

Nishida's Path from Pure Experience to the World

James Drayton

INTRODUCTION

The following article attempts to provide a critical overview of Nishida's philosophical project as presented in what is considered to be his major philosophical work, 「善の研究¹⁾」. As Nishida described it, the project was to "...explain everything in terms of pure experience as the sole reality," (".....純粹経験を唯一の実存としてすべてを説明して....." ²⁾), a project which we call below Nishida's *Pure Experience Foundationalism*.

It shall be our argument that this Foundationalism is *underlain by what could be characterized as a Humean, associational theory of Judgement and that this theory motivates Nishida's criterion for Pure Experience (PE: 純粹経験)*, namely, the criterion of *Strict Unity* (厳密なる統一). We shall further argue not only that this criterion allows Nishida to cast the concept *PE* broadly enough so as to include Thought as a species of *PE*, but also that the criterion affords Nishida the basis for what we call below his *Subject-Object Identity* theory. It is this theory which underlies his philosophical path from the nature of *PE* to the nature of the World. It shall be argued, however, that the path suffers from an insurmountable, logical gap, conflating epistemological with metaphysical positions.

Finally, we shall conclude with some observations on Nishida's motivation for expanding the concept *PE* into the later concept of *Topos* (*T*: 場所) for the purposes of essentially the same philosophical project. It shall be our view that the concept *Topos* was seen by Nishida as a device for resolving the classical One-Many problem as it emerged in his Foundationalism. This view not only makes sense of the origin of the concept *T* from early Greek philosophy, but also of

Nishida's insistence not only on seeing the nature of World as "absolutely contradictory self-identity" (絶対矛盾的自己同一), but also on his insistence of "a logic of the predicate" (述語的論理³⁾).

PURE EXPERIENCE

As for the concept of *PE*, it is important to appreciate that this concept is not peculiar to or distinctive of only Nishida's thinking. The concept or its relative, so to speak, is very deeply entrenched in Western philosophical thought, from Descartes, Berkeley, Locke, Hume, Kant, Hegel, Wundt, James, and J.S. Mill, to such recent thinkers as Wittgenstein, Clarence Irving Lewis, and Willard Van Orman Quine.⁴⁾

Indeed, generally speaking, there seem to be two approaches to Nishida's deployment of this concept. One stems from its use by William James; another stems from the roots of the concept in Nishida's Zen-practice which predated his writing of 「善の研究」. However, it seems that to emphasize either aspect of the concept would risk the confusion of its genesis with its logical tenability, not unlike the mistake Hume committed in his analysis of causation. Thus, our approach will rely on the concept as presented by Nishida in his text. So, nothing said here should prejudice the reader one way or the other.⁵⁾

Nishida tells us that by *PE* — for which he also uses such expressions as "direct knowledge (直接の知識)," "direct experience (直接経験)," "intuitive experience (直感経験)," "immediate reality (直接実存)," and the like — he is referring to "...an experiential state as such, without any addition of deliberated discrimination" ("……純粹経験というのは、……毫も思慮分別を加えない、真に経験其假の状態をいうのである。")⁶⁾ Thus, according to this recipe, we can understand a *PE* as a state obtained by successively subtracting from any typical experience what Nishida calls "deliberated discrimination" (思慮分別).

By this expression, Nishida means the everyday, mundane kind of conceptual interpretations which we impose on our experiences — the meanings and judgments which our experiences elicit from us. E.g., to interpret a sound as being produced by a nearby scooter is, according to Nishida, to deliberately discriminate the sound as being "the effect of an external object" ("……これが外物の作用である……").⁷⁾ Thus, to arrive at the content of *PE*, it will suffice to eliminate deliberated discriminations from any given everyday experience.

We will arrive at a characterization of *PE* by extrapolation from the perceptual case. We will characterize its application in this case via a certain philosophical thought-experiment, one designed as a response to the commonsensical answer to the question "How do we know that books, tables, chairs, and other such physical objects really exist?"

The commonsensical answer is "by experience or perception, i.e., by seeing, touching, hearing, smelling, or tasting." The thought-experiment set up to respond to this answer is meant not only to discover *what the real content of a seeing, or touching, or hearing, etc., is, but also to establish that the real content is not a book, or table, or any such physical object.*⁸⁾

Our version of the thought-experiment has five stages. In each stage, we ask a subject what she sees in the visual field we present before her, without letting her know whether the field involves something genuine or only something ersatz. The last stage makes it plain that, contrary to commonsense, she does not really see physical objects, but only has consciousness of shapish colorishness, as it were. This stage discloses what Nishida describes as "an experiential state as such, without any addition of deliberated discrimination."⁹⁾ In other words, the last stage shows what the content of a perceptual experience is at the "...moment of seeing color, hearing sound,..., prior not only to the thought that color or sound is the effect of an external object or that one is sensing such, but also to the judgement of what this color or this sound is" (".....色を見, 音を聞く, 刹那, 未だこれが外物の作用であるとか, 我がこれを感じているとかいうような考えのないのみならず, この色, この音は何であるという判断すら加わらない前をいうのである").¹⁰⁾ More briefly, the last stage of our thought-experiment illuminates the concept *PE* by showing the kind of content enjoyed in *PE*. Now, we turn to the thought-experiment itself.

In the first stage, we present our subject with a red ball. Clearly, her response to the question. "What do you see?" will be that she sees a red ball. However, if we question the exactness of her answer, asking how much she really, strictly speaking, sees, her response would naturally be trimmed, thus: she sees the hemispherical half facing her.

In the second stage, the visual field may contain either a red ball or a perceptually indiscernible hemispherical half of a red ball; and which it is, our subject is not told. In this case, her response to our question will be that she sees a hemis-

pherical half of a red ball, but whether it is just a hemispherical half or the hemispherical half of a whole red ball, she cannot tell perceptually. Again, however, if we ask how much she really, strictly speaking, sees, her response would have to be that she sees the outer shell of a hemispherical half.

In the third stage, the visual field may contain either a red ball, a perceptually indiscernible hemispherical half of one, or the shell of such a half; again, which it is she is not told. In this case, she will respond that she sees a shell of a hemispherical half, but whether it is just a shell, or the shell of a hemispherical half, or the shell of a red ball, she cannot tell perceptually — perceptually, they are all indiscernible. Again, if we go on to ask how much she really, strictly speaking, sees, her response would have to be that she sees a reddish color in a roundish shape.

In the fourth stage, which we need not expand upon, we increase her possible choices by one, namely, by the holographic projection of a reddish color in a roundish shape which is perceptually indiscernible from the red ball. In this case, clearly, her proper answer to our question will be that she sees reddishness in roundishness, there before her, so to speak.

Lastly, to finish the experiment, we introduce our subject to the possibility of having been unwittingly induced with a hallucination of a red ball. In this last situation, clearly our subject's response to our final question will be that, strictly speaking, she is merely presently conscious of reddishness in roundishness (she retracts there before her), i.e., our subject would describe her experience as a truly pure experience, for as Nishida tells us, the truly pure experience is "merely a present consciousness of facts just as they are" ("事実其俛の現在意識あるのみである").¹¹⁾

Each stage of the thought-experiment reduces what W.V.O. Quine would call "the objective pull"¹²⁾ on our subject's descriptions of her perceptual experience, by which is meant that these descriptions are couched in terms which allegedly refer to the objective world. In the fifth stage, this pull is eliminated altogether. However, at no stage was the "what" of the subject's experience in any way altered. Rather, her deliberated discriminations of those experiences were merely rendered more and more susceptible to doubt, forcing them to a narrower and narrower range of greater accuracy, certainty and immediacy, inducing direct knowledge of "facts just as they are."¹³⁾ Thus, by the last stage, in Nishida's

terms, our subject “has to dispose of all artificial assumptions, doubt what can be doubted, and proceed on a basis of direct knowledge” (“凡ての人工的假定を去り、疑うにもはや疑いようのない、直接の知識を本として出立せぬばならぬ”).¹⁴ In short, by the last stage, our subject has been forced to “completely dispose of [her] own artifice” (“全く自己の細工を棄てて……”).¹⁵

More briefly, in Nishida's terminology, each stage reduces the subject's deliberated discrimination. The residual content in the last stage displays the content of *PE*: present visual consciousness of reddishness in roundishness. (See Diagram 1 on the last past).

Now, it is a bit misleading to describe the content of *PE* as being the residual content of an everyday experience whose deliberated discriminations have been eliminated. This suggests that some content is actually removed from the experience. However, this is not the case.

Nishida holds that judgements and meanings imposed on an experience do not clarify, enrich, or add to its content. As he puts it: “the judgements and meanings of an experience ... do not add any richness to the content of experiences as such” (“……経験の意味とか判断とかいうのは……経験其假の内容を豊富にするのではない”).¹⁶ So, it would be more accurate to characterize *PE* as giving the pure or core content of any everyday experience — and it is in this sense that Nishida speaks of *PE* as being pure.

From these considerations, it follows that the content of all experiences is constituted by some *PE* — this was implicit in the thought-experiment. From stage to stage, we did not alter the “what” of our subject's experience (it may be assumed that the visual field is not tampered with); we merely increased the number of epistemological hazards which her discriminatory interpretation could meet. This was the motivation for reducing objective pull. At each stage, her experience was left unaltered: the same array of colors were present in her visual field. It follows, then, that the content of the subject's experience in stage one — an everyday seeing of a red ball — is the same as the content of her experience in the last stage — present visual consciousness of reddishness in roundishness.

These considerations show, again, that the content of experience at its most certain and immediate level, the content of an everyday experience bereft of all everyday discriminatory trappings, is simply a collage of expanses in various colors, temperatures, sounds, smells, and tactile feels.

DIAGRAM 1

THOUGHT-EXPERIMENT ELIMINATING DELIBERATED DISCRIMINATION

SUBJECT'S JUDGEMENT	VISUAL FIELD	EPISTEMOLOGICAL POSSIBILITIES
(1) a red ball ; strictly speaking (2) the near half	●	a red ball
(1) the near half strictly speaking (2) the outer shell of a half	● ◐	red ball indiscernible hemispherical half
(1) the outer shell of a half strictly speaking (2) hemispherically shaped reddish color	● ◐ ◑	red ball indiscernible hemispherical half shell of hemispherical half
(1) hemispherically shaped reddish color strictly speaking (2) reddishness in roundish shape	● ◐ ◑ “ ”	red ball indiscernible hemispherical half shell of hemispherical half holographic projection of shell
(1) reddishness in roundish shape strictly speaking (2) consciousness of reddishness in roundishness	● ◐ ◑ “ ” ?	red ball indiscernible hemispherical half shell of hemispherical half holographic projection of shell hallucination of red ball indiscernible half shell ...

As possibilities multiply, deliberated discrimination decreases.

It is such a collage that Nishida is calling *PE*. Such a collage gives the content of an experience confined to the “moment of seeing color or hearing sound, ..., prior not only to the thought that the color or sound is the effect of an external object or that one is sensing it, but also to the judgement of what the color or sound might be.”¹⁷⁾ In summary, an ordinary perceptual episode construed as *present consciousness of undiscriminated expanses of color, sound, smell, tactile feel, and temperature* is a *PE*.

Now, without developing Nishida's argument here — we develop it below — let us simply state that his concept *PE* is not confined to what, in ordinary parlance, we would call *an experiential episode*. Rather, he casts the concept further. Indeed, as long as an episode of consciousness possesses what he calls *Strict Unity* (厳密なる統一の状態), it is to be categorized as *PE*. As he puts it: “irrespective of its nature, in so far as a consciousness has strict unity it is pure experience: it is simple fact” (“……いかなる意識があっても、それが厳密なる統一の状態にある間は、いつでも純粹経験である、即ち、単に事実である”).¹⁸⁾ Thus, should a thinking-episode have *Strict Unity* it also would be categorized as *PE*.

This seems awkward: ordinarily, thinking-episodes are not seen as being experiences of any kind. However, we see below why Nishida wishes to maintain that “...the activity of thinking constitutes a kind of pure experience” (“……思惟の作用も純粹経験の一種であるということができると思う”).¹⁹⁾ The view that any episode of consciousness can be *PE* is the basis of what we will call Nishida's *Pure Experience Foundationalism*, whose pivotal position is that *Strict Unity* is a criterion of *PE*.

PURE EXPERIENCE FOUNDATIONALISM

With respect to the perceptual case, we can now understand Nishida's claim that “facts of pure experience must be at the base of judgments” (“……かく判断の本に純粹経験がなければならぬ……”),²⁰⁾ i.e., that *PE* must always underlie any kind of deliberative discrimination.

If the pure content of an everyday perceptual episode is given by the content of some *PE* — as our experiment tried to show — it follows, then, that judgements or meanings induced by the content of such an episode are based on the content of some such *PE*. That is to say, perceptual judgements are, thus, based on facts of *PE*. This was shown in the thought-experiment: the subject's judgement that

she is seeing a red ball was grounded in present visual consciousness of reddishness in roundishness.

However, it is not only perceptual judgements which are underlain by *PE*. According to Nishida, virtually any cognitive judgement is so underlain :

かく判断の本には純粹経験がなければならぬということは、常に事実に対する判断の場合のみではなく、純理的判断というような者においても同様である。たとえば幾何学の公理の如き者でも皆一種の直覚に基づいている。たとい抽象的概念であっても、二つの者を比較し判断するにはその本において統一的或者の経験がなければならぬ。いわゆる思惟の必然性というのはこれより出でくるのである。故に若し前にいったように知覚の如き者のみでなく、関係の意識をも経験と名づけることができるならば、純理的判断の本にも純粹経験の事実があるということがのできる。また推論の結果として生ずる判断について見ても、ロックが論証的知識においても一步一步に直覚的証明がなければならぬといったように（Locke, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, Bk.IV, Chap. II, 7）連鎖となる各判断の本にはいつも純粹経験の事実がなければならぬ。

The view that pure experience must underlie judgement pertains not only to the case of factual judgement, but also to purely rational judgement. For example, even the axioms of geometry are based on a kind of intuition. However abstract two concepts might be, a comparison and judgement about them must be underlain by an experience of a unity. From this, we can see whence comes the so-called necessity of thought. And not only perception as remarked before, but if consciousness of relations can be called experience, then facts of pure experience lie at the foundation of purely rational judgement also. This holds for judgements born of the result of inference, just as Locke argued (Locke, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, Bk.IV, Chap.II,) that each step of demonstrative knowledge must have an intuitive verification, there must also be facts of pure experience at the basis of each judgement in the sequence.²¹⁾

According to this argument, not only does *PE* underlie what we can call non-demonstrative judgements, such as perceptual and factual judgements, but also what we can call demonstrative judgements, such as conceptually abstract judgements, judgements in mathematics, and judgements that are, in some sense, based on pure reason. What's more, were we to assume that all human knowledge can be exhaustively expressed by both species of judgement, it would follow that *all human knowledge is underlain by facts of PE*. It is this position that we wish to call

Nishida's *Pure Experience Foundationalism (PE Foundationalism)*.

Nishida's strategy here is not unlike that found in Western philosophy. In this case, the strategy is to argue that there are basically two species of judgement — e.g., Kant's Synthetic and Analytic, Hume's Relations of Ideas and Matters of Fact, or the Logical Positivists' Tautologous and Empirically Verifiable. From this position, then, the aim is to show that both species are underlain by *PE*. If this can be shown, it can be concluded that all judgement is grounded on *PE*. From which it would follow, then, that *PE* constitutes the ultimate epistemological foundation of all human knowledge.

On the other hand, Nishida's *PE Foundationalism* is not just one more version of the Phenomenalism — not “Phenomenology” — which we find in the thinking of the Logical Positivists, and such thinkers as J.S. Mill, for whom judgements about physical objects were merely judgements about a permanent possibility of sensation, or C.I. Lewis, for whom nondemonstrative knowledge was grounded in indefinitely long conjunctions of subjunctive conditionals about future courses of experience.²²⁾

What distinguishes Nishida's *PE Foundationalism* from these forms of Phenomenalism is precisely that in Nishida's view what constitutes the *PE*-foundation of any judgement need not be some Phenomenalistic sensational given, such as *the sense-datum* or *the raw feel*. As the above passage expressed, the *PE*-foundation for judgement can be any state of consciousness, provided it possesses what Nishida calls *Strict Unity*.

According to Nishida, *Strict Unity* is both necessary and sufficient for a given state of consciousness to be a *PE*-foundation for judgement. As he puts it: “The reason for the immediacy and purity of a pure experience is not its simplicity, un-analyzability, or instantaneousness; it is the strict unity of concrete consciousness” (“純粹経験の直接にして純粹なる所以は、単一であって、分析できぬとか、瞬間的であるとかいうことにあるのではない。かえって具体的意識の厳密なる統一にあるのである”).²³⁾ What does Nishida mean by *Strict Unity*?

Nishida mentions *Strict Unity* in connection with *PE* in a number of places throughout his text. He seems to be referring to what we can describe as a *certain nonconceptually mediated connectedness in consciousness*.

For example, when Nishida mentions the “strict unity of concrete consciousness”²⁴⁾ he is referring to a connectedness that unites certain mental

phenomena as when “...one perception brings about another without so small a fissure between them that even Thought may enter” (“これらの精神現象においては、知覚が厳密なる統一と連絡とを保ち、意識が一より他に転ずるも……前の作用が自ら後者を惹起しその間に思惟を入れるべき少しの亀裂もない”).²⁵⁾ Other cases of such connectedness are “... the determined ascent of a cliff and the musician’s mastered performance of a composition....” (“たとえば、一生懸命に断岸をずる場合の加き、音楽家が熟練した曲を奏する時の加き……”).²⁶⁾

Presumably, the states of consciousness which accompany the climbing and the performance are so closely tied together as to apparently constitute but one temporally elongated state. Similarly, the same would be true of the states of consciousness which accompany reading, reaching for and then drinking a glass of water, and perhaps, the carpenter’s hammering so often characterized by Heidegger in his *Being and Time*.²⁷⁾

In each of these cases, there is a sequence of mental states each element of which is, in some sense, so intimately tied to its immediately adjacent states — immediate predecessor, immediate successor — as to be, in effect, indistinguishable from them. The structure of such a sequence of states could be described mathematically as satisfying the transitive condition imposed on immediate adjacency, i.e., $Ia(x, y)$, x is immediately adjacent to y , thus :

$$(1) (\forall x)(\forall y)(\forall z) \{ [Ia(x, y) \wedge Ia(y, z)] \Rightarrow Ia(x, z) \},$$

for any x , y , and z : if x and y are immediately adjacent, and y and z are immediately adjacent, then x and z are immediately adjacent. Graphically, the model for such closure could *not* be given linearly, as in Figure (a) below, but only circularly as in Figure (b) :



Figure b) depicts *arbitrarily separated* moments of a strictly unitary

mental state: the space, as it were, between each moment being so dense that the *first* and *third* moments are separated by the same distance which separates the *first* and *second*, and the *second* and *third*.

In summary, *Strict Unity* is a kind of density of a state of consciousness such that it cannot be nonarbitrarily construed as comprising distinguishable sub-states. Any sub-states which the given state might be thought to comprise would have to be arbitrarily (without a rational basis) distinguished from each other — clearly, a notion similar to Bergson's idea of pure duration.²⁸⁾

Now, what explains Nishida's emphasis on *Strict Unity*? For what reasons does he render it the essential characteristic of *PE*?

It should be clear that without the criterion of *Strict Unity*, another criterion would be needed to individuate the epistemological foundation for all judgements, both demonstrative and nondemonstrative. However, in the case of nondemonstrative judgements, it seems to be the absence of any conceptual discrimination in content which distinguishes its founding *PE*; and clearly, this could not be the distinguishing characteristic in the case of demonstrative judgements.

It is our view that Nishida is forced to characterize *PE* in terms of *Strict Unity* by virtue of what we can call his theory of Judgement. As a detailed account of the theory would call for a rich comparison with Hume's associationism, we will only provide a rough depiction.

Basically, according to Nishida, the judgements articulating deliberated discrimination "... arise from a connection between a present consciousness and a past consciousness....For example, when one judges an auditory perception to be the sound of a bell, this only positions the perception relative to past experience" ("意味とか判断とかを生ずるものつまり現在の意識を過去の意識に結合するより起こるのである……例えば或聴覚についてこれを鐘声と判じた時は、ただ過去の経験中においてこれが位置を定めたのである")²⁹⁾ — a comment which reads like it came straight out of Hume's *Treatise*.³⁰⁾

Now, when a present consciousness, such as the "meaningful" auditory perception Nishida mentions, is related to a past consciousness, this pairing itself can be construed as a state of consciousness also, an associational one, if you will. This latter state consists of two nonarbitrarily distinguishable states, and thus, does not possess *Strict Unity*. Thus, when a state of consciousness is subject to deliberated discrimination — judgement and meaning — *Strict Unity* is destroyed.³¹⁾ Nishida

himself remarks as follows :

……この〔厳密なる〕統一が破れた時、即ち他との関係に入った時、意味を生じ判断を生ずるのである。我々に直接に現われ来る純粹経験に対し、すぐ過去の意識が働いて来るので、これが現在意識の一部と結合し一部と衝突し、ここに純粹経験の状態が分析せられ破壊せられるようになる。

...when this [strict] unity is torn, when a present consciousness is related to another consciousness, meaning and judgement are born. In contrast to pure experience, whose expression comes to us directly, a past consciousness becomes active, becoming connected to but clashing with one part of present consciousness, and thus, the state of pure experience breaks apart and collapses.³²⁾

This helps to explain why Nishida is wont to insist that a *PE* is devoid of meaning. If any state of consciousness has meaning, then it would follow from Nishida's theory that this meaning arose in virtue of the given state bearing a relation to some past state — betraying such a structure as, say, xRy . This would provide a basis, then, on which we could analyze the given state into two related sub-states — x and y . From this analysis, then, it would follow that the given state does not possess *Strict Unity*, and is not a *PE*. Thus, again, if a state has meaning, it is not a *PE*. Conversely, if a state were a *PE*, it would possess *Strict Unity*, and would not be nonarbitrarily analyzable into such a structure as xRy . Thus, the necessary conditions for the existence of meaning would not obtain ; so it would be devoid of meaning.

We now see how Nishida's theory of Judgement grounds his criterion of *Strict Unity*, which in its turn, grounds a construal of *PE* wide enough to serve as a foundation for both demonstrative and non-demonstrative Judgement. So, we can see in what sense Nishida would like to maintain that, e.g., the axioms of geometry are underlain by *PE*.

In this case, the underlying *PE* is a certain strictly unitary, pure intuition — the cognitive counterpart of such self-evident states as the present visual consciousness of reddishness in roundishness.

The view resounds of the position which Kurt Gödel came to espouse as a result of his incompleteness discoveries in first-order number theory. These discoveries show, roughly, that in the case of any first-order theory powerful enough to express everyday arithmetic — Zero, Successor, Primitive Recursion, Induction

— the notion of truth and formal provability are not coextensive : there will always exist arithmetical truths which cannot be formally proven within the given theory. So, the discoveries render it problematic how we can know whether a given arithmetical sentence is true ; for, clearly, it cannot be by virtue of having a formal proof of it.

Gödel's position was that this knowledge is based on an intellectual intuition we have of arithmetical truth, a kind of cognitive vision of the state of affairs which the arithmetical truth expresses. It is in this sense that we wish to read Nishida's above remarks concerning geometrical truth, that we have a kind of intellectual intuition of the alleged truth which they express. More generally, it may be in this sense that Nishida wanted to espouse PE as an epistemological foundation for mathematical judgements and, perhaps, for those that are, in some sense, based on pure reason — at least, this is what we will maintain.³³⁾ We will see later that this position poses a serious problem for Nishida's metaphysics, however.

To further exemplify our comments, let us consider what Nishida says about Thought, whose articulations are judgement and meaning :

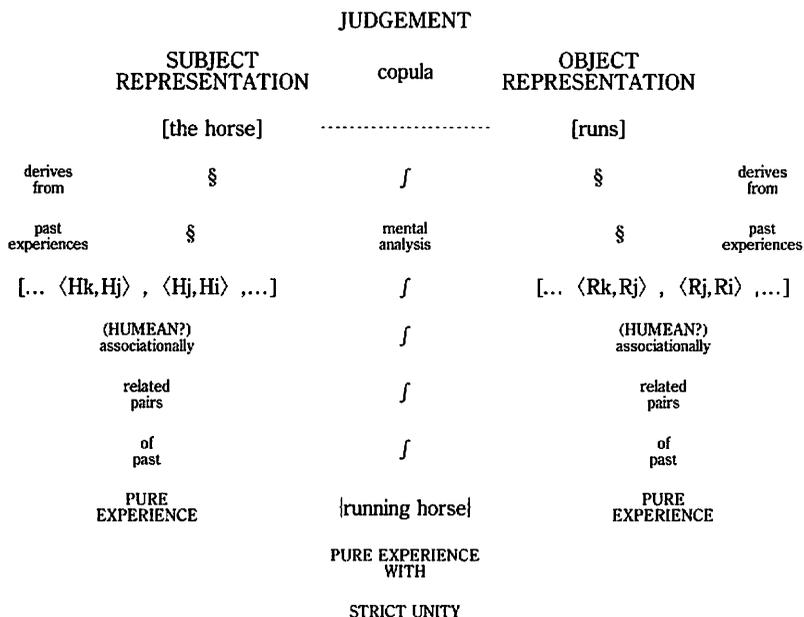
その[思惟]最も単一なる形は判断であって、即ち二つの表象の関係を定め、これを結合するのである。しかし我々は判断において二つの独立なる表象を結合するのではなく、かえって或一つの全き表象を分析するのである。たとえば「馬が走る」という判断は、「走る馬」という一表象を分析して生ずるのである。それで、判断の背後にはいつでも純粹経験の事実がある。判断において主客両表象の結合は、実にこれによりてできるのである。

Its [Thought's] simplest form is judgement, connecting two representations by establishing a relation between them. But judging is not connecting two independent representations ; it is an analysis of a single representation in its entirety. For example, the judgement .“The horse runs” . is born from analysis of the single representation .“the running horse.”.Facts of pure experience always underlie judgements, and in virtue of this we can connect the subject and object representations in a judgement.³⁴⁾

If we analyze this passage in terms of Nishida's *PE Foundationalism*, together with his theory of Judgement and criterion of *Strict Unity*, we have the following diagram of his views :

In summary, we now can see the structure of Nishida's *PE Foundationalism*. It holds that PE is criterially determined by *Strict Unity* ; and that so determined *PE*

DIAGRAM 2



is the ultimate epistemological foundation for both demonstrative and non-demonstrative judgements. We will now turn to Nishida's metaphysics, which we call his *Subject-Object Identity* theory. Nishida draws this theory out from his *PE Foundationalism*. As we see below, this turns out to be a weakness in Nishida's thinking.

Subject-Object Identity

As we now know, by *Strict Unity* Nishida means a kind of extreme density characterizing a state of consciousness. One which does not allow for any nonarbitrary partitioning of the state, such as the partitioning we have of the state accompanying judgment into what Nishida called above "subject and object representations." Indeed, given its *Strict Unity*, Nishida claims that the realm of *PE* is, in some sense, logically prior to any so-called subject-object distinction, that it makes no sense to characterize *PE*-content in terms of the notions of Subject and Object,

whether 'Subject' in the sense of logical subject of predication, or 'Subject' in the sense of a consciousness.

We can illustrate the position here with reference to the horse-example and our above thought-experiment. In effect, it is being claimed that, qua PE, we cannot analyze the content of "running-horse" in terms of, say, first-order logic: $(\exists x)[\text{Horse}(x) \wedge \text{Runs}(x)]$, which depicts an existing object as having the properties Horse and Runs; rather, the content is more akin to running horseness'. Similarly, with respect to the thought-experiment, the claim is that our subject's PE cannot be analyzed in terms of her *having* consciousness of a roundish something with a reddish color; rather, it is more correct to describe this situation as illustrating 'consciousness in roundish reddishness' — consciousness in *that* shape.

Throughout 「善の研究」 we can find the position that *Strict Unity* precludes descriptions of PE in any terms which presuppose a Subject-Object distinction:

……純粹経験の範囲……主客未分の状態……

The extent of pure experience ...the state where subject and object have not yet separated³⁵⁾;

とにかく直接経験の状態において、主客相没し……

In the state of direct experience, when subject and object are absorbed in each other³⁶⁾;

……主客の別を打破した最も統一せる直接経験……

...the most unified, direct experience, which has destroyed the subject-object distinction³⁷⁾;

……凡て直接経験の状態においては主客の区別はない……

...in any state of direct experience there is no distinction between subject and object....³⁸⁾;

……主客の別は経験の統一を失った場合に起きる……

the subject-object distinction ...arises when experience's unity is lost³⁹⁾;

……この時[純粹経験の]にはまだ主客の対立なく……

... at this time [of pure experience], there is yet no subject-object opposition⁴⁰⁾

純粹経験においては未だ知情意の分離なく、唯一の活動であるように、また未だ主観各観の対立もない。

In pure experience, Thought, Feeling, and Willing are unseparated ; as but a single activity, there is also no subjective-objective polarity.⁴¹⁾

上にいったように主客を没したる知情意合一の意識状態が真実存である。

As remarked above, the state of consciousness in which subject and object are absorbed into the unity of Thought, Feeling, and Willing is the true reality.⁴²⁾

As the above quotations make plain, according to Nishida, in the realm of PE, within the extension of the criterion of Strict Unity, there is absolutely no distinction between Subject and Object.

This denial of any Subject-Object distinction seems to Nishida to justify the conclusion that at this level, Subject and Object are identical, whether it is subject-of-predication or subject-of-consciousness. This view, that Subject is identical to Object, we will call Nishida's *Subject-Object Identity* thesis.

Given this thesis, it becomes clear not only why Nishida maintains that PE is the sole reality, but also why he claims that the principle that unifies consciousness is identical to the principle that unifies the World. In other words, from his Identity thesis, Nishida concludes that the essential nature of consciousness and the essential nature of the world are one and the same.

Nishida's inference here is not unlike those in wide currency in the world of 19th-century Western philosophy, especially among the so-called Absolute Idealists. Accordingly, any given state of consciousness is construed as a kind of systematically developed unity, a synchronically coherent structure which is also diachronically coherent, and for the accounting of which there must be some fundamental principle. Some such principles were Hegel's idea of Spirit coming to self-realization, and Bergson's notion of *élan vital*.⁴³⁾

In Nishida's case also, a given state of consciousness, e.g., a visit to a disco seems to be internally coherent at each moment: the colors, sounds, feels, temperatures, and smells all blend together, so to speak, to give us one synchronically coherent experience; and the experience seems diachronically coherent as well: it develops from a train of prior experiential states into later such states. However, according to Nishida, in this case, as in all cases, *Strict Unitary PE* ultimately grounds the experience.

Thus, from Nishida's perspective, there must be some fundamental principle which accounts for the *Strictly Unitary PE* grounding not only our everyday experience, but also our Thought as well. In Nishida's terminology, there must be some "unifying element" (統一或者) or some "unifying power" (統一力) accounting for Strictly Unitary PE. What's more, this power will account for all states of consciousness, given not only that it accounts for *Strict Unity*, but also given that all states are grounded on *PE*.

For example, the state of consciousness of seeing a blue car in front of a yellow house is a coherent visual consciousness. According to Nishida, this state is founded on *PE*, namely, consciousness in shapish colorishness. As this *PE* is inducible from the given state by simple subtractions, so to speak, of deliberated discrimination, it follows that whatever power accounts for the former must also account for its underlying *PE*. Thus, the unifying power that accounts for the coherence of consciousness is one and the same with the unifying power that accounts for *PE*.

According to Nishida, this unifying power is somehow attributable to consciousness itself. Furthermore, since in the realm of *PE*, Subject is identical to Object (i.e., Consciousness and Non-consciousness are identical), it follows that the unifying power accounting for the Subject is one and the same with the unifying power accounting for the Object. Since the unifying power accounting for the Subject is attributable to consciousness itself, the unifying power accounting for Non-consciousness is also attributable to Consciousness. In short, therefore, the unifying power accounting for Consciousness is one and the same with the unifying power accounting for the so-called objective world. Nishida argues the view thus :

この統一的或者が物体现象ではこれを外に存する物力となし、精神現象ではこれを意識の統一力に帰するのであるが、前にいったように、物体现象といい精神現象というも純粹経験の上においては同一であるから、この二種の統一作用は元来、同一種に属すべきものである。我々の思惟意志の根柢における統一力と宇宙現象の根柢における統一力とは直同一である……

This unifying element, in the case of physical phenomena, is a physical power existing externally, in the case of mental phenomena, is attributable to the unifying power of consciousness; but as noted earlier, since physical and mental phenomena are identical from the view of pure experience, these two types of unifying activity are essentially one and the same. The unifying power at the base of our thinking and willing and the unifying power at the base of the phenomena of the universe are truly one and the

same⁴⁴⁾

Concerning this very passage, Keiji Nishitani, Nishida's devoted disciple, wrote the following :

Our experience originates ...beyond the subject-object dichotomy. This means that at the point where it is immediately constituted ... the unifying power at the basis of our thinking and willing (the world of objects) is "directly identical" with the unifying power in the phenomena of the cosmos (the world of objects).⁴⁵⁾

To summarize, according to Nishida's *Subject-Object Identity* theory, understanding the nature of the Universe is one and the same with understanding the nature of *PE*. The view should remind readers of the mystical experience as portrayed in the opening stanza of Blake's famous "Auguries of Innocence" :

To see a world in a grain of sand,
And a heaven in a wild flower,
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand,
And eternity in an hour.⁴⁶⁾

CRITICISM AND THE TRANSITION TO TOPOS

Now, earlier, I claimed that a weakness in Nishida's thinking is that he often uses his epistemological conclusions to try to gain metaphysical ground. I want to expand on this claim by examining the argument in Nishida's *Subject-Object Identity* theory. In particular, I wish to examine the basic premise of the *Subject-Object Identity* theory, namely, *that the absence of a distinction between Subject and Object entails that Subject and Object are identical.*

First off, the absence of a distinction between A-items and B-items does not by itself entail that A-items are identical to B-items. There was a time when I could not distinguish apples from pears ; but it does not follow from this either that at that time, apples were pears, or that at that time, I was justified in believing that apples were pears. Similarly, that *we cannot distinguish between Subject and Object* does not entail that Subject is identical to Object.

This lack of a distinction is an epistemological lack ; it is not a metaphysical lack — recall the epistemological subtractions we used to arrive at the content of our

subject's perceptual *PE*. This is what was meant by the remark that Nishida uses his epistemology to try to gain metaphysical ground.

Similarly, the absence of a Subject–Object distinction at the level of *PE* is also an epistemological lack. We cannot tell from the position of a *PE* whether it is a purely subjective episode or is indicative of the world around us. At the level of *PE*, we, the conscious thinkers, just cannot tell from our perceptual position whether we are having a genuine experience or something ersatz. We suffer a lack of know–how. There is a distinction, we just cannot tell whether it applies. However, Nishida's argument needs a much stronger metaphysical claim, namely, that there is no distinction whatsoever — even in principle — between Subject and Object ; and this assumption seems false.

If there is no such metaphysical distinction whatsoever — which is what the argument requires (even setting aside doubts about Leibniz's Law) — then, outside of the level of *PE* also, there is no metaphysical distinction, e.g., at the level of everyday consciousness.

However, at the level of everyday consciousness, there certainly seems to be a distinction between Subject and Object. For example, the color blue and my idea of the color blue are metaphysically distinct kinds of items ; similarly, the color blue and my *hallucination* or *after-image* of the color blue certainly seem different. There is a distinction. Thus, I submit, the stronger assumption which Nishida needs for the validity of his argument is simply false.⁴⁷⁾

In short, if we reject the Identity Position, and I have argued that we should as it suffers a deep logical gap, then the path from pure experience to the nature of the Objective World is simply impassable.

What's more, even if it is assumed that Nishida can rescue his argument from this criticism, i.e., that Nishida can independently buttress this assumption of the Subject–Object theory, the following questions must seriously be considered. In what sense can Nishida plausibly argue that within the frame of a *PE*–foundation for mathematical judgement, is the Subject identical to the Object. What is the Subject of a mathematical Judgement ; the Object?

A Gödelian position does not encounter this difficulty as this position does not espouse a Subject–Object Identity. However, Nishida's position does.

While these considerations show that Nishida's *PE*–Foundationalism is incompleteable, it seems that these were not the kinds of reason which motivated him to

give up on *PE* in favor of *Topos* as a metaphysical–epistemological foundation to his account of the World. Indeed, there is a sense in which Nishida never did abandon *PE*, if by that we mean that he sometime later dropped the concept whole–heartedly. I.e., the shift in Nishida’s thought from *PE* to *Topos* as his new theoretical fulcrum is best described as an expanding of the account of *PE*: he often characterizes *Topos* as the *field* of consciousness, whereas *PE* is clearly only a state.⁴⁸⁾

The topic is better left for another paper. However, we will mention that the necessity to expand *PE* may have been seen by Nishida as early as his writing of 「善の研究」. The concept is clearly alluded to in this work, as the following passage makes plain :

實在の成立には……相互の反対むしろ矛盾ということが必要である。ヘラクレイトスが争は万物の父といったように、實在は矛盾に由って成立するのである……この矛盾がしょめつすると共に實在も消え失せてしまう。元來この矛盾と統一とは同一の事柄を両方面よりもたものにすぎない、統一があるから矛盾があり、矛盾があるから統一がある。

As for the establishment of Reality ... rather than a mutual opposition contradiction is necessary. Just as Heraclitus said that Strife is the father of all things, Reality is established from contradiction With the extinction of contradiction, Reality is also extinguished. Strictly speaking, contradiction and unity are different sides of the same matter : there is contradiction because there is unity and there is unity because there is contradiction.⁴⁹⁾

Nishida’s thinking here seems to nearly converge on the concept of *absolute contradictory self-identity* (絶対矛盾的自己同一), in terms of which he later characterized Reality. If one assumes with Nishida that Reality is a unity and that this unity is essentially the same as contradictoriness, albeit a different facet of it, it seems to follow that the identity of Reality is essentially a contradictory self-identity.

Nishida’s reference to Heraclitus in this context should provide us some hint as to the problem which Nishida was trying to articulate.

Heraclitus, as other Ionian pre–Socratic philosophers before him — Thales, Anaximander, and Anaximenes — was responding to the so-called One–Many problem, namely : the problem of understanding how Reality can be one unitary item,

but also the many distinct items which it seems to comprise ; if it is one, it cannot be many, and if many, it cannot be one.⁵⁰⁾

Now, if we were to assume that the identity of Reality derives from both One-ness and Many-ness, despite the polarity between One and Many, then we would naturally be led to characterizing the world in such terms as Nishida characterizes it in his *Topos-essay* :

... the world, the contradictory self-identity of the many and the one ...⁵¹⁾

Therein the material world ...the ... logic of contradictory self-identity is already at work ...⁵²⁾

The contradictory self-identical world⁵³⁾

... the world of truly concrete reality ... is the world of the absolutely contradictory self-identity of space and time, the one and the many, ...⁵⁴⁾

... the absolutely contradictorily self-identical historical world ...⁵⁵⁾

Another consideration which supports this position is that the One-Many problem arises from considerations of simple, everyday predicates, for example, "x is a chair."

On the one hand, chair seems to be one unitary phenomenon : there is something that answers to being a chair — "What is a chair?" has an answer. On the other hand, it is apparent that there are all varieties of chair : some with four legs, some with three, some with none, some with rests, some with none, some with backs, some with none, etc. However, at some level, on some account, these many are one. I.e., on some account, a chair is identically one and many, a contradictorily self-identical object.

Given Nishida's One-Many unity-characterization of the world, this problem suggests that the unity-plurality characteristic of predicates (at least, those with extensions) is somehow more indicative of the structure of the world than, say, the simple unitary characteristic of a concrete thing.

We are suggesting, then, that it is for reasons of the One-Many problem that Nishida came to emphasize the importance of a logic of predicates (述語的論理) : such a logic more nearly articulates the nature of the World than a so-called logic of Objects (of which First-order logic might be but one species).

To summarize, we are claiming that it is the One–Many problem which motivated Nishida to expand the concept *PE* into the concept *T*. Afterall, if Consciousness is identical to Reality, as the *Subject–Object Identity* theory claims, a One–Many problem arises. How can Reality be one but identical to many distinct Consciousnesses? ⁵⁶⁾ A full development of this claim must await another time. In any case, it provides one explanation of why Nishida went to *T* from *PE*.

CONCLUSION

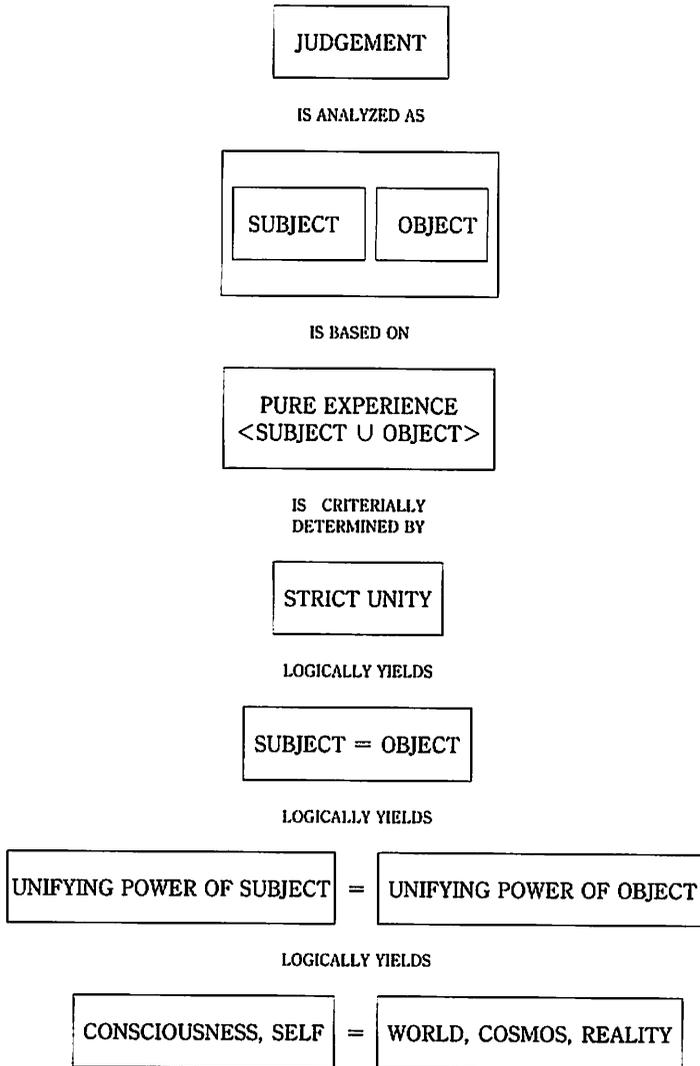
The above argument characterized what was called Nishida's *PE Foundationalism*, according to which *PE* — both its experiential and nonexperiential species — is the ultimate epistemological foundation of what we called *demonstrative and non–demonstrative judgements, and thus, of all human knowledge. This species rested on the notion of Strict Unity as a criterion; and it was from this criterion that Nishida concluded a Subject–Object Identity thesis.*

We argued that this latter thesis, construed as a consequence of Nishida's PE Foundationalism, conflated an epistemological with a metaphysical position, namely, the absence of an epistemological distinction between two items and the genuine indiscernibility of these items, and thus that Nishida's path from PE to the nature of the World could not be validly trekked.

Finally, we conjectured that it is because Nishida's PE Foundationalism suffers from a One–Many problem that Nishida expanded the notion of PE into the wider notion of T, a problem which we claimed he may have been aware of as early as the writing of 「善の研究」.

Lastly, on the following page, we diagram the mechanics of Nishida's PE Foundationalism.

DIAGRAM 3



ENDNOTES

- 1) All quotations are taken from the following :
 善の研究 (Zen no kenkyu ; hereafter, Zen), 西田幾多郎 (Nishida Kitaro) ; 岩波文庫 ; 1991,
 The text has been translated into English twice :
 (a) A Study of Good. Translated by V.H. Viglielmo.
 Tokyo : Government Printing Bureau ; 1960
 (b) An Inquiry into the Good. Translated by M.Abe and C.Ives.
 Yale University Press ; 1990
 All translations from Zen are my own.
- 2) Nishida ; Zen p.4
- 3) See : "Logic of Topos and the Religious World-view." Translated by M. Yusa
 The Eastern Buddhist 17, No.2 (1984)
- 4) The idea that there is an epistemological given in experience is argued for using various classical arguments, such as the argument from illusion, the argument from the relativity of perception, and more recently, by general considerations upon what, according to physiological psychologists, are the data of perception. An excellent treatment of the topic can be found in : Barry Stroud's The Significance of Philosophical Scepticism.
- 5) The following articles and books clearly illustrate these two approaches :
 David Dilworth. "The initial Formations of Pure Experience in Nishida Kitaro and William James." Monumenta Nipponica 24, no1-2 (1969)
 Robert E. Carter. The Nothingness beyond God. An Introduction into the Philosophy of Nishida Kitaro. Paragon House. 1989.
 Nishitani Keiji. Nishida Kitaro. University of CA. Press. 1991
 Ueda Shitzeru. "From Pure Experience to Self-Awareness to Place."
 Japanese Religions 18, No.2 (1992) ; Perhaps, a word or two should be said about my position concerning the importance of the genesis of this concept for an understanding of its content in Nishida's philosophy : very little. Like any other concept, the identity of this concept derives from its life in Nishida's philosophy, just as numbers are known through their laws. Thus, this article is not in any way a piece of psycho-biography : my aim is not to tell whence Nishida came to adopt this concept. Nor is it my aim to bring out the extent to which this concept might or might not articulate the content of the experiences which Nishida enjoyed while doing 座禪. Indeed, the doubts, themselves, that this could ever be adequately accomplished — and, thus, that this concept cannot be fully articulated in language — rest on certain philosophical views about the possibility of a so-called Private Language. I defer to the later Wittgenstein, and refer readers to him, especially, the Philosophical Investigations, §§

243–280.

- 6) Zen p.14
- 7) Ibid.
- 8) The idea of such a thought–experiment derives from the epistemological work of Thompson Clarke ; see his "Seeing Surfaces and Physical Objects" *Journal of Philosophy*, April 1960.
- 9) Zen p.14
- 10) Zen p.13
- 11) Ibid.
- 12) See : W.V.O. Quine. *Word and Object*. MIT Press (1960) ; especially Ch.2
- 13) Zen p.13
- 14) Zen p.60
- 15) Zen p.13
- 16) Zen p.20
- 17) Ibid.
- 18) Zen p.21
- 19) Zen p.26
- 20) Zen p.24
- 21) Zen pp.24–25
- 22) See : J.S.Mill. *Examination of Sir William Hamilton's Philosophy*. Dover.1967
 C.I.Lewis *An Analysis of Knowledge and Valutation*. Open Court. 1946
 A.J. Ayer *Language, Truth, and Logic*. Dover. 1978
- 23) Zen p.17
- 24) Ibid.
- 25) Zen p.16
- 26) Ibid
- 27) See : Martin Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit*. M.N.Verlag Tübingen.1986
- 28) See : Henri Bergson's *Creative Evolution*,(tr.A. Mitchel) McMillan. 1911
- 29) Zen p.21
- 30) See : D. Hume : *A Treatise of Human Nature*. Oxford. Clarendon. 1987
- 31) Note that Strict Unity as characterized is a purely epistemological notion, based on the lack of grounds for a distinction.
- 32) Zen p. 21
- 33) Godel's view is discussed in various texts in philosophy of mathematics ;
 See : Charles Chihara : *Ontology and the Vicious Circle Principle*.Ithaca.1973
 Charles Chihara : *Constructability and Mathematical Existence*.
 Clarendon.1990
- 34) Zen p.24
- 35) Zen p.16
- 36) Zen p.27

- 37) Zen p.27
- 38) Zen pp.52–53
- 39) Zen p.53
- 40) Zen p.73
- 41) Zen p.74
- 42) Zen p.79
- 43) See : Encyclopedia of Philosophy. ed. Paul Edwards.McMillan.1967
F.Copleston, SJ. A History of Philosophy. Vol.VI. Doubleday.1985
- 44) Zen p.85
- 45) See : Nishitani Keiji. Nishida Kitaro. University of CA. Press p.107
- 46) See : William Blake Writings. Vol.II. ed.Bentley, GE. Oxford. 1978.
- 47) See the article by G.E.Moore “Refutation of Idealism” for a similar attack against
Berkeleyan Idealism.
- 48) See Michiko Yusa. “The Logic of Topos” (note 3 above)
Robert Carter. The Nothingness beyond God (note 5 above)
- 49) Zen pp.85–86
- 50) See W.T.Jones. A History of Philosophy. Vol.I. Harcourt, Brace. 1969
- 51) Yusa, p.3
- 52) Yusa, p.4
- 53) Yusa, p.4
- 54) Yusa, p.6
- 55) Yusa, p.3
- 56) A similar problem seems to face Heidegger's concept of Dasein. If Dasein is its
world, then how can there be so many distinct Dasein but only one World? See :
Fredrick Olafson. Heidegger and the Philosophy of Mind. Yale. 1987