

Philosophy Live : A Perspective from Japan

著者	SUEKI Fumihiko, RIGGS Lynne E. , TAKECHI Manabu, SEVILLA Anton Luis
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CHAPTER 2

WHERE TO BEGIN?

To experience means to know facts just as they are, to know in accordance with facts by completely relinquishing one's own fabrications. What we usually refer to as experience is adulterated with some sort of thought, so by *pure* I am referring to the state of experience just as it is without the least addition of deliberative discrimination. The moment of seeing a color or hearing a sound, for example, is prior not only to the thought that the color or sound is the activity of an external object or that one is sensing it, but also to the judgment of what the color or sound might be. In this regard, pure experience is identical with direct experience. When one directly experiences one's own state of consciousness, there is not yet a subject or an object, and knowing and its object are completely unified. This is the most refined type of experience.⁴

—Nishida Kitarō

Nishida Kitarō's *An Inquiry into the Good* has been critically acclaimed as the first original work of philosophy by a Japanese and has been praised as the first and only work of philosophy by a Japanese since the Meiji era began. When it was first published in Japanese in 1911, it was received by the young generation of the time with a passion that is probably difficult for us today to even conceive. A young essayist and playwright named Kurata Hyakuzō (1891–1943) became so excited after reading the book that he traveled from Tokyo to Kyoto to meet Nishida, writing with praise that sounds almost like a love letter:

Like the blue-streaked white bellflower whose elegant blooms send out their fragrance even in the dry and barren soil in the shadow of a mountain, Nishida Kitarō has delivered to our parched, stagnant, and thoroughly vulgarized world of philosophy a work that fills us with pure delight and courage, along with a touch of surprise.⁵

⁴ Nishida 1990, pp. 3–4. All quotations in this translation are from this edition.

⁵ Kurata 2008, p. 50.

For many years, I harbored a biased view of *An Inquiry into the Good* and did not give it a truly in-depth reading. I dismissed it as rather shallow and immature compared to the philosophy Nishida produced in his later years and not worth coming to grips with seriously. Reading again more recently, I realized how squarely it grapples with the basic questions of philosophy, providing views well worth considering today.

What are those basic questions? One of them is the meaning of “reality.”

The book consists of four parts, the second of which deals with “Reality.” Nishida explains his task by saying, “We must now investigate what we ought to do and where we ought to find peace of mind, but this calls first for clarification of the nature of the universe, human life, and true reality.”⁶ He goes on to affirm that “reality consists only of phenomena of our consciousness, namely, the facts of direct experience.”⁷ He thus considers direct experience—pure experience—to be reality.

Reality—that is, what it is that truly exists—is the question that philosophy in the West pursued from the beginning. Let us look back at that history.

People do not want to place their confidence in things that are not reliable and believable. They are reluctant to rely on the ephemeral or illusory. They want to know what is truly real. Plato (427–347 B.C.), who said that reality exists in eternal ideas, provides one classical answer to that question. Everything we see and touch every day is transient, fragile, and incomplete. Ideas transcend sensory phenomena and are graspable only by reason.

Consider, for example, a triangle. We might try drawing a triangle on a piece of paper, but that is not a truly perfect triangle. There is unevenness in the paper, and even using the finest of pens, the width of the lines throws off the angles. So no matter how precise our draftsmanship, what we produce on the paper does not really represent an ideal triangle. In that sense, a “real” triangle is only that which exists as an idea above and beyond our individual perceptions of a triangle. In that way, there is an idea that corresponds to each of the multitude of things we perceive. In contrast to the transience of the sensory world around us, there is an eternally unchanging world of ideas that can be grasped only in the intellect, that is, the world of real existence. According to Plato, the supreme idea in that world of ideas is the idea of “the good.” To transcend the world of the senses and understand the idea of good, he says, is the greatest happiness and the objective of philosophy.

In contrast to the impersonal reality of ideas, in medieval Christianity God was equated with true existence and the creations of God were considered imperfect. That is why God is said to have been the center of all things in Europe’s Middle Ages. Western philosophy changed greatly between ancient and medieval times, but the notion that

6 Nishida 1990, pp. 37–38.

7 Nishida 1990, p. 42.

true reality exists beyond the world of our everyday experience remained the core of mainstream thought.

It was with the modern thought of Descartes (1596–1650) that a major change took place. Descartes decided to doubt all conventional knowledge and, by reexamining everything, find his way to what could be considered absolute truth. This led him to his rule of so-called methodological doubt whereby he made a “constant resolution . . . never to accept anything as true that I did not plainly know to be such . . . and to include nothing more in my judgments than was presented itself to my mind so clearly . . . that I had no occasion to call it in doubt.”⁸

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It goes without saying that the senses can be mistaken. What one infers, too, can be mistaken. One may think one is awake and aware, and yet it could be that such a thought is false and everything one sees and thinks is actually a dream. Up to that point Descartes doubts everything, and then he changes tack and says, “while I wanted to think that everything was false, it necessarily had to be the case that I, who was thinking this, was something.”⁹ So, even if one is in a dream, even if one is thinking illusory thoughts, that “I” who is thinking is a fact that no one can deny. And this brought Descartes to his famous axiom: “I think, therefore I am” (*cogito, ergo sum*).

Philosophy in the Middle Ages had rested upon the unquestioned presupposition of an order in the world created by God, and so the problem was only how fully human beings could accurately grasp what that order was. Human beings were of course incomparably inferior to the all-knowing God; they simply assumed that they ought to be able to understand the structure of that world by their powers of reason.

Descartes, however, cast doubt upon such objective truth. He sought to examine—without presupposing an order of the external world, the world outside of his mind—what it was that he could accurately understand. He wanted to reflect purely upon his own conscious experience, without relying on the power of God, to discover solid principles of the truth. Through his influence, philosophy thereafter came to be centered on human beings and to develop as principles of the consciousness of the individual “I.” The grand system of German idealism that evolved from Kant to Hegel, too, can also be seen as the hypertrophy of this individual consciousness.

This development triggered a shift in focus from ontology to epistemology. Since the purpose of philosophy in the Middle Ages was to understand God and clarify the order of the world created by God, the external world was something that firmly existed,

⁸ Descartes 1998, p. 11.

⁹ Descartes 1998, p. 18.

and ontological inquiry into the nature of that existence was the central problem to be addressed. With the Renaissance, however, the center of attention shifted to the problem of cognition: how the world looked from a human-centered viewpoint and from the human perspective. That trend extended from Kant and the New Kantians, and also to phenomenology.

The emergence of solipsism posed a major challenge to this trend. As certain as it might be that “I exist,” the solipsist argues, there is nothing to guarantee that others or anything in the external world really exists. All that is certain is “I.” Everything other than the self could be a dream or illusion. This school of skepticism was advanced by English empiricist philosopher George Berkeley (1685–1753) and continues to pose knotty problems for philosophy even today.

Solipsism is unsustainable from the outset, since after all the “I” is embedded in relations with the Other, but if we try to ignore that presupposition and attach importance only to the I, there is no avoiding the pitfall of solipsism and the ensuing deadlock. To navigate around this problem, Descartes turned back to God, whom he had initially placed outside his purview, saying, “I decided to search for the source from which I had learned to think of something more perfect than I was, and I plainly knew that this had to be from some nature that was in fact more perfect.”¹⁰ And this led him to recognize God as the perfect existence. Asserting the certainty of the self closes the door on further argument, but if you admit to the all-knowing God, you can prove anything as being the result of the power of God. That, of course, takes us to something quite different from the problem of the self-evidence of “I.”

The World of Pure Experience

Now let us return to Nishida Kitarō’s *Inquiry into the Good*. Nishida’s theory of pure experience, much influenced by the philosophy of that time espoused by William James and Henri Bergson, followed the direction of thought oriented to their idea of the stream of consciousness. From a macroscopic point of view, he has not deviated from the system of problems that Descartes addressed. It is clear that Nishida starts from the same issue as does Descartes, saying, “we must . . . doubt whatever can be doubted, and proceed on the basis of direct and indubitable knowledge.”¹¹

What is “direct and indubitable knowledge? Nishida’s answer is that “It is knowledge of facts in our intuitive experience, knowledge of phenomena of consciousness.”¹² What does this mean? Let us look once again at Descartes’s axiom, “I think, therefore I am.” Strictly speaking, when we say, “I think,” it is not as if there is some other identity “I” separate from the act of “thinking.” The act of thinking is in fact being performed, and

¹⁰ Descartes 1998, p. 19.

¹¹ Nishida 1990, p. 38.

¹² Nishida 1990, p. 39.

we can understand that the “I” is the one who is “thinking.” In the original Latin, the person is expressed by the verb suffix (*cogito*), so that the subject *ego* does not need to be added.

This means that evident datum is the workings of the consciousness called “thinking.” This is precisely what Nishida calls “pure experience.” The awareness that “I am thinking” is at that moment unmistakably at work. And he goes on, “A present phenomenon of consciousness and our being conscious of it are identical; they cannot be divided into subject and object.”¹³ This is his idea of the indivisibility of subject and object, which is referred to in the quotation at the head of this chapter and a major point in his ideas about pure experience.

When it comes to the act of “thinking,” judgment is always a factor; therefore subject and object are no longer one. The non-separation of subject and object in pure experience is a condition prior to judgment. As we saw in the opening epigram, “The moment of seeing a color or hearing a sound, for example, is prior not only to the thought that the color or sound is the activity of an external object or that one is sensing it, but also to the judgment of what the color or sound might be.” Then, judgment is made of the distinction between the “I” who is seeing and the object being seen. It is a *fait accompli*, and no longer represents pure experience, says Nishida. “It is not that there is experience because there is an individual, but that there is an individual because there is experience.”¹⁴

What does Nishida want to assert through his discussion of pure experience? Probably the preeminent feature of his theory of pure experience is to wipe away the fixity of distinctions such as “self” or “object.” The world is not made up of substantial things (truly, independently existing entities) that are fixed and immovable. The lively, moving, changing stream of consciousness, indeed, is the true state of the world. What so captured the imaginations of young men like Kurata Hyakuzō was that point above all. It no doubt reflected new trends in European and American thought, but it was different from the Western philosophical tradition since Plato and Aristotle; it sought to move beyond the Cartesian issue of *cogito*.

Meanwhile, if experience precedes the individual, it means that experience is something greater, not limited to the individual. The “one and only experience” diversifies and is fluid. Since subject and object arise from the differentiation of the one and only experience, all things in the physical and spiritual worlds are unified by “experience.” As Nishida says: “we must say that there is one unifying power at the base of the myriad things in the universe and that these things are the developmental expression of one and

13 Nishida 1990, p. 39.

14 Nishida 1990, p. 19.

the same reality.”¹⁵ “Our subjectivity is the unifying aspect, whereas objectivity is the unified aspect.”¹⁶

Nishida is not the only one who had the idea that the mutually opposing subject and object are integrated by a unifier that lies at their base. For example, in his phenomenology, Edmund Husserl (1859–1938) examined how the seeing subject and the seen object are formed within the consciousness, and he named the subjective side *noesis* and the objective side *noema*. In Buddhism, too, according to the philosophy of Consciousness-Only Buddhism (Yuishiki; Sk. Vijñānavāda), consciousness (*shiki*; Sk. *vijñāna*) is at the base of all phenomena and consists of four aspects: the objective aspect (*sōbun*); the subjective aspect (*kenbun*); the aspect (*jishōbun*) that corroborates the workings of *kenbun*; and the aspect (*shōjishōbun*) that corroborates the workings of *jishōbun*.

As these approaches demonstrate, consciousness can be considered to be at the base of all things as a unifier from which the division of subject and object arises. The notable feature of Nishida’s thought, however, is that the idea of pure experience, which ought to have been a theory of individual consciousness, is suddenly elevated to a cosmic reality that unifies the whole world. On that level, the theory of pure experience no longer remains a mere pursuit of basic principles but can be developed for the very practical problems of ethics and religion. The return of the divided subject and object to a state of union has to be the goal of ethics and religion. “We reach the quintessence of good conduct only when subject and object merge, self and things forget each other, and all that exists is the activity of the sole reality of the universe.”¹⁷

Nishida’s philosophy was well suited to Japanese intellectuals caught up in the rapid transition to the modern age. His theory of pure experience began with individual conscious experience and extended outward to all cosmic reality. In the late nineteenth and

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early twentieth centuries, Japanese intellectuals faced the sudden need to establish a modern sense of self. They found it difficult, however, to accept completely the kind of rigorous individualism found in the West. They tried to attain stability by locating the individual as absorbed within an absolute existence transcending the individual. That

entity transcending the individual was sometimes cosmic truth, but later it was invested more specifically in the state.

The idea of the individual being transcended by something greater is exactly what we find in *Inquiry into the Good*. It does include a number of what appear to be personalistic assertions; for example, “to satisfy these demands and thereby actualize personality is for

15 Nishida 1990, p. 63.

16 Nishida 1990, p. 64.

17 Nishida 1990, p. 135.

us the absolute good”¹⁸ and “personality is the basis of all value.”¹⁹ And yet he also says, that “it is only when we exhaust all of the power of the self, when the consciousness of the self nearly disappears and one is not conscious of the self, that we see the activity of the true personality.”²⁰ The realization of personality, therefore, is ultimately attainment of “the universal unity of consciousness inclusive of all individual consciousnesses.”²¹

This is quite a grand system, but seems a bit far-fetched and hard to follow. Nishida’s practice of Zen meditation contributed to this philosophical system. Orthodox traditions of philosophy from the Upanishads of India have taught of the pursuit of the ideal through the union of the individual self with cosmic truth. In contrast to Plato’s teaching of the search for the ideal based on reasoned analysis, in Indian philosophy the ideal was to be sought by transcending the use of rational distinctions. In Buddhism, this is not far removed from the Kegon philosophy of the unity of the self and universal truth. Nishida may have been trying to incorporate such Eastern traditions into his philosophy. In this sense, it diverges from Christianity, which emphasizes the distinction between God and humanity.

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What I would like to do here then, is to go back to the beginning with regard to pure experience. Nishida’s general direction is not difficult to grasp, but it is rather broad and digresses from the question of pure experience as a basic principle of philosophy. One wonders: Is pure experience in which judgment does not come into play really possible?

The performance of a veteran pianist is often given as an example of a case where there is no separation between subject and object. The pianist’s fingers move naturally over the keys, apparently without consciously or deliberately checking to make sure each key is played correctly, so it is said to be an example where the self (the pianist) is not conscious of separation from the object (the piano). If this sort of seemingly unconscious action of a highly trained pianist is pure experience, then it would seem unnecessary to give such a lofty example, for we know similar examples in our daily lives. Every day on our way to work or school, we do not stop carefully at every corner and curve as we go. Without even thinking, our feet automatically move in the direction we need to go. Is this not what we would also call pure experience?

Then, we cannot limit pure experience to a matter of consciousness alone; nor can we make sudden leaps from there to the whole world. As is obvious in the case of our day-to-day activities, pure experience is not limited only to consciousness, but to activities that

18 Nishida 1990, p. 132.

19 Nishida 1990, p. 133.

20 Nishida 1990, p. 134.

21 Nishida 1990, p. 160.

involve the physical body as well. Moreover, pure experience does not connect directly on a vast scale with the whole world, but rather more concretely within the framework of the world of our daily lives. In the case of the performance of a pianist, such a pure experience becomes possible only in the context of the scenario of the concert being held. In other words, it is not completely without presupposition, but something that can only occur in a world of some degree of structure. This is what Heidegger called being-in-the-world. We do not exist in isolation, but are part of the world from the outset, and part of relations with others in that world.

Probably the most effective critique of Descartes's "I think, therefore I am" axiom is this: when one thinks "I am thinking" one is already using words, and without words, one cannot even "think" that one is thinking. But language is not something that we possess of our own devising; it exists prior to the self and is part of the structure of our coexistence with others. "I think, therefore I am," is not a clearly evident statement that stands without any presupposition; it can only stand as part of the shared world in which language functions in communication with others.

Nishida's idea of pure experience, some might say, is prior to language, and that may be true. Yet such experience only occurs in very special circumstances as described above, and it is difficult to say it occurs without any presupposition at all. Moreover, the notion of the experience of pure experience that involves no judgment cannot be discussed in the realm of philosophical speculation in the first place. Only something that can be reflected upon and judged can become the object of speculation. This forces us to question whether pure experience was really an appropriate starting point of philosophy.

One other important problem is that when we make the leap between the consciousness of the individual and the world as a whole, the issue of the Other is excluded, even in the ethical dimension. In addressing issues of ethics, Nishida allows the connection to others to be excluded, saying, "I believe that people who thoroughly express their own unique characteristics are greater than those who forget their duty to themselves and heedlessly run around for the sake of others."²² If the personality of the self directly accords with the reality of the universe, there will be no space for connecting with others. An ethics that excludes others: Is that possible? That would seem to suggest a rejection of ethics.

Others are an integral part of the world in which we live. Indeed, we are all born into a world in which we coexist with others; there is no room for solipsism to be applicable from the outset. That being the case, what we must think about first is not so much pure experience per se but the structure of a world in which such experience is valid. We may have been somewhat mistaken in the way we started out with our

²² Nishida 1990, p. 137.

discussion of philosophy. Nishida himself departed from the rather simple approach of pure experience and later deepened his speculation through his theory of *basho*, or place.

From Pure Experience to “Place”

Descartes’s “I think, therefore I am” is a principle of such vast scope as to encompass the entirety of the history of modern philosophy. The central problem of philosophical inquiry in modern philosophy from Descartes onward shifted from the structure of the objective “object world” to the subject (“I”) and focused on epistemology rather than ontology. It was Kant whose ideas prompted this shift, and through him Descartes’s “I think, therefore I am” brought about a Copernican revolution in philosophy.

The basic idea of Kant’s theory of cognition was that the things of the world, which had until then been thought to exist outside the consciousness, could not, in fact, exist without the workings of the subjective consciousness. According to Kant, our senses are endowed with the structures of time and space. The structures are not those of external objects themselves, but the forms of sensitivity that perceive those objects. The objects we perceive are ordered by the categories of understanding of quantity, quality, relationship, and modality. The forms innate to the subject that cognize (perceive) things are what Kant called transcendental. The task of philosophy is not to study the content of cognition, he believed, but to explain the transcendental structure that makes cognition possible.

The transcendental framework that makes cognition possible has to be such that things will work—not in a sporadic or fragmented fashion—but for a unified world. That is the unity of consciousness that is “I think, therefore I am” and what Kant called transcendental apperception. Through the workings of transcendental apperception, the world of the self is unified and given order.

What is important here is that all people share the framework of transcendental cognition, so that the framework makes possible not only individuals’ specific cognition but also universal cognition—such as seen in the natural sciences. This is an expression of the Enlightenment idea that the truth can be cognized (perceived) through the reason that all human beings equally possess.

Thus, even though one might say “I think, therefore I am,” transcendental apperception is not something that stops at simply the unity of individual consciousness. “I” is a universal “I” that transcends the individual self. The German idealists from Kant onward made this universal “I” the basic principle of their thought and explained the world on that basis. The reason that Nishida’s pure experience, while being a separate, individual experience, was also a universalist, cosmic experience is no doubt because he

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was influenced by those trends. Indeed, after publication of *An Inquiry into the Good*, Nishida for a while came under the very strong influence of the German idealist Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762–1814).

The Neo-Kantian school that flourished from the late nineteenth through the early twentieth century represented a swing back to Kantian epistemology in reaction to the all-too-grand sweep of German idealism in the world of Western philosophy, and after the publication of *An Inquiry*, Nishida, too, came under Neo-Kantian influence. With the problem of scientific cognition as the center of attention, the Neo-Kantians sought to clarify the basic categories of scientific cognition. Husserl's phenomenology, by contrast, emphasized clarification of the specific structure of the individual consciousness. Kant's influence pushed Husserl, too, in the direction of clarification not of individual empirical facts but of the (innate) transcendental consciousness that makes experience possible. Husserl believed that, by practicing the *epoché* (suspension of judgment) vis-à-vis the natural attitude that cognizes objects without reflection, he could bring the structure of object cognition to the surface. This procedure was what Husserl called "phenomenological reduction."

Things . . . acquire meaning as phenomena within the transcendental space . . . the issue is how that datum is given to us.

Nishida, too, after publishing *An Inquiry*, moved in a similar direction, further refining his ideas. Instead of the specific content of experience called pure experience, he strove to clarify the "place" that makes such experience possible.²³ In the process of bringing these ideas to maturity, he resorted to the phenomenology of Kant and Husserl.²⁴ By probing deeply into the realm of religion, Nishida believed that he could surpass Kant and Husserl, but I will not go into that aspect of his work here.

What is important about this trend is that such concepts as reality and substance were no longer the objects of inquiry. Kant admitted that "things in themselves" really did exist, but since they cannot be grasped, he believed they were not the objects of thought. Things that can be cognized only acquire meaning as phenomena within the transcendental space or place. So the issue is not what the datum is, but how that datum is given to us (see Chapter 4, p. 42).

As an example, it is the same as using an indefinite variable when calculating in functions, using $f(x)$ in place of a specific variable like $f(a)$. The basic problem of traditional philosophy had been the pursuit of the specific figure a as reality, but now the problem had shifted, and in place of pursuit of the value of a , it was now the form f that was the subject of inquiry.

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23 See essay on "Place," in Nishida 1987.

24 As seen, for example, in the essay "The Intelligible World," included in Nishida 1987.

This transcendental place, as pursued by Kant, Husserl, and Nishida, was an extension of Cartesian consciousness. Husserl was the one who refined this consciousness most deliberately and in greatest detail, but if one tries to refine it, one only finds it all the harder to move outside of consciousness. This is the problem with the aforementioned solipsism. In his later years Husserl's interest was drawn in the direction of how the experience of the other is viable in relation to the consciousness of the self. Nishida, however, who began with the problem of consciousness, gradually moved beyond consciousness, leading him to think about "place" as the more basic "nothingness." The idea of place, which allowed him to move beyond the solipsism involved with pure experience, made it possible to juxtapose "I" and "Thou" so that both "I" and "Thou" could be simultaneously valid.²⁵

I will discuss Nishida's "place" in Chapter 8. Here I would like to briefly look at the problem of consciousness and "place" from the viewpoint of Buddhist philosophy. The purpose of Buddhism was originally to gain control over the mind and the problems of the mind have always been at the center of Buddhist philosophy. The Kegon sutra's teaching of *sangai yuishin*, literally "the Three Realms are only mind" means that control of the mind is the center of everything. This does not necessarily lead to a philosophically solipsistic idealism, but it does suggest the possibility of moving in that direction.

In Buddhism, the notion of "mind" was more thoroughly thought out than that of "consciousness." Thinking about mind went in two directions. In one, the fundamental mind—what was referred to in the Consciousness-Only School as *araya-shiki* (Sk. *ālaya-vijñāna*), the foundation on which human consciousness is based—was believed to give rise to all kinds of illusions. In the other, mind was thought to be pure and the principle of enlightenment. This mind is what is called the "tathāgata-garbha," or "buddha nature" (*bussō*) inherent in all sentient beings. In consciousness-only thought, mind had a quite pronounced solipsistic quality. The external world was perceived according to a person's karma (actions) and was therefore the world of that person alone. But, those who shared the same karma could perceive the same kind of world (common karma), and this prevented mind from being completely solipsistic. On the other hand, the principle in the case of the *tathāgata-garbha* was thought to be absolute, leading to a grand idealistic theory that developed from the "buddha nature" to the world, in a way similar to the manner of German idealism.

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In this way, Buddhism developed not so much as a philosophy of consciousness, but rather as a philosophy of mind. Quite refined epistemological debate was in fact carried

25 See the essay "Watashi to nanji" (I and Thou), in Nishida 1987.

out in India after the sixth century, but as Buddhism spread through East Asia the theory of mind was refined in relation to religious practice.

What is notable about Buddhism was its basic stance of “non-ego” (*muga*; Sk. *anātman*), hence denial of the substance of things. In Mahayana Buddhism, this was called “emptiness” (*kū*; Sk. *śūnyatā*). The idea is that phenomenal things do not have substance; they are not independent, but mutually interdependent and interrelated. If expressed in the form of mathematical functions, it would be $f(x, y, z, \dots)$. This is what is called interdependent arising (*engi*). In other words, it could be said that *muga*, non-self, is the same as *kū*, emptiness, which could be expressed also as the state of insubstantiality (*mujittai*), or interdependence of all things, or *engi*.

When we speak of non-self, by the way, we are generally talking about individual things, while *kū* usually refers to the structure of the world.

Nishida characterizes “place” in terms of “nothingness” (*mu*). The interrelationship of phenomenal things that have no substance in a “place” of “nothingness,” is precisely “emptiness” (*kū*). This is why Nishida’s philosophy of place is called “Asian.” We will look further at Nishida’s “place of nothingness” thought in Chapter 8.

The philosophy of “place” is one that can be effectively applied with regard to all sorts of problems. In the natural sciences today, for example, the concept of “place,” or “field” holds very important meaning. “Place” cannot possibly be in a state of completely homogeneous vacuum. Whether it is a magnetic field or a gravitational field, as soon as something is placed into it, that “place” becomes idiosyncratic, uneven, or endowed with dark and light. Relationships with others are of course shaped by such idiosyncratic “places.” What makes “places” different is what distinguishes our relationship with others. The nature of “place” is the nature of our relationships with others.

Encounter with Others in “Place”

In this book, I do not propose to explain the world by means of a fundamental principle like “pure experience.” Pure experience may appear to be something fundamental without presuppositions, but in fact it is only possible in a world in which things are shaped by preexisting understandings. In short, it is *not* without presupposition. So what is of greater importance is to clarify the structure of the world that presupposes pure experience.

What we will notice is that relations with others are fundamental in such a world. Even the case of the pianist who becomes completely absorbed in a concert performance to the point of having a “pure experience” is premised upon the presence of others—the audience. *Zazen* is another case where one might think pure experience could be possible without others, but *zazen* is part of the discipline of daily life with other practitioners in a Zen temple following the guidance of a master; it is inextricable from that community environment. Experience of any kind that is completely aloof from others is very

difficult to conceive, reminding us that the matter of relations with others is in fact a very important problem.

Here is where the theory of “place” comes to the fore. Place is not abstract space. It is the place where we encounter others and where relationships with them are formed, and place itself is created in the coexistence with others. For example, when we think of our communication with others through language, it is within such a “place” of language space that we engage in communication. Language space is not flat and characterless. For example, when young children are learning language, their learning takes place within the specific places of daily life in relation to their parents, so the relationships between the child and the others who are his/her parents is presupposed. Behind everything, as well, is the vast language space of the Japanese-speaking environment in which they live. This is not just an abstract space either, but is shaped by the specific relationship of the people who use that language.

What kind of relationships we have with others and in what kinds of “places”—these are what fundamentally shape the world in which we live. So this book addresses those questions. My working hypothesis is that there are two layers in these relationships with others. One layer is in relations where mutual understanding is possible, such as through the classical case of language space mentioned above. That alone might seem adequate, but in fact, we also have relations with the Other with whom we may have no mutual understanding. It is this other layer that I would like to explore in this book. With that point in mind, let us move on to Chapter 3.