

# THE UNSOLVED ISSUE OF CONSCIOUSNESS

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## *Translator's Introduction*

The following essay, “The Unsolved Issue of Consciousness” (*Torinokosaretaru ishiki no mondai* 取残されたる意識の問題), by Nishida Kitarō 西田幾多郎 from 1927 is significant in regard to the development of what has come to be called “Nishida philosophy” (*Nishida tetsugaku* 西田哲学). In what follows, in addition to providing some commentary on the important points of his essay, I would like to show its relevance or significance not only for those who would like to study Nishida’s thought but also for philosophy in general, especially in the contemporary setting. It was first published in 1927 by Iwanami Publishers in a collection of essays by different authors, *Philosophical Essays in Commemoration of the Sixtieth Birthday of Dr. Tokuno* (*Tokunohakushi kanrekikinen tetsugaku ronbunshū* 得能博士還暦記念哲学論文集). The essay was then included in Nishida’s own 1937 volume of essays titled *Thinking and Experience, Continued* (*Zoku shisaku to taiken* 続思索と体験), a sequel to an earlier volume of essays, *Thinking and Experience* (*Shisaku to taiken* 思索と体験), published in 1915. In his preface to this sequel,<sup>1</sup> Nishida states that he initially had no intention of republishing the essays since they belong to previous stages in the evolution of his thought. Nevertheless he agreed to republishing them as indicative of the course his thinking had traversed. The essays that make up this volume were written between 1927 and 1933, the period between *From the Working to the Seeing* (*Hatarakumono kara mirumono e* 働くものから見るものへ) (1927) and *The Fundamental Problems of Philosophy* (*Tetsugaku no konpon mondai* 哲学の根本問題) (1933). This was the period when his unique philosophical standpoint, the so-called “Nishida philosophy,” was in the process of being established.

The present essay thus stems from the same period when Nishida was formulating his concept of “place” or *basho* 場所. Its first publication in 1927 was soon after the publication of another important essay that many consider to mark the inception of “Nishida philosophy,” namely “Place” or “*Basho*” 場所. In the present essay, we see Nishida attempting to clarify, and simultaneously simplify, the thematic of that earlier “*Basho*” essay. The present essay is thus significant in its explanatory role of illuminating the beginnings of “Nishida philosophy” proper, and provides helpful clues for our attempts to understand what Nishida means by the concept of place and also the centrality of its theory vis-à-vis the rest of his oeuvre. For English readers who are interested in studying Nishida’s philosophy of *basho* in general or his monumen-

tal “*Basho*” essay in particular, whether in the original Japanese or its recently published English version, this short piece should be an invaluable source.<sup>2</sup>

Nishida explains that the essay is an attempt to look into the relationship between the logical and consciousness, and to conceive place and implacement on that basis. It is a result of his dissatisfaction with previous attempts in philosophy to unfold the relationship between being and knowing in the dualistic terms of subject and object or in the Greek hylomorphic terms of form and matter—a dualism that has always been rendered hierarchically. In the case of modern epistemology, which starts by assuming the opposition between knower and known, it is the knower qua transcendental subject who imposes his categories upon the sense data received from the external world. Previous to that, Greek philosophy refused to attribute even the possibility of a “logical independence” to its notion of “place,” that is, *chōra* χώρα, in Plato’s *Timaeus*, by submitting it to the hegemony of the *idea* ἰδέα. It was then (mis-)interpreted by Aristotle as *hyle* ὕλη, structured according to form (*morphe* μορφή). Nishida students who are familiar with the “*Basho*” essay will recall that therein Nishida states how he was inspired by Plato’s notion of *chōra* in the *Timaeus* and took it as a clue in developing his own concept of *basho* or “place.” While taking the Platonic *chōra* as a clue, Nishida, however, frees it from the confines of Greek metaphysics in order to unfold its sense of a *place* that possesses its own logical priority. On this basis Nishida attempts to understand the cognitive process. In the present essay Nishida expresses dissatisfaction with the ascription of mere *passivity* to that placiality, especially when regarded as a character of consciousness. Section 1 of the present essay clarifies Nishida’s relationship to Greek hylomorphism in this regard in his attempt to understand consciousness and cognition.

Nishida raises the point that modern epistemology begins with the opposition between knower and known. Such dualism reached its apex in Kantian epistemology. One of the catalysts that drove Nishida to his philosophy of place was his encounter with Neo-Kantianism. Immanuel Kant and the Neo-Kantians understood the subject-object relation in Greek hylomorphic terms, namely of form and matter, determining and determined. Cognition is accordingly the (re)constitution of the object by means of *a priori* conditions, a formative activity vis-à-vis sensible material. The subject-object dualism in modern epistemology is dubious, in Nishida’s mind, because it leads to the issue of how to bridge the gap between two distinct kinds of substances. That is, how does the object that is transcendent to consciousness come to *relate* to consciousness for its reconstitution as an object of knowledge? If the objective source of the material of cognition transcends the very determining process to begin with, the thing *in-itself* remains unknown, and what we know is but a projection of our own demands imposed upon the given material. The result is the dichotomization of reality into the realm of *a priori* conditions serving as forms of determination on the one hand, and the realm of the matter of determination, in-itself unformed, objectively undetermined.

To what extent can their conjunction in the grammatical structure of a sentence, expressed in the judicative terms of subject-predicate, accurately portray the world

of objects independent of our mental acts? This issue of Kantian dualism involving the hylomorphic unification of matter and form via the constitutive act of the epistemological subject was also raised in the “*Basho*” essay. In the present essay, however (especially in section 2), Nishida clarifies his dissatisfaction with this dualism as involving the issue of discovering what unifies the two elements—subject and object, form and matter, activity and receptivity—that have thus been objectified as two *things*, without objectifying the structure of unity itself. This, then, leads Nishida to the issue of what enables the consciousness of consciousness: how can we speak of such consciousness without objectifying it?

To conceive the cognitive process as involving two separate determinate terms objectifies not only its content but consciousness itself as some *thing* standing in opposition to its object. This makes consciousness itself *qua* object into the grammatical subject of a judgment. The hidden premise behind modern epistemology is this conception of cognition as a relationship between *objectified* beings. Even Edmund Husserl, who looked into the issue of consciousness more directly than the Neo-Kantians, is accused by Nishida of objectifying consciousness. In the “*Basho*” essay, Nishida only briefly discusses Husserl, making the point that even Husserl’s horizon of perception fails to transcend conceptual determination to reach *life*, which is irreducible to concepts. In the present essay Nishida relates this issue more directly to consciousness *per se*: the consciousness focused in Husserlian phenomenology is still consciousness thematized, as object, consciousness that one is conscious of. It is not yet the consciousness that is *conscious*, that is, as *act*. Unfortunately, in English there is no verbal equivalent of “consciousness” as there is in Japanese. In the Japanese text, Nishida uses the word for consciousness as both a noun to designate consciousness as object (*ishiki* 意識) and a verb to designate consciousness as act (*ishiki suru* 意識する). We see Nishida here accusing phenomenology of objectifying consciousness while at the same time failing to pay attention to the very consciousness that is *conscious* of that consciousness. The objectifications of knower and known both are attempts to reduce the irreducible, objectify the unobjectifiable.

So what is the pre-objective source of this objectification, this dichotomy? For Nishida the key to solving this mystery lies in the direction of the un-objectifiable pole of consciousness that is *behind* every objectifying act. But this turn away from the object is also a turn away from what in grammatical terms would be the subject. Thus, it is a turn to what Nishida somewhat misleadingly calls the “predicate” (*jutsugo* 述語)—which he takes to be the *a priori* source of determining acts, dichotomization, and objectification. This is in fact a turn away from Aristotelian substantialism, which views reality reductively under the lens of Indo-European grammar in terms of the grammatical subject. The essay is significant here in showing where Nishida thus stood in relation to Kantian epistemology and Husserl’s phenomenology of consciousness as he was developing his theory of place in the attempt to avoid the pitfalls of dualism, hylomorphism, and substantialism. What we get in the first two sections, then, is Nishida’s standpoint vis-à-vis the ancient Greeks, Kant and the Kantians, and Husserl in regard to the metaphysical and epistemological issues he

was concerned with, leading him to the formulation of his concept of place and, as we shall see shortly, his concept of the predicate.

The move away from the subject-object scheme of epistemology, as we have just discussed, is simultaneously a move away from the subject-predicate scheme of Indo-European grammar, which focuses attention upon the grammatical subject qua object. In section 3, Nishida conceives of consciousness to be the place of the (conceptual) universals operative in our cognitive acts. But even beyond that notion of consciousness we also see where his general move is heading. Against Aristotle's notion of substance as what becomes the grammatical subject, Nishida looks for ontological primacy toward what becomes the predicate but never the grammatical subject. He refers to Bernard Bosanquet's claim that when we say "this desk is made of oak," the true grammatical subject is not "this desk" but rather "reality."<sup>3</sup> There is, then, an association between Nishida's notion of "predicate" and his notion of "place" that his use of Bosanquet's theory here makes clear. Nishida understands what Bosanquet calls "reality" here to mean the entire situation as a "whole" that underlies and expresses itself in whatever it is that we objectify and make into a subject of assertion—in this case, the desk that is in turn situated within it. Nishida's intent is thus to de-focus attention away from that intentional object, the grammatical subject, in the counter-direction of what he calls "the transcendent predicate" (*chōetsuteki jutsugo* 超越的述語), that is, the environmental situation or "place" that unfolds in that act of objectification and determines the subject of assertion but which remains irreducible to—hence, transcends—what is thus objectified and made into a grammatical subject. It is the pre-thematically lived concrete contextual "whole" of experience-*cum*-reality that subsequently becomes expressed in objectified and dichotomized terms. It thus cannot be objectified and treated as a grammatical subject.

We see Nishida's ingenuity here in conceiving of that concrete wholeness in our lived situation in terms of the unobjectifiable "predicate," which is also what he means by "place." Hence, it becomes clear in the essay that Nishida's turn from the grammatical subject to the predicate is parallel to his turn to place as possessing "logical independence," a certain ontological priority in the sense that it grounds the being of objects (without itself being an object). It is a consequence of his search for a "logical foundation" (*ronriteki kiso* 論理的基礎) for his ideas that would answer the charge of psychologism. By this move, rendering "place" or "predicate" as "logically independent," Nishida hoped to erect a new kind of metaphysic that could ground epistemology without relying on the subject-object split. He tells us that he wants to open the possibility for a different sort of metaphysics that would ground epistemology in the direction of the predicate rather than seeking for its ground in the direction of the grammatical subject—a "metaphysics of the middle," if we want to make use of Mahāyāna Buddhist terminology—that would refuse reduction to either realism or idealism, or any sort of dualism.

One might, however, question here the viability of a language of "logic" (and the "logical")—its applicability to what he is trying to express—which is certainly a con-

sequence of the influence of the German Neo-Kantians (e.g., Hermann Cohen and Heinrich Rickert) and Idealists (G.W.F. Hegel), in response to whom Nishida is formulating his theory, and their use of the term “logic,” that is, the notion of a “transcendental logic” that transcends the psychological. Nevertheless, the dualism assumed by Neo-Kantian “logic” proved unsatisfying for the reasons already stated above, as was Husserl’s attempts to overcome the same issues of dualism.

In response to Husserl Nishida thus applies his sense of “predicate” or “place” to how one may understand consciousness (*ishiki*) in order to shed light upon the very consciousness that escapes objectification, that is, *not* the consciousness that one is conscious *of qua* object, but the consciousness that *is conscious of* that object. Consciousness as such is a “place” for the objectification of beings. But further escaping even that consciousness, which may nevertheless be reductively objectified as the epistemological subject or the grammatical subject of “*I think . . . X,*” there must lie the very place *allowing for* that knower-known, subject-object, relationship. That place of all self-other interactions is the place of nothing (*mu no basho* 無の場所), a place that escapes any reduction or objectification in terms of beings, a place that is hence “absolutely nothing” (*zettai mu* 絶対無). In this way Nishida brings us, in section 4, to that which lies beyond, but must be presupposed in, consciousness itself, as the inconceivable and indeterminable, which he calls “true nothing.” Nishida’s explication here of this structure of a true nothing (*shin no mu* 真の無) that cannot be made into a subject of a statement, to which consciousness inevitably but tacitly points, also serves to unfold the correspondence—distinctly Nishidan—in his philosophical scheme between the structures of the relationships of grammatical subject-predicate, ontological being-nothing, epistemological subject-object, logical universal-particular, et cetera.

Nishida’s comment in his “afterword” (attached to this essay at the end) allows us to discern the relationship between his theory of place and his later thought. For Nishida will explicate this holism of place further in an outward direction later in the 1930s in terms of our inter-activity with the world. In the years following the initial (late 1920s) formulation of his *basho* theory, Nishida shifts his view of place gradually from an introspective look into the interior depths of consciousness and toward a look at the external happenings of the world at large, the “socio-historical world.” Nishida will come to focus on the human world as the field whereupon the histories of peoples unfold through the interactivity of individuals. Introspective self-awareness is thus seen already to involve one’s interactivity with the world of others. During the 1930s, for example, in *Fundamental Problems of Philosophy*, Nishida will come to call this dialectical interaction between the human self and the world “acting-intuition” (*kōiteki chokkan* 行為的直観). Acting-intuition is Nishida’s term for the dialectical interactivity between human self and world, whereby we see things by working upon them, and as we work upon our environment our self-awareness is in turn shaped. Thus, in shaping the world, we in turn are shaped by it in the world’s self-formation. The world is the place (*basho*) that forms itself, and we are involved in that formation of the world. Acting-intuition is our mode of partaking in that pla-

cial dialectic (*bashoteki beshōhō* 場所的弁証法) as elements implaced in the self-forming world.

So the concrete standpoint of our existential implacement, which is prior to the bifurcation between subject-object, becomes explicated in terms of our embodied implacement in the world of dialectical interactivity. For this reason Nishida states in his afterword to the present essay (added in its second publication in *Thinking and Experience, Continued*) that what he negatively conceived here in terms of the place of nothing (*mu no basho*) is what he later comes to express in more positive terms as the standpoint of acting-intuition (*kōiteki chokkan*) or historical actuality (*rekishiteki genjitsu* 歴史的現実). And *The System of Universals in Self-Awareness* (*Ippansha no jikakuteki taikai* 一般者の自覚的体系), to which he refers the reader as providing the background to the present essay, is an important work from 1930 that develops the implications of his early *basho* theory. We thus obtain in the present work an important clue as to the connection between Nishida's late-1920s *basho* theory and his later, 1930s theory of the world of interactivity. Looking further into the 1940s (especially in his final essay of 1945, "The Logic of Place and the Religious Worldview" [*Bashoteki ronri to shūkyōteki sekaikan* 場所的論理と宗教の世界観]), the language of "place" (*basho*) again becomes prevalent in Nishida's final essays, but now explicitly connected to the world in its cosmic sense and with the religious motifs of God or the absolute (*zettai* 絶対).

In light of these later developments in Nishida's philosophy, the present essay is invaluable in showing the original epistemological motivations behind Nishida's formulation of the theory of *basho*, namely his project to overcome the dualism he encountered in Kantian epistemology and also the objectification of consciousness he found in Husserl's phenomenology. To the Nishida student, a familiarity with these beginnings of "Nishida philosophy" from this period (late 1920s) is indispensable for obtaining a clear sense of the entire trajectory of his thought. Unfortunately English translations of major works from this period are lacking. The English volumes of Nishida's *Inquiry into the Good, Art and Morality*, and *Intuition and Reflection* all belong to periods that fall prior to the development of what became "Nishida philosophy."<sup>4</sup> And the volumes *Fundamental Problems of Philosophy* and *Last Writings* (which contains the above-mentioned 1945 essay), while belonging to "Nishida philosophy," fall after its formative period.<sup>5</sup> It is thus my hope that this translation will help the English reader in his/her attempt to comprehend Nishida's philosophy in general, and his philosophy of place in particular, as well as to provide a foundation for tackling the "*Basho*" essay.

The question still remains, however, as to why one ought to study Nishida's philosophy in the first place. What does Nishida and his philosophy of place have to offer the contemporary philosopher attempting to comprehend the world and our place within it? Nishida's thinking directs our attention to the dynamism in our concrete experience of the world that escapes reduction and cannot be objectified, substantialized, or made into a grammatical subject. Nishida's philosophy of place suggests some answers to the quandaries that the history of philosophy have left

unanswered, and will certainly contribute to our thinking in regard to these issues, both epistemological and metaphysical, such as the subject-object split or the one-many relation. Especially in recent decades some Continental philosophers—Edward Casey being one notable example—have started to take note of the ontological and/or epistemological significance of “place” in its various senses. Nishida’s work on *basho*, by contributing a perspective that is well grounded in *both* Western philosophy and the Eastern traditions, has much to offer these developments in Western philosophy.

A related issue is that of the contemporary globalization of the world. Readers of *Philosophy East and West* are no doubt in tune with the necessity of cross-cultural dialogue in contemporary philosophy. Living at a time and place that saw rapid change and the incorporation of diverse and foreign modes of human existence—from the late 1800s to the first half of the 1900s in Japan—Nishida’s sagacity could not ignore the world context. This is reflected in his philosophy of place in its various incarnations, which bring Eastern insights, especially of Mahāyāna thought, into dialogue with Western philosophy. Nishida’s philosophy of *basho* thus provides a model for a sophisticated global philosophy spanning East and West. And especially when we are faced with an increasing sense of disorientation, uprootedness, homelessness, and displacement—of self or of others—due to the confusing turmoil of the shrinking of the globe, whereby the far is brought near yet the near remains far, Nishida’s thinking about place and implacement seems pertinent.

# The Unsolved Issue of Consciousness by Nishida Kitarō

I

Toward the end of *Phaedo* Plato conceives the nature of things as depending upon their *participation* in the *ideas*.<sup>6</sup> He thinks that the beautiful is beautiful, the large is large, the small is small, et cetera, by means of participation in the *idea* of beauty, the *idea* of largeness, the *idea* of smallness, et cetera. He takes the *ideas* that he conceived toward the beginning of the dialogue as the ground of cognition to be the cause of the nature of things. But how can the *ideas* join individual things when they remain eternally unchanged without any association with the opposing nature? Plato discussed the issue of participation in the *ideas* in, for example, *Parmenides* and *The Sophist*. Even if he did clarify the meaning of participation in the *ideas*, however, the clarification pertains only to the relationship between things and *ideas* in the objective world. Moreover, even the significance of the mind (*psychē*) that Plato discusses in the *Philebus* or the *Timaeus* never extends beyond an ordering principle (*ordnendes Prinzip*). In the *Timaeus* Plato regarded the *ὑποδοχή* (*hypodochē*)<sup>7</sup> to be the receptacle of the *ideas*. But this was nothing but a material principle called space. To *be* objectively here does not immediately mean to be conscious of that fact. This distinction has not yet been discussed with adequate awareness. I think that we can find a clue to the meaning of consciousness in the *Theaetetus*, where Plato compares the mind to a piece of wax.<sup>8</sup> In *De Anima* 2.12 Aristotle clarifies this idea to state the following:

In regard to all sense generally we must understand that sense is that which is receptive of sensible forms apart from their matter, as wax receives the imprint of the signet-ring apart from the iron or gold of which it is made: it takes the imprint which is of gold or bronze, but not *qua* gold or bronze. (Hick's translation)<sup>9</sup>

Aristotle thus takes the mind in regard to its sensory consciousness as that which receives, *δεκτικόν*. Nevertheless, in *De Anima* 3.4 he further extends this idea to reason. He states therein that if thinking and perception are alike this part of the mind must also be that which receives forms. And it must be not just what receives sensory forms as in sensation, not mere potentiality, but the receptacle of intellectual forms. He states that it is natural to think of the mind as a place for the *ideas*. But what Aristotle calls reason is still a potentiality, not simply a place. He writes: ". . . at this stage intellect (*νοῦς*) is capable of thinking itself."<sup>10</sup> Reason is that which thinks its own content; it is nothing but pure form and act. But in the end he failed to develop a way of thinking that, inferring from Plato's idea of the receptacle or place, would discover therein the deep essence of consciousness. The One in Plotinus is conceived as what transcends *nous* and furthermore envelopes it within.<sup>11</sup> And yet it still tends in the direction of the father in Plato's *Timaeus* and not in the direction of the mother.<sup>12</sup> Pure matter, without form, is conceived simply as that which mirrors, as [in itself] nothing. Greek philosophy failed to discover the deep and true significance of nothing.



Modern epistemology takes its premise from the opposition between knower and known. For epistemology this is inevitable. Epistemology is thus a discourse on the constitution of the cognitive object and a clarification of the objectivity of knowledge. To clarify the constitution of the cognitive object, however, is not immediately to clarify what it means to know. The issue of knowing qua consciousness has not yet been deeply reflected upon. When we oppose the knower and the known and conceive the relationship of knowing between them, we conceive of knowing as a kind of act, as either active or receptive. Even the starting point of Kant's Transcendental Aesthetic fails to avoid this way of thinking. But needless to say, an act is not immediately consciousness. As he clarified the meaning of critique by progressing to the Transcendental Logic, Kant conceived that "Wir erkennen den Gegenstand, wenn wir in dem Mannigfaltigen der Anschauung synthetische Einheit bewirkt haben,"<sup>13</sup> and that cognition involves the synthetic unity of transcendental apperception. Accordingly he may have purified his idea of the so-called act. Consciousness in general must be a pure epistemological subject by completely escaping the significance of an act. But in what sense can consciousness in general then maintain the significance of consciousness? To unite by means of means of forms of cognition is not immediately to be conscious. Knowing qua consciousness does not come out of this. When we conceive the unification of the epistemological content by assuming intuition or representation from the very beginning, we fail to notice their gap. And yet we fail to escape the gap that thoroughly prevents us from thinking of the two as immediately one. Needless to say, Kant could not have discovered the meaning of being conscious in the active-receptive relationship when he considered the mind as receptive at the beginning of the Transcendental Aesthetic. Yet the meaning of receptivity also contains the sense of receiving the forms. Where he conceives of thought as active in the Transcendental Logic, just as thought qua constitutive act loses the sense of reception, it becomes even more difficult to connect being conscious. But on the other hand, from one direction, a clear sense of consciousness is harbored therein for we can conceive what is without form as a pure form completely transcending any sense of being. And yet, from another direction, to the degree that form is transcendent, we can also think of the disappearance of any sense of consciousness. As a place for the *ideas*, thought possesses the meaning of consciousness. But when we think of it as active, as in Aristotle, it loses the sense of consciousness. Even if we view the matter strictly according to critique by completely eliminating any sense of an act that Kant calls the mind's spontaneity (*Spontaneität*), to the extent that the cognitive object is transcendent the sense of consciousness is moderated and in regard to the transcendent object one must ultimately step beyond consciousness. We conceive of consciousness in general at the extremity of the consciousness that tends toward that transcendent object. But at the point where we can regard consciousness as constituting the oppositional object from the oppositionless object, as Lask states,<sup>14</sup> consciousness in general becomes another kind of act that forms an opposition to the transcendent object. Their relationship inevitably becomes yet another relationship

of objects. Of course this would not be an oppositional relationship between objects on the same level. But even the oppositional object cannot escape being one kind of object of reflection.

What sort of thing is an epistemological subject that never becomes an object? If we eliminate it as inconceivable, only levels of objects remain from which consciousness could never emerge. Therein we would see nothing but the development of mere *logos*. On the other hand if we conceive of a constitutor that stands opposed to the transcendent object, it would be one kind of being, failing to escape the relationship of an act between the two. And the knower is not something active [*hatara-kumono*]. Kantian philosophy, by starting from a standpoint that regards knowing as one kind of act, mutually opposing the epistemological subject and object, thoroughly fails to escape the ingrained habit of that idea.<sup>15</sup> No matter how far back we conceive that epistemological subject to be in the recess of reflection, when we conceive it as standing opposed to the object it becomes nothing but something thought, a remnant of being. Thoroughly casting this off, we cannot but notice further endless levels of objects. The contemporary Kantian school takes experience as prior to cognition. But as soon as we speak of experience it cannot avoid being colored by subjectivity in some sense. Moreover, the consciousness of experience is not what constitutes [it]. If we are to speak of experience as prior to the subject-object split, we may call it experience or *logos* or even speak of Schelling's *Identität*.<sup>16</sup> But there is no particular necessity to girdle this subjective coloring by taking it as experience.

Because Kantian philosophy begins with the premise that there is knowledge and takes as its issue the problem of how its objectivity is possible, it naturally does not take consciousness qua knowledge to be the issue. Even if, as Cohen does, we regard consciousness as a category by taking it as an aspect of possibility,<sup>17</sup> needless to say, this is not equivalent to taking consciousness itself as an issue. And even if we illuminate the epistemology of contemporary psychology, I think that there is still a need to clarify the standpoint of being conscious of consciousness. Amongst contemporary philosophy it is Husserl's phenomenology—as opposed to Kantian philosophy—that takes consciousness as an issue. Husserl's idea of consciousness is built upon Brentano, and Brentano's idea can be traced, through the medieval Scholastic school, to Aristotle's idea of that which receives the forms. But even Husserl's phenomenology, while illuminating the structure of the consciousness that one is conscious *of*, does not take up as an issue the essence of the consciousness that is *conscious* of consciousness.<sup>18</sup>

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In any case I believe that philosophy hitherto has lacked deep reflection concerning consciousness. It seems to me therefore that the root of the irresolvable problems of both metaphysics and epistemology lies therein. When we ordinarily speak of consciousness, we are thinking of a consciousness that we are conscious *of*, an activity that bears meanings. But that act has already been objectified, it is not the consciousness that is being conscious, not the true consciousness itself. On the other hand one

might say that the consciousness that is conscious is something inconceivable. But even such a person must be aware of the fact that the consciousness that one is conscious *of* and the consciousness *that is* conscious are distinct. Only thus can one say that it cannot be conceived. If one says that in distinguishing the two we cannot conceive their oneness, one needs to establish what it is that is inconceivable. It is not just by negating what one is conscious of that one thinks the inconceivability of the consciousness that is conscious. In a certain sense we are immediately familiar with it more than anything else. And yet this is not to say that we know it but fail to depict it conceptually because it is immediate in the sense of so-called sensation. At this point I do not intend to enter into this huge issue. But I would like still to indicate in what direction we ought to pursue it.

In regarding the consciousness of judgment, I would like to look at the relationship between consciousness and the logical. We think of judgment as involving the connection between a meaning and an act. But in what way does knowing derive from their connection? The knower is not the so-called transcendent object or value; in some sense it must be that which is at-work [*hataraku*]. But in regard to mere acts that we can conceive in terms of physics, we cannot speak of their connection to meaning let alone designate them as knowing. It is at this point that we can think of what connects the two, that is, an act that bears meaning. But even that would be something known and not the knower. How does the actor [*sayōsurumono*] become the knower? We see this by deeply reflecting upon the root of the act.

When we think of that which is at-work there must be at its root a universal that determines it. By its means one act becomes distinguished from other acts. That which is at-work must be conceived in accordance with time. But a universal must be at the root of time as well. When there is a gap between universal and particular, that is, when the universal is not itself immediately the principle of particularization, we think of the universal as the substance and the particular as the quality. But when the universal directly plays the role of a principle of particularization, it becomes what is at-work, and the transcendent becomes the immanent. (I developed this view in my essay "The Working" [*Hatarakumono*].) What we think of, and call, the world of nature is also a concrete universal, and it is the self-determination of that universal that we conceive to be at-work. If we are accordingly to think of what is at-work, consciousness would be that which further envelopes that universal, that is, the place [*basho*] wherein that universal is implaced. To the degree that we can conceive of the universal as a single synthetic universal that determines itself by an internal connection between the universal and the particular, it is merely what is at-work. But when that universal is further determined by being implaced in a place, it becomes consciousness. When the universal is not limited to enveloping particulars within itself as its own determination, but becomes [regarded as] a place wherein it is further implaced and determined in its background, it becomes consciousness.

One may say that to conceive what envelopes an act from behind and to conceive a place beyond the concrete universal wherein that place is implaced is logically impossible. Aristotle, however, once defined substance (*οὐσία*) as that which becomes the grammatical subject of judgment but not the predicate.<sup>19</sup> As a definition

of substance I find this sufficient. When we speak of reality today we think of what had been constituted by means of the categories of time, space, and causality. But to consider such a thing as “a being,” the definition above must be applicable. To put this differently, however, can we not conceive of *what is* in a still deeper sense by putting this in reverse as that which becomes the predicate but not the grammatical subject? Aristotle sought the transcendent basis of judgment merely in the direction of the grammatical subject. The transcendent that truly founds judgment, however, is not in the direction of the grammatical subject but instead in the direction of the predicate. As Bosanquet put it, when we say that “this desk is made of oak,” what is truly the grammatical subject is not “this desk” but *reality*.<sup>20</sup> It is the synthetic whole that really becomes Aristotle’s substance (*ὑποκείμενον*). To the extent that we must conceive of something transcendent in that sense as the basis of judgment, there must be a place wherein it is implaced.

As we conceive the predicate to be completely transcendent in the above sense, it must be something that cannot be stated to be a being in the sense of a grammatical subject. As opposed to a being qua grammatical subject, it must be completely nothing. Moreover, being in terms of the grammatical subject is such by means of it and is implaced in it. Speaking of what *is* in the direction of the grammatical subject, the grammatical subject is individual to the extent that the predicate becomes transcendent and becomes nothing. To the extent that the universal becomes universal, the particular becomes particular. And when the predicate, that is, place, becomes absolutely nothing, the grammatical subject, that is, “the implaced,” becomes what is known. In this sense when we can think of the existent as implaced in the place of nothing, we see what is at-work as an object. This is analogous to the establishment of force from the relationship between space and “the implaced.” To the degree that the place of nothing is determined as a determinate predicate plane, we see, along with the determined consciousness, what is at-work in the direction of the grammatical subject. The consciousness that we are conscious of is the place of nothing that has been determined. The place of nothing that has been determined is still a kind of being. The nothing that opposes being cannot avoid being a species of being as well. Insofar as it is determined as a place of oppositional nothing,<sup>21</sup> we see the consciousness that we are conscious *of*. And we can say that as one kind of being, this oppositional nothing is also implaced in true nothing, that is, absolute nothing. The consciousness that is conscious is thus the place of absolute nothing. Everything implaced in it is thus an intuition of the self. Although I cannot here enter into a detailed discussion about this, we can think of the various meanings or acts that bear meaning on the basis of the relationship between the place of oppositional nothing and what is implaced in the place of absolute nothing. Meaning and act can be connected on the basis of that relationship.

#### IV

If we conceive consciousness in the way elaborated above we may be able to view the traditional problems of philosophy in a new light. Kantian philosophy, by starting

from the subject-object opposition, arrives at an untraversable precipice separating consciousness and the transcendent object. As Lask believed, the oppositionless object must be completely beyond consciousness.<sup>22</sup> But in what manner would that transcendent object, as an object of cognition, come to relate to our consciousness? By conceiving consciousness as a place of nothing, that which is implaced in it becomes an oppositionless object at the point where that place becomes absolutely nothing. On the other hand insofar as the place is determined as an oppositional nothing,<sup>23</sup> that nothing remains a kind of being. And we can thus conceive of what is implaced in it, from its relationship to that place, as an oppositional object.<sup>24</sup> Kantian philosophy, failing to provide consciousness with any logical sense of its independence, is incapable of clarifying the ground for the establishment of the world of cultural phenomena. In order to erect the objectivity of the world of cultural phenomena, we need to add to the constitution of constitutive categories that of reflective categories. And for this we need first to clarify how the world of objectivity built upon the constitution of reflective categories can be possible. I believe that what I call the place of nothing provides that clarification. Even Husserl's phenomenology does not escape the conception of the opposition between consciousness and object at its very starting point; it fails to conceive the true standpoint of consciousness. Even what he calls pure consciousness is nothing but consciousness conceived, a place of nothing that has been determined.<sup>25</sup>

In Greek philosophy, the Platonist school arrived at the idea of "the place of *ideas*."<sup>26</sup> But having conceived the forms as through and through *being*, Greek philosophy ultimately failed to render any logical independence to place. It conceived place as matter vis-à-vis the forms and as nothing vis-à-vis being.<sup>27</sup> Even the One of Plotinus was nothing but what transcends in the direction of the *ideas*, and the issue of matter remained unsolved. As I mentioned above I think instead that by admitting, in the direction of matter, being in a different sense from formal being—that is, the objectivity of place—we can take a distinct perspective to the issue of form and matter.<sup>28</sup> The true One must be the place of absolute nothing, something that absolutely cannot be determined as being. Every being would have to be implaced in it and seen by means of it. Not only being but the nothing that opposes being must be implaced in it. Metaphysics hitherto has recognized being in the direction of the grammatical subject. Even after Kant it has not cast this off. I think that we may find the key to opening a different sort of metaphysics by admitting something transcendent in the direction of the predicate. It would be something that we would have to recognize thus as the root of epistemology.

(Manuscript from July 1926)

Afterword.<sup>29</sup> This essay is from the period when I first entered into the idea of "place" [*basho*]. What I conceived here in negative terms as the place of absolute nothing is what I now call in positive terms the standpoint of acting-intuition<sup>30</sup> or the standpoint of historical actuality.<sup>31</sup> As a background to this essay, please refer to my *System of Universals in Self-Awareness* [*Ippansha no jikakuteki taikēi*].<sup>32</sup>

## Notes

- 1 – See *Nishida Kitarō zenshū* (Collected works of Nishida Kitarō), vol. 7 (Tokyo: Iwanami, 2003), p. 213.
- 2 – *Place and Dialectic: Two Essays* by Nishida Kitarō, trans. John W. M. Krummel and Shigenori Nagatomo (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).
- 3 – Bernard Bosanquet, *The Essentials of Logic: Being Ten Lectures on Judgment and Inference* (London: Macmillan, 1903 [1897]), p. 41.
- 4 – Nishida Kitarō, *Art and Morality*, trans. David A. Dilworth and Valdo Viglielmo (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1973); *Intuition and Reflection in Self-Consciousness*, trans. Valdo Viglielmo, with Takeuchi Yoshinori and Joseph S. O'Leary (New York: State University of New York Press, 1987); and *An Inquiry into the Good*, trans. Masao Abe and Christopher Ives, introd. Masao Abe (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).
- 5 – Nishida Kitarō, *Fundamental Problems of Philosophy: The World of Action and the Dialectical World*, trans. with introd. David A. Dilworth (Tokyo: Sophia University, 1970), and *Last Writings: Nothingness and the Religious Worldview*, trans. with introd. David A. Dilworth (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1987). There are also translations in English of various works that appear in journals and anthologies.
- 6 – Plato *Phaedo* 100c. Here the discussion is specifically about the relationship between what is beautiful and beauty itself. This note and all that follow are by this translator.
- 7 – “. . . that which receives, the place of reception” (Plato *Timaeus* 49a, 51a).
- 8 – Plato *Theaetetus* 191c–d.
- 9 – Aristotle *De Anima* 424a17–21. The original has the quotation in English from R. D. Hick's translation.
- 10 – Aristotle *De Anima* 429b9.
- 11 – Plotinus *Enneads* 6.9.2–3. “The One” has also been translated as “the unity.”
- 12 – Nishida is here referring to Plato's analogy that compares the receptacle wherein things come to be with the mother and the *idea* after which things are modeled with the father. See Plato *Timaeus* 50d.
- 13 – “We cognize the object when we have produced synthetic unity in the manifold of intuition” (Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* [Critique of Pure Reason] A105).
- 14 – The reference is to Emil Lask's philosophy. Oppositional objects (*tairitsuteki taishō* 対立の対象) are objects constituted in opposition to each other within a specific domain, whether it be the natural world of natural objects or the con-

ceptual category of color with various colors implaced therein. On the other hand an oppositionless (or unopposed) object (*gegenatzloser Gegenstand*) (*tairitsunaki taishō* 対立なき対象) would be the aspect of the object transcendent to cognition or judgment but given to experience in its complete unity (of form and matter, i.e., meaningfulness and being). In its bare givenness its meaning is experienced prior to its dichotomization by judgment (affirming or negating) as true or false, and prior to its analysis into the grammatical moments of subject and predicate or the metaphysical elements of matter and form. See Emil Lask, *Die Lehre vom Urteil* (Tübingen: Verlag von J.C.B. Mohr/Paul Siebeck, 1912) pp. 136, 157 ff., 171.

- 15 – In his *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, Kant says the following: “Our cognition springs from two fundamental sources of the mind. The first is that which receives representations (the receptivity of impressions). The second is the power to cognize objects by means of these representations (the spontaneity of concepts). By means of the former objects are given to us, and by means of the latter objects are thought in their relationship to those representations (as mere determinations of the mind)” (A50/B74).
- 16 – See Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling, *Darstellung meines Systems der Philosophie* §§ 4–20, in Schelling, *Sämmtliche Werke* (Stuttgart and Augsburg: J. G. Cotta, 1856–1861), pp. 116–123.
- 17 – “Die Möglichkeit stellt sich als der Ort dar, der das Bewußtsein als Kategorie entstehen läßt” (Possibility presents itself as a place that allows consciousness to emerge as a category) (Hermann Cohen, *Logik der reinen Erkenntnis* [Berlin: Bruno Cassirer Verlag, 1922], p. 420).
- 18 – It is unfortunate that in English there is no verbal equivalent of “consciousness” as in Japanese. In the text, Nishida uses the word as *both* a noun (*ishiki* 意識), to designate consciousness either as object or as subject, *and* a verb (*ishikisuru* 意識する), to designate consciousness as act.
- 19 – Aristotle defines substance as “the substratum [or grammatical subject] of which everything else is predicated, while itself not predicated of anything else” (*Metaphysics* 1028b36–37). While other things can be taken as its predicate, it itself can never be made into a predicate of anything else.
- 20 – “[T]he subject will always be Reality in one form, and the predicate Reality in another form. . . . The real subject in Judgment is always Reality in some particular datum or qualification, and the tendency of Judgment is always to be a definition of Reality” (Bernard Bosanquet, *The Essentials of Logic*, p. 41).
- 21 – By “oppositional nothing” (*tairitsuteki mu* 対立的無) Nishida means “nothing” that is relative to being as nonbeing. And by this he means consciousness determined as the epistemological subject relating to its object (as being).
- 22 – See note 14 on Lask’s concept of the oppositionless object.

- 23 – That is, as nonbeing determined in opposition to being, or as the epistemological subject relating to its object. On the concept of oppositional nothing, see note 21.
- 24 – *Tairitsuteki taishō* 対立の対象.
- 25 – Nishida’s point is that while objectifying consciousness, phenomenology fails to pay attention to the very consciousness that *is conscious of* that consciousness. It is consciousness as such that Nishida seeks to think through in terms of a place that is in itself nothing.
- 26 – See Plato *Timaeus* 52a. Nishida has in mind here Plato’s notion of *chōra* χώρα, which he touched upon above as the receptacle of the *ideas*.
- 27 – More specifically it was Aristotle who (mis-)interpreted, or developed, Plato’s *chōra* to mean “matter” (*hyle* ὕλη).
- 28 – In other words, Nishida wants to view the epistemological issue of subject-object in terms of the relationship between place qua nothing and implaced qua being, whereby the grammatical subject qua being is that which has been determined within an environment of determining factors, that is, place. This is also what Nishida has in mind when speaking above and in the following of the transcendent predicate.
- 29 – This postscript was inserted at the end of the essay when it was included in his 1937 book collection of essays *Zoku shisaku to taiken* (Thinking and experience, continued).
- 30 – *Kōiteki chokkan* 行為的直観.
- 31 – *Rekishiteki genjitsu* 歴史的現実.
- 32 – 一般者の自覚的体系.