

“PURE EXPERIENCE” AND THE PROBLEM OF ORDER IN THE EARLY PHILOSOPHY OF NISHIDA KITARŌ

Arūnas Gelūnas

Vytautas Magnus University, Kaunas

The article focuses on the analysis of “pure experience” (junsui keiken), one of the key concepts in the early philosophy of Nishida Kitarō, major Japanese philosopher of the twentieth century, as reflected in his first important book An Inquiry into the Good (Zen no kenkyū). Notwithstanding its Zen Buddhist origin, Nishidean “pure experience” bears strong similarities with the philosophical perspectives of such “psychologically oriented” western thinkers as William James and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Nishida, being in constant dialogue and discussion with the western philosophical tradition, was in constant search of the “logic of the East” as different from that of the West. In contrast to a classical western rationalist position treating perceptive experience as a passive, nebulous and non-discriminating state of consciousness, and reflection as active and creative, Nishida argues for a “systematic character of consciousness” from the very start, “when there is still no subject and object”. Therefore it seems productive for the purposes of the present article to link the concept of “pure experience” to one of the most fundamental philosophical categories, to that of order. For, we strongly believe, it is here that the obvious differences between Nishida and his western counterparts is revealed, bringing him close, however, to the “artistic standpoints” of such western authors as Nietzsche and the above mentioned French phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty.

A reality is that which constitutes in itself a single system. This systematic character induces us to think that it is an indisputable reality.

Nishida¹

The thought of Nishida, “the first Japanese Philosopher”, is, perhaps, best known to the western readers by the two translations of his first book, *An Inquiry Into the Good (Zen no kenkyū, 1911)*. No wonder, then, that this work has already been analyzed by a number of authors, such as S. Ueda, D. Dilworth, D. Putney, A. Feenberg, M. Abe and others. One of the main concepts in this early stage of Nishidean philosophy – “pure experience” (*junsui keiken*) – has been addressed from several perspectives. However, the relation of “pure experience” and Nishida’s search for the structure of reality or of *order* in reality, the mode of its presentation of itself in a systematic way to the consciousness, has not been emphasized as it would seemingly deserve. It is precisely this effort to uncover the orderly character of consciousness and thus of the perception of reality makes Nishida more understandable and at the same time more comparable to the western thought. Though it is hard to agree with Heidegger that “Nishida is a western philosopher”², it is nevertheless useful to see in what way Nishida makes use of the western

¹ Nishida (1990), 57.

² See Heidegger’s *Hidden Sources*.

philosophical language as the means to reveal the "unity of the human spirit". In this article I will try to trace the way which leads from Nishida's concept of "pure experience" to his understanding of orderly mode the reality unfolds to us.

Nishida's "cosmological project" could perhaps be best called the search for the logic of the East as different from that of the West, whose influence had threatened Japanese identity, and the attempt to formulate it in the language that would be acceptable in the Western philosophical tradition. For Nishida it had to be the search for the way to synthesize the Eastern and the Western thinking in such a way that the Eastern values were preserved, while at the same time the progressive march of "Western techniques" was justified and properly contextualized. Nishida had the basically favorable view of modernity while rejecting its positivistic self-understanding³. The answer for early Nishida seemed to lie in the realm of experience that is direct to us.

Nishida, at the time when he was writing his first independent philosophical work, the above mentioned *An Inquiry Into the Good*, was a practicing Zen Buddhist. It is almost beyond any doubt that Zen meditation provided him with the intuition of "pure experience" as the vantage point for reflections on reality. Readings of William James must have supplied him with the language he could use as an instrument for an attempt to translate his experiences into verbal form close to the Western philosophical discourse though, as we will see, notable differences exist between James and Nishida.

The word for "experience" (*keiken*), as so many other words, has become a philosophical concept in Japan rather late, at the end of the nineteenth century⁴. Later it came to be employed as a conceptual bridge between modern Western thought and Japanese, especially Buddhist, tradition. The most profound and systematic treatment of experience in modern Japan owes a great deal to Nishida: "pure experience" (*junsui keiken*) was to become a grounding notion of Nishida's early philosophy thus marking the beginning of original philosophy in Japan. In the preface to his first work *An Inquiry into the Good (Zen no kenkyu)* Nishida calls "pure experience" "the foundation of my thought" and confesses his long-time wish "to explain all things on the basis of pure experience as the sole reality."⁵ The first chapter of the book is dedicated to and starts with the explication of the concept:

<...> 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 the 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 experience⁶.

It was characteristic for Nishida to overview and correct his philosophical views many times so that they have undergone considerable changes later on, but the notion of pure experience was not to lose its importance throughout his whole life. Twenty-five years after *An Inquiry into the Good* was first published Nishida wrote in the preface to its third edition: "The world of action-intuition –

³ Feenberg, (1999), 275. For "Nishida and Modernity" also see Kasulis, (1995).

⁴ Feenberg, (1999), 276.

⁵ Nishida, *Zen no kenkyu*, 89.

⁶ Nishida, (1990), 3–4.

the world of *poiesis* – is none other than the world of pure experience.”⁷ The source helping Nishida to arrive at this concept most probably was his practice of Zen meditation as well as his readings of the Western authors such as British psychologist and philosopher George Frederick Stout and William James, who are frequently quoted and referred to in *An Inquiry into the Good*.

In quite similar fashion with the other philosophies “of radical doubt”, for instance, those of Descartes, Kant, or Husserl, Nishida is aiming at rethinking philosophy systematically himself and thus answering the question of how we are to understand True Reality. The answer is to become a grounding principle for Nishida’s new philosophical system: “we must discard all artificial assumptions,” writes Nishida, “doubt whatever can be doubted, and proceed on the basis of direct and indubitable knowledge.”⁸ In contrast with Descartes who arrives at certainty when he discovers the evidence of ego as the subject of reflection and who thus makes *cogito ergo sum* the first principle of his philosophy, Nishida finds certainty in a fundamentally different way. There is no deceitful Demiurge for Nishida: “From the perspective of direct knowledge that is free from all assumptions, reality consists only of phenomena of our consciousness, namely the facts of direct experience. Any other notion of reality is simply an assumption generated by the demands of thinking. <...> Assumptions regarding such a reality are abstract concepts formulated so that thinking can systematically organize the facts of direct experience.”⁹ So, the systematic and the strict order is possible in thinking only. To quote Shizuteru Ueda, here “certainty is found in that which is given us by breaking through reflection in such a manner as would overwhelm reflective thinking that doubts thoroughly.<...> (Generally speaking, experience is at once the *knowledge* of experience and the *fact* of experience.) This being so, the knower and the known are one from the very start in the ‘fact of direct experience’ and as ‘direct experience’.”¹⁰ This direct knowledge of experience is a primitive fact, which is a fundamental basis of all Nishida’s thinking. He is searching for it by “methodically doubting”, though this method is overwhelmed by direct experience. Thus this source is existing in a place not to be reached by reflection, it is a pre-reflective and pre-dichotomical state. Nishida is well aware of the classical treatment of perception as passive and thinking as active. For him pure experience as “direct knowledge” is active and dynamic state, for this experience is not some passive phenomenon *in* our consciousness but a phenomenon *as* our consciousness, a process rather than a thing. In this way, the concept of time as duration of pure experience in Nishida’s philosophy is similar to Edmund Husserl and his “inner perception of time” (*inneren Zeitbewusstsein*)¹¹. The time in pure experience can in no way be treated as the abstract *chronos* of the natural sciences but only as *kairotic*, inner perception of time as duration. “A truly pure experience has no meaning whatsoever; it is simply a present consciousness of facts just as they are.”¹² So pure experience is the way of being firmly rooted in the present moment, but different from *thinking* of the present moment; as soon as we start thinking about the present moment,

⁷ For the comments on *action-intuition* see the footnote by Masao Abe in Nishida (1990), xxxiii.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁹ Nishida, (1990), 42.

¹⁰ Ueda, (1991), 110.

¹¹ Quite possible that Nishida’s “pure experience” is analogous to Husserlian “primary impression” (*Urimpression*).

¹² Nishida, (1990), 4.

it is no longer present. Referring to Jamesian definition of the present consciousness Nishida states that "for a present as a fact of consciousness there must be some temporal duration."¹³ This temporal duration can not be perceived in the other way but as some inner dynamism, some flow, for otherwise it gets objectified and will be cast away into the chronological (that means – objectified and thus conceived within the dichotomic paradigm) scale. Time is called by Nishida "nothing more than a form that orders the content of our experience," but this is not enough, because "the content of consciousness must first be able to be joined, be united, and become one in order for the idea of time to arise."¹⁴ One of the most important aspects of pure experience is its being an important base for a non-dichotomic, dialectical thinking that Nishida is to develop in his future works. From the above quotation we see: "there is no yet an object or a subject" in pure experience. It is prior to any deliberative discrimination or "one's own fabrications" – it is perceiving the reality "exactly as it is." Is reflection in such a way of giving it a pejorative attribute of "one's own fabrications" denied or deprived of its status of a philosophical method? Shizuteru Ueda answers this question in a following way:

It is not that Nishida wanted to deny reflection and representation altogether. What he wanted to deny was rather setting up as self-evident from the start a duality that assumed forms like mind and nature, consciousness and thing, or formally expressed, subject and object. For Nishida it was a question where to posit the immediacy of experience, that original immediacy that is the basis of reality and that offers the final guarantee for the unity of experience. He shifted this immediacy back to a fact prior to the dichotomy and traced it back through experiencing experience itself. This fact of pre-dichotomy is not to be grasped through reflection. Nor can we apprehend it objectively – for every objectification it must remain an empty nothingness. We become aware of it only in an egoless, immediate, nonobjective fashion."¹⁵

Further, in somewhat Heideggerian manner, Ueda proceeds with the explanation how is such an awareness possible; according to him it is a "leap backwards" towards a silence and nothingness of "pre-". This leap is impossible as a voluntary or reflective activity, we do not succeed in making it through any conscious effort: we are "struck" by this moment of absolute present and "carried back" to the origin. It is perhaps in this sense that Nishida is stating an experience to be more fundamental than any individual differences, that "individual exists because there is experience" and not *vice versa*.

However, Nishida has to deal somehow with the dichotomy that is experienced after the original unity of pure experience is broken. For Nishida is not a question of a duality as a dichotomy of the kind stated above, but a *double perspective* to view the experience that has unfolded: the object-side and the subject-side of one and the same experience. Nishida explains it as follows:

It is usually thought that subject and object are realities that can exist independently of each other and that phenomena of consciousness arise through their activity, which leads to the idea that there are two realities: mind and matter. This is a total mistake. The notions of subject and object derive from two different ways of looking at a single fact, as does the distinction between mind and matter. But these dichotomies are not inherent in the fact itself¹⁶.

¹³ Nishida, op. cit., 5.

¹⁴ Nishida (1990), 60.

¹⁵ Ueda, (1991), 122.

¹⁶ Nishida (1990), 49.

It is particularly important, and, at the same time, difficult, place of Nishida's text, and many scholars find an inconsistency here; the opposition between immediacy and reflection is called undialectical, and the tendency to identify the Absolute with a particular state of mind – psychologistic. This can be observed in a passage, where Nishida explains the relationship between consciousness and reality:

<...> the so-called objective world does not come into existence apart from our subjectivity, for the unifying power of the objective world and that of the subjective consciousness are identical; the objective world and consciousness are established according to the same principle. For this reason we can understand the fundamental principle constitutive of the universe by means of the principle within the self. If the world were something different from the unity of our consciousness, we could never make contact with it. The world we can know and understand is established by a unifying power identical to that of our consciousness¹⁷.

In the chapter called “Nature” Nishida radically rejects the idea of a “purely objective nature.”¹⁸ Quite in a similar fashion with *Lebenswelt* phenomenology asserting the inescapability of the “horizon” of experience, he calls the conception of nature without a subjective aspect in it “the most abstract and most removed from a true state of reality.”¹⁹ If the unifying activity of consciousness is removed from concrete reality, what remains is “nature” that is “moved from without according to the law of necessity, and it cannot function spontaneously from within.”²⁰ The linkage of natural phenomena, if the subjective aspect of the consciousness observing them is erased, is accidental unity in time and space.

Further “pure experience” becomes a ground for his philosophy of religion where many statements sound as simply retelling of the Western philosophical ideas of the past centuries. Instead of developing a phenomenological ontology to which a notion of “pure experience” would seemingly lead, Nishida embraces the theories of such philosophers as Fichte. In his recent article “Experience and Culture: Nishida's Path to the Things Themselves” Andrew Feenberg explains this rather strange selection of the sources by the fact of *isolation* of the Japanese thinker. Be that as it may, his theory of “pure experience” remains deeply indebted to the influence of James on the one hand, and possesses strong links, though perhaps, unconsciously for Nishida at that time, with Husserl. It is interesting to see in what way the philosophies of James and of Nishida bear similarities, and what, nevertheless, makes them notably different (and thus, achievement of Nishida – original and important). Perhaps the most skeptical comments on this matter have been made by David Dilworth in his article “The Initial Formations of ‘Pure Experience’ in Nishida Kitaro and William James.” For Dilworth there is a radical difference between James and Nishida, though the one that clearly points to the virtues of the former at the cost of the shortcomings of the latter. He calls the main tendency evident in *An Inquiry into the Good* “idealistic” this being particularly evident in its section

¹⁷ Ibid., 62.

¹⁸ Ibid., 68.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid., 69.

four – "Religion." James, says Dilworth, escapes it in his notion of the world "perfectly fluent" and in his awareness of the fact that "any transcendental agency of unification 'derealized' the reality of felt transitions of experience."²¹ Probably Nishida himself was aware of this "difficult place" in his philosophy, and perhaps that is why in his later works he tries to elaborate his theory of the relation between "the one and the many." Shizuteru Ueda also stresses "a great gap between the really simple pure experience, mentioned on the first page of the book, and the explanatory development described in the form of the text."²² However, he does not point to the inferiority of Nishida's "pure experience" to the one coined by William James, but only calls it more radical. To James "pure experience" was the name that he gave to "the immediate flux of life which furnishes the material to our later reflexion with its conceptual categories" or "plain, unqualified actuality of existence, a simple *that*. In this *naïf* immediacy it is of *valid*; it is *there*, we act upon it."²³ Ueda comments on the above passage from Jamesian "Essays in Radical Empiricism" in a following way: "That James calls it *that* and *there* shows a distance between reflection and pure experience as it is seen from the perspective of reflection. Here is from the start the dichotomy of *that* existing *there* and *we* working on it. For Nishida, pure experience is not a material for reflection, but is the fundamental. Nishida calls it *this* not *that*. True, he, too, says that it becomes subject or object according to one's viewpoint. But he says clearly before that that "there is neither subject nor object."²⁴ I would say, it is neither *that* nor *this*, it is rather the unnamable *between* or *relationship* in a sense of, all the differences notwithstanding, Martin Buber's *I* and *Thou*. *I* and *Thou* are really the aspects of one and the same relationship, only different sides of it. However, *I* is irreducible to ego and *Thou* is irreducible to *That*, or, more strictly, to the object.

A sound analysis of Nishidean concept of experience is presented by a contemporary American philosopher Andrew Feenberg. Feenberg thematizes the notion of experience by situating it in the broader socio-cultural context of Japan of Nishida's time and by placing it into the comparative perspective. According to him, it would be a mistake to confound Nishida's concept of experience with the traditional notion of Buddhist enlightenment (which is nearly done by Dilworth²⁵). For Feenberg there are at least four concepts of experience implied in the Nishidean *keiken*. He defines each by an opposition: 1. Experience as *epistemological foundation*: the empiricist idea of experience as the basis of knowledge vs. dogma. 2. Experience as *life*: immediacy vs. reflection. 3. Experience as *Bildung*: the progressive construction of personality (or collective historical experience, "learning processes," etc.) vs. the cycles of non-human nature. 4. Experience as *ontological foundation*: the phenomenological-existentialist idea of experience as the unsurpassable horizon of being, vs. objectivity understood as a detached "view from nowhere." This last one, says Feenberg, is the most important for the interpretation

²¹ Dilworth, (1968), 110.

²² Ueda, op. cit.

²³ James, quoted in Ueda, op. cit., 121.

²⁴ Ueda, (1991), 121.

²⁵ Dilworth calls it a "Zen nuance", "Zen overtones," or "aesthetic religiosity" that is to blame for "idealistic reductionism" of the text.

of Nishida for it includes an attempt for a radical transcendence of the subject-object split and the return to the concrete. But, the fourth concept of experience as the primordial unity and pre-reflexive foundation of the subject-object split is not to be confused with a description of a mental event suspending the distinction between subject-object. According to Feenberg, “This difference appears as an ambiguity not only in Nishida’s theory of pure experience, but in James’ original formulation as well. It persists in Suzuki in the paradox of enlightenment as the realization in a privileged moment of a prior unity with the world that was always already there. In Husserl it appears as the potential for confusion between consciousness as a flow of elusive sensations “in” the mind, and as an ontologically distinct realm, coextensive with the real. It is perhaps of these ambiguities that Heidegger and the later Nishida abandon the language of experience for other ways of signifying it in terms of the fourth concept.”²⁶

Now let us try to see how the Nishidean concept of “*pure experience*” (*junsui keiken*) leads us to his concept of *order* (*chitsujō*). To put it briefly, *order* in this early stage of Nishida’s writing can be understood as the “strict unity (*tōitsu*) of experience,” the unity of experiencing consciousness. In the chapter of *An Inquiry into the Good* called “Pure Experience” he wrote: “The directness and purity of pure experience (*junsui keiken*) derive not from the experience’s being simple, unanalyzable, or instantaneous, but from the *strict unity* of concrete consciousness. Consciousness does not arise from the consolidation of what psychologists call simple mental elements; it constitutes a *single system* (*taikei*) from the start.” Further in the same passage Nishida proceeds: “The consciousness of a newborn infant is most likely a chaotic unity in which even a distinction between light and darkness is unclear. From this condition myriad states of consciousness develop through differentiation. Even so, no matter how finely differentiated those states may be, at no time do we lose the *fundamentally systematic form* (*katachi*) of the consciousness. Concrete consciousness that is direct to us always appears in this form <...> Like any organic entity, a system of consciousness manifests its wholeness through the orderly, differentiated development of a certain unifying reality (*tōitsuteki arumono*)”²⁷. This sense of “unifying reality” bears some semblance with the famous fragment 54 of Heraclitus (“Rubbish scattered in higgledy-piggledy – perfect harmony (*cosmos*)”). Indeed, until the unity of perception is undivided by thought and coincides with the sphere of attention no discrimination arises – rubbish is not yet “rubbish” but simple *this*, which is perceived as unity by experiencing consciousness. At this stage reality is by no means experienced as “elements” or “objects”. It is the “pre-objective,” “pre-elemental” and “pre-discursive” stage of the relationship of the consciousness with reality. In this stage there is even no “consciousness” and no “reality” but only two poles of the same *relationship*. Here another parallel with Heraclitus may be instructive. In the fragment 44 he says: “The road leading upwards and downwards – one and the same road.”

²⁶ Feenberg, (1999), 5.

²⁷ Nishida, 1990, 6–7 and Nishida, 1987, 95–96.

It is interesting to compare Nishida and James here. For James his own philosophy is "a mosaic philosophy" in which "the pieces are held together by their own bedding" instead of, as David Dilworth puts it, the connections being guaranteed by Substances, transcendental Egos, or Absolutes²⁸. Whereas James says that his "description of things <...> starts with the parts and makes of the whole a being of a second order," For Nishida "What James considers to be the relation between experience and experience seems somewhat external." In his own opinion, "the way in which experience develops might not be so much a gradual combination of fragmental elements as something like a gradual differentiation / unfolding of the one."²⁹ However, one of the most important questions remains unanswered: Is the state of pure experience a nebulous, nondiscriminating condition similar to that of an animal or has it something to do with the "more human" realm of meanings and judgements? In a manner very different from that of Wilhelm von Humboldt or Ernst Cassirer, who maintained the words to be the only key of a man to reality (which is, according to them, totally symbolic), Nishida asserts that "meanings and judgements derive from distinctions in the experience itself" and that "these distinctions are not imparted by the meanings or judgements: experience always includes an aspect of discrimination."³⁰ Further he is even more radical: "Meaning or judgement <...> does not add anything new to experience."³¹ They mark the moment of disunity in the experiencing consciousness: when the strict unity of pure experience is broken "and a present consciousness enters into a relation with other consciousness it generates meanings and judgements."³² The latter aspect notwithstanding, never the consciousness loses its profoundly systematic character; it is implicit in the nature of consciousness to develop in such a systematic manner. Nishida calls this "the great network of consciousness" which is the condition for meanings and judgements to arise as the connection between the present consciousness and "other consciousness" – the previous one. Such process of definition of the position of the present consciousness within the network of consciousness is the process which generates meaning: "meaning is determined by the system to which consciousness belongs. Identical consciousness yield different meanings by virtue of the different systems in which they participate." The Great Network of Consciousness varies in degree of unity. According to Nishida's observation, "there is neither completely unified consciousness nor completely disunified consciousness."³³ However, there is a correspondence between the sphere of judgements and the sphere of pure experience. When a judgement is refined and "its unity has become strict, the judgement assumes the form of pure experience."³⁴ Nishida's example here, in a quite similar fashion with the French thinker Maurice Merleau-Ponty, is a person who matures in an art: for him "that which at first was conscious becomes unconscious."³⁵ Popular

²⁸ William James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, 86, quoted in Dilworth (1970: 108).

²⁹ Nishida quoted in Ueda (1991: 125–126).

³⁰ Nishida (1990:8).

³¹ *Ibid.*, 9.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 10.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

contemporary example could be a driver and his/her driving experience. Further he calls the most unified state of consciousness “intellectual intuition.” It can be observed not only in fine arts, “but in all our disciplined activity.”³⁶

Nishida does not agree with the treatment of perception as passive and thinking as active. For him perception is active and constitutive activity with a higher degree of unity than that of thinking. Nishida refutes the assumption of psychological theories of his time that thinking is necessary to provide links between one representation and the other. For example, in the judgement “The horse is running” there is only one representation of “the running horse” with a fact of pure experience underlying it, and it is only for this reason that we can connect subject and object representations in it. The relationship between experience and thinking is described by Nishida in a following passage:

Consciousness, as stated earlier, is fundamentally a single system; its nature is to develop and complete itself. In the course of its development various conflicts and contradictions crop up in the system, and out of this emerges reflective thinking. But when viewed from a different angle, that which is contradictory and conflicted is the beginning of a still greater systematic development; it is the incomplete state of the greater unity. In both conduct and knowledge, for example, when our experience becomes complex and various associations arise to disturb the natural course of experience, we become reflective. Behind this contradiction and conflict is a possible unity³⁷.

The systematic character of the consciousness is reported by Nishida throughout all of his work. What is the conclusion to which it would seemingly lead? First important conclusion would be the one concerning the problem of truth (*shinjitsu*). The relationship of pure experience with truth helps us to understand better his concept of order as well. Truth is again linked by Nishida with unity. “There are various arguments about what truth is, but I think,” writes Nishida, “truth is that which comes closest to the most concrete facts of experience.”³⁸ Truth has nothing to do with abstract commonality, but is something abstracted and constructed out of the facts of pure experience, and its true unity lies in direct facts. Therefore, “Perfect truth pertains to the individual person and is actual.” That is why “it cannot be expressed in words <...>.”³⁹ Even in such abstract disciplines as mathematics, the foundational principles lie in our intuition, in direct experience; thus the standard of truth is not some external fact but lies in the state of pure experience. However, humans are not usually satisfied with just direct experience – they demand for universal system of consciousness that transcends the individual person. These demands are called by Nishida “demands of reason.” He is reluctant to see the laws of reason and the tendency of the will as completely different or even contradictory. “<...> when we consider them carefully,” says Nishida, “we see that they share the same foundation. The unifying activity of the will functions at the base of all reason and laws.”⁴⁰ This unifying

³⁶ Ibid., 32.

³⁷ Ibid., 16.

³⁸ Ibid., 26.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 28. This statement is followed by an interesting reference to Schiller: “As Schiller and others have argued, even axioms originally developed out of practical need; in their mode of origination, they do not differ from our hopes.” (ibid.)

activity, "the intuitive principles at the base of reason," are unexplainable, because "to explain is to be able to include other things in a single system. That which is the very nucleus of a unity cannot be explained; thus it is blind."⁴¹ Intuition is proclaimed by Nishida a *conditio sine qua non* for any order as it lies at the base of all relations. Order can be treated as such only in so far as there is some unifying principle, some "glue" guaranteeing that separate parts of the system hold together. In pure experience such holding together is guaranteed by a fundamentally systematical character of consciousness itself (and the reality so perceived in no way can be treated as *elements*, but, according to Nishida, as "the unfolding of the one"). But, even when the act of pure experience is over, and reason is at work in search of a greater unity, such an activity of reason is only possible with some basic intuition of unity beneath it: "However far and wide we extend our thought, we cannot go beyond basic intuition, for thought is established upon it."⁴² This intuition is "the power of thinking, not simply static form of thought."⁴³ This point is crucial for understanding the phenomenon of "order" itself or, to be more precise, the *possibility* of any order. Such a view, though seemingly lacking in exactitude, is somewhat closer to reality (as supported by contemporary investigations in psychology) than Kantian table of categories with fixed and limited number of *a priori* unifying agents behind perception⁴⁴.

Another important aspect of Nishida's theory of pure experience is the problem of solipsism. If the only reality is the activity of consciousness is there any bridge guaranteed to the other consciousness? Nishida answers this classical question in a following way:

That consciousness must be someone's consciousness simply means that consciousness must have a unity. The idea that there must be a possessor of consciousness above and beyond this unity is an arbitrary assumption. The activity of this unity – apperception – is a matter of similar ideas and feelings constituting a central hub and as such unifying consciousness. From the standpoint of pure experience, this unity of consciousness (*ishiki no tōitsu*) never entails absolute distinctions between itself and other such unities of consciousness. If we acknowledge that my consciousness of yesterday and today are independent and at the same time one consciousness in that they belong to the same system, then we recognize the same relationship between one's own consciousness and that of others⁴⁵.

At the same time Nishida rejects the application of the law of causality⁴⁶ for explanation of the phenomena of consciousness. "That a specific phenomenon accompanies another," says Nishida, "is the fundamental fact given directly to us, and contrary to expectation, the requirements of the law of causality are based on this fact."⁴⁷ He calls the law of causality "a habit of thinking that derives from changes in our phenomena of consciousness."⁴⁸ This tendency

⁴¹ Ibid., 29.

⁴² Ibid., 33. One would be tempted to apply Nishida's theory of unity only to the sphere of art and religion (which is frequently done by the Japanese philosopher himself), but his insights in many ways remind us of the Husserlian search for the firm base for exact sciences – the same symptom of the crisis of rationality.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ For a critique of Kant see Karl Jaspers, *Kant*, 85.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 44.

⁴⁶ For the differences between modern conception of "causality" from that of Aristotle see Richard Cole, "The Logical Order and the Causal Order," in *The Concept of Order*, ed. P. Kuntz, Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1968, 111–121.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 45.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

to abandon the law of causality when addressing the problem of consciousness matches well the overall tendency of contemporary science to abandon strict causal laws for *statistical laws* – less strict but closer to the workings of reality (to paraphrase Hans Reichenbach, a scientist should say “I don’t know” where he or she does not know instead of providing a fluent but false theory – “a credible story” of a sort of Platonian *Timaeus*). In a chapter dedicated to his concept of physics – “Nature” – Nishida points to the vacuous character of the causal explanation of natural phenomena: “The laws of nature, attained through the law of induction, are simply assumptions that because two types of phenomena arise in an unchanging succession, one the cause of the other. No matter how far the natural sciences develop, we obtain no deeper explanation than this one, which becomes ever more detailed and encompassing.”⁴⁹

An Inquiry into the Good can be treated as a treatise on order for one more reason. The problem of the unity of consciousness is carried by him into the realm of ethics. The concern of our dissertation is not with ethics but a few remarks can be revealing. “The Good” itself is understood by Nishida as “primarily a *coordinated harmony* – or mean – between various activities. Our conscience is the activity of consciousness that harmonizes and unifies the activities. <...> Simply saying that the good is the harmony or the mean, however, does not sufficiently clarify its meaning. What meaning do harmony and the mean have here? Consciousness is not an assemblage of sequential actions but a single unified system. Accordingly, *harmony or the mean does not carry a quantitative connotation; it must signify a systematic order.*”⁵⁰ (my emphasis – A. G.) The activity of reason is very important in this system – at the point of “articulation of the non-differentiation”⁵¹ – however, it does not acquire its true meaning as “human reason” if it is conceived in abstract, as a “device” that provides “merely a formal relationship with no content whatsoever.”⁵² In other words, “pure reason” is a rather vacuous concept without an idealistic element in it – the indefinable volitional center, the intuitive unifying activity of the consciousness which guarantees the processual character of the reason. Instead of being a rigid mechanical structure (its function powered by a “biochemical reactions in brain”), conceived of in spatial terms only, this system always contains an unexplainable energetic residue – an intuitive element that is precisely the “unifying power” at the base of consciousness. This applies even in such seemingly rigid discipline as geometry; even “geometric axioms are not elucidated solely through the power of formal understanding; rather they derive from the character of space. The deductive inferences of geometry result from applying the laws of logic to a fundamental intuition of the character of space.”⁵³ Such a unified systematic character of the “whole” is explained by Shizuteru Ueda in a following way:

<...> although the Whole constitutes a system, the Whole is always larger than the Whole with some *residue, inexhaustible by the system*, remaining in it. Thus the Whole is the Whole only insofar as

⁴⁹ Ibid., 69.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 128–129.

⁵¹ Ueda, op. cit., 125.

⁵² Nishida, op. cit., 130.

⁵³ Ibid., 113. For a similar concern of “later” Husserl with “the origin of geometry” see Edmund Husserl, *L’Origine de la Géométrie*, Traduction et introduction par Jacques Derrida, Paris: PUF, 1962.

it contains this *residue overflowing the system*. Originally, the proto-fatum, which is inexhaustible, is pure experience. Accordingly, although the form of development in which pure experience unfolds of itself is a system, it is an *open system*. This probably would be due to the fact that the primitive "there is neither subject nor object" is at once a *non-differentiated unity and an infinite openness*⁵⁴. (emphasis mine – A. G.)

The latter explanation bears strong similarity with more recent research. Algis Mickunas comes very close to the above point when he states that "the studies of lived worlds manifest, at the very least the following principle: permanent compositions are describable in their essence while flux, also in its essence, *cannot be delimited without residua*. <...> full description of flux would reduce it to a structure."⁵⁵ (my emphasis – A. G.)

However, the inclusion of movement or flux into the description of the world is an extremely difficult task very often contradicting the firmly established thinking habits. One of the well-known critics of Nishida's philosophy and one of the earliest proponents of phenomenology in Japan⁵⁶ – Tokuryū Yamanouchi – is right to observe that "Philosophers in quest of a system, however finely honed their idea of development and however key role they give to movement, are still thinking of system in terms of spatial modes of completeness."⁵⁷ According to Yamanouchi's point, any philosophy that seeks to be systematic is doomed to face the problem of "rigid order," that is – system without energetic residue that would guarantee its closeness to the lived reality.

The motive of the open system – the "infinite openness" – comes more and more to the fore in Nishida's later philosophy. This circumstance notwithstanding, *An Inquiry into the Good* remains a work of utmost importance as a first attempt in Japan to formulate an original philosophical system. In the words of Nishitani Keiji, this work "is an original *tour de force* that would have assured it a place among other great systems of thought even if Nishida have not developed further."⁵⁸ But this book was to be followed by more than thirty years of an extremely productive philosophical career, a major piece of writing appearing every year or so. In his later development Nishida did not give up his idea of unity but only sought to overcome the difficulties posed by his "philosophy of pure experience," that was blamed to be too psychologistic and mystical, and to give his philosophy a more solid epistemological grounding. Some researchers assert him to have "radically transformed" his religious philosophy "in the later stages of his career"⁵⁹ but I would rather say that the main themes of his philosophy remained very close to his initial intention throughout the whole of his life.

⁵⁴ Ueda, op. cit., 124.

⁵⁵ Algis Mickunas, "Permanence and Flux," *Phenomenology: Japanese and American*, ed. Burt C. Hopkins (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1990), 258.

⁵⁶ See the footnote 4, page 198 in Nishitani Keiji, *Nishida Kitarō*, trans. by Yamamoto Seisaku and James W. Heisig (Berkeley: University of California Press., 1991).

⁵⁷ Yamanouchi, T., *Taikei to tensō [System and Development]*, (Tokyo, 1937), 6–7, quoted from Nishitani Keiji, *Nishida Kitarō*, trans. by Yamamoto Seisaku and James W. Heisig (Berkeley: University of California Press., 1991), 199.

⁵⁸ Nishitani, op. cit., 96.

⁵⁹ See Dilworth (1973), 465.

REFERENCES

1. Dilworth, David, 1969: "The Initial Formations of 'Pure Experience' in Nishida Kitarō and William James." *Monumenta Nipponica*, XXIV, 1–2, 93–111.
2. Feenberg, Andrew, 1999: "Experience and Culture: Nishida's Path 'To the Things Themselves,'" *Philosophy East and West*, vol. 49, no. 1.
3. Feenberg, Andrew. 1995: "The Problem of Modernity in Nishida's Philosophy." A. Feenberg, *Alternative Modernity: The Technical Turn in Philosophy and Social Theory*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 169–193.
4. Kant, Immanuel, 1995: *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith, an electronic edition, courtesy Macmillan Press Ltd. (www.arts.cuhk.edu.hk/Philosophy/Kant/Kant/cpr/).
5. Jaspers, Karl, 1962: *Kant [from The Great Philosophers, Volume I]*, San Diego: Harcourt Brace & Company.
6. Kasulis, Thomas P., 1995: "Sushi, Science, And Spirituality: Modern Japanese Philosophy And Its Views Of Western Science." *Philosophy East & West*, Apr. 95, vol. 45, Issue 2, 227, 22.
7. Mickunas, Algis, 1990: "Permanence and Flux," *Phenomenology: Japanese and American*, ed. Burt C. Hopkins, Dordrecht: Kluwer.
8. Nishida, Kitarō, 1987: *Zen no kenkyū*, Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten.
9. Nishida, Kitarō, 1990: *An Inquiry into the Good (Zen no kenkyū)*, trans. Masao Abe and Christopher Ives, New Haven: Yale University Press.
10. Nishitani, Keiji, 1991: *Nishida Kitarō*, trans. Yamamoto Seisaku & James W. Heisig, Berkeley: University of California Press.
11. Ueda, Shizuteru, 1991: "Experience and Language" in the Thinking of Kitarō Nishida," trans. T. Nobuhara, *Zen bunka kenkyūjō kiyō dai 17 go nukizuri*, 1991 05 31, 91–154.

**„GRYNASIS PATYRIMAS“ IR TVARKOS PROBLEMA
ANKSTYVOJOJE KITARO NISHIDOS FILOSOFIJOJE**

Arūnas Gelūnas

Santrauka

Straipsnyje svarstoma pamatinė "pirmojo japonų filosofo" Kitaro Nishidos ankstyvosios filosofijos sąvoka "grynasis patyrimas" (*junsui keiken*), kurią jis išplėtoja savo pirmojoje knygoje "Gėrio tyrinėjimai" (*Zen no kenkyū*). Čia tą sąvoką mėginama sieti su sąmonės, kaip sisteminio viseto, dėl kurio tikrovė nesubyra į neprasmingus gabalus, o atsiskleidžia mums kaip prasminga ir akivaizdžiai "reali" problema. "Grynojo patyrimo" ir tikrovės tvarkos sąsajos analizuojamos remiantis paties Nishidos knyga ir kritiškai interpretuojant tokių žinomų jo filosofijos tyrinėtojų kaip S. Ueda, D. Dilworth, M. Abe, A. Feenberg bei kitų tekstus. Atkreipiamas dėmesys į dar vieną svarbų Nishidos kūrybos aspektą: japonų filosofas ieškojo konceptualaus tilto tarp Rytų ir Vakarų mąstymo mėgindamas atrasti gelminių budistinės ir moderniosios Vakarų filosofijos sąsają.