

Nishida Kitarō's Pure Experience and its Relationship with Transcendental Philosophy

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Pure experience is an all-encompassing, spontaneous and self-unfolding dimension that contains both mental and material phenomena. This is the main topic of An Inquiry into the Good, Nishida Kitarō's debut book. This paper is devoted to an analysis of the different filiations of this notion. On one hand, Nishida's notion has commonalities with some of the cornerstones of Buddhist tradition, specifically with the Zen experience. On the other hand, with regard to the Western front, my aim is to provide evidence of a transcendental discipline in pure experience, as the Japanese philosopher considers timeless subjectivity to be the gateway to access reality. It is the necessary condition for meaning, since it grasps the point where the division between subject and object fades away.

Keywords: Kitaro, Pure experience, Transcendental inquiry, Kant, Strict unity.

Nishida Kitarō¹ (1870-1945) is widely regarded as the first proper Japanese philosopher. The cultural vivacity his method has triggered in Japan is certainly one of the most valuable aspects of his philosophical commitment. Nishida is the founder of a method that treasures the sources of traditional Buddhist wisdom and at the same time relies on Western lenses to express an original production. Before his work, the contribution of Eastern intellectuals to Western philosophy had a popular purpose and mainly an historical interest. Intercultural dialogue is one of the most evident aspects of his writings and of his life as an intellectual: he perceived as his mission to make intelligible to the West the Zen intimate experience of reuniting with things, i.e. the point where subject and object forget each other. From the belief of the existence of a greater vocation to certain concepts in the East, Nishida found in his path of intellectual growth the writings of several great European philosophers, from whom he borrowed the conceptual instruments to achieve an appropriate coalescence between two cultures.

¹ Japanese names of persons are given with the family name first, according to the Chinese-Japanese custom.