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One Person's Journey into the Promise of Nishida Philosophy

How does one's personal path through life fortuitously spark an understanding of a philosopher whose work has already touched thousands of lives and opened new perspectives on the nature of the world? If a person is but a single focal point of the world—to use an expression of Nishida Kitarō, the philosopher in question—then how can a person's singular understanding reflect the full scope of the world the philosopher sees—the world that sees through him? And how might the philosopher's insights, intimating as they do a world that itself is aware, be made intelligible to other thousands who do not see what he did, and made relevant to the ecological crisis he did not foresee? These are the questions that motivate the reflections in this article, which traces a path from personal anecdotes to the development of Nishida's thought all the way to his vision of human selves and the possibility that nonhuman animals are also, in their own ways, focal points of the world. The occasion prompting these reflections was the Fifth Kanazawa University International Award ceremony that in November 2024 recognized Maraldo for his "contributions to the internationalization and development of Japanese philosophical studies."

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Although I have studied the philosophy of Nishida Kitarō for more than four decades, I feel as if I have barely scratched the surface of his profound thinking. And yet I dare to venture ahead and envision some ways that "Nishida tetsugaku" might contribute to understanding contemporary problems that he himself did not face. Here I would like to present some thoughts about the promise of Nishida philosophy, and how I came to see that potential.

Re-reading early works: the beginnings of a journey

Allow me to begin with the story of how I first came to know of Nishida Kitarō, or any Japanese Buddhist thought at all. It was indeed a fortuitous encounter, and reminds me now of Kuki Shūzō's comments on the power of contingency and the continuing imperative, "let not your encounters occur in vain."[1] As a college student in Washington D.C., in the early 1960s, I took several courses in philosophy and religion, but only in Greco-European philosophy and Christian religion. I had no exposure to Eastern traditions. I continued my studies of phenomenology and philosophy of religion in graduate school at the University of Munich, again, with little if any exposure to Eastern traditions or languages. Although I encountered the names Kuki Shūzō and Nishida Kitarō in Martin Heidegger's "Dialogue on Language," I found nothing by them I could read. Then a fortunate event occurred. Some fellow foreign students told me that I should read the poet Bashō, D. T. Suzuki about Zen, and *Zen in the Art of Archery* by Eugen Herrigel. I read these works and was amazed.

I sensed a deep connection to embodied knowing and everyday life—

1. For an elaboration of Kuki's imperative, see Maraldo 2019, 238–85.

realities that were neglected in the cerebral philosophy and theology I had been studying. To say these books intrigued me would be an understatement. I decided that, after earning a PhD, I would try to go to Japan. Then another fortuitous event occurred: Enomiya-Lassalle, a Jesuit priest as well as a Zen teacher, came to Munich and gave a lecture about Zen. I took my wish to him, and he helped me secure a position at Sophia University. My job was to teach philosophy in English, in the International Division of the University, and to translate books about Buddhism by Heinrich Dumoulin, the renowned historian of Zen. And soon I learned a little more about D. T. Suzuki and Nishida.

It was said that Nishida's philosophy was deeply inspired by Zen. This was somewhat of a welcome surprise, since I had the impression from Suzuki that Zen transcended rational thinking, whereas philosophy was supposed to be the exercise of rational thinking. The scant experience I had of Zen practice, at a single *sesshin* at Father Lassalle's *dōjō* called *Shinmeikutsu*, confirmed that Zen in practice had little if anything to do with philosophical thinking. So, I asked in anticipation, what in the world would a Zen philosopher be like? A year or two later, I found an English translation of *Zen no kenkyū* by Valdo Viglielmo, with a Foreword by Suzuki Daisetzu titled "How to Read Nishida," which I eagerly read and pondered. That was the bare beginning of my journey into the promise of his philosophy.

You will recall that *Inquiry into the Good* is a book that was written during Nishida's time teaching at the Fourth High School in Kanazawa.[2] For a philosophical work, the writing style was easy to follow; the content, however, proved difficult to fathom. Yet I was inspired by new possibilities. At the time, I thought I had an immediate understanding of Nishida's words—an understanding that nevertheless challenged the philosophy I had studied in Germany in new ways. But attempts to read and understand translations of works that came after *Inquiry into the Good* were frustrating. I will return to that topic shortly.

It was evident that Nishida's notion of pure experience had been influenced by William James and the German psychologists he mentions, but it was also clear that Nishida developed the notion quite differently than they had. It can be said that, instead of leaving "pure experience" as a primi-

2. Preface, NKZ 1: 3.

tive, isolated idea, Nishida's chapters propose how pure experience develops into thought and reflection and, indeed, a system of consciousness at the foundation of the entire world. What is more, this pure experience is said to manifest true reality prior to the distinction between an experiencing subject and an experienced object, and prior to the arising of an individual who experiences. But then the idea of pure experience challenged a basic thesis of phenomenology: if something is manifest, then it must be manifest to someone, and that someone is not only a recipient of the appearance, s/he is also an agent of manifestation. The terminology makes it sound difficult, but the idea is simple.

Let me explain in simple terms. In English, we speak of "awareness" and "being aware;" in German we speak of *bewußt* and *Bewußtsein*. In Japanese, we can speak of *kizuki* (気づき), *kakuchi* (覚知), and *mezame* (目覚め). Right now you are aware of my words, and of the things you have around you, and perhaps of the chair you're sitting in or the thoughts you have. Each of us is aware of the people and the things around us and of ourselves. Sometime we become aware of how our awareness misleads us, or of how we were unaware. But even then it is our awareness that opens to us the possibility of being wrong or of being unaware. For awareness to occur, there must, it seems, be someone who is aware and something of which one is aware. In phenomenology, awareness is "ground zero." In other words, behind every appearance—or rather in front of every appearance—stands a conscious being, and such conscious beings come in the form of individuals. That is, nothing is manifest without a personal consciousness. In contrast, Nishida's notion of an experience that originally belongs to no one, of thoughts without a thinker, remains a promising but challenging alternative for phenomenology.

Of course, my understanding of the first chapters of *Inquiry into the Good* has evolved over the decades. Let me mention here a recent insight into the idea of pure experience. Strictly speaking, pure experience is not an idea, but it does give rise to ideas, and as philosophers we reflect on those ideas and evaluate them. Re-reading *Religion and Nothingness* by Nishida's disciple, Nishitani Keiji, I noticed a deep connection to "pure experience" in Nishitani's discussion of single-mindedness (一心). The Buddhist term *samādhi* (三昧 in Japanese) is another name for this: the state of full attention or concentration. But it would be a mistake to take single-mindedness as a special state of mind, a psychological event or mental phenomenon

confined to Buddhist practice. Rather, it is an everyday event that usually goes unnoticed. Nishitani calls it a "mode of being," and says that this mode "realizes reality itself." I think this expression is close to Nishida's phrase, "to explain all things on the basis of pure experience" as the one, unifying reality. Further, Nishitani speaks of the "self-awareness of reality" that is "both our becoming aware of reality and, at the same time, reality realizing itself in our awareness."[3] We will need to return to the topic of self-awareness (*jikaku* 自覚) later; Nishida's first book does not mention this theme that became a seminal part of his philosophy. But Nishitani's words suggest the direction that Nishida took: the personal awareness that, for phenomenologists, manifests phenomena is, at the same time, an awareness that belongs to the world. And so "reality" is not simply what we endeavor to know; reality "appropriated through our understanding" (体認) is what actualizes us and is realized by us.

In reading Nishitani, I came to appreciate Nishida's early philosophy better, and to understand the continuity of his thought. Fifty years after Nishida's first work, Nishitani wrote of "reality realizing itself" through our self-awareness. Twenty-five years after *Inquiry into the Good*, Nishida put the point differently: our interactions with the world, our "performative intuition" (行為的直観), actualize us and the world. Perhaps I can illustrate these rather abstract ideas with a concrete example. The children we bring into the world are, in some sense, created by us and continue to mature into themselves through our interactions with them, just as we become who we are through our interactions with them. How we act toward others shapes them and their Umwelt, as well as shaping ours and who we become.

The translations of works of Nishida that I read after *Inquiry into the Good* often perplexed me. *Intuition and Reflection in Self-Awareness* seemed like a cascade of divergent ideas instead of a development of a unifying pure experience. The English translation of *Fundamental Problems of Philosophy* nearly threw me into despair. I felt a great frustration trying to comprehend ideas like "contradictory self-identity" and "self-aware dialectical universal." Even if I have some comprehension of terms like this now, I often feel that they need fresh translations or paraphrasing that can make them understandable to students trained in classical Greco-European philosophy. It

3. Nishitani 1987, 8 and Nishitani 1982, 5; on single-mindedness, see p. 17.

may be that I am now able to read and understand, to some degree at least, "Nishida philosophy" without relying on translations. Yet I feel that the process of translation can awaken us from the pretense that merely repeating Nishida's terms will result in comprehension. It is easy to fall into a repetition of Nishida's language and to be mesmerized by his terms, or literal translations of them, without truly understanding. Our explanations and translations of "Nishida philosophy" need to be more active. There is a saying in Italian, "*traduttore traditore*," which means that translators are traitorous. But I wonder if we might say instead that translators transfer and broaden understanding. Translators of Nishida today are well aware of the challenges and the rewards of this task.

Monographs by contemporary philosophers are supposed to be continuous and cohesive treatments. Nishida's works, on the other hand, are collections of essays, each of which may take up a matter again and again and rework his thought. Some were published serially in philosophical journals. *Intuition and Reflection in Self-Awareness* was published over four years in forty-four installments. I am still learning how to read these works—to read them thoughtfully and critically, piece by piece, with background study of his references. Recently, some scholars from several countries have been explaining the scientific side of Nishida's thinking in their articles for a forthcoming volume titled *Modern Physics and Kyoto School Philosophy*. For example, Rossella Lupacchini has discovered intriguing references to mathematics in *Intuition and Reflection in Self-Awareness*, and has drawn my attention to Nishida's essays on mathematics written just one year before he died. I have learned much about the reciprocal influence between Nishida and the Nobel Prize Laureate, physicist Yukawa Hideki. In fact, Nishida was instrumental in getting Einstein to come to Japan in 1922. Nishida was conversant with quantum theory as well as the theory of relativity, and his diagrams in *Fundamental Problems of Philosophy* depict individuals as finite parts or quanta of an infinite whole. The work by these scholars promises to recover the deep relationship between Nishida-philosophy and the history of modern physics. They confirm Nishida's conviction that, in Lupacchini's words, "knowing does not mean capturing a faithful, passive representation of an objective reality separate from the subject."[4] In Nishida's own terse

4. Lupacchini, nd.

words, "knowing must be thought of as a kind of [mutually determining] activity."[5] Contemporary epistemology and popular views of science need to recognize that knowing is a matter of interaction, and both we researchers and the world we study are inter-actors.

Self-awareness and world awareness: a promising insight

Let me now move on to a theme in Nishida philosophy that I think holds great promise.

I confess that I have been mesmerized by Nishida's idea of a self-aware world. I think that this unusual idea not only helps solve a philosophical problem; it also has consequences for the current ecological crisis. I begin with some conclusions Nishida reached by the end of his life, as they are condensed in his essay "On Self-Awareness" (自覚について), written in 1943. He begins with what we place at the center of all things when, for example, we describe the Big Bang or the formation of planet earth as leading up to now, to us here and now, to the presence that we are, that each of us is. He begins with the self, the self that is a center of awareness, is self-aware while being aware of others and things in the world. This self in act cannot be grasped as an object. From this active center, each of us can assume a standpoint, take a position or have a perspective on things and take account of them. But then Nishida adds a remark that turns our head around. Nishida writes: "[We] must take up the standpoint of the self-awareness of the creative self, the self that brings forth.... [Philosophy] proceeds not from the self, but from the world. That is why the self, as something that acts, is something to be reflected upon from the standpoint of the world."[6] What could this possibly mean?

Nishida's proposed standpoint does not describe the world of things "objectively," from a third-person point of view—the perspective aimed at in the empirical sciences. Rather, he insists on first-person viewpoints. First-person viewpoints come from self-awareness and allow for someone to take responsibility for what one says, especially when one makes truth claims.

5. NKZ 7: 76.
6. 「自覚について」[On Self-Awareness], in NKZ 10: 557, 559, my translation.

Nishida's "standpoint of the world" is not a perspective on the self from outside any self. In context, he does imply that the world is not something outside ourselves and we are not outside the world. For our selves, even as we reflect and find ourselves already here, are actively engaged with others and with things within the world. Unlike Descartes, Nishida understands self as embodied, conditioned by the world but also creative of it; there is no such thing as an "external world." Now, phenomenologists also show how selves are embodied beings in the world. Nishida stresses even more that self is that which takes action. Self is not only placed in the world but is also performative of the world in what it does and creates. Here we find deep resonances with *enaction theory* in the cognitive sciences today. "Enaction" may mean that "we assign meaning to the environment through physical actions,"[7] but Nishida's teaching is that this environment reciprocally determines human beings through their bodies and their history.

To come back to Nishida's words, I hear him saying that the personal self has to be understood from the standpoint of world—has to be understood *as* an interactive part of the world. But we need to say more than he does about the meaning of "world." Nishida's concern is to re-prioritize the elements of awareness so that a greater implicated whole takes precedence over subjective acts and the objects targeted by them. This implicated whole is the primary sense of *world* here. In modern philosophy, *world* can refer to the totality of all there is, or to all of "nature," or to the horizon of experience, or an emergent and interactive network of signification. Modern philosophy posits the subjective side of experience and the objective side of reality; Nishida rejects this split, two-sided worldview. The primary meaning of *world* for him is the lived, concrete whole that provides the context of experiential reality. The expression "standpoint of the world" points to the world precisely *as* an overarching place within which selves take their place, rather than the world supposedly as some conscious entity in itself that has a perspective on things. World as comprehensive place expresses a unity that is reflected in myriad selves.

Nishida stretches our imagination even further when he speaks of world as "self-aware," even if in a reciprocal way. He writes, "when the world becomes self-aware, the self becomes self-aware. And when our self becomes

7. Miyahara 2015, 5.

self-aware, the world becomes self-aware."[8] Once again, this statement jars with usual ways of speaking about the world. After all, the word *world* almost never means something that can have its own awareness, whether it refers to the totality of all there is, or to all of nature, or to a horizon of experience or network of signification. Nishida does provide a hint of what he means when he describes the structure of the world. Let's pay attention to some details of his description. In everyday Japanese, the expression *jikaku suru* (自覚する) can mean to realize or acknowledge something. For example, one realizes the responsibility one has, or realizes that one is a member of society. This meaning presupposes that one is aware of oneself. The self is—I am—self-aware in the sense that my consciousness manifests the world and presents things to me, individually and most often prior to reflection. But if self-awareness is to be an awareness of more than merely oneself, it cannot be interior to the self alone. Self-awareness seems interior, inside us, but somehow it must reach the exterior too. To solve that problem, modern European epistemology split the world in two, mind and nature, and then saw the mind as a mirror of nature, and ideas as representations of real objects. Nishida's solution is to see the world as mirroring itself in all the things "in the world." And whatever is "in the world" is a mirroring of the world. In this sense the world is "self-aware" or self-reflexive; and there is no outside to it. The world's structure is like that of an infinite set that is reflected in its parts, but never totally in any one of them. An individual's "self-awareness" is a partial mirroring of the world.[9]

There is one more factor to consider regarding Nishida's explanation in this essay. To explain how we come to know reality, we need to understand the role of self-negation. Nishida says that the world reflecting itself within itself must involve self-negation. Let me try once again to give a concrete example of Nishida's vision. The "world" (世界) is of course more than social relations (世間), but perhaps we may understand his point by thinking of ordinary human relationships. Consider again of our relation with the children we bring into the world. They reflect us and we are reflected in them. But then in opening themselves up to others they negate that limited identity, and we let them grow—and let ourselves grow— by negating our need

8. NKZ 10: 559

9. For elaboration of these themes, see MARALDO 2017, 276–98.

to manage them. This is a process of mutual self-negation, of identity that grows by "contradicting" what it was. Self lost is a greater self gained.

Nishida also describes the self as a "focal point" of the world.[10] The talk of reflecting, mirroring, and focal points implies, of course, optical metaphors. But Nishida is also talking about reflecting as thinking, and awareness as being conscious. Awareness is the power that lets things appear and be manifest. Earlier I mentioned how some phenomenologists think of consciousness as the power that lets things appear. And there must be someone *to whom* things appear—that is what phenomenologists call the "dative of manifestation." We must also be ones who enable the appearings or manifestations—we must be *agents* of manifestation. So what is the case with a world that somehow is aware? To speak like this would imply that world is somehow a power that lets things be manifest. A *self-aware world* functions such that it allows itself to be manifest and known—but to whom or to what? Is world a "dative of manifestation"—manifest to itself—as well as an agent of manifestation? The answer suggests alternative notions of both self and world. Nishida's world is neither an agent that could bring about an effect, nor a passive object brought about by actors outside it. It is, rather, a "place" (場所) of mediation. This is where the metaphor of focal points comes into play. We aware selves are the points—the places—in which world becomes aware.[11] The world for Nishida is not a singular agent independent of selves. And selves are not aworldly singularities independent of one another or of a world that appears through them. What is at stake is a certain reciprocity between world and selves.

Nishida's world and self are not the same, but neither are they independent. For one thing, world is singular but there exists a plurality of selves.

10. For an elaboration, see Maraldo 2022, 112.

11. This might seem similar to Schelling's view that nature becomes conscious of itself through human consciousness in the form of the transcendental ego. But Nishida's philosophy eschews the (notion of the) transcendental ego in place of myriad concretely acting, historically formed and creative selves. Nor is Nishida merely rephrasing Leibniz, where monads are utterly independent of one another and "each monad mirrors through its perceptions the whole universe, that is, each monad represents the entirety of the same universe from its own, unique perspective" (Leibniz 1887, 636); and where "spirits express God rather than the world, while other simple substances express the world rather than God" (Leibniz 2005, 42). In contrast, Nishida's individual selves co-create the world and each other; they are the world's expressive activity rather than a "representation" of the whole.

For another thing, the one world works through the plurality of selves, each of which expresses the world in its own way. I like to use another metaphor to make Nishida's point. We are the world's eyes, and not only eyes but ears and fingers and other sensitive organs, and in our own special ways we channel what the world has to say.

Now, this may sound like the height of anthropomorphizing, imagining that the whole world takes the form of a human self. But we could also see the matter in the reverse direction. Nishida repeats one phrase like a musical motif to describe the self. The self is that which acts, he says, that which can take action freely and creatively. The self is defined by its working in the world, by performing the world, as it were. It is more than an embodied self; it is an *enworlded* self that takes place within the world and is infused and defined by its relation to all others in a totality.[12] As a focal point of world, the self takes on the forms of the world, forming the world reciprocally and actively. If we channel what the world has to say, so to speak, we can also respond selfishly, bending or distorting it, refracting it rather than reciprocating. Here I see the beginning of the ecological relevance and promise of Nishida's standpoint.

But just who is this "we"? My metaphors and Nishida's expressions sound anthropocentric. He is clearly talking about human beings—all of them together—in a sense abstracted from social, cultural, and historical differentiations. He does emphasize that human selves are the very beings who make, and are made by, histories, cultures, societies, bodies; and there too he speaks reciprocally of the "historical body," "historical nature," and the "historical world." This world is threefold or three-dimensional in a special sense: the historical world encompasses the less inclusive biological sphere, which in turn encompasses the least inclusive physical realm that science calls "nature." The three "dimensions" are levels of description, with "historical and embodied" as the most concrete, and "physical" as the most abstract. Again, the idea is that a comprehensive account of the world must internally include the possibility of providing accounts, in other words, it

12.「我々が行為的直観的に物を見るということは、そこに世界が世界自身を映すことである。我々の自覚は世界の自覚であるのである。」[That we see things by means of action-oriented intuition means that the world reflects the world itself. Our self-awareness is the self-awareness of the world itself.].「物理の世界」[The World of Physics, 1944], NKZ 11: 21.

must include the possibility of self-awareness. Nishida's philosophy attempts to make sense of the living world that finds expression in us.

Pausing for a self-critical moment

Now it is time to pause for a moment to take stock of what I have presented. After all, rigorous, critical philosophy demands that we base our ideas on evidence and valid reasons, and not simply represent a worldview. To be sure, Nishida's philosophy is not based on empirical scientific evidence. A common assumption in the sciences is that valid scientific verification requires detached observers who do not participate in the world they investigate.[13] This is a dualistic account of the world that separates the knower from the known. Nishida rejects the dualistic account. Some contemporary physicists also challenge that account. For example, Karen Barad, expanding the results of quantum physics, understands the universe as comprised of phenomena that are inseparable interacting agents. "Phenomena or objects do not precede their interaction, rather, [they] emerge through particular intra-actions....Nothing is inherently separate from anything else, but separations are temporarily enacted so one can examine something long enough to gain knowledge about it." Her proposal is "a way of understanding the politics, ethics, and agencies of any act of observation, and indeed any kind of knowledge practice."[14]

As is well known, Nishida developed a notion of knowing that exemplifies reciprocity and occurs *by way of doing*. Scientific experimentation is one example of what he calls performative or enactive intuition, which requires a displacement of the self-centered self that would one-sidedly act upon things, rather than interact with them. Bodily, historical selves can know themselves as integral to the world they help create, and can know world by interacting within it. One critical test of Nishida's philosophy would be its power to expose hidden assumptions. Another would be a framework to

13. Quantum physics presents an exception, where the behavior of subatomic particles under observation is changed by the very act of measurement. At a macroscopic level in the world humans experience, the scientific ideal of objectivity prevails.

14. {https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agential_realism}. This is a summary of key points in Brandt 2007.

guide questions of empirical research. A third would be the power of his words to get us to see and to act more responsively and responsibly.

We may clarify Nishida's philosophy further by comparing and contrasting his standpoint with other philosophical and popular scientific positions. Consider Nishida's statement about one reciprocity: "When world realizes self-awareness, our self realizes self-awareness. And when our self realizes self-awareness, world realizes self-awareness."[15] And now, in contrast, consider a statement by the physicist Alan Lightman: "Nature has given us big brains, allowing us to build microscopes and telescopes and ultimately...to conclude that it's all just atoms and molecules...." This statement, apparently like Nishida's, speaks non-dualistically of the order of all things. But what is left out of Lightman's picture is the "mind" or consciousness that manifests the world and that "concludes" what it is. Lightman soon enough implies this subjective side when he ends his statement with these words "it's all just atoms and molecules. Or so I believe. I know this intellectually, yet I recoil from the idea."[16]

Nishida is attempting to answer the question: what must world be in order for conscious, acting beings to exist? Some physicists, writing today for a popular audience, have answered this question by reimagining the physical universe. Brian Swimme, for example, writes that "we are the self-reflection of the universe. We allow the universe to know and feel itself. So the universe is aware of itself through self-reflexive mind, which unfurls in the human."[17] Swimme presents an inspired and optimistic cosmology but, understandably, he does not take account of humans acting, for better or worse, socially and culturally. The quantum theorist David Bohm proposed that the universe is an undivided wholeness with an "implicate order," which enfolds everything in an interacting totality. In an astonishing paral-

15. Adapted from " On Self-Awareness," NKZ 10: 559.

16. LIGHTMAN 2018, 21–2.

17. SWIMME 1984, 58. Further, "the universe... continues to reveal itself to itself through human awareness.... We have a humanity that awakens to its planetary dimension, to its planetary responsibility, and thus begins to provide the Earth with a heart and mind... we can see how the planet as a whole awakens through self-reflective mind, which happens to unfurl through humanity" (31, 35). See also Amit Goswami's *The Self-Aware Universe*, which attempts to integrate science and spirituality but, to my mind, ends up reducing awareness to mathematical equations that mystify our subjective sense of awareness and performance.

lel to Nishida, Bohm once said that the "Implicate Order is getting to know itself better" due to human participation, and the individual is "the focus for something beyond mankind."[18] But Nishida connects more closely to human existence in his account of performative consciousness or awareness. And he takes account of interhuman activity and culture. He has layered the world of "nature" within the world of life and that in turn within the historically created world. What the physical sciences call "nature" he considers the most abstract, least inclusive of this three-dimensional world. Another comparison is with the physicist J. A. Wheeler. Wheeler proposed a "participatory universe," in which "the facticity of physics is related to [the] particular position of human beings in the world, such that this world allows them to produce its own explication and description."[19]

Typically, however, the sciences see consciousness as a product of the natural world. And at the other extreme, idealist philosophies see the world as a "product" of our consciousness. Nishida's philosophy offers an alternative, a more interactive view. This alternative contrasts with the scientific attitude in another way. The natural sciences typically seek a single true explanation of how things work, even when that explanation requires "complementary" observables such as "wave" and "particle" in the appearance of light, according to Bohr's "complementarity principle." In contrast, a philosophy that recognizes a plurality of the centers of awareness leads us to appreciate a diversity of viewpoints. That diversity, without lapsing into a nihilistic relativism, may be just as crucial to ecological balance as biodiversity is. The ecological relevance of Nishida philosophy needs to be developed much further, but the promise is visible.

18. Weber 1982, 77–80.

19. Nesteruk 2013, 2. Wheeler 1975, 270: "The brain is small. The universe is large. In what way, if any, is it, the observe affected by man, the observer? Is the universe deprived of all meaningful existence in the absence of mind? Is it governed in its structure by the requirement that it gives birth to life and consciousness? Or is man merely an unimportant speck of dust in a remote corner of space? In brief, are life and mind irrelevant to the structure of the universe—or are they central to it?"

Nishida's ecological potential

There is one final potential I would like to mention. It too concerns the relevance of Nishida philosophy for a well-rounded view of the world. Earlier I mentioned the latent anthropocentrism in my interpretation of Nishida: the emphasis on human selves as focal points of the world. The ecological crisis we now face may be due in part to such anthropocentrism. So we may ask, What is the place of animals in Nishida's vision? Animals are also aware beings who have their own kinds of languages and cultures; animals learn as well as react, create and teach as well as undergo. In some of his essays, Nishida almost recognizes animals as history-making beings. And, to a certain extent, he also attributes enactive intuition to animals as well as humans.[20] For a philosopher writing eighty-seven years ago, this is remarkable. To be sure, Nishida did follow the convention of his day in stating that animals act by instinct rather than out of free will. Human beings also exhibit instinctual behavior, but, importantly, humans are capable of freedom from bodily instinctual behavior, a freedom to create. Perhaps it is a matter of degree.

Current ethological research has challenged the assumption that animal behavior is governed largely by instinct, and some philosophers have challenged the notion that most human actions are initiated by freely formed, conscious intentions. These ideas would link humans and other animals in a continuum; perhaps they approximate a point Nishida is making. In one essay of 1938, Nishida presents animal being in sharp contrast with human being, but his contrast also connects them. When Nishida says that animal instinctual life is already enactive-intuitive, he is placing animal lives in a world with which they interact. If "instinct" names an ability to react to the environment in the very act of perceiving it, then it is at once active and intuitive in Nishida's sense of the words. The instinctive life of animals expresses the world's activity and remakes the world, if on a different scale than human freely-formed and more self-aware interactions. The "expressive activity" (表現作用) of animals and humans means the power to create new phenomena and change the environment. Contemporary research indicates that plants and fungi—to some extent at least—similarly act on, as well

20. In「人間的存在」[Human be-ing], in NKZ 9: 14.

as react to, others of their own kind and their environments. Perhaps we may consider extending Nishida's "expressive activity" to these life-forms as well. Nishida calls interactive life "form-making," and describes this rather abstractly as a movement "from the made to the making."

What is more, from "the standpoint of the world," the world as well as the individual is active; the world acts via the individual. This power properly belongs to the world as well as to the individual animal or human. In my understanding, it is the power of "historical nature" to change, to grow, to create new forms, as this power is "expressed" in individual beings, animal and human—and perhaps at some level, floral and fungal beings as well. It is the organism's activity that is both conditioned by and creative of body and environment. The creative power of world, the totality that expands the scientific concept of nature, expresses itself in both animal be-ing and human be-ing. Nishida's formulations emphasize reciprocity: what is given provokes new activity which remakes the given. In more personal terms, we make things that in turn make us who we are. The world as "created" or already there also functions as a creative world, a world ever in the making.

Is it not possible that animals also count as "focal points of the world," as Nishida describes the human self? If so, they, too, must be respected as the world's eyes and ears, skin and sensoria. These words function as a synecdoche for the manifold of sentience that opens the world to living beings. Yet that way of saying it is still only one-side of the story. The sensitivities of animals, human and nonhuman, function as ways the world knows itself, is opened to itself. The awareness that opens the world to itself belongs not merely to the human being but also to all beings capable of world-making. Insofar as these beings are capable of expressing the world, they are history-making beings. The respect due them is critical; to deny them this respect is to live against the world, to put the earth in a state of crisis. This is the message I hear in Nishida's philosophy. As you may recall, Karl Marx famously said, "Philosophers have interpreted the world; the point is to change it." But when it comes to letting a world heal that we ourselves have vandalized, Nishida might say: "If we want the world to change, we must heal ourselves."

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Abbreviation

NKZ 『西田幾多郎全集』[*Complete Works of Nishida Kitarō*], 4th edition (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1978–1980), 19 vols.

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