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## ON THE IDEA OF ‘BASHO’ IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF KITARŌ NISHIDA

*According to Nishida, the ‘true I’ or ‘self’ is that which infinitely reflects itself within itself or that which makes possible ‘infinite being.’ Put differently, it is not the act but that which sees the acts. Though it objectifies the self, it itself cannot be objectified; it is that which evades all conceptualization and cannot be determined as the (grammatical) subject.*

Kitarō Nishida (1870-1945) contributed greatly to the development of philosophy in Japan. He is a leading Japanese philosopher who laid the foundations for the so-called “Kyoto School.” Although one can find a continuous thread running through Nishida’s thought, we can also see that his thought underwent considerable change throughout his life. Looking back at the development of his thought upon the republication of *An Inquiry into the Good* (first published in 1911) in 1936, Nishida speaks as follows: “The standpoint of the pure experience [in *An Inquiry into the Good*], via Fichte’s *Tathandlung*, developed to the standpoint of the absolute will in *Intuition and Reflection in Self-Consciousness*. Then in the second half of *From That Which Acts to That Which Sees*, via Greek philosophy, it turned over to the idea of *basho*. There, I found the clue to lay the logical base for my ideas. I then concretized the idea of *basho* as the dialectical universal and gave that standpoint a direct expression, ‘acting-intuition.’ What I have called the world of direct experience or pure experience in the present book, I have now come to think of as the world of historical reality. The world of acting-intuition, the world of *poiesis*, is in fact and in truth the world of pure experience”<sup>1</sup> (1, 3).

One may say that the framework of Nishida’s thought is already present in his early theory of ‘pure experience.’ However, what really established his reputation was his theory of *basho* (topos) articulated in the mid-period of his philosophical career. Right after the publication of the essay “Basho” in 1926, Kiichiro Souda, known as a neo-Kantian scholar, published an essay, “Asking for Dr. Nishida’s Elucidation on the Method of Nishida-Philosophy.” In this essay, Souda relentlessly criticized Nishida’s idea of *basho* from a neo-Kantian

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<sup>1</sup> All the references to Nishida are from the new edition of the *Complete Works of Kitarō Nishida*, edited by Atsushi Takeda, Klaus Riesenhueber, Kunitsugu Kosaka, and Masakatsu Fujita (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2002-2009). The references are given in the text in brackets with the number of the volume followed by page number.

standpoint, claiming that “it is highly questionable that it should be accepted academically.”<sup>2</sup> Souda, however, did not downright criticize Nishida’s philosophy but rather did so upon recognizing that Nishida, with the essay “Basho,” and also the essay “That Which Acts” written prior to it, “stepped into the stage that shall be said to endow a single system.” As the title of his paper “Asking for Dr. Nishida’s Elucidation on the Method of Nishida-Philosophy” attests, Souda used the name, “Nishida-philosophy” (*Nishida tetsugaku*) to designate Nishida’s ideas precisely because he had recognized the maturity of Nishida’s thought in those essays. In fact, it was only after Souda’s essay that Nishida’s doctrine came to be widely acknowledged as “Nishida-philosophy.”

#### TO THE STANDPOINT OF ‘BASHO’

Soon after the publication of “Asking for Dr. Nishida’s Elucidation on the Method of Nishida-Philosophy,” Nishida replied to Souda’s criticisms in an essay “A Response to Dr. Souda” of 1927. In the beginning of this essay, Nishida writes, “At the end of the ‘Basho,’ I believe that I was able to arrive at a rather different idea than before” (3, 479). Here, Nishida uses a rather moderate tone to express the move to the standpoint of *basho*. However, in a different place, Nishida admits that his thought had significantly developed during that period. In the introduction to the revised edition of *An Inquiry into the Good* quoted above, Nishida writes that after the essay “Basho,” the standpoint of “pure experience” “via Greek philosophy, turned over to the idea of *basho*.” The significance of the change in Nishida’s thought is reflected in the phrase “turned over.” Moreover, as we can see from what is said in this introduction, this change was strongly related to laying the “logical base” of his ideas. There, Nishida picks out the insufficiency of his prior view by denoting it as psychologism, “the standpoint of consciousness,” and claiming that it was a type of subjectivism. It was presumably the neo-Kantians’ and Husserl’s critique of psychologism that enforced these reflections. In an essay “On the Theses of the Pure-Logic Schools in Epistemology” of 1911 compiled in *Contemplation and Experience*, Nishida grouped Husserl and the neo-Kantians, especially those in the Southwest school, together under the title of “pure logicians.” In this essay, Nishida discusses the pure logicist’s criticisms against psychologism which were directed towards the idea of dissolving epistemological problems into the empirical or the temporal. Nishida found such criticism a serious challenge to his own ideas.

<sup>2</sup> K. Souda, “Asking for Dr. Nishida’s Elucidation on the Method of Nishida-Philosophy,” *The Journal of Philosophical Studies*, No. 127 (1926): 3.

This is evident from the words used by Nishida in the introduction to *Philosophical essays III* published in 1939. Here, Nishida again looks back onto his own course of thought: "Ever since *An Inquiry into the Good*, my aim has been to see and think about things from the utterly direct and most fundamental standpoint. It has been to grasp that ultimate standpoint of wherefrom and whereto. Though pure experience had a psychological tinge, it was still a standpoint beyond the subject-object wherefrom the objective world could be conceived. However, upon contact with the Southwest school, such standpoint must now be put to a thorough criticism. With that, I have come to take the standpoint analogous to Fichte's self-consciousness [*jikaku*]" (8, 255).

The standpoint of "self-consciousness," however, was not yet completely freed from the "psychological tinge." Put differently, it did not sufficiently have the logical clarity necessary in order to construct a philosophical system. This is why the turn to the standpoint of *basho* was called for. In the introduction to Iwao Kouyama's book *Nishida-Philosophy*<sup>3</sup>, Nishida states: "Neither pure experience nor *Tathandlung*, at bottom, can escape subjectivism. I finally found the logically grounded starting point via Aristotle's *hypokeimenon*" (11, 281).

As Nishida here admits, once the standpoint of *basho* was reached, his philosophy achieved a significant turn. Yet, if we were to merely attend to the changes that took place, we would fall short of a comprehensive understanding of Nishida's thought. "To lay the logical base" of his ideas was not a matter of merely adopting a different logic that he had happened to come across. Rather, it was a consequence of his thought's inner demand. Hence we must consider its connection to his prior ideas. As said in the introduction to Kouyama's *Nishida-Philosophy*, what guided Nishida to "lay the logical base" was undeniably Aristotle's concept of *hypokeimenon*. It is here that Nishida found the 'clue' for laying the logical base of his ideas. However, instead of adopting the concept in its original form, Nishida, as will be shown later, reinterpreted the concept in an original way. Indeed, it was Nishida's own thought that allowed for this unique reinterpretation of Aristotle's idea. Therefore, in the following, let us first shed light on the connection between Nishida's prior ideas and the idea of *basho*. We will then look at what the idea of *basho* had to offer.

Nishida often speaks of the continuity between the idea of *basho* and his prior thought. For example, in the introduction to Kouyama's *Nishida-Philosophy*, he says: "Since *An Inquiry into the Good* my starting point lay neither in the subject nor in the object, but rather it lay in that which is prior to the subject-object split. That has not changed until today. Yet, in philosophically attempting to grasp that direct and concrete standpoint and to find a way to

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<sup>3</sup> Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1935.

contemplate the various problems from there, my ideas have changed upon much struggle” (11, 281).

It is sometimes said that after *An Inquiry into the Good* the concept of ‘pure experience’ or the ideas founded on that concept quickly disappeared from Nishida’s thought. However, what guided Nishida’s thought throughout was a quest to return to the “direct and concrete standpoint” or the “utterly direct and most fundamental standpoint,” from which the whole matter can be grasped. In the essay “The Directly Given,” which is the first essay compiled in *From That Which Acts to That Which Sees*, Nishida states the following using the term “pure experience”: “The truly given direct experience or pure experience ... must be thought of as that which includes infinite content. The more we enter into its depth, the more given reality presents itself. Subjectively speaking, this is the non-objectifiable self. Objectively speaking, it is the directly given that cannot be fully reflected on. The intuition of the subject–object unity and the awareness of the pure activity are found there. The source of all knowledge is there” (3, 272).

The essays compiled in *From That Which Acts to That Which Sees* are an attempt to deepen what is here called “pure experience,” i.e., “the non-objectifiable self” or “the directly given that cannot be fully reflected on.”

#### THE PROBLEM “TO LAY THE LOGICAL BASE” AND THE CONCEPT OF SUBSTANCE

In his attempt to deepen the idea of ‘pure experience,’ Nishida faced a serious problem that concerned the relation between such direct experience and conceptual knowledge expressed in judgments. It is in the form of this problem that the task “to lay the logical base” was initially revealed.

Nishida’s first engagement with the problem appears in the fourth essay included in *From That Which Acts to That Which Sees*, titled “On the Inner Perception.” In the beginning of the third section of this essay, Nishida refers to “The Essentials of Logic” by Bernard Bosanquet (1848-1923), stating that “the subject of a perceptual judgment is not the so-called logical subject but rather must be said to be Reality” (3, 325). It is after this quote that Nishida discusses Aristotle’s concept of substance. The claim above corresponds to the following passage from the essay titled “The Neglected Problem of Consciousness,” written right after the essay “Basho”: “As Bosanquet holds, when one says that this table is made of oak, the true subject not this table but Reality. The total whole is what is in truth Aristotle’s substance” (7, 221).

Through the use of such concepts as “Reality” and “substance,” Nishida sought the relation between direct experience and conceptual knowledge. Us-

ing Aristotle's original definition of substance as "that which can be subject but never predicate," Nishida speaks of the connection between the two: "Substance, which is that which can be subject but never predicate, must be the unity of infinite predicates. It is that which unites infinite judgments. What unites judgments with other judgments must be something beyond judgments. It is an object that our acts of judgment infinitely intend but cannot achieve. I believe that such object is intuitively given" (3, 327).

As claimed in this quote, according to Nishida, substance is that which is intuited. It is here that we can identify Nishida's peculiar understanding of substance. It is not understood as the merely 'one and only individual' as in Aristotle. For Nishida, 'an intuition of the irrational' grounds the 'individual.' Hence, according to Nishida, 'individual' results from the 'conceptualization' of the intuitively given.

In the sixth essay of *From That Which Acts to That Which Sees*, titled "That Which Acts," Nishida explains the relationship between experience and judgment: "The world of things is established upon our rationalization of the content of experience. To rationalize experience means for the experience itself to become the subject, i.e. to become the substance which is that which can be subject but never predicate. What it means for experience itself to become the subject is that the experience determines itself as a self-identical concrete universal. Through such self-determination judgments are formed within experience itself" (3, 397).

To rationalize experience is to take experience, which is itself beyond thought or judgment, as a self-identical universal (and hence something that only allows for self-identical judgments). To use Aristotle's phrase, it is to construe experience as a "substance which is that which can be subject but never predicate." Through the self-reflection within itself of such substance – which is precisely the concrete universal – or to put it differently, through the determination of the self-identical, and with its self-description, judgments are formed within the universal.

#### SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS AND 'BASHO'

Furthermore, for Nishida, the rationalization of experience is a matter of self-consciousness. In the essay "On the Inner Perception," Nishida states that "judgments are ... the self-consciousness of substance that never becomes predicate" (3, 351).

Here, substance is understood not as a mere universal but as a non-acting 'I' or 'self' that grounds and makes possible all acts while itself being something beyond all acts and judgments. It is a substance that does not come into acts

while, at the same time, it is that which knows itself or sees itself. In short, it is that which maintains itself by reflecting itself within itself. Judgments are thought of as self-expressions of such substance.

As generally recognized, ‘self-consciousness’ is a central topic of *Intuition and Reflection in Self-Consciousness* of 1917. Upon contact with the neo-Kantian ideas, Nishida came to realize that ‘thought’ does not easily assimilate into ‘pure experience.’ The pressing issue for Nishida was how to reconcile the autonomy of thought with the idea that direct experience is the sole reality. It is here that ‘self-consciousness’ appealed to Nishida. For self-consciousness is at once a reflection within itself and an intuition of itself. In other words, reflecting itself within itself is itself an infinite act of self-development. In *Intuition and Reflection in Self-Consciousness*, Nishida attempted to construe the whole reality as a creative activity where none other than the activity itself makes the being of it possible. In Nishida’s words, it was to understand reality as “a self-conscious system wherein the motivation of the development lies within itself, and wherein its self-reflection is itself its being and development” (2, 128).

In the sixth section of “On the Inner Perception,” Nishida states that mental acts in the strict sense are “that which creates itself from itself” and makes the following remark: “In our self-consciousness, there is no self prior to the self acting or knowing itself; the content of the self is produced through the acting” (3, 350). We can see that the understanding of self-consciousness here is carried over from *Intuition and Reflection in Self-Consciousness*. However, Nishida continues further and asks, “On what kind of object world does the content of self-consciousness develop?” He answers: “The self mirrors itself within itself. The mirror that reflects its own content is also that same self. It is not the case that the self reflects its shadows on things” (3, 350).

What should be noted in the essay “On the Inner Perception” is that here, Nishida attends to the *place* or *topos* (*basho*) of self-consciousness. Surely, one could say that the structure of self-consciousness understood as reflecting itself ‘within itself’ had the place-like feature already inherent in it. Yet, it is crucial that Nishida here takes a close look at the place wherein the self reflects itself – not ‘on things’ but ‘within itself.’ Directly after the above quote, Nishida continues: “Self-consciousness must be accompanied by ‘within itself.’ The knowing self, the known self and the place [*basho*], wherein the self knows itself, are all a unity in self-consciousness” (3, 350). It is here that Nishida, for the first time, uses the word *basho* with its distinctive meaning.

It is in this way that the thematization of the place-like feature of “self-consciousness” led to the idea of *basho*. What prepared for such idea, however, was Nishida’s peculiar interpretation of the concept of substance. According to Nishida, self-consciousness was precisely the self as ‘substance that does not

come into acts,' maintaining and seeing itself by reflecting itself within itself. Nishida also speaks of this in the following way: "That which is beyond the self and that which envelops the self is itself the same self" (3, 350-351). When the relation between the self and "that which is beyond the self" is understood as an enveloping relation, as is here, it seems that it was the most natural step to attend to the 'within itself,' i.e., the place-like feature of self-consciousness. Consequently, self-consciousness was no longer construed as merely an infinite self-development or activity of self-creation, but it was reinterpreted as having the structure wherein the substance which does not come into all acts reflects itself and sees itself within itself.

### SCOTTUS ERIUGENA AND PLOTINUS

In rethinking Aristotle's notion of substance and accordingly the structure of self-consciousness, Nishida most likely gained insight from ideas of Scottus Eriugena and Plotinus.

Nishida refers to Eriugena's ideas for the first time in *Intuition and Reflection in Self-Consciousness*. In this work, as already noted, Nishida attempted to grasp the whole reality as a self-conscious system, i.e., as the self-consciousness or expression of the unity which itself does not become the object of our consciousness. At the end of the work, Nishida reached the conclusion that this unity is nothing but the 'will.' Here, it was Eriugena's notion of God that Nishida had in mind. In section thirty-nine of *Intuition and Reflection in Self-Consciousness*, Nishida states: "The truly creative reality must be understood to be something like Scottus Eriugena's idea of God's will that evades all necessity. When we think of the infinite development of the 'ought' which is one with being in the self-conscious system, i.e., of a single personal history, this already belongs to the object world. We must think of an absolute will behind it – that which transcends and grounds this historical development" (2, 212-213).

It was this idea of the "absolute will" which "transcends and grounds this historical development" that prepared Nishida's interpretation of substance. In the fifth essay of *From That Which Acts to That Which Sees*, titled "Expressive Acts," Nishida refers to Eriugena's notion of "nature that neither creates nor is created,"<sup>4</sup> i.e., the God that creates all yet is itself at peace in its innate state of rest. He claims that there must be something that "neither creates nor is

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<sup>4</sup> See John Scottus Eriugena, *De divisione naturae*, in *Patrologia Latina*, 122, 441B, 1019A-B. See also *idem*, *Periphyseon*, trans. by I.P. Sheldon-Williams and John J. O'Meara (Montreal-Washington: Bellarmin and Dumbarton Oaks, 1987).

created” at the ground of the “unity of consciousness”: “In the past, the unity of consciousness has always been thought to have a single center, or further, to be a single continuous creative activity. However, such creative activity is nothing but a seen or objectified shadow. For there to be such creative activity, there must be that which neither creates nor is created. In other words, there must be a substance of that creative activity. That which has form is the shadow of the formless. Within the space with no shadows, there are infinite forms. At the ground of our selves – thought of as the infinite activity that develops by itself – there must be that which raises yet does not rise, moves yet does not move. It is with this that our unity of consciousness is formed” (3, 372). As we can see from this quote, the notion of substance is understood here in relation to Eriugena’s notion of God as “nature that neither creates nor is created,” and is thereby understood as that which makes the infinite creative activity of consciousness possible while itself being unchanged and at rest within itself.

However, the fact that the concept of substance was understood in this way implies that there was a change in Nishida’s understanding of Eriugena’s ideas. In *From That Which Acts to That Which Sees*, that which makes our acts of consciousness possible is no longer understood as the ‘will.’ Rather, it is understood as “that which is unmoved by acts while seeing its own acts within itself” (3, 379, emphasis added). The adoption of the concept of substance was related to the turn from voluntarism to intuitionism of which Nishida speaks in his introduction to *From That Which Acts to That Which Sees* (cf. next section).

In the essay “Expressive Acts,” Nishida also speaks of that which envelops and makes possible our conscious acts as “something akin to Plotinus’ One” (3, 374). In this way, along with Eriugena, Plotinus’ ideas also guided Nishida’s understanding of substance.

In relation to the above, what deserves attention is Nishida’s frequent usage of the analogy of the ‘mirror’ in expressing the structure of self-consciousness. As the already quoted passage from the essay “On the Inner Perception” makes obvious, Nishida makes use of the analogy of the mirror in order to pick out the place-like feature of self-consciousness: “The self mirrors itself within itself. The mirror that reflects its own content is also that same self. It is not the case that the self reflects its shadows on things.” It was Plotinus’ ideas that Nishida had in mind in using this analogy. In the essay “Expressive Acts,” he says, “Plotinus ... claimed that true matter is the place that receives forms or the mirror that reflects the forms.... While Plotinus says that the Intelligent is enveloped in the One, it is the One that is the space of the Intelligent.... If pure matter is the mirror that reflects light, then the One is the eye that sees light itself” (3, 381).

However, it is important that for Nishida, this “mirror” is understood within the structure of self-consciousness. Its characteristic feature is that it is a mirror

that has nothing other to reflect: it is a mirror that reflects the mirror itself. In the essay "Basho," Nishida speaks of how basho is indeed analogous to this mirror: "True *basho* is that which reflects its own shadows within itself. It is akin to the mirror that illuminates itself" (3, 429).

#### FROM "THAT WHICH ACTS" TO "THAT WHICH SEES"

I said before that the adoption of the concept of substance was related to Nishida's turn from voluntarism to intuitionism. It can also be described, as suggested by the title of the book *From That Which Acts to That Which Sees*, as the turn from "that which acts" to "that which sees." In the essay "The Directly Given," true self-consciousness is construed not merely as a reflection of itself but as "an experience of the will." Here, the "acting self" is said to be the "true self" (3, 267). In the essay following it, "The Intuition and the Will," intuition is indeed thematized. Yet here Nishida still understands intuition not as the seeing or the reflecting but as "the self-development of the mental." At this stage, Nishida's basic understanding of intuition was that it is something that "can be understood in the form of the will" (3, 286).

The positive characterization of 'seeing' appears only after reference to the substance is made in the essay "On the Inner Perception." It is after "the non-nercting is recognized behind the acting" (3, 345) and the substance behind the acts is construed as "that which reflects itself within itself." Here, substance is understood as the "seeing eye" that sees itself (3, 347).

We should also note that in the essay "Expressive Acts," which immediately succeeds the essay "On the Inner Perception," Nishida deals with the topic of expression in relation to reflection. Already in the work *Art and Morality* of 1923, Nishida discusses the importance of artistic expression with reference to the theory of art in Konrad Fiedler. Taking over the basic ideas from there, Nishida expands on the topic of expression in the context of a wider perspective opened up through the adoption of the notion of substance.

It is first pointed out that an expression is not a self-expression of the conscious self but it is an act that manifests itself from the 'ground' of conscious acts. Nishida says: "With expressive acts, the center of consciousness moves from the conscious self to the trans-conscious self and the so-called conscious acts become mere shadows reflected on the body" (3, 377). Put differently, expressive acts are nothing other than the self-development of the substance reflecting its own "shadows" as conscious acts within itself. In this way, self-reflection within itself or the objectification of the self from the deepest ground of self-consciousness – i.e., "the standpoint of the negation of the will" – is, hereby, understood as expressive acts and as intuition. As he also says: "When

the seeing envelops the seen, that is when true intuition is finally achieved” (3, 383).

In the essay “Basho,” too, Nishida emphasizes that reflecting is not attained from acting but rather, acting is attained from reflecting. We can also say that, contrary to his understanding expressed in the *Intuition and Reflection in Self-Consciousness*, Nishida regards the will as that which is seen. Making an analogy to Dionysius Areopagita’s “dazzling obscurity” with the *basho* which itself evades all determination yet infinitely reflects itself, Nishida speaks of the will in the following manner: “Within the true *basho* of nothingness, we see even will itself. The will is not a mere act but behind it there must be that which sees. Otherwise, there is no way of distinguishing it from mechanical processes or acts from instinct. The darkness behind the will is no mere darkness but it is the ‘dazzling obscurity’ of Dionysius. When the content of such standpoint is reflected on the standpoint of oppositional nothingness [consciousness], we see free will *qua* act” (3, 431).

Here, the will is not construed as the ‘absolute free will’ that is the basis of all acts. Rather, the will is understood as having behind itself “that which sees.” While the will has the property of being free, Nishida understands such freeness to be “freeness *qua* act.” According to Nishida, prior to such freeness, there is the “freeness *qua* state.” Nishida depicts the freeness *qua* act as “shadows of the eternal” (3, 463). In such readings, we can clearly see Nishida’s turn to intuitionism.

#### THE ‘BASHO’ OF NOTHINGNESS

I mentioned above that Nishida’s adoption of Aristotle’s concept of substance was crucial for the formulation of the idea of *basho*. Yet, as we have already seen, Nishida did not accept the concept in its original form, as it appears in Aristotle. In this connection, Nishida’s choice of the term *basho* is not irrelevant.

In the above quoted essay “The Neglected Problem of Consciousness,” we can find Nishida’s criticism of Aristotle’s concept of substance: “Aristotle once defined *ousia* as that which can be the subject of a judgment but never predicate. I have not yet found a definition of *ousia* that goes beyond this definition ... If so, however, can we not think of a more profound meaning of being by inverting the definition and seeking that which can be predicate but never subject? Aristotle sought the transcendent that grounds judgments only in the direction of the subject. However, the truly transcendent that is at the ground of judgments is not found in the direction of the subject but rather in the direction of the predicate” (7, 221).

For Nishida, substance is that which sees and knows itself by reflecting itself within itself, and in that sense it is that which transcends and envelops the 'I.' In terms of the subject–predicate relation in a subsumptive judgment, it is seen in the direction of the predicate. Accordingly, Nishida's criticism of Aristotle's notion of "substance" was that it fails to capture that which truly grounds judgments.

Nishida rephrases this criticism in the introduction to *Philosophical Essays III*: "Aristotle's logic was altogether subjective. However, we cannot think of the self with such logic. The self is not that which can be objectified. Yet we do think of the self. Here, there must be some different form of thought. I have called such form of thought, as opposed to Aristotle's logic, the predicate logic. The self as the unity of consciousness cannot be thought subjectively [i.e. as the grammatical subject] but rather it is thought as a place [*basho*], as the self-determination of the field of consciousness" (8, 255-256).

According to Nishida, the 'true I' or 'self' is that which infinitely reflects itself within itself or that which makes possible 'infinite being.' Put differently, it is not the act but that which sees the acts. Though it objectifies the self, it itself cannot be objectified; it is that which evades all conceptualization and cannot be determined as the (grammatical) subject. Nishida explains thus: "This thing [the true 'I'] cannot be said to be either the same or different, being or nothingness. It is that which cannot be determined by any logical form as such; it is rather the *basho* that makes possible such logical forms" (3, 419). It does not become the content of knowledge but it is the *basho* wherein knowledge is formed. If we attend to the subsumptive relation, it is the transcendent 'predicate plane' that is reached when one takes the relation to its limit – it is "that which can be predicate but never subject." It is itself something that never becomes the (grammatical) subject, i.e., never becomes the content of knowledge, and can only be grasped as *basho*.

What Nishida called the non-objectifiable 'self' in the introduction to the *Philosophical Essays III*, in the essay "The Neglected Problem of Consciousness," he terms the "conscious consciousness." It was Nishida's intention here to counter the Kantian or neo-Kantian epistemology: "Contemporary epistemology starts with the opposition between the knower and the known. It must be admitted that this is inevitable for an epistemology. With that, they have dealt with the constitution of the known object and clarified how the objectivity of knowledge obtains. Yet, to clarify how the known object is constituted does not straightaway clarify what it is to know. What it is to know in terms of consciousness *per se* is still a neglected problem yet to be thoroughly examined" (7, 216-217).

In short, since epistemology in the past had only dealt with the objectified consciousness, consciousness itself, or to use the phrase above, "what it is to

know in terms of consciousness *per se*” was overlooked and hence has been a neglected problem. It was just this neglected problem of the “conscious consciousness” that Nishida, with his theory of *basho*, attempted to understand. When one starts from the act of judgment that presupposes the opposition between subject and object – although that may be inevitable for an epistemology – what can be clarified therein is only consciousness as it is objectified. In order to move beyond the limits of such position, Nishida starts, not with the act of judgment, but – to adopt the expression from the essay “A Response to Dr. Souda” – with “the examination of judgmental consciousness itself.” Stated differently, Nishida attempted to return to that consciousness prior to that which is grasped within the subject–object framework, or as he says, to “what it is to know in terms of consciousness *per se*,” and to advance his thoughts from there.

Now, despite the fact that the concept of substance had, as we have seen, a great role to play in the development of Nishida’s theory of *basho*, Nishida eventually settles instead with the concept of *basho* to convey his own ideas. This probably has to do with the fact that in Aristotle, substance primarily meant *ousia*. On the contrary, Nishida claims that *basho* is not a being but nothingness. This nothingness, however, is not the nothingness that opposes being. For while such nothingness may be that which negates all being, as long as it is in opposition to something, it is still considered a kind of being. When Nishida denotes *basho* as the “*basho* of nothingness,” what is meant is “that which envelops being and nothingness,” “that which transcends the opposition between being and nothingness while having the opposition within itself” (3, 424). Since it is that which is never rendered the content of our knowledge nor characterized as a kind of being in any sense of the word, Nishida speaks of it as “simply *basho*” (3, 436). Yet it is precisely due to this *basho* reflecting itself within itself that the opposition between being and nothingness arise. Nishida’s *basho* is characterized by this dual feature.

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The underlying attitude of Nishida’s thought is to comprehend matters not in so far as they are objectified but to grasp the matter in its whole. Alternatively phrased, it is to see matters from reality itself. The theory of *basho* was developed against the backdrop of giving the logical grounds to such an idea. With that in mind, Nishida focused on judgments, specifically on the subject–predicate subsumptive relation. If we speak in terms of such a relation, the whole matter or reality itself mentioned above is found at the limit in the direction of the predicate. In short, it is “that which can be predicate but never subject.” According to Nishida, judgments arise from the self-determination

of the whole matter, i.e., reality itself. Speaking from the subject direction, a judgment is to be subsumed by a predicate. However, from the predicate direction, a judgment is the self-determination of the universal.

Nishida attempted to grasp matters not by starting from the subject–object dichotomy as is the general tendency of modern epistemology, but from the reality that precedes such dichotomy. Put differently, instead of first positing substance and then trying to understand matters in relation to its attributes, Nishida attempted to grasp reality as a concrete universal. Nishida set forth, at the very ground, that which cannot be objectified and hence can only be called nothingness, and attempted to grasp reality from there. Logically speaking, we can say that Nishida's logic is a logic centered not around the subject, but around the predicate. In terms of the 'self,' Nishida proposed to understand the 'self' not as a substance, but as a *basho*. In the essay "Basho," Nishida says, "The 'I' is not a unity *qua* [grammatical] subject but a predicative unity. It is not a point but a circle, not a thing but *basho*. The 'I' cannot know itself because the predicate cannot become the [grammatical] subject" (3, 469). From the above, we can say that Nishida strived to reexamine our presuppositions and even the whole framework of our thought. For this reason, Nishida's ideas are truly radical.

Translated from the Japanese by *Yuko Ishihara*