57–99.

⁵Maraldo 2019b gives an extensive but still incomplete bibliography of translations and secondary literature. Nishida 2015 adds J. Tremblay's French translation of Nishida's seminal *From That Which Acts to That Which Sees* (働くものから見るものへ *Hataraku mono kara miru mono e*), its first complete translation into a European language.

Particularly this latter kind of comparative work has begun to unfasten the frame of Nishida as “Japan’s first (modern) philosopher”. “Only by seeing [Nishida’s philosophy] as it is located in the wider *basho* of world philosophy”, James Heisig writes, “are we able to understand it” (Heisig 2015: 236).

Yet much of the interpretive work done so far remains confined within a second boundary, that of allegiance to the Japanese language. Translations of Nishida into European languages have varied from word-for-word reconstructions to free renditions with added interpolations.⁶

While most translators have aimed at accuracy in rendering Nishida’s thought, how that can best be achieved has been a bone of contention.⁷ What seems clear is not only that attempts at literalness do not necessarily result in making Nishida’s essays intelligible, but also that his philosophy *is potentially* more intelligible in translation than in the original Japanese. This is simply because translation has the capacity to transmit in fresh terms the thought that Nishida struggled to express in the Japanese language. The translator’s discernment of this original thought may determine how well Nishida will be understood, but that is only half of the picture. Translators also direct their work to readers who do not read Japanese, and it is they too who will turn the words into living, signifying texts. That completion is the condition for the possibility of conveying the relevance and testing the rigor of Nishida’s philosophy in the world today.

Heisig has eloquently argued that the future of “Nishida-philosophy” depends upon releasing it from its primary ties to Japan and to the Japanese language (Heisig 2015: 229–230). I would add that this future will also depend upon Japanese philosophers reading Nishida in translation and through the eyes of non-Japanese scholars. As long as interpreters and translators are concerned more with fidelity to the original language than with the clear communication of new ideas, they continue to support the frame of Nishida as *Japan’s* premier philosopher, a philosopher bound to the Japanese language. Ironically, today more than ever that frame undermines Nishida’s own interest in articulating truths not bound to a single language or culture, even assuming that “language” and “culture” are valid universal categories.

1.2 *Frame 2: A Philosopher of the East*

The very first translations of Nishida’s work appeared in the late 1930s and early 1940s, and rendered into German only four short essays. One essay was “Forms of Culture of the Classical Periods of East and West from a Metaphysical Perspective” (Nishida 1939); the other translations presented essays on Goethe’s metaphysical background and the difficult notions of the intelligible world and the unity of

⁶Maraldo 1989 presents an assessment of major translations into English up to 1987. Since then over one hundred translations into European languages have been published.

⁷Heisig 2010 elucidates the issue and presents the case against literal translation.

opposites. Schinzinger, who republished in English his translations of these last three, wrote of a Nishida who used Western concepts to express a basic experience that could not be properly formulated in Western terms, but who could open a new way “towards the mutual understanding of East and West” (Nishida 1958: Preface).

Despite their minimal readership and Nishida's own stance beyond cultural divides, these early translations advanced Nishida's reputation as a thinker of “the East” who was conversant with major philosophies of “the West”. This frame, as confining as it is, has been decisive for positioning Nishida's philosophy ever since. Although European philosophers as early as Leibniz recognized Chinese contributions to philosophy, their work referred exclusively to thinkers of the past. It was not until the twentieth century that the European philosophers could speak of a contemporary from “the East” and gradually learn to dialogue with “a Japanese” like Nishida. Nishida did have some personal correspondence with Rickert and Husserl, and other leading European philosophers gradually came to hear more and more about him (Yusa 1998: 45). But lacking both adequate translations and, not unsurprisingly, the resolve to deal directly with the Japanese language, their thought remained untouched by his. Only in the 1970s and 80s did a few of Germany's philosophical chair-holders feel even slightly compelled to engage with their counterparts in East Asia, in large part thanks to a number of young Japanese, Chinese and Koreans pursuing doctoral degrees in philosophy and often choosing comparative topics that required their European professors to take seriously the thought of their native lands. Yet the professors still tended to place Nishida in the rather broad and relatively undefined class of a thinker of the East, fundamentally outside the Western traditions he interpreted and critiqued in far more detail than he did any Asian tradition. Even when translations did begin to communicate his thought, it seemed clear that Nishida's philosophy did not belong to the traditions and schools that had formed their own philosophical education and, ironically, Nishida's as well.

Was it inaccurate, or inappropriate, for European philosophers to frame Nishida as a thinker of the East? The question is of interest not only for how we think of the scope of philosophy but also for how we conceptualize its history and its future. Part of the answer lies in Nishida's own reflections on the place of his continually developing philosophy. This chapter is not the forum to rehearse details, but we might think that he considered his philosophy to be rooted in the East, insofar as it takes nothingness as the ground of reality, in difference from the West that takes being as the ground. In any case, this is what Nishida implied in the 1934 essay on the forms of culture that appeared in German translation 5 years later (Nishida 1939). Furthermore, many of Nishida's disciples clearly demarcated East from West and considered themselves, along with their teacher, as representatives of the thinking of the East.⁸ However expedient that placement of Nishida has been, it must at least be qualified. Nishida's “absolute nothingness” is not a category set in opposition to being, certainly not as Eastern nothingness versus Western being, and even the

⁸ Bret Davis offers some illuminating reflections of this issue in section 5.1, “Between or Beyond East and West”? in Davis 2019.

relative cultural opposition between East and West was, in his eyes, meant to be overcome. The European and North American philosophers who did and still would place Nishida's philosophy originally in the other half of a laterally divided world would have to admit that its investigations and discussions focus on issues and philosophers that come from their half of the world. At the very least, then, this frame would make sense only to set apart a philosophy of the East that responded to "the West". The very reason that Europeans were apt to place Nishida in the East was, before anything else, the fact that he wrote in Japanese, a language relatively inaccessible to them. But Japanese is not an "Eastern" language; "East" and "West" are not linguistic categories, nor are they necessarily useful ways to conceptualize philosophical traditions. As more investigations of the history of philosophy become available, it will become evident that the time has come to put "East versus West" to rest.⁹

1.3 *Frame 3: A Zen Philosopher*

In retrospect, it has appeared to many readers that the Eastern character of Nishida's philosophy drew its inspiration from his experience with Zen Buddhism. Some interpreters have located its core insight in an enlightenment experience. Others have more broadly named personal religious experience as a major source of his thought. The principal theme of his first major work, after all, is pure experience, experience prior to the arising of any ego-consciousness that takes itself as a subject having experiences of objects different from it. In a later preface to that work Nishida himself described his later major themes as permutations of pure experience (Nishida 1990: xxxii-iii). Nishida first wrote of pure experience in 1908, right after 10 years of practice under Zen masters culminating—so it is thought—in an enlightenment experience. This experience was reportedly confirmed when Nishida passed the famous "Mu" kōan in 1903. *Mu*, in a distinct usage of the word and translated as Nothingness, became another great theme of his lifelong work.

A popular conception of Zen Buddhism, then, is a third frame in which Nishida's philosophy has been placed. Particularly in English-language commentaries, Nishida has appeared as a Zen philosopher, perhaps Zen's first real philosopher—the first philosopher to attempt a rational account of the world based on Zen enlightenment. Nishida's philosophical adventure was an exercise in clarifying "his experience with Zen", D.T. Suzuki suggested in 1960 in a preface to the world's first translation of Nishida's maiden work. "When all is said", Suzuki wrote, "Nishida belongs to the East" (Nishida 1960: iv-v). Masao Abe's introduction to the second English-language translation, 30 years later, was slightly more nuanced and presented Zen as the origin of Nishida's thought, to be sure, but a source that Nishida

⁹Arisaka 1999 places Nishida's universalism, described as "beyond 'East and West'", under the scope of post-colonial critique. John Krummel describes Nishida as a global philosopher whose thinking "escapes confinement or reduction to the dichotomizing scheme of 'West' vs. 'East'" (Nishida 2012a: 4).

necessarily needed to transform into intellectual analysis, in an “East-West synthesis” that could in turn transform Western philosophy (Nishida 1990: x-xii). Abe quotes Nishida's own words describing the basis of Eastern culture in “something that can be called seeing the form of the formless and hearing the sound of the soundless”, the quest for which he sought to give a philosophical foundation. This phrase has never ceased to intrigue commentators who see Nishida's philosophy in the context of Zen Buddhism. This framing is at work even in sophisticated scholarship like Michiko Yusa's biography of Nishida, titled *Zen and Philosophy*, that covers the entire scope of his philosophy (Yusa 2002), and Robert Wilkinson's *Nishida and Western Philosophy* that uncovers Nishida's arguments as a failed attempt to articulate the Zen experience of the East in Western terms (Wilkinson 2009).

Just as there are considered reasons to revere Nishida as a Zen philosopher, there are also considerable reasons to disconnect the philosopher from Zen. When his Zen master confirmed his *kenshō* or initial “enlightenment experience” in 1903, Nishida noted his dissatisfaction in his diary (Yusa 2002: 72). Thirty some years later he identified as the impetus for his first book an experience he did not relate to Zen, a moment following an intellectual discussion years before his formal Zen practice: “One day, walking through the streets of Kanazawa ... the sounds of the evening in my ears, this revelation came to me: ‘Just as it is all this is reality’”. Later still, Nishida recounts the experience of that moment when he “was still a student at the Higher School in Kanazawa”: “it is still very clear in my memory even though it happened so very long ago” (Shibata 1981: 128).¹⁰ If we nevertheless find here a connection to Zen, we need also to recall the comment Nishida made to his student Nishitani: “Certainly it is fine if *you* say [that Zen elements are present in my thought], but if ordinary uninformed people call my thought ‘Zen’, I would strongly object, because they do not understand Zen or my thought” (Yusa 2002: xx). And if the connection is a matter of personal religious experience, then we need to recall that Nishida strongly criticized autobiographical explanations and attempts to found religion, much less one's philosophy, on individual consciousness (NKZa 11: 447, 452, 455).

As much as the frame of Nishida as Zen philosopher has helped attract European and North American readers intrigued by popular images of Zen, it is time, I think, to realize that Zen does not need Nishida's philosophy to express it and Nishida's philosophy does not need Zen to be understood—neither Zen practice nor the scholarly study of Zen. In light of historically more critical studies of Zen and more detailed investigations of Nishida, this frame has reached its limit. To be sure, many of the authors mentioned above have presented Nishida in different frames. While they have not necessarily discounted the influence of Zen or of philosophies of the East, they have also reframed Nishida's philosophy in other, divergent contexts depending on their own philosophical and linguistic training and on the level of their intended audience.

¹⁰Nishida mentions this experience again in the 1936 Preface to his maiden work (Nishida 1990: xxxiii).

1.4 *Frame 4: Founder of the Kyoto School and Leading Philosopher of Nothingness*

Overlapping with the presentation of Nishida as a Zen philosopher is the prevalent view that frames him as the founder or leading figure of the “Kyoto School”. Commentators and translators have often traced the interests and themes of a certain group of Japanese philosophers back to currents in Nishida’s philosophy. Perceptive commentators frequently recognize that Nishida had no intention of founding a school of thought, and that the other “members” did not identify themselves under this rubric (Ohashi 1990: 12). Interpreters also frequently note that a few of them, TANABE Hajime in particular, count more as sources for Nishida’s own thought and critics of it than as disciples who carried on his work. Still, Nishida as founder or leading figure of the Kyoto School is one of the most widespread ways his philosophy has been framed.

The question of what characterizes the Kyoto School is itself controversial. Elsewhere I identified five interlacing factors at work in various depictions of this group (Heisig et al. 2011: 639–645; Maraldo 2019a), and Bret Davis has pointed out the ambivalence of some of its attitudes toward “the West” (Davis 2019). A personal association with Nishida—whether dependent, critical, or ambivalent—counts as one factor. Several factors overlap with defining features of other frames at work in presenting Nishida’s philosophy; Nishida, as it were, supports the entire edifice of the “Kyoto School”. Thus, another factor is Nishida’s and the group’s latent or overt appropriation of insights from “the East”, particularly from Zen and, to a lesser extent, Pure Land Buddhism. But perhaps the factor most emphasized is the celebration and elaboration of “absolute nothingness” in Nishida’s thought, in Tanabe’s, and in that of their followers. We have here, then, a single frame with two names: Nishida as founder or leader of the Kyoto School is nearly convergent with Nishida as the philosopher of nothingness. The work of James Heisig has been influential in defining this frame and criticizing its bounds; many others as well have highlighted the central place of nothingness in Nishida’s thought (Wargo 2005; Carter 1989; Stevens 2000; Heisig 2001).

The related Buddhist notion of nothingness, of course, can be traced back far earlier than the twentieth-century Kyoto School, but its designation as “absolute” and its function as an explanatory principle in philosophical accounts probably derive from Nishida and Kyoto School thinkers. Just what “absolute nothingness” designates for Nishida, however, is not a simple matter. For one thing, as a “philosopher of Zen”, Nishida purportedly took the experiential and practice-oriented thrust of the *mu* of Zen texts and redirected it toward a philosophical account of the world. Absolute nothingness, *zettai mu*, then became Nishida’s name for the ultimate place or *basho* of historical reality in all its immediacy and its resistance to objectification. On closer look, the notion of absolute nothingness seems to include several overlapping layers of meaning, including (1) that which enfolds both being and non-being; (2) the no-thing that is consciousness; (3) non-objectifiability, or that which defies objectification; (4) immediacy; (5) absence of a determinate ground or

foundation of reality, and (6) ultimate place, *topos* or *chōrā* that contextualizes not only all things known and acted upon but also all manners of knowing and acting, and that enfolds and accounts for interacting and self-realizing self and world. These are difficult notions that recent literature has endeavored to clarify.¹¹ One unresolved issue is the precise relation between absolute nothingness and Buddhist “emptiness” (*sūnyatā*); another is the relation to European philosophies of nothingness. Despite the disciple HISAMATSU Shin-ichi’s contention that the “nothingness of the East” is fundamentally different from and superior to “Western” notions of nothingness (Hisamatsu 1960), this issue deserves more attention and may eventually undermine the frame of Nishida as the leading philosopher of nothingness.

It is not clear that the meanings of Nishida’s *zettai mu* belong exclusively to Nishida or his followers. For example, when Nishida writes of consciousness as a place of nothingness, he invokes a sense of nonbeing or no-thing that he himself finds in Western thinkers as early as the Pseudo-Dionysius (although of course there is no equivalent notion of consciousness in Dionysius). At times Nishida writes of consciousness as nothingness in the sense of an immediacy that can never be objectified, in contrast to objectified being. Later “Kyoto School” thinkers such as NISHITANI Keiji and ABE Masao especially emphasized non-objectifiability. But the theme of an immediacy anterior to intentional consciousness, or a matrix anterior to representation, also occurs, for example, in Husserl’s sense of consciousness as primal streaming (*Ur-Strömen*) or as living present (*lebendige Gegenwart*) and in French philosophers like Emmanuel Levinas and Michel Henry. Moreover, Heidegger also addresses the possibility of a non-objectifying thinking in general (Heidegger 1976: 22–31). Finally, we can point to a long history of notions of nothingness in the European mystical and theological tradition (Cunningham 2002). Instead of assuming that Nishida and “Kyoto School” thinkers mean something fundamentally different than “Western” philosophers, it would be more fruitful to consider them together and to investigate their notions of nothingness, non-objectifiability, and immediacy in detail.¹²

1.5 Frame 5: Nationalist Ideologue?

Perhaps the most contentious factor at work in identifying “Kyoto School members” regards their stance toward the nation-state, the Pacific War, and Marxism. Intellectual historians concur that Nishida is one of Japan’s most influential intellectuals of the twentieth century, but they have tended to be more focused in their readings than philosophical commentators, and more critical in their judgments. They have placed Nishida in the context of debates about Marxism in Japan and Japan’s role in the Pacific War and World War II.

¹¹ Krummel 2015 exemplifies this work.

¹² Maraldo 2017: 351–385 contrasts Heidegger’s *Nichts* and Nishida’s Nothingness.

Historians of modern Japan have written much about the powerful influence that Marxism exerted on Japanese intellectuals, Nishida included; and their accounts began to construct another frame for understanding his thought that, in turn, directed the attention of philosophers who discussed the “Kyoto School”. In fact, some historically-minded philosophers have often drawn a sharp line between Nishida and his “school” on the one side and Marxist thinkers who studied with him on the other. They exclude TOSAKA Jun, who embraced Marxism, from the “Kyoto School”, as well as MIKI Kiyoshi to the extent that he is considered Marxist.¹³ Other readers have dubbed these thinkers the “left wing of the School” because of their Marxist stance and their criticisms of Nishida’s philosophy. In general, these readers have framed Nishida as a right-leaning, anti-Marxist thinker and thereby both ignored Tosaka’s and Miki’s affinities to Nishida’s philosophy and Nishida’s constructive response to their criticisms (Maraldo 2017: 249–264).¹⁴ The literature in European languages, at least, has often repeated Nishida’s criticisms of Marxism but has hardly begun to discuss his appropriation of Marxist ideas, for example, the themes of production and the historical body.¹⁵

As a participant in public discussions about the role of Japan in the world, Nishida in the eyes of many intellectual historians has appeared as a willing supporter of the emperor system and a culpable source of a pernicious ideology that enabled Japanese imperialism.¹⁶ Some scholars judged Nishida’s “Kyoto School” to be complicit in Japanese fascism and have suggested a parallel with Heidegger’s apparent Nazism. Other writers have just as forcefully defended Nishida as a moderating voice during a dangerous time of government suppression of public criticism.¹⁷ Nishida wrote relatively few politically motivated essays, but readers outside Japan have latched onto the catchphrases he invoked that were also used in militarist propaganda, such as “the *kokutai* or national essence, ‘the new world order’, and “the East-Asian co-prosperity sphere”. And they have linked Nishida’s reflections to the even more controversial public discussions that some of his disciples engaged

¹³The German-language collection edited by R. Ohashi explicitly excludes Miki as well as Tosaka because of their conversion to Marxism. See Ohashi 1990: 12, Note 5.

¹⁴Despite their mutual criticisms of each other, Tosaka’s notions of the “spirit of history” and of “the present as the *accent* of the totality of historical time” and as the site where the past is configured, have an apparent affinity with Nishida’s later notion of the absolute present’s “determination” of the historical world. See Tosaka 2013 (1930): 12–13.

¹⁵See for example Nishida’s 1937 essay on the historical body, “*Rekishitekishintai*” 歴史の身体 NKZ 14: 266–68. An exception to this framing is William Haver’s Introduction to Nishida 2012b. Haver argues that Nishida complements Marx’s emphasis on material manual labor by stressing immaterial intellectual labor.

¹⁶The criticism of Najita and Harootunian (1998: 238–39), directed more at Nishida’s disciples in the “Kyoto faction” than at Nishida himself, has influenced many other historians to see a direct connection between Nishida’s philosophy and “Japanese fascism”. The M.A. thesis of Martin Bastarache (2011) offers a more nuanced attempt to relate the two.

¹⁷The essays in Heisig and Maraldo 1994 display the controversy, and Maraldo 2006 adds detail to the question of Nishida’s complicity. Graham Parkes (1997), (2011) continues to refute the association of Nishida and Kyoto School philosophers with fascism and imperialism.

in.¹⁸ Only a minor portion of Nishida's essays on Japanese culture and nation have been translated into European languages; yet the controversy has overshadowed his reputation among historians if not among philosophers.¹⁹

What we need, in the case of Nishida and "Kyoto School" philosophers is a hermeneutics for reading texts composed under threat of punishment for non-compliance with state ideologies.²⁰ In the absence of such a hermeneutical sensitivity, persistent historicist readings that see Nishida as supporting Japanese militarism tend to frame him as a nationalist ideologue. The possibility that such readings themselves are no less ideological raises the question of whether Nishida has been framed in another sense of the English word: convicted of a crime by false evidence.

The more pressing issue for past and current philosophizing, however, is whether philosophers have a responsibility to respond publically to contemporaneous national and international political practices that enable or that obstruct their freedom and their work, whatever its focus might be. Do we learn from the case of Nishida, no less than that of Heidegger, that speculative philosophers had best refrain from engaging in political discussions and taking public stances, lest they speak beyond their area of competence or offend either the powers that be or their critics? Or must even the most abstract ontology discuss contemporary political situations if it intends to account for the whole of human being and action? A frame that depicts Nishida's entire philosophy as politically questionable needs to leave space for these questions as well.

2 Concluding Pointer: How Nishida Frames Our Frameworks

As ways to contextualize philosophical texts and themes, frames enable understanding and communication, and will continue to play a role in the future of Nishida's philosophy. I will not venture a guess as to what particular ways translators and interpreters will frame that philosophy in the future—whether deliberately or less consciously—nor will I conjecture how they will release it from prominent frames. They most likely will continue to find it difficult to place Nishida's thought in frames that predominate in determining the subfields and areas of specialization in philosophy: metaphysics and ontology, epistemology, ethics and the like, or "continental versus analytic" philosophy, and perhaps "Asian and comparative philosophy" as well. Frames let a philosopher's thought appear in familiar and unfamiliar ways, and help us keep that thought in focus. They also delineate a space around it, an open space that allows for engagement on our part. Ideally, in the activity of

¹⁸The excellent overview by Thomas Kasulis in Heisig, Kasulis & Maraldo 2011:1005–1037, along with other material in that volume, pages 1059–1092, puts the controversy into perspective.

¹⁹Arisaka 1996 translates and contextualizes Nishida's short essay on the new world order. Kracht 2001–2002 offers thorough documentation of Nishida's political philosophy, and Goto-Jones 2005, Stevens 2000 and Stevens 2011 bring balance to the discussion.

²⁰I owe this suggestion, if not the phrasing, to Raji Steineck.

philosophizing we do not merely look at (read, discuss, criticize) a philosopher's thought through a particular window as it were; rather, we also let that thought open a space and let us see differently. Not only can we look at Nishida's philosophy through different frames, we can also look at issues and debates in philosophy through Nishida's way of framing. His philosophy of placing or implacing offers one example.

On this occasion I can offer merely a glimpse of the possibility of engaging his philosophy to envision an alternative to one current philosophical dispute. Some philosophers argue that, in order to discover and describe how things truly are, it is necessary to posit an "outermost framework of all thoughts" as a "conception of what is objectively the case—what is the case without subjective or relative qualification", as Thomas Nagel puts it. Nagel insists that science and, indeed, any claims to truth presuppose such an "unconditional context" (Nagel 1997: 14–16). Other philosophers argue that we can never determine such an unconditional context, and so the entire search is misguided. Richard Rorty, who disapprovingly cites Nagel's *Last Word*, welcomes instead "Emerson's prophecy that every context, no matter how encompassing, will eventually be subsumed within another, larger context". "Once one gives up on unconditionality, one will cease to use metaphors of getting down to the hard facts as well as metaphors of looking up toward grand overarching structures" (Rorty 2016: 71 and 74).

Nishida's "*basho* of absolute nothingness" may at first sight seem to be a similar kind of overarching structure, unconditioned context, or outermost framework. After all, following Nishida, interpreters have presented it as an ultimate place in which all other *topoi* are implaced. In that presentation, all levels of reality and of ways of experiencing reality—as objects of consciousness, consciousness itself or relative nothingness, being as opposed to nothing—find their ultimate place in absolute nothingness. However, "place" may be understood as an alternative to the dual prospects of Nagel's definite foundation and Emerson's infinite regress leading nowhere. For one thing, this ultimate *basho* is to serve as the foundation of both world and self as they interact, not simply as a foundation for framing judgments about the world. Then again, it functions as an uncommon kind of self-negating foundation that forms or performs self and world rather than lying at their ground. If it functions neither as a final resting place for anything true we might say about the world, nor as a series fading away until we have nothing left at all, how then does it command a radically different view on the problem Rorty depicts? I conclude with his question without answering it or clarifying the terms it assumes, in the hope that it may point to the significance that Nishida's philosophy still promises.

Nishitani once wrote that some critics of Nishida were like people viewing the Himalayan mountain range each from his or her own perspective, or like blind people feeling the different parts of an elephant, in touch more with their own viewpoints than with the content of Nishida's philosophy. Concerning that philosophy, Nishitani (1985): 93 wrote, "it is high time to start making an effort toward real research and criticism". And—I would add—toward questioning our own dominant frames of thought. Once we begin to engage Nishida's insights and let them reframe and re-focus living philosophical discussions, his significance for philosophy worldwide will enter a new phase.

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Chapter 10

Is Nishida Kitarō an Eastern Philosopher?



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1 Eastern Philosophy

NISHIDA Kitarō (1870–1945) is a Japanese thinker who works in the field of philosophy. But is Nishida’s thought an “Eastern philosophy”? Is Nishida an “Eastern philosopher”?

To begin with, one can understand Japanese philosophy as philosophy *in Japan*. However, some have questioned whether there is philosophy in Japan. Philosophy outside of the European continent was inconceivable in the era of Hegel, who claims that no philosophical thoughts can be found in the Orient (Hegel 1975: 138–139).¹ To many European philosophers, the discipline of philosophy has its origin in the West. “Western philosophy” is tautological, and “Eastern philosophy” is self-contradictory.

¹ In fact, Nishida notices a problem in Hegel’s philosophy. In *Problem of Japanese culture* (1940), Nishida writes, “European culture, deriving from a Greek culture which was intellectual and theoretical in character and dedicated to an inquiry into true fact, has a great theoretical structure behind it, on the basis of which European scholars criticize different cultures and interpret the direction of their development. As a result of conflict and frictions among the various cultures for several thousand years, a certain theoretical archetype has been developed, which Europeans consider the one and only cultural archetype. On this basis they conceive of stages of cultural development, in terms of which Oriental culture is seen as still lingering in an undeveloped stage. Oriental culture must, if developed, become identical with the Occidental one, they believe. Even such a great thinker as Hegel shared this view. But I think a problem arises here” (NKZa 12:284). English translation from Nishida 1958:354. In case no translation information is given, all English translations are from the author.

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In the postmodern condition of today, however, we shall neither accept this Eurocentrism nor develop an Asia-centrism. In fact, we can see that so-called “Western philosophy” is highly indebted to the East, especially Arabic culture. On the other hand, philosophical thoughts in China or in Japan are not purely Asian; they are, in a sense, a *collage* of Chinese thoughts, European philosophy, Indian religion, etc. Here, philosophy is not defined as philosophical doctrines, but as an act of philosophizing, i.e. the act of searching for wisdom in general. Philosophy is not necessarily restricted to the philosophical tradition since Thales. Rather, there are many traditions of philosophies. Seen from this broader sense, one can say that there are also philosophies in non-European continents. One can inquire into philosophical problems whether one is from “the East” or from “the West”.

In East Asia, there is a tradition of the searching for truth, goodness, and beauty, but it was not called “philosophy”. In Japan, the word “philosophy” was historically introduced by missionaries in sixteenth century, but at that time it was a mere transliteration. Later during *sakoku* (鎖国 the period of national isolation) from the 17th to the eighteenth century, exchanges with foreigners were prohibited except those from China and the Netherlands. Consequently, the Netherlands became Japan’s only entrance to the Western world. At that time, there was a discipline in Japan called *rangaku* (蘭学), which means the knowledge from the Netherlands. Through the study of *rangaku*, Japanese began to import Western knowledge such as modern science and medicine, and soon they met “the knowledge of all knowledge” in the Western world, i.e. philosophy. However, philosophy was a completely novel concept to the Japanese, who found that there was no Japanese word equivalent to the meaning of philosophy. To tackle this problem, attempts were made to use Confucian terminology such as *rigaku* (理学) or *keigaku* (經学) to translate the word “philosophy”, but these attempts were not satisfactory. In 1861, a *rangaku* scholar called TSUDA Mamichi (1829–1903) proposed a translation for philosophy, namely, *kitetsugaku* (希哲学). Another *rangaku* scholar, NISHI Amane (1829–1897) suggested *hirososhi* (斐爾蘇比) and *kikengaku* (希賢学) as the translation for philosophy. *Kitetsu* (希哲) and *kiken* (希賢), both meaning the wish for wisdom, could have been the perfect translation for philosophy (the love of wisdom). Eventually in 1874, Nishi coined the Japanese term *tetsugaku* (哲学), combining the senses of *kitetsu* and *gaku*. As the translation for philosophy, *tetsugaku* is a *gaku* (学) which refers to Western science or knowledge, in contrast to *kyō* (教) which means Asian teaching or religion.

Despite Nishi’s mastery of traditional Chinese (漢文), his translation seems to be misleading: the “love” of wisdom becomes a “science” of wisdom. Nevertheless, Nishi’s term came into general use in Japan and beyond. In addition to pioneering scientific development in Asia, Japan was also in the forefront of philosophical research. For example, *tetsugaku*, as well as other Japanese translations of philosophical terms, were exported to China and Korea. Not only did Japan find a translation for the word “philosophy”, it also founded a new discipline that differed essentially from the tradition of Confucian thoughts pursued during the Tokugawa period. In fact, a chair of philosophy was established in 1876 at Tokyo Imperial University (currently the University of Tokyo), where the philosophy of Bentham,

Mill, Voltaire and Rousseau were taught.² We might say that Nishi's invention of the word *tetsugaku* was more than a mere translation, but also a symbol of the transformation of the old motto of *wakon kansai* (和魂漢才), meaning Japanese spirit and Chinese knowledge, to the new motto of *wakon yōsai* (和魂洋才), which means Japanese spirit and Western knowledge. The new motto of *wakon yōsai* in the Meiji era still emphasized the importance of Japanese spirit. However, the guiding principle was no longer the old Chinese teachings; rather, it was the newly imported knowledge from the West.

How can *wakon* combine with *yōsai*? Under the influence of the new ideology of *wakon yōsai*, Japanese intellectuals had to deal with the eclecticism of importing foreign knowledge while keeping their Japanese spirit. Borrowing Max Scheler's insight on the phenomenon of *ressentiment*, one can find two opposite feelings, namely, apostatic *ressentiment* and romantic *ressentiment*, among Japanese intellectuals (Scheler 1972: 57). For those Japanese intellectuals with apostatic *ressentiment*, they urged radical reformation by incorporating Western thoughts; this attitude was simply based on the desire to negate the past. Those with romantic *ressentiment*, typically nationalists, refused to import new thoughts, for they always wanted to return to the nostalgia of the idealized Japanese spirit. These two feelings of *ressentiment* are problematic: the former is a typical approach of modernism, which is simply a blind negation of the past in which all things are judged by the new measure from the West. The latter type, unlike the radical modernists, overemphasized Japanese culture and devoted themselves to Japanism. Both types of *ressentiment* are dangerous since they are biased towards two extreme ends.³

In the reception of *tetsugaku*, there were two opposite attitudes. First, *tetsugaku* was imported as *yōsai* and hence taken for granted as a Western product. It was such a novelty that the Japanese scholar, NAKAE Chōmin, asserts that “from the past to the present there has been no philosophy in Japan”. He continues, “People without philosophy do all things without a deep thought; they cannot avoid being superficial” (Nakae 1983: 155). Nakae suggests that it is important to study philosophy in the future, but he is doubtful of a rapid import of philosophy from the West. In

² Gould 1950:196.

³ In China, there was a political slogan of “Chinese thought as body and Western thought as use” (中学為體、西學為用). Through the import of Western knowledge, however, it was inevitable for the Chinese intellectuals to begin the study of philosophy. Similar to the Japanese, soon the Chinese also faced the problem that there was no suitable word in the Chinese language to translate the word “philosophy”. Instead of translating the word by their own, however, they imported Nishi's translation of *tetsugaku* into China. Nowadays, Japanese and Chinese are using the same kanji (i.e. 哲学) to translate the word “philosophy”, but the word is pronounced as *zhéxué* in Mandarin. Although *tetsugaku* and *zhéxué* are used to translate the word “philosophy”, it seems that they have different cultural meanings. It is suggested that *tetsugaku* refers to Western philosophy only, while *zhéxué* refers not only to Western philosophy but also Chinese philosophy, Indian philosophy, etc. One interesting fact is that nowadays most departments of philosophy in Japan normally only offer lectures or seminars on Western philosophy, but in many departments of philosophy in China or Hong Kong, courses are offered on Chinese philosophy, Western philosophy, as well as other philosophies from India, Japan, etc.

Discourse by Three Drunkards on Government (三酔人経綸問答 *San Suijin Keirin Mondō*, 1887), Nakae names three characters: Mr. Gentleman, Mr. Champion, and Master Nankai. These characters represent three different positions about Japan's modernization as well as three approaches to doing philosophy. Mr. Gentleman is a scholar in Western philosophy and political thought, and he emphasizes the importance of studying philosophy. It is not only the search for truth, goodness, and beauty from a mere academic point of view; it is also for the sake of enlightening Japan into an ideal civilized nation that no longer has the need for an army. Mr. Champion opposes this "Philosopher King" approach. He argues that it is useless to study philosophy, and it is more realistic for Japan to build a strong military power. Master Nankai does not have a clear position, but he is against these two extremes. He believes it is naïve to think that all problems can be solved by importing philosophical doctrines, but science and technology can be dangerous weapons that bring disasters. Blocker and Starling suggest a reason why the Japanese studied philosophy: "Japan felt it was needed in order to compete with the West and avoid being colonized by the aggressive Western powers" (Blocker and Starling 2001: 3). In other words, doing philosophy was a political signal to the rest of Asia—the Japanese people were leaving Asia and entering the West. As a result, *tetsugaku* is not conceived as a mere copy of the Western philosophical tradition, but a project to overcome the West. In other words, the Japanese tried to learn philosophy, not because of the will to become part of the West, but because they thought they were capable of overcoming the West. This is the twofold structure of Japanese philosophy. On one hand, Japanese philosophy is presumed as a part of the project of Westernization. Some Japanese believe that *tetsugaku* should be distinguished from Confucian studies and Buddhist studies, since philosophy is exclusively a Western import for the sake of enlightening Japan.⁴ "Japanese philosophy" does not exist, for they see "philosophy" merely as a product from the West; hence, the term "Japanese philosophy" becomes self-contradictory. On the other hand, Japanese philosophy is conceived as an "original" philosophical tradition since the Meiji Restoration with the ultimate task to overcome the predominant Western culture. In this sense, "Japanese philosophy" exists; it is not merely a subdivision of Western philosophy, but a philosophy that is capable of overcoming the problems in the West.

2 Twofold Structure of Japanese Philosophy

This twofold structure of Japanese philosophy was witnessed by Karl Löwith (1897–1973), a Jewish philosopher who escaped from Europe and taught philosophy in Tohoku Imperial University (currently Tohoku University) from 1936 to 1941. In his essay entitled "The Japanese Mind – A Picture of the Mentality that We

⁴Kyoto University has a Department of History of Japanese philosophy, which was established in 1995. But as a general fact, the research and teaching of Japanese philosophy in Japan has long been a marginal subject.

Must Understand if We are to Conquer”, published in the magazine *Fortune* in December 1943, Löwith points out that in Japan there was a serious effort to learn philosophy, but they were held back by their own way of thinking. In other words, the Japanese struggled to live and think in two different ways, as they wear two kinds of clothes—*kimono* at home and a foreign suit in the office. Löwith writes, “The Japanese claim that they have an extraordinary capacity for open-mindedness and synthesis. Most of them believe that they have integrated the old and the new. [...] All the Japanese I knew believed that they had mastered everything that was to be learned from us and that they had even “improved” it; they believed that Japan now stood above us” (Löwith 1983: 556). Löwith observes that the Japanese were not only good at imitating the West, but they also tried to overcome or take over the West by means of rapid modernization. Regarding Japanese students of philosophy at that time, he noticed that many of them had an excellent knowledge of philosophy. Löwith observes,

In their philosophical education the same contradictions appear. The Japanese started with a rather naïve respect for our framework of ideas, working at it hard and patiently, without any material ambition, for many years; but this study did not influence their outlook. They read Hegel in German, Plato in Greek, Hume in English; and at least one of them studied the Old Testament in Hebrew. At the University of Sendai [Tohoku University], where I taught philosophy, I had as an assistant a Japanese who had studied the German literature of the Middle Ages in the original texts, which I myself could not read. [...] There were Japanese “Hegelians”, Japanese “Kantians”, and Japanese “phenomenologists”, and the table of contents of their journals of philosophy were almost exact mirrors of the discussions that were filling our own journals (Löwith 1983: 558).

Löwith notices that the Japanese tried their best to Westernize themselves in the study of philosophy. But Japanese philosophers are living in two-storied houses: they live and think in a typical Japanese way on the ground floor, but they read European books on the first floor. Some Japanese became conscious of the fruitlessness of reproducing foreign philosophies, and eventually focused on traditional Japanese thoughts. In fact, one may see that many Japanese who studied the Western philosophical trends during that time became interested in the study of Japanese culture. Examples are KUKI Shūzō’s research on *iki*,⁵ WATSUJI Tetsurō’s study on

⁵KUKI Shūzō (1888–1941) is an important figure in Japanese philosophy. In the beginning of “*Aus einem Gespräch von der Sprache*”, Heidegger mentions the name of Kuki and shows great respects to the short-living Japanese philosopher. Kuki studied philosophy in France and Germany, and he attended lectures of Husserl and Heidegger. He devoted himself to bringing contemporary European philosophy to Japan, and proposed many insightful interpretations of *Sein und Zeit*, especially translating *Existenz* as *jitsuzon* (実存). In addition to German philosophy, Kuki also shows deep interests in French philosophy, especially Bergson’s philosophical thought. The most original and well-known work of Kuki is *Iki no kōzo* (1930). *Iki* (粋), literally meaning “chic”, is claimed by Kuki as the characteristic of Japanese culture. Kuki argues that the study of *iki* can only be based on the hermeneutics of ethnic being. The phenomena of *iki* are explained in two dimensions: on one hand, he argues that there are three intentional structures of *iki*, namely, *bitai* (媚態), *iki* (意気) and *akirame* (諦め). On the other hand, he explains the extensional structure of *iki* as a quadrilateral cylindrical one, with two layers at both ends of the cylinder. The top layer is based on human universality, while the second one is based on heterogeneous particularity, such as the rela-

fūdo,⁶ as well as ABE Jirō's study of Japanese culture.⁷ Löwith correctly states that

tionship between *iki* (意気), *yabo* (野暮), *amami* (甘味) and *shibumi* (渋味), etc. Kuki's analysis of *iki* is followed by detailed interpretations of traditional Japanese literature and architecture. For Kuki, *iki* represents the uniqueness of Japanese culture, which is fundamentally influenced by the moral idealism of *bushido* and the unrealistic worldview of Zen-Buddhist religious thought. He claims that a certain degree of *iki* can be found in Charles-Pierre Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal* or in Nietzsche's *Also sprach Zarathustra*; but they are not precisely *iki* due to the dominance of Christianity, on one hand, and the secularity of modernity on the other.

⁶WATSUJI Tetsurō (1889–1960) was the professor of ethics in Kyoto Imperial University (1931–34) and Tokyo Imperial University (1934–49), and he is well known to the Japanese intelligentsia as a philosopher of ethics. On one hand, he shows interest in existentialism and phenomenology. He is one of the first scholars who introduced the philosophy of Nietzsche, Kierkegaard and Scheler into the Japanese academic circle. On the other hand, he is also interested in Japanese culture and he tries to search for the uniqueness of Japan. The ethical theories of Watsuji can be found in *Ethics as Anthropology (Ningen no Gaku toshiteno Rinrigaku, 1934)*, as well as his *magnum opus: Ethics (Rinrigaku, 3 volumes, 1937, 1942 and 1949)*. Watsuji's ethical theory is characterized by a clear philosophical anthropological standpoint. Therefore, his ethics begins with his analysis of the concepts of man, person, and human being. In the Japanese language, human being is not simply understood as *hito* (人) but as *ningen* (人間), which means literally "between one man and another". Watsuji emphasises the relationship *between* human beings, and he further explains this phenomenon with the concept of *aidaagara* (間柄). The word *aida* (間) has a twofold meaning: the spatial condition of man (空間) and the temporal condition of man (時間). Watsuji also claims there is an environmental or climatic condition for human beings. This point of view can be found in his famous book, *Fūdo* (1935). His theory on *fūdo*, or climate, is highly influenced by Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit*, especially the concepts of *Dasein* and *ex-sistere*. Watsuji's philosophical anthropology can be regarded as an ethical personalism, in which human being is more than an isolated individual. Ontologically, human being is a personal being with different social roles. His interest in personalism can be found in his essay "Mask and Persona" (1935). Watsuji is interested in the roles of persons in a society. In the second volume of *Ethics*, he proposes six fundamental communities of human beings, i.e. family, close family, local community, economic society, cultural community, and finally the nation. I shall argue that Watsuji's theory is merely a theory about human relationship (倫理), but it is not and should not be taken as an ethics (倫理学). The most controversial issue in Watsuji's philosophy is his theory of the nation, which could be a justification of the hierarchy of values in the Japanese patriarchal system and of the cultural nationalism.

⁷ABE Jirō (1883–1959) was born in Yamagata Prefecture. He entered the "First High School" in 1901, and then enrolled in the Department of Philosophy of Tokyo Imperial University in 1904. He studied under the guidance of Prof. Raphael Koeber and graduated in 1907 with a thesis on Spinoza's ontology. Abe was impressed with NATSUME Soseki and maintained good friendship with other Soseki-followers such as MORITA Sōhei, KOMIYA Toyotaka, and ABE Yoshishige. He also was a friend of Watsuji, but later Watsuji renounced friendship with Abe due to private reasons. In 1914, Abe published a work entitled *Santaro no nikki* (Santaro's Diary), which is a diary-style essay recording Abe's path of thinking and despair. With the support from young readers, it became a bestseller, and a sequel was soon published in the next year. At that time, Abe established himself as a critic and became one of the editors of *Sichō* in 1917. His position, known as personalism, emphasizes that the top of all value is not the nation, but an individual person. In this sense, Abe joins MUSHANOKŌJI Saneatsu's humanism and KUWAGI Genyoku's culturalism as one of the most important representatives of the Taishō Democratic movement. Abe's interest is not only on personalism but also on aesthetics. His views on aesthetics can be found in *Basic Problems of Ethics (Rinrigaku no Konpon Mondai, 1916)* and *Aesthetics (Bigaku, 1917)*. Both works are clearly influenced by Theodor Lipps' theory of empathy. In 1922 Abe became a research fellow of *Monbushō* and travelled to Europe to study aesthetics. After returning to Japan in the next year, he became the professor of aesthetics at Tohoku University and wrote *Social Status of Art* (1925), *Art and Society in Tokugawa Period* (1931) and *World Culture and Japanese Culture* (1934). After his

there is a fundamental difference between *wakon kansai* and *wakon yōsai*, for “part of the Chinese culture is indeed integrated in Japan; the Western civilization is only adjusted and adapted” (Löwith 1983:557). Culture in the Western tradition has its root in the problem of cultivation, i.e. the organic process of the growth of a tradition. In the Eastern world, culture is about the process of “becoming humanity” (文化). In both traditions, culture is regarded as a living process, but different cultures bring different kinds of fruit. In the case of philosophy, the tree of philosophy in Japan is transplanted from the tree of philosophy from the West, but Japanese philosophy still needs to grow on the soil of Japanese culture for the fruit to fully ripen. However, the soil of Japanese culture is now covered with a thin layer of soil from the West since the Meiji Restoration. Therefore, the research of Japanese philosophy has two directions: First, it is an archaeological project to uncover the non-Western cultural elements hidden by modernization; second, it is a genealogical project to trace back the Western philosophical sources.

Without doubt, Japanese culture is one of the sources of Japanese philosophy. However, what is Japanese culture? Nowadays, one can easily name Japanese words such as *kimono*, *sushi*, *samurai*, *kamikaze*, *manga*, *anime* as some keywords of Japanese culture. Indeed, these Japanese words are well absorbed in English and in many other languages. Other representative words representing Japanese culture are *ukiyo-e*, *haiku*, *nō*, *kabuki*, *judō*, etc. Needless to say, Japanese culture is not the sum of the keywords mentioned above, for culture is an ever-growing process and not an end-product. However, some key concepts can be useful for us to understand Japanese culture. For example, American cultural anthropologist Ruth Benedict (1887–1948) suggests two keywords for Japanese culture, i.e. *kiku* (菊) and *katana* (刀). These two words, meaning chrysanthemum and the sword, are related to *bushidō* (武士道). The term *bushidō* means “the way of the warrior”, which is the bodily and spiritual practice for war. In the Edo period, *samurai* were required to learn seven martial arts: fencing, spearmanship, archery, horsemanship, *jūjutsu* (now *jūdō*), firearms and military strategy. Although *bushidō* is no longer practiced for actual warfare, it still remains as a part of Japanese culture. Eugen Herrigel (1884–1955), who had taught in Tohoku Imperial University before Löwith arrived, was not just an admirer of Japanese culture; he actually practiced *kyūdō* (Japanese archery) with Master AWA Kenzō. In his work, *Zen in the Art of Archery*, Herrigel writes,

From quite some time ago it has ceased to be any secret to a European that all the arts of Japan must, in terms of their internal form, be traced back to the single common root of Buddhism. This can be said of archery the same as it can be said of the various other arts: ink painting, the tea ceremony, kabuki, flower arrangement, swordsmanship, etc. And the immediate significance of this is that all of these arts have as their basic assumption a certain spiritual attitude, and while there may be some differences according to genre, they consciously cultivate that attitude. When it takes its ultimate form, that attitude is a particularly Buddhist one. Of course, when we speak of that which is particular to Buddhism, we

retirement in 1945, he continued his comparative research on Japanese culture, and he founded the Abe Japanese Culture Research Center (*Abe Nihon Bunka Kenkyusho*) in 1954.

are not speaking unconditionally. The Buddhism referred to here is not that *speculative* Buddhism that in fact only Europeans know, or think they know from the fact that its texts seem to be easily available; it is the non-speculative Buddhism called “Zen” in Japan (Herrigel 1978: 113–114).⁸

According to Herrigel, Japanese culture has a single root from so-called “Zen Buddhism”. However, this opinion is misleading. One should notice that Japanese culture is not equivalent to Zen. In fact, the very notion of Zen is from *Chán*, a branch of the Buddhist movement in China; and the *Chán* tradition was originally from the Buddhist tradition of *dhyāna*, which means meditation. What I am trying to emphasize here is the fact that Japanese culture is heterogeneous. There are many aspects of Japanese culture influenced by Shintō, Confucianism, Daoism, etc. Indeed, *bushidō* has its root in the tradition of *dō* (道), meaning “the way”. Needless to say, this tradition of *dō* is not purely Zen, but it has other sources such as the Chinese ancient philosophy of change.⁹ However, Japanese developed *dō* into a unique tradition called *geidō* (芸道), of which some of the representatives are *sadō* (the art of tea), *kadō* (the art of flower arrangement) and *shodō* (the art of calligraphy). The *geidō* tradition is regarded as the core of Japanese culture. For example, the sense of beauty in Japanese art is admired by many artists in the world. It is a well-known fact that many motifs of modern French and Dutch painters are from *japonaiserie* elements such as *ukiyo*e prints. However, we can see in the history of Japanese art that a pure “Japanese” element is in fact a fiction. The original creative activities of Japanese art are highly indebted to the process of imitation and reception, such as the influence of Buddhist art in the Asuka period (531–710), Nara period (710–794) and Heian period (794–1185).

It is undeniable that *bushidō* and *geidō* are two important sources of Japanese culture. However, one may argue that they are not philosophy, for they have their roots in the cultural soil of the East and have no relationship with the philosophical tradition from the West. These are not regarded as *tetsugaku* but *sisō* (思想), which are thoughts related to Zen Buddhism. It is unquestionable that Zen is one of the essences of Japanese culture. However, Japanese culture is not identical with Zen. I am not denying all attempts interpreting Japanese culture by Zen. However, one should notice that the overemphasis on Zen demonstrates an ignorance of the heterogeneous nature of Japanese culture.

In addition to relying on Zen to encapsulate Japanese culture, attempts were made to understand Japanese culture by decoding the Japanese mind. For example, a Japanese psychologist, KURODA Ryō (1890–1949) suggests that there is a common characteristic in the *satori* of Zen, the sublime of *geidō* and the Taoist thought of *dō*. This common ground is in their way of seeing the world. Kuroda provides us with an important hint to understand that Japanese culture has its root in East Asian tradition. He also suggests two keywords for us to understand Japanese culture:

⁸See also, *Zen in the Art of Archery* (Herrigel 1953), a less accurate translation. For example, Tohoku University is mistranslated as Tokyo University (Herrigel 1953:27)

⁹For example, in *I Ching* (易經), “the way” is defined as the metaphysical (形而上). Chan 1963:267.

“consciousness” (識) and “perception” (覺) (Kuroda 1933: 195). Kuroda’s interpretation can be useful for us to understand the uniqueness of Japanese thought. However, we should be wary of overelaborating of the originality of Japanese culture. NAKAI Masakazu (1900–1952), who reviewed Kuroda’s work, gives important advice to those who research Japanese philosophy and culture. He writes, “I hope that the research of this trend can be able to overcome the dangerous propaganda and never embrace as an empty Japanism, and to carry on the right and heavy road in freedom that only held in research” (Nakai 1981: 213).

Returning to the question: does “Japanese philosophy” exist? My answer is positive. There have been philosophical activities in Japan, even long before Western philosophy was introduced into the country. However, philosophy in Japan is not and should not be reduced as “Japanistic philosophy”. Japanese philosophy, like Japanese culture, is hardly an original philosophical tradition, but a hybrid type with its sources from China, India, Europe, etc. Japanese philosophy is not homogeneous but heterogeneous. In the research of Japanese philosophy, one should be aware of the problem of Japanism. If I have to answer whether Nishida is a Japanese philosopher, I shall point out that he is a Japanese philosopher, but his philosophy is not Japanistic. Generally speaking, Nishida is regarded as the “first Japanese philosopher”. This praise of Nishida can be traced back to TAKAHASHI Satomi (1886–1964), who is one of the pioneers of phenomenological research in Japan. Although Takahashi was not satisfied with Nishida’s philosophy, he admitted that Nishida is “the first and the only Japanese philosopher”¹⁰ in his era. Even now, Nishida is widely regarded as the first philosopher in Japan. For example, NAKAMURA Yūjirō points out, “Nishida’s work is *the first* to deserve the name of philosophy”.¹¹ It is true that Nishida is different from his predecessors who either imported or refused Western philosophy. He is also different from most of his successors who only studied philosophical doctrines and show little originality in their works. Nishida is a philosopher who shows true insights on various philosophical issues and generates his own philosophical problem. Nevertheless, I shall argue that it is meaningless to label Nishida as the “first” Japanese philosopher. Even though the word *tetsugaku* was a recent product in the late nineteenth century, it does not make sense to assert that there were no philosophical thoughts (in a broad sense) in the history of Japan before the Meiji era. For example, Buddhism and Confucianism in Japan should be considered as a part of Japanese philosophy. In this sense, Zen master Dōgen (1200–1253), Confucian thinker OGYŪ Sorai (1666–1728) as well as other Japanese thinkers deserve to be called Japanese philosophers.

¹⁰Takahashi 1973: 153–182.

¹¹Quoted in Blocker & Starling 2001: 2.

3 Nishida as a Japanese Philosopher

Nishida was well aware that philosophy is not singular, but plural. For Nishida, there are many sources that give rise to philosophies from different traditions throughout the world. In “New Year’s Lecture to the Emperor” (1941), Nishida writes,

If I may describe Greek philosophy as a philosophy of *the polis*, centering in the city life of the Greeks, medieval philosophy was a religious philosophy, centering in the European Christian life, and recent philosophy is a scientific philosophy, centering in the recent scientific culture. Turning to the East, systems such as Confucianism, which is based on the teachings of Confucius and Mencius, and the thought of the “one hundred philosophers” have been considered philosophy. In my humble opinion, Buddhist doctrines especially contain a deep philosophical truth that is at least on a par with, if not superior to, the achievements of Western philosophy. These Oriental philosophical traditions have greatly influenced Japanese thought. The difference, however, is that in the East, philosophy did not fully develop itself as a specialized learned discipline in the same way as it did in the West. I believe that we need to put our effort [into establishing philosophy as a distinct discipline] (NKZa 12: 267–68).¹²

We might not agree with Nishida’s assertion that Buddhism may be superior to the philosophical tradition in the West. But Nishida is right to point out that there are many philosophical traditions (Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism, Shintoism, etc.) in Japan. Although it is true that many Japanese monks (Saichō, Kūkai, Dōgen, etc.) visited China to learn Buddhism, Buddhism was not the only philosophical tradition in Japan. Confucianism and Daoism had also contributed to the development of Japanese philosophy. Thomas Kasulis suggests a reason why Japanese philosophy is linked with Buddhism. He writes, “partly through the influence from Hawaii, the U.S. flagship in the study of east-west philosophy, Japanese philosophy was originally classified as a subset of Buddhist philosophy. Such a categorization ignores all the philosophy in Japan that is not-Buddhist: Confucian, Neo-Confucian, Shinto (such as *kokugaku*), and the secular academic philosophy of the modern period” (Kasulis 2004: 74). Nishida does not hold such an attitude. Japanese philosophy without the source from the other philosophical traditions is fictional. Nishida has never said that there is a homogeneous “Japanistic philosophy”. He emphasizes the importance of the Japanese elements in Japanese philosophy, but it is a misunderstanding to reduce Nishida’s philosophy to a Japanistic philosophy.

It is inevitable that Japanese philosophy relates itself to Japanese culture, not in the sense of Japanism, but in the sense of the cultural nourishment that provides the source for the development of Japanese philosophy. Nishida expresses this view of philosophy in *From Acting to Seeing (Hatarakumono kara Mirumono e, 1927)*:

It goes without saying that there are many things to be esteemed and learned in the brilliant development of Western culture, which regards form *eidōs* as being and formation as the good. However, at the basis of Asian Culture, which has fostered our ancestors for over several thousand years, lies something that can be called seeing the form of the formless

¹²Nishida 2002a: 314–315.

and hearing the sound of the soundless. Our minds are compelled to seek for this. I would like to give a philosophical foundation to this demand (NKZa 4: 6).¹³

Nishida is well aware of the complex culture background of Japanese philosophy. In fact, he endeavors to unveil the relationship between Japanese philosophy and Japanese culture. Nishida showed his interest in “things Japanese” (日本的なもの *nihon-teki na mono*) in Japanese culture. This attempt can be found in his early essay “On Things Japanese” (日本のといふことに就て *nihon-teki to iukoto ni tsuite*) in 1917,¹⁴ and “The Importance of Searching for Things Japanese” (日本のなものを見出す必要 *nihon-teki na mono o miidasu hituyō*) in 1935.¹⁵

From the late 1930’s to 40’s Nishida began to thematize his problem of culture into the quest for the more nationalistic “Japanese spirit” (日本精神). In 1937, Nishida delivered a talk at Hibiya Park entitled: “On the Scholarly Method” (学問的方法). It is one of Nishida’s first open talks on Japanese spirit. In the talk, Nishida emphasizes, “We should not forget that, even if we engage in the study of foreign ideas and foreign disciplines, the Japanese spirit can manifest itself through that study. And this Japanese spirit in turn works toward things Japanese. We must not be misguided by mere outward labels” (NKZa 12: 394/NKZb 9: 94).¹⁶ Nishida is well aware of the problem of Japanism in philosophy as well as in culture. Facing the shift of *wakon kansai* to *wakon yōsai* in his era, Nishida is not satisfied with these two extremes. For Nishida, it is not impossible to return to the old ideal and to refuse Westernization, but it is also not impossible to ignore totally Japanese culture for the sake of receiving Western knowledge. Nishida did not follow the motto of *wakon yōsai* nor *wakon kansai*. In other words, Nishida falls into neither the apostatic nor the romantic *ressentiment* feelings. In contrast to these *ressentiment* feelings, Nishida shows a scholarly attitude towards *wakon yōsai*. In a letter to KATSUBE Kenzō, Nishida writes, “We must have a broad perspective and proceed in the right direction; we should neither turn our back on the novelties of the time nor blindly follow the fashion of the day” (NKZa 19: 119).¹⁷ However, it was easier said than done. Previously, *wakon kansai* has been a comparatively less difficult task, for Japan and China were in the same cultural soil of East Asia. *Wakon yōsai* requires the adoption of Western knowledge, which is from the completely foreign cultural tradition of Western civilization. Nishida warned that it is dangerous to import knowledge only from the West. Nishida writes,

Our country [Japan], while it is said to be quick to take in and clever in understanding and adapting the cultures of various foreign countries, anciently the cultures of China and India, and after Meiji, Western culture, is yet spoken of as not original. However, I think that in Japan, the Japanese have a way of seeing things and a way of thinking peculiar to themselves, and even while absorbing from Chinese and Indian cultures, the Japanese have come to create their own culture. However, as for it [Japanese culture] being an identity between subject and world and being what I call a vertical [or subjective] world, it cannot but be

¹³ Nishida 1990: x.

¹⁴ This paper can be found in NKZa 13:116–120.

¹⁵ This short text can be found in the new edition of Nishida’s collected works (NKZb 11:309).

¹⁶ Nishida 2002b: 277.

¹⁷ Quoted in Yusa 2002:307.

regretted that it has been lacking in such qualities as incisiveness and grandeur. Though people often think, to the contrary, of the Japanese spirit as being mystical or illogical, I am opposed to this view (NKZa 12: 349–350).¹⁸

Nishida was neither obsessed with the imported novelty, nor was he encouraging a return to nostalgia. Rather, he tried to show how Japanese culture can become global. In the controversial “Problem of Japanese culture” lecture series in 1938, Nishida argues that *wakon yōsai*, a similar approach of *wakon kansai*, is “an extremely shallow and unprofitable approach” (NKZa 14: 399–400). The lecture was published as *The Problem of Japanese Culture (Nihon Bunka no Mondai)* in 1940. Nishida’s position is that each culture is unique but not idiosyncratic. It means that each culture can contribute to the world culture and, hence, become part of the global world. Nishida calls this the task of Japanese culture:

To define Japanese culture, we must certainly investigate the history of Japan and our historical cultural heritage. This research must be thoroughly scholarly. And the result of such research will form the foundations of our thought. But if we merely focus on the uniqueness [of Japan], it will not yield a spirit that can act with vitality on the contemporary global stage. We must possess theories. This is a point that government officials ought to keep in mind when they formulate policies on research and education. If we are to return to Oriental culture with the view that we have fallen prey to foreign cultures since the Meiji period, we will develop a merely reactionary strategy and will not solve any real problems. Even if some claim easily that the Japanese aim to digest global culture by means of the Japanese spirit without rejecting foreign cultures, *how* that is done is not given serious consideration (NKZa 12: 393).¹⁹

The very essence of Japanese culture, such as the expression: “cherry blossoms fragrant in the rising sun (朝日に匂ふ山桜花 *asahi ni niofu yamazakura bana*)” (NKZa 12: 279), may not be well understood by the world. The task of Japanese culture is, therefore, neither to Westernize nor “Easternize” Japan, but to globalize it—to open Japan to the world. In fact, Nishida was well aware of the trend of globalism: “Today, however, because of the development of a global transportation network, the whole earth has become one world. Consequently, today’s nationalism has to take into account what it means to be a nation in the global world” (NKZa 12: 270–271).²⁰ He reminds us clearly that the project of globalizing Japan is not to make Japan into a subject, which may lead to a form of hegemony or imperialism. Nishida’s position is to avoid subjectifying Japan. It is clear that Nishida is concerned about the problem of Japanism. He writes, “One of the fashionable superficialities going around today is the talk of a ‘Japanese science’. The adjective *Japanese* adds nothing” (NKZa 14: 400 / 13: 14). The true spirit of Japanese culture, as suggested by Nishida, is to see Japan from a global perspective. In *The Problem of Japanese culture*, Nishida writes,

Japan now is no longer an isolated island of Japan in the East Sea, but a global Japan, in Ranke’s words, one of the great powers. The problem of culture of our country nowadays is

¹⁸ Nishida 1958:362–363.

¹⁹ Nishida 2002b:276–277.

²⁰ Nishida 2002a:317.

to keep the characteristics of vertical globality since thousands of years ago, and to expand it to the horizontal globality. It is to promote the soft-minded culture of abandoning the mind and body. It is not to face the other subject as a subject, but to include the other subject as the world. Besides, it is to constitute one world in the thing in contradictory self-identity. I think it is the mission of Japan as the builder of East Asia. Facing the other subject as subject, the attempt to render the self into the other by negating the other's subject is nothing other than imperialism. This is not Japanese spirit (NKZa 12: 349).

Nishida's view of culture is influenced by Leopold von Ranke (1795–1886), who suggests that the Roman Emperor united Europe and formed a cohesive world. In the history of Japan, Japanese culture has never become a global culture. Japan's task is not a matter of choosing either the Orient or the Occident, but to see how Japan can contribute to the future world history. We may say that Nishida's project is beyond East and West; it is an ultimate attempt to erase this demarcation. The problem of Nishida is that he accepts Ranke's view unconditionally, and believes Japan can become the new global leader, at least the leader of the East Asian world. This leads to the problem of justifying the nationalistic Japanese spirit. Although Nishida tried to show he is neither a blind believer of the West nor a narrow nationalist, his approach of globalizing Japan results in the justification of Japan's "imperial way" (皇道 *kōdō*). For example, Nishida writes,

Japan is no longer cut off from the world history and actually stands on the global stage. The present moment for the Japanese is the global, historical present moment. The Japanese spirit of the past was relatively linear, but today it must become fundamentally spatial. A new global principle has to be born out of the depths of our historical spirit, from the depths of our heart. The "imperial way" has to become global. Today, many hold that various ills resulted from the importation of foreign thoughts. But we cannot keep foreign ideas from coming into Japan by merely upholding the particular over the universal. Rather, we must cultivate a global principle from within the depths of our heart (NKZa 12: 386–387).²¹

One may notice in the above quotation that Nishida emphasizes, again, that Japan is no longer an isolated country. Nishida argues that Japan should not close herself to the world. Japan is the only nation that has the potential to become a universal global standard while keeping its own Japanese spirit. In particular, he tries to justify the *kokutai* (国体) or national polity of Japan. Japan has the imperial family as her center from which the "Japanese spirit" originates. Needless to say, the national polity presupposes the presence of the Emperor system, but Nishida argues that it is not totalitarianism. He writes, "The quintessence of the unbroken line of our national polity consists in the completion of the historical world itself with the Imperial House at its center. Our national polity signifies more than a center of an ethnic nation. Our nation's Imperial way [*kōdō*] contains the principle of world formation, i.e., the principle of 'Eight corners, one world'" (NKZa 12: 430).²² Here, we can see that Nishida tried to give a scholarly approach to soften the nationalistic

²¹ Nishida 2002b:272.

²² Arisaka 1996:102.

nuance of the notion of *hakkō ichiu* (八紘一宇) or *hakkō iu* (八紘為宇).²³ His approach is to emphasize the universality of Japanese Imperialism. This universal world is not an abstract world which negates the particularity of each nation; rather, it is the world that unites all particularities and becomes one global unity.

Nishida emphasizes the universality of Japan as an attempt to show his discontent with narrow nationalists who overelaborated the uniqueness of Japan in the world. Nishida claims that the “scholarly approach” to Japanese culture is to follow neither the newly imported Western culture nor to go back to the old Eastern tradition, but to develop a third position that can nourish Japanese culture. However, Nishida’s so-called “scholarly approach” is too political. He claims, “Philosophy is not separated from politics, and politics is not separated from philosophy” (NKZa 12: 393). Nishida admits, “I think that for us to return to the original founding spirit of Japan is not just to go back to the ancient times but to take a step forward into an ever-new era. I humbly submit that ‘restoration of the old ways’ (*fukko*) ought to mean ‘thoroughgoing renewal’ (*ishin*)” (NKZa 12: 272).²⁴ Nishida’s attempts of being both *fukko* (復古) and *ishin* (維新) is in resonance with the traditional Confucian notion: “to learn new things by revising the past” (溫故知新 *onko chisin*) *chisin*.²⁵ But his approach is also a justification of nationalistic slogans such as “The sovereign and the subject as one (君臣一体 *kunshin ittai*)” and “All the people supporting the Imperial Way (萬民翼贊 *banmin yokusan*)” (NKZa 12: 434). Nishida might have tried to keep a distance from an engagement with the nationalists, but he failed to fulfil this commitment. Nishida’s approach was to globalize Japanese philosophy to overcome the liberalism of the West, but he inevitably Japanizes his philosophy. The political nuance of Nishida’s “globalism” is to overcome European colonialism, but it is too ambitious to make Japan the center of the new world order. In other words, his position develops unavoidably into a Japanese form of colonialism. This brings the justification of Japan’s militarism to “emancipate” East Asia. Nishida writes,

Up to now, East Asian peoples have been oppressed under European imperialism and colonized. We lose our roles in the world-historical mission. Now, it is time for East Asian peoples to realize our own world-historical mission, to constitute a specialized world that surpasses our individual selves, in order to fulfil the world-historical mission of the East Asian races. We, the people of East Asia, must now assert our principle of East Asian culture together and assume our stance world-historically. But in order to build a particular world, a central figure that carries the burden of the project is necessary. In East Asia today there is no other but Japan (NKZa 12: 429).²⁶

Arisaka suggests that postcolonial critique provides us a way to understand Japanese philosophy. She writes,

²³The notion “*hakkō ichiu*”, which means “eight corners one world”, is from *Nihon Shoki*. See Arisaka 1996:120n.

²⁴Nishida 2002a:314–318.

²⁵In *Analecets*, Confucius says, “A man who reviews the old so as to find out the new is qualified to teach others”. See Chan 1963:23.

²⁶Nishida 1996:102.

Japanese philosophy exemplified the claim that history does not “culminate” in European civilization; instead history would have to recognize multiple centers, all of which had claims to being just as valid as the West. Hence, Nishida’s thought gave voice to the cultural ambivalence people felt at the time, that somehow Japan was “different” but not thereby “worse” than or “behind” the West. Japanese philosophy represented one of the earliest formulations of anti-Eurocentrism.²⁷

Arisaka notices the struggle inside Nishida’s philosophy:

He thus had to adopt the language of Western philosophy, precisely because Japanese thought could not have been *recognized* by the West as of universal significance if it did not “speak their language”. Given the choice between “speaking a purely Japanese philosophical language and being ignored” and “speaking in a universal philosophical language and being recognized”, Nishida chose the latter.²⁸

Arisaka concludes that Nishida’s philosophy is orientalist, but it is able to speak a universal language. However, the double-edged colonized/colonizing language is at work in Nishida’s philosophy. She explains, “Japan is seen as one of the ‘oppressed’, but it can be the leader of the pack in the fight for freedom. This rhetoric even had the advantage of convincing some of the other Asians that Japan could save them from the West, the ‘real’ colonizing power”.²⁹ Arisaka reminds us of an important question: How do we draw on the resources of modernity without unconsciously serving domination? In the context of Nishida’s philosophy, the question can be modified in the following manner: How can we interpret Nishida’s philosophy without unconsciously Japanizing Nishida’s philosophy?

Nishida’s view of philosophy is in resonance with his view on culture. For Nishida, the task of Japanese culture is not to “Japanize” Japan, but to explore the potential of Japanese culture from a global perspective. In the same sense, Nishida has no desire to “Japanese” philosophy, but to rethink the potential of Japanese philosophy in universal language. As is noticed by ABE Masao, Nishida synthesizes “on the basis of historical life innate in human existence, which is neither Eastern nor Western, he neither established a new Eastern philosophy nor reconstructed Western philosophy, but created a new world philosophy”.³⁰ In other words, Nishida is a Japanese philosopher, but he does not intend to build a particular Japanistic philosophy; rather, he tries to develop a philosophy with universality. For this reason, it is important to interpret Nishida’s philosophy with an open dimension. In other words, one should neither reduce Japanese philosophy to an extension of Western philosophy, nor to overemphasize it as a Japanized philosophy. Rather, Japanese philosophy is a project to find a third position beyond East and West. In this sense, Japanese philosophy is not a finished product, but in a process of becoming. As John Maraldo argues, “Rather than strictly delimiting philosophy, we can acknowledge its historical conditions and the context of our own interests today to

²⁷ Arisaka 1996:545.

²⁸ Arisaka 1996:555.

²⁹ Arisaka 1996:559.

³⁰ Abe Masao, “Buddhism in Japan”, in Carr 1997:787.

develop philosophy and allow it to continually re-define itself, as indeed Greek-European philosophy always has. Philosophy is forever in the making”.³¹ Philosophy should not be conceived as an end-product, but an on-going project. In fact, Nishida draws an analogy between his philosophical project and “mining”. He writes, “I have to refine in a modern way the ore of Eastern culture including precious metals” (NKZa 12: 160). But he also states, “I am just a miner. I have no time to refine the mined stones” (NKZa 12: 221).

Although some of Nishida’s insights are philosophical, there are some attempts to explain Nishida’s thought in the light of Zen Buddhism. As a matter of fact, Nishida’s philosophy is sometimes called a “philosophy of nothingness” or a “Zen philosophy”. In a certain sense, Nishida is more famous as a “Zen Buddhist” than a philosopher in Japan and overseas. It is true that he practices *zazen* and passed a *kōan*. Consequently, many researchers used to call Nishida a “Zen philosopher”. One of the most well-known examples is the reading of SUZUKI Daisetsu (1870–1966). In “How to read Nishida”, Suzuki writes, “Nishida’s philosophy of absolute nothingness or his logic of the self-identity of absolute contradictions is difficult to understand [...] unless one is passably acquainted with Zen experience”.³² Suzuki is a prolific writer, and his work is widely known in the English-speaking world. The central thesis of Suzuki is that Zen is essential in understanding Japanese culture as well as Japanese philosophy. Following this opinion, Nishida is a thinker ultimately concerned with Eastern religion (for example, Zen Buddhist thought) or the so-called logic of the East. The contribution of Suzuki is to explain Japanese culture from a Zen perspective. However, we should not be mistaken by the title of Nishida’s work, *Zen no kenkyū*, of which “zen” refers to the problem of “the good” (善), not the Buddhist notion of Zen (禪). I shall argue that labelling Nishida as a “Zen Buddhist” lacks precision and is misleading. In fact, Nishida tried to keep his distance from Zen. In a letter to NISHITANI Keiji (1900–1990), Nishida writes,

From the beginning I am not an expert of Zen, but I do believe that some people generally misunderstand what Zen is. I think Zen is to see life in grasping the reality truly. Even though it is impossible, I have tried to unite Zen and philosophy since thirty. I would like to tell you that some ordinary uninformed people link my thought with “Zen”, but I strongly object since they understand neither Zen nor my philosophy. They are doing nothing but equating X and Y as the same thing (NKZa 19: 224–225).³³

For Nishida, philosophy and Zen are closely related to each other, especially in their endeavor to search for the meaning of life. But Zen does not hold a monopoly on the problem of life. One of the reasons why Nishida is associated with Zen is due to the one-sided interpretation of the so-called Kyoto School, an important philosophical movement in Japan. In fact, Nishida himself is regarded as the father of the school. The central theme of the school is the so-called “philosophy of nothingness”. In many introductory works on Nishida, his philosophy is interpreted as a

³¹ John Maraldo, “Defining Philosophy in the Making”, in Heisig 2004:242–243.

³² See the preface of *A Study of Good*. Suzuki 1960:iii.

³³ Yusa 2002:xx.

philosophy of “nothingness”. This so-called “orthodox” interpretation originated with Nishitani and was followed by others such as UEDA Shizuteru and ŌHASHI Ryōsuke. However, the term “Kyoto School” can be misleading. Like many other recognized members of the Kyoto School, such as TANABE Hajime (1885–1962) and HISAMATSU Shinichi (1889–1980), Nishida was not born in Kyoto. His hometown is called Unoke (currently Kahoku City) in Ishikawa Prefecture. Nishida entered the Tokyo Imperial University in 1891. His first work *An Inquiry into the Good* (1911) was written not in Kyoto but in Kanazawa. Soon he became a professor of philosophy at Kyoto Imperial University and retired in 1928, but most of his philosophical works are written after moving to Kamakura³⁴ James Heisig reminds us that Kyoto School philosophers have a distinctively Eastern perspective, but they were not just “simply reupholstering traditional philosophical questions in an oriental décor”. (Heisig 2001: 3). Heisig concludes that “[t]he philosophers of the Kyoto school have given us a world philosophy, one that belongs as rightfully to the inheritance as much as the western philosophies with which they wrestled and from which they drew their inspiration” (Heisig 2001: 9). However, it is difficult to deny that Nishida’s global philosophy is covered with an oriental décor of “nothingness”.

“Nothingness” is an important philosophical concept. It relates not only to mathematical concepts such as “emptiness”, “zero” or “infinity”; it also relates to the ontological problem of “being” and “nothingness”. In the history of Western philosophy, the problem of nothingness is an important issue. Ancient Greek philosophers were aware of the problem of nothingness. Their ontology is *ex nihilo nihli fit*, which means “nothing comes from nothingness”. In Hellenistic culture, *cosmos* came from *chaos*, which is not nothingness but a mass of undifferentiated things. Parmenides followed this tradition and regarded “nothingness” as non-being. But later in the tradition of Christianity, there is a completely different ontology: *ex nihilo fit*, which means “being comes from nothingness”. God is the infinite creator, who creates all beings from nothing; while we are all *ens creatum*, and hence finite beings. In “Was ist Metaphysik”, Heidegger suggests his own ontological proposition: *ex nihilo omne ens qua ens fit*, or “from nothingness all beings as beings come to be” (Heidegger 1976: 120). Heidegger might have taken some insights from the East Asian tradition, but it is not my intention to assimilate the Heideggerian concept of nothingness to the notion of nothingness in the East Asian world. We should notice the differences among the meanings of nothingness in different cultures. What is the meaning of *mu* (無) or “nothingness” in East Asian culture? I shall demonstrate that this notion of “nothingness” has at least three meanings: “non-possession”, “negation”, and “nothingness”.

In Japanese language, the words for “being” and “nothing” are *aru* and *nai*. Grammatically speaking, the two words refer to the pair “possession” and “non-possession”. Grammar may be useful to understand a language, but it merely summarizes rules. In the context of East Asian studies, it is more important to investigate

³⁴For a detailed biography of Nishida in English, see Yusa 2002.

into their *kanji* (漢字), which means Chinese characters.³⁵ *Kanji* was imported from China to Japan in the fifth Century. The Japanese did not simply learn the written and spoken Chinese language at that time, they also borrowed *kanji* to develop the Japanese syllabary, such as *manyōgana* (万葉仮名) in the seventh Century. Nowadays, there are two types of syllabaries: *hiragana* (ひらがな) and *katakana* (カタカナ), but *kanji* still remains an important role for Japanese language. There are two systems for pronouncing the *kanji*: *onyomi* (音読み) and *kunyomi* (訓読み). For the *kanji* 有 (pronounced as *yū* in *onyomi* and *aru* in *kunyomi*), it is from the ideograms “right hand” (又) and “moon” (月) or “meat” (肉). Following this sense, the character 有 originally means “having a piece of meat”. For the *kanji*, 無 (pronounced as *mu* in *onyomi* and *nai* in *kunyomi*), it is derived from the character for 舞 which has two ideographs: 亼 (people) and 林 (wood), meaning “dancing”. They represent the scene of people dancing in a forest, probably as prayer for rain during a drought. Following this sense, the original meaning of nothingness is “non-possession”. For example, the character 無 means despair (an empty heart). In addition, it can be a word meaning “negation”, that is, the logical opposite of a concept. Examples are 無礼 *burei*, 無料 *busui*, etc. (In these cases, the onset “b-” of *bu* is a derivation of the “m-” root of *mu*.) Furthermore, it can also mean “nothingness”.³⁶ In the East Asian heritage, there is no “creation from nothingness”; rather, “nothingness” is conceived as the ground for both “being” and “non-being”. This notion of “Eastern nothingness” can be found in Lao Tzu’s notion of “the Way” (道). In the beginning of *Tao Te Ching* or *Daodejing* (道德經), Lao Tzu writes, “The Way can be said is not the Way”.³⁷

Perhaps some philosophers will never be satisfied by this conception of “nothingness”. Questions like “why is nothingness the ground for all beings”?, and “why can it not be spoken”? abound. A Kantian may argue that to know “the Way” is to know the thing-in-itself (*Ding an sich*), which is a misuse of human reason. A Wittgensteinian may say, “Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent”. Nishida did not keep silent. He notices that true nothingness is not the “non-possession” or “negation”. Rather, it is “nothingness” where being and non-being are subsumed. Nishida called this “nothingness” the “Eastern nothingness” (東洋の無 *tōyō-teki mu*) or the “absolute nothingness” (絶対無 *zettai mu*). Nishida explains,

³⁵ In Chinese, the characters for “being” and “nothing” are 有 and 無. 有 and 無 are pronounced as *yau5* and *mou5* in Cantonese, which has more phonetic similarity to ancient Chinese than Mandarin, the current official Chinese spoken language. While in Mandarin, 有 and 無 are pronounced as *yǒu* and *wú*, Korean pronunciations for being and nothing are *yu* (유) and *mu* (무), which are similar to the corresponding Cantonese pronunciation.

³⁶ The three meanings of nothingness, “non-possession”, “negation” and “nothingness”, are given in the linguistic facts of Cantonese: For “non-possession”, the word 無 is rendered in a special character 冇 (*mou5*), in contrast with the character 有 (*yau5*). E.g. 我有錢 (I have no money). For “negation”, the word 無 is rendered in a special character 唔 (*m4*). 唔 is a vowel-less sound with the onset “m” only. It is the word for the negation of verb. E.g. 我唔去 (I do not go). For “nothingness”, the word 無 is pronounced as *mou4*, with its tone (声調) different from 有 (*mou5*). E.g. 無中生有 (Being is from nothingness).

³⁷ Chan 1963:139. Translation modified.

“Nothingness means absolutely contradictory self-identity. From this position, all beings are both being and non-being. Absolute nothingness is that which is totally transcendent to all beings, but through this all beings come into being” (NKZa 9: 6/ NKZb 8: 257).³⁸ For Nishida, “absolute nothingness” is not on the same level as being (有) and non-being (無), but it is the ultimate ground for all beings.

One may argue that Nishida’s philosophy of nothingness is related to the Buddhist notion of *sunyata*, meaning “emptiness” or “non-being”. However, the Sanskrit word *sunyata* is not identical to nothingness. At least, it is impossible to create from *sunyata*. Nishida’s notion of nothingness may be closer to the Zen Buddhist tradition. However, it is incorrect to equalize Nishida’s philosophy with Zen alone, since Nishida’s intention is not to “Japanize” his philosophy by Zen, or to “Easternize” his philosophy by Buddhism. Rather, he philosophizes by pursuing various philosophical problems. We can say that Nishida’s philosophy is a Japanese philosophy with some influences from Zen. However, we must not forget that Nishida is not only interested in Zen Buddhism, but also Christianity. It is clear that the person, love, and God are keywords in Nishida’s philosophy. Nishida’s philosophy has its sources from Eastern religions, such as Zen Buddhism, as well as from Western religions, such as Christianity. But Nishida does not force himself into the dilemma of choosing only one religion. At least, Nishida never became a Zen monk or a Christian priest, though he practiced Zen and studied Christianity during his life.³⁹ As a philosopher, Nishida’s ultimate concern is not religion, but philosophy. Thomas Kasulis rightly points out, “Although the West has engaged the Kyoto school mainly as a philosophy of religion, this is only one aspect of the school’s concerns”.⁴⁰ In Nishida’s case, we can say that it is misleading to reduce Nishida’s philosophy into a philosophy of religion. As a philosopher, Nishida he philosophizes by pursuing different philosophical problems, not only the problems of religion.

Although it is a difficult task, Nishida tried his best to universalize the concept of Eastern nothingness. However, we have to admit that Nishida is wrong in judging that the Eastern conception of nothingness is more “superior” to the Western one. How can we prevent this error again? Westernizing Nishida’s philosophy may ignore the richness of its thoughts and insights, while Japanizing Nishida’s philosophy may also hinder the possibilities of Nishida’s philosophy. Therefore, it is necessary to avoid both “orientalism” or “occidentalism” in his philosophy.⁴¹

³⁸Nishida 2002c:303. Translation modified.

³⁹In a letter to WATSUJI Tetsurō, Nishida writes, “If I were a Zen monk or a Catholic priest, I suppose celibacy would be important, but for me, it is not so” (NKZ 18:396–98). Quoted in Yusa 2002:246.

⁴⁰Wargo 2005:viii.

⁴¹I agree with NOE Keiichi, who suggests the importance of the project of overcoming orientalism and occidentalism. Cf. Noe 2003:38–39.

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Chapter 11

Facing the Absolute Inside: Nishida's Conception of Religion



Gereon KOPF

Of course, morality does not comprise specific duties decreed by religious authority; neither does scholarship. But the possibility of all knowledge and morality is grounded in the faith that unites subjectivity and objectivity. The psalmist says we see the light when we are in the light of god". Scholarship and morality protect the empirical world. Scholarship and morality purify religion. It is impossible for the advancement of scholarship to harm religion. On the contrary, scholarship deepens and purifies religion. Copernicus' theory of the movement of the earth removes the impure elements of religion and, at the same time, promotes religion in its pure form. The theory of evolution does not take anything essential away from religion. Anyone who is inspired to piety and awe by the lawful movement of the heavenly bodies, as were Kepler and Newton, must be more deeply religious than the religious fanatic. Again, in some sense, it is possible to say that we advance in scholarship if we have religious faith, just as Descartes did.

Nishida (NKZa 15: 333–334, Kopf 2003a, 239 (This is my translation as published in Kopf 2003a, 239.))

1 The Project of this Paper: Untangling Religion from Scholarship and Morality

This paragraph from NISHIDA Kitarō's *Lectures on Religious Studies* (*Shūkyōgaku* 宗教学) (NKZa 15: 221–383) provides a radical challenge and solution to one of the primary intellectual dilemmas in the Anglophone world today, namely, to the question of how religion relates to science. The public discourse on religion in much of the Anglophone world is dominated by the belief endorsed by theologians and atheists alike that religion and science are incompatible and that one has to choose one domain over the other. Many "Conservatives" assert that "religion", specifically, a certain brand of Christianity, provides the Truth whereas science, especially, evolutionary science, presents nothing but a hypothesis that, ultimately, cannot and will not stand the test of time. Many "Liberals", on the other hand, especially the

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so-called “new atheists” reject all of religion as mere superstition. While many thinkers in the Anglophone world probably hesitate to subscribe to either of these two extreme positions, nevertheless, the public discourse seems to demand a choice between “faith in God” and “belief in science”. Nishida’s bold claim that “[i]t is impossible for the advancement of scholarship to harm religion. On the contrary, scholarship deepens and purifies religion” rejects both extreme positions as well as the underlying belief that religion and scholarship including science are irreconcilable. In this essay, I will explore Nishida’s conception of religion, his vision for the relationship between religion and scholarship, and the applicability of Nishida’s position to the twenty-first century.

To understand Nishida’s claim that scholarship and religion are not in conflict but rather mutually support each other, it is necessary to read his conception of religion in the context of his overall philosophy. One of the central concepts that ground his theory of religion is the notion of “god” (*kami* 神). While his use of this term is inspired by late 19th and early twentieth century Christian theologians, Nishida is very candid that his definition of this term differs significantly from that of the theologians to whom he responds. Central to Nishida’s concept of “god” is his rethinking of the “absolute” as internal negation and otherness. In his first work, *An Inquiry into the Good* (*Zen no Kenkyū* 善の研究), he contrasts his conception of “god” with that of monotheism and pantheism and, in his final completed work, *The Logic of Basho and the Religious Worldview* (*Basho-teki ronri to shūkyō-teki sekaikan* 場所の論理と宗教的世界観), Nishida clearly demarcates it from that of Karl Barth (1886–1968). I believe that the key to Nishida’s notion of “god” can be found in his overall non-essentialist approach to philosophy and in the three-fold heuristic model he designed to eschew dualism and monism alike. Reading Nishida’s conception of “god”, “self”, and “evil” as expressions of a conceptual framework that is both non-dual and non-essential illuminates Nishida’s philosophy of religion and differentiates his approach from philosophies of religion and theologies that inherit the dualism inherent in monotheism. Such a reading of Nishida’s approach highlights his conception of religion and illustrates the implications of non-essentialism for our understanding the religious phenomenon in general.

2 Nishida’s Methodology: Seeking a Middle-Way Philosophy

2.1 What Is a Middle-Way Philosophy?

Before I begin to examine Nishida’s conception of religion, it will be helpful to take a look at his philosophical method, which gave rise to his reformulation of this concept. In “The Absolute Contradictory What? How to Read Nishida” (Kopf 2010), I suggest that Nishida dedicated his career to developing a non-dual paradigm. From his first work, *An Inquiry Into the Good* (*Zen no Kenkyū*) (NKZa 1: 2–200), to his

last, *The Logic of Basho and the Religious Worldview (Basho-teki ronri to shūkyō-teki sekaikan)* (NKZa 11: 371–465)—interestingly enough both are dedicated to the exploration of “religion”—Nishida struggled to develop a paradigm that was able to replace neo-Kantian dualism without falling into a monism. Yet, while it is possible to identify the same project as the motor driving the majority of his work, Nishida's terminology, if not his philosophy, changed during the 34 years of his literary productivity. Some scholars identify different periods in Nishida's developments using his principal paradigms as guidelines. I believe that it is possible to identify three basic periods: Nishida focused on the internal life of the self during his “idealist phase” (1911–1929), shifted his focus towards the external world during an “interim phase” (1930–1936), and, ultimately, proposed to collapse the external and internal worlds in the dynamic interaction between the self and world, which he called “acting intuition” (*kōi-teki chokkan* 行為の直観), in his “non-dual phase” (1937–1945) (Kopf 2007, 129).¹ This tripartite division is relevant to the current essay for two reasons. (1) In the first two periods of his career, Nishida drew heavily on European scholarship to craft his notion of religion. Starting with 1937, Nishida's terminology became more idiosyncratic and he started to refer to Buddhist texts and ideas. (2) In the last period of his career, he proposed that the problem of dualism was not the notion of “difference” itself but that of “essence”. The key problem of philosophy was not the conceptualization of “god” and “humans”, “good” and “evil”, “self” and “other” but the reification of their difference. To subvert the essentialization of difference, Nishida created neologisms using the character of the Chinese copula “*soku*” (Ch. *ji* 即) such as “affirmation-*soku*-negation” (NKZa 11: 117) and employed Mahāyāna Buddhist phrases and ideas expressing what he referred to as the “logic of *is-not* from the Heart Sūtra” (NKZa 11: 405).

3 The Prototype of Nishida's Philosophy

While Nishida's later work presents his mature philosophy, his philosophical method is the clearest in his first two volumes. In *An Inquiry Into the Good*, Nishida tackles the basic questions of traditional European philosophy: epistemology, ontology, ethics, and philosophy of religion. Especially in the latter three areas, he presents two counterfactual alternatives as a foil to advance his, more inclusive and, thus, superior option: “nature” (*shizen* 自然), “spirit” (*seishin* 精神), and “god”, “heteronomous ethics” (*taritsu-teki rinri-gakusetsu* 他律的倫理学説), “autonomous ethics” (*jiritsu-teki rinri-gakusetsu* 自律的倫理学説), and “action theory” (*katsudōsetsu* 活動説), as well as “theism” (*yūshinron* 有神論), “pantheism” (*han-shinron* 汎神論), and the notion of “god” as “unifying energy” (*tōitsu ryoku* 統一力) (NKZ 1: 178) or “unifying activity” (*tōitsu sayō* 統一作用) (NKZa 1: 185). In Nishida's words, “[g]iven the facts of direct experience, there is no juxtaposition of

¹ Sueki (1983-1988) suggests five phases of Nishida's work.

subject and object, there is no distinction between matter and spirit, matter is mind/heart, heart/mind is matter, there is only one substance” (NKZa 1: 180–181).² Formulations like this one provoke criticisms of Nishida’s early philosophy as monistic or idealistic. Be that as it may, Nishida’s strategy is obvious: the options provided by traditional European philosophy in response to the great questions are inadequate; the solutions to these questions have to be sought through a middle way or a third term.

4 Nishida and his Antecedents

Faced with criticism of his *An Inquiry Into the Good*, Nishida penned his second volume, *Intuition and Reflection in Self-Consciousness* (*Jikaku ni okeru chokkan to hansei* 自覚における直観と反省) (NKZa 2) as an apology and explanation of his position. In a crucial section of this work, Nishida lays out his strategy and project for everyone to see. Since this is such a crucial passage, I cite its central section here:

There are various approaches to the connection between thought and experience. But usually the former is considered to be abstract, the latter to be concrete. It is thought that when the former unites with the latter objective truth emerges. [...] However, sensual content itself cannot be thought to provide objectivity to thought, rather, it has to be something along the lines of Bolzano’s so-called representation itself; in the structure of objective consciousness there cannot be any demand for rights; only, as Cohen said, when applied to the principle of internal quantity can objectivity be demanded in the middle of the epistemic system. [...] There is only one way to resolve this contradiction, namely, as Hegel said, thought must be being and being, thought. [...] That which is truly demanded is neither rationality nor irrationality but must be the pure movement where rationality is irrationality, *on* is *me-on*, and experience is thought. In this sense there is always the totality in our backgrounds; as Jakob Boehme said, where we stay and where we go there is god (NKZa 2: 181–2).

In this passage, Nishida reveals three basic keys to his philosophy. First, the construction of knowledge requires two basic features: “thought” (*shii* 思惟) and “experience” (*keiken* 経験). Any philosophy that wants to be taken seriously needs to account for and include both epistemic modalities. However, and this is the second take away here, Nishida contends that the philosophical tradition prior to him offers two insufficient alternatives: the abstract objectivism of Bernard Bolzano (1781–1848) or, alternatively, Wilhelm Windelband’s (1848–1915) Southwest School, on the one side, and what Nishida perceived to be the concrete subjectivism of Herman Cohen’s (1842–1918) Marburg School, on the other. However, the solution to this fundamental dilemma of epistemology lies in the dialectic of Georg

²If not indicated otherwise, all translations of Nishida’s work are my own.

Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831) or the mysticism of Jacob Boehme (1575–1624). The third lesson of this passage, which brings us back to the topic of this essay, is that this third position is essentially religious and implies the unity of self and god.

5 Nishida's Play Analogy

In the paragraph above, Nishida hints at what I call a threefold heuristic device. Throughout most of his work, he approaches a specific philosophical question by presenting two sample positions from the history of philosophy as counterfactuals, and then he presents his own position as the middle way. What is interesting, however, is that he identifies his position as the religious standpoint. In a rarely quoted passage from his *Lectures on Religious Studies*, he explains his model using what can be called a “play analogy”.

[We] can compare our existence in the world with a play. In this play, we human beings not only constitute the audience but also participate in the play as performers. If we observe the drama of this world from the standpoint of the audience, only the intellectual and aesthetic feelings arise. On the contrary, if we simply participate in the performance, we are completely absorbed in it and any place for reflection upon the performance itself is eliminated. This means that only the feeling of morality arises. However, because we simultaneously perform in and observe the play, the question of whether or not the object of our passions and desire, that is, our ideal, prevails in the contest to decide the dominant paradigm in this world stirs our emotion; this we call religious emotion (NKZa 15: 291; Kopf 2003a, 230).

Nishida suggests that human beings are neither merely spectators nor plain actors; rather, it is our predicament that we participate in reality and reflect on it, at the same time. So far so good. However, the problem is that the dualistic paradigm on which most philosophy prior to Nishida is predicated presents us with the absurd alternative of having to choose between the abstract objectivism of the spectator (as it is exemplified in the philosophies of Windelband or Bolzano) and the concrete subjectivism of Cohen. In his work, Nishida produced various versions of this threefold model whether it was articulated as his “logic of place” (*basho no ronri* 場所の論理) containing the “*basho*” 場所 of “being” (*yū* 有), “non-being” (*mu* 無), and “absolute nothingness” (*zettai mu* 絶対無), or the theory of the three “worlds” including the “physical” (*butsuri-teki* 物理的), “biological” (*seibutsu-teki* 生物的), and “historical” (*rekishi-teki* 歴史的) worlds. In either case, however, the third and highest realm, to Nishida, is grounded in religious experience. Nishida's conception of religion does not only constitute an exciting conceptual contribution to philosophical discourse in its own right, it also provides a key to Nishida philosophy and, in some sense, the philosophy of the Kyoto School.

6 Nishida's Typology of Religion: Theism, Pantheism, and "True Religion"

6.1 Nishida's Definitions of Religion

ABE Masao (1915–2006), one of the first popularizers of Nishida philosophy in the Anglophone world, portrayed Nishida as a Buddhist philosopher. This is, at best, overstating the case. While Ueda (1991) and Yusa (2002) emphasize that Nishida's ideas were influenced by the Shin Buddhist faith of his mother and his own Zen Buddhist practice, Nishida's theory of religion, especially as advanced in his early work and in his *Lectures on Religious Studies*, was thoroughly inspired by Christian theology and nineteenth century religious studies. Nishida defines religion as "the relationship between god and humans" (NKZa 1: 173) and in his lectures as "the unity between god and myself" (NKZa 15: 333). In *An Inquiry into the Good*, he employs Christian theology and imagery to delineate the religious project:

The religious demand is the demand that concerns the self, it is the demand that pertains to the life of the self. Our self is aware of the limitation of the relative and, at the same time, it is the demand that desires to grasp eternal life on the basis of that which unites absolute power. In the same way in which Paul said that we don't already live our lives but that we live in Christ, it is the feeling to live depending on the one God who is already nailed on the cross (NKZa 1: 169).

In accordance with the general sense of Japanese intellectuals in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Nishida fashions his concept of "religion" using Christianity as it was exported to Japan during the Meiji period as the prototype of religion.³ Similarly, Nishida borrows the notions of the "absolute" and "nothingness" from European philosophy, from German idealism to be exact. Nishida uses the term "*zettai*" ("absolute") to constitute the Japanese translation of "das Absolute" and borrowed the term "nothingness" from Hegel. A Buddhist philosopher in the literal sense of the term like, e.g., Nishida's student NISHITANI Keiji (1900–1990) would have used Buddhist concepts such as "emptiness" (S. *śūnyatā*) (NKC 11: 5-31) instead.

6.2 Nishida's Ranking of Various Types of Religion

Nishida employs three separate typologies of religion. As I mentioned above, in *An Inquiry into the Good*, he distinguishes between theism, pantheism, and "true religion" (*shin no shūkyō* 真の宗教) (NKZa 1: 173). Theism emphasizes

³NISHI Amane (1829–1897) created a neologism "*shūkyō*" 宗教 as the Japanese translation of "religion".

Table 11.1 (Kopf 2003b, 7) illustrates these three understandings of religion

| Religion type | Human-divine relationship | Worldview | Play analogy |
|---------------|---------------------------|-------------|---------------------------------------|
| Theism | Separation | Dualism | Spectator |
| Pantheism | Oneness | Monism | Actor |
| True religion | Mutual dependence | Non-dualism | Engaged observer and reflective agent |

transcendence, which separates the divine from human beings, and enforces a dualistic worldview. Thus, it replicates the position of the spectators at a play. Pantheism focuses on immanence, claims the oneness of god and humanity, and endorses monism. This view of religion mirrors the predicament of the actors who lose themselves in the action of the play. True religion, i.e., one that envisions humans as spectators and actors alike, highlights, to use a term from Nishida's later work, the "mutual determination" (*sōgo gentei* 相互限定) of god and humans and promotes non-dualism (Table 11.1).

6.3 Nishida's Typology of Religion

In his *Lectures on Religious Studies*, Nishida introduces the religious typology developed by Hermann Siebeck (1842–1920). He identifies two types, "salvific religions" (*kyūsai shūkyō* 救済宗教) and "moral religions" (*dōtoku shūkyō* 道德宗教) (NKZa 15: 324). Contrary to what the nomenclature might suggest, in Nishida's reading, "moral religions" have nothing to do with morality *per se*. Rather, Nishida maps Siebeck's terminology onto the typology rendered by the various versions of theism. To be exact, Nishida uses the rhetoric of "other-power" (*tariki* 他力) and "self-power" (*jiriki* 自力), popularized in Japan by Shinran (1173–1263), the founder of Shin Buddhism, to imply a connection between theism and pantheism, on the one side, and salvific religions and moral religions, on the other. Salvific religions and theism are characterized by salvation through other-power. Moral religions and various forms of pantheism are characterized by salvation through self-power. His use of these typologies indicates that Nishida is more interested in making an argument for his threefold heuristic device than in the precise presentation and application of these three typologies. He is intent on arguing that both dualistic and monistic axiologies do not provide a sufficient model of reality; only a non-dualism based on religious experience and the religious worldview is able to accomplish such a feat (Table 11.2).

Table 11.2 (Kopf 2003b, 13) illustrates the relationship between these three typologies

| Theism-terminology | Siebeck's typology | Nishida's typology | Worldview |
|--------------------|--------------------|----------------------|-------------|
| Theism | Salvific religion | Other-power religion | Dualism |
| Pantheism | Moral religion | Self-power religion | Monism |
| True religion | N/A | True religion | Non-dualism |

7 The Concept of “Religion” in the Latter Nishida: The Absolute as Transcendence-and-Yet-Immanence

7.1 *Re-Thinking Transcendence*

In the second half of his final work, *The Logic of Basho and the Religious Worldview*, Nishida tends to describe god and the absolute more and more in non-dualistic terms using symbols he borrowed from Buddhist and Christian traditions. The result is a conception of god that bears little resemblance to the god of either Barth or pantheism but reads like an interpretation of the symbol of god that is heavily influenced by one specific brand of Kegon (Ch. *huayan* 華嚴) or Zen (Ch. *chan* 禪) non-dualism. Relying on Shinran's *Tannishō* 歎異抄, the *Diamond Sūtra* (Ch. *Jingangjing*, Jp. *Kongōkyō* 金剛經) (T 235.8) selected sayings by Zen masters such as the *Wumen's Barrier* (Ch. *Wumenguan*, Jpn. *Mumonkan* 無門関) (T 2005.48), and *The Records of Zen Master Linji* (Ch. *Linjilu* 臨濟錄) (T 1985.47), among others, Nishida begins to describe “god” and the “absolute” as the transcendence in the form of the immanence. Nishida uses a quotation from the *Records of Zen Master Linji* to express this collapse of immanence and transcendence that is as famous as it is shocking: “[t]he Buddha dharma is not useful nor does it accomplish anything; it constitutes nothing but the everyday and the ordinary; have a shit, take a piss; put on your clothes, eat and drink, retire when tired” (T 1985.47.498.16–18; NKZa 9: 333, NKZa 11: 424, 446).

7.2 *Nishida's Use of the Phrase “Soku”*

To interpret this new notion of the divine philosophically,⁴ Nishida evokes what he calls, following the writings of his friend SUZUKI Daisetsu 鈴木大拙 (1870–1966), “logic of sokuhi” (*sokuhi no ronri* 即非の論理). Both Suzuki and Nishida contend that this phrase constitutes and articulates the pinnacle of Mahāyāna Buddhist philosophy. This “logic of sokuhi” comprises in some sense the inverse formulation of his *soku*-phrases. While the *soku*-phrases have the form A-*soku*-(not-A), the logic of

⁴Elsewhere, I have argued that this sense of the “transcendence-in-immanence” has a lot of similarities with Mark Taylor's “divine milieu” (Kopf 2010).

sokuhi takes on the form A-*sokuhi*-A; A-and-yet-not-A (SDZ 5: 381).⁵ The outcome is the same in both cases: the formulation of a non-dual principle. Despite the frequent evocations of Buddhist thinkers and texts in his last works, Nishida does not interpret the Buddhist texts he cites but uses them as markers to indicate his rejection of the various dichotomies he argues against such as absolute and relative, non-being and being, transcendence and immanence. He finds these concepts useful for expressing what he considers the fundamental character of reality, namely that the immanence of the phenomenal world requires the assumption of a transcendence, which, in turn (and ironically), cannot exist independently from the phenomenal world.

7.3 *Transcendence and/in Everyday Life*

This move towards the notion of the “transcendence-and-yet-immanence” marks a twofold shift: First, at this point in his career, Nishida’s philosophy moves from the realms of the dialectical discourse on the ground of philosophy for the first time to more, dare I say it, existential themes. Second, Nishida shifts the focus from the terminology of god as the non-dual principle to the discussion of two terms that express the relationship between the transcendent and the immanent in some Zen and Shin Buddhist writings, namely “the depth of the everyday” (*byōjōtei* 平常底) (NKZa 9: 303, 333; NKZa 10: 122; NKZa 11: 446–452) and the “inverse correlation” (*gyakutaiō* 逆対応) (NKZa 11: 425–450). This shift in terminology is not all that surprising. As we have seen, Nishida defined religion as “the relationship between god and humans” and as “the unity between god and myself”. In his *Lectures on Religious Studies*, he adds that god symbolizes objectivity, the “I” symbolizes subjectivity, and religion constitutes their unity. Here Nishida assumes the position of the religious adherent who constitutes the subject of the religious activity and any theology that makes god their object. Of course, achieving this position is not that easy since god constitutes a “self-identity of contradictories” (*mujun-teki jiko dōitsu* 矛盾的自己同一) and cannot be objectified.

So, what does it mean to make “god” the symbol for objectivity? I think there are two clues that can help us understand Nishida’s conception of god. First, god does not constitute a simple objectivity, but rather an absolute one. This means that this conception already includes the moment of subjectivity to a certain degree. Moreover, the god that symbolizes objectivity is the god conceived of as separate from the self, that is Barth’s absolutely transcendent god. It is this objectified god that opposes the self and whose opposition to the self is overcome in the religious activity Nishida describes with the Mahāyāna terms “*byōjōtei*” and “*gyakutaiō*”. The latter he attributes to the Japanese Zen master DAITŌ Kokushi 大燈國師

⁵For a more detailed discussion of Nishida’s use of Buddhist philosophy see Takemura (2002) and Kopf (2005).

(1282–1338) (NKZa 11: 415). Inspired by the Christian discourse, Nishida adds his own word creations such as “the eschatology of the everyday” and “the transcendent in the form of the immanent” into the mix. These terms express the unity of the two extremes of absolute and relative, transcendent and immanent. The two opposites have to be united. However, this cannot be done in conceptual and abstract language or in unreflective engagement, but exclusively in an existential modality that is reflective and engaged like the engaged observer or reflective participant in a play. To exist means to be actor and audience, historical agent and historian, at the same time. This attitude is, to Nishida, only actualized in the religious attitude. This attitude he calls the “religious mind” (*shūkyōshin* 宗教心).

8 Nishida’s Conception of “God” as “Absolute Thou”

8.1 *God as Absolute Thou*

What makes Nishida’s conception of “god” hard to understand is that he conceives of it as a relational concept. It is literally on the last pages of his collected works that he started to use the relational concept “*gyakutaiō*” in lieu of “god”, but the idea expressed by this concept was in the making from the beginning of Nishida’s career. As early as 1932,⁶ Nishida conceived of “god” as the “absolute thou” at the bottom of the self. He explains that

The absolute other that resides in the depth of the self has to be thought of as absolute thou. For this reason, we feel an infinite responsibility in the depth of the self and our existence has to be thought of as evil. We always store within ourselves a profound disease and fear and the more self-consciousness becomes clear, we feel the corruption of ourselves. Even if we say that in the depth of ourselves there is nature and reason we cannot arrive at this thought (NKZa 6: 420).

God conceived here as “absolute thou” does not constitute a transcendent other because it “resides in the depths of the self”. This means that god and self are not disjoined but inextricably intertwined. God is part of the self, and the self is part of god. This intimate relationship to god implies an “infinite responsibility” on the side of the self. Taking part in the infinity of god, the self also participates in god’s infinite responsibility. At the same time, Nishida contends, the existence of the self “has to be thought of as evil”. Why is this? While there are clues in monotheistic theologies to identify human existence as god’s other and, thus, as evil, the notion that god and self share a common ground and are “mutually determined” goes against many monotheistic sensibilities. So, what is Nishida’s reasoning here?

⁶James Heisig presents an exciting comparison between Nishida’s and Martin Buber’s (1878–1965) conception of “god” as the “absolute thou” (Heisig 2015:85–130).

8.2 *God's Self-Negation*

In his *Logic of Basho and the Religious Worldview*, Nishida elucidates this problem when he defines the self as god's self-negation. This is important. In many monotheistic theologies, god is conceived as absolutely different from human beings and, thus, to appropriate Nishida's language, constitutes an external negation of the self. Nishida explains that

When the absolute opposes nothing, it is truly absolute. Opposing absolute nothing, it is absolute. There is nothing, which opposes the self objectively from the outside. To say that the self opposes absolute nothing means that it opposes itself as self-contradiction. It constitutes a contradictory self-identity (NKZa 11: 397).

If god is truly absolute there is nothing external to god. An absolute god is not merely transcendent but transcendent in an immanent way. God opposes the self absolutely "at the depth of the self". The self, actually the multiplicity of selves, constitutes god's self-negation and vice versa. Thus, Nishida conceives god as "the self-identity of the absolute contradictories of the many-and-yet-one and the one-and-yet-many" (NKZa 8: 561)—god expresses itself in the act of self-negation in an infinite number of selves—as well as "the dialectic of internality and externality" (NKZa 8: 526).

9 The Difficult Problem: How to Understand the Non-Duality of Good and Evil?

9.1 *Good and Evil*

The question is, of course, how can we understand Nishida's attempt to formulate a non-duality of good and evil. In some sense, this non-duality can be understood as a means to destabilize the notions of good and evil in the same way in which he de-essentializes the notions of "god" and "humans", "transcendence" and "immanence", and "outside" and "inside". However, it is interesting that Nishida does not apply his *soku*-phraseology to the relationship of good and evil even though he refers to the logic of *sokuhi* in the same literary context. In a key passage of his *The Logic of Basho and the Religious Worldview*, Nishida discloses the fundamental pillars of his notion of religion. Since this is a central passage, I will quote it in some length.

The true absolute contains absolute self-negation. This is absolute being as the absolute affirmation-qua-negation. For this reason, it is the true absolute. God includes the absolute self-negation of itself within itself. ... The god that simply fights evil, even if we say that he defeats evil in some sense, is a relative god. A simply transcendent highest god is merely abstract. The absolute god is the god who contains the absolute self-negation inside; it descends to ultimate evil. The god that saves the evil doers is truly absolute. The highest form forms the lowest matter. Absolute *agape* extends to absolutely evil people. God hides

even in the heart of the absolutely evil in the form of inverse correlation. A god that simply judges is not a god. In this sense, good and evil are not undifferentiated. [...] As I said before, the absolute god constitutes the self-identity of absolute contradictories; subsequently, our self constitutes the point in which the absolute reflects itself truly forms the self-identity of good and evil. In the case of Dimitri Karamazov, beauty is hidden in the middle of Sodom [...] Therefore, this world is, to some degree, abound with the demonic. Our selves as the individual many of the world, are equally evil and divine. A theology of the logic of *basho* is neither theistic nor deistic; it is neither spiritual nor natural; it is historical (NKZa 11: 404).

This passage is revealing and shocking at the same time. It is revealing in that it collapses the realms of religion and history and, thus, effectively rejects a traditional understanding of “transcendence”. It is shocking as it seems to collapse good and evil. However, as Brook Ziporyn has shown in his brilliant *Emptiness and Omnipresence: An Essential Introduction to Tiantai Buddhism*, in which he coins the phrase “Hitler bodhisattva” (Ziporyn 2016, 260) to illustrate Tiantai 天台 philosophy, non-dualism neither negates the fact of evil nor does it conflate it with goodness. On the contrary, it acknowledges the fact of evil as well as the predicament of human beings who are caught, as the conception of the six realms of *samsāra* illustrates, in the realm of moral ambiguity.

Therefore, an application of Nishida’s model of the three worlds will illuminate his conceptions of good and evil. Defined in opposition, good and evil constitute merely abstract ideas in the world of knowledge. Even if one extends this world to the world of conditionality, the individual considers itself either justified against an unjust world or as a sinner fallen from the world of goodness. The “historical world”, however, belies this abstract opposition between good and evil. Not only are these concepts relative to each other—good is defined over and against evil and vice versa—and not only does a totality obviously include both good and evil, but the world of engagement as well as the world of transformation challenges rigid conceptions of good and evil themselves. The activity by means of which individuals engage with the world and the world transforms itself is neither good nor evil; good and evil are secondary categories, judgments applied within the world of knowledge and at least one step removed from the unifying activity that constitutes the world of engagement. If the concepts of good and evil can be applied to the “historical world”, what is considered good is that which promotes unity and totality, and what is considered evil is that which obstructs it. Nishida consistently insists that good and evil always will be in conflict with each other; there is no resolution. The observation that life is an eternal struggle between good and evil, which seems to be more realistic than anything else, leads Nishida to another conclusion, namely that human existence is inherently demonic.

9.2 *The Conception of the Demonic*

Nishida uses the term “the demonic” in the last 6 years of his life. He started to introduce it together with Plato’s “daimon” but later acknowledged his direct indebtedness to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832) and the indirect influence of Friedrich Nietzsche’s (1844–1900) notion of the “Dionysian” in “*Die Geburt der Tragödie*”. Nietzsche also refers to the demonic in this work. Nishida generally uses the term “demonic” with three meanings: First, it describes the basic principle and “driving energy” of history: “The self-expression of the world of the self-identity of contradictories is paradoxical and can be thought in the words of Goethe as the demonic” (NKZa 10: 61). Second, it refers to the individual’s attitude towards the totality and the subject’s comportment towards the environment: “Individuality constitutes the demonic power to form history” (NKZa 10: 379). In a third step he applies this thinking to the one example of the specific, namely the ethnic community: “The ethnic community constitutes the demonic power to form history” (NKZa 12: 421). In short, Nishida defines the demonic as the contradiction at the bottom of history that cannot be resolved and as the potential of the individual specific—be it an individual person or an individual country—to make history. Paradoxically, the ambiguity of human existence is demonic insofar as the failure to bear it will have demonic consequences, paranoia and/or narcissism.

9.3 *What Does it Mean to Be Religious?*

In some sense, then, evil is a soteriological concept for Nishida. He uses it frequently in the context of Shinran. In the same sense in which Nishida uses Dimitri Karamazov as a prototype for the ambiguity of human existence, he uses Shinran as a prototype for the religious heart, the heart of conversion. Biographically, his liking for Shinran is rooted in the faith commitments of his mother. But, most of all, he is attracted to Shinran’s self-defacement. In one of his earliest essays entitled “The Fool Shinran” (*Gutoku shinran* 愚禿親鸞), Nishida explains “In all humans there is wisdom and stupidity, morality and immorality. However, even in the case of greatness, human knowledge is human knowledge and human morality is human morality”, therefore, it is the “essence of religion” “to convert one’s existence, discard this knowledge and morality, gain new knowledge and acquire a new morality, and enter a new life” (NKZa 1: 407). Even though Nishida wrote these lines long before he penned the above-cited passage on evil, I think it does highlight Nishida’s basic thought. The ambiguity of the demonic indicates the fact that no human individual is all-knowing and all good or completely ignorant and immoral. Human

individuals exist in the grey zone between knowledge and ignorance, morality and immorality; and so are our actions.

This is a hard pill to swallow, especially at a time when political leaders try to divide the world into good and evil. While we humans take solace in such distinction and, more importantly, while it is morally necessary to condemn genocide, torture, and rape, labeling people or communities “evil” or “ultimately evil” does not solve a single ethical dilemma in the world. In effect, Nishida implies an infinite process of recognizing our limitations, even though he seems to assert the opposite at times. This is what he admires in Shinran: the awareness of the human limitations and the need for constant conversion. The process of an infinite conversion is, of course, parallel to his demand that our knowledge of reality deepen itself infinitely. Nishida’s emphasis on the demonic, then, indicates the fact that “in all humans there is [...] immorality” and, like Shinran’s confession of his ignorance, the need for conversion. To Nishida, the process of infinite conversion and the infinite deepening of the self’s awareness in the form of god’s self-expression is at the heart of the religious enterprise.

10 Conclusion: Religion in the Face of the Absolute Inside

With this discussion of the moral dimension of “god”, we have come full circle. We are now in a position to understand the quote with which I opened this essay. To understand the relationship between religion, scholarship, and morality as envisioned by Nishida, we needed first to examine his conception of “god”. Nishida arrives at the concept of “god” in his attempt to ground his epistemology and ontology. However, conceptually “god” does not function the same way in Nishida’s system as it does in monotheism. Nishida defines “god” neither as “necessary being” nor as opposed to “non-being”, “creation”, or even “evil”. As the “absolute”, Nishida’s “god” encompasses all of these. Nishida’s god is also subject to change as it continuously negates and transforms itself and exists in mutual dependence on its opposite—its own negation. God has to be understood as the “absolute other” at the bottom of the self. At the same time, to Nishida, “god” implies moral awareness and action. But, in Nishida’s system, god constitutes neither the authority of morality nor a judge. God constitutes the dynamic relationship between all things as “inverse correlation” (*gyakutaiō*). Similarly, in Nishida’s system, “religion” marks neither a tradition, an institution, a dogma, a specific practice, nor a set of rules. To Nishida, religious experience is coming face-to-face with the totality of existence and thus with one’s own volatility and death. Prototypes of religious persons are people who have faced the abyss of their own annihilation such as Shinran and Fyodor Dostoyevsky (1821–1881). Religion emerges under the horizon of totality. It emerges through our engagement with this reality, rooted in the concreteness of subjectivity, and the abstract objectivity of scholarship (i.e., our removed understanding and analysis of the world). This is the meaning of a non-essential conception of god. It is for this reason that “the possibility of all

knowledge and morality is grounded in the faith that unites subjectivity and objectivity"; it is for this reason that "scholarship and morality protect the empirical world" and "purify religion"; and it is for this reason that "[a]nyone who is inspired to piety and awe by the lawful movement of the heavenly bodies, as were Kepler and Newton, must be more deeply religious than the religious fanatic" (NKZa 15: 333–334, Kopf 2003a, 239). These are the implications of a non-essentialist conception of religion.

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- NKZa *Nishida Kitarō Zenshū* 西田幾多郎全集 [*Complete works of Kitarō Nishida*]. 20 volumes. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1988.
- SDZ *Suzuki Daisetsu Zenshū* 鈴木大拙全集 [*Complete Works of Daisetsu Suzuki*]. 32 volumes. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten. 1968-1971.
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Chapter 12

Science and Religion in Nishida Philosophy



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What role does science play in the philosophy of NISHIDA Kitarō 西田幾多郎? When we consider this question, we must also take account of the role of religion. This essay will explore the place of science and religion in Nishida's philosophy. The first part will elaborate Nishida's concept of "perfect truth" as the foundation for scientific knowledge. The second part will provide an overview of some of the key concepts of Nishida's later philosophy in relation to prominent areas of contemporary theoretical science and mathematics, namely set theory and quantum physics. This discussion will demonstrate the ways in which scientific and religious truths intersect while explaining the foundational role that religion plays in Nishida's thought overall.

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1 Science and Religion in *An Inquiry into the Good*¹

Nishida's first book, *An Inquiry into the Good* (善の研究 *Zen no Kenkyū*), was published in 1911. His discussion of the notion of truth in this book points to a necessary connection between science and religion. Therefore, Nishida's understanding of scientific truth must be sought within the context of his views on truth more broadly.

1.1 Perfect Truth

Today the scientific notion of truth is widely regarded as the standard of truth because it is presumed to be objective and universal and, therefore, valid under all circumstances until proven otherwise. Other kinds of truth (such as those found in religion and art) must somehow follow the model of scientific truth in order to be regarded as "truth" at all. In defiance of such a view, Nishida develops the notion of "perfect truth" which refers to the actuality of the world before it has been divided into objective facts and subjective knowledge.

The culmination of truth is the most concrete, immediate realities that synthesize various facets of experience. [...] Though truth lies in unity, the unity is not a unity of abstract concepts. True unity lies in the immediate realities. Perfect truth pertains to the individual person and is actual. Perfect truth therefore cannot be expressed in words, and such things as scientific truth cannot be considered perfect truth (NKZa 1:36–37).²

Nishida insists that "perfect truth" cannot be scientific, because perfect truth must be composed of the "true unity", of immediate reality. He claims that immediate reality can only be grasped by the individual and experienced in the present in the form of "pure experience (純粹経験 *junsui keiken*)". Thus, true unity constitutes perfect truth. Moreover, true unity, i.e. perfect truth, cannot be expressed in words or concepts because language can be realized only through a series of distinctions. Thus, there are three defining factors for perfect truth according to Nishida: Perfect truth (1) belongs to the individual, (2) is actual, and (3) cannot be expressed in words.

For Nishida, scientific truth is built upon an epistemological foundation that already assumes the separation between subject and object. It articulates an abstraction, a one-sided, "objective" realm of knowledge. However, people consider it universally valid in its own way. In this sense, scientific truth is an abstract derivative of what Nishida calls "perfect truth" and is only one of the truths constructed out of perfect truth.

One may object here that Nishida's notion of truth appears to be subjective since it identifies "individual" experience with what is "actual". Here one must keep in

¹ Nishida 1990: 1–218.

² Nishida 1990: 26. The present writer revised some phrases of this translation according to the Japanese original text.

mind that the notion of pure experience is indeed not “subjective”; it is the dynamic out of which the notion of subjective experience arises in reflection. By the same token, it is also incorrect to describe it in objective terms, as if what Nishida means by the “actual” could be ascribed to the “experiential states of the subject”. The perfect truth of pure experience exists prior to any division between objective reality and subjective experience.

1.2 *Correlation Between the Self and World*

Generally speaking, the philosophy of Nishida can be considered to have been developed from the fundamental idea of pure experience. The essential characteristic of pure experience lies in the oneness of the subject and object. In some of his later works, Nishida gives this principal notion a new name: “radical positivism” (徹底の実証主義 *tetteiteiki jissshōshugi*).³ By this term, he means that reality is self-demonstrating.⁴ This self-demonstration of reality is put into practice in the following manner: The world as creating “subject” determines itself by becoming concrete and actual. At the same time, the self becomes aware of the concrete, actual world by participating in the world’s creative activity. Through its participation in the world’s creative activity, the self creates, changes, and evolves some aspects of the world. In so doing, the self is realized, and a new world is created. This process of creation and realization is none other than the self-demonstration of reality, which Nishida denotes with the term “radical positivism”.

To put it another way, the self-determination of the world and the self’s becoming aware of its own state of pure experience occur simultaneously as an interaction. Therefore, they take place interdependently. The interdependent activities of the world and the self lead to the view that the world expresses itself both through its own self-determining activity (in which it becomes actual), and through the self’s becoming self-aware within the world that it is actively shaping. Thus, the self-expression of the “objective” world is one with the “subjective” self-expressive activity of becoming self-aware.⁵ In other words, a being that is born of the world becomes a creative element within it. This reciprocal creative activity of the self and world constitutes what is actual. The actuality of truth, therefore, does not lie in a temporal “existing now”, but in a reciprocal “*actualis* (L.), being active”. This process may be understood as a developed form of “pure experience”, and it is an essential part of the meaning of “radical positivism”.

This self-expression of the world, which is both creative and a product of creative activity, constitutes objective fact. Therefore, a theoretical understanding of the world belongs concurrently to the self-expression of the world and that of becoming

³ See, for example, NKZa 11:18, 124 and so forth.

⁴ Cf. NKZa 11:7.

⁵ Cf. NKZa 11:17, 18.

self-awareness. From this perspective, we can say that the so-called objective world of fact is nothing but the self-expression of the creative world. Its self-determination can be realized only through a “subjective” activity of a human being as a created and creating element of the world. Therefore, theory, as a human activity of understanding, is one with the self-expression of the creating and created world. It is the unification of the world’s self-expression, the becoming of self-awareness, and the actual world. Here we can find a true characteristic of “radical positivism” as oneness between the subjective and the objective, experience and reality, practice and theory, and the empirical and the conceptual.

1.3 *Standard of Truth*

Now, to return to our previous subject, we must ask ourselves in more detail what kind of truth can be “perfect” truth, according to Nishida. Perfect truth lies in “our state of pure experience” which indicates the congruence of the experiencing subject with the object being experienced. In this sense, perfect truth is individual because pure experience must occur for a person in an on-going development. The incorporation of the “I” in the ongoing development of pure experience denotes its actuality (referred to before as “*actualis*”) because the unity of subject and object in this process lays the foundation for the interaction between the subjective and objective ingredients of experience.

True unity, then, is also what Nishida calls the ultimate unity, because there is no “before and after” of pure experience; rather, pure experience is simultaneously the beginning as well as the end of this continually unifying action. Thus, Nishida makes a statement that “we have firm belief in truth” when we find ourselves in the state of pure experience. This becomes our “standard of truth”. There is no “reality” other than the “firm belief” that derives from the simultaneous experience of the continually unifying action of pure experience. In Nishida’s words:

The standard of truth is not external, for it lies in our state of pure experience. To know the truth is to be congruent with this state. [...] It is in the state of immediate experience – when subject and object merge with each other and we are unable, even if we try, to doubt the single actuality of the universe – that we have firm belief in truth” (NKZa 1: 37).⁶

The expression “firm belief in truth” indicates that perfect truth cannot be grasped by means of the intellect. It is realized intuitively in the certainty of the immediate state of pure experience which is characterized by the merger of the subject and object. The intellect is not capable of having “immediate” experience because the ordinary procedure of the intellect’s activity is exercised under the conditions of subject-object separation. “Immediate” knowledge can be reached by the intuiting power that brings the intellect, emotion, and volition together as a whole. This

⁶Nishida 1990: 26–27. The author revised some phrases of the translation according to the Japanese original text.

intuition can be accomplished by the unifying function of pure experience. Nishida calls this function “intellectual intuition (知的直観 *chiteki chokkan*)”.

1.4 *Intellectual Intuition and Religious Truth*

We can have “firm belief” in perfect truth. This occurs in “immediacy”, when our awareness is one with the actuality of the universe. The immediacy of pure experience is an aspect of intuition. A firm belief afforded by intuition is a kind of immediate knowledge.

Immediate knowledge is not the same as intellectual knowledge. It is a kind of primordial, direct “knowledge” reached in the state of immediate experience, i.e. in an integrated state of intellect, emotion and volition as a whole. Intuition in this case is called “*intellectual intuition*” in *An Inquiry into the Good*. In this context, Nishida refers to the essence of intellectual intuition as follows:

[F]rom the standpoint of pure experience it [intellectual intuition] is actually the state of oneness of subject and object, a fusion of knowing and willing. [...] Intellectual intuition sounds like a subjective activity, but actually it is a state that goes beyond subject and object. In fact, the opposition of subject and object comes into being by means of this unity, and things like artistic inspiration are attained by it (NKZa 1:43).⁷

Intellectual intuition produces “immediate” knowledge resulting from the unifying function of pure experience. This oneness can be *personally* reached only by firm belief in truth. From this we can infer something about the religious aspect of firm belief, perfect truth, and intellectual intuition. In the following, Nishida touches upon true religious awakening in relation to intellectual intuition:

True religious awakening is neither an abstract knowledge based in thinking nor a blind feeling. In this awakening, we realize with our whole being the profound unity at the base of knowledge and the will. It is a kind of intellectual intuition, a deep grasp of life. The sword of logic, whatever the logic may be, cannot penetrate it and desire cannot move it. This intellectual intuition or a deep grasp of life is the basis of all truth and contentment (NKZa 1:45).⁸

It has become clear that true religious awakening, intellectual intuition, and a deep grasp of life are intrinsically no different from each other. As “the sword of any kind of logic cannot penetrate it”, so we can presuppose that firm belief and perfect truth are not expressible by means of logos. Religious awakening can be reached only in a state of pure experience where the differentiations of logos cannot penetrate. Thus, firm belief and perfect truth arise as something dark and unreachable by the activity of the intellect on its own. In order to emphasize the distinction between intellectual

⁷Nishida 1990: 32. The present writer revised some phrases of this translation according to the Japanese original text. The words in parentheses are added by the present writer.

⁸Nishida 1990: 34. The present writer revised some phrases of this translation according to the Japanese original text.

knowledge and firm belief in perfect truth, Nishida often stresses the importance of emotion and will. He writes, “We should search for truth of religions on the basis of human emotion and volition. It is based on the great life of humankind. It places itself in a position beyond the truth of natural science”. (NKZa 14:308).⁹

For Nishida, perfect truth corresponds to religious truth, which is experienced personally as an actuality and is beyond words. In contrast, scientific truth is universal and reached mainly through the intellect. However, all knowledge—and all truth—is based on the ultimate unity of pure experience; and given its relationship to religious awakening, intellectual intuition is fundamentally religious. Nishida writes:

At the base of our consciousness there is always a unity of pure experience, and we cannot jump outside it. [...] In this sense, God can be seen as one great intellectual intuition at the foundation of the universe, as the unifier of pure experience that envelops the universe (NKZa 1:186).¹⁰

The “one great”, i.e. ultimate, intellectual intuition is regarded as God. Accordingly, all investigations of truth have a religious dimension at their foundation. Knowledge through intellectual intuition forms the foundation of so-called objective knowledge essential to the natural sciences, but objectivity does not come into being until the separation of subject and object. Because it follows from the immediacy of perfect truth, we must insist that scientific truth is derived from religious awakening and is, therefore, an extension of religious truth. Thus, Nishida asserts that religious insights form the basis of all kinds of sciences, including morality.¹¹

2 Science and Religion in the Late Philosophy of Nishida

In the course of his philosophical research, Nishida traversed a difficult path on a quest for the essence of intuition. In his late philosophy, his notion of intellectual intuition develops into what he calls “acting intuition (行為的直観 *kōiteki chokkan*)”. In his later work, Nishida also develops his “logic of place (*basho*)” and the notion of “absolute nothingness (絶対無 *zettai mu*)”. Both of these are key terms when considering the relation between religious truth and scientific knowledge in Nishida’s philosophy.

In an attempt to gain a rough understanding of acting intuition, we consider the following passage from the thesis, *Logic and Mathematical Principle* (「論理と数理」 *ronri to sūri*): Acting intuition “does not mean only practical intuition. What lies at the root of acting intuition is self-aware intuition of our Self as a self-expressing process of the World” (NKZa 11: 88).¹² Acting intuition involves the

⁹Translation mine. Nishida refers to truth in a lecture, *Standpoint of religion* (「宗教の立場」 *shūkyō no tachiba*), given at 龍谷大学 *Ryūkoku University* in 1919.

¹⁰Nishida 1990:164.

¹¹Cf. NKZa 1:45. Nishida says: “There must be religion at the base of learning and morality”.

¹²Translation mine.

reciprocal movements of the self-determination of the self and world. The *basho* (place), which is none other than the world, becomes actual by reflecting and determining itself; and the individual, in turn, reflects into that *basho* and determines itself as a concrete mode of being.

Furthermore, acting intuition does not differ from intellectual intuition in principle. In it, a multitude of individuals are, at once, distinguished from and correlated with one another. In fact, it is by means of their contradictory relationship to each other that the many maintain their individual identities. Although the many and the one contradict each other and are incompatible, both the many and the one coexist in harmony because the *basho* subsumes them through acting intuition. Here we can find one of the most important concepts in Nishida's late work and the logic of *basho*—the “self-identity of contradiction between the one and the many (一と多の矛盾的自己同一 *itsu to ta no mujunteki jiko dōitsu*)” in the same *basho*.

2.1 *Logic of Place* (場所的論理 *bashoteki ronri*) and *Absolute Nothingness*

According to Nishida's logic of *basho*, a thing and its place stay in a logical relationship of *subsumption* (包摂 *hōsetsu*). A place subsumes a thing where it is found, and a thing, which belongs to a certain place is subsumed within it. The place that subsumes and the thing that is subsumed cannot be separated from the perspective of place. They find a kind of unity, or complementary coexistence. The place serves as a universal to the individual thing, and both terms are essentially irreconcilable and opposed to each other. The place and the thing, therefore, have a contradictory relation to each other in a dialectical sense. On the one hand, their modes of being are intrinsically different from and contradictory to each other. On the other hand, however, even if the place and the thing are opposed, they are found in a certain state of unity by virtue of the fact that no entity can be realized without that which opposes it. The place wherein entities arise could not be a concrete place without the mutual opposition of the things to which it gives rise. Things and the place are complementary to each other.

The complementarity between things brings them into a kind of unity in which they settle in a common place. At the same time, however, they must oppose and contradict one another in order to keep their own individuality. The same is true for individuals in relation to the universal. An individual is independent and can never be absorbed within a more comprehensive thing like a universal. This multi-structured complementarity among discrete things, between a place and a thing, and, moreover, between multiple places is called the “self-identity of contradictories” by Nishida.

The self-identity of contradictories is an expression of the undeniable fact of the actual existence of things in their places. This becomes understandable when places and things are seen as originating in the place of absolute nothingness. There is

absolute negation working at the root of the place of absolute nothingness. This is the ultimate place behind perceivable concrete places. Perceivable places can be negated, affirmed, and then recovered in the flow of the process of absolute negation. Through the first step of absolute negation, places and things become their opposites and stay in contradiction. Then, through the negation of negation, they affirm their self-identity. In this way, absolute negation is always working in the background of the superposition of things, events, and the intersection of places.

Stepping back to take an even more comprehensive view, things among themselves and places among themselves accomplish the same process of negation as the one just mentioned. In the process of absolute negation, the ultimate place works on the once negated things or places, and then affirms them as a result of the “negation of negation” in the continual process of negation. This ultimate place was designated as the “place of absolute nothingness (絶対無の場所 *zettaimu no basho*)” by Nishida.

Let this suffice as a rough sketch of the logic of place. However abstract, the logic of *basho*, as the place of absolute nothingness, is the ground on which life and death unfolds in the concrete, actual world. Though technical in its dialectical articulation, Nishida’s views on the *basho* of absolute nothingness express some of his deepest religious insights.

2.2 *Set Theory, Inverse Correspondence, and the Logic of Basho*

To further understand the place of science in Nishida’s thought, it is necessary to explore his use of set theory to illuminate some of his core concepts. Nishida takes up the concept of an empty (or null) set according to Georg Cantor’s set theory (集合論 *shūgōron*) to shed new light on the “logic of *basho* (place)” and the dialectic of the “self-identity of contradictories”. Set theory allowed Nishida to grasp a logical function of nothingness from a different angle. In the long run, the application of mathematical ideas to his logic of *basho* led him to the abstruse idea of “inverse correspondence (逆対応 *gyaku taiō*)”. From this viewpoint, he tried to lay a philosophical foundation for set theory. He especially attempted to provide a logical basis for how elements can become countable within set theory and/or how a set can produce its own elements.

The following paragraph explains how individuals (in the dynamic relation of the one and the many) determine each other *inversely* by means of self-negation through the medium of nothingness. The nothingness is concretized as “an empty set” within set theory. Therefore, nothingness materializes itself in an empty set through the determination (qua self-negation) of nothingness.

A set according to Cantor’s set theory must be primarily equal to my concept “universal of place (場所の一般者 *bashoteki ippansha*)”. In consequence, the self-identity of contradictories between a null set and an element “one” must fulfill a cardinal requirement for the foundation of set theory. If not, we could not even count numbers in accordance with the

self-identity of contradictories because the many become the one owing to the self-negation of the many. To sum, elements become a set owing to the self-negation of elements (*Elemente* → *Menge*) and, on the contrary, the one becomes the many owing to the self-negation of the one. In brief, a set becomes elements owing to self-negation of the set itself (*Menge* → *Elemente*). This argument is not a demand made by the standpoint of my logic of *basho*. It is based on the logical analysis of the fact of acting intuition that we can count numbers. It results naturally from the self-awareness of the self-reflection of mathematical reality. The logic of *basho* is primarily a logic of a fact that proves itself” (NKZa 11: 252-253).¹³

In this dense paragraph, Nishida explains how a set (as one that comprises only a null set) produces and determines its many elements (the individuals contained in that set).

Contrariwise, the elements determine the set through the medium of nothingness as a place of incessant negation. The incessant negation is an essential function of nothingness, but the function of negation switches to affirmation as negation of negation in the process of incessant negation. Therefore, negation is also its own type of affirmation. Accordingly, we can see how the set and its elements are separate yet interdependent. This dynamic describes the *inverse* relationship of a set and its elements. It takes place in the *basho* of interdependency, of the “self-identity of contradictories”. However, it is not yet apparent how the *basho* of nothingness and the individual determine each other *inversely*. The dynamic structure of the self-contradictory identity of an empty set and its elements should be explained.

Bringing together his concepts of *basho*, the self-identity of contradictories, and inverse correspondence, Nishida writes:

In the *basho* (place) of self-identity of contradictories an individual is contrary to other individuals to the farthest limits, namely they are not united with each other and so negative (adverse) to each other. However, an individual is inversely correspondent with other individuals to the utmost while the *basho* reflects itself into itself, that is to say that the *basho* expresses itself (NKZa 11: 278–279).¹⁴

In this passage, Nishida explains how individuals correspond negatively (adversely) to each other. This is what it means to correspond inversely. It is a reciprocal negation between individuals which results in “negation of negation”. Through the reciprocal process of negation, the *basho* of each individual reflects itself infinitely into its “bottomless bottom” (nothingness).

The inverse correspondence of individuals correlates with the becoming of self-awareness. When a *basho* reflects itself into the depths of its *bottomlessness*, it undergoes a reversal. At the same time when the self-determination of the *basho* goes into the depths of nothingness at its farthest limit, it reveals or *expresses* (表現 *hyōugen*) itself as the bottomless *bottom*, and becomes self-aware as a *basho*. This reversal is an act of nothingness taking place; it is a moment of becoming self-aware. This birth of a *basho* can be considered as a birth of a singular element,

¹³Translation mine. A German word “*Elemente*” means “elements” and “*Menge*” does “a set” in mathematics.

¹⁴Translation mine. The present writer complementarily adds a word in the parentheses.

“one”, within the *basho* of nothingness. Theoretically, the *basho* of nothingness can be born infinitely in the ongoing process of the self-expression.

The “birth” and “death” of the individual in the *basho* of nothingness is not simply a metaphor. The negation and affirmation of individuals is their actual life (and death). It is the becoming of the world through time. As to the inverse correspondence between individuals in the *same* place (*basho*), Nishida says as follows:

The fact that the individual is individual must mean that the individual is unique or is once only in terms of time. Thus, the *basho* of inverse correspondence between individuals is not the one in which the *basho* simply reflects itself, but must become temporarily-spatially the world of self-creation or the *basho* of death and birth (NKZa 11: 279).¹⁵

From this we can understand the empty set (the *basho* of negation-qua-affirmation) as the *basho* of the birth and death of a set and its elements.

Nishida discusses the concept of inverse correspondence in one of his later works, *A Philosophical Foundation for Mathematics* (「数学の哲学的基礎付け」 *sūgaku no tetsugakuteki kiso-zuke*). In this treatise, he strives tirelessly to explain how the empty set performs the function of the *basho* of nothingness, that is, how it produces (gives birth to) elements in a set. In short, Nishida tries to identify a so-called mechanism by which the empty set negates itself and converts itself into its elements, while also retaining its cohesion as a *basho*, that is, a set that contains elements. The empty set converts itself into a *basho* within the *basho* of nothingness. From there, it converts itself into an element or “a being in a *basho*”. Thus, the inverse correspondence between individuals can be described as the self-determination of a “form (形 *katachi*)”. In Nishida’s words:

As far as an individual and others correspond inversely to each other, we can consider a form which determines itself. Consequently, such a form must be self-aware in a manner of the self-identity of contradictories. In self-awareness, all the individuals are independent from each other and negate other individuals to the utmost, and each individual constitutes its form by determining itself (NKZa 11:243).¹⁶

From the viewpoint of the logic of *basho*, the inverse correspondence is applicable to the relationship between elements, or between individuals. The idea of the inverse correspondence between numerous elements occurred in the process of thinking through the foundation for mathematics. Therefore, we call this inverse correspondence “mathematical inverse correspondence”.

We should also note that the foundation of mathematics by means of set theory is not enough for grasping the structure of the real world, since, according to set theory, the elements produced from an empty set are all equal to each other in qualification. This means that there are no differences among elements in a set. To give real significance to “individuality”, Nishida tries to find another mathematical system for the nearest approximation to reality. To establish individuality, it is necessary to introduce three axioms—the associative law, a unit element, and inverse elements. Above all, the associative law allows elements to develop their own uniqueness through their mutual determination. When these three axioms are

¹⁵Translated mine.

¹⁶Translated mine.

applied to elements in a set, the set is called a group. Through the function of the associative law, elements in a group can make themselves different from each other, thereby establishing their own uniqueness and individuality. The establishment of the individuality of elements describes the reality of beings in the world more approximately. This is a very short sketch of the theory of groups (群論 *gunron*).

2.3 *The Intersection of Philosophy, Religion, and Science*

In his last treatise, *Logic of Basho and the Religious Worldview* (『場所的論理と宗教の世界観』 *Bashoteki ronri to shūkyoteki sekaikan*), Nishida works to position his philosophy within religion.¹⁷ Within this work “absolute nothingness” is a recurring theme. As previously mentioned, “absolute nothingness” has a deeply religious meaning. Yet, it unites the various strands of Nishida’s logic of *basho* and his application of theoretical mathematics.

Absolute nothingness is a kind of term expressing an agent of action of absolute negation. The *basho* of absolute nothingness is the ultimate *basho* subsuming the actual *basho* of an individual. In other words, an actual *basho* is backed with the *basho* of the incessant negation of absolute nothingness. Likewise, one’s self-awareness must be always backed by the horizon of the world, which is, itself, subsumed by the *basho* of absolute nothingness. The *basho* (place) of the actual world consists of oppositions and contradictions that are ultimately enveloped by the ultimate *basho*. Though they are brought into unity, they remain themselves nevertheless. This is the doubly structured system of *basho* and the foundation to which the self-identity of absolute contradictories is applied. Thus, a being faces both a relative and an ultimate *basho* of nothingness. In the *basho* of nothingness, a being faces death and is immediately brought back into the world as its own *basho* (rebirth of the self) as said before. In this connection, Nishida refers to “inverse correspondence” between a relative being and the absolute in a religious context as follows:

When a relative being faces the absolute, death must be found there. That being must pass over into nothing then. The self of each of us comes into contact and becomes linked with God in inverse correspondence – only through dying (NKZa 11: 396).¹⁸

In addition to mathematical inverse correspondence, here we find what Nishida thinks about religious inverse correspondence. While the mathematical inverse correspondence is applicable to the relationship between an individual and others, i.e., between the one of a world and the many of individuals, the religious inverse correspondence is applied to the relationship between a relative being and the absolute (God). Therefore, God and a human being (or the absolute and a relative being) correspond inversely to each other. On the one hand, the *basho* of absolute

¹⁷Nishida 1987: 1–176.

¹⁸Nishida 1987: 68. The present writer revised some phrases of this translation following the Japanese original text.

nothingness opens up for human beings. We become actual in the *basho* of absolute negation. On the other hand, when the absolute returns to itself as the absolute, it conceals itself and is beyond the grasp of human beings. In this regard, there is an abyss between the absolute and a relative being, between God and a human being. Yet, the abyss between them is overcome when one perceives this abyss from a higher or a deeper perspective. The double-structure of *basho* enables the distance necessary for this higher or deeper perspective from where the abyss can be felt. Here we find the pattern of “continuity of discontinuity (非連続の連続 *hirenzoku no renzoku*)”. This is another expression of inverse correspondence, i.e. the self-identical correspondence of contradictoriness.

The results of our analysis about the function of an empty set in the set theory and inverse correspondence have led us to appreciate the differences between scientific truth and religious truth. Nishida refers to truth in his last writing as follows:

Truth is found in the concrete dimension where we think a thing in a state of becoming the very thing, and we see a thing in a state of becoming the very thing (NKZa 11: 444).¹⁹

This notion of truth is applicable to scientific, philosophical and religious truth. There are no essential differences between these kinds of truth insofar as they involve the “objectivity” of “becoming the very thing”. This is the essence of “radical positivism” as referred to at the beginning of this paper.

Despite their intersection, religious truth has a particular aspect that distinguishes it from philosophical and scientific truth. Without being enveloped or corroborated by the *basho* of absolute nothingness, the *basho* of an individual would not be concretely real, but abstract. The absolute negation, or the inverse correspondence as a result of absolute negation, does not work until the ultimate *basho* of absolute nothingness envelops or corroborates an actual *basho* (place) in which a human being and things are situated. In other words, only on the basis of religious inverse correspondence, can one think and see things as they truly are.

To summarize, individuals can correspond inversely to each other in a *basho* of nothingness corroborated ultimately by the *basho* of absolute nothingness. In that *basho*, individuals correlate with each other in the way of continuity of discontinuity. The empty set, as a concrete example of a *basho* of nothingness, determines itself as numbers and, at the same time, as a *basho* for numbers. Thus, the absolute and relative beings correspond inversely to each other immediately in the *basho* of absolute nothingness.

2.4 *The Logic of Place and Quantum Physics*

The “logic of place” developed by Nishida in the later stage of his philosophy forms a bridge over a river of conflicts between philosophical, religious and natural-scientific approaches to the reality of things. For example, the controversial theory

¹⁹Nishida 1987:107. The present writer revised some phrases according to the Japanese original text.

of measurement in quantum theory²⁰ shows that subjective activities of the measuring agent can determine objective states of a targeted thing to be measured. Seen from the perspective of quantum theory, what it is called the objectivity of measurement leads to the fact that the measurement in physics can come into effect only on the basis of collaboration between subjective observation (or measurement in a macroscopic world) and an objective state of things in a microscopic world. This subjective-objective intersection (collaboration) can be consistently elucidated by means of the logic of place whose principle is essentially connected with the “self-identity of contradictories”, a kind of logical form developed from the pure experience.

In the well-known thought-experiment, “Schrödinger’s cat”, it is shown how an objective state of something, like a cat, can be undeterminable. To simply summarize the experiment, a cat, which is placed inside a box installed with a device, is unobservable from the outside. The device sprays poison gas and kills the cat when a radioactive substance can decay and emit an alpha particle in such a way that the radioactive substance can decay on the one-to-one, or half-and-half probability after an hour. Before an observer opens the device box, the existential state of the cat in the box can be described as a “superposition” (or overlapping) of life and death after an hour.

Superposition implies that the existential state of the cat is represented as half-alive *and* half-dead just after an hour. In other words, the state of the cat is on the one-to-one, or half-and-half probability of life and death. In reality, however, we observe the state of existence of the cat either as alive or as dead. Being half-alive *and* half-dead is unreal in our ordinary life.

The event of superposition of life and death includes two aspects at once. On the one hand, the superposition can indicate the intersection of two worlds, a microscopic world and a macroscopic one. This is an issue of the place, wherein two “places” come into unity. On the other hand, the superposition demonstrates incompatible states within a single living thing—life and death. This is an issue of how two actual states of one existing thing are and can be grasped as the unity of two existential events or modes of being. Therefore, it has something to do with the unity of two existential modes of being that contradict one another. To sum up, we can say that the superposition of life and death is an event in a microscopic world, while the intersection between a microscopic world and a macroscopic one is an encounter between two worlds on the horizon of a more comprehensive “place”.

We can get a hold of the quantum theoretical explanation of the superposition from the standpoint of unity between subject and object in pure experience. Originally, our mode of being is comprised of experiences originated in pure experience. Therefore, it belongs originally to the naked truth of our existence in a similar way to how our way of existence is always comprised of primordial unity between

²⁰ See: John Polkinghorne “*Quantentheorie*” (übersetzt von Manfred Weltecke), Reclam Sachbuch, Stuttgart, 2011, S. 65–75, 86–90.; Brigitte Röthlein: “*Schrödingers Katze Einführung in die Quantenphysik*”, dtv, München, 2019, S. 9–14.; John Gribbin: “*Auf der Suche nach Schrödingers Katze*”, Piper, München/Berlin, 2016, S. 225.

subjective elements and objective ones, or between things or events contradictory to each other. Our everyday understanding of existence is only an intellectually inferred result from the primordial unity of pure experience. The mode of being half-alive and half-dead is contradictory to itself; it belongs to the primordial unity of pure experience. In this context, we can say that the superposition of life and death in the field of quantum theory is another expression for the unity of subject and object in pure experience.

Furthermore, the intersection between two levels of the world can come into being when an observer in the macroscopic world intervenes in the state of existence of the cat in the microscopic world by means of a human act of observation, that is, after opening the device box and confirming the state of existence of the cat. The observer's act of opening the device box influences "subjectively" a microscopic state of being of objective things like a cat in the device box or an alpha particle. It is very probable that the act of opening the box and finding the state of the cat can determine the definitive state of existence of the cat. This kind of determination of the existential state of the cat can come to happen as a result of unity in pure experience in the form of the intersection of a subjective world with an objective one, that is, only at the intersection of places that are enveloped in a more comprehensive place. Hence, the intersection is not concerned with events, per se, but with places wherein the events or the things happen—a more comprehensive place. The intersection of a microscopic world (place) with a macroscopic one does not happen until those worlds (places) should be enveloped in a more comprehensive world (place). Without this more comprehensive place, there could be no possibility of the intersection of worlds.

For example, it is in the more comprehensive world of our observation and determination that the quantum-theoretical intersection of worlds transpires. The place of the device box is furthermore enveloped in a more comprehensive place wherein an observer and the box come into contact; and this place, in turn, is enveloped by yet another more comprehensive place and so on. This series of envelopment of another more comprehensive place results ultimately in the place of absolute nothingness according to Nishida's logic of place. The ultimate place of absolute nothingness is the ground on which the various beings and levels of *basho* come into the unity of intersection and superposition.

3 Conclusion

To sum up, we can say that scientific truth that is based on the mathematical inverse correspondence is enveloped in religious truth that is grounded in the religious inverse correspondence. Consequently, we can say that science can be founded on the basis of religious insight. Scientific knowledge is gained only through the activity of the intellect, while religious wisdom is disclosed to human beings through the activity of intellect, emotion and volition as a whole. On the threshold between

these two types of knowledge, philosophy is required to bridge the divide between scientific knowledge and religious wisdom.

In a letter to MUTAI Risaku, one of his disciples, on July 27, 1943, Nishida wrote: “My dearest wish and my final goal is to unite Buddhist thought and modern scientific mentality through the medium of my logic of *basho*” (NKZa 19:249).²¹ Nishida was always on a quest to unite the religious standpoint of Mahayana-Buddhism with the scientific one according to an “objective” way of thinking in what he called “radical positivism”. On these grounds, we can understand that religion always lies at the core of his thought.

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²¹ Translation mine.

Chapter 13

Nishida's Philosophy and Art



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NISHIDA Kitarō persistently sought out the truth underlying our everyday reality. In a sense, his quest can be understood as overlapping with that of an artist. Throughout his life, Nishida harbored an interest in the interpretation of art, a passion reflected in his *An Inquiry into the Good* (*Zen no Kenkyū* 善の研究), the starting point of his philosophy. In its various stages, Nishida's work is deeply inspired by art and shows a continuous dialogue with it.

Following the publication of *An Inquiry into the Good*, in which Nishida first established his philosophical position, he gradually develops a theory built on “self-awareness (*jikaku* 自覚)”. His central theme, “pure experience”, was part of his earliest philosophical thought and was well aligned with art theorist Konrad FIEDLER's (1841–1875) idea of “pure visibility”.

Later in his career, art became even more prominent in his philosophy where he developed a theory of art interpretation based on a historical formation. Nishida's late philosophy can be characterized as a historical understanding of the world and the conceptualization of a dialectic relationship between place and individuals (things-in-place). Creativity, viewed as a form of *poiesis*, is also a central theme in late Nishida philosophy, and he grants poetry a privileged rank above all other art forms.

Addressing these topics, this paper discusses Nishida's reflections on art and their relation to his philosophy overall. It addresses a wide purview of his writings, from the early *An Inquiry into the Good* to the late “Artistic Creation as a Historical Formative Act (*Rekishiteki keiseisayō toshiteno geijutsuteki sōsaku* 歴史的形形成作用としての芸術的創作)” (NKZb 9: 233-300).

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1 Aesthetic Reflection in the Early Nishida¹

1.1 *Aesthetic Experience as the Self-Realization of Pure Experience*

Aesthetic or artistic experience is generally considered a way to give shape to one's own vivid perception. However, Nishida expresses aesthetic experience in relationship to pure experience: aesthetic experience can be considered a concrete way in which pure experience expresses itself. As a goal of one's will, aesthetic experience is a cultural value equal to the Good. Nishida says, "Beauty is felt when things are realized like ideals".² In other words, he believes that the concepts of beauty and the good approach each other and, in relationship with one another, constitute the world of values. In this sense, both are situated at the final stage of the self-development of pure experience.

In *An Inquiry into the Good*, Nishida uses the term "intellectual intuition" to refer to an artist or religious person's ability to apprehend a reality that transcends space, time, and the individual. Intellectual intuition, according to Nishida, reveals pure experience as the state of oneness between subject and object. After the publication of *An Inquiry into the Good*, he develops more specifically the philosophical concept of "will", which was originally contained in pure experience as the subsuming universal. He uses the terms "pure will" or "absolute will" to refer to true reality prior to the separation of subject and object. In other words, human beings try to satisfy the fundamental demand of reality through their own volition, and by attempting to realize absolute ideals and values, they come in touch with dynamic absolute will. On the other side, Nishida calls the concrete sphere of ideals and values, the self-realization of the will—the world of "cultural phenomena" (NKZb 3: 13).³

It is important to note that Nishida describes the beginning of human "cultural" activities with the advent of artistic activity, not the discovery of useful tools or mechanical techniques. Technology forces human spirit and nature into opposition; the spirit objectifies nature and uses it as a means to an end. On the contrary, Nishida argues, the self-realization of the will lies at the base of both spirit and nature and can best be described as culture: "art is the beginning of culture". He writes, "In art, nature is not a means but the goal itself. Art finds its own life behind nature" (NKZb 3: 52).

The above shows that aesthetic experience and artistic intuition are an essential part of Nishida's philosophy. He believes that aesthetic experience is a

¹Although Nishida has not published any books that deal exclusively with the theme of aesthetics, there are a lot of articles and sentences of his about aesthetic reflections. Therefore, we can discuss the concept of "aesthetics" in the broad sense of the word in Nishida philosophy.

²Nishida (1990), p. 125.

³NKZb (2002-2009).

All quoted parts from NKZb were translated by this writer.

self-reflective activity and, therefore, can be understood as the highest stage of pure experience; it participates in the return to pure experience as reality. Nishida uses pure listening as a metaphor to describe pure experience: "Just like when we become enraptured by exquisite music, forget ourselves and everything around us, and experience the universe as one melodious sound, true reality presents itself in the moment of direct experience".⁴

In his essay "The Beauty and the Good (*Bi to zen* 美と善)", Nishida compares his idea of pure will to that in Jakob Boehme's "The Bottomless (*Ungrund*)", stating that beauty is a shadow the will reflects within itself (NKZb 3: 188f). Beauty is not an activity, Nishida argues, as it is portrayed in "The Bottomless (*Ungrund*)". Beauty may approach activity and reflect it, but it remains pure will, never attainable. It may seem that Nishida is comparing the limits of aesthetic experience to morality, but what is more important is the realization that "seeing" penetrates through the acting-self, and the aesthetic and the practical are unified.

1.2 Purity of Aesthetic Experience

Nishida's understanding of aesthetic experience can be considered a form of "self-purposing", that is, realizing the essential purpose of the senses. In aesthetic experience, we see for the sake of seeing and hear for the sake of hearing. The purity of seeing and hearing is to see seeing and to hear hearing. By "purity", Nishida means that the purpose of consciousness is not to approach some object, or view it objectively, but to become conscious of consciousness itself—to see seeing—and, therefore, to reflect the self. This gives rise to the world of aesthetic values. Herein the will, lying at the base of our consciousness, reflects itself within itself, thereby making itself an object. Doing so manifests a form of self-realization. Nishida explains:

From the epistemological standpoint, we cannot see seeing. But to see seeing makes us have an infinite world of objects for art. From the intellectual standpoint, we cannot hear hearing. But to hear hearing makes us have an infinite world of music. When we can will the simple will, an infinite world of history and that of culture will be open before us (NKZb 3: 104).

KANT clarifies that the feeling of aesthetic values has a "reflective" structure, like the above-mentioned consciousness of consciousness. In other words, Kant recognizes reflective judgment in aesthetic feeling and sees it as a way to derive the universal from the particular. Nishida explains such a structure of aesthetic experience as follows:

To see things reflectively (*reflektierend*) is to see things returning to their concrete base, that is to see them as inner objects. To see an object which exists a priori returning to its origin is to see it as an inner process. To see nature in the form of finality belongs also to this point of view, that is to see nature in the category of spiritual phenomena (NKZb 2: 320).

⁴Nishida, *An Inquiry into the Good*, 48.

1.3 *Activeness of Sensation*

Nishida seems both to accede to Kantian aesthetic judgement and to overstep it. For Nishida, the concept of purity has meaning beyond mere formalism and a tacit purposiveness. Kant strictly discriminates between the intuition of the sensuous manifold and conceptual knowledge and considers intuition passive without reservation. Nishida, on the other hand, emphasizes the active nature of direct experience. He states, “Our direct experience is not originally passive. Our pure perception is dynamic in itself as say today’s scholars of art. Both visual perception and auditory perception have a pure part” (NKZb 2: 320).

Unlike Kant, Nishida thinks sensation, or perception, is more than simply passive. Even when writing *An Inquiry into the Good*, he remains unsatisfied with Ernst MACH’s elementalistic conception of “sensation”, refusing to consider sensory reality as something passively given. It is not material to be manipulated by means of thought. Nishida’s view was strengthened and supported by the art theory of Fiedler, whom Nishida encounters after writing *An Inquiry into the Good*.

From an ontological point of view, Fiedler agrees with Nishida that reality is not an object given to a subject, as simple realists believe; rather, it is psychophysically constituted in an infinite activity. Experiencing the material world involves creative activity: even on the sensory level of seeing, humans work to actively systematize the world around them. In other words, interpreting the material world is like removing veils one by one. In doing so, sensation faces what is other than the self, what is negative, and actively works to cut its way free. Fiedler emphasizes the autonomy of the senses (especially visual sensation), which cannot be reduced to other activities (especially linguistic activity).

Fiedler separates visual activity from other senses, isolating its peculiarity. Again, he refers to the purifying nature of “seeing”—visual activity that cannot be reduced to other activities. He says that purified “seeing” can approach the peculiar truth and reality of visual activity only when hands give concrete shape to what the eyes are seeing. When Nishida mentions activity on the sensory level, we can clearly see the influence of Fiedler’s thought.

1.4 *Aesthetic Tradition and Nishida’s Philosophy*

At first sight, it may seem that Nishida’s idea of beauty, which has equal value to the good, is merely an extension of Western traditional metaphysics. However, his idea of beauty as a shadow, or a reflection of pure will, shows a distinctly East Asian way of thinking. A more detailed examination will be needed to elaborate on this point.

One of the basic characteristics of Nishida’s thought is that contradictory elements (such as acting and seeing, and will and intuition) constitute two sides of the same coin. His later concept of “acting intuition (*kōiteki chokkan* 行為的直観)” directly expresses this. However, his earlier work seems to emphasize the will

exclusively (in agreement with Fichte). As Nishida, himself, admits, this tendency leads to voluntarism.

Nevertheless, Nishida's emphasis on both beauty and the good, and the fact his chapter on "Intellectual Intuition" follows that on "Will" in *An Inquiry into the Good*, shows that his thought is more contemplative than volitional. There is an undeniable aspect of "contemplation and resignation" when facing the ever-changing world: the eyes will always look at and reflect the will.

For example, in his essay "The Beauty and the Good", Nishida applies the concept of indifference to moral conduct, which has been traditionally accepted to denote beauty. He writes:

In order to know clearly what we should do in a certain case, we must reflect things themselves objectively apart from thinking in our own interests ... Once we must see things in the same manner that the artist sees things, once we must live in things themselves just like the artist lives in things themselves. Such an attitude of spirit we call truly listening to our conscience's voice (NKZb 3: 198).

Nishida seems to be influenced by a long-standing tradition of Buddhist poetic and aesthetic thought accepted in Japan, an influence he attempts to express with the words: "Seeing the form of the formless and hearing the sound of the soundless" (NKZb 3: 255). Though based on the assumptions of resignation and aesthetic distance from the world, this sentiment does not express powerless lamentation or resentment toward the world; rather, it encourages the self to complete its own given purpose. Instead of persistently bringing the self into being as a volitional subject, his thought aims to recast the will. This understanding gives a new perspective to the following words.

For a human to display his or her innate nature—just as a bamboo plant or a pine tree fully displays its nature—is our good. [...] From this perspective, the concept of good approaches that of beauty. Beauty is felt when things are realized like ideals are realized, which means for things to display their original nature. Just as flowers are most beautiful when they manifest their original nature, humans attain the pinnacle of beauty when they express their original nature. In this regard, the good is beauty.⁵

Here, it may seem like Nishida is referring to Platonic ideals since Western metaphysics has incorporated the concepts of beauty and art since the ancient Greek era. However, Nishida attempts to reinterpret them in light of his own aesthetic traditions, which evolved within East Asian culture.

Nishida's early ideas, including his understanding of pure experience, face one major criticism: his exhaustive efforts to purify "seeing" renders his thinking overly contemplative and incapable of dispelling static thought patterns. Nishida's later philosophical thought attempts to respond to such criticism by directly confronting historical dynamism, leading to a kind of philosophical "turn". To this end, Nishida's later work discusses various artistic themes in the context of their relations with the historical formation process.

⁵Nishida, *An Inquiry into the Good*, 125.

2 Historical Formation and Art

2.1 *The Poietic Nature of History*

Nishida understands historical praxis as a formative act based on the ancient Greek concept of *poiesis* (creation in general), and this plays an important role in his interpretation of history. He examines creative and expressive dynamism that generates history, thinking of *praxis* (practice or action) in terms of *poiesis*.

We may ask why Nishida regards *praxis*, the continuing self-formation of the historical world, as something that is *poietic*. The answer comes from the following point: *Poiesis* must be regarded as the act of creating things using materials, tools, and techniques; therefore, we cannot consider *praxis* (practical actions) without the ever-present involvement of “things”. For example, the desk in front of you is a historical occurrence in the form of a technological product. *Praxis* is always premised on such “things”, and therefore is always based in materiality. In this sense, it is a creative process.

Precisely speaking, there is no need to strictly define “things” as “materials”. Legislature and various systems are no different from “made things” (artifacts), but can be interpreted as things conferred in the context of historical actualities. Acts of historical formation (“making things”) unfold on the foundation of these created things that are produced continuously throughout the course of history. The historical world can only be observed at the correlative field where made things and making things are co-determinate. This interaction carves out new realities with every era, every hour, and every moment, revealing a singular modality. According to Nishida, “the world that undergoes self-formation from that which is made to that which makes” is the world of historical actuality (*vide* NKZb 9: 219 f.).

Nishida considers acts of historical formation as outcomes of the union between practice and creation, or *praxis* and *poiesis*. This interpretation is influenced by a dialectical view of history, propounded by philosophers ranging from HEGEL to MARX. However, Nishida is unique in his exposition of historical formation within the context of his unique conceptualization of creation. Nishida sees *poiesis* in the midst of the interactions of the active and the passive. For example, he observes that “through becoming a thing, man thinks, through becoming a thing, man acts”, and “the self becomes a thing, the thing becomes the self”. Here, the passivity of seeing or reflecting (intuition) inevitably accompanies the activeness of working (actions). Nishida places emphasis on “working by seeing, seeing by working”. In this sense, the logic guiding *poiesis* is termed “acting intuition”; this is one of the most important concepts in late Nishida philosophy. As the logic guiding historical formation, “acting intuition” is itself *poiesis*; and it concerns itself not simply with “seeing” but also, in a creative sense, with “things” and is thereby continuously engaged in a process of constructing these “things”.

2.2 Art as Acting Intuition

Acting intuition entails the total unification of practices with reflection. Moreover, the mutual interaction of action and intuition is precisely regarded as that which guides historical formation.

As a principle of *poiesis*, acting intuition is deeply connected with technology. Nishida focuses his attention on the activity of “art” in the form of technology *par excellence*. Nevertheless, he perceives history as something creative and discerns the logic of historical formation within acting intuition (i.e., within its union of opposing activities). It seems likely that he first adopted this viewpoint not in the context of technology, but rather in relation to the creative activities of poetry and the arts (general technology in purified form).

This is the viewpoint grounding Nishida's “Artistic Creation as an Act of Historical Formation”. In this paper, while expatiating the various theories of art scholars like J.E. HARRISON, A. RIEGL, and K. FIEDLER, Nishida argues that our conscious acts are expressive and formative; at their very roots, they are *poiesis*. *Poiesis*, in turn, is continually supported by the self-determination of the historical world. In this sense, *poiesis* unifies the actor and the acted-upon in “a self-identity of absolute contradictions (*zettai mujunteki jiko dōitsu* 絶対矛盾の自己同一)”.

It appears that the fundamental core of Nishida's understanding of art can be viewed within this unity of contradictory things. For example, Nishida concisely states:

What we call a work of art is the object of artistic intuition, which is established where our *poiesis* is considered *poiesis* in the immediate world from the standpoint of self-identity of absolute contradictions. A work of art so defined is no longer a work of mine, but a piece of heaven (NKZb 9: 274).

Our actions form historical actualities through the making of things, but at the same time, they are products of historical actuality. Acting intuition must, therefore, be understood in the context of the codetermination of made things and making things.

The dynamic role of acting intuition in the process of historical formation points to the importance of artistic creation for Nishida more broadly, as well as the significance of his ideas for us today.

The art scholars mentioned above—J.E. HARRISON, A. RIEGL, and K. FIEDLER—are believed to have influenced Nishida's views on artistic creation. For example, Fiedler discusses the process of forming reality from the viewpoint of the purely visual. In short, the persistent creativity of our vision shifts a state of chaos and figurative darkness toward a reality conceived as a single cosmos, actualizing process of forming reality itself. It is here that the significance of figurative art is revealed. Historical actuality is something that is continually constructed after becoming manifest in our creative processes.

Accordingly, the activity of artistic creation (i.e., expressive acts) is not merely creation by an individual artist, but the self-formation of a historical actuality. In “Artistic Creation as a Historical Formative Act”, Nishida draws on Fiedler's ideas of reality's creative process to further examine the theories of Riegl and others, who

discuss historical formation by artistic will (i.e., the developmental history of art forms), integrating them into his own philosophical thought.

Scholars believe that Nishida's later philosophy is influenced by LEIBNIZ's *Monadology*.⁶ Here, a monad constitutes one center of the world's perspectivity and is conceptualized as an expression formed by acting intuition. Just as every wave crest reflects the great ocean that birthed it, a monad participates in the dynamism of history as a point of self-projection reflecting the transcendent while ultimately remaining an individual thing. What we see here is a subjective activity that expresses historical formation through self-negation. More precisely, this activity is by no means subjective; it merely appears to us as such.

If we consider individual monads to signify creative acts (making things) defined by the environment (made things), we can conceive of a monad's existence as manifested in art itself. Therefore, an artistic activity includes three simultaneous aspects. It includes (1) efforts to "reflect" the world as an individual mirror, (2) a creative act (*poiesis*) by which this reflecting activity directly concerns itself with things, and (3) an activity of historical formation.

2.2.1 Perspectivity

Perspectivity in art refers to the fact that art, as the expression of a monad, is an activity that is individual at its very core. Therefore, different individuals make different representations of the same object. It also indicates individuals' infinite diversity continually constituting the realm of artistic inquiry. If we probe further in terms of temporal theory, individuality is reduced to an event that manifests the transcendent present in a series of instances of "now". In Nishida's terminology, this is the "self-determination of the absolute present (*zettai genzai no jiko gentei* 絶対現在の自己限定)". Art intentionally mirrors the most trivial matters in our daily lives, gazing upon the events as events and committing them to "things" called works of art. In this case, artistic activities, as one form of acting intuition, signify the individual internalization of transcendent things. In short, artistic *poiesis* is a central pillar of the perspectivity of the world, and it creates the singular instances of perspectives.

2.2.2 Creation of Things

Art is not limited to abstract viewpoints floating in space. Creative acts are continuously involved with "things" as well. The expression of a monad does not stop at reflecting and seeing: it forms things and is, in turn, formed by things in the process of acting intuition. When considering figurative art, this way of thinking entails a

⁶But Nishida's adoption of the term "monad", as we see here, departs radically from Leibniz's conception of it. For example, Nishida's monad is not "windowless". To the extreme contrary, Nishida's monad has a contradictory self-identity with others.

unified perception of seeing (the activities of the eyes) and acts of formation (the activities of the hands). We can see here the influence of art scholars like Fiedler in Nishida's work.

In this case, acting intuition—seen and perceived in a “purified” form in artistic intuition—transcends the modern Western concept of “Art” (with a capital A), expanding and leading to *techne* (or *waza* 技 in Japanese, “art or skill”), rooted in our everyday world. In its true sense, the world of acting intuition is none other than the everyday world (*heijōtei* 平常底 in Japanese, “the ordinary basis of life”), in which singular encounters with things arise (what Nishida terms *ichidotekina mono* 一度的なもの, “the uniqueness”). For example, Nishida notes, “Even in a case such as simply building a house, it is not merely what a thing is conferred by its materials: it must also be what is conferred to our actions by things according to destiny. In all *poiesis*, it is not only that I change things, but that things change me” (NKZb 7: 53f).

2.2.3 Activities of Historical Formation

In his paper “Artistic Creation as an Act of Historical Formation”, Nishida provides a detailed overview of J. E. Harrison's *Ancient Art and Ritual* and adds his own commentary. He shows interest in Harrison's arguments, which locate the origin of art in rituals (*dromenon*), similar to Nishida's account of the dynamic historical formation within art. In other words, “power”, “desire”, and “drive” (*Drang*) constitute the most fundamental and essential provisions of the monad at the time of its conception.

Nishida also focuses on Riegl's concept of “artistic will in history” when understanding power, because he regards various cultures as endemic to their historical worlds. He fears that *poiesis* would simply become an abstract activity if people only considered expressive activities located between transcendence and immanence, between the dialectic universal and the individual, and if they regarded the relation between the two as an absolute contradiction. Critically influenced by TANABE Hajime 田辺元, Nishida introduces the medium of “species (*shu* 種)” between the two. This term does not, of course, connote the biological meaning of “species”. Rather, it signifies societies and communities as ultimately constituting historical “species”. In short, Nishida considers the various dimensions and modalities of the public that mediate between individuals and history, concluding that *poiesis* is rooted in both.

3 Creative Self-Awareness and Poetry

Heretofore, the arguments in this paper have focused on the ways in which creative acts offer opportunities to develop self-reflective knowledge that reveals the countenance of reality through intuition and self-awareness. Acts of historical formation

(including science, technology, and art) take the form of acting intuition when an individual mediates the self-formation of the world. This is a process that unceasingly arises in the form of an absolutely contradictory relationship between the world and individuals. However, we must assume a reflective, self-aware view of historical formation, as well as a higher level of acting intuition, in order to describe the relation of the individual and world in this way. Nishida's philosophy locates the self within this dimension:

Scientific knowledge is that which is established based on the acting intuition of our *poietic* self; however, there must be awareness of the creative self at the root of our awareness of the *poietic* self. As individuals in the creative world, our selves are *poietic*. Philosophical knowledge is established based on the awareness of our creative selves, as absolute facts that determine one's self in all respects (NKZb 9: 529f.).

Here we recognize the consistent recurrence of transcendental perspectives throughout Nishida philosophy, even in the *epoché* of phenomenology and reduction. This is apparent in Nishida's use of expressions like "from the reflected to something that reflects" and "from *noema* to *noesis*", already evident in the middle period of his ideology, which focused on the concept of "place (*basho* 場所)".

We can arguably discern Nishida's idea of "from the made to the making (*tsukurareta-mono kara tsukuru-mono e* 作られたものから作るものへ)" in the conceptual extension of the conversion "from *noema* to *noesis*", viewing *poiesis* as creative consciousness. Nishida interprets self-awareness as a turn of these aspects to an *epoché*, broadly defined. While we can detect a change in the philosophical and methodological attitudes (one kind of transcendental reduction), we should recall that his notion is rooted in the primacy of poetic experience. Therefore, the words of poems—the outstanding accomplishments of the creative act of *poiesis*—that appear to be wrapped in a kind of privilege can also be understood from this perspective. Here one could uncover deeply interesting affinities between philosophical thinking and poetic language. Let us assume that the mandate of philosophical inquiry is to confront the moment (i.e., the absolute present) in a self-aware and intuitive way, and then to unceasingly draw closer to it. In this context, poetic language throws us back to the dimension of the creative self by interrupting time and expressing a representative world.

Nishida mentions poetry in his paper "Artistic Creation as an Act of Historical Formation" and expounds on the uniqueness of "poetic intuition" in the following manner:

However, only poetry is truly free art. The things in our historical world become poetry by means of artistic intuition. The viewpoint that a temporal event can be reflected, immediately and unaltered, and seen on a plane of the absolute present is the viewpoint of poetic intuition. It is the viewpoint of viewing the inherently transcendental as the inherently immanent. We can consider the poem as art of pure *fantasia*; we can call poetry art in the truest sense of the word. [...] To call a poem an art of *fantasia* means, translating, to call all people poets in some sense (NKZb 9: 286f.).

Viewed from an individual aspect, a poem intuitively transcends things immanently and speaks out as a singular voice. By reflecting the universal and transcendental in the form of the particular, poetry brings us back to the individual here and now.

However, the question remains as to why poetry is given a privileged status. Nishida provides a certain interpretation of this point in his paper "Artistic Creation as an Act of Historical Formation", an interpretation that could also be directed at language itself. Let us examine this point further.

First, we can observe one striking characteristic of later Nishida philosophy: its attempts to interpret the structure of our world's reality from both the transcendental and immanent poles as if from two focal points of an ellipse. *Transcendence* refers to phenomena in the world that are expressed by language and the thinking self. Along the transcendent-immanent axis, we can locate the scientific world at the extreme transcendental end. *Immanence*, on the other hand, refers to phenomena expressed by the historical and physical self (*vide* NKZb 9: 274 f.). The place where unified expressions of the world's environment are integrated with the expressions of multiple, subjective lives (e.g., the joining of the transcendental and the immanent and of the world and individuals), even as they confront each other mutually and contradictorily, is the place where life and death are determined.

Poetic language ultimately comprises an individual and singular working of artistic creation established at the immanent pole. Because its expression is inherently linguistic, however, its conceptualization is related to thinking; thus, the transcendental cannot be avoided. In short, while *poietic* language, too, is a language of which the true nature is abstraction and universality, it is also a "work of the soul" that operates through *poiesis*. Nishida locates the activities of synthesis and mediation at the root of this poetic language, viewing it as a "work of the soul". These activities, in short, consist of both the common sense by which various physical sensations are synthesized (*kinesthesia*) and an act of the imagination (*fantasia*), or an activity of the "image" that mediates the gap between understanding and intuition. These so-called acts of imagination are considered similar to expressive acts in the profoundest sense of the term because, while imagination is conceptual, it is simultaneously a language shared by all sensory forms (*vide* NKZb 9: 284).

Poetry thus enables us to perceive the transcendental world as immanent from the standpoint of the historical, physical, and *poietic* self. By mediating between thoughts and the body, and between concepts and intuition, and by unifying these pairs, poetry illuminates the structure of the world of reality that is established in conjunction with words. The phenomenon of poetry is, arguably, none other than the incarnation of thoughts in the oneness of every moment and their acquisition of historical physicality.

All in all, art can be conceived of as both the embodiment of the temporary nature of the moment and as the form of that embodiment. However, seeing and viewing (*Augenblick*, "an instantaneous look") accompanies every moment (the continuity of the discontinuity). When we become thoroughly self-aware of this intuition-*cum*-poetic intuition, poetry (as a language art in its very essence) appears as the self-determination of the moment itself. It seems that Nishida's work reflects his incisive insights into poetic language's unique form of expression and its openness (i.e., its reflection of the self-conscious). In short, these insights concern the contradictory yet unifying relationship between the act of the transcendental abstraction of language itself and, despite this, the origination of poetry as an immanent, singular expression.

Addressing the question of how poetic language relates to our lives, we see that it converts an individual's acquired viewpoints and signifies their concentration within a singular scene of one's life. In other words, the contradictory yet identical relationship between transcendence in language and immanence in poetry thus overlaps perfectly with the relationship between temporality and momentariness in our lives. In his short piece, "Concerning Tanka (*Tanka ni tsuite* 短歌について)" (1933), Nishida states:

Life is unitary from the beginning. In practical terms, however, watching the onward-moving life from the environment is not the same as seizing it from a pointed head of life as *élan vital*. Depending on from which of these perspectives one looks, life presents different outlooks and communicates that we live with differing significances (NKZb 11: 163).

In other words, by viewing our lives through short verse, we are seizing life from "the center of the present", which is exactly the same as "seeing from the single point of the ephemeral moment" (NKZb 11: 163)

As a philosopher, Nishida had no other option but to speak using words that express thoughts that are, at their very heart, universal. We, then, have no choice but to face the singular character of experiences-*cum*-moments by turning to their theoretical and logical expression by means of philosophical discourse. Thus, Nishida himself surely cannot escape the fate of philosophical language. However, at the same time, he wrote, "My heart is deep; neither waves of happiness nor of sorrow may reach its bottom" (NKZb 18: 103).

As a poet, Nishida seems to have deeply understood the specificity by which poetic language of the ephemeral moment can touch upon what cannot be uttered through the temporary "thing" of words.

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Chapter 14

Significance and Positioning of Nishida's Philosophy in the Contemporary World



ARISAKA Yoko

1 Philosophical Significance

As with many historical figures in philosophy, there are many ways to “tease out” a theme or a strand of interpretation to highlight an idea or insight of a philosopher in order to shed light on a particular theoretical focus. Nishida is no exception, and this book amply demonstrates the variety of approaches and foci. The conventional interpretation among Nishida scholars regarding the development of Nishida’s corpus as a whole is to read the early theory of “pure experience” as rather psychological. Subsequently, Nishida tried to avoid psychologism and subjectivism to develop a more elaborate theory of the will as “pure act”, which later became systematically developed as his “logic of place” as absolute nothingness. In order to preempt misinterpretations that would cast his philosophy as “empty” metaphysics, Nishida simultaneously emphasized his theory of “place” as the self-determining “dialectical universal” that concretely involves historical subjects and their concrete actions. These historical subjects engage the world through “active intuition”. In this line of accepted interpretation, one could discern a shift from the “first-person” standpoint of the early theory of pure experience, to the “third-person” perspective which grasps the metaphysics of place and its dialectical universal from a theoretical standpoint of the philosopher. The standpoint of the (first-person) self becomes integrated in the system, but the theoretical standpoint that sees this self within a dialectical system is often taken to be no longer the first-person standpoint of pure experience.

However, let me tease out an alternative line of interpretation, one which sustains the “first-person” stance throughout. By the “first-person”, I do not mean a

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psychological standpoint focusing on the subjective content of a self, such as sensations and perceptions. Rather, the “first-person” signifies a concrete perspectival center that is the self—it is a *noesis*, a meaning-giving-subject that is one’s self which cannot be an object. The theory of pure experience is a first-person theory, insofar as one begins from the simple fact of “immediate experience” prior to the establishment of the subject and object. In Nishida’s words, “in the immediate experience, there is not yet the distinction of subject and object” (NKZa 1: 9). It is often misunderstood as a version of psychologism as Nishida himself admits, but if pure experience is prior to the subject-object distinction, it cannot refer to the psychological contents or the consciousness of the presupposed subject. It is rather something like an “experiential ontology”, a new kind of ontology based on the immediacy of the self simultaneously opening up to the world, not unlike Heidegger’s *Dasein* as being-in-the-world (that is also not a psychological self yet retains the first-person-ness in its ontology).¹ “Reality” is this “field of experience” that is prior to the individuation of “experiences” belonging to persons. As such, it is not a psychological notion but, rather, an ontological “field” or a “ground” that contains in itself principles that define what would be subsequently analyzable as subjective and objective. Thus, according to Nishida, “it is not that the individual has experience, but in Experience emerges the individual. The individual experience is only a small part of Experience” (NKZa 1: 28).

I want to argue that even in his abstract logic of place or his theory of the dialectical universal, this first-person stance never disappeared. Nishida himself writes in his third preface to *An Inquiry into the Good* (originally published in 1911) in 1936:

Seeing from today’s perspective, the standpoint of this book may be considered that of consciousness and it is rather psychologistic. It is understandable that it might be criticized as such. However, even as I wrote this book, my ideas were not simply those of consciousness. The standpoint of “pure experience” became that of “absolute will” through the influence of Fichte’s notion of *Tathandlung* in *Intuition and Reflection in Self-Awareness*, which in turn went through another transformation and turned into the standpoint of *Place*, mediated by Greek philosophy, in the latter half of *From That Which Acts to That Which Sees*. That was my attempt to systematize my thinking. The philosophy of Place, then, became concretized as the Dialectical Universal, and this standpoint became again “immediate” as the standpoint of action-intuition. What has been discussed in this book, the world of immediate experience or pure experience, is now understood as the historical reality. Thus the world of action-intuition, the world of *poiesis*, is actually no other than the world of pure experience (NKZa 1: 6–7).

As this quote indicates, throughout the systematization attempts, Nishida never abandoned the initial insights of his early theory of pure experience even in his later, more robustly developed theories. It is therefore not an incoherent line of interpretation to follow the development of the initial first-person perspective even in the later theories.

In order to follow this line of interpretation, another key concept I find helpful is the notion of the “eternal present”, at times also called the “absolute present”. The

¹ See *An Inquiry Into the Good* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992). For the notion of experiential ontology and for the comparisons with James, see Feenberg and Arisaka (1990).

term began to appear sporadically after the early 1930s.² The “eternal present” is the Here/Now that “simultaneously unifies the past and the future; it is the present at the center that determines a world” (NKZa 6: 133). The past, present, and future are not on a timeline, as it were; they are “determinations” or “expressions” of the Here/Now. There exists only the Here/Now (as the eternal present) which expresses itself as the past or the future, depending on the particular focus. For example, when I think of a particular content of an occurrence of the past, it unfolds itself in the present. Thus, Here/Now, as the absolute present, is simultaneously both the past and the future:

The absolute present that determines temporality—one can consider this as the self-determination of the absolute nothingness, with multiple centers and without borders. In this sense the absolute present can begin anywhere and instantly gathers infinite past and future at the point of the present—such is the eternal present. Time is established through the self-determination of the eternal present (NKZa 6:188).

What is interesting is that Nishida connects the “I” (the first-person) to the eternal present through our actions, which are both, in turn, connected to the self-determination of absolute nothingness. To quote:

The moment the contents of the eternal present get intuitively determined, there is the I (*jiko*, the self as the I). The content of the true self is no other than the content of the eternal present; the outside becomes the inside. Our world does not flow from the past to the future. The past flows into the present and the future to the present as well. Our world flows from the present to the present (NKZa 6:132).

That the present determines itself to be the past or the future—the self-determination of the eternal present—that a world is determined as the present at the center—all this means that “we act”. Through action, we are constantly in touch with the eternal present. Our actions always arise from it (NKZa 6:133).

What is considered the self-determination of the eternal present is the self-determination of Absolute Nothingness as the universal Place itself. This is the true meaning of intuition. Actions can be thought of as that which unifies the irrational, as the self-determination of the eternal present. At the same time, this is the self “seeing itself” as the Now determines itself (NKZa 6:133-134).

The self as the I, the seeing/acting self, is identified as the dynamic eternal present. This is the *noetic* self, not to be confused with the I-as-seen, a *noematic* self (an object). Nishida sometimes describes this *noetic I* as located at the center of the “circle without circumference”:

The self-determination of the circle without circumference is the self-determination of the place of nothingness; this is to establish the present as the determination of the self itself. The determinations are both dialectical and historical as the self-determinations of

²The first essays where Nishida explicitly discusses the notion of the “eternal present” are “My Notion of the Self-Determination of Absolute Nothingness” (「私の絶対無の自覚的限定といふもの」), “The self-Determination of the Eternal Present”(「永遠の今の自己限定」), and “I and Thou”(「私と汝」), all contained in *The Self-Determination of Nothingness* (『無の自覚的限定』), published in 1932. All are contained in NKZa 6.

nothingness. At the same time, as the self-determination of the Place itself, one can also think of this as transcendent; the process contains within itself the dialectic that transcends itself within. This is the self-determination of the circle without circumference. The Place thus determined, is the embodied self. The embodied self is not to be thought of simply as the psychic nor the physical determinations. [...] At the bottom of the ungraspable present is the individual self—this is the “point” that determines the self, the split-moment that determines the self that is at the center of the infinite circle (NKZa 6:196–197).

The quote is a bit cryptic, but if one follows Nishida’s intuition (or if one is familiar with the Mahayana notion of *sunyata*), one can certainly see the development from his earlier theory of pure experience, expressed in another articulation. The immediacy of the Here/Now is the moment of “seeing without the subject and object” prior to reflection, the field of pure experience. It is the ongoing Here/Now, the eternal present, which unifies reality as it appears, and the seeing self—the noetic I—is always at its center, as it were. But this “I as the seer” is not mere consciousness. It is an embodied self, a series of actions which are embedded in history, dialectically interacting and co-creating at all times. Precisely through this process of dialectical determinations (of our embodied selves), our present is the *lived present*, the eternal present constantly born. And this, the whole dialectical world that is the eternal present, is the self-determination of absolute nothingness. If this is so, the self-determination of absolute nothingness is not some mysterious metaphysical occurrence, but it is happening *right now* through our very embodied selves, at all times. In Nishida’s words, “that which is truly concrete existence—which is the self-determination of the Absolute Nothingness—is our individual selves as the self-determination of the eternal present” (NKZa 6: 211).

Here lies Nishida’s novelty, and in my view, the most interesting idea that makes his philosophy relevant today. To clarify in more detail, let me refocus on the difference between the first- and the third-person points of view, with special attention to the perspective of ourselves—the standpoint of the theorist as well as the reader in the present moment.

First, as already mentioned, there are, in fact, two ways in which the “first-person perspective” can be understood. The first is the “seeing-self”, the noetic “I” that cannot itself be an object. This is what I mean by the first-person perspective throughout this essay. Most often, the first-person perspective is grasped in the third-person (which is unavoidable in writing to some extent). This is to see the first-person perspective as an object (of analyses, of reflection, etc.). Such a first-person perspective is “seen” from the above-mentioned “seeing” self, the initial first-person perspective. This “seen” first-person perspective is ordinarily understood as the self’s perspective in psychology, consciousness studies, theories of mind, and the like, and it usually means sensation, inner states, contents of consciousness, thought, reflection, etc. But this is not what I refer to as the first-person perspective in discussing Nishida.

Next, what I call the “third-person perspective”, in contrast, is the assumed perspective of the theorist in the natural and social sciences, and traditional philosophy. One often takes this perspective even in reading Nishida. In philosophy it is also sometimes referred to as the “bird’s eye perspective”, “view from nowhere”, or the

“God’s eye view”. It is in itself unthematized, but its standpoint presumes to “see the whole”. When we analyze the standpoint of pure experience, for instance, we necessarily take this third-person perspective and “project” the contents and operations of pure experience as an object of analyses, and in this process, the embodied actions of the analyses (the initial first-person above) becomes invisible to itself.

In analyzing Nishida’s corpus as a whole, the development of his theory from the so-called psychologistic theory (of pure experience) to the more systematic and ontological theory of place, and on to the more historical and dialectical theory of the acting self, could be read as the development from the first-person (pure experience) to the third-person (the system of “reality”, even grasping Absolute Nothingness). But, if one understands the first-person as the initial first-person above (the seeing self that cannot be object), this perspective never left Nishida’s theory throughout.

But the story goes further. Even when one necessarily takes the third-person perspective to read and analyze Nishida (for instance when we read and analyze the self-determination of absolute nothingness as the self-determination of the self as eternal present and thereby project this whole theory as an object of analyses), the initial first-person is always at hand in the act of reading/thinking. In fact, this is the real subject of reality at all times, the unfolding of the eternal present right now, as you read this line. So, this initial first-person turns out to be the ineliminable “field” in which all that is to be seen, thought, acted upon, etc. (in short, the whole of reality). This is what Nishida has been referring to all along, but the reference is not to the content, but to our present consciousness in the actual Here/Now.

So far as I know, there is no philosophical theory that tries to thematize this unfolding Here/Now of ourselves at this very moment, but this is, in fact, what Nishida’s theory tries to articulate. In a trite way, this is the “Zen element” in Nishida, though he himself hardly refers to Mahayana Buddhism.³

Thus, it turns out that the content of Nishida’s theory cannot be grasped as an object of thought. And yet, it is ubiquitously available if we stop and reflect, if we can avoid turning such reflecting into an object. Moreover, in light of this, Nishida is attempting to illuminate the *living present*—our embodied present in the Here/Now, 2021 and beyond—not his theory, his writings, what happened in history, or even the theory of absolute nothingness, in his corpus or his time. This is why Nishida’s theory is *necessarily* relevant today. He is still speaking to us. It refers to our very present moment, as we live, and we are called upon to become aware of this fact. The force of Nishida’s theory, in this sense, lies in our taking full account of the living present. We read, discuss, and analyze Nishida and his entire theory as content, but in fact, the very content is not what Nishida writes, but our Here/Now

³Nishida mentions it once in discussing the eternal present in “What I call the Self-Actual-Determination of the Absolute Nothingness” (1932): “The true meaning of Mahayana Buddhism is to touch the bottom of facts themselves, one step at a time; that which has form, that is the shadow of the formless” (NKZa 6: 155). Explicit references to Mahayana Buddhism occur in his “Logic of Place and Religious Worldview” (「場所の論理と宗教的世界観」), one of his last essays he wrote two months before his death in 1945.

as it unfolds, regardless of the content. We constantly *enact* what Nishida calls the “self-identity of absolutely contradictory opposites” (of pure nothingness out of which all things become what they are—the simultaneous contents of our reality at this very moment).⁴ Keeping this point in mind, let me now turn to the second issue, the historical context, which I see as relevant to situating Nishida in today’s framework.

2 History and the Dialectical World

From the mid- to late 1930s, Nishida began to develop his theory in a much more concrete framework.⁵ The abstract theory of the logic of place as absolute nothingness in the late 1920s acquired a distinctively historical content, influenced by Hegel and Marx’s dialectic. The historical development (qua the self-development of place as absolute nothingness) takes place through what Nishida calls “action-intuition” (*kōi-teki-chokkan*, “*kōi*”: action, “*chokkan*”: intuition). Historical development is to be understood as the dialectic of the subject making the world (object) which in turn forms the subject. The original insight from the theory of pure experience (the “experiential field” that is supposed to develop into subject and object) is now historicized and concretized through dialectical action. The historical subject negates or “transcends” itself in becoming the historical environment, while at the same time, it negates the environment to become itself again. A similar process occurs among the historical agents, the “we” of our history.

In his political writings, the process of the acting dialectical self and its co-determination with the environment gets applied to the relations among nations. For example, in *The Principle of the New World Order* (*Sekai Shin-Chitsujo no Genri*, 1943) the metaphysical-dialectical theory of Nishida’s “historical world”, which posits all entities to be mediated through the process of historical action-creation-mediation, was applied to a theory of the “age of the self-realization of the world” through nation-building.⁶ Every nation, in order to establish itself, would do so through a negation of itself (in the recognition of other/difference) as well as a negation of the other (to establish itself as the other of the other). Through this dialectic, each nation affirms itself in relation to others. In this process the particularities of cultures are preserved and the essential interdependence of nations is recognized.

⁴This point is also discussed in Y. Arisaka (2017) in Davis (2017).

⁵See, for example, *The Fundamental Problems of Philosophy I and II* (『哲学の根本問題』NKZa 7), published in 1933 and 1934.

⁶I do not refer to the postwar controversies surrounding this essay and the role of Nishida during the Pacific War here, but this is a subject that has been amply analyzed. For an English translation of the essay as well as the summary of the controversy, see Arisaka (1996). See also Arisaka (1999) and (2017) for a further discussion. For a collection of essays on the connection between Japanese philosophy and nationalism, see Heisig and Maraldo (1994). For further discussions on the politics of Nishida and the Kyoto School, see also Goto-Jones (2005) and (2008).

Through this process on a global scale, the “realization of the global-world” (*sekai-teki sekai no jikaku*) is achieved.

Notice how easy it is at this point to slip into the third-person perspective and “see the acting self” interacting and co-creating the historical world. Reading Nishida's historical theory requires this theoretical third-person perspective, from which the development of history and the dialectical world can be grasped. The acting self becomes seen (from a “view from nowhere” as it were) as one of the essential elements in this historical process. But as mentioned above, the initial first-person perspective is only hidden; the unthematized standpoint of our reading self is nonetheless there at all times.

In a highly multifaceted world today, such a dialectical theory of identity-formation is not only applicable but also helpful in negotiating multi-layered relations among groups. Be it nations, cultural subgroups, or political identities, identity formation necessarily involves a recognition of the other, as well as the recognition of oneself as the other of the other; and it is here that the power negotiations occur. Nishida's context was the rise of Asian solidarity against the encroaching Euro-American imperialism during the Pacific War, but the same theoretical framework could be used to discuss today's problems of multiculturalism, intercultural dialogue, and global diversity, as discussed by recent Nishida scholars such as Maraldo, Davis, and Kopf.⁷

Beyond the mutual dialectical determination of identities, there is also a historically interesting fact about the development of Nishida's historical-political theory. It was one of the first sustained attempts to critique the Euro-American dominance (the so-called Eurocentrism) that arose from a non-European philosophy. For those who might be unfamiliar with the history and development of Japanese philosophy (for which Nishida is known to be the founder), let me discuss briefly the historical context that led to the formation of Japanese philosophy.

From 1639 until the mid-1800s, Japan remained relatively isolated from the rest of the world. Since the mid-seventeenth century, in order to control the spread of Christianity the Tokugawa Shogunate closed all the ports except the port of Nagasaki in the southernmost island of Kyushu, and only China and Holland were allowed to continue trade under strictly controlled conditions. It was not until the mid-1800s, that the American “Black Ships” lead by Commodore Perry arrived and demanded the opening of the country. The amazing industrial advancements and revolutions that occurred in Europe and America during the eighteenth Century were only vaguely perceived by the leading Japanese thinkers at the time. But when Perry demanded the opening of the country with his modern weaponry and superior military power, the leaders were suddenly confronted with what had not taken place in their own country: the process of modernization based on science, technology, and

⁷See, for example, Davis (2006, 2013), Kopf (2011), and Maraldo (1995).

economic development. Japan faced two alternatives: either become a victim of Western expansionism or open itself up to modernization to protect itself.⁸

The decision was made for modernization. With the official Meiji Restoration of 1868, the whole country was mobilized in order to “catch up” with the process of Western-style modernization. Due to its 250 years of self-closure, the contrast between “what is Japanese and traditional” and “what is Western, modern, foreign, exotic, and new” was rather clearly perceivable. It is not an exaggeration to say that the history of post-Meiji Japan is shaped by the cultural understanding of a *difference* between “Japanese vs. Western”, or more commonly, “East and West”, where the East represented what is traditional, spiritual, indigenous, cultural, backwards, particular (to Japan or Asia), and the West represented its contrast, namely what is modern, materialistic, foreign, scientific, advanced, universal (as science and technology). The chief markers of modernity were said to be based on the principles of universal truth.⁹ Philosophy, as a system of “logic”, was also considered a part of this universal knowledge.

As the initial shock of “either-or” difference subsided, the Meiji intellectuals began to grapple with the idea of advancing a hybrid culture of “Japanese yet modern”, epitomized in SAKUMA well-known slogan, *wakon yosai*, or “Eastern spirit, Western science”.¹⁰ The hope was to combine and develop the best elements of both, to form a unique, modern yet non-Western culture of Japan.

In this mood of optimism, some thinkers and cultural leaders (such as the founder of “Japanese arts”, OKAKURA Tenshin) began to critique the inherent “Eurocentrism” of Western thought. In the European tradition at the time, following Hegel, it was rather taken for granted that the “center of truth” and the most advanced and civilized culture was that of Christian Europe. The long-standing Christian ontology that contrasts reason, faith, and civilization vs. irrationality, heathen, barbarism became combined with the “scientific” racist developmental thinking ushered by the publication of Charles Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species: By Means of Natural Selection or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life* in 1859.¹¹ The heathen (and “non-white”) non-West, including Japan, was simply outside the realm of truth, or “behind and backwards” in the timeline of civilizational development.

The universalism of science (and philosophy) was supposed to apply to all human beings. Yet, in practice, the Western thinkers took it for granted that only Euro-American civilization represented the truth. This intellectual attitude

⁸James Heisig notes that by the time the Black Ships arrived, Japan knew enough about the industrial and technological advancements in the West that it was ready to end its isolation. See Heisig (2001), 10.

⁹For a more detailed account of the process of change, see Samson (1984), and Jansen (1965).

¹⁰Shozan (1811–1864) was educated in the neo-Confucian tradition, but he also learned Dutch and modern technology. For discussions on post-Meiji thinkers and developments, see Tsunoda, et al. (1958).

¹¹For the influence of this development-based metaphysical thinking on colonialism and racism, see McCarthy (2009).

continues to this day in Europe and North America. When one speaks of the discipline of “philosophy” today, it normally refers unproblematically to “Western philosophy”; the so-called “non-Western philosophies” must justify themselves in order to be counted as “philosophy” at all. The Meiji intellectuals were dissatisfied with such imperialistic arrogance even back in those times and aspired to develop a philosophical system that is “Japanese yet universal”. If Japan could develop a culturally non-Western yet universal form of philosophy, then that would be a proof that European civilization is not the only center of truth. If such a philosophy is indeed universal, then it would necessarily mean that European and American minds must also be able to understand it to be applicable to the nature of the human mind or reality. If this can be achieved, then Japan can contribute to the creation of a more globally balanced world culture, offering a conception of an “alternative, non-Western modernity” to the Western-dominated world. Japanese philosophy came to be developed in this milieu, combining the goal of developing a philosophy based on Japanese culture with the demand for systematic universality of the Western philosophical tradition.¹² Philosophy became a site of intellectual negotiation between rationality, systematicity, and logic, on the one hand, and spirituality, holistic thinking, and artistic thinking, on the other.

Nishida's dialectic of national identity formations (as well as the idea that the self-realization of the parts increasingly unfolds and realizes the whole) is rather explicitly borrowed from Hegel's notion of the development of *Weltgeschichte*. However, Nishida rejects Hegel's process-oriented dialectic as well as his European provincialism which holds that world civilization culminates and finds true expression in Europe. To this extent Nishida's theory was indeed ahead of its time in anticipating today's postcolonial critiques of Eurocentrism, as well as the move to include the legitimate participatory capacities of non-Western civilizations in global culture.

Granted in today's global context, the difference between what is Euro-American and what is indigenous is certainly no longer clearly discernible, but the effects of Euro-American dominance continue. Philosophy, for example, as an academic discipline remains one of the most obstinate in opening up its conceptions of itself. The so-called “non-Western philosophies”, including Japanese philosophy, are still quite marginalized, and those whose specializations are in such fields still struggle to define their place in the wider academy that is still largely conceived on the model of European civilizational development.

Politically speaking, the effects of a presumed Western supremacy can also be felt. Apart from the problem of colonial violence since the era of postcolonial independence after the 1940s, the everyday intellectual “struggle” to grapple with what is “Euro-American” (perceived also as “modern, advanced, and superior” in some felt sense) and what is “local and indigenous” (“backwards and primitive”) has been

¹²For overviews and translated essays by Japanese philosophers from the seventh to the twentieth Century, see Heisig et al. (2011). This comprehensive 1300-page volume is a *tour-de-force* on the major thinkers of Japan. For a shorter summary and introduction see also Blocker and Starling (2001).

a common experience and cultural theme in many nations and peoples of Africa, Asia, and Central- and South-America. It is true that all over the world, practically all spheres of life today are hybrids. Though, this particular sense of *difference* was more acutely felt among the so-called non-Western peoples because their own ways of life were deemed “less developed, less civilized, and backwards” in comparison to European civilization in the way that required reflection and self-evaluation. Japan’s case occurred earlier—perhaps one of the first major instances in which a small country resisted colonization and succeeded—but the general theme of incorporating Euro-American systems, values, lifestyles into the local and the indigenous remains an on-going global issue. Nishida engages this endeavor in a philosophically sustained manner.

At the end of the Pacific War, Nishida attempted to develop a philosophy and a self-validating cultural narration that was faithful to the local history, and his work also inspired many other non-European thinkers. Though there was hardly any direct influence, perhaps in a parallel fashion to modern Japanese philosophy, negotiations with Western philosophies became one of the recurring themes in the fields of modern African, Latin-American, Arabic and Indigenous philosophies.¹³ (Indian and Chinese philosophies, with their long historical developments, are less concerned with “incorporating” Western philosophy. The focus is perhaps more on the comparison, contrast, and reconstruction than incorporation.) In this way, tracing the politico-historical context of its development shows that Nishida’s philosophy did not come out of a historical vacuum. Its conception and development show an intellectual struggle defined in relation to the much broader context of the Western modernization process shared by many other thinkers in many parts of the non-Western world.

3 Conclusion: Taking Responsibility in the Eternal Present

Let me now put the two discussions together. Nishida’s ontology stipulates that the content of his theory is no “theory” at all, but rather our lived present that can never be turned into an object as such. It can be analyzed and systematized as if it were an object as Nishida attempts, but what he refers to are the immediate actions with which we are constantly involved, the immersion in our surroundings, and even the

¹³The history of the development of modern African philosophies (especially since the 1920s during the postcolonial reconstruction), for example, was much driven by reactions against the racist Western depiction of African peoples and histories. The reactions against Europe was, of course, much more acute and visceral than the case of Japan, yet the African thinkers such as A. Cesaire, K. Gyekye, and H. O. Oruka incorporated Western philosophical systems (e.g. the Hegelian dialectic, Marxism, communitarianism, deconstruction) in order to produce a unique hybrid much more faithful to the local thought. For a good overview, see Jonathan Chimakonam’s <https://www.iep.utm.edu/afric-hi/>

act of thinking or reflection. It refers to the nonobjectifiable Here/Now that is the "I myself" at all times, as *you* read these lines right now.

Next, this "field of experience" that is the Here/Now, has the dialectical structure that continuously makes the self and its world. Perhaps similar to Heidegger's being-in-the-world, the existential opening unfolds the world through involvement. The eternal present is already an ongoing field that unifies all of its elements.

The self, that is the "I", in this process is not simply a thing among other things; it is a creative self that interacts, and what it does "matters" in the immediate appropriation of the future, the enaction of present, and the making of the past. To put it in first-person language: What I think and do "makes a difference" in terms of what kind of future and history I have a hand in creating. To the extent I am constantly involved with others in this ongoing process, I am a co-maker of history, and I can make decisions this way or that way, and that lead to different outcomes, however small. If this is the case, then the responsibilities I have for my decisions and interactions are also an inalienable aspect of this "I". I can orient myself according to my view of the world, and I can inform myself about its process. I can develop moral sensibilities, empathy toward others, learn about ethics, and think about a better society and world. I can, of course, also do the opposite, and I would still be responsible.

Such decisions may appear to "come in the near future" as if it is a linear process, but in fact it is actually the Here/Now that we drag and postpone. I could say to myself, "it doesn't actually make a difference in the end", and while that may be true, this is still a decision and a stance to which one has committed oneself. I can dwell in the past (whatever this may entail—personal or historical), but that, too, is an ongoing unfolding of the Here/Now to which I have committed myself. In this way, I am an *agent* who deliberates and contemplates the actions (even though some of this deliberation and contemplation may not be at a conscious level). The historical world of such agents ("personalities" in Nishida's terms) is full of responsibilities connected with decisions, and since we are always engaged in creative acts that are, in turn, shaped by a made environment, our responsibilities are always relational, for the other within a larger context.

From the first-person perspective, since my decisions are situated and implicated in the concrete processes of history, my dialectical involvement with others and with the wider environment is *always already* moral-political. In this sense, history does not "just happen"; rather, it is dialectically created through its participants and their decisions, actions, projections, reflections, interpretations, moral sensibilities, compassion, understanding, will, and freedom. From the first-person perspective, Nishida's theory highlights this existential dimension in the dialectical-historical process, and such a dimension includes *us today*. Pure experience, action-intuition, and the dialectical universal's self-determination are not simply in "books" or in "Nishida's philosophy". They are still, emphatically, the articulations of the very processes in which we live, theorize, and communicate, here and now. We continue a living tradition, a concrete universal in the process of unfolding.

Philosophy and culture are remarkably intertwined. Philosophers are cultural beings, and philosophizing is rooted in a cultural context with geopolitical

particularities. Tracing the development of Japanese philosophy over 130 years of turbulent history shows, first, a pursuit of universality in cultural particularity, which is followed by the pursuit of particularity in the particular. Finally, the global setting of entire process is reflected upon. Today our philosophical discourse goes beyond such categories, yet our fascination and interest in different philosophical traditions, imaginations, and ways of philosophizing are worth preserving. In this current context, Nishida reminds us of the role and place of the “I” embedded in the Here/Now. The eternal present unfolds, and along with it, the legacy of Nishida that we carry out in our very actions.

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Chapter 15

Nishida Kitarō and Virtue Ethics: With a Focus on *Zen no Kenkyū*



LAM Wing Keung

The good is the actualization of personality. Viewed internally, this actualization is the satisfaction of a solemn demand — that is, the unification of consciousness — and its ultimate form is achieved in the mutual forgetting of self and other and the merging of subject and object. Viewed externally as an emergent fact, this actualization advances from the small scale development of all humankind [...] Morality is not a matter of seeking something apart from the self [...] it is simply the discovery of something within the self (Abe and Ives 1990: 142–144; NKZb 1: 131–133).¹

1 Nishida Kitarō and Virtue Ethics: a Hidden Connection

This chapter examines NISHIDA Kitarō’s ethical discourse from the perspective of virtue ethics, with a focus on his writings up until *Zen no Kenkyū* (*An Inquiry into the Good*) in 1911. There are three reasons for this focus: Firstly, among the voluminous scholarship on Nishida, there are only a few works on moral philosophy.² Secondly, I suggest that virtue ethics is a promising approach for (re)interpreting Nishida’s moral philosophy as a kind of “energetism (活動説)”.³ Thirdly, by

¹ The English translation is taken from ABE Masao and Christopher IVES, *An Inquiry into the Good*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990. The original text in Japanese refers to 新版『西田幾多郎全集』 (hereinafter, NKZb). Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2002–2009.

² See Goto-Jones (2003), pp. 514–536, Goto-Jones (2005), Yanagida (1939), Kōsaka (1983), Yukiyasu (2007), pp. 108–143, Yukiyasu (2012), pp. 1–22 and so on.

³ Energetism refers to an “ethical theory that bases itself on such fundamental ideas”, that is, the “internal demands of consciousness, not from without”. Nishida argues that such “fundamental ideas” or “internal demands” “appear in the consciousness as goal concepts which unify consciousness; when such unification reaches completion—when ideals are realized—we feel satisfaction. When we go against these ideals, we feel dissatisfaction”. As a result, as “Aristotle wrote that the goal of human life is happiness (*eudaimonia*), and that we research this happiness through

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rereading Nishida's moral philosophy in line with virtue ethics, not only can we shed light on its potential for ethics, we can also attempt to rearticulate Nishida's philosophy. Due to limitations of space, however, in this chapter, I will only go so far as to outline these three interconnected points. I will not discuss all models of virtue ethics and their relationships with other ethical theories, particularly utilitarianism and deontology, in order to connect them with Nishida. In the following discussion, I will follow Roger CRISP and Michael SLOTE in focusing on two general approaches to virtue ethics: virtue and agent-based ethics. As Crisp and Slote write:

Certainly, it is characteristic of modern virtue ethics that it puts primary emphasis on aretaic or virtue-centered concepts rather than deontic or obligation-centered concepts.

Another striking feature of virtue ethics is its focus on moral agents and their lives, rather than on discrete actions (telling a lie, having an abortion, giving to a beggar) construed in isolation from the notion of character, and the rules governing these actions (Crisp and Slote 2013: 2–3).

Undoubtedly, there are various definitions of virtue ethics. Some scholars like Crisp and Slote highlight its uniqueness by comparing it to utilitarianism and deontology, whereas some view it as overlapping other normative moral theories. As Rosaline HURSTHOUSE writes:

A deeper reason for the demand that we should come up with a crisp answer to “What is virtue ethics”?, I suspect, is the persistence of the belief that virtue ethics is not, as I claimed above, “a rival to deontological and utilitarian approaches, as interestingly and challengingly different from either as they are from each other”⁴ (Hursthouse 2010: 7).

Meanwhile, even if there is a risk of oversimplification, virtue and agent-based ethics seem to be two representative features of virtue ethics. I suggest that both of these approaches can help us to reconfigure Nishida's moral philosophy.

Before proceeding further, some further detail is required on the above mentioned three reasons for my line of inquiry. To begin with, I suggested above that Nishida's moral philosophy is an area which has remained understudied to date. Yet, going further, I suggest that ethics is in fact the starting point as well as the consummation of Nishida's philosophy. Having been influenced by NAKAJIMA Rikizō 中島力造 (1858–1918), his mentor at Tokyo Imperial University, Nishida read quite a number of works on ethics, including, but not limited to, KANT and Thomas HILL GREEN.⁵ The first “academic” essay, which was unpublished at that time (1893), titled 韓國倫理学 (Kantian Ethics), was an answer to an examination given by Nakajima. During his 10 years (1899–1909) of teaching at the Fourth High School (第四高等学校), ethics was one of the subjects that Nishida offered. However, the

perfect action, not through the pursuit of pleasure” (Abe and Ives 1990:122–123; NKZb 1:114–115).

⁴Rosalind Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010, p. 7.

⁵Regarding the influence of NAKAJIMA Rikizō on Nishida, see YUKIYASU Shigeru, *Modern Japanese Thinkers and British Idealism*, pp. 108–143 and 藤田正勝 (FUJITA Masakatsu), 「人間・西田幾多郎—未完の哲学」(*Nishida Kitarō as a Human Being: Unfinished Philosophy*). Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2020, pp. 37–41.

lectures he gave proved to be so difficult that his students asked him to provide them with “handouts” (NKZb 1: 460–461) These in turn furnished the base material for a number of his journal publications,⁶ before becoming the third part (“The Good”, 善), of *Zen no Kenkyū*.⁷ In fact, Nishida’s first academic position at Kyoto University was also related to ethics. Moral philosophy, therefore, is the starting point of Nishida’s philosophy. Furthermore, ever since Nishida (re)defined philosophy as the problem of life (人生問題, NKZb 5: 139), which he viewed as the central theme of *Zen no Kenkyū* (NKZb 1: 6), ethics as a practical concern (NKZb 1: 85) has always been a theme of Nishida philosophy. As seen in his very last completed essay, “The Theory of *Basho* and Religious Worldview” (場所的論理と宗教的世界観), ethics remained a key topic for Nishida until the very end of his philosophical career.

People who conceive of the religious form of life through the medium of moral perfection do so from such a standpoint [the moral self has eternal life]. This is essentially what Kant’s second *Kritik* amounts to. I will contend, however, that religion does not gain adequate definition from the moral standpoint. Even if such a thing were to be imagined, it would not be true religion⁸ (Dilworth 1993: 65, NKZb 10: 314).

A second reason for this inquiry is that virtue ethics is a promising avenue for examining Nishida’s moral philosophy. The value of virtue ethics here in part follows from Nishida’s notion of the actualization of personality (人格の実現). Nishida is uninterested in establishing rules or norms for morality. Rather, he emphasizes that morality entails the actualization of one’s personality. As per the quote given above, Nishida claims that “The good is the actualization of personality. Viewed internally, this actualization is the satisfaction of a solemn demand – that is, the unification of consciousness” (Abe and Ives 1990: 142; NKZb 1: 131). For Nishida, personality

⁶ 「グリーン氏倫理哲学の大意」緒言・第一編 (An Outline of Green Moral Philosophy, Prologue, Part I) 『教育時論』 (*Topics on Education*), No. 362, May 5, 1895, 「グリーン氏倫理哲学の大意(承前)」緒言・第二編 (An Outline of Green Moral Philosophy, Prologue, Part II), 『教育時論』 (*Topics on Education*), No. 363, May 15, 1895, 「グリーン氏倫理哲学の大意(承前)」緒言・第三編 (An Outline of Green Moral Philosophy, Prologue, Part III), 『教育時論』 (*Topics on Education*), No. 364, May 25, 1895, 「カント倫理学主義」 (Kantian Ethical Discourse), 『北辰会雑誌』 (*The Journal of Hokushinkai*), No. 29, April 3, 1901, 「倫理学説(一)」 (Ethical Discourse I), 『東亜之光』 (*Tōa no hikari*), Vol. 3, No. 3, March 1, 1908, 「倫理学説(二)」 (Ethical Discourse II), 『東亜之光』 (*Tōa no hikari*), Vol. 3, No. 4, April 1, 1908, 「倫理学説(三)」 (Ethical Discourse III), 『東亜之光』 (*Tōa no hikari*), Vol. 3, No. 6, June 1, 1908, 「倫理学説(四)」 (Ethical Discourse IV), 『東亜之光』 (*Tōa no hikari*), Vol. 3, No. 7, July 1, 1908, and 「倫理学説(五)」 (Ethical Discourse V), 『東亜之光』 (*Tōa no hikari*), Vol. 3, No. 8, August 1, 1908. For details, see NKZb 24:181–183.

⁷ Regarding the background of Part III of *Zen no kenkyū*, see 藤田正勝 Fujita Makastu, 「後記」 (Postscript), NKZb 1:460–461.

⁸ David A. Dilworth translated Nishida’s article 「場所的論理と宗教的世界観」 as “The Logic of the Place of Nothingness and the Religious Worldview”. I suggest that this translation is problematic. The word “Nothingness” is not included in the original title. Furthermore, the term logic is a potentially confusing translation for *ronri* 論理, as Nishida does not follow what “Western” or at least “Aristotelian” sense of logic. See David A. Dilworth, *Last Writings: Nothingness and the Religious Worldview*. Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1993.

means “the satisfaction of a solemn demand – that is, the unification of consciousness”. By this expression, Nishida means that one’s “personality” is not something external and outside of one’s consciousness. Viewed in this light, Nishida’s moral philosophy looks very similar to two general features of virtue ethics: Firstly, the internal personality may refer to virtues, particularly in the Confucian sense. Secondly, the concept of satisfaction shares the agent-based approach of virtue ethics.

Finally, beyond helping us to rearticulate Nishida’s moral philosophy, virtue ethics might also enable us to reconfigure Nishida’s whole philosophical system. By re-reading Nishida’s moral philosophy through virtue ethics—especially with respects to its connection to classical Confucianism—I argue that we can shed light on both the Confucian coloring of Nishida’s moral philosophy, as well as the Nishidian shading of Confucian ethics.

2 Virtue and Agent-Based Approaches: Confucius, Mencius and Nishida

Nishida himself never used virtue ethics to outline his moral philosophy. What Nishida repeatedly emphasized is that a person should listen to his or her “internal demands” (Abe and Ive 1990: 122–124; NKZb 1: 115–117) in order to be moral. In saying so, Nishida explicitly refers to the Aristotelian concept of *eudaimonia*, while also implicitly employing classical Confucian ideas, sincerity in particular. I suggest that such understandings can be better articulated by way of virtue and agent-based ethics; the two general approaches of virtue ethics.

While criticizing a number of ethical theories, including intuitive theory 直覺説, authority theory 権力説, rational theory, intellectual theory 合理説 (or dianoetic ethics 主知的倫理学), and hedonic theory 快樂説, Nishida strongly supports energetism. His reasons are as follows: Firstly, value judgments must be based on the internal demands of consciousness. Secondly, the internal demands of consciousness induce the will of action (not reason). Thirdly, internal demands are more fundamental than feelings of pleasure and discomfort as hedonic theory asserts (Abe and Ives 1990: 122–123; NKZb 1: 115).

It is debatable as to whether Nishida’s views on the above moral theories are convincing. Nishida emphasizes that the ground of value judgments and action is not something external, but rather something which arises from “internal demands”. We can, therefore, conclude that Nishida is dissatisfied with authority theory as well as deontological ethics, which advocate for the suppression of desires through laws and duties. Instead of relying on “imperative authority” (Abe and Ives 1990: 124, NKZb 1: 116), which does not have any “inherent value in moral duty and moral law itself” (Ibid), Nishida argues that “natural enjoyment” is more important. However, for Nishida, value judgments and moral actions should not rely upon the hedonic conception of pleasure. Rather, the Aristotelian concept of *eudaimonia* is

preferable. While the former is “the goal of the will”, the latter is “the good” (Abe and Ives 1990: 124; NKZb 1: 116). Nishida believes that “(t)true happiness is actually something acquired through the realization of ideals [...] (which is) the voice of the deepest internal demands of the self [...] and there is nothing in human nature more awe-inspiring than this” (Ibid.).

By differentiating pleasure and happiness, Nishida condemns hedonic theory, reiterating that the good is derived from “internal demands”, which are embedded in “human nature” (Abe and Ives 1990: 124). Although the term “human nature” is not used in the original Japanese text, Nishida illustrates happiness through a passage of CONFUCIUS, which embodies similar nuances and the idea of virtue: “Eating coarse food, drinking water, and bending one’s elbow to make a pillow—pleasure also resides therein” (Abe and Ives 1990: 124, NKZb 1: 116). For Confucius, pleasure or joy (*le* 樂) can be obtained through a simple life of “eating coarse food, drinking water”. The meaning here is that materialistic things are not that important for pleasure. In addition, as seen in the sentence which follows the above quotation, Confucius states that: “I have still joy in the midst of these things. Riches and honors acquired by unrighteousness, are to me as a floating cloud”. This statement indicates that virtues such as righteousness are always more important than “riches and honors”.

Why are materialistic things not important for pleasure in the Confucian sense? HUANG Yong provides a very interesting analysis of the above passage. This analysis not only helps us to understand why and how virtue ethics is more effective and convincing for Confucian ethics, it also reaffirms that virtue ethics offers a “new” and promising approach to rearticulating Nishida’s moral theory. Huang claims that “the source of his [Yan Hui 顏回] joy [*le*] comes from being in accord with what is virtuous” (Huang 2013: 69). Confucius does not really refute the idea of pleasure obtained by materialistic things, including riches and honors, but he contends that it *should* be based on righteousness, which is a matter of moral virtue.⁹

Of course, a number of questions remain. Firstly, we might ask whether pleasure should be based on moral virtue in Confucianism. Secondly, there is the problem of how pleasure relates to the idea of self-actualization of personality or internal demands which Nishida advocates. Thirdly, we have the question of why and how virtue ethics can help to better illustrate Nishida’s moral philosophy.

The answers to the above questions are interconnected. Regarding the first question, Huang advances an argument by referring to MENCIUS’ idea of *cheng* 誠. In *Jin Xin I* (盡心上), Mencius says, “All things are already complete in us. There is no greater delight than to be conscious of sincerity on self-examination. If one acts with a vigorous effort at the law of reciprocity, when he seeks for the realization of perfect virtue, nothing can be closer than his approximation to it”. Instead of self-examination, Huang prefers to translate *cheng* as self-realization in English for two reasons: “[o]n the one hand, through self-examination, one realizes (knows) oneself

⁹For the debates on Confucianism and its relationship with virtue ethics, see Sim (2007), Van Bryan (2007), Yu (2009), Angle and Slote (2013), Besser-Jones and Michael Slote (2015), Huang (2019) and so on.

or, rather, the nature (*xing* 性), or Dao within oneself; on the other hand, one realizes (fulfils or completes) one's self-nature by being moral" (Huang 2013: 70). For Huang, there is no greater joy (*le*) than the realization of the self by being moral.

Huang's argument also helps us to answer the second question; that is, why Nishida repeatedly argues that a person should listen to his or her own internal demands for the good. As quoted above, Nishida argues that "[s]incerity is the good not because of the results arising from it, but because it is good in itself [...] the internal necessity of personality – that is, sincerity – is a demand based on the union of knowledge, feeling and volition" (Abe and Ives 1990: 134; NKZb 1: 123). I suggest that this is what Mencius means when he contends that the good is not derived from results but is good in and of itself. The good is not something which one can attain from an external realm, but rather from within oneself. However, this does not mean that human beings do not have to do anything in order to realize or actualize nature in Mencius' sense, or the good, internal demands, and personality in Nishida's sense. Human beings should be moral or do something virtuous. Here, the word "should" does not point towards a kind of Kantian deontological law. It means that a person ought to try their very best to be moral if and only if they are a human being. Human beings do not really have to follow or fulfill certain duties to be moral. Rather, they only become moral by realizing their nature, or actualizing their personality within themselves. As Huang states, the "Confucian answer to the question 'why be moral' is that it is a joy to be moral; in other words, being moral is what pleasures one's heart-mind, just like delicious food pleasures one's mouth. Since one is naturally motivated to do things that please him or her, one should have the motivation to be moral (Huang 2013: 74)". By distinguishing moral justification from moral motivation, Huang argues that the former makes morality something instrumental, whereas the latter explicates morality as something natural (Huang 2013: 74).

By highlighting "internal demands" rather than hedonic pleasure and Kantian deontic duties as the ground of actualization of personality, the Confucian influence on Nishida's thinking is decisive. Confucius' *le* and Mencius' *cheng* indicate that internal moral virtues motivate human beings to be moral, rather than external rules or duties. Internal moral virtues, that is, the internal demands that Nishida posits, serve as moral motivation rather than as moral justification.

The above point echoes Nishida's idea of satisfaction, which can be viewed from the perspective of an agent-based ethics approach. For Nishida, the good is not based on pleasure in the hedonic sense, but rather should be taken as a kind of satisfaction. While the former understanding looks for the good externally, or through the result of one's actions, the latter understanding highlights the actualization of personality within oneself.

Although they resemble each other, pleasure and happiness are different. We can achieve happiness through satisfaction, and satisfaction arises in the realization of demands for ideals. [...] True happiness is actually something acquired through the realization of ideals. People of course often view the realization of the ideas of the self or the satisfaction of demands as identical with egoism and selfishness, but for us the voice of the deepest inter-

nal demands of the self has great power, and there is nothing in human nature more awe-inspiring than this (Abe and Ives 1990: 124; NKZb 1: 116).

By emphasizing the difference between happiness and satisfaction, Nishida argues that satisfaction should not be identified with egoism and selfishness. Here, too, Nishida's stance arguably derives from Confucianism and can be explained by way of virtue ethics.

To follow the sincere internal demands of the self – to actualize true personality of the self – does not mean to establish subjectivity in opposition to objectivity or to make external objects obey the self. [...] In this way, the sincerest demands of each and every person necessarily coincide at all times with the ideals of the objective world the person sees. For example, however selfish one might be, if one has any degree of sympathy, the greatest demand is certainly to give satisfaction to others after one's own satisfaction. [...] In this regard, good conduct is love. Love is the feeling of congruence between self and other 自己一致の感情,¹⁰ the feeling of the union of subject and object. Love exists not only when one person faces another, but also when a painter encounters nature. [...] Confucius said, "I follow what my heart desires, without overstepping the bounds of morality" (Abe and Ives 1990: 134–135; NKZb 1: 124–125).

By considering the good as the actualization of personality, Nishida argues that it is definitely not a kind of selfish or egoistic activity; rather, it is something that should be related to others. The "greatest demand" of one's self is not only to give satisfaction to oneself, but also to others. For Nishida, the conduct that makes mutual satisfaction of the self and others possible is called love, which is a feeling of congruence.

As Huang points out, the Confucian idea of a virtuous person is not egoistic or self-centered. In Confucianism, "a person is not only concerned with other people's external well-being, but also with their own internal well-being; in other words, they are not only interested in making themselves virtuous but also in making others virtuous" (Huang 2013: 78). The Confucian sense of self-cultivation for becoming a virtuous person is not an activity that is confined to itself in a narrow or egoistic sense, but the development of becoming "fully human" (Huang 2013: 79) through the flourishing of "one's inborn tendencies to be concerned with others' interests, both internal and external" (Ibid.). Having emphasized the good as the actualization of personality with internal demands as its content, Nishida again employs the Confucian sense of the cultivation of personal virtue. For Nishida, actualization is not limited to one's own satisfaction, but rather by a mutual satisfaction between self and others through love; that is, the congruence of feeling. Otherwise, it would not be a true—or, in Huang's words, "full"—satisfaction, and, therefore, could not be considered a true or full actualization of personality.

Furthermore, the actualization of personality leads to satisfaction rather than a hedonic sense of pleasure, which also echoes the Confucian understanding of being moral. According to this understanding, to be moral "is not just to look at the end-result of how a virtuous person and a non-virtuous person perform a virtuous action (the former with ease, the latter with difficulty), but to look at the process through which a virtuous person becomes virtuous and the process through which a

¹⁰The translation here is not compatible with the original text in Japanese.

non-virtuous person becomes or remains non-virtuous” (Huang 2013: 84–85). One of the reasons why Nishida is dissatisfied with hedonism is that it takes pleasure as an external ground for value judgments. Nishida agrees with the Confucian view that self-cultivation or the actualization of personality is not about the “end-results”, but how a person can become moral or virtuous through actualizing his or her virtues or internal demands.

Since satisfaction rather than hedonic pleasure is the very meaning of the actualization of personality, and since such satisfaction is a mutual satisfaction of self and others, it is clear that Nishida’s moral theory can be effectively interpreted via the approach of agent-based ethics. Nishida explicitly argues that “practical issues [...] can subsume the various phenomena of the practical human realm within the category of conduct, [...] conduct is physical action that arises because of a conscious goal; it is willed action” (Abe and Ives 1990: 87; NKZb 1: 83–84). Nevertheless, Nishida does not suggest that the will induces action and entails a cause and effect relationship between them. Rather, he claims that “they are the two sides of one and the same thing. Action is the expression of the will, and that which is regarded from without as action can be regarded from within as the will” (Abe and Ives 1990: 94; NKZb 1: 90). Space does not permit an examination here of the issues of will, action and their relationships in detail. However, I note that Nishida clearly states that “when we speak of the will, it mainly indicates [an] internal phenomena of consciousness” (Abe and Ives 1990: 88; NKZb 1: 83). The will is neither something external such as consequences, authority and duties which make action arise, nor is it the cause of action; rather, it is the “internal phenomena of consciousness”. In fact, Nishida is not interested in looking for something external or in creating some rules to serve as the basis of action. Instead, he rather forcefully argues that it is an “internal” matter of human beings. Rather than justifying whether certain actions are moral, it is the agent of those actions, including their motive (internal demands) and their goal (satisfaction), which is the core concern of Nishida’s moral philosophy.

3 Knowledge, Feeling and Volition: Xunzi and Nishida

While personality, sincerity or internal demands are the content for actualization, Nishida further explains that it embraces “the union of knowledge, feeling and volition” (Abe and Ives 1990: 134, NKZb 1: 123). Before concluding this chapter, I would like to give a very brief sketch of the concept of “feeling”, one of the aspects of the above-mentioned union. Such a sketch can serve as a concrete example of how virtue ethics can be of assistance in explaining Nishida’s moral philosophy.

Feeling, or moral psychology, is one of the key issues engaged by virtue ethicists. As Elizabeth ANSCOMBE argues, “In present-day philosophy an explanation is required how an unjust man is a bad man, or an unjust action a bad one; to give such an explanation belongs to ethics, but it cannot even be begun until we are equipped with a sound philosophy of psychology” (Crisp and Slote 2013: 29–30).

In order to understand the link between moral psychology and Nishida's morality, there are a number of problems which need to be addressed: the origin of the idea of the union of knowledge, feeling and volition; the reason why Nishida claims that the content of internal demands should be the union of knowledge, feeling and volition; and, finally, the manner in which virtue ethics can better explain this union.

The first problem has a simple answer. The idea that knowledge, feeling and volition are united comes from Kant. In his essay, *Kantian Ethics*, Nishida deploys the concepts of knowledge, feeling and volition while summarizing the theories of Kantian ethics.

Kant differentiates metaphysics of moral and the general practical philosophy of Wolf. The former only examines the principle of pure will, whereas the latter studies the action and condition of volition in general (NKZb 11: 404).¹¹

Our will is moved by Reason and feeling (NKZb 11: 405).¹²

Nishida does not present Kantian notions of reason, feeling and volition in German, nor in Japanese, but only in English. Why, then, does Nishida use the Chinese characters 知, 情 and 意 to render reason (or knowledge), feeling and volition later in *Zen no Kenkyū*? I suggest that Nishida does so because he is implicitly employing the expressions and discourse found in the writings of XUNZI. I note that similar philosophical connotations can be found in Xunzi, and that they can provide some hints for rearticulating Nishida's moral philosophy in line with virtue ethics.

Nishida only mentions the name Xunzi four times in his 24 volume collected works. He even criticizes Xunzi in *Zen no Kenkyū* for the way in which his moral philosophy is an authority theory which contends that "the good is to follow the way of ancient kings" (Abe and Ives 1990: 108, NKZb 1: 102). Yet this does not mean that Nishida never borrowed Xunzi's expressions to illustrate the ideas of knowledge 知, feeling 情 and volition 意. On the contrary, his criticism of that earlier thinker demonstrates that Nishida has paid much attention to the teaching of Xunzi. It may also be noted that Nishida's personal library contained the following works on Xunzi: 『荀子集解』 (*Xunzijijie*), 『荀子箋釈』 (*Xunzijianshi*) and 『先哲遺著漢籍國字解全書』 (*Xianzheyizhuhanjiguoziqieshu*).¹³ Although it is uncertain just how familiar Nishida was with Xunzi and his philosophy, he certainly has more than a passing awareness. I suggest that the similarity between Nishida and

¹¹ The original text in Japanese is 「カントは又Metaphysik der SittenとWolfのgeneral practical philosophyとを区別し、前者はpure willのprincipleのみを研究し、後者はvolition一般に関して其action & conditionを講究する者也。」

¹² The original text in Japanese is: 「吾人のwillはReasonに由て動かさるゝと共に、又feelingに由て動かさる者なり。」

¹³ 『荀子集解』 (*Xunzijijie*). 上海涵芬樓 (Shanghaihanfenlou), 1907–1932 (year of publication, unknown) 『荀子箋釈』 (*Xunzijianshi*). Tokyo: Hokokudō, 1884, and 『先哲遺著漢籍國字解全書』 (*Xianzheyizhuhanjiguoziqieshu*). Waseda University Press, 1912. See 山下正男 Yamashita Masao, ed., 『西田幾多郎全蔵書目録』 (*A Catalog of Nishida Kitarō's Complete Collection of Books*). Kyoto: Institute for Research in Humanities, Kyoto University, 1984, p. 197 and p. 188.

Xunzi's understanding of feeling 情 can be better appreciated if we deploy the perspective of virtue ethics.

As mentioned earlier, feeling 情 plays an important role in Nishida's moral philosophy. Having emphasized that love is the good conduct needed for fulfilling one's great demands, Nishida posits that "Love is the feeling of congruence between self and other (自他一致の感情), the feeling of the union of subject and object" (Abe and Ives 1990: 135, NKZb 1: 124–125). This definition of love as "a feeling of congruence between self and other", which "arises when that which is lacking tries to return to its original, perfect state", echoes a similar discourse given by Xunzi.

Human nature is the accomplishment of Heaven. The dispositions are the substance of the nature. The desires are the responses of the dispositions to things. Viewing the objects of desire as permissible to obtain and seeking them are what the dispositions cannot avoid (Hutton 2016: 244).

For Xunzi, feeling 情 (dispositions in Eric L. HUTTON's translation) is the substance of nature, which induces desire, and the two are interdependent. In addition, feeling and desire are related to governance.

Thus, order and disorder reside in what the heart approves of, they are not present in the desires from one's dispositions (Hutton 2016: 244).

Further examination should be conducted on Xunzi's understanding of feeling, especially on its ethical and socio-political meanings. For now, I simply note that for Xunzi, like Nishida, feeling is one of the important subjects that directly relates to praxis between self and others, and, in a larger context, to matters of governance.

In what way can virtue ethics help explain the importance of feeling in Nishida and its implicit relationship with Xunzi? As Hutton points out, emotion is one of the features of Xunzi's moral philosophy, especially in his emphasis of rituals. This is also one of the important features of virtue ethics, which does not depend on consequences and duties like utilitarianism and deontology.

A large part of what explains Xunzi's high regard for the rituals is their *expressive* power. [...] First, it conduces to the well-being of the ritual practitioner by providing an outlet for various emotions, such as grief at the death of a family member. Second, since people's social interactions are highly influenced by what they take to be the emotions and attitudes that motivate others [...] Third, on Xunzi's view, it is part of at least some virtues to express certain sentiment (Hutton 2015: 120–121).

In his article "Virtue Ethics and the Chinese Confucian Tradition", Philip J. IVANHOE offers two models of virtue ethics for understanding the Chinese Confucian tradition, namely, the virtue ethics of flourishing (VEF) and the virtue ethics of sentiments (VES). The former is "a theory about human nature and a related view of human flourishing described in terms of an ideal agent", whereas the latter "describe[s] the virtues primarily in terms of certain broadly construed emotions" (Ivanhoe 2013: 49). Although Ivanhoe's analysis focuses on Mencius and WANG Yangming, feeling or emotion plays an important or even indispensable role in Confucian ethics, which is one of the crucial components of virtue ethics.

One may suspect that since feeling or emotion is also emphasized by other Confucians it is not necessary to focus on Xunzi in particular when it comes to discussing Nishida's moral philosophy. However, I suggest that by putting feeling together with knowledge and volition, a fuller picture of the similarities between Xunzi and Nishida can be drawn. I will return to this point on another occasion.

4 Concluding Remarks

In this chapter, I have attempted to show how we can better appreciate Nishida's moral philosophy if we adopt the perspective of virtue ethics in order to consider the ideas of sincerity and feeling addressed by classical Confucian thinkers like Confucius, Mencius and Xunzi. By advocating energetism, Nishida repeatedly claims that the good is derived from internal demands rather than external consequences (pleasure in Nishida's terms), authorities and duties. Accordingly, Nishida's moral philosophy looks very similar to virtue and agent-based approaches to ethics. I suggest that virtue ethics, therefore, is one promising approach for rearticulating Nishida's moral philosophy. Having defined philosophy as the problem of life, moral philosophy can be taken as both the starting point and the consummation of Nishida's philosophy. Thus, the relevance of virtue ethics is not confined to moral philosophy, but extends to the whole of Nishida's philosophical system. It is a subject which deserves further examination in the future.

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Brief Chronology of Nishida Kitarō

(An extract from “Nishida Kitaro Nenpu (Chronology of Nishida Kitarō)” in the 19th Volume of NKZa 1965. Not all the theses, but some important theses are listed in this chronology.)

1870 (Meiji 3)

Born as the third child between Nishida Yasunori (father) and Nishida Tosa (mother) in Unoke, Ishikawa Prefecture.

1883 (Meiji 16)

Entrance into Ishikawa-Prefectural Normal School (Ishikawa-ken shihan gakkō).

1886 (Meiji 19)

Entrance into Elementary Junior High School (shotō chūgaku ka) attached to Ishikawa-Prefectural School of Liberal Arts (Ishikawa-ken senmon gakkō).

1888 (Meiji 21)

Entrance into Fourth Higher Middle School (Daishi kōtō chūgakkō).

1890 (Meiji 23)

Leaving Fourth Higher Middle School before graduating.

1891 (Meiji 24)

Entrance into special course of the Imperial University of Tokyo, College specializing in liberal arts, department of Philosophy (Tokyo teikoku daigaku bunka daigaku tetugaku ka senka)

1894 (Meiji 27)

Graduated from special course of the Imperial University of Tokyo.

1895 (Meiji 28)

Teacher at Nanao Branch of Ishikawa Prefectural Noto Junior High School (Ishikawa-ken Noto jinjō chūggakō Nanao bunkō).

Married to Tokuda Kotomi.

- 1896 (Meiji 29)
Lecturer at Forth High School under the prewar education system (in charge of Psychology, Ethics, German Language etc.)
- 1897 (Meiji 30)
Great interest in the practice of Zen meditation. Participation in the practice of Zazen Meditation since then.
Resigned from the lectureship at Fourth High School.
Practice of Zen meditation at Myōshin-ji Temple in Kyoto.
Part-time lecturer at Yamaguchi High School (Yamaguchi kōtō gakkō).
- 1899 (Meiji 32)
Professor at Yamaguchi High School.
Professor at Fourth High School in Kanazawa (in charge of psychology, logic, ethics, German language etc.).
- 1901 (Meiji 34)
A Buddhist name “Sunshin” given by Zen master Setsumon.
- 1909 (Meiji 42)
Professor at Gakushūin, School for children of Imperial Family and Noble Families.
- 1910 (Meiji 43)
Associate Professor at Kyoto Imperial University, College specializing in liberal arts (in charge of ethics).
- 1911 (Meiji 44)
An Inquiry into the Good (zen no kenkyū) published by Kōdōkan Publisher.
- 1913 (Taishō 2)
Professor at Kyoto Imperial University, College specializing in liberal arts (in charge of religious studies).
Began to publish a series of essays from “Intuition and Reflection in Self-Awareness” in a journal *Geibun*.
- 1917 (Taishō 6)
Finished publishing all the essays on “Intuition and Reflection in Self-Awareness” in a journal *Tetsugaku kenkyū (Research in Philosophy)*.
Intuition and Reflection in Self-awareness (Jikaku ni okeru chokkann to hansei) published by Iwanami shoten.
- 1920 (Taishō 9)
Problems of Consciousness (Ishiki no mondai) published by Iwanami Shoten.
- 1923 (Taishō 12)
Art and Morality (Geijutsu to dōtoku) published from Iwanami Shoten.
- 1925 (Taishō 14)
Passing away of his wife, Kotomi.
- 1925 (Taishō 14)
“That which acts/works (Hataraku mono)” published in *Tetsugaku kenkyū*.
- 1926 (Taishō 15)
“Basho” published in *Tetsugaku kenkyū*.
“Unsolved issues of consciousness” published in *Tokunō hakushi kanreki kinen tetsugaku ronbun shū*

- 1927 (Shōwa 2)
 “In reply to Dr. Sōda (Sōda hakushi ni kotau)” published in *Tetsugaku kenkyū*.
From That Which Acts/Works to That Which Sees (Hataraku mono kara miru mono e) published by Iwanami Shoten.
- 1928 (Shōwa 3)
 Retired from Professorship at Kyoto Imperial University.
 “The Intelligible world” published in *Tetsugaku kenkyū*.
- 1929 (Shōwa 4)
 “The Self-determination of the universals and self-awareness (Ippansha no jiko gentei to jikaku)” published in *Tetsugaku kenkyū*.
- 1930 (Shōwa 5)
Self-aware System of the Universals (Ippansha no jikaku teki taikai) published by Iwanami Shoten.
- 1931 (Shōwa 6)
 “About my self-aware determination of absolute nothingness (Watashi no zettai mu no jikaku teki gentei to iu mono)” published in *Shisō*.
 Married to Yamada Koto.
 “I and thou (Watashi to nanji)” published in *Iwanami Course ‘Tetsugaku’*.
- 1932 (Shōwa 7)
Self-aware Determination of Nothingness (Mu no jikaku teki gentei) published by Iwanami Shoten.
- 1933 (Shōwa 8)
 “Introduction to metaphysics (Keijijougaku joron) in *Iwanami Course ‘Tetsugaku’*.
Fundamental Problems of Philosophy (Tetsugaku no konpon mondai) published by Iwanami Shoten.
- 1934 (Shōwa 9)
 “Logical structure of the actual world (Genjitu no sekai no ronri teki kōzō)” published in *Shisō*.
 “The world as dialectical universal (Benshōhō teki ippansha toshite no sekai)” published in *Tetsugaku kenkyū*.
Fundamental Problems of Philosophy, II (Tetsugaku no konpon mondai zoku hen) published by Iwanami Shoten.
- 1935 (Shōwa 10)
 “Standpoint of acting intuition (Kōi teki chokkan no tachiba)” published in *Shisō*.
Collection of Philosophical Papers, Vol. 1 (Tetsugaku ronbun shū dai ichi) published by Iwanami Shoten.
- 1936 (Shōwa 11)
 “Logic and life (Ronri to seimei)” published in *Shisō*.
- 1937 (Shōwa 12)
Thinking and Experience, second series (Zoku shisaku to taiken) published by Iwanami Shoten.
 “Acting intuition (Kōi teki chokkan)” published in *Shisō*.

- Collection of Philosophical Papers, Vol. 2 (Tetsugaku ronbun shū dai ni)* published by Iwanami Shoten.
- 1938 (Shōwa 13)
Lectures ‘The problems of Japanese Culture (Nippon bunka no mondai)’ in the Monday-lecture-series held by Students’ Society of Kyoto Imperial University.
- 1939 (Shōwa 14)
Collection of Philosophical Papers, Vol. 3 (Tetsugaku ronbun shū dai san) published by Iwanami Shoten.
- 1940 (Shōwa 15)
Problems of Japanese Culture (Nippon bunka no mondai) published by Iwanami Shoten.
Received a Cultural Medal (Bunka kunshō).
- 1941 (Shōwa 16)
Collection of Philosophical Papers, Vol. 4 (Tetsugaku ronbun shū dai yon) published by Iwanami Shoten.
- 1943 (Shōwa 18)
‘Principles for a New World Order (Sekai shin chitsujō no genri)’ written for Society for the study of national policy (Kokusaku kenkyū kai).
‘About self-awareness (Jikaku ni tsuite)’ published in *Shisō*.
‘Tradition (Dento)’ published in *Shisō*.
- 1944 (Shōwa 19)
‘The world of physics (Butsuri no sekai)’ published in *Shisō*.
‘Logic and theory of mathematics (Ronri to sūri)’ published in *Shisō*.
‘With a guidance of pre-established harmony to religious philosophy (Yotei chōwa wo tebiki toshite shūkyō tetsugaku e)’ published in *Shisō*.
‘About the philosophy of Descartes (Dekaruto tetsugaku ni tsuite)’ published in ‘*Shisō*’.
Collection of Philosophical Papers, Vol. 5 (Tetsugaku ronbun shū dai go) published by Iwanami Shoten.
‘Life (Seimei)’ published in *Shisō*.
- 1945 (Shōwa 20)
Started writing his last work ‘About my logic (Watashi no ronri ni tsuite)’.
Passing away of kidney failure in Kamakura.
‘A Collection of Philosophical Papers, Vol. 6 (Tetsugaku ronbun shū dai roku)’ published by Iwanami Shoten.
‘The philosophical foundation for mathematics (Sūgaku no tetsugaku teki kiso-zuke)’ published in *Tetsugaku kenkyū*.
- 1946 (Shōwa 21)
Collection of Philosophical Papers, Vol. 7 (Tetsugaku ronbun shū dai shichi) published by Iwanami Shoten.

1947 (Shōwa 22)

The first volume of *The Complete Works of Nishida Kitaro* (*Nishida Kitarō Zenshū*, NKZa, the first edition) in 18 volumes was published by Iwanami Shoten.

1948 (Shōwa 23)

“Thinking and Experience, third series (Zoku shisaku to taiken ikō)” published by Iwanami Shoten.

1953 (Shōwa 28)

“Introduction to Philosophy (Tetsugaku gairon)” published by Iwanami Shoten.

1965 (Shōwa 40)

The first volume of “Nishida Kitarō Zenshū=NKZa” (the second edition) in 19 volumes published by Iwanami Shoten.

1978 (Shōwa 48)

The first volume of “Nishida Kitarō Zenshū=NKZa” (the third edition) in 19 volumes published by Iwanami Shoten.

1987 (Shōwa 62)

The first volume of “Nishida Kitarō Zenshū=NKZa” (the fourth edition) in 19 volumes published by Iwanami Shoten,

2002 (Heisei 14)

The first volume of “Nishida Kitarō Zenshū=NKZb” (the fifth edition) in 24 volumes published by Iwanami Shoten.

Glossary of Main Concepts

With reference to John W. M. Krummel's "Place & Dialectic" (Oxford, 2012) and to "Japanese-English Buddhist Dictionary" (Tokyo, 1979). However, the authors of this list are responsible for all the descriptions in this glossary.

A

ai-tairitsu, 相対立(する): co-relation (co-relate); (is) contradictory to; (is) in opposition to;
aru, 有る: is; exist;
arumono, 有るもの: that which is; (a) being;

B

baigo, 媒語: middle term (as in the syllogism);
baigo men, 媒語面: middle term-plane;
baikai, *baikaisha*, 媒介、媒介者: mediation; medium;
basho, 場所: place; *basho*;
basho no ronri, 場所の論理: the logic of *basho*, the logic of place;
basho no ippansha, 場所の一般者: universal of *basho* (place);
bashoteki baikaisha, 場所的媒介者: placial medium; *basho*-medium;
place-medium;

Bashoteki ronri to shūkyō teki sekaikan, 「場所的論理と宗教的世界観」: “The Logic of Basho and the Religious Worldview”, 1945
benshōhō, 弁証法: dialectic/s;
benshōhō teki ippansha, 弁証法的一般者: (the) dialectical universal/s;
benshōhō teki sekai, 弁証法の世界: (the) dialectical world;
bosatsu, 菩薩: Bodhisattva/s;
busshin ichinyo, 物心一如: things and mind are one (as they are);

C

chi-jō-i, 知情意: cognition-emotion-volition; knowing-feeling-willing;
chi teki, 知的: intellectual;
chōetsu teki ishi, 超越的意志: transcendent will;
chōetsu teki jutsugo, 超越的述語: transcendent predicate;
chōetsu teki jutsugo-men, 超越的述語面: transcendent predicative plane; transcendent predicate-plane;
chokkaku, 直覺: intuition;
chokkaku men: 直覺面: intuition-plane;
chokkaku teki, 直覺的: intuitive;
chokkan, 直觀: intuition;
chokkan teki, 直觀的: intuitional;
chokusen teki, 直線的: linear;

D

danzetsu, 斷絕: severance; discontinuation ;
daigo, 大語: major term (as in the syllogism);
daigo men, 大語面: major term-plane ;
dokuga ron, 独我論: solipsism;

E

Eichi teki, 叡智的: intelligible;
Eichi teki ippansha, 叡智的一般者: intelligible universal/s ;
eien no genzai, 永遠の現在: eternal present;
eien no ima, 永遠の今: eternal now;
eien no ima no jiko gentei, 永遠の今の自己限定: self-determination of the eternal now;
eizō (or *yōzō*), 影像: image;
enkanteki, 円環的: circular;

F

fugo, 符号: sign; symbol;
fuchō, 符牒: sign; symbol;
funi, 不二: not different; the two are not different;

G

ga, 我: (the) ego; selfishness;
gainen, 概念: concept/s; notion/s;
genjitsu, 現実: actuality;
gentei, 限定(する): determination (determine);
gentei suru mono nakushite gentei suru, 限定するものなくして限定する: determine without determining agent; determine without that which determines;
genzai, 現在: the present;
gutai teki ippansha, 具体的一般者: concrete universal;
gyaku gentei, 逆限定: inverse determination;
gyaku taiō, 逆対応: inverse correspondence;

H

handan, 判断: judgment;
handanteki, 判断的: judicative;
handanteki ippansha, 判断的一般者: judicative universal/s;
hansei, 反省: reflection;
hataraki, 働き: activity, working-activity; being-at-work, working;
hataraku, 働く: act; work; be at work;
hataraku-mono, 働くもの: the acting; the working; the being-at-work; that which acts/works;
Hatarakumono kara mirumono e, 「働くものから見るものへ」: “From the Acting to the Seeing”, 1927. ; “From that which acts to that which sees” ;
hataraku-mono nakushite hataraku, 働くものなくして働く: act/work without acting/working agent; work without working agent; act/work without that which acts/works;
hirenzoku no renzoku, 非連続の連続: continuity of discontinuity;
hyōgen (suru), 表現(する): expression (express);

I

ichi soku ta, ta soku ichi, 一即多、多即一: one in many, many in one; one *soku* many, many *soku* one; one is many, many is one; → *soku*

ippansha, 一般者: universal/s;

Ippansha no jikakuteki taikei, 「一般者の自覚的体系」: “The Self-aware System of Universals”, 1930.

Ippan teki gentei, 一般的限定: universal determination;

ishi, 意志: will; volition;

ishiki, 意識(する): consciousness (be conscious of);

ishiki ippan, 意識一般: consciousness-in-general;

ishiki men, 意識面: plane of consciousness; consciousness-plane;

ishiki no ba, 意識の場: field of consciousness;

ishiki suru, 意識する: be conscious (of), discern; be aware of;

J

jikaku, 自覚: self-awareness; self-awakening; self-consciousness; → *jiko ga jiko nioite jiko wo utsusu*

jikaku suru, 自覚する: be self-aware (of); be self-awaken (to); be self-conscious of;

jikaku teki, 自覚的: self-aware; self-awaken; self-conscious;

Jikaku ni okeru chokkan to hansei, 「自覚に於ける直観と反省」: “Intuition and Reflection in Self-Awareness”, 1917.

jikakuteki ippansha, 自覚的一般者: self-aware universal/s; self-awaken universal/s; self-conscious universal/s;

jiko, 自己: (the) self;

jiko dōitsu, 自己同一: self-identity;

jiko dōitsu teki, 自己同一的: self-identical (with);

jiko ga jiko note jiko wo utsusu, 自己が自己に於て自己を映す: the self mirrors itself in itself; the self reflects itself in itself;

jiko hitei, 自己否定: self-negation; self-denial;

jiko mujun, 自己矛盾: self-contradiction;

jitsugen suru, 実現する: actualize; realize;

jitsuzai, 实在: reality;

jōi, 情意: emotion-and-volition; feeling and willing;

junsui keiken, 純粹經驗: pure experience;

jutsugo, 述語: (the) predicate;

jutsugo-men, 述語面: predicate-plane;

jutsugo teki ippansha, 述語的一般者: predicative universal/s;

K

Katei teki benshōhō, 過程的弁証法: (the) process dialectic;
katei benshōhō teki, 過程弁証法的: process-dialectical;
keiken, 経験: experience;
keisei sayō, 形成作用: formative act;
keisō, 形相: form;
kobutsu, 個物: (the) individual/s;
kobutsu no jiko gentei, 個物の自己限定: self-determination of the individual;
kobutsu no sōgo gentei, 個物の相互限定: codetermination of individuals;
kobutsu teki gentei, 個物的限定: individual determination;
kobutsu teki gentei soku ippanteki gentei, 個物的限定即一般的限定、一般的限定即個物的限定: individual determination-in-universal determination, universal determination-in-individual determination; individual determination *soku* universal determination, universal determination *soku* individual determination; → *soku*
kōi teki chokkan, 行為の直観: acting intuition; action-intuition;
kūkan teki, 空間的: spatial;
kyaku, 客: object;
kyakkan, 客観: (epistemological) object;
kyakkan-kai, 客観界: objective world;
kyakkan-sei, 客観性: objectivity;
kyokugen, 極限: limit (as in the mathematics); extremity;
kyōtsū-kankaku, 共通感覚: *sensus communis*;

M

Miru mono, 見るもの: the seeing; that which sees; seer;
Miru mono nakushite miru, 見るものなくして見る: see without seeing agent; see without that which sees;
mono, もの、物: thing/s;
mono to hitotsu ni naru, 物と一つになる: becoming one with thing/s;
mono to natte kangae, mono to natte okonau, 物となって考え、物となって行う: becoming a thing, think it, becoming a thing, do it; think in a state of becoming a thing, act in a state of becoming a thing;
mu, 無: nothingness; non-being; nothing;
muga, 無我: no-ego; selflessness;
mugen, 無限: infinity; infinitude; unlimitedness; the infinite;
mujun no jiko dōitsu, 矛盾の自己同一: self-identity of contradiction;
mujun teki jiko dōitsu, 矛盾的自己同一: self-identity of contradictions; self-identity of contradictories;
mujun teki tōitsu, 矛盾的統一: contradictory unity, contradictory unifying;

mu no ippansha, 無の一般者: universal of nothing(ness);
Mu no jikaku teki gentei, 「無の自覚的限定」: “The Self-aware Determination of Nothingness”, 1932.
 myōgō, 名号: the name of Amida Buddha, invoking the name of Amida Buddha vocally;

N

naibuchikaku, 内部知覚: inner perception;
naimen souk gaimen, *gaimen souk naimen*, 内面即外面、外面即内面: inner-in-outer, outer-in-inner; inner *soku* outer, outer *soku* inner; →*soku*
naizai soku chōetsu, *chōetsu soku naizai*, 内在即超越、超越即内在: immanence-in-transcendence, transcendence-in-immanence; immanence *soku* transcendence, transcendence *soku* immanence; →*soku*
nanji, 汝: (a) Thou; (a) you;
Nihon-bunka no mondai, 「日本文化の問題」: “The Problems of Japanese Culture”, 1940.
noēsisuteki, ノエーシスの: noesis-like; noetic;
noēmateki, ノエーマの: noema-like, noematic;

O

oite-aru, 於てある: be placed (in);
oite-aru basho, 於てある場所: place where the in-placed is; *basho* for the in-placed; place/s-wherein;
oite-arumono, 於てあるもの: the in-placed; wherein-thing/s;

R

rekishi tekishintai, 歴史的な身体: historical body;
rogosu teki, ログスの: *logos*-bearing; *logos*-like;
ronri, 論理: logic;
Ronri to seimei, 「論理と生命」: “Logic and Life”, 1936.

S

sayō, 作用: act; action;
seimei teki ippansha, 生命の一般者: living universal; universal as life;

Sekai shin-chitsujo no genre, 「世界新秩序の原理」: “Principles for a New World Order”, 1943.

shakai teki rekishiteki sekai, 社会的歴史的世界: socio-historical world;

shikō taishō, 志向対象: intentional object/s;

shin no jiko, 真の自己: the true self;

shin no mu no basho, 真の無の場所: *basho* (place) of true nothingness;

shintai teki jiko, 身体的自己: bodily self; body-like self;

Shisaku to taiken, 「思索と体験」: “Thinking and Experience”, 1922.

shisaku, 思索: thinking; thought;

shisō, 思想: thought; thinking; idea;

shōgo, 小語: minor term (as in the syllogism);

shōgo men, 小語面: minor term-plane;

shōmetsu, 生滅: birth and death; generation and destruction; appearance and disappearance;

shu, 主: subjectivity; the subject;

shugo, 主語: (grammatical) subject;

shūgō, 集合: set/s (as in the mathematics);

shugo men, 主語面: (grammatical) subject-plane;

shūgō ron, 集合論: set theory;

shukan, 主観: (epistemological) subject qua seeing or knowing agent;

shu kyaku, 主客: subject and object;

shusa, 種差: difference in kind;

shutai, 主体: subject; subjectivity;

shōchō, 象徴: symbol; representation; subject qua acting or working agent;

Sōda hakushi ni kotaeru, 「左右田博士に答える」: “In Reply to Dr. Sōda”, 1927.

sōgo, 相互: reciprocal; mutual;

sōgo gentei, 相互限定: codetermination;

sōgō tōitsu, 綜合統一: synthetic unity; colligation and unification;

soku, 即: is; *qua*; identical (with); -in-; *soku* ;

T'ien-t'tai (Tendai) explained the profound meaning of *soku* as follows: I. The state in which two different things are united into one and are not divided into two.

II. The state in which two things that seem to be different outside are one inside.

III. The state in which A is identical with B, A and B not being two.

sonritsu suru, 存立(する): existence (exist); subsistence (subsist);

sonzai, 存在(する): existence (exist); subsistence (subsist); being (be in being); entity;

sonzai sei, 存在性: beingness; existentiality;

sōtai (suru), 相对(する): relative (relate);

sōtai mu no basho, 相对無の場所: *basho* (place) of relative nothingness;

suiron, 推論: syllogism;

suiron shiki, 推論式: a system of syllogism; formula of syllogism;

T

tachiba, 立場: standpoint/s; perspective/s;
taiken, 体験: (lived) experience;
tairitsu, 対立: opposition;
tairitsu teki mu, 対立的無: oppositional nothing(ness); relative nothing(ness) ;
tairitsu teki mu no basho, 対立的無の場所: basho (place) of oppositional
nothing(ness); *basho* (place) of relative nothing(ness) ;
taishō, 対象: object/s;
taishō kai, 対象界: world of objects;
taishō ronri, 対象論理: logic of objectification; objectifying logic; logic oriented
toward object ;
Tetsugaku no konnpon mondai, 「哲学の根本問題」: “Fundamental Problems of
Philosophy”, 1933-34.
tannaru ippansha, 単なる一般者: (the) mere universal/s;
tōi, 当為: ought, what should be, *Sollen*
tōi teki shi(yu)i, 当為的思惟: ought-thinking;
tōitsu, 統一: unity, unification; union;
tokushu, 特殊: (the) particular;
Torinokosaretaru ishiki no mondai, 「取残されたる意識の問題」: “The
Unsolved Issues of Consciousness”, 1926.
tsukurareta mono kara tsukuru mono e, 作られたものから作るものへ: from the
made to the making; from that which is made to that which makes;
tsutsumu, 包む: envelop; include;

U

u (or *yū*), 有: being; existence;
u mu, 有無: being-nothing (or being and non-being); being and nothing; existence
and non-existence;
utsusu, 映す: mirror; reflect;

W

ware, 我: (an) I; (a) self;
watashi, 私: (the, an) I;

Y

yotei chōwa, 予定調和: pre-established harmony;
yūgen, 有限: finite;
yuiga ron, 唯我論: solipsism;
yuishin ron, 唯心論: idealism; “mind-only” theory;

Z

Zen no kenkyū, 『善の研究』: “An Inquiry into the Good”, 1911.
zentai sei, 全体性: wholeness; totality;
zettai hitei (suru), 絶対否定(する): absolute negation (absolutely negate);
zettai ishi, 絶対意志: absolute will;
zettai jiyū ishi, 絶対自由(の)意志: absolutely free will;
zettai mu, 絶対無: absolute nothingness; absolute nothing;
zettai mujun teki jiko dōitsu, 絶対矛盾的自己同一: self-identity of absolute contradictions; self-identity of absolutely contradictories;
zettai mu no basho, 絶対無の場所: *basho* (place) of absolute nothingness;
zettaisha, 絶対者: the absolute;

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