Aristotle and the Epistemology of Nishida Kitarō (1924–1928)

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A careful look through the *Complete Works* of Nishida Kitarō (1870-1945) shows an extended dialogue with Aristotle. Although Aristotle was not foundational for Nishida's thought, his ideas had an important role to play in helping Nishida to clarify his thinking on ethics and politics.

Between 1914 and 1924 Nishida carried on a dialogue with Bergson, the neo-Kantians, and Husserl's phenomenology (Jacinto 2005), but there is no marked interest in Aristotle's thought and only scant references to his views on logic, movement, and duration. From 1924 on Nishida begins to cite Aristotle to point out the positive and negative side of Greek thought and to enter into a dialogue with the Western philosophical tradition. He also took up some of the works of Aristotle (which he read in translation) in his lectures at Kyoto University.

By and large Nishida accepted the standard interpretation of Aristotle found in Lotze and others. Space prohibits pursuing the matter any further here. We will also forego listing all of Nishida's allusions to Aristotle[1]

1. Kayano and Ōhashi (1987) list close to a hundred places in the *Complete Works* where Nishida mentions Aristotle by name. The list does not include references to

in order to focus on the epistemological aspect of Nishida's dialogue with Aristotle at the time. This dialogue was a stimulus to the view of consciousness as *basho*, to his concept of the *basho* of nothingness and its importance for the subject-object relationship, and finally, to his theory of knowledge.

With all of this in mind, I will limit myself to two of Nishida's works. First, I will examine *From the Acting to the Seeing* (1927), in which we can see the great change that took place in Nishida's thinking with the introduction of idea of *basho* and the *basho* of nothingness. Next I will turn to three aspects of conceptual knowledge found in *The Self-Perceiving System of Universals* (1929).

In an earlier book, *Tradition and the Historical World in Nishida's Philosophy* (JACINTO 2004), I traced the development of the idea of the *basho* of absolute nothingness as a historical world. Here I will focus on the place of Aristotle's texts in Nishida's writings, in particular, on twenty texts where Aristotle is cited in connection with Nishida's epistemological views.

Between September and October 1924, Nishida wrote an essay entitled "Inner Intellectual Apperception" (NKZ 4: 76–134), in which he carried his dialogue with Aristotle beyond his earlier ethical concerns. We should also remember that it was in June of 1926 that Nishida published his article "*Basho*" (4: 208–89), marking an important new turn in his thought. This article was included in *From the Acting to the Seeing*, a book that took up the relationship between intuition and will (the years 1912–1923 constituting Nishida's voluntaristic period) as an epistemological problem and translated it into the relationship between intuition and the knowing subject.

Nishida takes as his starting point the intuition that lies at the basis of the will (4: 3), the intuition of the immediately given. At the time he considered the immediately given as something creative and active. In the attempt to clarify the idea that "at the basis of the active is that which sees," the active becomes "the form of the self-perception of the will" (4: 4), and the immediately given is interpreted as an inner intellectual

Aristotle's technical terms. Most of the references in this paper come from my own personal database of Nishida's key terms.

apperception of the will. This is the theme that occasions his new dialogue with Aristotle, which may be divided into five themes: intuition, knowing subjectivity, the *basho* or *topos* of nothingness, knowledge in *basho*, and conceptual knowledge.

Intuition

The Immediately Given and Internal Self-Perception

First, Nishida relates the active (that is to say, that which acts) to the immediately given. The active refers to the form of the will's self-perception, while the immediately given represents the content in which it is expressed. In October 1925, Nishida sought to clarify this relationship by comparing it to the Aristotelian substratum as a "connective unity" in which the logical subject, metaphysical substance, and the epistemological subject are united. For Aristotle, the substratum is a subject that does not become a predicate. Nishida turned this inside out by looking at things from the viewpoint of that which acts, that is, a predicate that does not become a subject. This subject is a transcendental predicate, a universal which, upon becoming a subject, is transformed into consciousness. Intuition becomes the basis for this transformation whose occurrence implies (1) that "everything that is, and every active [thing, is seen as] the shadow of that which, as nothingness, reflects itself within itself"; and (2) that "in the depths of everything [is to be found] that which sees without a seer" (NKZ 4: 5–6).

The Substratum: The Uniting Point of Subject, Substance, and Knowing Subjectivity

Nishida begins by posing a basic problem: What kind of relationship exists among the logical subject, metaphysical substance, and knowing subjectivity?

As noted in his "Introduction" to *From the Acting to the Seeing*, Nishida turned first to Aristotle. In chapter 2 of the 7th book of the *Metaphysics*, Nishida saw Aristotle's view of reality covered as including four different meanings of "being" from which to choose: being as essence (*ousia*), being as the universal, being as the *genus*, and being as the substratum

(*hypokeímenon*).[2] Nishida chose the last: "The true concept of reality is the *substratum*." Aristotle defined the substratum as "that of which anything is predicated, while it itself is not predicated of anything else" (NKZ 4: 95),[3] and this led Nishida to ask about that which is predicated in judgement without itself ever becoming a predicate of a judgement. One might think that it is the universal, but "that which is universal can in some sense be predicated of something else." For this reason Nishida opted for the individual, because "the individual, which is unique, can only become its own predicate in the form of a judgement of self-identity" (4: 94–5). Thus "the true meaning of immediate perception is… not simply to submerge the self but to discover the self within something objective," and in this way grasp the notion of the "individual" (4: 95–6). Through intuition one comes to the concept of the "thing": the form of the "thing" is perceived, and taking that objective unity as a logical subject, diverse attributes are predicated of it. Intuition is the keystone to understanding the individual.

Intuition: The Maximum Limit of Will

Intuition is a pure activity with three characteristics: (1) it is a union of subject and object; (2) it is "to see that which, being eternal, is unchanging" (4: 45); and (3) it is a self-development of the spiritual.

First of all, this means that the transformation of the predicate into a subject is accomplished in intuition.

Secondly, it means that in intuition we perceive the goal towards which everything is oriented. In this sense, it sees the good that is eternal and unchanging, which makes it comparable to Plotinus's "One." Intuition is seeing the absolute fullness which, as final cause, includes the efficient cause, and to that extent resembles Aristotle's prime mover. Like the prime mover, "it is the union of that which advances and returns to the origin: it is the union of the dynamic and the static" (4: 46).

This brings us to the third characteristic of intuition: it is a self-unfold-

2. See ARISTOTLE 1978B, Book VII.3, 33–5. Note that Aristotle uses the word "substance," not "reality," and that Nishida refers to chapter 2 instead of chapter 3.

3. See ARISTOTLE 1978B, Book VII.3, 1028B, 35: "the substratum is that of which everything is predicated, while it is itself not predicated of anything else."

ing of the spirit in the sense that the circle of the spirit, which begins and ends in the will, is intuition. This is why Nishida referred to intuition as the maximum limit of will (4: 44).

Will Becomes Intuition

In intuition, the present becomes the "clearest point of lived experience" and thus "the center of all concrete knowledge." It is in the present that all intentional lived experience comes to fullness. In this sense, "the present holds an infinite content" that expression can never exhaust. It is not through the categories of thought that we reach the knowledge of the concrete (4: 92.). Rather, knowledge is the self-expression of the content of the present, and this content is an "objective unity." In other words, it is "something objectively unmoving."

In the self-expression of the content of the present, the knowing subjectivity and the logical subject of judgement are still one. But when we refer to something concrete, the present unfolds and "its content becomes infinite and, at the same time, an unreachable limit" (4: 93). Hence, this unfolding means that

> the simpler the content of [objective] unity, [the more] we can think that the present is something that must be reached; and the more its content becomes infinitely rich, [the more] we can think that the present is unreachable. (4: 94)

This is why, when we ask, as did Aristotle: *tì ēn einai*, What is being?, we can answer that each thing is a self-expressive content of the present.[4] But the present is not an independent element but always belongs to a saccadic continuity of presents, in each of which the self-perception of the will, as the creative dimension to activity, brings about the transformation of will into intuition. This results in a multiplicity of intuitions whose unity Nishida found in the "One" of Plotinus: "the 'One' must be an intuition of intuitions" (4: 47).

4. Literally the question is: "What was being?" For Aristotle this is a question "that was raised of old and is raised now and always" (1978b, 1028b, 3–4). Nishida takes the citation from Hermann Lotze, who states that there is a second question: "*tì estai einai*" (What will being be?), not mentioned by Aristotle (Lotze 1883, 66).

Intuition as Apperception of the Expressiveness of Things

For Aristotle, the substratum is "a subject that does not become a predicate." It is a "unity of infinite predicates, …a unity of infinite judgements" (4: 97). This unity of infinite judgments never reaches intuition, because intuition is like an outer limit intended by the activity of judgement but never reached by it. Intuition is beyond judgement and at the same time is the basis for the union of judgements. Immediate perception lies at the ground of a continuous activity that "may never in any case become a predicate" (4: 98).

After presenting his concept of true reality and its perception as a continuous activity, the next question for Nishida was, "What relation is there between judgement and immediate perception?" (4: 98.). The main problem here is to explain how intuition can also lie at the basis of every judgement. Nishida argued that the function of intuition in abstraction is to single out one predicate from among the many attributable to a particular concrete thing. Intuition transcends judgement; it is an apperception of the expressiveness of things. According to Nishida, objective reality is expressive, concrete things are expressive, and the self, too, is expressive, since "through expressive activity we become separate from things and see that which is ideal." In the judgment of identity "immediate perception and thinking become united."

This was part of the answer. But intuition still had to be related to "sensorial substance, *sensible substance*, changes" (4: 99). All things move from potency into act, from the possible to the actual. As Nishida read Aristotle, "in order to say that a thing changes, there must be something that changes" (4: 143), and that which changes is matter, which is capable of taking on opposite conditions (4: 99). According to Aristotle, "that which changes moves into its opposite" (4: 143; ARISTOTLE 1978D, Book V.225A, 12–15). Nishida accepted this and went on to claim that origination and decay are to be seen in the movement towards affirmation or negation (4: 190–1). That which is capable of change must be something in which matter and form are united (4: 100). This is why Nishida claimed that

> in his book on the *Categories*, Aristotle says that primary substance does not become a predicate of something else and is not in anything

> else. What in this sense is truly to be called substance must be something that cannot be thought of. That which we can think must, at the very least, be something like a secondary substance."[5]

In intuition, "the universal that becomes its own predicate is transformed into its own substance." The result is that "judgement is constituted through such a universal, and this very universal must be the subject of judgement" (4: 101). Nishida found this solution convincing.

Knowing subjectivity

The Knowing Subject is the Individual

The second aspect of our initial problem is that of the knowing subject. Knowing subjectivity has four basic characteristics:

1. "it is understood through itself" (4: 108) because "in the present, we start out from self-reflection";
2. "it can never be separate from the meaning of being" and the predicate "to be" can always be added to it;
3. it is a subjectivity that, no matter what the conditions, "can never become an objectivity"; and
4. it "unifies given matter, …it constructs the world of reality [and] gives it an experiential content." This is why we perceive the real world "as a construction of the given and, even more so, as its explanation" (4: 106).

Being becomes visible when the self is submerged and exhausted, "wherever subject and object become one" (4: 107). But there is a distinction here between "being" as a copula and "being" as an assertion of existence. Following Aristotle, Nishida argued that "the copula 'to be' depends on the 'being' of existence… as Aristotle says, the being of any other category depends on the being of the substance" (4: 108). This is why we can see "in the background of Kant's knowing subject… the Aris-

5. See Aristotle 1978a, 2a, 12–15: "Substance… is that which is neither predicable of a subject nor present in a subject. But in a secondary sense those things are called substances within which, as species, the primary substances are included."

totelian substratum which, being subject does not become a predicate" (4: 109). This subject is the individual as substance. With this step, Nishida's epistemological problem became an ontological one.

On the ontological front, Aristotle's substance is pure form without matter; that is to say, it is pure activity. At the same time, the opposition between form and matter, between act and potency, is seen as an "impulse of nature," a kind of natural *élan*. Nishida considered this view of substance close to Plato's *idea*, so that "the substance of truth is at the same time the substance of reality." This would make substance "the initial point of all production" (4: 109; cf. ARISTOTLE 1978B, Book VII.9.1034A, 30). If substance—which, as subject, does not become a predicate—is posited in the depths of reality, then "everything that is called [metaphysical] form must be true reality… [and] empirical reality is overlaid on ideal reality." The knowing subject that does not lose its integrating unity becomes "a unique substance as a form of pure forms" (4: 109–10). This was Nishida's explanation for Aristotle's claim that the individual *as substance* constitutes the knowing subject.

The Individual as Substance

Aristotle "thought of the individual as a substance." For Nishida, the individual was not necessarily a self but included everything with individuality. For Aristotle all things are made up of metaphysical matter and form, and "through matter, a thing becomes an individual, [it] becomes a reality." Matter particularizes form. This is why "that which *is properly* called [metaphysical] matter as opposed to form must be a principle of particularization." But this is a particular that cannot become a substratum. Here Nishida ran into one of the great paradoxes in Aristotelian philosophy: "the true substratum must be a rationalization of something irrational." On one hand, it is completely non-predicable and unknowable, and as such may be considered a nothingness; on the other, if it is to be considered knowable we must predicate something of this non-predicable, namely, its "being." And so, he says that, "the idea of the true individual, that is, [the idea] of substance, comes about when there is no other recourse than to consider as being what is otherwise nothingness." In an attempt to clarify this paradox, Nishida probed deeper into the relationship between matter and form.

First, he said, we need to consider that everything that belongs to matter in reality is none other than that which Aristotle calls "prime matter," that of which "all empirical content is negated." Furthermore, it is this aboriginal matter that in fact constitutes the subject of every judgement, that is to say, "the reality that can become a subject in every judgement of fact" (4: 111). This prime matter is what makes our empirical world a "real world," because, as Nishida recalls, for Aristotle an individual originates only from another individual, and every actual reality originates only from another actual reality (Aristotle 1978b, Book ix.8.1049b, 23–4). This is why "in the background of prime matter there must be a first mover as a form of forms" (4: 110–12).

Still, the questions remains, How do we reach the knowing subject by starting from something that as subject does not become a predicate? Nishida sought an answer in the concept of pure form. Aristotle's pure form, like Plato's "idea," is also pure activity. In Plotinus, it is as pure form that primary substance becomes pure activity (or an "idea" in the Platonic sense). Therefore, this form "must be universal and at the same time something that as a subject cannot be a predicate; it must be [as Hegel calls it] a concrete universal." Taking his inspiration from Bosanquet, Nishida took the concrete universal as something capable of being the subject of a judgement (4: 113–14). In this sense, his idea of the concrete universal was akin to Aristotle's secondary substance, which can become a predicate even though it is not itself a mere predicate on the grounds, as Aristotle affirms, that it can include its opposite. In other words

> We may say that in secondary substance the universal, as a subject, includes the particular: …[the universal] includes all forms within itself and constitutes all particular forms. However, the universal as a subject is not active, because, in an active substratum, …matter must include form: the particular must include the universal. (4: 112)

Thus for Nishida pure matter became a "subject that does not become a predicate." In contrast to Aristotle, Nishida considered the possibility that matter might be a description of nothingness, but the inert nature and irreducible potency of pure matter led him to reject the equation.

Nishida considered "time the category that transforms [metaphysical] substance into [metaphysical] form." This means that the subject that

does not become a predicate and "is rationalized through the category of time"—that is to say, the substratum—is a rationalization of the irrational. Matter transmuted into form becomes a non-active substratum "through which the reality of activity is actualized," and thus such matter as has been transmuted into form becomes "the substance of a substratum-less activity." This is why the substratum of pure activity must be contained within activity itself as a non-active substance (4: 122–3).

The knowing subject is "a unity of pure activities" that unites and particularizes them. The knowing ego is "a unity of active universals… [and] a point of union for that which acts." The unity of pure activity is sustained by the substratum within pure activity itself. Nishida compared this substratum to "something like an eye that sees" (4: 123). As noted above, Nishida held that when a judgement becomes its own subject, pure activity is constituted. In the case of the seeing eye, the visual activity itself would be pure activity. The substratum that Nishida took to be pure activity because it sees itself is the sort of substratum of which Aristotle said that "when white changes into black, there must be a substratum in its basis." It is a substratum that underlies change and, at the same time, one that allows for judgements. Just as for Aristotle, "what changes must consist of matter," so for Nishida, "when matter itself judges, it becomes active" (4: 124). It is not a question of defining matter as potency but of seeing it as *active* matter. From this viewpoint, reality itself may be said to be active.

To solve the problem of the knowing subject from the viewpoint of pure activity, then, the knowing subject must be considered an active subject within an active reality, a creative, individual, self-perceiving subject.

The Active Subject is the Substratum of Pure Activity

Self-perception is a pure activity that comes to light "when we consider that form in act precedes matter in potency." Self-perception is a thinker thinking itself. This hold as true for Nishida as it does for Aristotle's notion of *theoria*. In both we have to do with an actualization of the *noesis noeseos*. In the case of mental activity, form precedes matter. Matter is not merely passive towards form but is active and, as such, constitutes itself a kind of form. In the case of things that have been made, "latent form, that is to say, matter, would be the universal, and actual form, that is to say, the form

in act, would be the particular." Mental activity is something that "makes itself within itself," and to that extent, it is not a mere union of the knower and the known. Rather, "true self-perception is to know oneself within oneself"; it is a manifestation of the creative self, because "when it reflects itself within itself" the knower becomes the "substratum of pure activity." The self that sees itself is the unchanging and unmoving substratum through which "infinite activity without an agent" (4: 125–8) comes about. Its self-expression is judgement: "the knowing subject must be a substance that predicates something of itself" (4: 130–1) and in this regard is comparable to prime mover: "thinking becomes an eternal reality through its [activity of] thinking itself" (4: 172).

This standpoint allows us to see the relationship between judgement and substance, and from there to reach the idea of pure activity (4: 131).

The Active Subject and Noesis Noeseos

Returning to the discussion of the knowing subject, we may follow Nishida's account of the similarities and differences between Aristotle's *noesis noeseos* and Kant's transcendental apperception. The two agree in affirming that "at the basis of our empirical knowledge there must be a predicative universal of that which being subject does not become a predicate." Yet while Aristotle posited a confrontation between active thinking and that which is thought about, Kant argued that "what opposes thinking must already be included in pure transcendental apperception." In the case of transcendental apperception, time is the category through which the irrational is rationalized, resulting in the natural world. Transcendental apperception is the synthetic unity of understanding and immediate perception. This is why, when experience and concept unite in a substratum which as subject does not become a predicate, that substratum must be able to determine itself within itself. Carried to term, this way of thinking brings us to "that which thinks itself, [that is to say] the idea of the form of forms." At its limits, the union of experience and concept results in "a meaning similar to that which is reached [in the move] from the unity of the mutually different or [from the unity] of opposites to the unity of contradictories." All content, as concept, "belongs to reflective thinking" and the generic concept of experienced things is constituted through the representation of my

representations. In this way, the empirical concept becomes individualized and comes to be "the last specific difference of which it may be said that being a subject, it does not become a predicate" (4: 197). The representation of one's representations "turns the transcendent into the immanent.., [because] self-perception turns the transcendent into the immanent." The content of experience is irrational and, even though it cannot be thought, it can still be represented. It can be thought only to the extent that we are able to reflect on our representations. In this way we come to see that "in pure transcendental apperception the universal and the particular are directly united in empirical knowledge, and this is the reason that seems to bring us to a unity of contradictories" (4: 195–8). Such was Nishida's approach to comparing Aristotle's *noesis noeseos* to Kant's transcendental apperception.

The *basho* (*topos*) of nothingness

The Basho Constitutes Knowledge, Will, and Feeling

This brings us to a third question regarding knowledge: Where and how is knowledge constituted? Although some of the neo-Kantians saw knowledge as the unification of matter through form, Nishida argued that knowledge in this sense presupposes a "constructive activity of the subject" as the bearer of the forms. This brought with it certain problems.

On the one hand, if subjectivity lacked form, it could not shape the meaning of knowledge and yet "what is merely constructed through the form is no more than an object beyond opposition." On the other, if matter were constituted through form, it would be a subjective activity and knowledge would not be objective. And there is a third problem here: two different kinds of opposition—the opposition between matter and form, and that between subjectivity and objectivity—have been conflated. In other words, "the *basho* of the opposition between [metaphysical] matter and form must be different from the *basho* of the opposition between the true and the false." In the *basho* of knowledge, matter and form are distinct, and their separation and union must be free. The subjectivity of a subject beyond opposition is introduced from without. This is why, "in contrast to

fundamental logical form, someone like Emil Lask considers the object of lived experience, which is completely irrational, to be the basic [metaphysical] matter." The content of lived experience, of art, and of morality, are not simply irrational but transcend objective logic; or rather, their logic is internal to them (4: 212–13). Lived experience reflects itself within itself: "to know is nothing other than for lived experience to form itself within itself."

On the one hand, then, the opposition between matter and form is constituted within the *basho* of lived experience. On the other, the opposition between subject and object is constituted within a nothingness that includes infinite beings, because the "*basho* constitutes logical forms" (4: 213), and as the form of forms, it is the *basho* of forms. Aristotle states in his *De anima* says that the soul is the "receptacle of forms" (Aristotle 1978c, 429a, 15). For Nishida, this *basho* brings about not only knowledge but also will and feeling. "True lived experience must be a viewpoint of utter nothingness: it must be a free point of view distinct from knowledge" (4: 213).

The Basho of Nothingness and the Non-Oppositional Object

What becomes of the object in a *basho* in which knowledge, feeling, and will are constituted? If the *basho* in question is the *basho* of nothingness, clearly we need to rethink the meaning of "object." Nishida was aware of Emil Lask's view of a "non-oppositional" object that completely transcends activity (4: 217), but did not find it suited to his needs. For Nishida, when we speak of something that is or is not in something else, when we speak of having or not having, of being or nothingness, we have first to take into account the locus or *basho* in which such things are constituted. Ultimately, for Nishida "true nothingness is what constitutes the background of being." This is why we need to think of *basho* not as equivalent to a space in which attributes are located but as *a field of activity,* one that includes being and nothingness, and in which things are fused in a relationship of interdependence. The *basho* must be thought of as an "a-substantial activity," that is to say, as "pure activity as opposed to substantial being." That which acts includes its own opposite. Thus "the very *basho* that includes being and nothingness is unequivocal activity" (4: 218). In it things do

not merely become their own contrary but their own contradictory. At the same time, "the true *basho* must not simply be a *basho* of change but also a *basho* of coming to be and passing away." In this *basho* of origination and corruption (*génesis kai phtora*), that is to say, in this *topos* of transmutation, the meaning of acting becomes lost and only seeing remains, as something that "enfolds activity within itself." This *basho* is a pure activity in which we can see "the non-oppositional object that [completely] fuses form and matter" (4: 219).

Basho and A-Substantial Modes

As regards the notion of *basho*, recall that for Nishida whatever *is* must *be in* something. Here the problem is the relationship between "having," on the one hand, and "being in," on the other. For example, Aristotle's secondary matter is much like a *basho* in which is located everything that belongs to it. Or again, it could be said that the universal concept is much like a *basho* in which all its attributes inhere. In this sense, "Aristotle thought that qualities inhere in [a] substance." There is something hidden in the background of this "having" or "being in" (4: 225); this something hidden is the *basho* which "comes to be that which reflects its own shadow within itself; it comes to be like a mirror which throws light upon itself." When A is in B, we can also say that B has A; or we can say that A is a manifestation of B and, in this case we should say that B acts vis-à-vis A, which means that there is an external relationship between A and B. But "when being is within true nothingness" we need to say that "true nothingness reflects being." In this case, we understand *reflect* to mean "constituting something and receiving it just as it is without distorting its form." Here there is no external relation. Nothingness constitutes being within itself without being "something active vis-à-vis" being (4: 226). The more that which is reflected loses its sense of "being in another" and becomes a sign, the more we can say that A and B are independent, that A acts vis-à-vis B, or that there A and B are mutually related (4: 227).

Now "in order to say that something is completely in another, the first must be a mode of the second," that is to say, the second is a substance of which the first is a mode. Nishida says that for this to happen (or, in neo-Kantian terms, for the reflexive categories to precede the constructive cat-

egories), interrelationships must obtain among mutually diferentiated pure qualities—the modes of the substance—in such a way that each "maintains its own system." Nishida sees a two-step progression here: (1) when we think of immediate experience completely unified without reference to a substance, we can see "a world of activity without a substance"; and (2) when even this activity is discarded, we can see "a world of pure condition," that is to say, "a world of a-substantial modes." The world of the reflective categories may therefore be likened to this world of a-substantial modes. Reflection is not an activity, nor does "reflecting result from acting." That which acts is the result of "its infinitely reflecting itself within itself," so that "in the *basho* of nothingness which negates all being, to act becomes simply to know: to know is to reflect" (4: 228).

When at last we arrive at the content of immediate experience within the *basho* of true nothingness, the will itself becomes manifest as an activity of the "brilliant darkness" of which Pseudo-Dionysius writes in his *Mystical Theology*. In the background stands the "seer" that, as nothingness, sees.[6] This is why Nishida says that "the will is a mode of consciousness" and that, on this account, "freedom as a condition precedes freedom as an activity" (4: 228–9). In other words, viewing freedom broadly as the possibility of volitional activity guides us to transcending Kant's "consciousness in general."

Knowledge in the *basho* of nothingness

The Transmutation of the Universal and the Basho of True Nothingness

As noted at the outset, Nishida gives us a counterpart to the Aristotelian substratum, that is, something that becomes a subject while being a predicate. This new subject is a transcendental predicate, a universal. The rationale behind this transformation depends on the *basho* of true nothingness. After laying out the proper way to understand the *basho*, Nishida

6. In the opening chapter of the *Mystical Theology*, it is said that "the mysteries of God's Word lie… in the brilliant darkness of a hidden silence." See Pseudo-Dionysius 1987, 135.

takes up the problem of knowledge in the *basho* of nothingness, beginning with the relationship between the universal and consciousness:

> At the basis of consciousness there must be a universal. When the universal becomes a *basho* in which everything that is, is, it [the universal becomes] consciousness. (4: 233)

For the universal to be transformed into consciousness, it must also include "the negative activity of consciousness" or "relative nothingness." When the *basho* of the opposition between being and nothingness opens up into the *basho* of true nothingness, "at that turning-point, the viewpoint of Kant's 'consciousness in general' comes about" and the whole of reality becomes an object of knowledge. But if "true reality hides [its] form behind the world of the objects of knowledge and becomes the thing in itself," then "the viewpoint of consciousness in general is the viewpoint of nothingness encompassing being." But consciousness in general is neither consciousness as reality nor active consciousness, but merely a judging consciousness that transcends activity altogether (4: 233–4). To negotiate the move from an oppositional nothingness to a true nothingness, we have first to overcome consciousness in general. To accomplish this, several steps are required.

First of all, if we begin with the "activity of an unknowable force" we have to pass through "conscious activity" in order finally to reach "willed activity in the broad sense of the term." In other words, "the activity of judging can be seen from the viewpoint of consciousness in general" precisely because "consciousness in general is consciousness engaged in judgment." Passing through that door, "we can conceive of judgement and will as two aspects of a single activity" (4: 234).

Secondly and from a different standpoint, the transition to true nothingness requires establishing reflective categories as the background of constructive categories and then breaking through the restrictions of the reflexive categories in order to reach the world of free will, the world of free choice (cf. 4: 234).

From a third perspective, this transition may be said to take us from substance as reality, through pure activity as reality, to intelligible existence as reality. For Nishida, these three modes of existence show that "in the sense of what I call *basho*, several meanings of existence emerge" (4: 235). He

illustrates these three steps in the following manner: (1) when the *basho* is "something like a transcendent field of consciousness… the substratum disappears… [and this field] becomes pure activity"; (2) crossing through the passageway of consciousness in general implies that "activity loses its sense of existence" and suddenly the "ought" appears; and finally, (3) when the *basho* of true nothingness is reached, everything within it becomes an intelligible existence, and the "ought," as itself a type of being, is transformed into a shadow of that intelligible existence (4: 235–6).

The Constructive Universal and the Basho of Absolute Nothingness

The relationship between the particular and the universal is reciprocal: the universal is included within the particular, and vice-versa. It is a relationship of mutual inclusion and subsumption. As long as there is a gap between the particular and the universal, particulars that are included within the same universal differ among themselves. But when this gap is bridged, particulars within the same universal become mutually contradictory, which gives rise to a contradictory unity or unity of contradictories. Here the universal "does not simply embrace particulars but takes on a constructive sense." Driven to its limit, this mutual subsumption "takes the form of pure activity," which brings about an intuition of the union of subject and object. If this union is simply reduced to their oneness, the fuller meaning of the sumbsumptive relationship is lost and it makes no sense to claim that "the predicate becomes the substratum."

At the same time, although we speak of a union of subject and object, "in no sense should the opposition between them disappear." This two-dimensionality of fusion and separation, union and opposition, is the basis of all activity. This is the *basho* of contradictory unity or the *basho* of the unity of contradictories (4: 274–6).

For Nishida, when the universal is pressed to its limits within a subsumptive relationship, the orientation to the universal reaches its limit, or when the predicative dimension in judgement is allowed to run its course, "we cannot but come to what I call the *basho* of true nothingness" (4: 276). This *basho* of true nothingness "must encompass being" and the manifestation of being means for "*phaenomena* to be in true nothingness." Greek philosophy, he argued, failed to arrive at the fun-

damental meaning of true nothingness (4: 277). When a determined universal is transcended, or when a concrete universal is taken to its limit and judgement disappears, we can say with Aristotle that the *apeiron* or unlimited of Parmenides resembles the whole. Yet this whole "is not the encompassing but, rather, that which is encompassed" (ARISTOTLE 1978D, Book III.5.207A, 25, 30), and therefore, "we cannot say that the unknowable or unlimited encompasses or determines [anything]" (4: 276). The true universal encompasses both the universal and the particular in their mutually subsumptive relations.

The relationship among contradictories may represent the outer limits of what can be known through judgement, but there the knower and the known are stand in contrast to one another. *A priori* knowledge is possible whenever subject and predicate are located within a given realm or *basho*. The reason is that the relationship of contradiction does not obtain between a subject and a predicate but among predicates with respect to the same subject:

> Contradiction is something [that pertains to] predicates; we can talk about contradictory relationships among things that are reflected in the predicative aspect of judgement. In the subjective aspect, it constitutes the opposition between this and not-this. (4: 277)

In contradictory relations we meet the "mere predicative aspect" in the possibility of predication. It is here that the categories of consciousness are to be found. This is the foundation of reflexive categories. From the standpoint of judgement, "intuition means simply that the aspect of the subject is submerged within the aspect of the predicate"; from the standpoint of the predicate, we can see consciousness objectively; and from the vantage point of judgement, consciousness "is that which, while completely a predicate, does not become subject." The ego is not a subjective unity but a predicative unity, "not a thing but a *basho*." When the ego knows itself, the predicate becomes the subject, "the perceiving I is the thinking I," and what is intuited "is included within the aspect of predicate" (4: 281). In other words, the universal concept defines the conscious perimeters of intuition, and meaning is like a field of force defined by changing relationships among the vectors of what is consciously intended (4: 278–81).

True Intuition: Seeing the Non-Oppositional Object within the Basho of Nothingness

Nishida states that in the *basho* of nothingness that negates all being, "all phenomena can be considered immediate and immanent." Transformation is also possible in this *basho* insofar as oppositional nothingness (i.e., non-being) comes to have the meaning of being. In his words, "the *basho* that was formerly being overflows with potency, that is to say, we can think of something like a substance of consciousness, [something like] a conscious ego." Moreover, "insofar as we move from the mere *basho* of being to the negative *basho* of nothingness, [we encounter] a variety of teleological worlds and the unreal becomes real." When this new transformation takes place, the *basho* becomes nothingness, and "Aristotle's assertion that actual reality precedes potency, that [metaphysical] form precedes [metaphysical] matter" is clarified (4: 243).[7] The *basho* becomes absolute because it "absolutely transcends what is within itself." On the one hand, this *basho* of absolute nothingness "transcends all activity and is simply eternal," and on the other, "because it includes all the *topoi*, we must think that it is something infinitely active, in a word, that it has freedom as [its] attribute" (4: 245–6).

The transformation of the *basho* of being into the *basho* of nothingness gives rise to the realm of energy,[8] where to perceive is "to determine the *basho* of being within the *basho* of nothingness," and where "true immediate perception consists of seeing into the *basho* of nothingness" (4: 253, 255). It is a union of the subject with the object. This transformation enables knowledge of truths grounded in contradiction, and this in turn implies "emerging from the universal concept" to make those contradictory relationships visible. This does not entail a dissolution of the universal concept but merely a departure "from the *basho* of determined being to arrive at the *basho* of true nothingness, which is its ground: it is to see the

7. Nishida takes as a basis Aristotle 1978a, Book ix.8.1049b, 5. We also read there that "it is clear that actuality is prior to potency," and that "it is obvious that actuality is prior in substantial being to potency" (1050b, 4).

8. Lotze (1883, 91) mentions the transition from *dynamis* to *energeia* in Aristotle, that is to say, the transition from the potential to the real.

basho of being as the *basho* of nothingness, it is to see being itself immediately as nothingness" (4: 254).

In other words, "to move from a determined *basho* to a determining *basho* is to move from a *basho* of oppositional nothingness to the *basho* of true nothingness, i.e., from a mirror that only reflects to a mirror that sheds light on itself." Once there, the content of nothingness opens up and blossoms in the former *basho* of being, so that "we can recognize contradictory relations in what were relations of mutual difference; we can see the active within the qualitative" (4: 254–5). The will is the ground of that which acts and at the same time "the unification of activity." Immediate perception, in contrast, "transcends this *basho* of will to reach deeply into the ground of nothingness." This is why "when we truly live in perceptive activity, we are in the *basho* of true nothingness: infinite mirrors overlaid one upon another" (4: 259–60).

In this sense, intuition is not knowledge, and where it can be thought of as knowledge, it ceases to qualify as immediate perception (4: 260). Immediate perception comes about whenever there is a break in the continuum of intuition. The horizon of perception runs parallel with conceptual thought. That is, perception does not transcend conceptual thinking but is circumscribed by it (4: 261). To forsake a universal concept is to take leave of a determined *basho* by means of the universal concept and thus to supersede perceptual intuition.

Thus true intuition implies that (1) the *basho* of being is transformed into the *basho* of nothingness; (2) that nothingness becomes the whole of the background of being; (3) that the predicate envelops the subject; and (4) that being disappears within nothingness. When these conditions are fulfilled, we have an intuition of the categories, a constitution of the predicate as substratum, and a realization that "Kant's 'consciousness in general' is, in this sense, a *basho* of nothingness." When the subject disappears within the predicate, it comes to have "the meaning of a will that subsumes the universal within the particular" (4: 261). The transformation of the *basho* of being into the *basho* of nothingness also helps illuminate the relationship between knowledge and will. Intuition is seen as a union of knowledge and will. To know is "to subsume the particular within the universal," and to will is "to subsume the universal within the particular" (4: 258).

To Know is to Include the Particular within the Basho of Absolute Nothingness

Nishida carries his reading of Aristotle over to the problem of knowledge. Traditionally, knowledge has been grounded on the opposition between mind and things. The assumption is that mind and things are mutually opposed, and that knowing is an activity of the mind. However subtly, this opposition has been taken for granted with the result that we came to think of knowledge as "a constructive activity of the subject" (4: 313–4). The phrase reminds us of Husserl's constitutive consciousness and at the same time points towards an alternative solution. In the attempt to clear away the vestiges of the activity, and in particular of cognitive subjectivity as a conscious activity that includes within itself a relationship with the object, Nishida began from the "self-reflection of judging consciousness itself" and from there sought to rethink the epistemological relationship between subject and object.

Nishida took as his starting point the judgement of mutual inclusion or implication, that is, "the subsumptive judgement that subsumes the particular within the universal." Knowledge achieved by way of judgement is based on objectivity. This is why Nishida returns to the Aristotelian concept of the substratum, to the idea of a "primary substance which, as subject, does not become a predicate." In other words, Nishida pursued objectivity in the direction of the substratum and subjectivity "in the direction of the predicate." Behind it lay an understanding of "consciousness as that which, as predicate, does not become subject."

In this way Nishida was able to invert Aristotle's view of consciousness and think of it as a *basho*. By his own admission, the conception of knowing subjectivity as a *basho* was "based on the receptacle of *ideas* [referred to by] Plato's followers." In its relation to the subject and the object, consciousness thus became a kind of universal that embraced the opposition of the two. From that viewpoint, judgement meant "for the particular to be in the *basho* of the universal." Knowing subjectivity is "a transcendent *basho* which, as predicate, does not become a subject."

From the perspective of this *basho*, then, the fundamental meaning of knowing for Nishida became the inclusion of the particular within the *basho*. This is why he concluded that "true knowing subjectivity has

to be something like what I have called the 'transcendent' *basho* that encompasses everything, including the opposition between subject and object" (4: 314–6).

The Emergence of the World of Concepts

Nishida did not think of immediate perception as lifeless. On the contrary, it represented for him the fullness of life "within the *basho* of true nothingness." Activity cannot be directly intuited. "We cannot directly see the activity itself" but only through a *basho* determined by a universal concept. Nevertheless, "that which acts becomes visible when the predicate assumes the position of the subject." In that case, "a universal concept is always included at the ground of activity, and the predicate… [is included] as a universal concept solidified within the *basho* of true nothingness." The world of concepts is constituted "wherever the *basho* of being and the *basho* of nothingness touch each other." This is why "all activity is made manifest when we see that a *basho* [the *basho* of being or the *basho* of relative nothingness] is within the *basho* of true nothingness."

The transition from being to nothingness here reflects a progression from Aristotle's *sensus communis* to Kant's "consciousness in general." Beyond this progression we can also see pure activity: "when the *basho* of being is [placed] directly within the *basho* of true nothingness, we see a world of pure activity." We see activity "through a *basho* that is determined as an immanent object," that is, as "a universal concept that is solidified in the *basho* of true nothingness" (4: 266–8).

The immanent object, in this sense, is "a *basho* of being intertwined with nothingness, or a *basho* of true nothingness determined by relative nothingness." When this immanent object is within the *basho* of true nothingness, "for the first time we see the world of will" wherein we are able to perceive identity and difference, contradiction and development through contradiction. Being and nothingness unite and are transformed within a deeper *basho* where this transformation takes place. There the object of knowledge reaches an outer limit beyond which it cannot go (4: 268). Here again Nishida cites Aristotle to the effect that there must be a universal at the ground of what undergoes change. Depending on which kind of *basho* this universal is, three distinct outcomes are possible. If the universal is finite

and determined, what undergoes change is visible to us. If it is infinitesimal, only pure activity is visible. And if it is completely transformed within the *basho* of nothingness, we can see "the mirror of consciousness that simply reflects" and in which "infinite possible worlds are reflected, including the world of meaning" (4: 270).

To reiterate, "when the *basho* of determined being comes into contact with the *basho* of nothingness, we can speak of a union of subject and object, and if we go a step further, something like pure activity comes about" (4: 270). It is our free will that sees pure activity within this *basho* (4: 271), though the world of concepts as such is constituted "wherever the *basho* of being and the *basho* of nothingness touch each other" (4: 266).

Conceptual knowledge

In 1929, Nishida published a series of essays under the title *The Self-Perceiving System of Universals.* This book sets out from the premise that "knowledge is constituted through the form of judgement, and when we think something we do it through that form" (NKZ 3). From there Nishida advances from a presentation of the self-determination of the universal of judgment to a discussion of the modes of the universal that determine different types of knowledge. He then retraces his steps and examines the idea that underlies this discussion. Here I shall pick up only those places in the text that have to do with Aristotle and the three elements of conceptual knowledge.

Conceptual Knowledge

In an essay on "Predicate Logic"[9] Nishida asserted that all conceptual knowledge is comprised of three elements: (1) "that which is" in something; (2) "the *basho* in which" it is; and (3) "the *Mittel* between those

9. In April 1928, Nishida wrote: "In this chapter… I tried to think out the determination of the self-perceiving universal from the viewpoint of the school of predicate logic" (NKZ 5: 58), with which he was acquainted through the works of Heinrich Rickert. We know that Nishida read Rickert in January 1909 and that by August 1911 he had

two" (V: 59). The first of these refers to the subject; the second, to the universal or predicate; and the third, to judgement. The relative importance given to each of these elements would arguably result in "different forms of conceptual knowledge." For example, if (3) were lacking, we would have "the *basho* in which"; in the absence of (2), we would have only "that which is"; and if only (3) were present, we might consider conceptual knowledge as "merely the unity or development of an infinite relation."

Abstract conceptual knowledge "signifies a determined *basho*." If we consider that in judgement the universal is determined as a subject, then we could say that the subject is determined *within* a universal concept. When this determined universal also includes the *Mittel* as a self-determining *basho*, that which was an abstract concept may be considered the equivalent of what Aristotle referred to as secondary substance. Still, the abstract concept itself can be a subject or a predicate. It is neutral in that it does not include within itself its own *Mittel* or mediator, nor does it include a principle of individuation. In the event, only the first and second of the three elements mentioned above remain. As Nishida remarks, only "a denotative relation remains, through which so-called taxonomic conceptual knowledge, which consists in series of species and genera, comes about." For his part, however, "the true concept must be concrete, [that is to say,] the concrete concept includes its own *Mittel* within itself, and also includes the principle of individuation." In other words, the true concept must include within itself "what Aristotle calls primary substance, [which is] a subject that does not become a predicate." This kind of universal, a concept that truly denotes the individual, must belong to a judgement. This is why the true concept goes beyond the determination of abstract concepts where we are unable to take denota-

completed the second edition of *Der Gegenstand der Erkenntnis* which had been first published in 1892 (NKZ I: 210, 211). In May 1916, he wrote the preface (13: 188–90) to the Japanese translation by Yamanouchi Tokuryū. He refers to Rickert's work in autumn of 1916 (14: 30). In fact, he wrote a letter to Rickert (dated 22 September 1924) and kept in touch with him through Takahashi Satomi (see Letter # 492, 12 August 1926, to Tanabe Hajime) and met with Eugen Herrigel, a disciple of Rickert's on 12 April 1925. Rickert himself notes that his first proposal of a logic of the predicate was published in 1892 in the aforementioned work (RICKERT 1930, 5).

tive relations into account and must stop short at "what is objectively individual" (V: 60–2). This is why Nishida insisted on a subsumptive relation or a relation of mutual inclusion as the only possible ground of a true concept.

The Individual within the Basho of the Universal

"That which is" can also be thought of in a number of different ways. But insofar as we say of something that it "is," it must be subject that cannot become a predicate. This was why Nishida insisted that "the Aristotelian definition of primary substance is the best suited to include all that is: true reality must be something individual." The universal develops through its fragmentation and "we are able to think of the individual at the limits of this fragmentary development of the universal." This is why the individual falls "within the transcendental predicative aspect of a concrete universal, that is to say, it lies within what I call a *basho*." Thus, when "what is" refers to the self as an individual reality, it leads us in two directions: (1) "directed towards the subject of judgement, it transcends the [Aristotelian] individual which is a subject that cannot become a predicate"; and (2) "directed towards its own [*i.e.* the Aristotelian individual's] envelopment through its own determinative judgment, it must be something that transcends even the transcendental predicative aspect of the concrete universal that constitutes knowledge by judgment within itself." Insofar as the universal determines itself, "'what is' becomes self-determining," and whatever has the character of subject "includes the predicate" (V: 189). We can even say that "in that which acts, what is predicative becomes a subject" (V: 191). As Nishida explains, "in order to be able to think the individual, there must be a universal that includes all individuals and determines them."In other words, the *basho* of the universal is the "transcendental predicative aspect" and "that which is" within this *basho* is the individual (V: 421) encompassed by the self-perceiving self.

The Self-Perceiving Self Encompasses the Individual

Self-perceiving consciousness, as noted above, implies a "self that determines itself within itself" (V: 360), and includes within itself not only the self that is seen but the self that does the seeing. From this standpoint,

the individual considered as an Aristotelian "subject that cannot become a predicate" is only a self that has been transformed into an object and not a self that sees itself and includes the self that is seen. Here we see the possibility of a transition from the noematic to the noetic. The truly self-perceiving self is not only *noema* but also *noesis*. Moreover, when the true self-perceiving self "transcends the depths of the *noesis*" to become a transcendental self, it "embraces the individual within itself and determines it." This is what we referred to above as the "aspect of the transcendental predicate" conceived of as a *basho* and as "the conscious aspect of normative consciousness." From the viewpoint of judgement, Nishida argued that "the subject of a judgement can be considered something that is a subject and cannot become a predicate.… We may think of it as a predicative aspect wherein the determination of the subject does not come about," a predicative aspect that "embraces within itself that which has the character of subject and determines it" (V: 361).

Conclusion

If much of Nishida's thought has been left without adequate explanation, I can only refer the reader to other works where these matters have been given fuller treatment (Jacinto 1995; 2004; also Wargo 2005, 90–178). Moreover, although I have tried to present the gist of each section in a short heading, there has been no strict sequence in the analysis of each of the five themes. This is not altogether surprising, since Nishida's texts are not a mere reworking of Aristotle's ideas. Rather, he alludes to Aristotle from time to time in order to clarify his own thinking. Nonetheless, I believe a more or less coherent pattern has emerged of Nishida's use of Aristotle between the years 1924 and 1928, the period when he was struggling to formulate a field theory of his own (parallel to efforts in the West, as I have shown in the Appendix to Jacinto 2001) in terms of the *basho* of absolute nothingness.

Obviously, in approaching the knowing subject from both the noetic and noematic aspects of self-conscious consciousness, Nishida discarded a number of elements in Aristotelian thought as unhelpful for solving the problem of how we know the individual and especially of how we know the

self-perceiving individual. The problem is threefold: (1) the confusion that originates from a displacement of the problem of existence to a problem of truth and falsehood; (2) the invariant and unchanging character of the substratum; and (3) the manifestation—for example, in a logic grounded in the subject as an invariant and unchanging substratum, and aimed at explaining change by way of universal predicates—of the problems of language and of what can or cannot be said in a language. In the background lay three presuppositions passed over by Nishida at the time: substantialism, dualism, and the emphasis on being for understanding reality. Yet his own solution, centered as it was on the *basho* of nothingness which is nondual, a-substantial and ungrounded, made confrontation with these presuppositions inevitable (Jacinto 2004).

The stimulus for Nishida was his attempt to carry out the full implications of Aristotle's *noesis noeseos* in the case of the knowing individual, and more specifically, in the case of the knowing of a self-aware, conscious individual. He found that he needed to keep close to the existentially real and to point out the irrational and changing character of the rationalized Aristotelian substratum and, at the same time, to dislodge the unchanging substratum from its logical position as subject and replace it with the changing predicate. Above all, he found that he needed to center the problem of knowledge on four aspects:

1. The knowledge of the individual. If individuation is based on matter, then the substratum has an irrational dimension that has been unduly rationalized. Since matter is changing and not inert, we must speak of it as "active."
2. The assumption that things are not conscious, that they are not active and that there is no need for the substratum to change. This view does not coincide with Shinto and Taoist worldviews, let alone with the foundational Buddhist idea of interdependent origination.
3. The unintelligibility of the substratum. If the human individual is self-conscious, then it does not do to assume that only the individual's attributes are knowable but based on a hidden and unknowable substratum. Both must be intelligible. For this reason, Nishida took the *noesis noeseos* as his point of reference in seeking a solution by way of the self-perceiving consciousness and a systematic theory of a recursive *basho* (Jacinto 1995, 233–54).

4. The *basho* cannot be simply a *basho* of universals. It is not the case that universals have only form (or neither matter nor form) and for this reason can represent a nothingness vis-à-vis the substratum. Rather, the *basho* of nothingness must be one in which not only universals and the substrate but also concrete universals originate. This conclusion, though logical, was unexpected and would require further research.

Between 1926 and 1928, while Nishida was already mulling over the idea of the transformation of the *basho* of being into the *basho* of nothingness as the primal origin of reality, his idea of *basho* had not yet been expanded to include things like the human body, social praxis, and the dialectical-historical world. These questions would be formative in his later years (JACINTO 1995).

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