

The Eye of The Hurricane

Conversation with Professor Ryosuke Ohashi
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Ikujiro Nonaka and Claus Otto Scharmer¹

C.O. Scharmer: Professor Ohashi, I'd like to hear about your story, the journey that brought you to philosophy and Nishida. What's the journey that got you here?

I. Growing up in Kyoto

Ryosuke Ohashi: I was born in Kyoto; that's my home city.

COS: I see. And your parents?

Ryosuke Ohashi: My father was a mathematics teacher. For this reason, I was not a good pupil. I went to middle school and high school in Kyoto and studied in Kyoto University. My specialty was philosophy.

COS: What was it that made you want to study philosophy?

Ryosuke Ohashi: First I studied in Kyoto University from '69 till '73. I had determined to study philosophy before I went to university, because of problems I had as a high school pupil.

One day in my second year of high school, I went to a bookshop and quite accidentally, I found a philosophy text—Heidegger's Time and Being. I was very surprised to see that someone in the world treated the same problem that I had. Time and being. "Oh!" I was very surprised. As a high school pupil, I took this book and opened the pages. After that, I determined to go to Kyoto University, because it was well known for philosophy. At that time, I went to high school at night. During the day, I worked.

COS: What was your work?

Ryosuke Ohashi: In a printing factory. At the time, there was no computer and printing was done with, what they say, numbering.

¹ The conversation with Ryosuke Ohashi took place as part of a global interview project with 25 eminent thinkers on knowledge and leadership. The project was sponsored by McKinsey & Company and the Society for Organizational Learning (formerly the MIT Center for Organizational Learning). The interviews and the summary paper are accessible as free downloads from www.dialogonleadership.org.

COS: Yes, I know.

Ryosuke Ohashi: I was a good printer. And there was no one in my night school who thought to go to Kyoto University. I enjoyed the life of school at that time – working during the day, preparing to go to university at night.

COS: And how was it, then, the first year? What was it like?

Ryosuke Ohashi: In the first two years, we don't study philosophy, because, just like in America, we do general studies. In the third year, one can begin to study philosophy. So I studied philosophy for two years in this university. That was in '69.

COS: Yes, what was it like here in '69?

Ryosuke Ohashi: I got engaged in what was going on. And I thought it was something which perhaps had meaning -- as I had studied in Heidegger, I wanted to understand it from the Heideggerian viewpoint; I wanted to see through the meaning of this event. Partly because of this philosophical meaning, and partly because I got too far engaged in the student revolution in order to be promoted within the Department of philosophy, I went to Germany.

COS: You did?

Studying Heidegger in Germany 1969-73

Ryosuke Ohashi: Yes, to Munich, Munich University.

COS: In what year? In '73?

Ryosuke Ohashi: No, in '69.

COS: '69, really?

Ryosuke Ohashi: In '69, in Germany, the movement was almost at the end.

COS: Yes, it was. Certainly it was in Munich.

Ryosuke Ohashi: And I went to the professor who was a well-known disciple of Heidegger.

COS: Which one?

Ryosuke Ohashi: Max Mueller. He accepted me. You know there are two Max Muellers. One Max Mueller is very well known in religious philosophy, and lived decades ago.

And the second Max Mueller was a disciple of Heidegger. And he accepted me and I studied with him. Of course, he went to Freiburg, soon after and I had to study

almost alone in Munich. But that was not important, because he accepted my doctoral thesis. Like they say in German, he was my doctor-father.

COS: He was your thesis adviser.

Ryosuke Ohashi: Yes.

COS: So your first encounter with philosophy was, really, with Martin Heidegger.

Ryosuke Ohashi: Yes.

II. Meeting Martin Heidegger

COS: What do you consider the core question that underlies, that has organized your own work?

Ryosuke Ohashi: I studied, as I said, for two years in Kyoto and wrote a thesis, and I believed that I understood Heidegger. And in '69, I went to Germany. It was Heidegger's 80th birthday, and I was able to visit him.

COS: You were?

Ryosuke Ohashi: Yes.

COS: Really?

Ryosuke Ohashi: Yes, with two other professors. Now, before I visited Heidegger, I had believed that I understood Heidegger. I believed that I had written a good thesis. Someone had said to me that when I visited Heidegger, I should prepare questions. Because a dialogue with a thinker is very important—not with the text, but with the thinker himself. As a young student, I had prepared some questions, but as I sat in front of Heidegger, I got stagefright. I forgot all the questions. At that time, I couldn't speak German fluently. I tried to ask one question. I couldn't formulate it well. But the question was as follows. Heidegger's text begins with a question and ends with a question. Where lies the decisive answer? That is a primitive question, but perhaps important. But I couldn't formulate this question. Heidegger said to me, "I don't understand your question well."

So that was the first encounter with Heidegger, in October '69. I could read and write German, but could not understand aurally. And I couldn't speak.

So I began to study philosophy. First as a guest student, not a regular student. It took one hour to take part in the lecture, which began at 7 o'clock. So in winter, it is very dark in the morning. I had to wake up, get up in 5:30 or so, 6 or so. And I took the tram and I sat behind the lecture room, far behind, in the back.

And the text which was used was Aristotle, metaphysics. Professor Max Mueller came into the room and he sat in the front, far from me. The first words he spoke were, “What is the main theme of this text, Mr. Ohashi?” He spoke very slowly. And I could only say, “I cannot speak German.” That was my start. But I could read and write, so that at the end of the semester, I had good notes and so forth. So in eight semesters, I wrote the thesis, he accepted it and so forth. And the study was not difficult. I had no difficulties. And I got the paper and remained assistant professor and came back to the new university. And later he toured this university.

But to your question, I understood that I had not understood Heidegger. Why? Because the main problem from which or for which or because of which Heidegger has thought in is the Western tradition of metaphysics, for more than 2,000 years. And this tradition of metaphysics has not been transported to Japan. Only the text, only the result of this tradition was imported to Japan. That was the same as the problem of modernization in Japan. Modernization has its own history and grounds. But in Japan, technology was accepted and developed without experience of the background where technology was born and developed and modernized.

The modernization of the Japanese occurred, the Europeanization of Japan occurred. But Japan remains Japan. What has remained and what was Europeanized?

I had understood Heidegger’s text without knowing from which ground his philosophy was born and built and developed. And this ground of metaphysics was quite unknown to me. And I couldn’t see why Heidegger had tried obstinately, again and again, to destroy the tradition of metaphysics. And this was not understandable for a Japanese student. In order to destroy the tradition of metaphysics, the tradition must be there.

Further, I have got another problem or task or question, namely, for Heidegger, he starts from the German word “Sein” [Being]. In German, the substantive noun ‘Sein’ is also to be used as verb sein. And Heidegger says if the word ‘sein’ falls down, vanishes, we cannot speak, we cannot talk, we cannot understand anything. Sein. So the word ‘sein’ is decisive. And during the translation of a similar word from Greek into Latin, esse, something decisive was lost. According to Heidegger.

Now, I had to reflect on the Japanese language. In Japanese translations of Being and Time, there are two translations for the word ‘sein’ For one decisive word, there are two translations. What does it mean for other philosophical problems?

And in Chinese, there is no copula. Can you imagine how a language is spoken and written without copula? In Chinese, only one form of the verb is used for future, present and past. And once sentence can be made and is made without copula. Where is ‘sein’?

III. Language is the house of being

Heidegger says that language is the house of being. This means that there is nothing which cannot be expressed with a language. Everything which we think, which we think about or which we communicate, is spoken or written. Without language, we cannot express anything. So language is the house of being.

What kind of house is Chinese language and Japanese language? The house must be different from the European house. I must continue my questions. On what ground should I think? On the European ground, Heidegger could think in his way. But if his text is translated into English, there are two words for 'sein'. In Chinese, there is no word for 'sein'. And, you know, the text Being and Time is translated into Chinese. There are two translations. And the translator must have had enormous difficulties translating this word, 'sein'.

So that is an impossible translation. **With the translation, nothing is translated, except something which is not important.** That is the secret of philosophical thinking.

So I had to ask myself, what is the Japanese ground for thinking, what kind of character do we have? And in what way have the traditions of metaphysics been transplanted into Japan and so forth. So I began to treat also the problem of culture and art. Art, my engagement with art began with a trip around Germany for two weeks in a bus. From one city to another, we took this trip. At that time, Germany was divided into East and West. And I could, from the bus, see buildings and cities and various styles of architecture also in East Germany as the bus run through the streets between Hamburg and Berlin. And I got various questions and I could observe the differences in the style of architecture and arts and cultures from district to district.

And at the end, I had a big kind of culture shock, as I observed the so-called Kaiserdom in Bamberg. It was built in the transitional epoch, from Romanesque to Gothic. On one side, on the West side, one sees more elements of Romanesque. And on the East side, one observes more elements of Gothic. And in the parts below, more Romanesque. The higher, the more Gothic style. And I have got the question. What is a style, a style of architecture? What is a style?

IV. The Kyoto School

COS: Tell us about the Kyoto School and about Nishida's work. What was your encounter, when did you first come across the work?

Ryosuke Ohashi: As I was a student in Kyoto University, I had naturally already had interest in Nishida's philosophy. And intuitively I had felt that Nishida is like a grandfather in thinking.

COS: Why would that be?

Ryosuke Ohashi: I have said intuitively. **I read Nishida's text, but I couldn't understand a word. But somehow, I felt an affinity with him.** I began to engage myself with Nishida's philosophy after I came back from Germany. After I understood that something of Heidegger would not be appropriate for me, because of his ground of thinking, which doesn't belong to Japan, to the Japanese ground of thinking. So I began to see myself and perceive my own culture ground, culture tradition. And to see what differences arise between East and West.

So in this context, I began to read intensively Nishida. And the philosophers of the Kyoto School. But I knew that the Kyoto School, the name Kyoto School, had a dark image.

COS: Has it?

Ryosuke Ohashi: The history is a little similar to that of Heidegger, because of the collaboration with the Nazis.

There was and there is also till now, hard discussions, controversies on the total philosophy of the Kyoto School – whether or not they collaborated, how they were.

And even now, two years ago, there was a symposium in America, to which critics from America and some scholars from Japan were invited.

COS: What's your take on that?

Ryosuke Ohashi: My opinion is, or my understanding is that the philosophers of Kyoto School tried to change the direction of the war. Or change the direction of the policies of the pre-war Asians, within their ability. There were some philosophers who were arrested and died in prison, shortly before and shortly after the end of the war.

Other philosophers were not arrested, partly because the liberally oriented navy was friendly to them. The regime was formed by an extremely nationalistic and militaristic army. And without that protection of navy, Nishida, perhaps, and his disciples would have been arrested also.

COS: Nishida did take part in some anti-war activities, right?

Ryosuke Ohashi: No, no. Nishida was too old.

COS: I thought I once read a letter or something where he ...

Ryosuke Ohashi: They wrote many things.

COS: Yes, against the war.

Ryosuke Ohashi: Against colonialism and so forth—against colonialism and nationalism. And I think that if I had lived in the same age, I would have done the same. That is my opinion. And some critics argue from the safe zone of today. I don't like this way of critics.

I always think what I would have done. Then I think I would have done the same, I would have written the same as Nishitani did. That is my position.

Naturally: Seen from the contemporary viewpoint, they could have written perhaps in a better way. For example, they had rather a classic concept of war—not a concept of war with modern equipment, and not a war with atomic bombs. For some philosophers, war is a situation in which the people notice something. In a critical situation, one notices inner power: war in a classic age had such a positive side, such positive effects, and that was a part of the thinking of these philosophers.

But when an atomic bomb is used, the situation changes. They thought about war in terms of the model of samurai in the feudalistic, Edo period, where samurai had to be confronted with the possibility of conflict. Samurai are people who must always be confronted with death. In everyday life, we forget death. We don't think always about death. But for samurai, everyday life means that they must think of their own death in conflict.

Perhaps the philosophers thought in terms of such a way of life, but it is too classic for the modern world with an atomic bomb, I think.

COS: So the Kyoto School thinkers talked about pure experience while lacking the real experience, they just talked about the concept of pure experience, not the reality of real experience.

Ryosuke Ohashi: The reality of the war was not known at that time. No one had anticipated something like the atomic bomb, except some specialists.

V. The essence of Nishida's work

COS: What do you consider the essence of Nishida's work?

Ryosuke Ohashi: I would say there could be some various expressions for this essence. One expression I would like to formulate is that philosophy is a new discipline for Japan, one which came from the West. Nishida came to philosophy from outside of Western philosophy, but he went into that tradition of philosophy. And in the end, he went through to a place where he began perhaps a new kind of thinking. So that is one expression, in my view.

So one task for the next generations in philosophy, like me, is to take over this place of thinking and to develop it anew in the context of the contemporary situation. Historically, 95% of the task of philosophers in Japan has been to understand European text, interpret it and translate it into Japanese.

The Japanese economy has grown up so fast. The scope of the Japanese economy may correspond to the sum of England, Germany and France – it's a little smaller than two-thirds of the American economy. But in the field of philosophy, there is almost nothing which is broadcast from Japan. I ask myself why. Why only in philosophy does this one-sided reality remain, in spite of the fact that Nishida and Kyoto School have built a philosophy?

So that is one reason why I, in collaboration with some others, have begun to edit a new series of texts, reprint texts of the Kyoto School. The first round contains 15 volumes. And the second will contain thirteen volumes; every two months, two more volumes will be published.

COS: I see. So what are the key concepts from Nishida, which also interest us from our professional background very much, such as the concept of pure experience? Could you explain a little bit, elaborate on that, what he means?

Nishida's issue with his concept of pure experience

Ryosuke Ohashi: He has borrowed this concept from the American philosopher, William James, as you know. There are some fundamental areas of commonality between James and Nishida. But there are also differences, which will be more important. Nishida didn't use this word after his first book.

At any rate, **pure experience means for Nishida that subject and object are not yet divided.** Subject stands against object. Object can be observed. But when I, for example, when I play a sport such as baseball, the ball is not an object; when a pitcher throws the ball, the batter thinks the ball is not an object. After a while, when a batter analyzes his batting in freedom, then the ball becomes an object.

So, the first reality lies in the pure experience, where subject and object are not yet divided. The division comes after the analysis between them—the analysis of the subject and object in it. So pure experience, in the first stage, is a situation where subject and object are not yet divided.

But pure experience can also mean religious experience for Nishida, where subject and object are no longer divided. "No longer divided" means that I can conceive something as my own self, although this tree or house is something different from me. But there is a stage of religious experience where one can say I am this and this. Or this is not different from me. Or everything in the universe is my own self. That is

often the formulation spoken out by religious people in the past. Nishida formulated perhaps the same thing in philosophical terms.

And in this religious experience, James has also written many things regarding religious experience. But Nishida tried to formulate and develop it with his own logic. He didn't succeed in it at first. And he abandoned the words "pure experience", because these words were too psychological for him.

COS: What do you mean by too psychological?

Ryosuke Ohashi: The words "pure experience" sound like an expression of the standpoint of "consciousness". And it doesn't fit for that which Nishida wanted to say, namely that when I say that in the pure experience subject and object are not yet divided or are no more divided, then this oneness is not a reality in the consciousness, but the reality as *itself*.

But how is it to express clearly and logically that something is only one unique thing? Everything, such a small thing, is only one. **This uniqueness, how this uniqueness and oneness could be, should be expressed logically. That was one question that Nishida has had.**

And the question means that the significance of my own self should also be logically expressed – the significance of my own existence and also the significance of everything. The significance of historical world, biological world and the physical world and so forth should be expressed. The task Nishida has had is **to grasp the reality. Grasp the true reality. Reality is something that can be felt, that can be expressed somehow. What is the reality that is simple and difficult to question? What is the reality of this world? What is the reality of this history? What is the reality of my own existence?**

Nishida wanted to grasp the reality with logic, in the form of a philosophy. And that was the Alpha and Omega of his philosophy, I think.

Nonaka: The uniqueness of one's self or uniqueness of every existence cannot be explained only by saying oneness.

Ryosuke Ohashi: Yes.

Nonaka: That's the reason he abandoned it. And he developed later?

VI. Nishida's Concept of Basho (Place) and Nothingness

Ryosuke Ohashi: The theory of *basho*, the theory of place.

COS: Could you elaborate a little bit on how that concept gives a more satisfying answer to his fundamental question?

Ryosuke Ohashi: I am not sure if I can formulate this thought of place in a few words. Perhaps I could say as follows. The traditional way of philosophy has a key concept, substance. The ultimate substance is God. The concept substance is a highly loaded concept in the philosophy and it has always been an important cornerstone of Western philosophy. Now, every substance has its own basho. Space is one example. But God is not spacial. So long as God is conceived as the ultimate substance, the basho for God is unthinkable. It is nothing. But just this “Nothing” is the basho for God. For Nishida, space was only one meaning of the Basho of “Nothing”.

The other perspective of the thought of Basho regards the relationship between the whole totality and individual things. It could be explained to some extent within this traditional system of thought, i.e., one individual thing remains a part of the whole. But as long as the part is defined by its position within the larger whole, it cannot express his own absolute uniqueness. So when something is only one part of the whole, then it is defined from the whole.

On the other hand, it is also unique, one unique thing which is so far absolute and which should be able to define the whole conversely. It can revolt against the whole.

If a system contains such an absolutely unique part which can revolt against the system, the system cannot remain a system in the traditional sense, that is the whole which dominates the individual. The relation between the whole totality and the individual is not continuous, but discontinuous. This discontinuity requires a “place”. And this place is no more something. Place is no-thing. So we are in the room, the room is the place for us. What is a room, spatially, which is located in the university campus? And the university campus, where? And so forth. And the whole universe? Where is the whole universe? There’s no space outside of the universe. I.E. Nothing outside of it. Nothing. Without this “Nothing”, the universe can not exist. Also we exist in the place of nothingness which enables us to be unique individuals.

Nishida has revised a thought of Aristotle. A well-known formulation of Aristotle is that substance is something which is subject but not predicate. Namely, A is B, B is C, C is E and so forth. Substance is the last rise in the last stage in the series in the direction of predicate subject. The last subject is substance.

Nishida has revised these formulations. Place is that which at the end becomes the predicate and not the subject.

COS: What exactly is a predicate?

Ryosuke Ohashi: Predicate is always on the side of our consciousness. I observe something. This something is objective. Something objective is formulated through subjective consciousness subject. “I” look at it. This ‘I’ cannot be objectified in a sentence. That’s I, myself, standing on the side of predicates.

But I can reflect on myself. I can observe myself, in a mirror, in self-analysis and so forth. But analyzing me, analyzing I, lies behind analyzing me. This predicate is at the end nothing. **There must be a place which is nothing where something is.** The thought of place is the thought of nothingness in Eastern meaning.

Perhaps I have formulated too simply. Nishida's thought of place or Nishida's thought of nothingness was the first trial of the philosopher's trial, to formulate something which was maintained in the tradition of Eastern religion and ethics, I suppose. He went through the Western philosophy and came to his own philosophy of nothingness.

So far, his philosophy can be compared with and confronted with Western philosophy, I think. But he had another root. He came to the tradition from outside of Western philosophy. So this is a mixture of alienness, of the alien roots of philosophy, and the method and concept of philosophy. This mixture is new to Western philosophy. And as I said already, 95% of Japanese philosophy professors are engaged with Western philosophy, a quite different situation than in economics. But I think that this philosophy can and will contribute something to future fields.

VII. The Philosophy of Sein (Substance)

COS: How does the philosophy of place or of nothingness relate to the second phase of systems thought that you referred to earlier in our conversation? You said, the first phase was based on substance centered thinking. Now, is the philosophy of nothingness part of the second phase? How does it relate?

Ryosuke Ohashi: The philosophy of substance and the first phase of systems thinking can be described as a philosophy of being. Being, the last being or the ultimate being is substance, according to Aristotle. According to Plato, ideas. According to Leibniz, monadic substance. According to Marx, das Kapital. According to Nietzsche, the Will to Power. All these are examples of different philosophies of Being. But the concept nothingness was always regarded as a negative side or shadow side of substance. Something which fades.

VIII. Something which is alien to me is in my own self

Only the tradition of German mysticism was the exception. But mysticism was not mainstream of Western philosophy. For Nishida and perhaps for Buddhists, the nothingness was not something negative, but ultimate something.

But the philosophy of the Kyoto School and of Nishida wanted to grasp this world, not from the viewpoint of the philosophy of Sein, but from the viewpoint of the philosophy of nothingness.

COS: Which means? So, what does that mean? How does that change your perspective?

Ryosuke Ohashi: One problem is, as I said, the significance of individual human beings or individual things. Which remains only one part of the whole. So long as one regards it from the viewpoint of substance, I am one part of the whole. And so long as I am observed from the viewpoint of the whole, I remain as one part. But the relation of this individual one part and the whole is one side. **The other side is strict discontinuity between me and the whole. Me and you and the whole.**

For example, we make conversations. That means that we have continuity, somehow. In spite of this relation, we remain as quite absolutely independent beings. That means that there must be a kind of discontinuity. Continuity and discontinuity must be here as our relation. And discontinuity means that between you and I there is nothing.

This nothingness should also be observed in the structure of my own self and in the structure of your own self. Our self is something alien to us. This relation is inconceivable so long as myself and your self is grasped from the viewpoint of substantial subject. Because this subject dominates itself. It excludes everything which is alien to him, till it grasps itself as a “system” in the sense above. In this system there is no individual which is unique and free. The system in which the individual is free and unique, is not closed, but open. **That means that system must have something absolutely alien within it. The same can also be said to our own self.**

For Descartes this would be impossible. But for Nishida, there is something which is absolute, there is something in my own self which is quite alien to my own self. Perhaps a mystic will agree. Or perhaps Heidegger, who formulates this in other way, namely, I am here—not because of my own power or ability. When I have noticed that I am in this world, I am already in this world. Heidegger says, one is thrown into this world. Then, I have a free will. I can decide everything on my own responsibility. But my own existence is thrown into this world. **Something which is quite alien to me enables my existence.**

In traditional Christian terminology, this absolute alienness could be said to be God. God is in me. But Nishida will not directly say “God.” But something which is quite alien to me is in my own self. This nothingness enables my existence. And also enables my relation with all. So long as one conceives, grasps this world from the viewpoint of Sein, or being, this idea of nothingness cannot be conceived.

This philosophy of nothingness is the starting point of a philosophy of history for Nishida and the Kyoto School. This philosophy of history is one field that has remained undeveloped since then, in my view. And perhaps it can contribute something also to the contemporary philosophical situation.

COS: Can I repeat that in my words? I asked the question about how the philosophical shift of perspective relates to a shift in systems thinking, in thinking about systems. And what I understood what you said is, there are really two ways: the essentialists or the substantialists and the view from nothingness.

And depending on from what point of view we take, there is a different relationship between the part and the whole.

In the first perspective, the parts are defined through their position in the larger systems. A part comes only into being in as much as it serves a function of the larger whole.

Whereas, if we shift the perspective and look at the relationship between part and whole from the perspective of nothingness, the part would not be defined by what it does for the larger whole, but the part would mirror the whole in itself. It would be a whole universe in itself that mirrors and enhances the whole in a certain unique way which could not be found elsewhere in the universe.

Ryosuke Ohashi: Perhaps so. “Perhaps” means you are right, but I can also add that Nishida used mathematical models that could be useful. Namely the set theory fits very well with the thought of systems, while group theory fits very well for the thought of place and nothingness.

IX. Three types of basho

COS: Nishida differentiated between different types of basho, right? Like the basho of being, the basho of relative nothingness and the basho of absolute nothingness. Could you elaborate a little bit on that?

Ryosuke Ohashi: The first basho is about being in space. The second basho, the place of mere nothingness, is about our consciousness. Our consciousness can never be objectified as something that exists. But all things that we conceive are conceived in consciousness, in the place of nothingness. But this place of consciousness, or place of mere nothingness, is still too psychological. The third basho, the place of absolute nothingness can be reached when this—in German, “Ich-heit”—I-ness can be broken, can be broken through.

COS: Transcended.

Ryosuke Ohashi: Not transcended. Broken through, I would say. Not translated as “transcended”, but “broken through”. So that I can say everything is in oneness with me. But I am no more “I.” This “no more I”, what is it? Then I say, I am one with god, in oneness with god. This has similar meaning, perhaps, with the place of nothingness, with the place of absolute nothingness. But in the oneness of god and

me, god feels to be like something that is the largest ultimate substance. While, for Nishida, the union with nothingness is ultimate.

That place of absolute nothingness is ultimate because the place of mere nothingness, namely our consciousness, is broken through it. It melts—not only melts, but vanishes.

And what's important is that, for Nishida, this place of nothingness is not contemplation, contemplative and meditative experience, but real. Real experience.

X. The eye of the hurricane

COS: So with that, we are back to the initial part of our conversation. And my last question, really, is on this subject/object relationship and how that relates to the unity and difference between knowing and will.

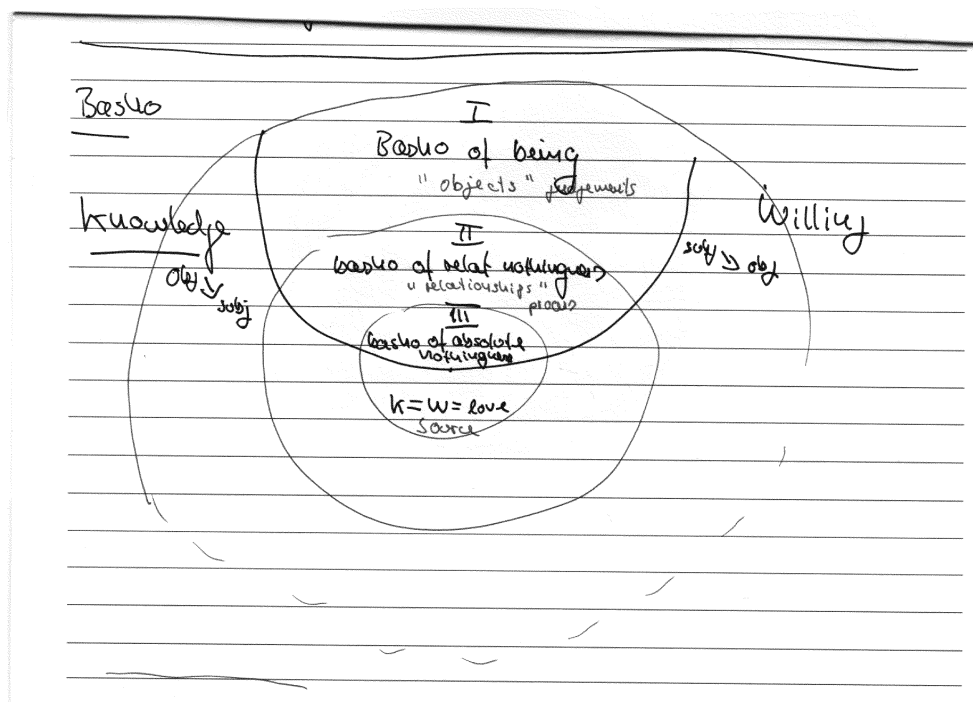
And what he writes here is that in knowledge, it is a movement from the objective to the subjective, right? And in will, it is a movement from the subjective to the objective. So in both cases, you talk about unity, but the perspective is different, the direction of the movement is different. Knowledge is the subordinating of the subjective to the objective. It's a movement from the objective to the subjective, and will is the movement from the subjective to the objective. But it's still a unity.

But then he talks about this transition, about this figure ground shift. And what really is that? To rephrase the question, what type of knowledge is it that allows us to tap into the deep quality of will?

Ryosuke Ohashi: So far as I understand Nishida, he conceives, he thinks that the will is a base for knowledge. So the will, in this meaning, is...

COS: is the deeper.

Ryosuke Ohashi: Deeper. Yes. Deeper. And this will is, as it were, superficial. Surface of the will. And this will moves the knowledge. So there is one axis. But, this axis must also have nothingness in its root. The self is nothing.



One example. You know a hurricane. That is will. The center, the eye of the hurricane, is always quiet. Without this quietness, the hurricane cannot move. So driving force in the center of will is nothingness.

COS: So could one say, then, in order to access these underlying layers, so you have to go through the three bashos as indicated in this drawing [see above]?

Ryosuke Ohashi: Yes.

COS: And the eye of the hurricane is really the third basho, the place of absolute nothingness.

Ryosuke Ohashi: This eye can be seen in every stage, in its own form.

COS: In its own manifestation?

Ryosuke Ohashi: Yes.

COS: Say more.

Ryosuke Ohashi: Already the example of eye. That is perhaps the stage of nothingness, a place of nothingness, in the first stage, that is a spatial example.

COS: Where would it be in the spatial example? So that's the eye?

Ryosuke Ohashi: The eye of the hurricane.

COS: Oh, I see, okay. And in consciousness, it's the observer.

Ryosuke Ohashi: Observer or eye of myself. In myself.

COS: My subject.

Ryosuke Ohashi: Yes.

COS: And here [pointing at the third level]?

Ryosuke Ohashi: The subject must go. Subject must melt and vanish. But that means, that doesn't mean a kind of intoxication, a kind of ecstasy. That doesn't mean ecstasy.

That's not difficult for someone who has some experience in Zen practice. Sitting, in sitting one forgets oneself. I forget myself. But not externally. I know that I am sitting, but in this sitting the I doesn't exist. And this nothingness accompanies me in every stage. Also in everyday life.

COS: It's full presence.

Ryosuke Ohashi: Full presence, yes. And this quietness is part also in the process.

COS: Thank you very much for the conversation.

Ryosuke Ohashi: I enjoyed it. It has been a pleasure.

XI. Reflection

I gained three main insights from the conversation in Kyoto. One was an understanding of Nishida's emphasis on pure experience as the oneness of subject and object. The second was that the reason he later abandoned that concept concerned his attempt to articulate a different relationship between part and whole, microcosm and macrocosm. In the traditional type of that relationship the part is determined by its position in the already existing whole. A new type of that relationship would give much more freedom to the parts. In this mode, the parts would not only reflect but also enhance and co-create an emerging new whole (see also the interview with Henri Bortoft on this topic). The third insight was that in order for this to happen, I must discover that "there is something alien in my self that allows me to exist." This "alienness" in our own self is the gate through which the new can "break through" into the present moment.

XII. Bio

Ryosuke Ohashi (born 1944) holds a Ph.D. in Philosophy from the Ludwig-Maximilians University München. He received his Phil. Habil (Habilitation) from Würzburg University 1983 - as the first Japanese in Philosophy -. He was awarded in

1990: the "Franz-Phillip-von-Siebold Preis" - the price is given every year for one Japanese scholar from all scientific fields - from the German President C.F. v. Weizsäcker;

1996: the "Humboldt-Medaille" from the President of Alexander von Humboldt-Stiftung.

1997. 10. 1. till 1998. 7. 31.: Fellow of the Wissenschaftskollegs Berlin (Institut for Advanced Study Berlin)

He is Professor for Philosophy and Aesthetics at the Design Department of the Technical University, Kyoto/ Japan.

His publications except works in Japanese include: Ekstase und Gelassenheit. Zu Schelling und Heidegger (München, 1975), Die Zeitlichkeitsanalyse der Hegelschen Logik (Freiburg i. Br., 1984), Die Philosophie der Kyoto-Schule (Freiburg i. Br., 1990), Kire - Das "Schöne" in Japan (Köln, 1994), Japan im interkulturellen Dialog (München, 1999). He has published ca. 30 articles and book chapters in Germany, France, etc. His special fields are: Phenomenology, Aesthetics, German Idealism, Heidegger, the Japanese Philosophy orientated by Buddhism.