

Nishida's Thought

UEDA SHIZUTERU

THE TASK ENTRUSTED to me within the framework of this symposium¹ is to speak on the philosophy of Nishida Kitarō (1870–1945). Our theme “*Beyond East and West*” may sound a bit ostentatious, but in my understanding, it refers not simply to a unified world, where one can journey easily from east to west by plane or view the same events in either East or West on television. Implied here, rather, is the opening-up of a single, boundless world embracing both East and West, and informed by a principle not simply *either East or West*, but transcending both East and West alike. If we had to present such a principle from the Eastern side, we would be faced with the difficult problem of deciding what that could possibly be.

With regard to Nishida, I propose to discuss four topics. First of all, what was Nishida pursuing as a philosopher? Here I want to illustrate Nishida's thinking by a single concrete example, which I shall treat in considerable detail. Secondly, how did Nishida regard the problem of “East and West” that constituted the historical situation in which he,

¹ This is a translation of “Nishida Kitarō no Shisaku” 西田幾太郎の思索 in *Keiken to jikaku: Nishida tetsugaku no basho o motomete* 経験と自覚: 西田哲学の場所を求めて [Experience and Self-Awareness: In Search of Nishida's “Place”] (Tokyo: Iwanami, 1994), pp. 1–30. It was originally a paper delivered at the symposium “Beyond East and West,” organized by the Goethe Institute in Kyoto in September 1991.

as a philosopher, was placed? I shall first say something in general about this and afterwards dwell for a moment on the problem of Zen and philosophy as it presents itself in Nishida's case. And then returning once again to Nishida's philosophy, I will investigate briefly how Nishida conceived of experience in the philosophy of pure experience (*junsui keiken no tetsugaku*) that was his critical point of departure, and also examine how the problem of Zen and philosophy is dynamically at work in the structure of *An Inquiry into the Good* (*Zen no kenkyū*; 1911) in which he developed his philosophy of pure experience. Finally, in view of the fact that, Nishida's philosophy evolves from its original standpoint of pure experience into that of self-awareness (*jikaku*) and later into that of *basho* (place or *topos*), I want to consider what is implied by those changes and the sequence in which they occur.

Nishida's Philosophical Quest

Let us first examine Nishida's way of thinking by a concrete example. Nishida wrote, "All experiential knowledge must be accompanied by 'I am conscious of it'" (4:279). In this case, the "I" must not be "a subjective unity (*shugoteki tōitsu*), but a predicative unity; not a point, but a circle; not a thing, but a place" (4:279). This is why in Japanese he says "*watashi ni*" (something is conscious *to me* or *in me*) and not "*watashi ga*" (I, as subject, am conscious). Since it may be difficult to grasp from this one quotation the full implication of what is happening here, I shall elaborate on it a bit more.

When Nishida makes the above statement, he takes his lead from Kant's basic tenet that "the consciousness of '*Ich denke*' (I think) must be able to accompany every one of my representations." However, while following Kant's line of reasoning, Nishida expresses a view of his own, different from that of Kant, namely, that the "I" wherein something becomes conscious is the place (*basho*) in which things are reflected and made manifest, and that consciousness is precisely this. When this is called *my* consciousness, it does not mean that the "I" exists from the beginning as "I," but rather that the "I" is this very coming to consciousness. Such an "I" is nothing but *self-awareness*; that is, it is not that "I" am self-aware, but that self-awareness is "I." Nishida tried to conceive of the act of "knowing" from such a self-

awareness. From that point of view, Nishida maintains that the "I" of Kant's "I think" must, in fact, be called a "place of experience," a place "in which the logical as well as the sensory are located."

Is there anything in our experience that can serve as a clue to understanding this way of thinking? When we speak in Japanese, we naturally say, "The sound of the bell can be heard" (*kane no oto ga kikoeru*). In most languages this same phenomenon would be expressed differently; in English we would say, "I hear the sound of the bell." In this case, the logical subject "I" can be said to immediately *emerge* or *issue* from the experience—a pattern in which the experience is reconstructed from the "I." In the Japanese mode of speech, however, becoming conscious is simply a matter of the bell's resounding and its resounding becoming manifest. Here, there is no need to make special recourse to an "I"; instead, an "I" that is not called "I" becomes, dispassionately as it were, the place of experience. Confronting us here is something fundamentally different from the mode in which the "I" emerges right from the beginning, with the experience being reconstituted or restructured as a function of that "I." The sound of the bell comes to be heard originally at a point prior to that activity of the "I." If we want to speak of an "I," it is in the sense that the very fact of the bell coming to be heard *is* the "I." It is not that the "I" as the subject hears, but that the place wherein the ringing of the bell as such becomes manifest *is* the "I." That is the original state of affairs that obtains when "something becoming conscious to me." Consequently, we can already speak here of a "self-awareness," but this self-awareness is, in its primary mode, not the self-awareness of an "I," but the very fact that the ringing of the bell has become manifest; this is the primary sense of self-awareness. Within that self-awareness one comes to speak, secondarily, of an "I." The later Nishida—if we may look ahead for a moment—will say: "When the world comes to self-awareness, I come to self-awareness." This does not mean that Nishida does not speak of an "I," but he implies that the "I" is spoken of and can be spoken of only on the basis of a preceding and more fundamental state of affairs.

However, the uttering of the word "I" triggers a very startling chain of events. The moment one says "I," one takes it in such a way that it is as if this "I" exists from the very beginning and is the origin of everything—beginning with itself. This appeared to Nishida to be a kind of

fundamental reversal or inversion. Consequently, if one wants to be true to the original scheme of things, one must speak of the "I" in the sense that the event of the bell coming to be heard *is* the "I." At the same time, in order to safeguard that originality, one must negate the "I" (negating the "I" while saying "I"), or once more speak of "I," but this time implying its negation. Expressing this moment formally by itself, we could say—in a manner different from the direct self-identity of "I is I"—that the "I is I because it is not I." And this is precisely the prototype of the "contradictory self-identity" to which the later Nishida would often refer. The phrase "I am I without being I" certainly sounds abstract, formalistic, and contradictory in the extreme. It is, however, the form that originates when the hearer becomes one with the fact that the sound of the bell is heard, and expresses that moment from the side of the "I."

It may be remarked here, incidentally, that, once Nishida arrived at the point of speaking of the "I-Thou" as a "fundamental category" virtually in the same sense as Martin Buber, Nishida located the Thou, very concretely, in the point of that "not being I," as the other "who is not I" and faces the "I." In that vein, he then said, "At the ground of the I there is Thou," and "At the ground of the Thou there is I" (6:381).

Above I used a Japanese sentence as an example. I did not intend to suggest thereby that there are different ways of thinking or structures of consciousness according to the different expressions found in various languages. I believe that the state of affairs expressed by the above Japanese usage can be an original and universal one. Some time ago, when asked to speak at a German university, I presented the same idea in German by saying, "*Ich bin, indem ich nicht ich bin, ich*" and the philosophers in the audience told me afterwards that they had understood that point very well. Nonetheless, the fact that I have referred to a Japanese sentence as my starting point to disclose an original state of affairs is certainly not intended to mean that we Japanese are more in touch with original reality. As the Japanese propensity to avoid the word "I" lessens, the opposite attitude is becoming increasingly manifest, and the "I" expressed by Japanese in that new vein must be said to be a strongly assertive one. My intent here was merely to explore the kind of characteristics displayed when one says, "The

sound of the bell is heard," as opposed to saying, "I hear the bell."

Given the above discussion, one can raise several basic objections to the usual way of thinking espoused by Kant and others. Even from the ordinary way of saying, "I hear the sound of the bell," philosophical analysis as commonly practiced will conclude that there are things *given* to the "I." One comes to say, "I hear the sound of the bell," when things (usually called the material or matter) are given the "I," which then proceeds to assemble them. It is not necessarily clear or self-evident, however, that, from the standpoint of the "I," one ought to interpret what exactly is given. Is what is given simply material for the act of cognition? What is given for the act of cognition is, originally, something given prior to the act of cognition. Hence, to interpret, from a cognitive standpoint, that that which is given before the act of thinking is sense material or matter, for instance, is already to make many presuppositions. When the given is taken to be given to the thinking "I" (as in Kant's case), that given divides into two things: the material and the *Ding an sich* (the thing-in-itself). On the one hand, it is the material for "my" thought, and on the other hand—as a *Ding an sich*—it is a limitation to "my" thought. But, as I just stated, this does not necessarily provide a basis for interpreting what is given to me from the standpoint of the "I." It is rather that the "I" (the ego) projects itself into the thing-in-itself and works the division into sense material and *Ding an sich*. In another context, with an eye to the originality of experience, Nishida accordingly reinterprets Kant as follows: "For example, what Kant calls *Ding an sich* is the concrete, direct experience before our thinking has worked upon it and added to it."²

To come to an understanding of Nishida's thinking on this point one more quotation may be helpful:

The given fact is not "this bird" flying, but "this bird flying." . . . However, the very fact-in-itself that is expressed in this phrase views the self as the present content that determining the self, and even the so-called "I" that sees this fact is determined in accordance with it. (6:168)

² In this sentence, I summarize texts by Nishida, to be found in his *Collected Works*, vol. 2, p. 339 and vol. 4, p. 12.

Taking reality "before the opposition of subject and object" as the point of departure, while sticking to the most immediate and concrete facts and further maintaining that they become the original self-awareness of the subject that is "without I" in its adaptation to these facts—these are the characteristics of Nishida's fundamental standpoint, which remains unaltered from beginning to end. In other words, it is the resolve to think, not from the thought, but from the world of reality, wherein also the act of thinking is pursued.

The Problem of East and West

Currently, Nishida's philosophy is becoming well known in Europe and especially in America, and it appears to be having some impact. The great artery that has been running for thousands of years beneath European philosophy, or the way of thinking that forms the background of the European thought structure is, in ontology, for instance, the idea of substance, that is, the structure of essence and phenomenon. In logical terms, it is the principle of identity or the scheme of subject-object thinking, or again the distinction between sensation and reason. Linking all these together as the common basis was the idea of a transcendental, substantial God or, in modern times, the idea of a transcendental subject. At present, however, that way of thinking is being questioned in different ways within European philosophy itself, and Nishida's impact may be connected with that crisis.

As to East and West, there is no need now to discuss which of the two should come first or whether the two can be separated so clearly. Historically speaking, that is a delicate problem. In my talk here, I want to speak of the West that we Japanese have historically experienced since the coming of Perry's black ships at the end of the feudal period and the opening of the country with the Meiji Restoration (1868), and of the Eastern tradition that, at least until then, had been the basis of life and culture in Japan. In a sense, Nishida's situation was very different from ours today. Still, the problem that Nishida faced and with which he struggled is not solved even today. It is only buried under the impression that the world has become one, and it is sure to resurface whenever anything untoward happens. It was Nishida's generation that experienced that problem in its original form. Since Nishida had his roots in the Eastern tradition, his encoun-

ter with the West was a turbulent one, given the brusque way the West first made inroads into the East. He experienced the West as a totality, and even while looking only at philosophy, he was confronted all at once with the whole range of elements that formed the history of European thought, from Greek philosophy and Christianity, to modern scientific thinking and contemporary philosophy (up to Husserl and Meinong). In a word, Nishida found himself at the exact point where East and West collided with one another full force.

A generation later, things were already very different. Specialists had appeared, for example, in Greek philosophy, and specialized studies were advancing in leaps and bounds. In the case of specialists, however, an interest in and understanding of Christianity, for instance, would have been minimal; there were those who would concentrate on Descartes, Kant, or Hegel, but would hardly touch on Plato and Aristotle, just as there were those who specialized in modern scientific thinking, but would show virtually no interest in religion. In Nishida's case we can detect none of this narrowness. He experienced the full confrontation of East and West as they threw themselves against each other headlong, like rival floats crashing into one another at a *matsuri*. Everything—religion, philosophy, science—was called into question together, and it made for a situation in which human existence in all its aspects became fundamentally problematic. That was also manifested itself in the way things were studied then, but we have no time to enter into that now.

Let me now cite a few quotations to show how Nishida thought of the problem of East and West.

East and West are two separate realities [Nishida speaks here from bitter experience] . . . but in their ground they are linked and mutually complementary. [However,] it is not possible to conceive of a world culture in which East and West are one, without discovering that deeper ground. (14:406)

I think that the East has something radically different. [If we can discover that deeper ground,] will not then East and West form a human culture in mutual complementarity, and thus manifest complete humanity? (14:405)

The "deeper ground" Nishida alludes to here is one that can be

reached only after one has overcome one's own culture. We may think here of Merleau-Ponty's idea that "in order not to be a prisoner of one's own culture, one must recover one's own 'wild region,' which enables us to communicate with other cultures."³ But is it, after all, possible to recover one's own wild nature? Were this possible, it would not only revitalize our own culture, but would also enable us to truly communicate with other cultures for the first time; it would thus serve as the ground on which a new world culture could take shape. As the term "wild region" suggests, it is a region untainted by our own particular culture, a region we are brought into contact with only after the hardened shells of our own cultural forms have been broken through. When Nishida spoke of "pure experience," he must have been thinking of a situation wherein our wild nature is reached.

The Philosophy of Pure Experience

I want to reflect here a moment on the meaning of experience in the term *pure experience*. Experience is a word used in everyday language; it is also one of the basic terms of philosophy. In the history of European philosophy we encounter various conceptions of experience. There are, for example, Aristotle's concept of experience, the British empiricist concept, Hegel's science of the experience of consciousness, and Heidegger's "from the experience of thinking." As far as terminology goes, Nishida's use of the term "pure experience" harks back directly to William James. But when it comes to ascertaining what that term basically means for Nishida, I believe the following can be said. When we speak of experiencing something, we usually understand the term *experience* as including a simultaneous understanding of what we experience, and even some kind of self-understanding. This self-understanding means basically understanding things in a mode that can be expressed in words; words are thus woven into the experience. It is here that Nishida felt that such an understanding was problematic. Indeed, in the mode of experiencing that can be expressed in words, right from the beginning (as is supposed when we say that we experienced this or that), a kind of reversal seems to have taken place.

³ Merleau-Ponty, *Signes*, Japanese translation (Tokyo: Misuzu shobo), vol. I, p. 194.

It is as if we have experienced that which is being expressed in the words we use, as if experience occurs only in a form that can be expressed in language, as if words are what constitute the experience (as if experience is a construction of the speaking subject). Nishida realized that such an understanding of experience makes it impossible for us to truly enter into the *Sache* itself, and he therefore tried to break it down. Nishida's *pure experience* thus implies that experience is an original event in which, by breaking down the linguistic structures, the *Sache* is encountered for the first time and that this event itself becomes a new impulse for putting that experience into words.

An Infinite Opening

Above we saw how, for Nishida, the creation of a single world culture integrating East and West was possible only by the discovery of a deeper ground. Having encountered the West while remaining rooted in the Eastern tradition, Nishida made the following two observations with regard to the creation of that world culture. One was—a much-cited phrase of his—"to see the form of the formless" (4:6). He then adds that he would like to open up a philosophical standpoint from which the meaning of that way of experience would become transparent. His desire to do so is certainly not to force Eastern culture on other people; he is making a new effort to create, rather, a more all-embracing world that also subsumes within itself the values of Eastern culture, whose roots differ from those of the West. And for Nishida—this, his second point—that new effort is strongly linked with *learning*. He expresses this in many ways, but I shall restrict myself to only one, which is more readily understandable. Regarding science, Nishida wrote the following passage:

Since the Meiji Restoration, our country has been taking in Western culture pellmell. Those who speak rather flippantly of *wakon kansai* [or *wakon yōsai*] ("Japanese spirit and Chinese [or Western] learning [or crafts]") in this connection may think that one can use these things merely as tools. They forget that every one of these things has a spirit of its own. Even the natural sciences carries a spirit proper to the natural sciences. We must digest these things by grasping each in its

particular spirit. (12:162)

In these simple words Nishida expresses an important message when it comes to opening oneself to the West: as to the natural sciences, we must learn the spirit inherent in the natural sciences. Nishida's texts are rich in variations on this theme. He will say, for instance, that from now on Eastern culture must be scholarly or that it must have logic. In saying this, however, he does not imply that Western scholarship and logic can directly become the model for the world culture of the future. While stressing the necessity of passing through these forms, he demands a scholarship and logic where the mode of experience in which one "sees the form of the formless" becomes significant. I think that this signals an epoch-making new task, a demand so tremendously difficult as to sound preposterous.

Much more needs to be said about this problem, but I shall concentrate only on the main points. First of all, the need for a "deeper ground" appears as an extremely important desideratum in Nishida's view. Secondly, when we speak of "East" and "West" we tend to align the two, but in Nishida there is the sense that East and West both form their own separate spheres. For him, it is certainly not the case that the two would naturally form one world in which they both harmoniously coalesce; rather, a great gap lies between them. To be able to speak of "East and West" in the sense of spanning that gap, it is necessary, in Nishida's own words, that *a place* be opened up in which both East and West "are located," *an opening* that embraces and subsumes both. We may bandy about terms such as "global world" or concepts such as "mankind" or "humanity," but the problem is not that simple. If our experience is not directly infused with a sense of wide "opening" in some form or other, it does not become an open experience. And this renders us incapable of conceiving a new principle for a unified world that can withstand the pressure of contradictions involved in the relationship of East and West.

In connection with that deep sense of a wide open space, we may remind ourselves especially of Nishida's fondness for the sea. Born near the sea on the Noto peninsula, as a middle school teacher in Nanao he would go to the harbor whenever his duties allowed, to gaze out at the sea. Once a villager asked him what he was doing, and he replied, "I'm watching the sea; the sea is something mysterious." Then asked what

he was thinking, he said, "I'm thinking of the world." This anecdote is related in Nishitani's essay, "Nishida, My Teacher" (1951).⁴ Later, Nishida himself wrote, "I love the sea. I have the feeling that in the sea something infinite is at work." And Nishitani has left the words: "The expanse of the sky is infinity become visible." This feeling common to both Nishida and Nishitani is noteworthy in that it points to an important dimension in their thought. In seeing the sky or the sea, they both had the feeling of experiencing a kind of infinite "opening up," wherein East and West, among other things, are "located"; or again, in their sense for sea and sky an infinite opening is taking place. If one is to speak at all of going *beyond* East and West, it must be there. Without a foundation in this living experience, whatever kind of thought system one may build, it would only have a limited framework, would be apt to fade with time, and be subject to change. Thus, an opening that is merely a product of thought may eventually revert to a crude attitude of ethnocentric closedness and opposition.

In keeping with the problematic of Nishida's age, I have treated the problem as one of East and West, but in our present consciousness it is further complicated by the North-South opposition. In this case too, we would be unable to conceive of a common bond strong enough to withstand the inherent stresses, were it not for the Zen-inspired sense of "since originally there is no East or West, where could we look for a North or a South?"

Nishida and Zen

What really led Nishida to that kind of openness was his practice of *zazen*. In connection with the problem of East and West, we must try to obtain a clear picture of the historical conditions in which Nishida engaged in Zen practice. *An Inquiry into the Good* appeared in 1911, the year in which Natsume Sōseki delivered his famous speech on "The Opening Up of Present-day Japan." In this speech, Sōseki presents a

⁴ See Nishitani's *Waga shi Nishida Kitarō Sensei o kataru* (1951), in his *Collected Works* 9: 15–50 (the anecdote, in a slightly different version, appears on pp. 30–31); for an English translation, see "Nishida, My Teacher," in Nishitani Keiji, *Nishida Kitarō*, translated by Yamamoto Seisaku and James W. Heisig (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), pp. 3–38 (pp. 18–19).

most revealing description of the spiritual situation in which Japan found itself at the time. I cannot go into detail here, but the gist of it is as follows.

Sōseki says that, spiritually speaking, the “opening up” that people are talking about is not so different from the situation that existed in barbaric times, since it means being frantically engaged in competition and antagonism. And since the country is being physically forced to open up under special circumstances, the Japanese are, as it were, only skating on the surface. Moreover, the fact that they have to keep their legs stiff for fear of taking a tumble has made them nervous wrecks. Indeed, the Japanese are to be pitied, for having been placed in an indescribably strained situation. Sōseki adds that he himself does not know what can be done. “I can only sigh,” he says.

Still, at that time (right after victory in the Russo-Japanese War), Japan looked very successful on the surface. Sōseki thus continued: “One hears on all sides boastful voices saying ‘We have become a first-rate nation.’ Yes, you could say that, if you are simpleminded enough.” (Today is not very different; only today one would speak of having become an economic superpower.) Sōseki had no blueprint ready for those who asked him what to do. “The only face-saving answer I can give is: let us try to change from within, but, if at all possible, without becoming neurotic.”

We may find these statements by Sōseki intriguing, but the situation it describes must be called a difficult one, nay, a dreadful one. When we look back on the drastic changes that took place in Japan’s history during the Meiji, Taishō, and Shōwa eras from about 1890 onwards, we must admit that the situation was really much as Sōseki described it. In his *History of Meiji Literature*,⁵ Nakamura Mitsuo makes a significant comment about Sōseki. I want to introduce it here because it also has bearing on Nishida. Nakamura notes that several of the heroes of Sōseki’s novels are “idlers,” people who deliberately stay aloof from society. (The expression “high-class idlers,” or “idle rich,” in fact appears in one of the novels.) Nakamura says of them, “Not doing anything themselves, they criticize the life-style of their contemporaries and of people engaged in society. . . . The intelligentsia in Sōseki’s novels are seeking an inner norm for their lives, without finding any.

⁵ Nakamura Mitsuo, *Meiji bungakushi* (Tokyo: Chikuma shobō, 1963).

The pen of the author, who takes up the problems that these people encounter on various levels of human life, naturally moves into a critique of contemporary society and of the Japanese culture of the time" (p. 220). Daisuke, the hero of *Sorekara (And Then)*, for example, says bluntly that "since the relations between Japan and the West are all wrong and offer no hope for the future, there is nothing for me to do" (p. 220). He is, indeed, a typical "high-class vagabond." His life-style serves no purpose, but for that very reason it becomes a criticism of the life-style of the age and society. Now, assuming that such a thing were possible—that one can truly become a critic of society by doing nothing—then one could say that the practice of *zazen* is, in the true sense of the word, a total criticism of "being in the world," since *zazen* is precisely "to practice doing nothing" in a literal and radical way.

On 5 January 1905, while the town of Kanazawa, where he then lived, was noisily celebrating the fall of Port Arthur with lantern processions and the like, Nishida wrote in his diary, "In the morning, *zazen*; in the afternoon, *zazen*; in the evening, *zazen*" (17:130). And then he added the following remark: "How frivolous the human heart!—to engage in such foolish celebrations without even thinking of the long haul still lying ahead." *Zazen* is certainly not a way of becoming indifferent to the actualities of history; there are things, rather, that become visible precisely by doing nothing while one is surrounded by them. In Nishida's case, it was the things that lay farther ahead that became visible, and those things truly came to pass later on. Nishida passed away while writing his last essay during a troubled time: in June of 1945, a few weeks before the defeat of Japan.

Nishida thus engaged in Zen practice at the historical interface—or "betweenness"—of East and West. He strenuously walked the path of Zen, which consists of practicing *zazen* (meditating in sitting position), getting up for an audience with the master, and then returning to *zazen*. He walked the path of Zen while living out a personal life that often made him lament "the misery of human life." Rather than entering upon the question of what this signifies as a way of life (which I have discussed elsewhere in detail⁶) I want to concentrate here on Zen and philosophy as the form in which the problem of East and West

⁶ See the section "A Zen Life" in Ueda Shizuteru, *Nishida Kitarō o yomu* [Reading Nishida] (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1991).

took radical and concrete form in Nishida.

In the ten years preceding the publication of his first philosophical work, *An Inquiry into the Good* (1911), Nishida was voraciously reading the basic works of European philosophy, all the way from the Greek classics to the moderns, with truly incredible breadth and thoroughness—although he himself disparagingly spoke of it as “random reading.” During these same ten years, however, Nishida was also vigorously engaged in Zen practice, that is, *zazen* under the guidance of a master—to the point, as he himself clearly states, of completely forgetting about philosophy. Zen and philosophy form a study in contrast—one, an Eastern practice; the other, a discipline of reflection that originated in the West. This philosophical reflection, moreover, is more than simple reflection; it is a high-level kind of reflection that reflects also on the nature of reflection itself—a reflection on reflection, as it were, that thereby takes on the character of a science. In complete contrast, Zen, as an Eastern praxis, which is often characterized as “non-thinking,” stresses precisely the overcoming of reflection.

There lies an immeasurable gap between Zen and philosophy. But, in fact, Nishida practiced them both, simultaneously and assiduously, for ten years. When the same person engages in two such opposing practices, something is bound to happen. What happened in Nishida’s self-awareness is that he came to take upon himself, in full consciousness, the world-historical task of building a world wherein East and West, as he saw them, would be one. This meant, however, throwing himself body and soul into that qualitative difference and therefore feeling his personality being torn internally, right down the middle. While we can empathize with the pain that this must have caused him, this entitles us to say, as grandiloquent as it may sound, that, in the person of Nishida Kitarō, for the first time in world history, Zen and European philosophy truly encountered one another.

In Nishida’s person Zen and philosophy came face to face with each other directly across the abyss that separates them. What happened there can be described more concretely as follows. A “magnetic field” of mutual questioning was generated, in which Zen probed philosophy as to the originality of its principles, and, conversely, philosophy challenged Zen as to the coherence and concreteness of the world it builds. By this process, the philosophical principle made a qualitative leap in depth (in *An Inquiry Into the Good* it becomes “pure

experience" as the only reality) and, on the other hand, Zen underwent an epoch-making development in its world project (Zen itself, stepping out of itself in a metamorphosis into philosophy, and reaching the point of wanting to "explain all things with pure experience as the only reality").

Experience-Self-Awareness-Basho

Among the central questions regarding Nishida's philosophy we must include the following: How are we to conceive of the *experience* that constitutes the starting point of his philosophy? And what does it mean that he thought of this experience as *pure experience*, and that this pure experience evolves later into *self-awareness* and, further, into *basho* (place or *topos*)?

In an extreme formulation, *pure experience* is "the moment of seeing a color or hearing a sound, prior to the bifurcation of subject and object." It is an event in which the subject-object framework by which we ordinarily interpret experience is broken through. In that event, while being opened up to an "infinite openness," one finds oneself, selflessly, in the midst of a vast and bountiful fullness. One is reminded here of Dōgen's statement, "One is fulfilled by letting go." Nishida considered this event the ground of true reality and the foundation of the true self, and tried to see everything from that perspective.

In the strict sense, the expression "neither subject nor object" clearly designates an experience free from all language. It does not point, however, to a state of mere quietistic silence, but originally to a primordial event, the *Ereignis*, which itself becomes the impetus that drives us to express that experience in words. When we speak of "pure experience," we have already crossed the threshold of language; it has become a word of "self-awareness," while oriented in such a way that it can be applied as a principle of philosophy. At this point, the element of self-awareness comes emphatically to the fore, but it must be said that self-awareness here does not simply mean a self-consciousness whereby the self knows the self. To begin with, since it opens up within pure experience, and thus at a point where there is neither ego nor things, it cannot have the form of a "self-awareness of an ego." I think it can best be characterized as "pure experience become self-aware," or again as a state of being opened up to and illumined by an "infinite

openness." Moreover, in the process, the possibility of reflection is recovered and the way to explain everything with pure experience as the only reality is disclosed.

That is the philosophical standpoint of *An Inquiry into the Good*. In its intention to explain everything, "reflection" was already fully at work. *An Inquiry into the Good* still lacked reflection on the very fact that reflection is already fully at work, however. Hence it does not yet contain a basis for a philosophical standpoint. The link between pure experience and the reflection implied in explanation comes to be thematized in Nishida's next major work, *Intuition and Reflection in Self-Awareness* (*Jikaku ni okeru chokkan to hansei*, 1917).⁷ We can say that this work places itself squarely on the standpoint of self-awareness, but we must then clarify what exactly self-awareness means in this case. Self-awareness here combines in itself the aspect of being "the self-awareness of pure experience," as indicated above, and the aspect of being "reflection on reflection." (Taken by itself, this latter aspect corresponds to the self-consciousness addressed by European philosophy and to the standpoint of transcendentalism.) A prominent characteristic of Nishida's notion of self-awareness is the fact that in it these two aspects completely interpenetrate each other. Once this characteristic comes into clear focus, the notion of *basho* comes to be thematized. This time, "self-awareness" comes to be thought of as "a place reflecting itself within itself." It is within this context that "consciousness" in general also comes to be conceived of as a "place."

In that series of essays, the notion of "place" appears concretely, first of all in connection with the conception of consciousness. So-called *subsumptive judgments* are cited as the basic form of all knowledge that is "located in" consciousness. Here also the "place" character of the predicate is clearly delineated via the original idea that the subject is located in the predicate. This then leads to the formulation of an original "predicative logic," which, through its development into a "logic of place," will bestow a decisive and long-range significance on Nishida's philosophy.

From the outset (with the standpoint of pure experience), the theo-

⁷ For an English translation, see Nishida Kitarō, *Intuition and Reflection in Self-Consciousness*, translated by Valdo H. Viglielmo with Takeuchi Yoshinori and Joseph S. O'Leary (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987).

ries of consciousness and ontology have always gone hand in hand in Nishida's thought, and this does not change with the standpoint of "place." From that standpoint, consciousness is seen as a place, but the question is also asked where consciousness itself is located ("the place of consciousness"). The idea of place is then further pursued in terms of "the place where we are located," and the "self" then comes to be defined as "a being located in" (i.e., a place-related self). Nishida then finally conceives of a kind of "double place": each place, while being a concrete place in its own context, is ultimately located in the "infinite openness," disclosed by the event of "the instant of seeing a color or hearing a sound." In predicative language, Nishida then speaks of "a place of being" and "a place of absolute nothingness"—terminology that takes on great significance in various contexts.

I believe that we could reformulate this "double place," with a gain in generality, as a "double-opening" (which, however, does not *appear* as double). We could then speak, on the one hand, of "limited openings" (comprehensively, this would be the "world" as the general framework of all complexes of meaning) and, on the other, of an "infinite openness" that embraces and subsumes the former within itself while transcending it. I believe that by this reformulation a pattern becomes apparent with which we can pursue further what Nishida had in mind with the concept of "place." (In my talk at a Germany university, I translated "double-opening" as *Doppelperschlossenheit*.)

With the idea of "place," the decisive characteristic of Nishida's thought clearly comes to the fore. This notion constitutes the originality and enduring significance of Nishida's philosophy. The idea, however, was reached on the basis of a very special point of departure: pure experience. From that point of view, we can also say that from the very outset, Nishida's conception of pure experience contained what later developed from this *pure experience* into *self-awareness* and to *basho*. It is due to the nature of that point of departure (i.e., Nishida's concept of pure experience) that the standpoints of self-awareness and of place could develop from it, and emerge with the specific character they in fact have. We could say that the dynamic concatenation of *pure experience*–*self-awareness*–*place* corresponds to the basic relationship between experience, the self-understanding of experience, and the horizon of that self-understanding; however, the special feature of this whole chain is that the starting point of experience lies in pure

experience. In order to understand what all this means, we must first come to a sufficient understanding, via the texts, of what Nishida was working on with his idea of place. This, however, is an extremely difficult undertaking. Looking back from the final destination, one can discern a certain thread running throughout the whole of Nishida's philosophical output, but it is truly difficult to follow that thread chronologically, while at the same time grasping the reasoning at each node of transition. Still, I want to make a new effort at understanding by starting again from pure experience.

The course is clearly laid out, with the various stages that Nishida went through on his intellectual pilgrimage serving as our milestones. A few fixed points can thus be indicated. First, the notion of *basho* signifies basically that "all existing things are located in something," in other words, that "being" means "being located." From this idea, two predicates are derived: "a place wherein things are located" and "things that are located (in a place)." The characteristic traits of this conception appear clearly in the "predicative logic," which is gradually elaborated into a "logic of place." In the later Nishida, "the place wherein things are located" is provisionally seen as threefold, but finally as the irreducible and invisible twofoldness of "the place of being" and "the place of absolute nothingness"; in other words, the world and the limitless margins and bottomless, interlinear spaces of the world. As to "the things that are located," "our selves" come to be seen as their model. When the accent falls on "selves," "historical bodies" are concretely meant, and when "our" is stressed, the image is that of an infinite number of "individuals upon individuals" against the background of logical expressions such as "an individual is an individual over against an individual" and "dying into nothingness and arising from nothingness." And the mode of being that is signified by the term "being located" is conceived of as "an acting intuition." The logic of *basho* as the state of affairs that involves this entire picture is then characterized as "(absolute) contradictory self-identity" (or "place-related self-identity"). Finally, in his last years, Nishida articulated this further into the two predicates of "inverse correspondence" and "the bottom of everydayness."⁸

⁸ The Japanese term, *heijōtei* 平常底, here translated literally, evidently goes back to the Zen spirit of "everydayness," and carries the nuance of detachment (*Gelassenheit*).

UEDA: NISHIDA'S THOUGHT

Those are the terms that appear, in broad overview, as indicators of the scale, the links, and the directions of Nishida's thought. I want to go on investigating, again and again and at every chance, Nishida's difficult texts, in a quest to understand more exactly what those terms mean, what significance they have, and what "place" Nishida's logic of "place" has in the history of philosophy.

TRANSLATED BY JAN VAN BRAGT