

A Comparison of Nishida's *basho* from his Middle Period with Plato's *chóra* and the One of Plotinus

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Abstract

In this paper, the principal question is the following: How and to what extent can Nishida's *basho* ("place"), as it is outlined in his famous treatise *Basho* (1926), taken together with the "adjoining" essay *The Unsolved Issue of Consciousness* (1927), be understood and interpreted from Plato's and/or Plotinus' (i.e. Neoplatonic) philosophical viewpoint—and, possibly, also *vice versa*? What do Nishida's conception (or rather intuition) of *basho* on the one hand, and Plato's quite "vague" concept of *chóra* in *Timaeus* and/or Plotinus' first *hypóstasis* "the One" on the other, have in common? The main formal similarity between *basho* and "the One" is that they cannot be "predicated" (in the Aristotelian sense) by anything else—or, to put it in Platonic terms, both are absolutely transcendent. However, there are also several important differences, mainly because of the different frames of thought, which are discussed in this paper.

Keywords: Nishida Kitarō, Plato, Plotinus, *basho*, *chóra*, the One, comparative philosophy

Primerjava med Nishidovim pojmom *basho* v njegovem srednjem obdobju s Platonovo *chóra* in Enim pri Plotinu

Izvleček

Osrednje vprašanje v tem prispevku je naslednje: Kako in v kolikšni meri lahko razumemo in interpretiramo Nishidov pojem *basho* (»prostor«) – kakor ga je japonski filozof razvil v svoji znani razpravi *Basho* (1926) in pridruženem besedilu *Nerešeno vprašanje zavesti* (1927) – s Platonovega in/ali Plotinovega (tj. novoplatonskega) filozofskega stališča ter, morda, tudi obratno? Kaj imata skupnega Nishidov pojem (ali prej intuicija) *basho* na eni strani ter Platonov dokaj »nejasen« pojem *chóra* v *Timaju* in/ali Plotinova prva hipostaza, tj. Eno, na drugi? Glavna formalna podobnost med *bashom* in »Enim« je v tem, da ne moreta biti opredeljena (»predicirana« v aristotelskem pomenu) z ničimer drugim – oziroma, če se izrazimo v platonski terminologiji, oba sta absolutno transcendentna. Vendar pa je med njima tudi več pomembnih razlik, ker sta nastala v različnih miselnih okvirih, o katerih razmišljamo v tem prispevku.

Ključne besede: Kitarō Nishida, Platon, Plotin, *basho*, *chóra*, Eno, primerjalna filozofija

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The comparative philosophy between East and West has always been and still is a hard task. Those times when the Eastern philosophical and/or religious systems were modified by Western interpreters in order to fit into some Europocentric referential scheme have passed, fortunately, long ago. In my younger days, the opposite tendency was quite strong, mostly influenced by French (post)structuralism¹, namely the opinion that we Westerners should study and understand all Eastern philosophies (Indian, Chinese, Japanese etc.) just “by themselves”, i.e. not “contaminated” by our notions and theoretical “prejudices”. However, one of the main and methodologically justified principles in the philosophical hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer is the acknowledgement that there is no real cognition without some kind of productive “prejudice”, or rather that there is no mutual understanding of different cultures or historical epochs without what he terms the “merging of horizons”. Following and developing this view, I am convinced that at the end of the day all human knowledge and experiences converge, because they are in the deepest (or highest) sense the same for all of us. Therefore, in spite of the unavoidable fact that some or even many nuances happen to be “lost in translation”, we can understand each other in the basic strata of our human *Dasein*. As Heraclitus said at the dawn of the Western wisdom: “*Logos* is common to all”. Nevertheless, after the fall of the Tower of Babel, our deeply common *lógos* requires translations of our different languages, in order to *compare* our ways of thought in their similarities and differences, and thus to understand others and thereby also ourselves.

For a Western philosopher like me, a comparative approach also proves itself quite difficult—maybe contrary to expectations—in the research into the greatest Japanese modern philosopher, Nishida Kitarō, in spite of the fact that he was very receptive and creative in his studies of Western philosophies. There are several reasons why this comparison is difficult. *First*, Nishida is a very deep and complex thinker, and can be compared with his greatest European contemporaries (Husserl, Heidegger, Cassirer, Bergson, et al.). *Secondly*, Nishida endeavoured to construct a most comprehensive philosophical system, a synthesis extending from the classical Greek philosophers (especially Aristotle) to many Western philosophers of the Modern Age, from Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz to Kant, Fichte, Schelling and Hegel, Schopenhauer and Lotze, Emil Lask and others. We might note here that in Western philosophy the last attempt at such a comprehensive philosophical synthesis, as Nishida tried to develop, was the great system of Hegel. It is surely an extremely hard task to think “together” and include in a single consistent system so many different philosophical paradigms, and at the same time to remain sensitive to all subtle differences among them.

1 In this tendency, Jacques Derrida's concept of *différance* has been particularly influential (see David A. Dilworth 1993, 136–40).

The *third* reason why Nishida is difficult for a comparative philosopher, especially for a Westerner, are the deep and important foundations of Nishida's philosophy in the tradition of the Buddhist spirituality, especially in Zen and the Madhyamaka School of Mahayana Buddhism (needless to say, I appreciate and like this background to Nishida's thought very much). Here I have in mind particularly the Buddhist "origin" of Nishida's key concept (or, better, of his intellectual "intuition") of *mu no basho*, the "place of nothing", as well as his basic idea of the "ungroundedness" of the will. In this context, I would like to express my opinion that every pristine philosophical thought has and indeed must have its spiritual, "experiential" background, both personal and cultural, whereby I guess that we can more easily recognize the background of a philosophical system that is rooted in *another* cultural frame, more or less different from our own.

Due to the general difficulties of the comparative philosophy between East and West, and also because of some particular features of Nishida's philosophy, as stated above, I have decided to apply two thematic reductions in the present paper: 1) The first reduction is obvious from the very title of this (broader) research project: in the focus of the comparison, there will be the relations between Nishida's and Plotinus' philosophies. Of course, this does not mean to put completely aside all other philosophers, which were important for the development of Nishida's thought, but rather just to limit this project thematically, in order not to miss the leading thread in a too large labyrinth. 2) The second reduction applies only to my present contribution in this paper, where I limit myself to the issue of *basho* in Nishida's "middle period", particularly developed in his treatises *Basho* (2012a [1926]) and the "adjoining" paper *The Unsolved Issue of Consciousness* (2012b [1927]). I have divided the topics discussed here into three sections: 1. Nishida's *basho* and Plato's *chóra*; 2. Some differences between Plato and Plotinus' Neoplatonism; 3. Nishida's *basho* in comparison with the One of Plotinus, particularly concerning their relation to the "place of ideas" in the Intellect. In short, the main task of the present paper is to analyse and understand the triangle of three important philosophical concepts: *basho* – *chóra* – the One.

Nishida's *basho* and Plato's *chóra*

In Nishida's treatise *Basho*, we cannot find a unique and exhaustive definition of the key concept *basho*—such a definition indeed cannot be expected, since *basho* is considered as the highest "transcendent predicate" and therefore not positively definable. But, of course, we find several outlining "descriptions" of *basho* and its different epistemic levels, from *basho* as the physical space of material objects, *basho* as the

“place” of various mental acts and entities, up to the “highest” (or “deepest”) “*basho* of nothing” (*mu no basho*). Still, interpreters of Nishida have tried to formulate a more comprehensive definition of *basho*, among them we may quote here John W. M. Krummel, one of the principal English translators and Western commentators of Nishida’s works: “So what then is *basho*? [...] It would be a ‘place’ enveloping and encompassing all mental acts and their objects, all perspectival horizons of intentionality that constitute the world of objects” (Krummel in Nishida 2012a, 9). Of course, this is only a preliminary and non-compulsive “definition” of Nishida’s “middle period” *basho*—nevertheless, it is enough adequate for our present investigation.²

Notwithstanding the sophisticated development of Nishida’s concept(s) of *basho*(s), his *original* idea of the universal “place” where all differences are “implaced” was unique (and, of course, also his “deepest” intuition of *mu no basho*)—as we can see already from the first page of his treatise:

... in order for objects to relate to one another, [to] constitute a single system, and maintain themselves, we ought to consider not only what maintains the system but also what establishes the system within itself and wherein the system is implaced. That which *is* must be implaced in something. Otherwise the distinction between *is* and *is not* cannot be made. Logically it should be possible to distinguish between the terms of relationship and the relationship itself, and also between that which unifies the relationship and that wherein the relationship is implaced. Even if we attempt to think in regard to acts, taking the I as a pure unity of acts, insofar as the I is conceived in opposition to the not-I, there must be that which envelops the opposition between I and non-I within itself and makes the establishment of the so-called phenomena of consciousness possible within itself. Following the words of Plato’s *Timaeus*, I shall call the receptacle of the *ideas* in this sense, *basho* [place; *chóra*]. Needless to say, I am not suggesting that what I call *basho* is the same as Plato’s “space” or “receptacle place”. (Nishida 2012a, 49–50)

In spite of the fact that Nishida’s original concept of *basho* was inspired by Plato’s *chóra*, we have to state that the latter is quite far from the former, as already

2 We may supplement this “definition” of *basho* with Krummel’s further explications, for example: *basho* is the “pre-objective environing background for determining acts and determined content, the plane of potentials (predicates) allowing for the foreground emergence of beings *qua* objects or *qua* grammatical subjects” (Krummel in Nishida 2012a, 16)—or, in short, *basho* is “the place of implacement” (ibid.) of (all) existing entities and/or acts; it is “behind all objectifying or determining acts” (ibid., 12); *basho* is “the un-objectifiable, the indeterminate, the non-differentiated, i.e. ‘nothing’ (*mu*)” (ibid.) etc.

Nishida himself pointed out in the last sentence of the quoted passage—but, unfortunately, he has not articulated this distinction clearly enough. Later, in the “adjoining” paper *The Unsolved Issue of Consciousness*, he repeated the above quoted formulation of *basho* as “the receptacle of the *ideas*”. We read at the beginning of this paper: “In the *Timaeus* Plato regarded the *hypodoché* [i.e. *chóra*] to be the receptacle of the *ideas*. But this was nothing but a material principle called space” and so on (Nishida 2012b, 51). At the end of the same paper, he sketches (rather casually) his critique of Plato’s conception of *chóra*: “In Greek philosophy, the Platonist school arrived at the idea of ‘the place of *ideas*’. But having conceived the forms as through and through *being*, Greek philosophy ultimately failed to render any logical independence to place. It conceived place as matter *vis-à-vis* being” (ibid., 56). (Obviously, Nishida had in mind here also Aristotle, not only Plato.) In his notes to Nishida’s paper, Krummel adds the following explanation: “See Plato *Timaeus* 52a. Nishida has in mind here Plato’s notion of *chóra*, which he touched upon above as the receptacle of the *ideas*” (ibid., 59, note 26). In the introduction to this paper, Krummel also speaks of Plato’s *chóra* as the inspiration for Nishida’s concept of *basho*: “Nishida states how he was inspired by Plato’s notion of *chóra* in the *Timaeus* and took it as a clue in developing his own concept of *basho* or ‘place’” (ibid., 45). I think that it is important to bear in mind that Nishida’s *basho* is actually his own concept, which is a much more refined and enhanced concept of “place” than Plato’s *chóra* was, so we may ascertain that the latter was only a preliminary motivation for Nishida. In the following, we shall look into some important aspects of this comparison.

First we have to agree that Plato’s *chóra*, like Nishida’s *basho*, is conceived as an *empty* “place”, i.e. as a formless “receptacle” (*hypodoché*), in which all *sensory* objects as the “images” or “impressions” of Platonic ideas (“the Forms”) are “implaced” (if we use Nishida’s term). In this “definition” of the indefinable *chóra* (following *Timaeus*), I have emphasized the word “sensory”, since *chóra* does not “implace” ideas themselves, but only sensory (physical) things as the “impressions” of ideas.³ Let us consider carefully the famous passage from *Timaeus* (50b...52b):

... And the same argument (*lógos*) applies to the universal nature which receives all bodies—that must be always called the same, for, inasmuch as she [!] always receives all things, she never departs at all from her own nature, and never, in any way or at any time, assumes a form (*morphé*)

3 The literal meaning of the Greek term *ekmageion*, which occurs in *Timaeus* (in our quoted passage), and also in a rather different, epistemological sense in Plato’s *Theaetetus* (194d), is the “impression” of a form in some matter/material, for example in wax (cf. also the famous “wax analogy” of Descartes in his second meditation).

like that of any of the things which enter into her; she is the natural recipient of all impressions (*ekmageion*), and is stirred and informed by them, and appears different from time to time by reason of them. But the forms which enter into and go out of her are the likenesses of eternal realities modelled after their patterns in a wonderful and mysterious manner, which we will hereafter investigate. [...] Wherefore the mother and receptacle (*hypodochē*) of all created and visible and in any way sensible things is not to be termed earth or air or fire or water, or any of their compounds, or any of the elements from which these are derived, but is an invisible and formless being which receives all things and in some mysterious way partakes of the intelligible, and is most incomprehensible. [...] that is /next to the Forms and the sensory world/] a third nature, which is space (*chóra*) and is eternal, and admits not of destruction and provides a home for all created things, and is apprehended, when all sense is absent (*anaisthesía*), by a kind of spurious reason (*logismós nóthos*), and is hardly real—which we, beholding as in a dream, say of all existence that it must of necessity be in some place (*tópos*) and occupy a space (*chóra*), but that what is neither in heaven nor in earth has no existence. (Plato 1985, *Timaeus*, 50b...52b)

As we may see from the last sentence of this passage, Plato would probably agree with Nishida's statement: "That which *is* must be implaced in something" (see the quotation from Nishida 2012a, above). However, *chóra* as the Platonic primordial place where the demiurge creates and therefore "implaces" sensory things as *eídola* of the paradigmatic Forms (i.e. as their "impressions" which "enter into and go out of" *chóra*) does *not* "implace" ideas themselves in the sense as Nishida's *basho* implaces (also) ideal entities and/or cognitive acts. Nishida was, of course, conscious of this difference when he remarked: "Needless to say, I am not suggesting that what I call *basho* is the same as Plato's 'space' or 'receptacle place'" (ibid.). However, in order to be clearer about Plato's *chóra*, it would be better to refer to this "receptacle" as the place *for* ideas to be "impressed" in it (or in Her, i.e. in the cosmic "Mother"), not to denote it as the place *of* ideas, since in Plato's philosophy the place *of* ideas is considered as the transcendent *tópos hyperouraníos*, mentioned in *Phaedrus* (Plato 1985, 247c), which is surely *not* the same with *chóra* in *Timaeus*. Moreover, Plato in his dialogues does not explicitly (i.e. with theoretical concepts) define a *place* of ideas, except in the very abstract sense of their conceptual *tópoi*, for example in *Parmenides* or in *The Sophist*. Only in the later development of Platonism, especially in the Neoplatonism of Plotinus and his followers, is the Intellect (*nous*) explicitly considered and much discussed in the sense of the *place* of ideas (and/or of intellectual acts), as we shall point out more clearly in the next section.

Secondly, I would like to mention here another difference between *chóra* and *basho*: Nishida, when speaking about *basho* as the “place of ideas”, states that “there must be that which envelops the opposition between I and non-I within itself and makes the establishment of the so-called phenomena of consciousness possible” (see again the quoted passage from the *Basho* treatise, above). In this sense, the conscious phenomena, made possible by the opposition of I and non-I, are often presented by Nishida with the metaphor of mirroring, for example in the following passage, where he speaks of the *basho* that includes everything: “And at its bottom it would have to be a plane that endlessly extends with nothing there, like a formless space that mirrors what has form” (Nishida 2012a, 89). However, if we follow our comparative study, Plato does not use the metaphor of mirroring in the context of *chóra*. The mirror-metaphor is often present later, in Neoplatonism, particularly in Plotinus who compares matter to an empty (or even false) mirror.⁴ But in Plotinus matter is considered as the ultimate “privation” (*stéresis*) of being, as the complete absence of any form (which it neither “enfolds” implicitly), therefore it cannot “alternate”, and even less “generate alternations” in the sense that Nishida conceives of *basho* in the following passage: “We then come to think that space without form or sound is a universal containing everything and that form and sound are generated through the alternations of space” (Nishida 2012a, 78).

Nishida distinguishes several levels of space, especially the following three, as presented in Krummel’s note 180 to the *Basho* treatise: “Again we see here a three-tiered sequence of deepening but in terms of space: (1) perceptual space or the *basho* of beings; (2) *a priori* space in the *basho* of consciousness (or oppositional nothing); and (3) true nothing [i.e. *mu no basho*]” (Krummel in Nishida 2012a, 206).⁵ It is evident that Nishida’s *basho* is not only the space of sensory beings, equivalent to Plato’s *chóra* or Descartes’s *res extensa*, it is much more (or paradoxically, “less”, namely as the ultimate *mu no basho*). Nevertheless, the notions of “space” (i.e. *chóra* in Plato and/or *tópos* in Aristotle⁶) and “place” (in the sense of Nishida’s *basho*) are closely intertwined, as we can see also in the following passage, where Nishida distinguishes three levels of *basho* in relation to the levels of being, and each of these levels is “implaced” in its own (level of) *basho*:

4 Plotinus (1967, *Enneads*, III 6(26).7.25–42 and 9.17–19). In this and the following references to the *Enneads* of Plotinus, the numbers in brackets—here 26—denote the chronological order of his 54 treatises.

5 Nishida’s passage to which this Krummel’s note refers is the following: “The perceptual space that we see is not immediately *a priori* space. But it is implaced within a *priori* space. Accordingly there would have to be true nothing behind a *priori* space” (Nishida 2012a, 80).

6 In the Greek philosophy, generally speaking, there is not a sharp distinction between *tópos* and *chóra*, e.g. also in the last sentence of the above quoted passage from *Timaeus*.

We see things that are merely at work in the *basho* of determinate beings, we see the so-called acts of consciousness in the *basho* of oppositional nothing [i.e. the cognitive space which enables the subject-predicate propositions and their truth-values], and we see true free will in the *basho* of absolute nothing. (Nishida 2012a, 65; see also Krummel's note 116)

Following this threefold scheme, we may state that Plato's *chóra* corresponds only to the *first* level of Nishida's *basho*, being the "receptacle" of the sensory, physical objects as the "impressions" (or, metaphorically, "shadows") of the ideas.

Other than the above quoted passage, in the treatise *Basho* Nishida explicitly refers to Plato only once more. At the end of the first section of this treatise, he states:

In Plato's philosophy, the universal was conceived to be objective reality. But this did not lead to the idea that the universal that truly envelops all things would have to be a place (*basho*) that establishes them. For this reason place [*basho*, namely as *chóra*, see Krummel's note 75] was instead thought of as unreal and as nothing. But there would have to be such a place (*basho*) even in the depths of the intuition of the *ideas* themselves. (Nishida 2012a, 59)

On this point, namely that there must be a *basho* of ideas themselves, we can surely agree with Nishida, and this is also in line with the Neo-Platonic point of view. However, in order to consider explicitly the "place" of the Intellect (of *nous* in Greek) we have to pass from Plato to Plotinus. I suppose that Nishida—at least in the treatises of his we are discussing—did not consider carefully enough some relevant distinctions between Plato and Plotinus, and therefore he did not realize that the Intellect as the "place of ideas" in Plotinus was much closer to his own philosophy of *basho* than the concept of *chóra* in Plato's *Timaeus*.⁷ But before going into more details on this crucial point of the present comparative study, we should first remember some important differences between Plato in Plotinus themselves.

7 On the other hand, it is evident from some casual references to Plotinus in Nishida's earlier works that he knew the mystical flavour of Plotinus' philosophy, and consequently that he was conscious of the difference between Plotinus and Plato. For example, in his book *Intuition and Reflection in Self-Consciousness* (1987 [1917]), Nishida wrote: "In terms of a theory of stages of reality, Plotinus, Pseudo-Dionysius and Eriugena show that God transcends all categories, that absolute free will which entirely eludes reflection is the most concrete, primary reality" (Nishida 1987, 155).

Some Differences between Plato and Plotinus' Neoplatonism

We may state that the *chóra* of *Timaeus* has a rather unfortunate role in Plato's foundation of philosophical idealism, especially from the ontological point of view, because it introduces into his system a kind of (at least implicit) dualism, although that was not Plato's own intention. If we follow the traditional (especially Christian) understanding of Platonism, it *seems* that it is just Plato, with his distinction between "the world of senses" and "the world of ideas", who is the principal founder of ontological dualism in the Greek philosophy. However, this is not entirely correct, since a really dualistic metaphysics was not established until Aristotle, with his distinction between form and matter. As is well known, Plato endeavoured to explain the relation between sensory objects and ideas with the concept of "participation" (*méthexis*) of the former in the latter⁸—and we might assume that Plato's main motive for introducing the relation of participation was to preserve, in spite of the "separation line" (*chorismós*), ontological *monism*, albeit in a rather "dualistic" variant. Plato's primarily monistic ontology (ideas as the only real beings) was also the main reason why he was confronted with serious troubles when he tried to define the nature of *chóra* in *Timaeus*. Therefore, it is probably not a coincidence that *chóra* only features in this dialogue of Plato's, and nowhere else. The whole discourse of *Timaeus* is introduced to the reader as a kind of cosmological *mýthos*, not as a theoretical (dialectic) dialogue in the proper philosophical sense. From this point of view, it is also understandable that Plato mythologically refers to *chóra* as the cosmic Mother. Last but not least, we have to remark that Aristotle's theoretical concept of the "first matter" (*próte hýle*) is essentially different from Plato's "indefinable" *chóra*—we may say that the former is quite well defined as the "pure potentiality"—whereas Plotinus' concept of matter as complete "privation" of being is different from both, although it seems to be closer to Aristotle's concept of the first matter as pure potentiality than to Plato's *chóra*.

Plotinus mentions *chóra* in some of his treatises, but mostly just as a reference to his great master Plato, not as a theoretical concept of his own system, which is

8 Nishida was, of course, very well aware of the importance of *méthexis* in Plato's philosophical system—however, he was not satisfied with Plato's solution. At the beginning of the treatise *The Unsolved Issue of Consciousness*, he wrote: "Toward the end of *Phaedo* Plato conceives the nature of things as depending upon their participation in the ideas. He thinks that the beautiful is beautiful, the large is large, the small is small, et cetera, by means of participation in the *idea* of beauty, the *idea* of largeness, the *idea* of smallness, et cetera. [...] But how can the *ideas* join individual things when they remain eternally unchanged without any association with the opposing nature?" (Nishida 2012b, 51) Nishida assumed that in Platonism *chóra* was a medium for joining things, but this assumption is valid only for physical things, since *chóra* as the "receptacle" (*hypodochê*) "was nothing but a material principle called space" (ibid.). In order to join together higher entities too, like thoughts and acts, Nishida "upgraded" Platonic *chóra* to his concept of *basho* ...

radically monistic. Plotinus does not need *chóra*, since his ontology strictly applies the concept of *méthexis* (or *metálepsis*), which he has taken over from his master. In Plotinus' monism, *all* beings "participate" in the "one-many" reality of three primordial "hypostases": the Soul (*psychê*), the Intellect (or Spirit, *noûs*), and the One (*tò hén*). We have to point out again that matter (*hylê*) is considered by Plotinus as the complete "privation" (*stéresis*) of any form (*eîdos*), as the ultimate absence of the Light of being, of the One or the Good (*tò agáthon*). Plotinus does not even need the figure of a demiurge, since the process of "emanation" (the term itself was coined later) replaces him in the evolution of the world from three hypostases.

For our context, it is especially important to understand properly how Plotinus conceived of the *place* of ideas, in order to establish its correspondence with Nishida's *basho* of consciousness. Following Plotinus, ideas are "implaced" in the Intellect itself. The Intellect as the second hypostasis—after the One that "reflects" itself in the Intellect (by the internal division into *nóesis* and *noéma*, which are dual even in the Intellect's own pure self-reflection)—is conceived by Plotinus as the transcendent "world of ideas" (and further on, by emanation of the world Soul, ideas as *lógoi* are immanent in the world, which is a unique cosmos). Concerning the true "place" of ideas, Plotinus' principal point is that they are *not* outside the Intellect (as it might be argued from some passages of *Timaeus* about ideas as paradigmatic "archetypes" for Plato's demiurge), since they constitute, as spiritual "living beings", the Intellect's own "one-many" structure. Let me emphasize again: Plotinus' ideas are *within* the Intellect, not somewhere "high up", in some distant "heaven". Let us look at a relevant passage from the treatise *That the intelligibles are not outside the Intellect, and on the Good*:

One must not, then, look for the intelligibles [i.e. ideas] outside, or say that they are impressions of the real beings in Intellect [... but] we must attribute all (real existences) to the true Intellect [itself]. For in this way it will also know them, and know them truly and will not forget them or go round looking for them, and the truth will be in it and it will be the foundation of all realities and they will live and think. (Plotinus 1984, *Enneads*, V 5(32).2.1 and 9–13)

At the end of this passage, it is particularly fascinating that the ideas ("intelligibles"), which are "implaced" (using Nishida's term, again) *in* the inner "place" of the Intellect, are themselves—as well as the Intellect as a whole—living and thinking beings. We have to understand them not only as intelligible "objective" entities, i.e. as archetypal paradigms, but also as intelligent "subjective" *acts* of the eternally living Intellect itself. Of course, the "living eternity" is a paradox, but

philosophy has to accept paradoxes as “contradictory identities”, if we use Nishida’s term from his late writings. However, we shall leave these fine metaphysical enigmas of Plotinus for some other discussion, lest we turn too far away from the main topic of the present paper.

Now let us look at another famous passage from Plotinus’ tractate *On the intelligible beauty* (1984, *Enneads*, V 8(31).4), where it is evident that the Intellect, which “implaces” in itself the ideas (or the “intelligibles”) as living entities and/or acts, is not only a transcendently real “place”, but it is also a very beautiful, sublime *tópos*, the Platonic *tópos hyperouraníos*, shining in the supreme Light of the One or the Good. The apex of this Plotinus’ vision is the overall reflecting or “mirroring” world of shining entities, of “true realities”, which can be visualized also as immortal “gods” (or later, in the Christian Platonism, as angels).⁹ In the context of our comparative study, the vision of mirroring also has an important role in Nishida’s philosophy, particularly in considering the *basho* of consciousness. Beside that, the following passage from the treatise *On the intelligible beauty* is also very interesting because it is reminiscent of “Indra’s net”, a famous metaphor from the Mahāyāna Buddhist *Avatamsaka Sūtra*, which is also mentioned in some interpretations of Nishida’s philosophy (see Krummel in Nishida 2012a, 208, note 203). As I have already said, Plotinus speaks in this passage about the “true realities” (i.e. ideas) as gods who “are gods because of their intellect [... since] their thinking is always right in the calm and stability and purity of Intellect [...as] they continually contemplate” (Plotinus 1984, *Enneads*, V 8(31).3ff.). In the next chapter of this treatise, we come to the metaphor of the resplendent light in which each being is transparent to every other, “and each star is the sun and all the others”:

For it is “the easy life” [i.e. a Homeric phrase for the gods] there, and truth is their mother and nurse and being and food—and they see all things, not those to which coming to be, but those to which real being belongs, and they see themselves in other things; for all things there [in the Intellect] are transparent, and there is nothing dark or opaque; everything

9 Concerning the transcendent “world of ideas”, the question can be raised as to what kind of *matter* this “place” and its “implaced” entities (“intelligible realities”) are constituted of. Does something like “intelligible matter” exist, independently of the ideal entities themselves, but also quite different from the “dark” matter as the complete “privation” (*stéresis*) of being? Plotinus discusses this question in two treatises: *On (the two kinds of) matter* (1966, *Enneads*, II 4(12)) and *On the impassibility of things without body* (1967, *Enneads*, III 6(26)), but does not come to a definite conclusion. (The question of the “heavenly matter” was later extensively discussed in Christian scholasticism.) Here I just add my opinion that the problem of the “intelligible matter” and the issue of the “place of ideas” are in spite of their metaphysical connection two different questions, or to put it another way, if we assume the existence of the “place of ideas”, this assumption does not necessarily imply the existence of some other kind of *matter*, at least not such which would be akin to the sensory matter.

and all things are clear to the inmost part to everything; for light is transparent to light. Each there has everything in itself and sees all things in every other, so that all are everywhere and each and every one is all and the glory is unbounded; for each of them is great, because even the small is great; the sun there is all the stars (*hēlios ekeî pánta ástra*), and each star is the sun and all the others. A different kind of being stands out in each, but in each all are manifest. (Plotinus 1984, *Enneads*, V 8(31).4.1–12)

Let me return to the main point of this section: as we can see in both quoted passages from *Enneads*, we may attribute to the (Neo)Platonic “world of ideas” a *noetic* “place” *within* the Intellect—which Nishida might call the “*basho* of cognition”. However, for Plotinus it would not be appropriate to attribute a *place* to the One itself, since the One is neither “implaced” nor “implacing” the Intellect (nor the Soul, etc.). The One is absolutely “dimensionless”, whereas every place must have some dimension(s), although quite abstract and possibly infinite. (If I venture a question: Could we say that Nishida’s “place of nothing” is also dimensionless? Could any *place* be dimensionless?) To stress again, the One of Plotinus is *not* a place, not even a place of/for philosophical intuition (or ecstatic contemplation), if we understand the term “place” *per analogiam* with the cognitive place in/of the Intellect, let alone with the geometric space of sensory objects. But if we nevertheless try to preserve geometrical metaphors, which are also liked by Plotinus (and later even more so by Cusanus), we might rather say that the One is like a “point” in(to) which all beings/realities “converge”. More accurately, it is like a *transcending* central point of the series of concentric circles (i.e. of beings), which tend to converge with their radii in(to) the limit that is not one of the members of the series itself. Just as the Sun is not one of its infinite radius.¹⁰ If we have in mind the comparison between Plotinus and Nishida, we might also say that the One is the “null” point of the entire series of concentric circles that constitute the “predicate-plain” of/for all possible cognition.

Plotinus repeatedly emphasizes in his treatises¹¹ that the One itself is *not a being*, not even the “highest” (or the “first”) Being—that is namely the Intellect, not the One, although it is named “the first hypostasis”. The One is, we may say, the most “inner point” of the Intellect, and thereby of the Soul, and consequently of the whole world of emanated beings. But even if the One does *not exist* as other beings (ideas, sensory objects, their shadows etc.), it is *not* nothing, not even the “true nothing” (*shin no mu*) in Nishida’s sense. In Plotinus, the One is “beyond” being *and* nothing. In order to comprehend this “transcendence” of transcendence,

10 See Plotinus, *Enneads* (1984, IV 3(27).17.9–13; 1988, VI 5(23).5; VI 9(9).8.10–24, and elsewhere).

11 *Enneads* (1967, III 8(30); 1984, V 1(10); V 3(49); V 6(24); 1988, VI 7(38); VI 9(9) et al).

we have to bear in mind Plato's famous phrase that the Good is "beyond all substances/essences" (*epékeina tês ousías*, Plato 1985, *Republic*, VI, 509b9): that means that the Good (or the One, in Plotinus) is not just an idea (a substance/essence) among other ideas, not even the "highest" Idea, but it might be metaphorically visualized as the all-present Light which illuminates all beings, all ideas and all the sensory objects which "participate" in their reality (in Plato's famous "Allegory of the Cave", the Good is likened to the Sun, although perhaps more accurately to the all-present "Sunshine"). Therefore, the supreme Light has two transcending "names" in Platonism: "the One or the Good", whereby the "meaning" of these two "names" indicates the absolute identity: the One = the Good. Both "names" evoke the same absolutely "transcendent predicate" (as Nishida would say), but do not predicate each other. The Platonic "the One or the Good"—like Nishida's *basho*—cannot be in the position of the Aristotelian grammatical "subject" (*hypokeímenon*), since it is not a substance. And here we are already at the topic of the third section of the present paper.

Nishida's *basho* in Comparison with the One of Plotinus

We return now to two Nishida's treatises from his middle period, to *Basho* (2012a [1926]) and its "adjoining" paper *The Unsolved Issue of Consciousness* (2012b [1927]). First, I have to point out that Nishida's "logic of *basho*" is much closer to Plato (and even more to Plotinus) than to Aristotle, in spite of the fact that there are in both treatises (and in Nishida's works in general) more references to Aristotle than to Plato and Plotinus—the main reason for this is Nishida's polemical point towards Aristotle's conception of "primary substances" (*prótai ousíai*, see *Categories* 2a35), which are individual entities, and "secondary substances" (*deúterai ousíai*), which are universals (ibid., 2a11–a18). In Aristotle's logic, this distinction corresponds to the subject-predicate structure of propositions. As every student of philosophy knows, Aristotle criticized the doctrine of his philosophical teacher Plato that ideas (or the Forms) had transcendent ontological reality, or otherwise stated, Aristotle's position was that the ideas in Platonism were just "hypostatized" predicates, considered by himself only as "secondary substances". (Needless to add, one of the greatest and longest disputes in the history of the Western philosophy followed: the so-called "problem of universals".) Nishida, in contrast to Aristotle, has developed his doctrine of *basho* on the "predicate-plane", not on the substantival "subject-plane". The "*basho* of nothing" (*mu no basho*) is not and cannot be a substance, since it is the supreme "transcendent predicate", i.e. the *last* in the sequence of predicates (universals), which cannot be itself predicated by anything else—and (also) in this sense, the deepest *basho* "is" *nothing*. Something

similar, *mutatis mutandis*, can be stated about Plato's "the Good" and/or Plotinus' "the One". From the logical point of view (needless to say, we take here the term "logic" in a broad sense, like Nishida), the emphasis on the "predicate-plane" is common to both Nishida and Platonism—and later, of course, to Kant, but we do not enter here into the very complicated relations between Nishida and Kant—whereas the "predicate-plane" is *not* Aristotle's approach in ontology.¹² Let us look at several important details by considering some passages from Nishida.

In the treatise *Basho*, Nishida writes: "This predicate-plane is what we may conceive to be the world of our consciousness. To be that what I am conscious of means to be implaced in such a predicate-plane. The object of thought is implaced in it as well and so is the object of perception" (Nishida 2012a, 96). However, *basho* itself as the "transcendent predicate" can never become neither the object of thought nor of perception, at the utmost it might be present-in-absence in the philosophical *intuition*.¹³ For if we tried to approach "*basho* of true nothing" (*shin no mu no basho*) from the merely logical (i.e. cognitive in the Aristotelian sense) point of view, Nishida would teach us the following: "By driving forward in the direction of the predicate of judgement towards its culmination, that is, by continually transcending predicated in the predicate-direction, we see the mirror that simply mirrors. Upon it is mirrored the world of infinite possibilities as well as the world of meanings" (ibid., 90). Krummel adds the following note to this passage:

12 In this context, we can also state that the concept of "the good" in Nishida's first and seminal book *An Inquiry into the Good* (1990 [1911]) is closer to Plato's ontological conceiving of "the Good" than to Aristotle's concept of the good in *Nicomachean Ethics* and elsewhere—although Nishida's concept of the good is still considerably different from Plato's *tò agáthōn*. In a quite exposed point of his *Inquiry*, in Chapter 23, Nishida assumes in a rather Platonic manner that "from a certain angle, the concept of the good coincides with the concept of reality" (Nishida 1990, 125–26) and that "in concrete reality existence and value are fundamentally one", while at the end of this chapter he resumes: "The above ideas [of the good] are fundamental to Plato's stance (that the idea of the good is the foundation of reality) in Greece and to the *Upanishads* in India. And in medieval philosophy we encounter the expression, 'All reality is good' (*omne ens est bonum*). I think such ideas constitute the most profound notion of the good." (Nishida 1990, 126)

13 In the introduction to his English translation of *An Inquiry into the Good*, Masao Abe, an eminent professor of the "Kyoto School", raises the following question: "How did Nishida develop the standpoint of self-consciousness into the standpoint of *basho*, place? With the notion of place Nishida moved from voluntarism to a sort of intuitionism" (Abe in Nishida 1990, xxii). As a part of his answer to this question, Abe refers to Nishida's statement from the preface to *From the Acting to the Seeing* [1927]: "Since [the book] *Intuition and Reflection in Self-Consciousness* [1917] 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" (ibid.). It seems to me important that Nishida mentioned Plotinus in this context; compare, for example, Plotinus' treatise *On Nature and Contemplation and the One* (1967, *Enneads*, III 8(30)). See also Nishida's preface to the third edition (1936) of *An Inquiry into the Good* (Nishida 1990, xxxii). Obviously, Nishida's reading of Plotinus was important for the formation of his "intuitionistic" logic of *basho*.

“I.e., what Nishida elsewhere calls the transcendent predicate or the *basho* of absolute or true nothing” (ibid., 211, note 241). And Nishida continues on the same page: “In the foregoing, I have explained that breaking through the *basho* of being enclosed by universal concepts, there is the *basho* of nothing, which we may regard as a mirror that simply mirrors and which we can see the will in the relationships of that *basho* to the *basho* of being. [...] At the *basho* of true nothing, the will itself must be negated as well (ibid., 90). On the last page of the treatise *Basho*, Nishida resumes his main point(s):

... for the predicate-plane to see itself in the subject-plane means that the predicate-plane itself becomes the *basho* of true nothing. It means that the will destroys itself and that everything implaced in it becomes intuition. As the predicate-plane becomes infinitely expansive, *basho* itself becomes truly nothing and what is implaced in it simply becomes an intuition of the self. That the universal predicate reaches its extremity means that the particular subject reaches its extremity and become itself. (Nishida 2012a, 102)¹⁴

And just at the end of the treatise, Nishida humbly acknowledges: “I regret that after many repetitions in the foregoing discussion ultimately I could not adequately express what I was thinking ...” (ibid., 102). This is indeed a noble confession from a great thinker! In our highest aspirations, we always feel that words are not enough to express our deepest intuitions. Nevertheless, as we have already stated, a year later Nishida returned to the topics raised of *Basho* in his “adjoining” paper *The Unsolved Issue of Consciousness*, explaining again his critical position towards Aristotle’s “subject-plane” ontology of substance:

... Aristotle, however, once defined substance (*ousía*) as that which becomes the grammatical subject of judgement but not the predicate [in *Metaphysics* 1028b36–37, see Krummel’s note 19]. As a definition of substance I find this sufficient [...] however, can we not conceive of what is in a still deeper sense by putting this in reverse as that which becomes the predicate but not the grammatical subject. Aristotle sought the transcendent basis of judgement merely in the direction of the grammatical subject. The transcendent that truly founds judgement, however, is not in the direction of the grammatical subject but instead in the direction of the predicate. [...] As we conceive the predicate to be completely

14 Krummel adds to this passage the following note: “We may say that this refers to the experience of emptiness in the Buddhist significance. [...] This is Nishida’s rendering, in modern philosophical terminology, of the middle standpoint of Mahāyāna Buddhism.” (ibid., 217–18, note 315)

transcendent in the above sense, it must be something that cannot be stated to be a being [i.e. a substance] in the sense of a grammatical subject. As opposed to a being qua grammatical subject, it must be completely nothing. (Nishida 2012b, 54–55)

When reading these and similar passages of Nishida, it seems rather surprising (at least to me) that Nishida himself did not refer in his works more to Plotinus (and also to Plato), because the similarities between his concept of *basho* and the concept of the Intellect as “the place of ideas” in Plotinus is (rather) clear, in spite of some important differences to which we will come later. Of course, there is a large historic (and not only cultural) distance between Plotinus and Nishida, and it is understandable that Nishida directed his philosophical “dialogues” more to the modern than to the ancient Western philosophers, however, this is not the whole explanation of Nishida relative “silence” about Plotinus, especially if we have in mind that both philosophers strived for *philosophia perennis*. It is even more surprising that in those few passages from Nishida’s middle period, where he mentions Plotinus, he does not mention this late Greek sage with as much respect as he actually deserved—almost the opposite, in fact. For example, in *Basho* Nishida mentions Plotinus only once, as he expresses the following quite sharp judgement: “The Greeks with their intellectualism, even with Plotinus’ ‘the One’ (*tò hén*), were unable to thoroughly exhaust this significance of true nothing” (Nishida 2012a, 94). In spite of the fact that we surely could discuss to what extent or if at all Nishida’s judgement of “the Greeks” concerning the understanding of “true nothing” is justified (but I will not go here into this direction), it is at least rather odd that Nishida also placed Plotinus into Greek “intellectualism”, as if “the One” in Plotinus were something only conceptual and abstract, as it was in the debates of Sophists, or even in the discussion about the one and many and so on in Plato’s dialogues *Parmenides* and/or *Sophist*. Nevertheless, I think that Nishida knew perfectly well that “the One” of Plotinus was much more than just an “intellectualist” idea.

A similar opinion about Plotinus to that expressed in *Basho*, although more moderate and explained in a little more detail, can be found in Nishida’s “adjoining” paper *The Unsolved Issue of Consciousness*, in the context of the discussion about Plato’s *chóra*:

The One in Plotinus is conceived as what transcends *nous* and furthermore envelopes it within. And yet it still tends in the direction of the father in Plato’s *Timaeus* and not in the direction of the mother. Pure matter, without form, is conceived simply as that which mirrors, as [in itself] nothing. Greek philosophy failed to discover the deep and true significance of nothing. (Nishida 2012b, 51)

A point of contention in this quite general judgement is the fact that “mirroring” is not even mentioned by Plato in the context of *chóra*, while the “pure matter” in Plotinus is not *something* that mirrors, but at the utmost the “privation” of being is *like* a “false mirror”. In the last paragraph of the same text, Nishida repeats his, we may say, premature judgements about Plotinus and Greek philosophy in general:

In Greek philosophy, the Platonist school arrived at the idea of the “place of *ideas*”. But having conceived the forms as through and through being, Greek philosophy ultimately failed to render any logical independence to place. It conceived place as matter vis-à-vis the forms and as nothing vis-à-vis being. Even the One of Plotinus was nothing but what transcends in the direction of the *ideas*, and the issue of matter remained unresolved. [...] The true One must be the place of absolute nothing, something that absolutely cannot be determined as being. (Nishida 2012b, 56)

I surmise that the principal problem of this interpretation of the Plotinus’ One comes from Nishida’s questionable understanding of Plato’s *chóra* as the “place of *ideas*”, which I have already discussed in the first section of this paper. From this starting point, Nishida jumps to the One in Plotinus, attributing to it a “place” that should be “the place of absolute nothing”—thereby subsuming Plotinus’ philosophy under his own “logic of *basho*”?—and finally saying (in this latter case, Plotinus would probably agree) that “the true One must be [...] something that absolutely cannot be determined as being”. Indeed, Plotinus “first hypostasis”, the One or the Good, is “beyond” (*epékeina*) all beings (or “substances”), also “beyond” all transcendent ideas (i.e. Platonic Forms), and even “beyond” the Intellect (*nous*) as a whole, the “second hypostasis”, which “implaces” the ideas *within* itself as “subject-object”, as “one-many”. (I have put the word “beyond” in quotation marks, because here it is *not* meant in the ordinary spatial sense, i.e. beyond all visible celestial spheres, although it might be considered as a kind of “ideal” *tópos*, a transcendent “place”, or if we use the traditional Platonic term, the “world of ideas”.)

From Nishida’s cursory references to Plotinus (at least in the two treatises that we discuss in this essay), it seems that he considered Plotinus mainly as an interpreter of Plato—like many important Western philosophers of the Modern Age, following the enormous influence of Hegel’s history of philosophy. However, today we know (again, after many centuries) that Plotinus was not only a very lucid interpreter of Plato’s philosophy, but that his “Neoplatonism” was indeed a new, enhanced variant of Greek idealism, which was based, of course, on the perennial philosophical insights of the “divine” Plato himself. In the last few decades, a new Plotinus “renaissance” has been going on. We may guess that these historical

turns in evaluations of the history of philosophy and the shifts concerning the importance of its principal representatives are probably the main reason for Nishida's "overlooking" the deep similarities between his own philosophy and Plotinus. One of the main motives for our present comparative project is also to correct this "lapse" and to fill the gap between two historically and culturally distant, yet in their very depths much related philosophical systems and/or ways.

Let me resume the analysis of the relations among Nishida, Aristotle and (Neo)Platonism, following the longer passage about Aristotle from Nishida's paper *The Unsolved Issue of Consciousness*, quoted above. In his "reversal" of Aristotle's metaphysics, Nishida passes from the ontological "subject-plane" to the "predicate-plane"—we might say that this is his step "back" from Aristotle to Plato.¹⁵ Nishida's way to transcendence points in the same "direction" as the (Neo)Platonic way, to the limiting point where "the predicate-plane becomes infinitely expansive" (see above), however, the limit itself is different: for Nishida the limit of the expansion of the predicate-plane is *basho* that is "true nothing", while for Plato/Plotinus the limit of the ascend to transcendence is "the Good" or "the One". Nevertheless, from the epistemological point of view, the way "upward" is very similar in both cases: going "up" to the transcendence through the ascending hierarchy of more and more "pure" predicates. And even on the level of the Intellect (i.e. *noûs* in Plotinus, *basho* of consciousness or "oppositional nothing" in Nishida) there are striking similarities, particularly in the comprehension that the supreme wisdom is not attainable by intellect alone, but by *intuition* which transcends the duality of intellectual cognition.

Here I would like to emphasize again my conviction that the deep similarities between Nishida and Plotinus are greater and much more important for the comparative philosophical investigations than the differences between them—and this is also my main motive in this research project: the highest (or the deepest)

15 Nishida's closeness to the "(Neo)Platonic Way" in philosophy is evident also in his last treatise *Nothingness and the Religious Worldview* (1993 [1945]). In the first chapter of this treatise, where Nishida endeavoured to develop further his "logic of *basho*" in the direction of the historical-cultural (Buddhist) "background", he returned to the explanation of the "logic of the predicate", especially to the difference between Aristotle's "objective" ontology and Kant's (later also Husserl's) "subjective", i.e. transcendental method. In this essay, he states again that "in contrast to Aristotle's subject that cannot be predicate, the conscious self has its being as predicate that cannot be subject", and adds "I think I can grasp the true meaning of Kant's contribution to philosophy from the perspective of my logic of the predicate" (Nishida 1993, 59). For our present context, it is especially relevant that Nishida in his last treatise explicitly assigns the "logic of the predicate" to Plato as well, when he remarks that "Plato's 'essences' [i.e. ideas, the Forms] would seem to pertain to this latter assumption" (ibid., 57), namely to the predicate-plane philosophy, in contrast to the Aristotelian "objective" ontology of the grammatical subject (*hypokeîmenon*). This view would apply even more to Plotinus, (cf. the above quoted passage from the 1984, *Enneads*, V 5(32), titled *That the intelligibles are not outside the Intellect, and on the Good*).

points of Western and Eastern philosophies converge, since we are all members of the same global human “family”. In addition, I have to remark that my aim in this comparative study is absolutely not to “correct” Nishida’s understanding of (Neo)Platonism, since every philosopher, especially such a great thinker as Nishida, has the right to understand and develop the philosophies of his predecessors in his own way (like Aristotle in his understanding of Plato, Hegel towards Kant, Heidegger towards Husserl etc.)—maybe these “misunderstandings” are in fact essential for the historical development of philosophy—and that is why my principal intention in the present comparative project is just to analyse and elucidate similarities as well as differences between two great thinkers, Plotinus and Nishida, not to judge which of their ways is “better”.

Following this line of thought, I must finally say at least a few words about the main difference between Nishida and Plotinus, which I notice as a seeking wanderer in their vast philosophical “landscapes” at the very top (or bottom) of their ways: the final goal of Nishida’s philosophical meditation is to attain the “*basho* of true nothing”, while the highest summit of Plotinus’ philosophical contemplation is the ecstatic “experience” of the One or the Good, beyond every duality, even beyond the highest cognitive duality of the Intellect. This difference is reflected also in the “topological” distinction between the deepest “place” (*basho*) of the “true nothing” in Nishida and the transcendent “point” of the One, as conceived of by Plotinus. The One of Plotinus is not even the highest “Self”, since the latter is attained (already and/or only) in the Intellect as the “self-reflected” One—while in Nishida this point is not quite clear (at least for me), since he often speaks of the “*basho* of nothing” as a kind of source (?) of the will and/or of the intellect. However, to be honest, we also have to add that in the philosophy of Plotinus it is not quite clear how and why the process of *emanation* “starts” from the One to the cognitive duality of the Intellect, to the multiplicity of ideas within it, and then “downwards” to souls and things. The question “Why there is anything at all, rather than nothing?” remains the great philosophical enigma. Concerning Nishida’s concept of *basho*, I think that it is probably helpful to “comprehend” it against the background of Zen’s *mu* (in Sanskrit *sūnyatā*).

At the end of this paper, and as my contribution to the comparison between Nishida in Plotinus, I venture to ask a question which seems essential to me, but is surely too difficult for a finite human mind to answer: Is the “true” *nothing* of Nishida (and, in several “variants” of philosophical and/or religious formulations, also of the whole Buddhist spiritual tradition) indeed so much different from “the One” in the ancient Greek wisdom? Or, if I ask otherwise: Is the “pure” *being* different from the “pure” *nothing*? (Not only in the abstract sense of Hegel’s dialectical logic, but also in the “experiential” sense of great mystics of East and

West.) Or, if I ask the same question inside the ancient Indian (and consequently overall Asian) religious wisdom: Is Buddha's *nibbana* indeed different from the Upanishadic *moksha*? Or, put in terms of the great Christian mystics Dionysus the Areopagite and/or Master Eckhart: Is the deepest divine Gloom different from the supreme Light? Of course, I cannot answer to any variant of this "final" question. However, we philosophers must raise such questions that cannot hope to be answered, at least not "here", not "yet", and the issue of *nothing* vs. *being* is surely one of the most basic philosophical questions.

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