MASAO ABE

Introduction

People in the West sometimes ask, "Is there philosophy in Japan?" This question is not surprising, for although Westerners have come to know a fair amount about Japanese art, literature, economics, and technology, their knowledge of the intellectual history of Japan is still sparse.

Yet this question has been raised even in Japan. Chōmin Nakae (1847–1901) once said, "Over the ages in our country, Japan, there has been no philosophy."[1] Nakae was a pioneer in the areas of democracy and materialism. After studying Chinese classics and Zen Buddhism, he went to

1. "Ichinen yū han" (One year and a half, 1901), in *Nakae Chōmin Shū* (The collected writings of Nakae Chōmin) (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1967), 168.

France in 1872 to study Western philosophy. Deeply moved by the thought of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Nakae translated Rousseau's *Du Contrat social: Ou, principes du droit politique* and he later promoted a democratic movement in Japan. He advanced a materialistic theory without God, Buddha, or souls. To him, pure philosophy is a rational theory completely free from religious concerns.

The response of Japanese intellectuals to Nakae's statement has been mixed. In my view, one's answer to the question of philosophy in Japan depends on how one defines the term *philosophy*. If philosophy implies a purely rational and theoretical system based on logical thinking, as in the case of Descartes, Kant, and Hegel, then there has been no philosophy in Japan. But if philosophy indicates an existential, religiously oriented discipline as seen in Augustine, Schopenhauer, and Kierkegaard, then there has surely been philosophy in Japan. In Japanese intellectual history a parallel to these Western thinkers' "philosophical" works appears in the writings of Kūkai (774–855), Shinran (1173–1262), Dōgen (1200–1253), Itō Jinsai (1627–1705), and others.

The problem, however, is not so simple. In the West, philosophy and religion occupy two different arenas: while philosophy is a human enterprise involving the intellect and reason, religion is a matter of faith and practice in the light of revelation. In one sense, Western intellectual history is a process of opposition, conflict, and synthesis between philosophy and religion, reason and faith. Throughout the long history of philosophy, its practitioners have usually insisted upon its independence from religion and upon the autonomy of human reasons vis-à-vis divine revelation. As a result, purely theoretical philosophy, logic, and science are unique to the Western tradition. And even when the identity of knowledge and practice or metaphysics and ethics is advocated, rational thinking is predominant.

In India, China, and Japan, on the other hand, philosophy and religion are originally undifferentiated and inseparable. Truth in knowledge is none other than truth in practice and vice versa. But such an emphasis on the unity of knowledge and practice has resulted in a lack of logic and of purely theoretical doctrines regarding human beings and the world.

This basic difference between the Western and Eastern traditions finds expression in the reactions of Japanese thinkers to Western philosophy when it was first introduced to Japan in the 1860s following a three-century period of isolation from the rest of the world. Many Japanese

thinkers steeped in Confucianism and Buddhism were attracted to the theoretical clarity and logical consistency of Western thought. The first Western philosophies introduced to Japan were nineteenth-century French positivism and English utilitarianism. Although these philosophies were not as profound as Buddhism and Confucianism, their practical character and rational and analytical way of thinking appealed to the Japanese. In the 1890s German philosophy took center stage, for Japanese thinkers discovered a profundity in German idealism similar to that of Buddhism. For a long time thereafter, German philosophy held sway in academic circles.

At this time, as Toratarō Shimomura states, "the Eastern spirit and national self-awareness as a reaction against Europeanization came to be emphasized, and thinkers directed their attention to problems under such slogans as 'the unity of Eastern and Western thought' and 'the rolling of all things into one.'"[2] Although their attitude toward Western philosophy was selective, it was not critical, and their efforts at synthesis resulted in eclecticism. To generate a truly creative synthesis, the Japanese had to engage in fundamental criticism of Western thought and radical reflection on Eastern thought.

An Inquiry into the Good (1911) is the first fruit of Kitarō Nishida's effort to respond to the need for this kind of synthesis. The attempt required him to confront cultural differences in thinking. The process of thought that underlies Western philosophy is demonstrative. Based on the principle of contradiction, it must be able to be discussed verbally and precisely. Western philosophy and science are its inevitable product.

Philosophical thought in such cultures as China and Japan does not necessarily require demonstrative arguments and precise verbal expression. Communication of thought is often indirect, suggestive, and symbolic rather than descriptive and precise. The thought process underlying this nondemonstrative approach does not simply rely on language but rather denies it; science, logic, and mathematics did not and could not have emerged from it. This does not mean that it is undeveloped and that it must evolve along Western lines. The Eastern way of thinking is qualitatively different from the Western with its emphasis on verbal and conceptual expression. This separation from language and rational

2. Toratarō Shimomura, "Nishida Kitarō and Some Aspects of His Philosophical Thought," in *A Study of Good*, trans. V. H. Viglielmo (Tokyo: Printing Bureau, Japanese Government, 1960), 193–194.

thought is typically found in Zen, which conveys its basic standpoint with the statement, "No reliance on words or letters; a special transmission apart from doctrinal teaching." The same attitude appears in Confucius, who proclaims, "Clever talk and pretentious manner are seldom found in the Good."[3] We encounter it in ink drawings that negate form and color, Noh theater with its negation of direct or external expression, and Japanese *waka* and *haiku* poetry. The Eastern approach must be sought in non-thinking beyond thinking and not-thinking. To generate a creative synthesis of Eastern and Western philosophy, one must include but go beyond the demonstrative thinking that is characteristic of the West and both arrive at unobjectifiable ultimate reality and give it a logical articulation by conceptually expressing the inexpressible.[4]

How, then, did Nishida strive to create an East-West philosophical synthesis? The following two quotations clearly show his basic intention and direction. The first comes from the preface of his book *From the Actor to the Seer* (1927).

> It goes without saying that there are many things to be esteemed and learned in the brilliant development of Western culture, which regards form [*eidos*] as being and formation as the good. However, at the basis of Asian culture, which has fostered our ancestors for over several thousand years, lies something that can be called seeing the form of the formless and hearing the sound of the soundless. Our minds are compelled to seek for this. I would like to give a philosophical foundation to this demand.[5]

The second quotation comes from *The Problem of Japanese Culture* (1940).

> Is there no logic besides the Western way of thinking? Should we think that if the Western way of thinking is the only one, the Eastern way of thinking is in an undeveloped state? In order to solve this problem we must try to consider it by going back to the origin and role of logic in our historical world. Even our thinking is fundamentally an historical operation—the self-formation of our

3. Arthur Waley, trans., *The Analects of Confucius* (New York: Vintage, n.d.), 84.

4. Toratarō Shimomura, "Nihon no tetsugaku" (Japanese philosophy), in *Tetsugaku shisō* (Philosophical thought), vol.24 of *Gendai Nihon shisō taikei* (A series on modern Japanese thought) (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1965), 24–25.

5. *Nishida Kitarō zenshū* (The Complete Works of Nishida Kitarō) [hereafter *NKZ*], vol.4 (Tokyo: Iwanami, 1978), 6.

> historical life. I do not want to refrain from due acknowledgment of Western logic as a systematic development of a great logic. We should first study it as a world logic. Yet is Western logic beyond the particularity of the historical life, beyond being a mode of its self-formation? Formal, abstract logic may be the same wherever it occurs, but concrete logic as a form of concrete knowledge cannot be separated from the particularity of historical life. . . . Although we should learn from the universality of Western culture, which is persistently theoretical, the life that drives it at its foundation is not the same as ours. I think there is something quite valuable in our way of life. We must consider the issue logically by returning to the structure of the historical world and the formative function of the historical world.[6]

From these quotations we can extract the following three points as indicative of Nishida's basic philosophical attitude. First, Nishida valued Western philosophy and logic as universal and thereby recognized the importance of learning from them. And yet he insisted that even Western philosophy and logic are an instance of the self-formation of historical life and are not free from the particularity of the West. Second, though lacking in logic, the Eastern way of thinking is also a mode of the self-formation of historical life; Nishida wanted to give the Eastern mode a logical foundation. Third, Western and Eastern ways of thinking take different directions toward the self-formation of historical life. In order to create a truly universal logic, Nishida had to return to the origin and role of logic in our historical world and wrestle with the issue on that basis.

The first statement quoted above was written about sixteen years after *An Inquiry into the Good*; the second, written thirteen years after that, gives the basic intention of his philosophical efforts an even more explicit and articulate expression. Though his intention became increasingly explicit over time, it was already apparent in his maiden work, *An Inquiry into the Good*.

To clarify the significance of *An Inquiry into the Good* in the history of philosophy, I shall consider both the relation between Zen and philosophy in *An Inquiry into the Good* and the philosophical significance of the book in its contemporary situation vis-à-vis Western thought.

6. *NKZ*, vol.12 (1979), 287–288.

People often say that Nishida's *Inquiry into the Good* is based on his Zen experience. The actual situation is not this simple. While he was studying philosophy and writing *An Inquiry into the Good,* Nishida did pursue the serious practice of Zen. Consequently, his thought was surely influenced by Zen, and yet Zen is not explicitly discussed anywhere in the book. Instead, in his preface, Nishida states his basic intention as a writer: "I wanted to explain all things on the basis of pure experience as the sole reality." Of course, *An Inquiry into the Good* is a philosophical work that is intellectual, discursive, and systematic, whereas Zen experience is beyond intellectual analysis. They are entirely different. Accordingly, if we assume that Nishida's *Inquiry into the Good* is based on his Zen experience, then it is necessary to clarify the meaning of "is based on"—that is, the relationship between Zen and the book or Nishida's philosophy as a whole.

As Shizuteru Ueda points out, "It is inappropriate to regard Nishida's philosophy simply as a philosophy of Zen. At the same time, however, it is insufficient to take the philosophical uniqueness of Nishida's philosophy only as an issue in the rubric of philosophy without investigating its origins in Zen."[7] When Nishida asked what he considered the most fundamental philosophical question—"What is ultimate reality?"—Zen provided the direction in which he sought an answer. But for it to become a *philosophical* answer, he had to engage in philosophical thinking; he had to transform Zen experience into a philosophical answer.

This transformation has two aspects. First, the practice of philosophy requires a logical expression of Zen experience that breaks through Zen's trans-intellectual character. At the same time, Zen practice requires that philosophy be transformed by breaking through its intellectual rationality in order to awaken to the living ultimate reality. *An Inquiry into the Good* stands upon this mutual transformation of Zen and philosophy. As both a philosopher and a Zen Buddhist, Nishida transformed Zen into philosophy for the first time in the history of this religious tradition and, also for the first time, transformed Western philosophy into a Zen-oriented philosophy. In Nishida, then, the East-West encounter took a most remarkable form.[8]

An Inquiry into the Good has unique philosophical significance in relation to the state of Western thought at the time of its writing. The

7. Shizuteru Ueda, "Zen and Philosophy," *Risō* 514 (1976): 5.

8. Ibid., 12–24.

collapse of Hegel's absolute idealism in Western philosophy gave rise to division and opposition. One of the significant oppositions is that between the philosophy of realism, positivism, and empiricism, on the one hand, and *Lebens-Philosophie* (philosophy of life) and existential philosophy on the other. The former is represented by the dialectical materialism of Feuerbach, Marx, and Engels, the positivism of Comte, and the empiricism of J. S. Mill and Spencer. The basic stance common to these thinkers is a strict adherence to empirical facts and a rejection of any trans-empirical, a priori principles. This means denying both traditional idealism since Plato and two-realm theories of the phenomenal and noumenal. Closely related to natural science, this kind of philosophy is antimetaphysical and often atheistic. In contrast, the latter strand is represented by the *Lebens-Philosophie* of Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Dilthey, and Bergson and the existentialism of Kierkegaard, Schestow, Unamuno, and others. These thinkers, opposing the former group's adherence to empirical facts and materialistic leanings, wrestle with the inner dimension of human existence, the creative development of subjectivity, and the irrational power of life. Although they usually reject idealistic metaphysics, they do concern themselves with metaphysical problems and religious issues.

Between these two opposing philosophical strands emerged a new branch of philosophy based on psychology, which as a discipline had been largely independent of philosophy until then. Keiji Nishitani points out that, as an empirical science divorced from philosophy and its categories and constructions, modern psychology grasped the phenomena of consciousness as directly given facts.[9] This trend toward a psychology based on the pure positivity common to natural science stimulated the emergence of a new philosophy represented by Wilhelm Wundt (1832–1920) and William James (1842–1910), as well as Gustav Theodor Fechner (1801–1887) and Ernst Mach (1838–1916). These thinkers advocated a new form of empiricism—as seen in Wundt's theory of "pure experience," James's "radical empiricism," and Mach's "empirico-criticism"—which emphasized pure experience rid of impure additions to so-called "experience." That is, they generated a philosophical standpoint by reducing experience to its pure and direct form. Behind the emergence of this kind

9. Keiji Nishitani, "Nishida tetsugaku: Tetsugakushi ni okeru sono ichi" (Nishida philosophy: Its position in the history of philosophy), in *Nishida Kitarō* (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1985), 109–112.

of philosophy loomed the historical situation of mistrust of both traditional metaphysics and two-world theories and dissatisfaction with positivism and materialistic philosophy. The only remaining possible basis for philosophy was experience that is direct to us. As Nishitani said, "What was demanded at that time was a type of philosophy that, while firmly based on direct and pure experience, could answer the fundamental questions dealt with before by metaphysics. It could not be a metaphysics in the traditional sense or a philosophy of scientific psychologism. Rather, it had to be a philosophy that could fulfill the demands represented by the two trends. At the same time it constituted a fundamental contradiction in philosophy. And yet a new form of philosophy that could overcome such a contradiction was needed."[10]

It was in this historical context of philosophy that Nishida wrote *An Inquiry into the Good*. "For many years," he states in his preface,

> I wanted to explain all things on the basis of pure experience as the sole reality. At first I read such thinkers as Ernst Mach, but this did not satisfy me. Over time, I came to realize that it is not that experience exists because there is an individual, but that an individual exists because there is experience. I thus arrived at the idea that experience is more fundamental than individual differences, and in this way I was able to avoid solipsism. Further, by regarding experience as active, I felt I could harmonize my thought with transcendental philosophy, starting with Fichte. Eventually, I wrote what became Part II of this book and, as I have said, certain sections are still incomplete.

From this statement we can distill three points: at this time, Nishida clearly regarded *pure experience* as the sole reality and wanted to develop his philosophy on this basis; he was not satisfied with the theories of pure experience expounded by the psychological philosophers; he wanted to connect his own theory of pure experience to transcendent philosophy or metaphysics by grasping experience as active.

Why was Nishida dissatisfied with Western philosophical expressions of pure experience? As indicated by the many references to Wundt and James in *An Inquiry into the Good,* Nishida was sympathetic to their ideas,

10. Ibid., 112.

but in his writings he criticizes them.[11] His criticism can be summarized as follows:

First, they explain pure experience on the basis of many uncritical assumptions, such as the claim that experience is individual and conforms to the categories of time, space, and causality. Such an assumption does not reflect pure experience in the strict sense, for it has already added a dogmatic idea to experience.

Second, they grasp pure experience not from within but from without, thus missing the true reality of pure experience. To see it from without means to analyze the concrete, dynamic whole of pure experience into abstract psychological elements like perception, feeling, and representation, and then to reconstruct them. In this explanation, living individual experience is generalized.

Third, true pure experience is direct experience, that is, experience direct to the subject. But in the above psychological philosophies, the observed consciousness and the observing consciousness stand dualistically opposed. Consequently, pure experience observed in this way is not direct experience. It is direct only in an indirect way. True directness is realized only from within the actual living reality of experience prior to the separation of subject and object. To grasp pure experience in its strict sense, we must return to the root-source of experience that is individual and yet trans-individual and universal. On this horizon of pure experience a new metaphysics is possible.

Through this critique, Nishida regrasped the "pure experience" of Wundt and James and shifted the basis of metaphysics from speculation to factuality. And from Zen he received the intuition that became the formative power in this new philosophical standpoint.[12]

The following quotation from the preface of *An Inquiry into the Good* provides an avenue to the consideration of pure experience in Nishida's sense: "It is not that experience exists because there is an individual, but that an individual exists because there is experience. I thus arrived at the idea that experience is more fundamental than individual differences, and in this way I was able to avoid solipsism." The ordinary understanding of experience is that first the self or the individual exists and then this self experiences something as an object.

11. For example, see "Ninshikiron ni okeru junronrika no shuchō ni tsuite" (On assertions by the pure logic school in epistemology), an essay written in 1911 immediately after the publication of *An Inquiry into the Good, NKZ*, vol.1 (1953), 210.

12. Keiji Nishitani, *Nishida tetsugaku,* 101–129.

Diagram 1
"Experience exists because there is an individual."

This perspective conceptualizes experience as if the experiencing self and the experienced thing, subject and object, are distinguished. This commonsense understanding is firmly rooted in the human mind. In the West this dualistic understanding of experience has been presupposed even in metaphysics. The metaphysical search for a universal truth or principle beyond the framework of individual consciousness has to transcend the realm of experience and to move in the direction of a transempirical, noumenal realm.

But in its real form experience is not such that first the self exists and then it experiences something as an object. Rather, the self is also experienced. In actual experience it is not that *the self experiences* something but that *the self as well is experienced*. This is why Nishida states that because there is experience there is an individual and argues that experience is more fundamental than the individual.

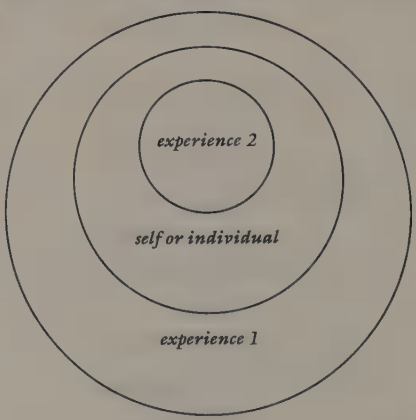

Diagram 2
"An individual exists because there is experience."

Experience in which not only things but also the self or the individual is experienced (Experience 1 in Diagram 2) is direct, whereas experience that is experienced by a presupposed self is indirect (Experience 2 in Diagram 2). A direct experience goes beyond the individual—it is fundamentally trans-individual. Direct experience is pure experience in Nishida's sense, and this is why he says the notion of pure experience enabled him to avoid solipsism.

As stated earlier, Western metaphysics transcended the empirical realm in order to find a universal principle and thus moved away from experience. But there is another way of transcending the realm of empirical, or ordinary, experience. This way involves not a transcendence *away* from us beyond the empirical realm, but a transcendence *toward* us, to this side, a return to a more direct realm of experience. It is a transcendence or, better, trans-descendence[13] toward direct or pure experience. It is upon the standpoint of this pure experience that we can establish a new metaphysics that is beyond the realm of experience in the ordinary sense and yet does not drift away from experience in the traditional search for a universal principle.

Pure experience in Nishida's sense has at least the following three characteristics.

1. Pure experience is realized prior to the distinction between subject and object. It is the common basis for subject and object because both the self and things are experienced equally in pure experience. In Nishida's understanding of pure experience—unlike in most forms of empiricism—the knower and the known are not two but one. Thus Nishida writes on the opening page of *An Inquiry into the Good*:

> To experience means to know facts just as they are, to know in accordance with facts by completely relinquishing one's own fabrications. What we usually refer to as experience is adulterated with some sort of thought, so by *pure* I am referring to experience just as it is without the least addition of deliberative discrimination. For example, the moment of seeing a color or hearing a sound is prior not only to the thought that the color or sound is the activity of an external object or that one is sensing it but also to the judgment of what the color or sound might be. In this regard, pure experience is identical with direct experience. When one directly

13. Yoshinori Takeuchi's terminology.

experiences one's own state of consciousness, there is not yet a subject or an object, and knowing and its object are completely unified. This is the most refined type of experience.

2. Pure experience is active and constructive. In ordinary empiricism, experience is understood to be passive and static, for experience is understood from the outside, indirectly. By contrast, experience that is grasped from within—directly—is active and creative. It is systematically self-developing and self-unfolding. It is a dynamic, unified reality that includes differentiation and development. As Nishida writes in chapter 1, "The directness and purity of pure experience derive not from the fact that the experience is simple, unanalyzable, or instantaneous, but from the strict unity of concrete consciousness," and, "Like any organic entity, a system of consciousness manifests its wholeness through the orderly, differentiated development of a certain unifying reality."

3. In pure experience, knowledge, feeling, and volition are undifferentiated. Ultimate reality is not merely known cognitively but also felt or realized emotionally and volitionally. The unity of intellectual knowledge and practical emotion-volition is the deepest demand of human beings, and it indicates the living ultimate reality. (And yet the will is the most fundamental *unifying* power of our consciousness and the most profound manifestation of ultimate reality.) In this regard, pure experience is a metaphysical organ in and through which one can contact ultimate reality (see first two paragraphs of chapter 5).

An Inquiry into the Good consists of four parts. After examining the characteristics of pure experience (part I), Nishida discusses the ultimate reality of the universe (part II), human personality and the good (part III), and religion, especially the problem of God (part IV). All of these problems are dealt with from the standpoint of pure experience; therefore, Nishida has developed the system of pure experience in *An Inquiry into the Good*.

In part II Nishida emphasizes that the problem of ultimate reality is not merely a theoretical issue but is closely related to the practical demands of morality and religion. Ultimate reality is realized in the deepest unity of philosophy and religion, knowledge and emotion-volition. To grasp true reality we must "discard all artificial assumptions, doubt whatever can be doubted, and proceed on the basis of direct and indubitable knowledge" (chapter 5). Direct knowledge that cannot be doubted is pure experience. From the perspective of pure experience, ultimate reality is

neither phenomena of consciousness nor phenomena of matter but an independent, self-sufficient, pure activity. This is the unifying reality that operates behind all realities; the unifying power at the basis of our thinking and volition and the unifying power of the universe are fundamentally identical. This unity is not static but dynamic, and it develops opposition and contradiction from within, dynamically and endlessly maintaining ultimate unity. The universe is no more than "the sole activity of the sole reality" (chapter 10). Furthermore, our true self is not separate from the universe but rather is the very unifier of universal reality (chapter 11).

Nishida discusses the problem of ethics, especially human conduct, the freedom of the will, the good, and personality, in part III. The problem of morality, for Nishida, is always grasped in connection with the problems of truth or ultimate reality. The good is not merely the way of human beings but also the way of reality. The good is understood on the basis of reality. Accordingly, in opposition to the ordinary understanding of personality—an understanding based on the subjective self—*personality* is grasped as the infinite power of unity in terms of pure experience and is realized by "forgetting" the subjective self. "The true unity of consciousness is a pure and simple activity that comes forth naturally; it is the original state of independent, self-sufficient consciousness, with no distinction among knowledge, feeling, and volition, and no separation of subject and object. At this time our true personality expresses itself in its entirety" (chapter 24).

With this angle on personality, Nishida maintains that the purpose of the good is neither to obey the formal laws of morality as in Kant nor to seek for pleasure as in hedonism, but to fulfill one's deepest nature, to realize one's personality. This is why he bases his own ethics on energetism and his theory of self-realization (a realization of the life of the universe). To realize the fundamental identity of the self and the universe is to realize this infinite reality as infinite truth, good, and beauty: "We find that truly good conduct is neither to make objectivity follow subjectivity nor to make subjectivity follow objectivity. We reach the quintessence of good conduct only when subject and object merge, self and things forget each other, and all that exists is the activity of the sole reality of the universe" (chapter 25). Here we see the uniqueness of Nishida's understanding of the good and of ethics, an understanding deeply rooted in the Asian tradition.

In the beginning of part IV, "Religion," Nishida writes, "The religious demand is a demand that concerns the self as a whole, the life of the self.

True religion seeks the transformation of the self and the reformation of life. . . . and as long as one has even the slightest idea of believing in the finite self, one has yet to acquire a true religious spirit. . . . An absolute unity is gained only by discarding the subjective unity and merging with an objective unity" (chapter 28).

The religious demand is thus the deepest demand for the ultimate unity of the self and the universe. For Nishida, God is nothing but the basis of this ultimate unity: "God must be the foundation of the universe and our own foundation as well. To take refuge in God is to take refuge in that foundation. God must also be the goal of the myriad things in the universe and hence the goal of humans, too. In God, each person finds his or her own true goal" (chapter 29).

Nishida rejects both theism and pantheism and advances a type of panentheism: "Our God must be the internal unifying power of the universe, which orders heaven and earth and nurtures the myriad things in them" (chapter 29); "God is the unifier of the universe and the universe is an expression of God. . . . God is the greatest and final unifier of our consciousness; our consciousness is one part of God's consciousness and its unity comes from God's unity" (chapter 30).

God—as the basis of the unity of the universe—is discussed by Nishida not from the perspective of speculative metaphysics but as a fact of pure experience. And in pure experience this unity called God is experienced as personal, and as inspiring love and respect. God's self-development in itself is infinite love for us.

An Inquiry into the Good leaves a number of problems that must be solved in order to give a clearer philosophical expression to the standpoint of pure experience. One of the most serious problems is that of fact and meaning in pure experience. Nishida defines pure experience in chapter 1: "A truly pure experience has no meaning whatsoever; it is simply a present consciousness of facts just as they are."

Elsewhere, however, he writes that "pure experience is none other than thinking" (chapter 2), and that "the will is a fact of pure experience" and that true reality "is not simply an existence but something with meaning" (chapter 7). Pure experience is a fact without meaning, and yet at the same time it is full of meaning related to thinking, feeling, and willing. This apparent contradiction disappears when we understand that in pure experience prior to subject-object separation, act and meaning, or being and value, are not two but one.

Yet Nishida does not specify how fact and meaning are identical in

pure experience and how the opposition between fact and meaning arises from pure experience. It is not clear how the separation between subject and object arises from intuitive pure experience and how it comes to be united into a systematic unity through differentiation and development. In *An Inquiry into the Good* Nishida's explanation of pure experience stresses the aspect of fact and being rather than the aspect of meaning and value.[14] This emphasis results in a tint of psychologism in the book, as Nishida himself recognized when he wrote in "Upon Resetting the Type" in 1936: "As I look at it now, the standpoint of this book is that of consciousness, and it might be thought of as a kind of psychologism. Yet even if people criticize it as being too psychological, there is little I can do now." But he continues, "I do think that what lay deep in my thought when I wrote it was not something that is merely psychological."

After *An Inquiry into the Good,* Nishida's task was to overcome this tint of psychologism and to clarify philosophically that "what lay deep in [his] thought . . . was not something that is merely psychological." Nishida had to stress meaning and value in pure experience and to develop a more logical inquiry into its structure. He had to reflect on intuition logically and to grasp the relation between intuition and reflection from the standpoint of basic unity.

Nishida attempted this task in his second major work, *Intuition and Reflection in Self-Consciousness,* which he called in his preface "a document of a desperate fight and struggle." In this book he developed the standpoint of *jikaku,*[15] "self-consciousness"—better translated as "self-awakening"—in which the inner relations between intuition and reflection, fact and meaning, being and value, are conceptually analyzed and logically grasped. He did this by confronting the philosophy then prevailing in the West—Neo-Kantian philosophy, especially that of Heinrich Rickert, and the philosophy of Henri Bergson. Through his effort to deepen philosophically the basic standpoint of his maiden work, Nishida moved

14. Masaaki Kōsaka, *Nishida Kitaro Sensei no shōgai to shisō* (The life and thought of Kitarō Nishida) (Kyoto: Kōbundo, 1947), 87.

15. *Jikaku,* one of the key terms in Nishida's philosophy, has no exact equivalent in Western languages. It is not a psychological or epistemological concept but rather an ontological and religious concept in which true reality awakens to itself and is awakened by us. In *jikaku* the subject and object of awakening are one. This is the reason we prefer the term "self-awakening" for *jikaku.* The term "self-consciousness" is usually psychological, and even when it is used in a philosophical context it refers to the modern intellectual and cognitive subject, which is only one aspect of *jikaku.*

from the standpoint of pure experience to that of self-consciousness or self-awakening.

At the end of *Intuition and Reflection in Self-Consciousness* Nishida expounds the notion of absolute free will, which is the culmination of self-consciousness. In this connection a confrontation with Johann Fichte was inevitable, for Nishida's notion of self-consciousness is neither psychological nor epistemological but essentially metaphysical.

Nishida in "Upon Resetting the Type" describes the development of his thought from the standpoint of pure experience to that of the absolute free will and beyond: "In *Intuition and Reflection in Self-Consciousness,* through the mediation of Fichte's *Tathandlung,* I developed the standpoint of pure experience into the standpoint of absolute will. Then, in the second half of *From the Actor to the Seer,* through the mediation of Greek philosophy I developed it again, this time into the idea of 'place.' In this way I began to lay a logical base for my ideas."

How did Nishida develop the standpoint of self-consciousness into the standpoint of *basho,* place?[16] With the notion of place Nishida moved from voluntarism to a sort of intuitionism. "Since *Intuition and Reflection in Self-Consciousness,*" he wrote in the preface to *From the Actor to the Seer,* "I have considered the intuition at the base of the will. I have had an idea, like Plotinus' idea, that to act is to see. For this reason I have regarded the absolute will as the ultimate."[17]

At this point Nishida realized the "seeing" at the base of acting, a "seeing without seer." Nishida did not halt his inquiry with this mystical intuition because he persistently strived to take a philosophical approach to the problem of ultimate reality. To be philosophical, he had to give mystical intuition a logical foundation. But he could not be satisfied with the epistemology of Neo-Kantian philosophy, James's theory of pure experience, or even the Bergsonian notion of pure duration (*durée pure*), for they were not completely free from the subjectivism common to modern Western thought. He approached ultimate reality by overcoming subjectivism through a confrontation with Greek philosophy, especially Aristotle's realism and his notion of *hypokeimenon*. By inverting Aristotle's

16. *Basho* is the most characteristic notion in Nishida's philosophy. It originates in the idea of *topos* in Plato's *Timaeus* and Aristotle's *De Anima*. In Nishida, however, "place" is entirely unobjectifiable and nonsubstantial Absolute Nothingness, which embraces and takes everything as its self-determination. See Masao Abe, "Nishida's Philosophy of 'Place,'" *International Philosophical Quarterly* 28, no.4 (Winter 1988): 355–371.

17. *NKZ*, vol.4, 3.

definition of the individual as "the subject that cannot become predicate," Nishida defined the most concrete universal as "the predicate that cannot become subject" and undertook to establish a logic of unobjectifiable reality. As I have written elsewhere:

> Nishida was convinced that for the individual as the grammatical subject—viewed by Aristotle as Substance—to be known, there must exist that which envelops it, the place in which it lies, and that this place in which the individual lies must be sought in the plane of "transcendent predicates," not in the direction of the logical subject. . . . What is referred to here as the direction of predicates is the direction of consciousness, and what is referred to as the plane of transcendent predicates subsuming the individual as grammatical subject is nothing other than "place" or nothingness as the so-called field of consciousness. In his grasping of the *plane of consciousness* as the *plane of predicates,* with Aristotle's hypokeimenon as medium Nishida gave a logical foundation to immediate and direct consciousness and seeing without a seer which otherwise could not escape subjectivism and mysticism. By so doing, he also laid a logical foundation for Reality.[18]

This logical foundation for ultimate reality is formulated in terms of the logic of place or the logic of absolute nothingness, which is not apart from the directness of life and yet is thoroughly metaphysical and logical. It is a logic of Oriental *nothingness* (*śūnyatā*) and it is essentially different from Western logic, which Nishida calls "objective logic."

After retiring in 1928 from Kyoto University, where he had served as professor of philosophy since 1913, Nishida began to write more and published many books, including *Ippansha no jikakuteki taikei* (The self-conscious system of the universal, 1930), *Mu no jikakuteki gentei* (The self-conscious determination of nothingness, 1932), *Tetsugaku no konponmondai* (The fundamental problems of philosophy, 2 vols., 1933–34), and *Tetsugaku ronbunshū* (A collection of philosophical essays, 7 vols. 1935–46). During these years he advanced such unique concepts as *action-intuition, continuity of discontinuity, historical body,* the *dialectical universal,* and *absolutely contradictory self-identity.* The most remarkable shift in his philosophical development was from the standpoint of place to the stand-

18. Masao Abe, "Nishida's Philosophy of 'Place,'" 370–371.

point of the world. Nishida's early work on the theory of pure experience had been largely concerned with individual consciousness in terms of ultimate reality; even when he had discussed the world and universe he had grasped them from the perspective of the individual. With *The Fundamental Problems of Philosophy,* Nishida shifted from seeing the world from the standpoint of the self in terms of individual consciousness to seeing the self from the standpoint of the world in terms of the self-determination of the world.

Most philosophers start with subject-object opposition and see the object from the subject—that is, they grasp the world from the standpoint of the self. From such a subjectivistic perspective the self is understood to stand, as it were, outside the world. But in reality the self exists in the world; the knowing and functioning of the self take place as historical events in the world. The world is not something that opposes the self but something that envelops it. And this actual and concrete world is the dialectical world, for within it our knowledge is the self-consciousness of the world and our expression is the self-expression of the world. In self-awakening (*jikaku*) the self and the world are dialectically identical in knowing and functioning. The self is a creative moment of the creative world. Logically, this actual, historical world is the world of absolutely contradictory self-identity, because the historical world is always moving from the created to the creating, from the one to the many and from the many to the one. It is this dialectical world or the world of historical reality that Nishida finally reached by deepening his theory of pure experience as true reality.

Nishida's persistent concern with taking a philosophical approach to the problem of ultimate reality is inseparably connected with a deep religious interest. We can see this in the preface to *An Inquiry into the Good*: "Part IV consists of my ideas about religion, which from my perspective constitutes the consummation of philosophy." In his last complete article, "The Logic of Place and the Religious World View"—the conclusive essay of his philosophical thought—Nishida argues that unlike morality, which is concerned with human conduct and value, religion is primarily concerned with the very existence of the self. When this existence is questioned, the religious demand arises in us. This question of our own existence is inescapable, for human existence itself is self-contradictory. It is in the realization of death that we encounter the deepest contradiction in our existence: we see God only through the realization of eternal death, because in the realization of our eternal death

we realize the true individuality of our self in the face of the absolute; we thus find the ultimate ground of our existence in the absolute only through the realization of eternal death. This absolute is God, who includes absolute negation in Godself and descends to save even the most wicked. To die the death of the self is to see the absolute God and to be saved by the grace of God. Religion for Nishida can be properly understood by the logic of absolutely contradictory self-identity precisely because God is an absolutely contradictory self-identity.

Given Nishida's philosophical work after *An Inquiry into the Good,* we can argue that his entire philosophy is a development and deepening of his initial notion of pure experience.[19] *An Inquiry into the Good* provided not only the point of departure but also the foundation of his philosophy.

The theory of pure experience laid a foundation in a larger sense as well. Nishida's fifteen years of teaching at Kyoto University and his thirty years of writing exerted a great influence on Japanese intellectuals. This is not to say that his philosophy was free from criticism. During World War II right wing thinkers attacked him as antinationalistic for his appreciation of Western philosophy and logic. But after the war left wing thinkers criticized his philosophy as nationalistic because of his emphasis on the traditional notion of *nothingness*. Nishida was, however, neither antinationalistic nor nationalistic. He recognized a kind of universality in Western philosophy and logic but did not accept it as the only universality. Realizing the uniqueness of the Eastern way of thinking, Nishida took absolute nothingness as ultimate reality and tried to give it a logical foundation through his confrontation with Western philosophy. Forming his synthesis on the basis of historical life innate in human existence, which is neither Eastern nor Western, he neither established a new Eastern philosophy nor reconstructed Western philosophy but created a new world philosophy.

In this connection we cannot overlook a serious criticism of Nishida's philosophy by Hajime Tanabe (1885–1962), his successor at Kyoto University. Although Tanabe received Nishida's inheritance, taking the notion of absolute nothingness as the basis of his philosophy, he criticized Nishida's logic of place as being akin to Plotinus' emanation theory and

19. For a bibliography of primary and secondary sources in European languages, see "Nishida Kitarō Bibliography," compiled by Masao Abe and Lydia Brüll, *International Philosophical Quarterly,* vol.28, no.4 (1988), 373–381. For major translations and secondary sources in English, see the Select Bibliography.

as lacking a philosophical foundation for historical reality. Tanabe consequently emphasized moral practice and formulated a logic of absolute mediation.[20]

The next generation of philosophers, under the guidance of Kitarō Nishida and Hajime Tanabe, developed their teachers' philosophies in various philosophical arenas and came to be known as the Kyoto school of philosophy.[21] Although their philosophical efforts are diverse, all are positively or negatively influenced by the idea of absolute nothingness as realized in Nishida and Tanabe, and all attempt to create a world philosophy through the meeting of Eastern and Western thought.

20. Due to space limitations we cannot discuss Tanabe's philosophy and his criticism of Nishida in further detail. See the following translations and secondary sources on Tanabe: *Philosophy as Metanoetics,* trans. Y. Takeuchi with V. H. Viglielmo and J. Heisig (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986); "The Logic of the Species as Dialectics," trans. D. Dilworth and T. Sato, *Monumenta Nipponica* 24, no.3 (1969): 273–288; "Memento Mori," trans. V. H. Viglielmo, *Philosophical Studies of Japan* 1 (1959): 1–12; Y. Takeuchi, "Modern Japanese Philosophy," *Encyclopedia Britannica,* 14th ed., vol.12 (1970): 958–962; M. Inaba, "Zur Philosophie von Tanabe Hajime," *Orieus Extremus* 2 (1966): 180–190.

21. See T. P. Kasulis, "The Kyoto School and the West: Review and Evaluation," *The Eastern Buddhist* 15, no.2 (1982): 125–144.

A Note on the Translation

In this translation of *An Inquiry into the Good,* we tried to be as faithful as possible to the original text, avoiding paraphrasing and addition. We did not eliminate the apparent repetitions often found in the text, for we believe that it is important for the Western audience to experience the breadth of Nishida's thinking as directly as possible and to think with Nishida along the lines of his speculation. We tried to make the translation as readable as possible, of course, but we did this insofar as we did not run contrary to the above approach. Finally, to assist readers, we compiled the explanatory notes to the translation. Several people and institutions, both in the United States and Japan, were involved in the translation at various stages. A translation of part I was made by Thomas

Kasulis of Northland College and later revised by Christopher Ives. James Heisig, of the Nanzan Institute at Nanzan University in Nagoya, revised chapter I, offered suggestions, and provided a clean typescript midway through the translation process. Parts II, III, and IV were translated by Ives. Masao Abe went over the entire translation by checking it against the original text. The version that resulted was then polished by Ives for final checking by Abe. A Martin Nelson Award for Summer Research from the University of Puget Sound enabled Ives to work on the manuscript at the Nishida Archives at Kyoto University in the summer of 1988.

The manuscript also benefited from careful typing throughout the translation process. Sections of the first draft were typed by Earlyne Biering and Charlotte Tarr at the Claremont Graduate School. The second draft was typed at Haverford College and the Nanzan Institute. The final typescript was made by Janice Cable and Carol Avery with the assistance of two typing grants from the University of Puget Sound.

KITARŌ NISHIDA

Preface

I wrote this book during my years of teaching at the Fourth National High School in Kanazawa. At first I intended to develop my ideas in the section on reality and then publish what I had written. Hindered by illness and other circumstances, I failed to achieve this goal. In the following years, my thought changed somewhat and I began to sense the difficulty of doing what I had initially intended. At that point I decided to publish this book just as it was.

I wrote parts II and III first and then added parts I and IV. Part I clarifies the nature of pure experience, which is the foundation of my thought, but those who are reading the book for the first time should leave this section for later. I set forth my philosophical thought in part

II, the core section of the book. I wrote part III with the aim of expounding the good on the basis of the ideas presented in part II, but one can regard it as an independent ethic. Part IV consists of my ideas about religion, which from my perspective constitutes the consummation of philosophy. I wrote this part of the book while ill, so there are numerous rough passages; yet I managed to reach the end of what I had set out to discuss. I entitled the book "An Inquiry into the Good"[1] because I felt that even though philosophical inquiry constitutes the first half, the problem of human life is the central concern running throughout the book.

For many years I wanted to explain all things on the basis of pure experience as the sole reality. At first I read such thinkers as Ernst Mach,[2] but this did not satisfy me. Over time I came to realize that it is not that experience exists because there is an individual, but that an individual exists because there is experience. I thus arrived at the idea that experience is more fundamental than individual differences, and in this way I was able to avoid solipsism.[3] Further, by regarding experience as active, I felt I could harmonize my thought with transcendental philosophy[4] starting with Fichte. Eventually, I wrote what became part II of this book and, as I have said, certain sections are still incomplete.

Those who speculate might be ridiculed by Mephistopheles as being like animals who feed on withered grass while standing in a lush, green

1. We rendered the original title, ***Zen no kenkyū,*** as "An Inquiry into the Good" instead of using the common rendering, "A Study of the Good." For Nishida this book was no mere theoretical "study" of the good but, rather, as he himself states in the next few sentences of the Preface, a more practical, existential "inquiry" into the good as a major problem of human existence.

2. Ernst Mach (1836–1916) was an Austrian physicist and philosopher who was connected with the Vienna Circle of logical positivists. In his ***Analysis of Sensations,*** Mach argues that psychology and philosophy must be based on sensations. In moving toward a scientific and objective approach to mental phenomena, Mach took leave of earlier doctrines of the soul and systems of metaphysics. See R. S. Peters, ed., ***Brett's History of Psychology*** (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1953), 488–490.

3. Solipsism (Latin ***solus,*** alone, and ***ipse,*** self) is the theory that the self can know only its own experience, which does not necessarily reflect the way things are objectively (epistemological solipsism), or that the self is the only existent thing (metaphysical solipsism). Historians of philosophy often regard George Berkeley (1684–1753) and Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762–1814) as advancing types of solipsism.

4. Nishida is referring to German idealism, which includes Fichte, Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling (1775–1854), and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831).

field.[5] One philosopher (Hegel) said he was condemned to think about philosophical truth. Indeed, for someone who has eaten of the forbidden fruit, such anguish is inescapable.

Kyoto January 1911

PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

I first published this book more then ten years ago, several years after I wrote it. After moving to Kyoto, I was able to concentrate on reading and reflection, and this enabled me to refine and enrich my thought. I grew dissatisfied with this book and even considered taking it out of print. Later, however, various people asked me to reprint it. Feeling that I would need several years to set forth an updated, comprehensive statement of my thought, I decided to print this book once again.

I am deeply indebted to Professors Mutai and Sera,[6] who assumed the burden of correcting and editing the text for this edition.

January 1921

UPON RESETTING THE TYPE

With numerous reprintings of this book, certain letters came to lose their clarity, so the publisher has now reset the type. This book, in which I first organized my ideas to some extent, is my earliest published work and consists of ideas from my younger days. At this point I would like to revise various sections, but since one's thoughts have a living integrity at each point in time, I cannot change the book now, decades after I wrote it. I have no other choice than to leave it as it is.

As I look at it now, the standpoint of this book is that of consciousness, which might be thought of as a kind of psychologism. Yet even if people criticize it as being too psychological, there is little I can do now. I do think, however, that what lay deep in my thought when I wrote it

5. In Goethe's *Faust, Der Tragödie erster Teil,* Mephistopheles says to Faust: "A chap who speculates—let this be said— / Is very like a beast on moorland dry, / That by some evil spirit round and round is led, / While fair, green pastures round about him lie." Trans. George Madison Priest, "Faust, Parts One and Two," in *Goethe,* vol.47 of *Great Books of the Western World* (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1952), 43.

6. Risaku Mutai (1890–1974) and Hisao Sera (1888–1973) were early students of Nishida. Mutai developed Nishida's philosophy through the study of phenomenology under Edmund Husserl and eventually taught philosophy at Tokyo Bunri University. Sera became a professor of ethics at Otani University.

was not something that is merely psychological. In *Intuition and Reflection in Self-consciousness,*[7] through the mediation of Fichte's *Tathandlung,*[8] I developed the standpoint of pure experience into the standpoint of absolute will. Then, in the second half of *From the Actor to the Seer,*[9] through the mediation of Greek philosophy, I further developed it, this time into the idea of *place.*[10] In this way I began to lay a logical base for my ideas. I next concretized the idea of place as a *dialectical universal*[11]

7. *Intuition and Reflection in Self-Consciousness* (1917) is Nishida's second major work, in which (following his discussion of reality and the good from the standpoint of pure experience in *An Inquiry into the Good*) he tries to clarify, from the standpoint of self-consciousness, the relationship between intuition and reflection and the connection of being and value, fact and meaning. In his foreword to the 1987 English translation of the text, Joseph S. O'Leary writes that "it chronicles Nishida's eager search for a more sophisticated grounding of immediate experience in an account of self-consciousness loosely inspired by Fichte, as well as his long-drawn-out confrontation with the Neo-Kantian philosophers, Cohen, Natorp, Rickert, and Windelband, then at the zenith of their fame, but now, despite the reviving interest of a few historians, forgotten" (p.x).

8. In developing Kant's idealism with its view of the thing-in-itself and the cognitive subject as dualistic, Fichte emphasized *Tathandlung* (act) as the principle of the unity of cognition and reality, thinking and action. Specifically, in Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* (Science of knowledge), *Tathandlung* refers to the activity of the transcendental ego that posits or affirms itself, then limits itself by positing the non-ego, and finally posits the ego, the epistemological subject that stands in opposition to its object (the non-ego). In this dialectic, the act exists prior to subject-object dualism and constitutes the basis of consciousness.

9. *From the Actor to the Seer* (1927) represents a significant shift in the development of Nishida's thought. In this work he moves from his earlier voluntarism à la Fichte to an intuitionism, inspired by Plotinus. In *Intuition and Reflection in Self-Consciousness* Nishida had considered intuition the basis of will. Because his interest went beyond epistemology to a primary focus on the problem of ultimate reality, he rejected modern, subjectivistic idealism and moved to the intuition at the depths of self-consciousness, to "seeing without a seer," which he develops as the "place of absolute nothingness."

10. With his notions of place (*basho*) and logic of place, Nishida works out a logical basis for the intuition set forth in *From the Actor to the Seer.* His shift from voluntarism to an intuitionism involves a parallel shift from existential experience to logic—hence, to Nishida, place is not only metaphysical but also logical. As an expression for absolute nothingness, place envelops both Hegel's Idea and the concrete individual in all its irrationality, that is, Aristotle's substance as the "subject that cannot become predicate."

11. Nishida develops the notion of the dialectical universal in *The Fundamental Problems of Philosophy,* vol.II (1934), in which he states that the universal has three different dimensions: the judgmental universal (the realm of nature), the self-conscious universal (the realm of consciousness), and the intellectual universal (the realm of the intellect). The

and gave that standpoint a direct expression in terms of *action-intuition.*[12] That which I called in the present book the world of direct or pure experience I have now come to think of as the world of historical reality. The world of action-intuition—the world of poiesis—is none other than the world of pure experience.

Gustav Fechner said that one morning, while relaxing in a chair in the Rosenthal in Leipzig, he gazed in the bright sunlight at a spring meadow with fragrant flowers, singing birds, and flitting butterflies and became engrossed in what he called the perspective of the daytime, in which truth is things just as they are, as opposed to the colorless and soundless perspective of night found in the natural sciences.[13] I do not know what influenced me, but since long ago I have had the idea that true reality must be actuality just as it is and that the so-called material world is something conceptualized and abstracted out of it. I can still remember a time in high school when I walked along the streets of Kanazawa absorbed in this idea as if I were dreaming. In fact, my ideas of that time constitute the foundation of this book.

When I later wrote this book, I had no idea that it would be read for such a long time by so many people, or that I would live long enough to see numerous editions of it. I cannot help feeling like Saigyō:[14]

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realm of the intellect is, in concrete terms, the realm of culture and the socio-historical world by which we enter into the dialectical universal through action.

12. Action-intuition (*kōiteki-chokkan*) appears in Nishida's later writings, including "The Logic of Topos and the Religious World-View." By this term he indicates that intuition is not a passive state but a formative activity as seen in great artists. We see, know, and work through the body in the world. Our self-formation is the self-formation of the world. In the body, seeing and working, or intuition and action, are identical through contradiction.

13. Gustav Theodor Fechner (1801–1887), a German philosopher and psychologist, expressed this idea in *Die Tagesansicht genenüber der Nachtansicht* (The daylight view as opposed to the night view). He attempted to integrate Hegel's *Naturphilosophie* into experimental psychology. In such works as *Elemente der Psychophysik,* he advanced "psychophysics," a theory of correspondence of mental and physical events. Erwin A. Esper, *A History of Psychology* (Philadelphia: W. B. Saunders, 1964), 235–236.

14. Saigyō (1118–1190), a Buddhist monk and renowned poet, was originally a court warrior with the secular name Satō Norikiyo. At the age of twenty-three he resigned from his court position and became an itinerant monk, travelling throughout Japan, composing poetry, and giving talks. His poems were compiled in the volume *Sankashū* around 1179; a supplement was compiled later.

I never thought
I would cross Mount Nakayama again;
yet, growing old,
I live long enough to do so tonight.

October 1936