

A Study of Nishida's Conception of Self-Awakening

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Abstract

This paper intends to show the idea of self-awakening in Nishida's philosophy. Nishida was a Japanese prominent thinker in the modern age. His conception of self-awakening is one of the remarkable systems of Japanese philosophy and related with rapidly development of Japan after world war II.

Introduction

In the modern philosophy of Japan, Nishida kitarō was a prominent thinker for his philosophical system. In this paper, Nishida's theory of pure experience, conception of ultimate reality, Ethical problems and Nishida's awakening theory will be described. They are interrelated to each other.

The Concept of Pure Experience in Nishida's Thought

The concept of "*pure experience*" is the foundation of Nishida's philosophy. His ontology, epistemology, ethics and religious views are developed from the idea of "pure experience". Nishida had studied "*Wilhelm Wundt's (1832-1920) theory of pure experience*", "*William James (1842-1910) theory of Radical Empiricism*," "*Ernst Mach's (1838-1916) theory of Empirico-Criticism*", and "*Henri Bergson's (1859-1941) theory of Time and Freewill*," which emphasized the idea of "pure experience". Nishida attempted to give the meaning, nature and significance of pure experience, with relating to his metaphysical, ethical and religious ideas. To know his theory of "self-awakening", it is needed to grasp his basic idea of "pure experience".

Nishida regarded "pure Experience" as the sole reality. He wanted to explain all things basing on his theory of "pure experience". According to him, "pure experience" means direct experience, immediate experience, direct awareness of things as they are or to know facts just as they are. It means that it is the experience without any addition of opinion, judgment, or any thought or reflection. It is immediate experience of things or facts with nothing added.

For Nishida, "pure experience" is prior to any distinction between subject and object. So in "pure experience", the knower and the known are not two but one. But for Nishida, in the real form of experience, it is not that the self first exists and then experiences something as an object.

According to Nishida, pure experience is not passive and static, but active and constructive or creative. In pure experience, knowledge, feeling and volition are undifferentiated.

According to Nishida, pure experience is not only the basic form of every sensuous and every intellectual experience but also the fundamental form of reality.

For Nishida, cognitive activities such as: thinking or judging, willing, and intellectual intuition are all derivative forms of pure experience. Thought and thinking are included in pure experience.

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Will also included in pure experience because it is the realization in the praxis of pure experience. In pure experience the goals of the will are actually facts that exist within consciousness. To will something is to direct attention to it. Will is an intentional aspect of all knowing. Will is a fundamental unifying activity of consciousness and a power of the self. The activity of the will is an expression of direct experience. It is not merely a state of hope. It is the establishment of the unity of consciousness. Actuality is the fulfillment of the will. In thinking the focusing of attention is to solve a problem. The seeking of a solution is a form of the will.

Nishida believed that intellectual intuition is the same as ordinary perception. For Nishida, intellectual intuition can deepen and enlarge our state of pure experience. Intellectual intuition, in its ultimate form, appears in religious awakening. Therefore, religious intellectual intuition is the perfection of pure experience. In essence, pure experience is something religious.

In early notion of pure experience, Nishida defined that a truly pure experience has no meaning whatsoever; it is simply a present consciousness of facts just as they are. But later, he wrote that pure experience is none other than thinking and the will is a fact of pure experience. True reality is not simply an existence but something with meaning.

Nishida's Conception of Ultimate Reality

Nishida had tried to seek the answer to the fundamental philosophical question "What is Ultimate Reality?" Both Eastern and Western thinkers gave various answers to that question through their respective point of view. As a philosopher and a Zen Buddhist, Nishida wanted to provide a philosophical answer by transforming Zen Buddhism into philosophy and western philosophy into Zen-oriented philosophy.

For Nishida, the problem of Ultimate reality is not merely a theoretical issue but is closely related to the practical demands of morality and religion. For the practical demand of morality, Nishida tried to seek what we ought to do. He holds that the good is not merely the way of human beings but also the way of reality. For the religious demand, he attempted to investigate where we ought to find peace of mind. Religious demand is the deepest and the highest.

Nishida regarded that to grasp true reality, it is needed to discard all artificial assumptions and doubts and then proceed on the basis of direct and indubitable knowledge. According to him, direct knowledge that cannot be doubted is "pure experience". Nishida, thus, tried to explain the problem of ultimate reality based on pure experience. Pure experience is the starting point and foundation of his metaphysics.

Reality can be understood in various ways. Nishida considered objects of internal perception are real or the real is empirical content which is immediate to the self. The self is an acting self. So true reality is the object of the acting self. True reality must be considered from the perspective of the acting self. For Nishida, seeing, hearing as well as thinking is all activities. Even intuition also is a kind of action.

For Nishida, true reality can neither be called conscious phenomena nor material phenomena. Berkeley's assumption was "To be is to be perceived". But Nishida contended that "to be is to act". Rene Descartes's (1596-1650) proposition "I think, therefore I am" has no longer a fact of immediate experience. Therefore,

"reality, which can be known by clear thinking", was an also arbitrary assumption. For Nishida, the independent, self-sufficient, pure activity is the unifying power of the universe are fundamentally identical. This unity is not static but dynamic.

In pure experience, material phenomena and mental phenomena are identical. Therefore these two types of unifying activity are fundamental one.

Nishida attempted to build up his ontology basing on the phenomena of consciousness. For Nishida, whatever we perceive, feel, or think is a phenomenon of consciousness. Even nature, which we normally think exists "outside" the phenomena of consciousness, in fact, exists to us as phenomena of consciousness. There is no distinction between nature and spirit, the "thing" and "I".

True reality is prior to the separation of subject and object. True reality is not the subject matter of dispassionate knowledge. True reality is established through our feeling and willing. So for Nishida, ultimate reality is not merely known cognitively but also realized emotionally and volitionally.

According to Nishida, the will is the most fundamental unifying power of consciousness and the most profound manifestation of ultimate reality. The will is a fact of pure experience and also the will is the primary characteristic of consciousness.

Nishida described the Buddhist insight that our actual world is constituted by our feelings and desires rather than abstract concepts and theories. But for Nishida, it is not that the individual possess feeling and the will but rather than feeling and the will create the individual. True reality is not found outside of the phenomena of consciousness. The objective world is not apart from our consciousness.

The so-called objective world as well as the phenomena of consciousness is both established on the basis of the same principle. For Nishida, both a unity at the base of reality and mutual opposition are necessary for the establishment of reality. The unifying power of consciousness must necessarily contain opposition and contradiction. Unity and contradiction are two views of one and the same thing. The most powerful reality is one that most thoroughly harmonizes and unifies various contradictions. Reality is the self-development of a single entity of reality is that which constitutes in itself a single system. Or reality develops itself through dynamic movements of self-differentiation and unification. True reality emerges through infinite opposition. These oppositions come from within reality itself. So, true reality is the free development that emerges from the internal necessity of a single unifying factor.

Nature, as a truly concrete reality does not come into being without having a unifying activity. Therefore nature possesses a kind of self, too. There must have the unifying power in nature. He said that nature and spirit are not independent realities distinguishable from each other. All of reality is established through unity, and in spirit, the unity emerges as a clear fact. It is only in spirit that reality becomes a perfect reality, an independent, self-fulfilled reality. Therefore spirit is the unifying activity of reality.

The Ethical Problems in Nishida's Philosophy

Nishida had discussed the problem of ethics, especially concerning with human conduct, the freedom of the will, the good, and personality.

For Nishida, conduct is a physical action, in which the goal is clearly known in consciousness. It is a willed action. For the will to arise, there must be a physical or mental cause that initially determines the direction of action or movement. The will is an internal phenomenon of consciousness and essential part of conduct. The will is the deepest unifying of consciousness or the deepest unifying power of consciousness is the will. It is also the power of the self.

The power of will, as motivation, must be accompanied by an idea of a result or an idea of a certain goal, Human will developed from unconscious movements to conscious movements. The various goals of organisms serve the maintenance and development of life in the individual or in its species. The goal of our will, too, is the preservation of life.

According to Nishida, the good is the goal of our life. The good is the realization of our internal demands, our ideals; it is the development and completion of the will. The ethical theory which Nishida took is called energetism. It is originated in Plato and Aristotle.

According to Nishida, the satisfaction of the demands of the self or the realization of ideals constitutes happiness. True happiness is actually something acquired through the realization of ideals.

Nishida continued to say that ideals and desires are causes of the will. They arise from the nature of the self itself. They are the power of the self.

Nishida considered desire or ideals to be a manifestation of the innate nature of the self. The will is the unifying function of the independent and self-sufficient activity that forms the ground of conscious phenomena and also of the universe of reality.

For Nishida, it is clear that consciousness is not a simple activity but rather a synthesis of various activities. The desires that arise in us are not simple but varied and many. It arises a question that the fulfillment which demand constitutes the highest good?

The Conception of Self-Awakening in Nishida's Thought

The word "jikaku" is one of the key terms in Nishida philosophy. It has no exact equivalent in Western Language. But the word "Jikaku" may refer to "Self-consciousness", or "self-awareness" or "Self-awakening", or "Self-realization".

Thomas P.Kasulis, Professor of Comparative Studies, the Ohio state University, points out:

"The term "Jikaku" literally means "self+awakening". He notes that the term "kaku" of is a common synonym for "enlightenment, and the "ji" component does not necessarily refer to the self as the seat of personal identity. It can also mean "automatically" or "spontaneously", that is, it can refer to something occurring without external help or agency".¹

So "Jikaku" means automatically awakening or enlightenment or spontaneously awakening or enlightenment .

For Nishida, by "Jikaku" is meant not the psychological phenomenon of self-analysis, but rather than Johann Fichtes' self-consciousness of the transcendental ego.

For Nishida, an authentic awakening to one's self consists of getting rid of one's own petty ego. Special attention to the self-awareness is the foundation of his

system of thought. His idea of "self" is distinguished from "ego". His notion of self is the acting self. Man is an acting perceiving being.

Nishida found a double meaning in the character for "self".

" (1) It was a person's awareness of one's innermost nature.

(2) it was an awareness that was not so much accomplished by the person but allowed to take place spontaneously, of itself, and without interference".²

In other words, "awareness" in Nishida came to carry the combined sense of an auto-awareness of the self. For Nishida, philosophy is the transformation of ordinary consciousness into a being aware. In self-awareness, immediate experiencing and reflection are unified. In epistemological terms, knower and known are the same. This instance of unity serves as the prototype of all knowledge.

Most philosophers start with subject-object opposition and see the object from the subject. But Nishida's solution was to see the world as mirroring itself in all the things "in the world". Whatever is "in the world" is a mirroring of the world.

In this sense, it is the world that is, self-aware or self-reflexive; and there is no outside to it. An individual's "self-awareness" is a partial mirroring of the world. For Nishida, in "jikaku" the self and the world are dialectically identical in knowing and functioning. The self is a creative moment of the creative world.

From the subjectivist perspective, the self is understood to stand outside the world. But for Nishida, the self exists in the world. The knowing and functioning of the self take place as historical events in the world. The actual and concrete world is the dialectical world. Our knowledge is the self-consciousness of the world. Our expression is the self-expression of the world. The world is not something that the unifying activity of consciousness. So this unity changes, the self changes as well.

According to him self-consciousness is a phenomenon that accompanies the unification of a partial system of consciousness in the centre of the entirety of consciousness.

Intuition and Reflection in Self-consciousness

Nishida's aim was to rethink each dimension of the real, in light of what he called the system of self-consciousness and to consider the fundamental problem of the connection between value and being and between meaning and fact, the relationship between intuition and reflection.

According to him, "self-consciousness is the internal connection between intuition and reflection.

"Intuition is a consciousness of unbroken progression of reality just as it is. In intuition subject and object are not yet divided, and that which knows and that which is known are not two but one. So in intuition, it is needed to be aware of a flowing continuous reality unbroken by subject."³

"Reflection is a consciousness which standing outside of his progression, turns around and views it. In reflection it is needed to step outside of the flow of reality to recognize it"⁴

For Nishida, self-consciousness was analyzed the inner relation between intuition and reflection. So self-consciousness is consciousness of the transcendental

unity of the self. It is not an accidental happening, but it is an intrinsic nature of consciousness. His position is closed to that of Fichte's "Act" but not strictly the same. Nishida focused on the self-generation and self-development of concrete experience.

For Nishida, when the self reflects on the self or reflects itself, it is in the self that the self is reflected. It is not dealing with something apart from the self. Therefore reflection is an event within the self, by which the self adds a certain something to the thinks it are immediately identical. The unity of different conscious states is possible only self-consciousness of the transcendental unity of the self.

For him, self-consciousness already transcends time. So the ability to recollect the past and to think of the historical events is possible.

Nishida discussed an intellectual intuition in which the transcendental "sollen" or "ought" actively recognizes itself. Intellectual intuition is the purest form of thinking. Thinking and intuition are usually considered to be totally different activities. But for Nishida, thinking and intuition are facts of consciousness; and they are the same kind of activity.

Conclusion

Nishida studied deeply in Western Philosophy and attempted to combine the Western thought with the Japanese's traditional outlook. The concept of self-awakening in Nishida's system is a new aspect of thought which is related with the modernization of Japan especially the development of epistemological process. In this modernization, the two aspects are included: technological and socio-cultural. Socio-cultural aspect itself expresses the combination of Japanese traditional belief and modern ideas from the Western civilization in nineteenth century. Nishida, thus, has tried to show the new aspect self-awakening, which supports the development of the living standard of Japan in Meiji period.

In Nishida's new version, the object known and knowing mind (knower) are the one, the same, and the identical. There is on diversity between the two things which are one, the same, and the identical. There is no diversity between the two things which are called ontological reality in Western view. Infact, Nishida's view is based on the notion of "Not-self" in Buddhism. In Buddhist Philosophy the existence of an object independent of the knower is not allowed. The following passage shows to confirm this point.

"Buddhists deny the existence of an object in the external world, independent of the perceiver. All objects exist only relative to, and vary with the percipient and even the occasion. "To be" means "to be perceived" esse est percipi. Also, the perceiver is relative to the perceptions as the perceptions are to him. The Buddha himself stated the non-realistic nature of all objects in the Surangawa Sutta."⁵

It can, thus, conclude that the concept of self-awakening is similar to the teaching of Buddhist thought. Nishida tried to build his own view strongly on Buddhism because he himself is a Mahayana Buddhist.

Notes

- ¹ Robert E.Carter, *The Nothingness Beyond God: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Nishida Kitaro*, Second Edition: Paragon House Publishers, 2700 University Avenue West, St.Paul, MN 55114.
- ² James W.Heisig, *Philosophers of Nothingness: An Essay on the Kyoto School*, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- ³ Nishida kitarō, *Intuition and Reflection in Self-consciousness*, (trans.) Valdo H. Vuglielmo, New York: State University of New York Press.
- ⁴ Ibid.
- ⁵ Northrop F.S.C & Helen H Livingston, *Cross-Cultural Understanding*, New York, Evanston, and London: Harper & Row, Publishers

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