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GOD AND NOTHINGNESS

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I think that we can distinguish the West to have considered being as the ground of reality, the East to have taken nothingness as its ground. I will call them reality as form and reality as the formless, respectively.

Nishida Kitarō¹

[T]hat which is beyond the representation of both 'being' and 'nothingness' is the true nothingness. That which can in no way be objectified is this 'nothingness.'

Nishitani Keiji²

Introduction

With the exception of a handful of mystics, the West has not taken the idea of nothingness as either a vital or a positive element in its philosophizing or theologizing. On the whole, Western philosophers have understood nothingness to be directly related to being, insofar as nothingness simply stood for the negating of being, as in Heidegger's crossed-out being signifying nothingness as negation. Thus it is that Nishida Kitarō's somewhat simplistic caricature, which views the West as cultures of being and the East as cultures of nothingness, seems, on the whole, accurate. Yet, in the West, Meister Eckhart is something of a paradigm for those few who did take nothingness to be an important notion in describing the divine nature, and, in general, it is usually the mystics who come closest to the East in all but eliminating the gap or boundary between creator and creatures, self and others, and being and nothingness.

My strategy in this essay, which is essentially about Nishida, is to use Eckhart as a more familiar entrée into our inquiry into nothingness because he is a Western thinker, a Christian, and a mystic. What I find remarkable about Eckhart, theological deviant from the mainstream though he was, is just how similar many of his insights are to those of Nishida. By comparing these two thinkers, I believe it will be considerably easier to clarify the meaning of "absolute nothingness." Finally, I will focus on Ueda Shizuteru, who goes beyond both Eckhart and Nishida by describing Zen as a "non-mysticism," which, nevertheless, includes mysticism in its dynamic base.

The Problem of Mysticism

While there is no doubt about labeling Eckhart a mystic, there is considerable doubt about whether Nishida was a mystic, not the least of which stems from the fact that he adamantly said he was not. It will be necessary to define "mysticism" and, along the way, to offer at least a sketchy decision as to whether Nishida's philosophy is a

mystical one. James Heisig, in his recent book *The Philosophers of Nothingness*, mentions “mysticism” sixteen times and yet never defines or discusses it, nor does he ask whether or not Nishida Kitarō was in any sense a mystical philosopher. Mysticism is “the apprehension of *an ultimate nonsensuous unity in all things*, a oneness or a One to which neither the senses nor the reason can penetrate.”³ To be sure, the meaning of “unity” in this statement is not uniform among the mystical traditions; for example, most Christian mystics vehemently resist talk of an identity between the Creator and the created, and instead speak only of a “union,” whereas Daoist, Hindu, and Buddhist mystics speak of the identity or oneness of *all* things.

Nishida was heavily influenced by Zen Buddhism through his decade of Zen meditation in monastery settings. His boyhood and lifelong friend, D. T. Suzuki, who for decades served as the major source of information in the West about Rinzaï Zen, is clear and distinct in his opinion that Zen is not mystical: “Zen masters are not mystics and their philosophy is not mysticism.”⁴ The reason, he tells us, is that while mysticism in the West begins with the assumption that there is an antithesis—God and human being—that ends with “unification or identification,” in Zen “there is no antithesis, therefore no synthesis or unification.”⁵ Union, absorption, oneness, he maintains, are all ideas that develop from a dualistic conception of things. Hence, it is not that a union takes place, but that oneness has been the state of things all along, albeit unrecognized for the most part.

To the extent that Western mystics do take a dualistic stance ontologically, then Suzuki has indeed successfully distinguished mysticism from Zen. But the case is considerably less certain if we focus on the more philosophical and “radical” forms of Western mysticism. As already mentioned, my case in point will be the German mystic Meister Eckhart, who lived in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. More about Eckhart shortly.

Thus far I have used Suzuki as our initial introduction to Japanese thought, but what does Nishida have to say? In his last work, completed just days before his death at the very end of World War II, he wrote: “Zen has nothing to do with mysticism, as many think.”⁶ Like Suzuki, Nishida bases his conclusion on what he takes to be the nearly universal Western assumption of dualism, which he tends to call “object” logic, that divides the world of experience into subject and object, human being and God.⁷ He acknowledges that Western mysticism “is something extremely close to Zen,” but nonetheless “stands at an opposite pole to the Zen experience of nothingness.”⁸ What Zen and Nishida both affirm is *kensho*, or the self-awareness of the self’s *true* nature.⁹ Yet, “in the depths of the self is that which transcends the self.”¹⁰ The self discovers itself to be a bottomless contradictory identity and, as such, is both individual self and yet a manifestation of the whole of things as nothingness. In more traditional religious language he tells us that “we are images of God as mirrors of the self-reflection of the absolute One, and yet we are beings of absolute self-will.”¹¹ Still more succinctly: “to transcend oneself is to return to one’s true self. . . . ‘Mind in itself is Buddha, Buddha in itself is mind.’ To think of the objective identity of mind and Buddha would be to misconstrue the point. It would be to employ a Western logic of objective identification.”¹²

So, instead, we must use Nishida's sense of becoming the thing itself; that is to say, we look into our own souls with Jakob Boehme's "reversed eye,"¹³ and we see God or nothingness in ourselves, for we are self-contradictorily both manifestations of nothingness and self-willed autonomous individuals. We need to see the reality of things stereoscopically, as individual yet one, as immanent yet transcendent. Religious experience is not something set apart from common experience, but is precisely the seeing of the everyday in a new light, just as it is. It is to see with an ordinary mind that, in fact, is not what is usually thought of as ordinary; it is to become no-minded, apprehending things and ourselves in their and our suchness.¹⁴ Nishida is right in that he is not talking about a special kind of consciousness and that the ordinary mind is the correct pathway, but it is neither a common way, nor is it easily achieved. Zen Buddhists and mystics work hard to reach the heights, or depths, that they claim to reach, and if Nishida is an adequate representative of Zen, then both speak of love as their theory of knowledge. Nishida writes that "love is the deepest knowledge of things. Analytical, inferential knowledge is a superficial knowledge, and it cannot grasp reality. We can reach reality only through love. Love is the culmination of knowledge."¹⁵ It would be difficult to imagine anything closer to a mystical theory of knowledge than this passage. Indeed, his most outstanding student and disciple, Nishitani Keiji, even against Nishida's own denial of mysticism, concludes that "once the standpoint of immediate experience has entered the realm of religion, it is related to the experience of the mystics. . . . This affinity with the mystical is another of the distinguishing marks of *An Inquiry Into the Good*."¹⁶

My working hypothesis, then, is that Nishida does present us with an intensely argued philosophy that is, all the same, a mystical philosophy. It is one that is quite unlike most others in its rigor, yet remarkably similar to Eckhart's position, once one tones down the specifically Christian and Buddhist overtones of each. What Nishida wants to show in his philosophy is that "mystical does not mean . . . contrary to knowledge," or at least it need not mean that, although it is often taken to be so, even by some mystics.¹⁷

Meister Eckhart: An Example Closer to Home

I turn to Eckhart now, as the major source of insight for the positive use of the term "nothingness" in Western literature. Of course, he is by no means alone, for there were other equally radical but lesser-known mystics of the Middle Ages to whom we might turn: Marguerite Porete, Mechthild of Magdeburg, and Hadewijch are examples. But Eckhart is exemplary in his clarity and courage in voicing his insights and understanding. Bernard McGinn provides us with a useful entrée with his suggestion that it is the "ground" (*grunt/grund*) that serves as the "master metaphor" in Eckhart's work.¹⁸ It is a master metaphor because it ties together his many descriptions of both the object and goal of his mystical understanding, which is perhaps best summarized by the phrase "God's ground and my ground [are] the same ground."¹⁹ Yet while this metaphor is the center and ultimate point of Eckhart's experiential wisdom, it is the case that *grunt's* meaning, "paradoxically, vanishes from our grasp

when we try [to] contain it in a definable scheme, or circumference, of speculation."²⁰ This ineffability is all too familiar to scholars of Japanese thought, where both nothingness and the self are somehow known but are never objects of knowledge. The eye sees all things but cannot see itself; so while it sees everything else imaginable, it is unknown in anything like the same way itself. It cannot become an object of its own seeing but can only be apprehended reflectively, if at all, in and through the act of seeing. Similarly, fire can burn all things (if hot enough), but can never burn itself. Fire burns without burning. Still, even though, for Eckhart, God and the self are beyond words and cannot be objectified, the term "ground" does give us important needed information that might point us in the right direction.

McGinn suggests, drawing on the learning of scholars of Middle High German, that the word *grunt* (ground) was typically used in one or more of four different ways. The first general manner of usage is to signify the physical ground beneath our feet, the earth. Second, it can also mean bottom, or the lowest side of an object or surface. Hell was thought of as being at the bottom of the universe, as in abyss (*abgrunt*). Third, it was used to signify the origin, or beginning, or cause or reason for something. Fourth, it can be used to refer to that which is hidden, innermost, or that which is most proper to a thing, namely its essence. Eckhart and his followers used it often in this fourth sense to refer to the depths of the soul, the bottomlessness within us. But just as it refers to our hidden depths, it can also be used to refer to the hidden depths of God. McGinn argues that a still more important use and meaning is *grunt's* linkage with *principium*, a term that is used to indicate the "emanation" of the three persons of the Trinity. It points to creation, an "inner boiling" within God and a "boiling over" that is descriptive of the activity of creation. And here again West and East seem to converge, for this boiling over is a pure potentiality of the divine depths, just as absolute nothingness is often referred to as a fullness, an unbounded richness of possibility, a "pregnant" emptiness.

McGinn points to the already cited passage in Eckhart's work as the key thesis that exploded the limits and expectations of the theology of Eckhart's day, and carried him to the heart of his views on God: "God's ground and my ground [are] the same ground."²¹ McGinn takes this to be the announcement of a new and distinctive form of mysticism, a mysticism that radically expands previous understanding, and that stretches language beyond its customary limits in order to point to a yet deeper understanding of God's nature and His relationship to us. The innermost in God is *identical* with the innermost in us. At this level, there is an "absolute unity" of God and the human person. In this sense, we are already divine, already one with God. Both God and we humans share the same origin: "the ground that has no ground."²² Even more powerfully, Eckhart writes, "If anyone wishes to come into God's ground and his innermost, he must first come into his own ground and his innermost, for no one can know God who does not first know himself."²³

This insistence on a fused identity is surprising, if not heretical. Indeed, it has been a consistent concern throughout the history of the mysticisms of the West: is the separation and distinctness of Creator and created maintained, or is there an eventual oneness of identity in the mystical merging that is depicted? The ground

is the “uncreated something *in* the soul,” and, whether God or human, “this ground is a simple silence, in itself immovable, and by this immovability all things are moved, all life is received by those who in themselves have rational being.”²⁴ This ground lies deeper than the Trinity, beyond even the Father and the birth of the Word, notes McGinn, making this perhaps the most dangerous of Eckhart’s teachings, as well as his most distinctive and original. He distinguishes between God and Godhead, as is well known, noting that while the Godhead does not act, God does. The Godhead becomes God “in the flowering of creation. God *unbecomes* when the mystic is not content to return to the ‘God’ who acts, but effects a ‘breaking through’ (*durchbrechen*) to the hidden source through their union in the deconstructed ‘intellect.’”²⁵

Moreover, there is yet another potential point of comparison to note. McGinn refers to Susanne Kobebe’s claim that Eckhart’s identification of the divine ground with the ground of the human soul is “a dynamic identity.”²⁶ McGinn adds that this ground “should be understood not as a state or condition, but as the *activity* of grounding—the event or action of being in a fused relation.”²⁷ To state this the way another student of mysticism does, this means that God is a verb.²⁸ God, or, for Eckhart, “Godhead,” is not a thing, not something that “exists,” but rather is that activity that brought existences into being, and is that which sustains them. Rabbi David Cooper writes, “We can relate to God as an interactive verb. It is God-ing. Moreover, from this perspective, creation should not be treated as a noun. It too is an interactive verb; it is constantly creationing. And, dear reader, you should not treat yourself as a noun—as Joan, or Bill, or Barbara, or John.”²⁹ And then, as if to paraphrase the Buddhist notion of the radical interdependence and interconnection of things, Rabbi Cooper adds: “Each part in the universe is in dynamic relationship with every other part. . . . The true discovery of the intimacy of our ongoing relationship with the Divine can dramatically change our lives. It often happens spontaneously, without a reason. Some call this experience ‘grace.’”³⁰ Similarly, McGinn says of Eckhart that “this continuous union with God is not an ‘experience’ in the ordinary sense of the term—it is coming to realize and live out of the ground of experience, or, better, of consciousness. It is a new way of knowing and acting, not any *particular* experience or act of knowing *something*.”³¹ And the mystic’s way of being in the world is radically transformed by this event. Ueda stresses the point that any sense of “union” in Eckhart must be thought of as a “oneness,” rather than a union: “What matters for Eckhart is to return to the point where ‘I and God’ are one, not united, and to live there always renewed, always present.”³² God and the soul are simply one.

Eckhart insists that Godhead is beyond all conception. McGinn thinks of this achievement in understanding as akin to the Death-of-God theology of more recent times, for we are required to totally abandon self, all things, and even God.³³ Nishitani quotes Eckhart, who exclaims, “I beg of God that he make me rid of God,” and “I flee from God for the sake of God.”³⁴ It is a letting-go, akin to the dropping-off of Zen with respect to worldly things and especially to the ego or everyday self. We must forsake God, because “as long as the soul has God, knows God and is aware

of God, she is far from God."³⁵ We must let our soul die in God, lose herself in God, and then even the imaging of God must cease, and God is lost in order that there be nothingness—only nothingness. Then, using the same "eye" example mentioned earlier, Eckhart concludes that "the eye in which I see God is the same eye in which God sees me. My eye and God's eye [are] one eye and one seeing, one knowing, and one loving."³⁶ And one now lives out this new awareness as one knows, acts, and loves in the world.

Nishitani concurs that Eckhart offers "the most radical example of negative theology,"³⁷ and that God's true essence can only be described as "absolute nothingness." Amplifying this, Nishitani writes that "absolute nothingness signals, for Eckhart, the point at which all modes of being are transcended, at which . . . even the modes of divine being—such as Creator or Divine Love—are transcended. Creator, he [Eckhart] says, is the Form of God that is bared to creatures and seen from the standpoint of creatures, and as such is not to be taken as . . . the essence of God."³⁸ Nishitani concludes that God's essence "renders ineffable" all forms and modes of being of God, and therefore "absolute nothingness" is Eckhart's way of indicating that the ultimate God, or, as I like to say it, the nothingness beyond God, is beyond words and conception. Indeed, even to speak of God's essence is to have said too much.

In comparing Eckhart with Zen, Ueda Shizuteru reminds us that "the radicalness of Zen is evident from the fact that it speaks of nothingness pure and simple, while Eckhart speaks of the nothingness of the godhead. For Eckhart, to say that God is in his essence a nothingness is to treat nothingness merely as the epitome of all negative expressions for the purity of the essence of God, after the manner of negative theology."³⁹ Ueda agrees that "we can see something analogous to the Zen sense of nothingness . . . in Meister Eckhart's idea of the nothingness of the Godhead."⁴⁰ Eckhart's nothingness is never just nothingness, but always the nothingness of the godhead. Furthermore, while there is a clear recognition in Eckhart that the soul and the godhead are one, nature is almost completely cast to one side, whereas in Zen, nothingness expresses itself in and through nature as a whole.⁴¹

McGinn concludes his discussion of the ground of Eckhart by noting that the actualized mystic, as one who lives in continuous union with God, cannot be said to be having an 'experience' of God in any ordinary meaning of the term. Rather, it is a *realization*, a self-transformation coupled with an ever-present sense of living from the ground of experience in one's everyday actions. "It is a new way of knowing and acting, not any *particular* experience or act of knowing *something*."⁴²

Nishida

For Nishida, God *is* an experience. This is true for most Japanese religious traditions, and the way to actualize this experiential potential, which is open to us all, is through the practice of self-cultivation, or self-realization. Nishida insists that religion is "an event of one's soul,"⁴³ and that rational proofs have little or nothing to do with God:

If we seek God in the facts of the external world, God must inescapably be a hypothetical God. Further, a God set up outside the universe as a creator or overseer of the universe cannot be deemed a true, absolutely infinite God. The religion of India of the distant past and the mysticism that flourished in Europe in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries sought God in intuition realized in the inner soul, and this I consider to be the deepest knowledge of God.⁴⁴

And, like Eckhart, he refers to this conception of God as “the ground of reality,” or the “base of reality.”⁴⁵ Following Jacob Boehme’s image, Nishida remarks that we must come to “see” or experience God with a “reversed eye.”⁴⁶ It will come as no surprise that the reason why he is so certain that we are all, in our depths, religious, is because the true or “deep” self in each of us is identical with God. This is why the “reversed eye” will lead us to God, for to see the divine within ourselves is at the same time to see God. “Within the very breast of creatures as small as we are, bound to the limits of space and time, . . . the unifying power of infinite reality is there. Because we possess this power, we are able to seek out the truth of the universe through study, to express the true meaning of reality in art, to know in our innermost heart the foundations of reality that structure the universe—in short, to comprehend the face of God,”⁴⁷ or, perhaps better, the nothingness beyond God.

The claim that we are God in our depths, and that we are one with God in nature is rarely found in the three main Western religions, except in the mystical traditions. By contrast, this idea is ubiquitous in the East. That we are all intrinsically divine and/or, by nature, good is a fundamental belief, indeed a fundamental starting point for many Eastern philosophies and religions. And the direct route to the realization that we are divine—or, more precisely, for the Buddhist, that we are not separate from the whole of things, that is, that we are interconnected with all at our unfathomable depths—is generally some form of meditation or self-cultivational practice through which we lose our small self in order to reach our true or deep self. Nishitani Keiji summarizes Nishida’s position succinctly: “How does this great self relate to God? Clearly God is conceived of as something inseparable from the true self. God does not transcend the true self and stand outside it.”⁴⁸ This involves a uniting of subject and object. Nonduality is another key notion in understanding the Kyoto School thinkers, and Zen Buddhism. The dualism of the West, codified in Husserl’s dictum that consciousness is always consciousness of some object (a subject aware of an object)—his doctrine of intentionality—is seen as a precise and accurate account of everyday awareness, but not of the enlightenment experience itself. Enlightenment breaks through the “floor” of everyday experience, and discerns a nonduality where the distinction between self and other disappears. Turning to Nishitani once more, he confirms this:

In knowing our true self we merge with the good of humanity in general where self and other are joined as one; we fuse with the noumenon of the cosmos and become one with the substance of the universe and merge with the will of God. The way to know the true self and join ourselves to God lies in appropriating the power to unite subject and object as one. This state of appropriation is called being born again in Christianity and enlightened insight in Buddhism. . . . To know the true self is to become one with God.

Enlightenment is a vision of the divine, seeing God with inverted eye. . . . In other words, when the unifying power of the universe of reality is experienced immediately as the infinite activity of the human mind and appropriated as such, the power of God throughout the universe becomes a fact of immediate experience.⁴⁹

Still, Nishitani's account does seem to be about a unification of what was at least seen to be dual. And perhaps this is the major point to be made: from the ordinary perspective, mysticism is the coming to oneness of experiencer and God; from the perspective of pure experience, human and absolute are always already one, never having been anything but one all along. Nondual experience is experience as it is prior to the subject-object split, indeed prior to all division and distinction making. And while Husserl, and many of us in the West, would deny that there is such nondual experience, it is taken as experienced fact by Nishida and his followers. There are, of course, critics of this view.

To take a familiar example, Bernard Faure has been critical of the sometimes too saccharine reception of the Kyoto School thinkers. Yet, in his attempts to maintain the critical spirit, he merely quotes Steven Katz, who, in his *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis*, all too quickly concludes that "there are *no* pure (i.e. unmediated) experiences. . . . That is, *all* experience is processed through, organized by, and makes itself available to us in extremely complex epistemological ways."⁵⁰ So much for Nishida's focus on "pure" experience. Faure admits that he is uncomfortable with Katz' way of going about things and goes on to remark that "Katz's argument is somewhat weakened by its dogmatic tone."⁵¹ In fact, Katz misses the point altogether, for neither Nishida nor any mystic of any stripe claims to be dealing with ordinary experience. And neither Katz nor Faure can simply legislate away the claims of extraordinary experience that have appeared, and continue to appear, in the literature worldwide, both within and completely outside religious traditions.

Similarly, could I wipe away all doubt as to the authenticity of such experiences by simply stating that they do exist, adopting an equally dogmatic standpoint? What remains for us all is a perpetually unresolved philosophical problem to be examined and reexamined, as it has been for centuries. While few in Japan have any direct acquaintance with enlightenment (*satori* in Zen Buddhism), nonetheless it is in the cultural "air" and is generally assumed to be a genuine result of the various meditative methods of self-cultivation, including the various arts: calligraphy, the martial arts, the way of tea, flower arranging, landscape gardening, et cetera.

In any event, what Nishida wishes to point out is that the most fundamental experience is nondual experience. He reminds us that subjects and objects have to be carved out of something that is not yet so carved. Borrowing a term from William James, he defines "pure experience" as "the state of experience just as it is without the least addition of deliberative discrimination."⁵² Once again returning to an examination of consciousness, he characterizes pure experience as an immediate awareness: "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."⁵³ It is experience prior to the distinction of the various kinds of conscious

abilities, namely knowing, feeling, and willing, since these are all aspects of the subjective self that has not yet been differentiated. There is a layer of experience beneath the everyday phenomena of which Husserl speaks, a layer that is always a self-unfolding unity. This deep self of pure experience cannot be objectified, spoken of directly, or perceived. It is a *basho*, an empty place, a nothingness from which an objective self can be abstracted, but which presents itself as an awareness without one who is aware; a seamless awareness where knower and what is known are not yet distinguished. The deep self of pure experience is not a construction of consciousness, but a manifestation of that unity that lies at its depths. What is to be plumbed, then, is a consciousness that

is never confined to the so-called individual, which is not more than one small system within consciousness. We usually take a microsystem with corporeal existence as its nucleus to be the center, but if we try to think of a larger system of consciousness as the axis, this macrosystem would be the self and its development the realization of the will of the self. It is something like this with serious devotees of religion or scholarship or art.⁵⁴

We then would have deepened and widened the connections of the unifying power of pure experience with the unifying power of the universe itself. One passes beyond the frame of reference of the individual to a self-awareness that becomes the broad and deep system of pure experience itself, prior to distinctions between self and all others. It is this move beyond the individual that leads Nishida to the religious, for what is now grasped is that “our true self is the very study of the universe. To know the true self is not only to be joined to the good of humanity in general, but also to melt into the stuff of the universe and to blend in with the divine will.”⁵⁵ Nishitani adds that “to see things by becoming them is a standpoint that kills the ego completely by becoming the principle of the universe itself. It is a standpoint of pure experience at which he joins to the power that unifies all things. If we call it mind, it is not the mind of a mind-matter opposition but rather a mind that transcends them both, a mind like the mind of which it is said, ‘the mind just as it is, is the Buddha.’”⁵⁶ It is a cosmic consciousness.

God

We are left with a conception of God that is quite different from most Western conceptions. God is not a transcendent personality outside the world. It is Nishitani who best summarizes Nishida’s take on God’s nature: “What Nishida means . . . is that all things come about through the unity of God—‘the unifying activity of God is at once the unifying activity of all things’—and that this fills us with a sense of an ‘infinite love’ that makes us think of God as personal.”⁵⁷ In a way, we are God’s self-awareness, for we are God made manifest: “our consciousness is one part of God’s consciousness.”⁵⁸ Religion, for Nishida, involves a transformation of one’s life, and this transformation consists of leaving the subjective self of ordinary human experience behind and becoming aware of that unity that exists at one’s depths, and the unity in the cosmos as a whole, which are one and the same.

There is a tendency to fear or dismiss pantheistic interpretations of God and the world because such a rendering is thought to remove personality from things; at other times, we cling to personality in such a way as to separate ourselves from nature, and from the universe, keeping personality solely for ourselves and rendering nature unresponsive, alien, and dense. However, Nishida's meaning of "personality" is one that refers to something beyond the ordinary subjective self, to the true person behind or beneath, which only appears when the subjective self, the egoic self, is forgotten or left behind. What has been realized is that there is an infinite unifying power at the ground of reality, and our own deep self is one with this power. This is Nishida's "ground," and it is remarkably akin to Eckhart's. To know reality is to know the self. The "personality" of this power is encompassed in the term "God." Yet, this God is to be found within, as one with our own deep self. As such, God is a no-thing, and is beyond all objectification. This is Nishida's God beyond God, his nothingness beyond God. Most will be familiar with the well-known saying of Dōgen, which crystallizes both the path to understanding and the understanding of the relation between self and whole: "To study the . . . way is to study the self. To study the self is to forget the self. To forget the self is to be actualized by myriad things."⁵⁹

For Nishida, then, "the universe is not a creation of God, but a manifestation of God,"⁶⁰ for "there is nothing that is not a manifestation of God."⁶¹ In that sense, "our consciousness is one part of God's consciousness."⁶²

Nothingness

And what of nothingness? Analogous to the way in which Eckhart and Paul Tillich referred to "the God beyond God," Nishida's God is inevitably a nothingness beyond God. And the same nothingness that is the ultimate foundation of the universe is also to be found deep within each of us. This direct experience of the nothingness within is described by Nishida as more like a "feeling." In Nishida's words:

It is a common idea that feeling differs from knowledge, and that its content is less clear. . . . The alleged unclarity of feeling means nothing more than that it cannot be expressed as conceptual knowledge. It is not that consciousness in feeling is unclear, but rather that feeling is a more subtle and delicate form of consciousness than conceptual knowledge.⁶³

For Nishida, feeling is what is left when we imaginatively remove all content from consciousness, for when we do so we are left with "personal unity, the content of which is precisely that of feeling."⁶⁴ This is most evident when the self is merged with its activity, and all qualities disappear in one undifferentiated awareness. However, it is an awareness that is perfectly lucid and clear, for it is everything, without being a distinguishable anything. It is not an awareness of something, nor is it someone being aware. There is just *awareness*. The most efficient way of reaching such feeling is through the various paths of meditation. The methods of Zen sitting (*zazen*), the diligent practice of the tea ceremony, the various martial arts, the writing of

haiku poems—all of these self-cultivational forms are training in meditation that ultimately could lead one to pure experience, with its focus on the moment, on the here and now, where all activity is going on in the midst of pure awareness. This was also the Buddha's experience. The Buddha is your own mind, as your mind gives way to the place that is now the focus.

The focus, if indeed there can be said to be a focus at all, is on the background rather than on the foreground of experience. Your true self, as pure experience, is an undifferentiated place (Nishida's *basho*) or opening where all things arise. It is a place or "clearing" (Heidegger) that is itself without characteristics, and so is "where" all things arise, or take form. To try to characterize it as anything more than an aperture or dynamic place is to lose it. Even this is to say too much. It is empty. And because it has no characteristics of its own, it is able to allow experiences of an indefinite number of forms and qualities to arise, to be revealed. It is the formless "place" where any form may arise. Because it has no form of its own, it is able to give birth or place to all possible forms. Indeed, the only route to an understanding of this formlessness is by the direct experience of its revealing of the myriad forms. The awareness of forms reveals, beneath these forms, the formless, which makes the awareness of forms possible, in the same way that the seeing of things presupposes an unseen seer, namely the eye. The eye can never see itself directly, although it is capable of seeing all other things directly; in the same way, the self can never catch the self directly, not as pure subjectivity. To objectify the self is to grant that there is an awareness that has just objectified the self, but which itself is never an object—it is just awareness and can never be caught in this objective fashion, but ever resides at the back of consciousness as pure awareness itself.

All unity of consciousness, whether God's or that of an individual, "cannot become the object of knowledge, and transcends all categories; we are unable to give it any fixed form, and all things are established according to it."⁶⁵ In Ueda's terms, nothingness "dissolves substance thinking," and even nothingness itself must not be viewed as a kind of substance, "or even as the nihilum of a kind of 'minus substance.'"⁶⁶ What results is a nothingness of nothingness, a negation of negation. Ueda's gloss on this statement is both useful and insightful, for he maintains that this negation of negation entails a movement in two directions at the same time: "(1) the negation of negation in the sense of a further denial of negation that does not come back around to affirmation but opens up into an endlessly open nothingness; and (2) the negation of negation in the sense of a return to affirmation without any trace of mediation."⁶⁷ It is a death and a resurrection, a taking away of the world and a giving back of the world with a brilliance and distinctness hitherto unknown.

The path to an understanding of nothingness, then, involves the self as pure awareness. Focusing in on the question of the relationship between God and nothingness, Masao Abe writes that "if Ultimate Reality, which being taken as Nothingness or Emptiness, should be called 'Him' or 'Thou,' it is, from the Zen point of view, no longer ultimate."⁶⁸ Speaking from within the Zen tradition, Abe states unambiguously that "True Emptiness is never an object found outside of oneself. It is what is really *unobjectifiable*. Precisely for this reason it is the ground of true objectivity."⁶⁹

Some Buddhists, even Zen Buddhists, will speak of Buddha or even of God in seemingly Christian-like terms. Nevertheless, the self-corrective background of Buddhism forces one to understand that such words are used analogically. A creed, an image, a sacred work, even the actual Buddha himself are but pointers, “hundred-foot poles” to be used as finite springboards carrying one to the top of a seemingly unscalable cliff, that is, into the depths of nothingness itself. Once one has scaled the heights, the pole can be left behind. But, as with Eckhart, the masses need to focus on the pole, for most will not be in shape to vault themselves above the cliff’s rim. For the spiritual athlete, however, the pole is left behind once the goal has been reached; the pole, God, and the creeds are no longer the point. Thus, as D. T. Suzuki writes, “what we must grasp is that in which God and man have not yet assumed their places.”⁷⁰ This undivided something out of which even God arises is the nothingness beyond God, which is the ground of God, the Godhead, both being and non-being. It is the ultimate ground of everything.

Etymologically, “nothingness” or “emptiness” is a Buddhist notion, originally termed *śūnyatā* in Sanskrit. “*Śūnyatā*” is difficult to translate, but it derives from the Sanskrit root “*su*,” which means, among other things, “to be swollen,” both like a hollow balloon, hence empty, and like a pregnant woman, hence full. Thus, while *śūnyatā* may be nothing, and empty, it is also pregnant with possibilities. All the while it must be kept firmly in mind that the notion of *śūnyatā* is deconstructive in its force. It is a heuristic notion, and not a cognitive or metaphysical one with an independent and substantial existence. There is no such thing as *śūnyatā*—emptiness, nothingness. *Śūnyatā* is permanently “under erasure.” The notion itself is employed to help us let go of our concepts, in which case we must let go of the concept of *śūnyatā* as well. It was Nāgārjuna who warned that *śūnyatā* was a snake that, if grasped at the wrong end, could prove fatal; and yet that is what has happened repeatedly in later Buddhism. *Śūnyatā* became a “thing,” became reified, and available to “representational” thinking.

Creation

Nothingness does not create the world as forms, but *is* the world of forms, for forms are the self-expressions of, and thereby the self-revelations of, the formless. Furthermore, no special revelation or moment is privileged, for “every single moment of infinite time has the solemn gravity that these privileged moments possess in Christianity.”⁷¹ In other words, the secular has taken on the fabric of the sacred, and, to use that fruitful image of Nishida’s, it is like the deep and precious pure silk lining of a Japanese kimono: it is the unseen and rarely glimpsed that gives shape and ultimate meaning to the whole. The connoisseur alone realizes the importance of the lining, while also recognizing that the value of the lining is best revealed by paying attention to the shape and color of the outer form of the kimono. “Ultimate Reality is not something far away, over there, it is right here, right now. *Everything starts from the here-and-now*. Otherwise, everything loses its reality.”⁷² You, me, rocks, and the seeming emptiness of outer space itself are all forms of the formless, and, as such,

are particular revelations of that which is prior to both the finite and the infinite, the secular and the divine. Any attempt to define it in words will fail, but one can catch it in the marrow of direct experience, in pure experience. It is the place, itself without characteristics, out of which all things with characteristics arise. Nothingness is God's face, your face, and my face before any of us were born—that is, before we or anything else was differentiated.

Of course, one could find salvation both within or beyond this world through the many approaches that religion and spirituality afford. The point at issue here, however, is that it is all too easy to dismiss the more abstract and unexpected ultimate principle of Nishida and Zen Buddhism as mere vacuous assertion, a legacy of unethical times past, than it is to dismiss the Western theorizings about God, being, and being's ground. I suspect that Nishida may be closer to the truth and to the point of this chapter when he writes:

Reality is both being and non-being; it is being-*qua*-non-being, and non-being-*qua*-being. It is both subjective and objective, both *noesis* and *noema*. Subjectivity and objectivity are absolutely opposed, but reality is the unity of subjectivity and objectivity, i.e., the self-identity of this absolute opposition.⁷³

The notion of our self as an identity of self-contradiction becomes an increasingly focal theme in Nishida's work. Not only are we self-contradictory at our core, but so is reality itself as experienced. Religious experience arises when one becomes aware of "a profound existential contradiction in the depth of his own self."⁷⁴ As in the series of the Ten Ox-herding pictures, this awareness, at first, is but the whispers and quiet murmurings of the deeper self (the Ox). The foreground of this growing existential awareness is the fact of our own mortality. We live by dying. Furthermore, the existential death of which the religious individual is aware arises from our looking directly at the nothingness at the roots of our bottomless self. We not only die a biological death, but we die an eternal death at each moment. Hence, at the depths of our awareness of self is the recognition that we are a no-self. This point could be elaborated by retracing the path of the Buddha himself and his denial of the substantive nature of the self in his doctrine of *anatman*. We face our own inner depths, and we find our individuality slipping away into "absolute infinity, the absolute other."⁷⁵ This is absolute negation, for we are a momentary, impermanent reflection of the whole. Essentially, we are absolute nothingness; it is only temporarily that we are a form, an expression of this infinity. We are a self-determination of the absolute, a self-manifestation of the absolute, hence our divinity. It is thus that "the self truly realizes its own temporal uniqueness as it faces its own eternal negation."⁷⁶ Our uniqueness lies in the fact that we are *this particular* self-manifestation of the absolute, and there is no other exactly like us, with the same history, the same fears and aspirations, the same longings and satisfactions. But my very existence is an absolute contradiction, between individuality and a reflection of the whole, and it is this realization that enables me to become truly self-conscious. My individuality is my mortality, and my true nothingness is my immortality. I am a contradictory self, and my awareness of this is the ground of my religious awareness.

The absolute contradiction is ever present, in layer after layer, and Nishida turns what appears to be mere anguish into anguish *and* the realization of meaning and joy—another contradictory pair: “For to realize one’s own death is simultaneously to realize the fundamental meaning of one’s own existence.”⁷⁷ It is by dying, by leaving the self behind, and confronting the nothingness that is at the core of our being, that we actually come to encounter the divine at all. Our loss is our gain; our death is the giver of eternal life. The dying is not washed away, however, for the antinomy of paradox remains. Immortality arises only at the price of mortality. The divine is immanent, for it is our own bottomless self. At the same time, this divinity is, “in itself,” absolute nothingness. Hence, “God is ‘nowhere and yet everywhere in the world.’”⁷⁸

On Being Human

Perhaps all of this can be made clearer still by returning to our previous discussions of the self. The self is both personal and unique *and* a manifestation of infinite Oneness. When we see in another that he or she is divine, we are looking deep within that person, at the divine “spark” that resides in his or her depths. But when we talk with this person, interact with this person, and perhaps intimately love this person, we are primarily dealing with the surface self or ego. The self, recall, is a self-contradictory identity, for it is both one of many and a manifestation of the One. It is both One and not-One. Only by reframing language in this way can we even begin to give expression to the complexity and paradoxicality that is the human being. We are both divine and human, individual and nonindividual, mortal and immortal, et cetera. As a result, I can now grasp that you are my brother or my sister in having the same divine origin, in being of the same divine “stuff” as me. But I still interact with you as a separate individual, as Frederick or as Jillian. You are both an aspect of the One, of absolute nothingness, as am I. And so is God, as we conceive him/her. The God of religions is not to be rejected, but neither is He/She to be taken as ultimate, for there is a God beyond all conceptions of God, a more ultimate divinity. This ground, as Eckhart told us, is “pure possibility.”⁷⁹ Whether as Jesus Christ or as Buddha, the divine in us was revealed by those enlightened souls who knew who they were. And, as Eckhart stated so forcibly, “God became man so that man might become God.”⁸⁰

Zen as “Non-Mysticism”

Perhaps the leading interpreter of Nishida’s philosophy is Ueda Shizuteru, professor emeritus at Kyoto University. Ueda’s Ph.D. thesis was a study of Eckhart and Zen, a theme that he has continued to explore throughout his career. In a recent essay, Ueda repeats a position that he has maintained all along—that allows those who have argued that Nishida in particular, and Zen generally, are mystical in orientation—to be, at least, partially right. And those, like Nishida himself, who have argued the opposite, are also partially correct.

Ueda contends that Zen includes the mystical, but that it goes beyond it by becoming “non-mysticism.”⁸¹ Non-mysticism, while not just mysticism, nevertheless includes mysticism in a relationship that Ueda insists is *dynamic*; the mystical foundation of non-mysticism continues to inform and affect non-mysticism, and non-mysticism continues to affect mysticism. The insight offered is that of a mutual interaction where each relational aspect continues to inform and affect the other *ad infinitum*.

Non-mysticism, Ueda makes very clear, is not not-mysticism. Simply put, non-mysticism denies mysticism, deeming it nonexistent or even absurd.⁸² This position maintains that there is no such thing as a mystical experience of the oneness of all things; so-called mystics are simply deluded.

On the other hand, as I read Ueda, what characterizes non-mysticism is twofold. First, something spiritual arises in the experience of the mutually interactive relationship between mysticism and non-mysticism. It is a different spirituality from the spirituality of mysticism. Second, the non-mystics’s experience of the oneness of all things takes us beyond the “things,” beyond God, and even beyond Being, to non-being, nothingness, *mu*. It is as though a hole opens, and this empty hole or opening leads infinitely beyond. It is an opening to infinity, to the infinite universe beyond God, then to nonbeing beyond Being, and then beyond both Being and nonbeing to absolute nothingness. And this last is, of course, not a thing in any sense, but more like an infinitely expanding and extending process or pathway.

Even Eckhart’s godhead is still in Being, and his march toward nothingness as its prime characteristic remains a thing-like vision that, while going beyond Being, still includes Being as non-Being. After all, nothingness is a characteristic of the godhead; it is not just nothingness itself. Zen and Nishida go beyond non-Being to absolute nothingness. Non-mysticism is the disembodiment of mysticism. Nothingness is not a thing at all, it is but a hole, a process, an infinite event that leads us to an experience of impermanence as the only reality and of infinite flow as the only stability. It is just nothing. As Varela writes, “It is no ground whatsoever; it cannot be grasped as ground, reference point, or nest for a sense of ego. It does not exist—nor does it not exist. It cannot be an object of mind or of the conceptualizing process; it cannot be seen, heard, or thought of. . . . When the conceptual mind tries to grasp it, it finds nothing, and so it experiences it as emptiness. It can be known (and can only be known) directly.”⁸³

And yet Zen is ever paradoxical. Hence, once one experiences the oneness of all things as pure nothingness—that is, all distinctions disappear, and there is only the one of nothingness without the many—the world reappears once more with a renewed brilliance and pinpoint sharpness, and each thing now self-manifests with an even more intense distinctness. Those familiar with the Ten Oxherding Pictures will recognize this as the move from picture eight, of the empty circle as *mu*, to picture nine, filled with bright blossoms, rushing water, rocks, and grass, and all with a new, intense brilliance. The enlightened individual sees both of these at once, having acquired a kind of stereoscopic vision or having become accustomed to a double exposure in seeing. Nishida uses another metaphor to describe this: the kimono

hangs as beautifully as it does on the wearer because of an unseen lining deftly sewn in by a skilled seamstress or tailor. A well-tailored garment is recognizable because of the way it hangs and keeps its shape. Likewise, all things that exist are formed as they are, and yet their very form is a form of nothingness for those who can see, for a nothingness that can be discerned in each and every form. In Zen, the mountains are first lost in nothingness and then regained, but now even more brilliantly, as the form of nothingness itself, and so it is with each and every thing. In no other way is nothingness to be known except as each and every thing, for now one can “see” and “feel” the oneness of all things as absolutely nothing, and absolute nothingness as each and every thing. One sees nothingness as every thing’s background or lining.

Conclusion

In garnering insight from Eckhart, Nishida, and Ueda, a vision of life lived in this way seems to emerge. For Nishida, we are always already born as a self-manifestation of the absolute, but our task as individual humans is to recollect this fact, to rediscover that truth within ourselves, and then to live our lives in the recognition of what it is that we really are. To do so is to pave the way for an even greater oneness than we had originally, for to yearn for oneness as a discrete and separate seat of consciousness is the goal and the weave of enlightenment itself. To know that one is divine, while knowing this as a distinctively individual entity, yields a passion to throw oneself into the flux of experience, gathering ever-new awareness and a deeper love of this incredibly wonderful flow of creation. To love—oneself, another, one’s world, and the universe of which one is a part—is to preserve and cherish all that exists. It is to preserve the unique worth of everything that exists in the best way that one can, even though it is impossible not to stand in the way of some of that flow in the very course of living. When we alter the flow of another existing thing, or, sadly, even end its flow altogether, we would still be mindful of the worth of that which is being affected, and we should feel a deep sorrow that it had to be so, from our perspective on life. We would have become sensitive instruments, brought to tears of joy by the dew on a rosebud, or to tears of sadness by the roadkill on our highways and byways.

Ultimately, this vision of things will undoubtedly change our view of the world and our place in it, as well as our relationship with one another. In this sense, religion, for Nishida, is the ultimate source of *self-transformation*, a view that makes of religiosity the stuff of everydayness: when sweeping the floor, just mindfully sweep the floor. Whether washing dishes, going to the bathroom, teaching in the classroom, or making love, each and every action, when performed with the mindfulness of no-mindedness in the here and now, is an instance of God (or nothingness) made manifest in the space and time of this very world. Our responsibility is greatly increased as a result, but so is our joy and sense of purpose in a universe of which we are now an integral part. We now see ourselves as co-creators with the universal energy. We are “aspects” of nothingness, gatherers of divine experience, manifestations of the ultimate whole. Just as “God” is an expression of the creative function of

the universe on a macrocosmic scale, so we are microcosmic expressions of that same creative energy. God and nothingness are two sides of the same coin, but the same can also be said of us, and of the rest of this constantly changing universe of which we are a part. It is all one, and in spite of the horror that we ourselves all too often create, it is still glorious, and thoroughly divine, and yet, at the same time, just as unholy and ordinary. The mundane is divine and the divine is to be found in the everyday, right underfoot.

Notes

- 1 – Nishida Kitarō, “The Forms of Culture of the Classical Periods of East and West Seen from a Metaphysical Perspective,” the final essay in his *Fundamental Problems of Philosophy: The World of Action and the Dialectical World*, trans. David A. Dilworth (Tokyo: Sophia University Press, 1970), p. 237.
- 2 – Nishitani Keiji, “Ontology and Utterance,” *Philosophy East and West* 31 (1) (January 1981): 40.
- 3 – Walter T. Stace, *The Teachings of the Mystics* (New York: New American Library, 1960), pp. 14–15.
- 4 – Daisetz Teitarō Suzuki, “An Interpretation of Zen Experience,” in *The Japanese Mind: Essentials of Japanese Philosophy and Culture*, ed. Charles A. Moore (Honolulu: An East-West Center Book, the University of Hawai‘i Press, 1967), p. 135.
- 5 – *Ibid.*, p. 133.
- 6 – Nishida Kitarō, *Last Writings: Nothingness and the Religious Worldview*, trans. David A. Dilworth (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 1987), p. 108.
- 7 – *Ibid.*, p. 109.
- 8 – *Ibid.*
- 9 – *Ibid.*, p. 85. Nishida writes that truly scientific knowledge about spirituality “cannot be grounded in the standpoint of the merely abstract conscious self. . . . [I]t rather derives from the standpoint of the embodied self’s own self-awareness. And therefore, as a fundamental fact of human life, the religious form of life is not the exclusive possession of special individuals. The religious mind is present in everyone. One who does not notice this cannot be a philosopher.”
- 10 – *Ibid.*
- 11 – *Ibid.*, p. 87.
- 12 – *Ibid.*, p. 89.
- 13 – Nishida, *An Inquiry into the Good*, trans. Masao Abe and Christopher Ives (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990), p. 81.

- 14 – Nishida, *Last Writings*, p. 115.
- 15 – Nishida, *An Inquiry into the Good*, p. 175.
- 16 – Nishitani Keiji, *Nishida Kitarō*, trans. Yamamoto Seisaku and James W. Heisig (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), p. 148. The sentences before the quoted passage are also interesting: “Particularly striking here is the frequency with which the names of mystics like Augustine, Eckhart, and Boehme (not to mention Dionysius and Cusanus) come up in the chapters of part 4. What is more, they are generally introduced in the context of the *approfondissement* of the basic position of pure experience to religious experience.”
- 17 – Nishida, *An Inquiry into the Good*, p. 157.
- 18 – Bernard McGinn, *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart: The Man from Whom God Hid Nothing* (New York: Crossroad, 2001), pp. 37–38.
- 19 – *Ibid.*, p. 38. McGinn adds that this phrase is used frequently by Eckhart.
- 20 – *Ibid.* McGinn supplies the following citation for this passage: “See Blumenbert, ‘Paradismen,’ 131–136; *idem*, ‘Beobachtungen,’ 170–171.”
- 21 – See note 4 above.
- 22 – Quoted in McGinn, *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart*, p. 44, from Eckhart’s *Predigt* 42.
- 23 – McGinn, *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart*, p. 45; from Eckhart’s *Predigt* 54b (*Die Deutsche Werke* 2 : 565.13–566.2).
- 24 – *Ibid.*, p. 46; from Eckhart’s *Predigt* 48 (*Die Deutsche Werke* 2 : 420.7–421.3).
- 25 – *Ibid.*, p. 46.
- 26 – *Ibid.*, p. 48. The reference is to Susanne Kobele, *Bilder der unbegriffenen Wahrheit: Zur Struktur mystischer Rede im Spannungsfeld von Latein und Volkssprache* (Tübingen/Basel: Francke, 1993).
- 27 – *Ibid.*
- 28 – Rabbi David A. Cooper, *God is a Verb: Kabbalah and the Practice of Mystical Judaism* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1997).
- 29 – *Ibid.*, p. 70.
- 30 – *Ibid.*
- 31 – McGinn, *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart*, p. 149.
- 32 – Shizuteru Ueda, “Freedom and Language in Meister Eckhart and Zen Buddhism,” pt. 1, in *Eastern Buddhist* 28 (2) (Autumn 1990): 24.
- 33 – *Ibid.*, p. 145.
- 34 – Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, p. 64.
- 35 – *Ibid.*

- 36 – Ibid., p. 149. Reference is to Eckhart, *Predigt 12 (Die Deutsche Werke [Middle High German Works] 1 : 201.5–8)*.
- 37 – Keiji Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, trans. Jan Van Bragt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), p. 61.
- 38 – Ibid.
- 39 – Shizuteru Ueda, “‘Nothingness’ in Meister Eckhart and Zen Buddhism,” in *The Buddha Eye: An Anthology of the Kyoto School*, ed. Frederick Franck (New York: Crossroad, 1982), p. 159.
- 40 – Shizuteru Ueda, “Freedom and Language in Meister Eckhart and Zen Buddhism,” pt. 2, in *Eastern Buddhist* 24 (1) (Spring 1991): 55.
- 41 – Ibid., pp. 70–74.
- 42 – Ibid., p. 149. McGinn goes on to say that this new way of knowing and acting is “Indeed, as we have seen, . . . actually achieved by not-knowing (*unwizzen*).”
- 43 – Nishida Kitarō, *Last Writings: Nothingness and the Religious Worldview*, trans. David Dilworth (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1987), p. 47.
- 44 – Nishida Kitarō, *An Inquiry into the Good*, p. 81.
- 45 – Ibid., pp. 79–80.
- 46 – Ibid., p. 81.
- 47 – This passage is Nishitani Keiji’s translation of Nishida in his study of Nishida, *Nishida Kitarō*, trans. Yamamoto and Heisig, p. 146. In Nishida’s *An Inquiry into the Good*, the Abe and Ives translation, it is found on p. 81.
- 48 – Nishitani, *Nishida Kitarō*, p. 146.
- 49 – Ibid., pp. 146–147.
- 50 – Bernard Faure, “The Kyoto School and Reverse Orientalism,” in Charles Weisun Fu and Steven Heine, eds., *Japan in Traditional and Postmodern Perspectives* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), pp. 245–281, at p. 249.
- 51 – Ibid., from Steven T. Katz, *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 26.
- 52 – Nishida, *Inquiry into the Good*, p. 3.
- 53 – Ibid., pp. 3–4.
- 54 – This passage is Nishitani Keiji’s translation of Nishida in his study of Nishida, *Nishida Kitarō*, trans. Yamamoto and Heisig, p. 146. In Nishida’s *An Inquiry into the Good*, the Abe and Ives translation, it is found on p. 81.
- 55 – Nishitani, *Nishida Kitarō*, pp. 90–91; Nishida, *Inquiry into the Good*, p. 145.

- 56 – Nishitani, *Nishida Kitarō*, p. 91. Nishitani adds that “the mind that changes its perspective as it changes its location is the great free and unobstructed mind able to see things by becoming them” (p. 92). In another place, Nishida goes on to say that this ability and desire to “become things” is a “characteristic feature of Japanese culture,” which seemed to him “to lie in the direction from subject to object [environment], ever thoroughly negating the self and becoming the thing itself; becoming the thing itself to see; becoming the thing itself to act. To empty the self and see things, for the self to be immersed in things, ‘nomindedness’ [in Zen Buddhism] or effortless acceptance of the grace of Amida . . . these I believe, are the states we Japanese strongly yearn for. . . . The essence of the Japanese spirit must be to become one in things and in events. It is to become one at that primal point in which there is neither self nor others” (from “The Problem of Japanese Culture,” in Ryusaku Tsunoda, Wm. Theodore de Bary, and Donald Keene, *Sources of Japanese Tradition*, vol. 2 [New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1958], p. 362).
- 57 – Tsunoda, de Bary, and Keene, p. 156.
- 58 – Nishida, *Inquiry into the Good*, p. 161.
- 59 – Kazuaki Tanahashi, *Moon in a Dewdrop: Writings of Zen Master Dōgen* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1985), p. 70.
- 60 – Nishida, *Inquiry into the Good*, p. 158.
- 61 – Ibid.
- 62 – Ibid., p. 161.
- 63 – Nishida Kitarō, “Affective Feeling,” ed. Nitta and Tatematsu, *Analecta Husserliana* 7 (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1978): 223.
- 64 – Ibid., p. 225.
- 65 – Nishida Kitarō, *A Study of Good*, trans. V. H. Viglielmo (Tokyo: Japanese Government Printing Bureau, 1960), p. 175; quotation to be found on p. 1665 of the Abe and Ives translation of *Inquiry into the Good*.
- 66 – Ueda, *The Buddha Eye*, p. 161.
- 67 – Ibid.
- 68 – Masao Abe, “God, Emptiness and the True Self,” *Eastern Buddhist* 3 (2) (October 1969): 23.
- 69 – Ibid.
- 70 – D. T. Suzuki and Ueda Shizuteru, “The Sayings of Rinzai,” *Eastern Buddhist* 6 (1) (May 1973): 93.
- 71 – Nishitani Keiji, *Religion and Nothingness*, trans. Jan Van Bragt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), p. 272.
- 72 – Abe, “God, Emptiness and the True Self,” p. 24.

- 73 – Nishida Kitarō, *Fundamental Problems of Philosophy*, trans. David A. Dilworth (Tokyo: Sophia University Press, 1970), p. 246.
- 74 – Nishida Kitarō, “The Logic of Place and the Religious Worldview,” in *Nishida Kitarō zenshū*, vol. 11, pp. 371–464, written in 1945; quoted from *Last Writings: Nothingness and the Religious Worldview*, trans. David A. Dilworth (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 1987), p. 32.
- 75 – Nishida, *Last Writings*, p. 34.
- 76 – Ibid.
- 77 – Ibid.
- 78 – Ibid., p. 38.
- 79 – McGinn, *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart*, p. 49. McGinn actually borrows the phrase “pure possibility” from Niklaus Largier (“Negativität, Möglichkeit, Freiheit, Zur Differenz zwischen der Philosophie Dietrichs von Freiberg und Eckharts von Hochheim,” in *Dietrich von Freiberg: Neue Perspektiven seiner Philosophie, Theologie und Naturwissenschaft*, ed. Karl-Hermann Kandler, Burkhard Mojsisch, and Franz-Bernard Stamkötter [Amsterdam and Philadelphia: B. R. Gruner, 1998], pp. 158–162). McGinn writes of the “groundless ground” or “groundless Godhead,” which, while beyond all movement and distinction, remains “pure possibility.” One must learn to act from this place oneself, and then there is no remaining distinction between knowing and acting. The result is a spontaneous and apparently nondual spontaneity, at least akin to the seamless action of the Zen person.
- 80 – McGinn, *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart*, p. 51. While this is not the place to explore Eckhart’s Christology, it is worth expanding on this somewhat. Eckhart writes: “It would be of little value for me that ‘the Word was made flesh’ for man in Christ as a person (*supposito*) distinct from me, unless he was also made flesh for me personally so that I too might be God’s son” (In *Expositio sancti Evangelii secundum Johannem* [Die Lateinische Werke 3: 101.14–102.2]). McGinn then inquires, “Does this mean that we ourselves become the Second Person of the Trinity? Yes and no, according to Eckhart. Yes, in the sense that there is only one Sonship, which is none other than the Person of the Word; no, in the sense that ‘we are born God’s sons through adoption’ (pp. 117–118).
- 81 – Shizuteru Ueda, “Meister Eckhart and Zen,” *Journal of the Japan Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies* 4 (2005): 21–28.
- 82 – Ibid., p. 28.
- 83 – Francisco J. Varela, *Ethical Know-How: Action, Wisdom, and Cognition* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), p. 68.