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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Pure experience revisited: A critical reassessment of Nishida Kitaro's radicalization of William James' empiricism

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Abstract

In this paper, we will revisit the relation between the respective conceptions of pure experience of Nishida Kitaro and William James. As various authors have previously shown, comparing Nishida and James can not only help us better understand both of their specific understandings of pure experience, and consequently its position within their respective enterprises, but also give a platform with which to see how these two authors could contribute to contemporary discussions on philosophical methodology. However, despite the long history of comparative research on these two thinkers, there is still no consensus about the extent to which Nishida's philosophy actually resembles James' work at all. Was Nishida's interest in James' work found only in superficial similarities between two authors interested in overcoming the subject–object distinction? Or did Nishida attempt to somehow develop or radicalize James' work, taking his notion of pure experience into the realm of religion and metaphysics? In this contribution, we will agree with previous authors who have argued that Nishida is best understood as trying to go beyond or develop James' work. However, we will make this claim with the caveat that James had good reason not to take the avenues Nishida pursued, and that Nishida's attempt to radicalize some ideas in James may have led to some difficult points within his early philosophy.

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1 | INTRODUCTION

It is widely accepted that the career of Nishida Kitaro (1870–1945), one of the most important philosophers in 20th century Japan, somehow started with his original take on William James' (1842–1910) conception of "pure experience (純粋経験)." Indeed, in Nishida's *An Inquiry into the Good* (1911, henceforth shortened to *Inquiry*), we find a respectable effort to explain reality and its innermost workings outgoing from "direct" experience that resonates greatly with James' own attempt to formulate a radical empiricist philosophy.[1] It is not surprising, then, that decades of comparisons between the two authors have not only helped clarify their respective projects, but also helped spotlight how both can contribute to contemporary philosophical discussions.

However, despite the long history of comparisons between Nishida and James, there still seems to be no agreement as to the extent to which James' influence can be felt in Nishida's work. On the one hand, critics dating back to Takahashi Satomi have implied that any "empiricist" elements Nishida has inherited may conflict with his more Hegelian insights.[2] Indeed, as we shall see later, some thinkers like David Dilworth (1969) take this line of thought even further by arguing that Nishida's notion of pure experience may not actually have been all that similar to what James had proposed in the first place, pointing out several core elements that defined James' philosophy but seem to be lacking in Nishida's work.[3] On the other hand, though, some authors—like Feenberg and Arisaka (1996)—seem to have taken Nishida's connection to James' philosophy to be much more substantial, arguing that a key feature of Nishida's notion of pure experience was that it was somehow more radical than what James had presented.[4] Hence, we can see that despite decades of research done on the topic, we have still yet to answer a fundamental question: how "Jamesian" was Nishida's philosophy in all actuality? Considering both the fact that Nishida himself characterizes his entire philosophical career as an attempt to refine this early idea of pure experience, as well as the consequences that the alleged issues posed by the Jamesian elements of his work could have on contemporary debates on topics such as the mind-world relation or selfhood and personal identity, this is not a question we can ignore.

Keeping this in mind, in this paper we will revisit the relationship between William James and Nishida Kitaro. Our aim is twofold. First, we wish to critically assess the degree to which Nishida took up the Jamesian notion of pure experience while keeping in mind previous research up to this point. Second, by doing this, we will also clarify the extent to which Nishida's ideas on pure experience and the self can still be relevant to contemporary philosophical debates. Here, we argue that previous comparisons have correctly identified the difference between James and Nishida in their attitude toward having a unified conception of pure experience but have often failed to give James credit for why he avoids the kind of ultimate unity in experience that Nishida vigorously pursued. To this end, we will proceed in the following order. In the first section, we will begin with a basic taxonomy from Feenberg (1999) of different ways that the word experience was used at the beginning of the 20th century. After doing so, we will clarify James' understanding of the stream of consciousness as a "blooming, buzzing confusion" that manifests itself in a plurality of ways. This will then be contrasted to Nishida, who on the one hand seems to have been influenced by—and agree with—James in many respects, but also insists on an ultimate unity in experience found in religious consciousness. We will proceed to note how these apparently conflicting views leave Nishida with inconsistencies that have often been downplayed in many treatments of his early work. However, we shall also argue that this does not render Nishida's philosophy meaningless. Indeed, as we shall claim, there is reason to believe that a thorough attempt to reconstruct Nishida's philosophical project can lead to important clues for accounting for the development of our awareness as individual persons (and that such an account could still be valuable for contemporary philosophers).

2 | PREPARATORY CONSIDERATIONS: WILLIAM JAMES AND THE MEANING OF EXPERIENCE

Before proceeding with our analysis of how James impacted Nishida, we would like to take a slight detour and address what we mean by the word "experience" as a sort of touchstone to help us understand the similarities and differences between Nishida and James. Indeed, keeping these different potential meanings in mind, Andrew Feenberg has provided a rundown of the ways in which the term experience was used while Nishida and James were writing at the beginning of the 20th century (Feenberg, 1999, pp. 29–31):

- Experience as epistemological foundation (i.e., we can only know something by witnessing or experiencing it for ourselves).
- Experience as life (i.e., lived immediacy in opposition to mediated reflection).
- Experience as *Bildung* (i.e., as the development of the individual's personality).
- Experience as ontological foundation (i.e., experience as the concrete horizon of being that stands in contrast with an abstract "view from nowhere").

So, to which of these categories does pure experience belong? As we shall see, the answer seems to be "all of them." Indeed, both Nishida's and James' philosophies of pure experience start with the first of category but will deal with, and have ramifications for, all four of these potential meanings of experience. Remembering this constellation of related terms under the umbrella of experience will be important later on when we assess the difference between these two thinkers.

Now, let us move on to a brief summary of William James' philosophy of pure experience. To do so, we shall first clarify the problem at hand. In "A World of Pure Experience," James describes a classic problem of philosophy, explaining the difficulty regarding transitive relations. While knowledge (specifically philosophy) "has always turned on grammatical particles," (James, 1904b, p. 535) neither of the main epistemological outlooks—that is, empiricism or rationalism—were capable of offering a satisfying explanation of how these relations are possible. That is, while it seems to make sense that knowledge consists in a relation between knower and known connected by certain grammatical particles (x is y, x is with z, etc.), James disagreed with both "major" classic views of relations in Western philosophy. While rationalism, in its attempt to render the universe a completely unified, orderly whole (held together by God, the Self, or some other trans-experiential entity), reduces such transitive relations into one ultimate master relation, classical empiricism goes in the other direction, reducing relations between discrete individuals to little more than psychological fabrications. As James explains, neither of these extreme views are satisfactory, given that such conjunctive relations come in *degrees*. While James would agree with the empiricist view that *there is no ultimate relation that obtains through all the experiences that compose our universe*, he seems to disagree with classical empiricism on the point that it overemphasizes the mere "with-ness" between isolated individuals (as well as the consequent tendency to overlook the fact that there are forces at work that put these elements into actual relation with one another) (James, 1904b, p. 536). In a nutshell, for James, it is necessary to avoid both any kind of monolithic monism that robs us of any kind of plurality in the universe, as well as the kind of nominalistic view that denies any kind of relations between individuals.

Importantly, according to James, this inability to account for relations in degrees was largely responsible for one of the main challenges in epistemology: the subject–object divide. Should one follow the empiricist and take objects to be cut off from one another, then one will need to somehow bridge the gap between knower (subject) and known (object) that allegedly occurs in the acquisition of knowledge. Should one follow the rationalist in relying on an ultimate Subject or a Self to bridge

this gap, one will not only rely on an empirically unverifiable entity, but will also collapse the relation of knowledge on itself by removing any distance between subject and object and integrating them into said Self. Without any capacity to explain the relation of *co-continuity* (which, to reiterate, would be impossible if the items of said relation were either completely separate from one another or collapsed into the same thing), there would be no means to provide an alternative view to this quandary. The challenge, then, was to do "*full justice* to conjunctive relations, without, however, treating them […] as being true in some supernal way, as if the unity of things and their variety belonged to different orders of truth and vitality altogether" (James, 1904b, pp. 534–535).

In response to this perceived deficiency, James offers a novel worldview called Radical Empiricism. That is, anything that is experienced as real *is* real and, conversely, anything that is not experienced is not taken into account (James, 1904b, p. 534). Naturally, this principle ensures that any and all "trans-experiential" suppositions, entities, or powers are left out of consideration. Yet, crucially, anything experienced as real was equally left on the table. Most importantly, *this includes our transitive or co-continuous experiences*. It is a fact of experience that we not only experience relations, but that we experience them in degrees. The food on the table is close to me, but the fork is even closer. Moreover, it is a fact that we experience continuity. Moments do not exist separately from one another, but rather flow and overlap. Hence, James' solution to the problem of relations is a fascinating one: insofar as these relations are experienced as real, there is no reason to deny their reality.

It is here that we finally return to the topic of our investigation, pure experience. Pure experience was introduced as a byproduct of, and sister corollary to, this radical empiricist worldview. James states his intended rethinking of the rationalist and empiricist debate in the following way:

> My thesis is that if we start with the supposition that there is only one primal stuff or material in the world, a stuff of which everything is composed, and if we call that stuff 'pure experience', then knowing can easily be explained as a particular sort of relation towards one another that portions of pure experience may enter. (James, 1904a, p. 478)

How can James support this thesis? If, according to James, we were to suspend any empirically unjustifiable or trans-experiential suppositions, we would only find one kind of "stuff"[5] that we have ever engaged with. This "stuff" is referred to as pure experience, that is, the actual and concrete experiences we have of the world. Thus, if we are to be truly faithful to this radical empiricist intuition, we would have no grounds to discuss anything other than the "stuff" in question here. Knowledge, then, cannot be the relation between one kind of thing (a self or a subject) and another kind of thing (its object), nor can it be chalked up to the machinations of an ultimate, trans-experiential Subject. If we are to be truly faithful to our experiences of the world, then we would have to accept that experience has "no such inner-duplicity" (James, 1904a, p. 480). Rather, for James, knowledge is a *relation between one part of this stuff and another*. James' goal, and the origin of his notion of pure experience, thus appears to be located in his desire to provide an alternative explanation of the relations of which our knowledge consists by moving away from our naïve and abstract views of experience based on the subject–object divide and toward an account more faithful to how we know *things* in our *concrete interactions* with the world.

These discussions of pure experience thus mark a continuation of James' earlier attempts to move away from a "saltatory" view of knowledge, wherein a mental subject goes beyond its own interior boundaries to come into relation with an exterior object. Instead, we move toward an "ambulatory" view, wherein *progression* in the field of consciousness leads us from one event to the next, thereby creating context through the inter-relations of different moments. Put differently, it would seem that James is attempting to move away from experience described in terms of discrete "bits" or "pieces,"

cut up into subjects or objects or meanings or sensations. Indeed, as James explains in a groundbreaking chapter in the *Principles of Psychology*, "The Stream of Thought," no one has ever actually had a simple sensation all on its own and the idea that we start with such a simple sensation before adding concepts on top of it is absurd (James, 1890/1983, p. 219). To the contrary, we are given a full scene, with parts that we are and are not interested in. This interest draws us in further and invites us to look at "what comes next." We are moved from one view to another, in a continuous progression from the center of consciousness to what is enticing us on the fringes. We learn about the world not by detaching ourselves from it and cutting it up into moments through judgment, but by acting in the world, finding out what comes next, and making sense of the continuous progression from one moment to the next.

Now, this talk of concrete consciousness that is not chopped up into concepts and acting within a progression may make it sound as though James is somehow glorifying a flow of "purely" nonconceptual sense data and dismissing conceptual content altogether. However, on the basis of the previous paragraphs and the radical empiricist principle introduced therein, we can soon see that this is not the case. Indeed, if we follow a radical empiricist methodology—accepting everything we experience as real to be real and rejecting the rest[6]—then we reach the following important conclusion: insofar as they are experienced as real, *the relations and meanings we experience everyday must themselves be real*. In this regard, a Jamesian philosophy of pure experience does not entail a denial of logic or thought. Rather, so long as we accept that it is through the above-mentioned concrete transitory process of finding out what comes next that meanings and relations are generated, we have no grounds to dismiss either of them as fictitious.[7] Some very ordinary experiences can help us to understand this: We *see* a box that is *on* the table. The box catches our eye and we move closer to see what is *inside* of it. Inside, we find a hat. These relations are not mere fabrications of our mind but are instead a gradual development of a train of thought and a sign to move on to our next "perching." As we move from one perching to the next, we may gain a better grasp on our situation, in the sense that we add details to our view (we find out what was in the box). Otherwise, we might become less clear about the situation after gaining knowledge of something that could open up new horizons of possibilities (we wonder why there was a hat instead of the gloves we ordered online). Or we may lose track of our initial train of thought altogether (when our newfound hat makes us forget about the gloves we were expecting to find in the box). No matter the outcome, though, this flow creates a dynamic process that constantly updates and recontextualizes our conscious lives.

What we find in James' work, then, is a continuously moving flux. Things come into and out of relation constantly. Pure experience is described as a "mosaic" of different, interchanging parts that always moves on from one relation to the next; a "that" which stands before the "what." There is never a static, fixed, or complete picture. Indeed, earlier on in his career, James describes the stream of consciousness as a "buzzing, blooming confusion" (James, 1890/1983, p. 462), lacking any inherent clarity of its own. At the same time, it would seem, insofar as there is almost always some degree of relation between one moment and the next and the parts that make up this "buzzing, blooming confusion", these disparate experiences can somehow be reconciled or made, to some degree, commensurate with one another. To use another term of James, there is a "multivariate field" of experience, wherein a plurality of different experiential elements can always be somewhat, but never completely, reconciled. Indeed, insofar as this flux will always continue and remain in transit, there will always be some new shift to be explored further, something new to be reconciled or made obsolete.

At this point, we ought to clearly emphasize one more critically important feature of James' thought. As one can glean from what was written in the previous paragraphs, conceptual experience must also fall within the realm of pure experience. Given this, we can further claim that all experiences or moments, regardless of whether they be conceptualized or not, *can only be disclosed within*

pure experience. This means that, in the moment our experience is thought experience, relations are thought relations, but other relations are constituted, or emerge, as more purely sensuous relations.[8] Crucially, though, the difference between thought relations and sensuous relations is also a matter of experience; they are two different ways in which we live through the stream of consciousness and navigate our surroundings. In this regard, we can see that typical views of experiences, that is, as sensations we first "receive" or have "impressed upon us" before we are able to bestow judgments upon them with thought, are exorcized from James' philosophy.

As a question to this discussion of experience as a "flux" or "mosaic," one might wonder if we could ever catch this chaotic flux of lived experience precisely "as it is," in its most natural or—dare we say—pure form. And indeed, it is possible in some sense to think of pure experience as a "buzzing, blooming confusion" in a literal sense, with different elements coming in and out of our conscious stream. Yet, we should be careful at this point to avoid thinking that such chaotic states are typical of our conscious lives, or that James himself believed them to be closer to "truly" pure experience. As James notes, "only new-born babies, or men in semi-coma from sleep, drugs, illnesses, or blows, may be assumed to have an experience pure in the literal sense of a that which is not yet any definite what" (James, 1905, p. 29). Thus, the idea of having a "pure" experience in which there is no context present in consciousness to make sense of the various elements that we experience is possible to imagine, but would ultimately be rare and not indicative of our usual lived experiences. Additionally, just because such experiences are possible in rare cases does not imply at all that our ordinary experiences are less pure than the one in which there is a melting of subject and object, or in which thought and judgment are apparently absent. Focusing on only this type of "naked" experience would also miss the point for James. The reason for this is that, as we touched upon in the previous paragraph, conceptual experience is also a form of *pure* experience. The difference between conceptual and nonconceptual, *aka* purely sensory experience, is of kind, not of reality. To this, we could add that, although James does not thoroughly thematize and scrutinize the issue, there does seem to be reason to think that conceptual experience is founded upon sensory experience, that is, experience of conceptual relations presupposes sensory unities and relations. This relationship between conceptual and sensory experience, in turn, can be discovered experientially, just by reflecting on and following the links between pieces of experience.

For James, then, pure experience might in some sense be considered a "blooming, buzzing confusion," given that there is a flux of different elements coming in and out of our streaming consciousness at all times. The view of this kind of whirlpool, however, can be of two kinds: the one we get through reflection on experience in general, thus objectifying experience itself in a higher order act, or the one we somehow experience directly, being immerged in the whirlpool itself, as it were, and somehow losing track even of ourselves as a subject and as distinct from our surroundings. The first view obviously does not imply that, outside of reflection, we are constantly in states of panic, mystical confusion, or indistinctness. Moreover, we should remind ourselves that there is no reason to believe we understand reality more deeply if and when we enter such confused states and lose our sense of ourselves and identity. James' use of the term "pure experience" is rather meant to help us explore the development of meaning (or perchings) within the continuously changing flux we live through.

Experience is a dynamic process, it equates with a constant realization of relations, both sensory and conceptual. Meaning is possible *only* as a development of experience. Therefore, no specific kind of experience—not even those in which we seem to fuse with the environment in some kind of panic (running from a bear so desperately we lose any distinction between ourselves and our environment) or skillful performance (such as a tennis player who is so desperate to reach the ball before it goes out of bounds that, in the process, he loses any distinction between himself, the racket, and the court)—is absolutely more meaningful than any other experience. As a matter of fact, meaning is never purely

given, but rather constantly realized, attained, overcome, and, also, lost. We can have experiences of meaning in which we are both completely absorbed in the environment and interact with it naturally, as well as in cases in which there is some kind of initial confusion or inability to make sense of the situation. Again, my discovery of the hat in the box on the table was made possible by my initial curiosity about why there was a box present before me in the first place, that is, there was an experience of being puzzled that led me to interact with the world and reach new "perchings."[9] There is, at any rate, one thing that can be said which is important for making any comparison between James and Nishida. That is, for James, the experience of nonmeaning is neither more fundamental nor purer than the experience of meaning.

With this, we have completed a basic overview of James' philosophy of pure experience. Something more will need to be said later concerning the relationship between pure experience and religious experience that emerges from James' writings. For the moment, though, it is sufficient to state that, while the word pure may seem to carry connotations of stillness or clarity, that does not seem to be what James is describing. Instead, James offers us a look at experience as a mosaic whirlwind that articulates itself into various constantly changing relations. While these thoughts were certainly complementary to his views on truth, ethics, and religion, James' notion of pure experience seems to stand on its own as an analysis of how meaning forms in consciousness, and how meaning is experienced in a constant flow of which it constitutes a part, and not a superimposed or overlooking dimension. Keeping this in mind, in the next section we would like to highlight the extent to which Nishida departed from James' initial project.

3 | NISHIDA'S AMBIGUOUS ACCOUNT OF PURE EXPERIENCE (1)—JAMESIAN OR NOT?

Now that we have seen a synopsis of James' understanding of pure experience, we are in a position to evaluate precisely which Jamesian elements remain in Nishida's philosophy. Or, more precisely, we ought to begin by confirming if there were any Jamesian elements in his philosophy in the first place. Was Nishida's usage of James' ideas a stumbling block that detracted from his capacity to explain his own worldview? Or was he aiming to somehow create an empiricism more radical than what James had put forth? We have seen in the introduction that previous research on this topic has tended to be split into various camps regarding these issues. However, before we can make a critical case in favor of one view or another, we need to recognize that Nishida seems to be rather inconsistent with his usage of the phrase pure experience in his early philosophy. As a result, Nishida's relation to James almost seems to follow along from "which version" of Nishida you choose to believe. Here, we will start our comparison by first analyzing the multi-faceted (and seemingly conflicting) nature of Nishida's theory of pure experience.

Now, the "first version" of Nishida seems to take pure experience to be precisely what we have claimed James did *not* mean by the term. That is to say, Nishida starts *An Inquiry into the Good* by explaining pure experience as "the state of experience just as it is without the least addition of deliberative discrimination" (Nishida, 1911/1990, p. 3). It follows from this that when "one directly experiences one's own state of consciousness, there is not yet a subject or an object, and knowing and its object are completely unified" (Nishida, 1911/1990, pp. 3–4). In other words, Nishida contrasts "pure" or "direct" experience with reflective or mediate experience, which has abstracted the subjective and objective elements of our experience from their original unity and put them through the filter of language and thought. While such mediate experience fails to capture the richness of experience, pure experience is described as a "refined" state of consciousness in which things appear exactly as

they are (Nishida, 1911/1990, p. 4). Crucially, this includes our own selves, given that we find no inherent cut between mind and world/self and other in direct experience. For this reason, one who has achieved a state of pure experience will know the true state of things (and the true nature of their own self as being but one part of pure experience) without relying on any of the "fabrications" or "dogmas" that arise when we rely on reflective thought.[10] On this reading, Nishida's goal as a philosopher is to explain the nature of reality by analyzing things as they truly are as they appear in their most pure or unfiltered state.

Going further, we should also note that Nishida openly embraces an ontological aspect of pure experience that was left purposefully vague in James' work, referring to pure experience as the "one true reality" consistently throughout the text. Naturally, one would be welcome to say that Nishida claims that pure experience is an *activity* and that Nishida is not arguing that there is such a *thing* as pure experience.[11] Yet, to focus on this point would lead us away from a more important difference: Nishida's implication that there is a *unified* or *true* reality in the first place. Indeed, in contrast to James' acceptance of an inherent plurality in experience, Nishida seems to focus instead on a "dialectic" of sorts, wherein acts of reflection or thought abstract elements from the whole of pure experience, which is claimed by Nishida to appear implicitly in any experience, but achieving a state of pure experience takes back reality's original unity. Hence, while we may try to express the nature of reality through thought and language, Nishida (at times) implies this to be a mistake, insisting instead that language can only express "an abstract shell" of true reality (Nishida, 1911/1990, pp. 50–51). Rather than scientific analysis or linguistic articulation of one element abstracted from pure experience, it is instead the artist who—lost in artistic praxis—knows reality for what it is in its primordial unity, before it has been broken up or abstracted into different parts (Ex., Nishida, 1911/1990, p. 49). Thus, rather than serving as a constant, never completed (yet also rarely completely naked) flux, as James' notion of pure experience had, Nishida's sense of pure experience is instead presented in the opposite way, that is, as the original state of how reality truly is before it has been analyzed, which we can only understand once we finally overcome the subject–object distinction.

Keeping this in mind, we see why some scholars (most notably, the aforementioned David Dilworth)[12] have argued that Nishida's project was actually rather distant from James' work or that Nishida's interest in James was fueled mainly by similarities in trying to overcome the subject–object divide. On the contrary, however, if we were to listen to a "second version" of Nishida, the two are more similar than they appear at first glance. Most notable are the several passages on meaning in pure experience that seem to be at odds with a characterization of Nishida's pure experience as a psychological state that stands prior to thought or language. More specifically, there appear to be several passages which indicate Nishida takes pure experience as an activity that bestows (otherwise mute) individual moments with meaning by putting them in connection with one another. Consider, for instance, the following passage:

> "[W]hat are the meanings or judgments added to it [pure experience] and how do they relate to pure experience? […] Meanings or judgments derive from the connection of a present consciousness to past consciousnesses; meanings and judgments are based on the unifying activity in the great network of consciousness. They indicate the relation between present consciousness and other consciousnesses, and therefore merely express the position of present consciousness within the network of consciousness." (Nishida, 1911/1990, pp. 9–10)

So, what does all this talk of a "network of consciousnesses" mean? Throughout the first section of *Inquiry*, Nishida seems to argue that *particular moments* in pure experience do not have any inherent

meaning to them, nor is there any trans-experiential Self that could provide meaning from an external standpoint. For this reason, it is only by progressing from one moment to another that the relations between conscious moments can allow themselves to manifest in pure experience as meanings. Citing an example from Nishida directly after the passage cited above, Nishida notes that hearing a "bell" can only be done when several moments of hearing bell-like sounds have been put into relation with one another. In other words, it is only as several experiences of hearing a certain sound aggregate within the stream of consciousness that we can begin to judge said sound as a bell.

This notion of a "network" that puts different moments into relation with one another and, in the process, gives birth to meaning, does indeed start to have a more Jamesian feel to it. At the very least, the basic intuition that knowing is a relation between different parts of pure experience remains intact. It is not by mistake that Nishida cited James' example of the sentence "the pack of cards is on the table" from "The Stream of Thought," when he states that "consciousness is not stuck in its present, for it implicitly relates to other consciousnesses."[13] Perhaps more importantly, though, we find in Nishida an intuition shared with James that, insofar as the content of judgments or meanings can only be disclosed in our experiences, *thought and pure experience are not separable from one another*. To the contrary, Nishida states that they are "different facets of one and the same thing."[14] What this point hints at, crucially, is that pure experience is (for this "second version" of Nishida, anyway) not to be contrasted with mediate or reflective experience. Instead, all experiences, regardless of whether or not they have been peppered with thought, are pure experiences. Indeed, this process of re-contextualizing (or developing) pure experience is—similar to James—continuous and has no final or complete form (Nishida, 1911/1990, p. 13).

Hence, while some passages make Nishida's pure experience out as a particular, quiet state of consciousness that stands in opposition to reflective experience (i.e., as the state of consciousness in which we see things as they "truly" are before concepts spoil them), other passages show Nishida to share James' vision of pure experience as a continuously progressing flux that gains meaning by putting different experiences together, yet never reaches a fully completed state. Indeed, at times, Nishida even seems to share James' vision of "truly" pure experience being somehow chaotic or unintelligible until it has gained the necessary context to produce meanings, possibly borrowing James' example of the newborn.[15] In this sense, we find a certain inconsistency in Nishida's relation to James, and, more specifically, to James' concept of pure experience. How can Nishida's work be at once the opposite of what James intended while also seeming to share the same basic structures?

4 | NISHIDA'S AMBIGUOUS ACCOUNT OF PURE EXPERIENCE (2)—OVERSIGHT OR INSIGHT?

The answer to the question of how Nishida seemingly understood pure experience as both a psychological state that shows things precisely how they are and as a Jamesian flux that generates meaning by putting different experiential elements into relation with one another can be formulated in several different ways. One could highlight the historical dimension of Nishida's development and follow Hirayama (1997) in distinguishing between different "characteristics" of pure experience and how they came in and out of his work in the early 20th century.[16] Otherwise, one could simply claim that in the end, Nishida's project was not actually substantially related to James and that the aspects of his philosophy that reflect a Jamesian influence were minor. For our part, though, we think it is more telling to see how Nishida attempted to connect these two seemingly different notions of pure experience.

Now, in order to bridge this potential gap and show how two apparently different notions of pure experience can co-exist with one another, we will have to take a detour away from this comparison

with James and focus a bit more on how meaning is generated in Nishida's version of pure experience. As we mentioned in the previous section, meaning generates over the flow of pure experience. As we hear the sound of a bell in various different experiences, these sounds start to connect with one another, thereby allowing us to abstract one element of our pure experience and delineate it as a bell. Yet, this explanation raises an important question: how does Nishida explain this act of associating different sounds together and identifying them as a bell? Nishida's answer to this question is, at first glance at least, not necessarily Jamesian in spirit.

> "We ordinarily think we know the universal through thinking and the individual through experience. But apart from the individual there is no universal. That which is truly universal is the concealed power behind the actualization of the individual; the universal is located within the individual as the power that causes the individual to develop. […] The true universal at the base of the unity that is found in the activity of thinking therefore must be the concealed power that takes as its content the individual actuality. The universal and the individual differ only in that one is implicit and the other explicit; the individual is that which is determined by the universal." (Nishida, 1911/1990, pp. 17–18)

Hence, Nishida appeals to the Hegelian (or possibly Neo-Hegelian)[17] conception of concrete universals to explain how we are able to abstract different elements of pure experience into concepts. To use an analogy from Nishida himself, the "seeds" of the concepts we use (e.g., red, triangle, bell, etc.) lay dormant in pure experience until they are realized within the flow of experience (Nishida, 1911/1990, p. 18). These patterns gather within the stream of consciousness, aggregating into recognizable meanings that can then be applied in reflection to make judgments. Hence, when one asks me what a particular noise was, I can look back on previous experiences to answer "it was just a bell."

Of course, there is one more issue in play here, which would be the matter of how reflection occurs in the first place. After all, Nishida very clearly denies the possibility of a pregiven individual subject who can perform this act by their own (selective) volition. To wit, the most coherent answer that Nishida gives would be to look at both reflection and selective volitions as "functions" of pure experience. In other words, from what we can gather, Nishida believes that the stream of consciousness is structurally inclined to seek unity between subject and object in any cases where the dynamic flow of experience causes these two aspects of our experience to be seemingly broken apart from one another.[18] Hence, when any kind of disruption or contradiction appears that splits the subjective and objective aspects of experience in two, reflection occurs as a function of pure experience to put things back on track. As an example, a student walking along a peaceful street on their way to school may be idly enjoying her time (without any strong distinction between her "self" and the world she lives in), but the interjection of an unexpected noise can remove the person from the action. At this point, reflection occurs as a *function* to right the ship. While the initial sound may catch our student unaware at first (and leave her wondering what happened), the judgment that the noise was the school bell allows her to get past the initial startle and go back to walking (and, more importantly, melt back into her surroundings without needing to abstract any particular elements from it). As an addendum, we can even point out that on Nishida's scheme, once these occurrences are regular enough to no longer require reflection, it is possible for our student to respond appropriately to the sound of the bell (e.g., by starting to run so she will not be late for school) without requiring an act of reflection.

Now, the question is: how does all of this help us reconcile the Jamesian idea of experience as a buzzing confusion of different elements in our stream of consciousness generating meaning and the

non-Jamesian view of pure experience as experience "as it is" before it has entered the filter of concepts? Well, outgoing from the previous description of Nishida's idea of pure experience, I think we have a means to argue that pure experience *is* an ever-continuing and anonymous flux that gradually generates meaning within itself and, hence, becomes laden with concepts. At the same time, though, as we have seen in the example of a person reacting to a bell, Nishida's scheme also allows for skillful action wherein the stream of consciousness continues unimpeded without requiring reflection to intervene in the experience. If we put these two elements together, we have a story wherein an anonymous flux is broken by reflection but regains its initial one-ness[19] (and gains a sense of clarity) after it has overcome reflection in skillful performance. If we follow this view, then pure experience is capable of doubling as both (1) a flux or activity that gives meaning in experience and eventually leads to (2) a state of consciousness wherein one can intuit the true nature of their self as existing in continuity with the world (and *not* as a separate or independent soul-substance). Hence, we could interpret Nishida as saying that pure experience *starts* as a primordial confusion but, by its very nature, develops in such a way that we become able to enter said flux and see the world as it truly is through skillful performance without needing to draw ourselves apart from the world or, otherwise, take ourselves away from our experience in the lived present.

Keeping this in mind, we may think that all this is evidence enough that Nishida did indeed actively integrate James' view of pure experience as *one aspect* of his own notion of pure experience or, at the very least, the Jamesian elements of his work are not as inconsequential as some have argued in the past. Moreover, while even Nishida's contemporaries—like Takahashi Satomi—questioned how well such empiricist influence meshed with the Hegelian aspects of his philosophy (such as the concrete universal mentioned earlier), it seems likely that Nishida saw no tension between the two elements at the time of writing *Inquiry*. Or, rather, Nishida's description of concrete universals as "seeds" that develop over the flow of experience seems to clarify how they could be paired with a Jamesian view of meaning developing through transitive relations arising in concrete experience. We make this claim insofar as both require a *dynamism* in consciousness for meaning to be generated and, additionally, both rely on the intuition that relations generated within consciousness are *real* (and not mere psychological fictions). Hence—even if Nishida may introduce elements James would not admit to—there is at least a surface-level coherency to the two seemingly conflicting visions of pure experience that Nishida puts forth.[20]

5 | PURITY AND NORMATIVITY IN EXPERIENCE

To summarize what we found in the previous two sections, we have seen that Nishida's characterization is inconsistent, given that he seems to treat it both as a particular awakened state of consciousness of seeing things precisely as they are and as a universal activity that generates meaning which is present in any and all experiences. However, we have also seen that this is almost certainly not by accident, insofar as Nishida seems to paint a picture in which an anonymous flux generates meaning in itself by analyzing its different aspects in reflection before—finally—overcoming this analytic moment to see things for what they are without abstracting them from their inherent unity. In Nishida's scheme, then, while there are elements (such as the concrete universal) that James would almost certainly deny, it would seem that they are capable of co-existing with a Jamesian account of the flow of consciousness generating meaning within itself by putting one conscious moment into relation with another. At the least, then, we can safely say that Nishida's interest in James was probably not superficial or based on a misunderstanding of James' work. However, there are two—in our view—much more crucial differences between Nishida and James that deserve special attention: the issues of normativity and the ultimate unity or universality of pure experience found in religious consciousness.

As we have stressed multiple times in the first section of this paper, the word "pure" for James does not carry with it any positive connotation or implication that experience should be a certain

way. As Joel Krueger has pointed out before us, however, this is not the case for Nishida.[21] There are two reasons that we say this is not the case for Nishida. First, one could possibly argue that "pure" experience has a special status in Nishida's philosophy insofar as there it contains within itself a structural drive to reunite subject with object. In other words, as we have described in the last section, any gaps, inconsistencies, or contradictions open a rift between subject and object and—as Nishida makes clear throughout the book—the most natural movement of pure experience is to reconcile this issue through the functions of reflection or selective volition. Second, and more importantly, we make this argument because pure experience is granted an explicit ethical and religious value by Nishida as a result of this structural concern. In other words, for Nishida, it is not only the case that experience *can* be pure; rather, it is more the case that experience *should* be pure.

This second claim likely raises the question of why Nishida would give the purity of experience any ethical or religious value. While many authors have tackled this question in detail,[22] the basic reasons for this have already been alluded to in the previous section. In pure experience, we overcome our usual tendency to view ourselves as entities cut off from the rest of existence and instead feel the primordial connection between ourselves and the world we live in. In other words, to borrow a phrase from Nishida, in pure experience we return to the garden of Eden, finding ourselves back in touch with our original unity (Nishida, 1911/1990, p. 151). In doing so, we are released from the struggles, contradictions, and unfulfilled desires that haunt reflective consciousness and, instead, find a profound sense of freedom in this unity by moving naturally, in lockstep with events as they occur in the lived present.[23] As we discussed in the case of a student responding to a bell, one could say that the student's mastery of situational skills (running after hearing a bell) affords her both a release from any unsureness of how to handle the problem as well as a certain degree of harmony with all of the other elements that make up her environment. In this release from the contradictions and oppositions (that lead us to wonder what we should be doing), we find only a continuous and harmonious progression between ourselves and the world.

What Nishida sees in these situations, as far as we can tell, is a religious experience of *transcending* this duality between unity and disunity. Or, put differently, coming into contact with a notion of experience that ultimately unites all of the different experiences within itself. Indeed, for Nishida, the very nature of religion is to "break free" of our individual subjectivity and meet with the "lofty universal spirit that functions at the base of consciousness" (Nishida, 1911/1990, p. 156). Put differently, for Nishida, there exists a dimension of experience in which we become one with the universe as a manifestation of God and comes to know our true self therein. Now, to be clear, James does not outright deny the existence of these sorts of experiences of feeling a one-ness with the world. To the contrary, as one can see in *The Varieties of Religious Experiences*, he admits such a state of feeling at one with the world as *one kind* of religious consciousness.[24] Additionally, James does not merely overlook potential connections between his theory of pure experience and ethics or religious consciousness. However, the fact that James' philosophy is capable of accommodating multiple different "kinds" of religious consciousness at all shows a fundamental gap between his theory and Nishida's early philosophy, given that Nishida seems to be asking for *more* than just positing this as one type of experience. Indeed, while James clearly views pure experience as a "plurality" or "mosaic" that cannot be "fully" or "completely" unified into a single category, Nishida, in the end, uses this description of religious consciousness to integrate the various conflicting elements in pure experience into one overarching, universal activity. Put differently, Nishida's religious philosophy attempts to "go beyond" James' view of pure experience as a never completely unified mosaic by showing how all these different, plural experiences can culminate in the religious life of the true self.

Perhaps it is on this note that we can understand why some interpreters have claimed that Nishida started with similar conclusions to James' notion of pure experience, but ultimately went beyond them

into the realm of metaphysics and religion.[25] If nothing else, it is clear from the above considerations that Nishida did not merely want to address ontological or epistemological problems related to pure experience. As Nishida himself stated several times, his philosophy of pure experience was meant to serve as a platform to rethink not only the nature of reality, but also what it means to be a concrete individual self living in that reality. Insofar as this is the case, we can and should respect Nishida's attempt to go beyond merely identifying formal structures of reality by additionally attempting to account for the concrete self that is situated within pure experience and drawing important conclusions about our religious/ethical fulfillment. Put more simply, we find in Nishida a genuine attempt to "explain everything" starting from pure experience that includes a genuine explication of what I am and how I can achieve genuine self-realization. On at least a superficial level, this attempt seems to "go beyond" James' sketch of a new form of epistemology and ontology (and his cautious attitude toward tying it in with his religious, ethical, or ontological thought).

For our part, we believe that authors who view Nishida as reaching similar conclusions to James but somehow attempting to go beyond him have the right idea. However, we do need to recognize some issues while making this claim. First, and possibly most importantly, we should admit that even if Nishida sought a more radical unity of consciousness than James admitted, this does not necessarily make him more coherent or philosophically appealing. Indeed, James has good reason to avoid the kind of ultimate unity that Nishida pursues. This is true on a technical level, seeing as to how Nishida's final, unified pure experience in religion seems to imply an unjustified assumption that recollective, imaginative, perceptual, and all other types of experience comprise a single, unified category.[26] Yet, it seems difficult to take for granted that all of these experiences could be part of an overarching and uniform activity, particularly from James' and Nishida's respective attempts to accept only what is given in experience and avoid trans-empirical elements. But perhaps more importantly, the ethico-religious implications of pure experience likely are not as clear cut as Nishida would like them to be. As we have established, James would also admit that reuniting subject with object and feeling "at one with the world" in skillful performance can be an ethically positive tool. However, to assume that this state of being at one with the world is the only conception of religious consciousness that is compatible with pure experience is question-begging. Moreover, the idea that achieving a state of unity between subject and object in skillful performance is always morally good leads to no shortage of unintuitive conclusions. For example, we could easily imagine an assassin skillfully killing her target in one masterful stroke with no need for reflective thought. Intuitively speaking, it seems to make sense to say that this would be an ethically blameworthy act. Yet, would Nishida's scheme not render her actions to be good? After all, she has reclaimed the unity between subject and object, with no disharmony between her and the environment that she lives in. Even putting this kind of case aside, it seems hard to say that Nishida has done enough in *Inquiry* to convincingly argue in favor of the normative value he ascribes to pure experience.

Once we make these disclaimers, though, we can safely return to the premise that Nishida has somehow radicalized James or developed what was already present in his work. Specifically, the point that Nishida accounts for the concrete life of the self-embedded in pure experience is worthy of our attention. Or, perhaps, this way of thinking can point to the very core of Nishida's philosophy: Dating back to *Inquiry*, it is clear that Nishida intended to give a systematic account of how the self becomes aware of itself as an individual amidst the otherness inherent in our experience. While Nishida's views on ethics, free will, and religion were handled with more nuance over the course of his career,[27] there was an undeniable focus on providing a logical account of what the individual is and connecting this back with our most concrete experiences as selves that seems to mirror many recent developments in debates on how we individuals can be aware of ourselves as individuals.[28]

6 | CONCLUSION

To begin this paper, we started by asking which of the competing interpretations best captured Nishida's relation to James. Various authors have implied that Nishida's work is either only superficially related to James or was better off for embracing the more "Hegelian" aspects of his thought. For our part, however, we tend to side with those who state that Nishida attempted to develop or radicalize James' insights by detailing an ultimate unity in experience that culminates in religion. Indeed, as others have noted before us, Nishida attempts to not only present a view of experience as a nondual "mosaic" of sorts, but also accounts for the ultimate culmination of these various experiences in the religious self. Hence, Nishida tries to go beyond James insofar as he draws various normative claims about the purity of experience related to how the individual self develops within its flux. However, we should also emphasize that Nishida's attempt to go beyond James is likely little more than that: an attempt. In addition to (at least superficially) inconsistent descriptions of pure experience, Nishida loses sight of the reasons that James did not go this far. Namely, Nishida seems to assume rather dubiously that there is such an ultimate or unified category of experience in the first place and, as a result, loses sight of the potential plurality in religious consciousness that James was able to pick up on.

As a final note, though, we would like to emphasize that this does not devalue Nishida's contribution to the world philosophical community. What Nishida provides, and would continue to pursue throughout his career, is a full-blooded account of how the individual comes to achieve self-awareness and religious self-realization. While Nishida's earliest attempt here in *Inquiry* makes several unjustified (if not unjustifiable) assumptions that cause problems for his program, the fact remains that he offered a thorough-going view of how the individual self is developed and achieves its various realizations based on the structures that could be found in immediate or direct experience. While this platform may not have found immediate success in his early work, it did provide a springboard for Nishida's further attempts at this important task.

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ENDNOTES

[1] This is at least partially evidenced by Nishida's letters to his lifelong friend, D. T. Suzuki, in which he announces his affinity to James by stating that "[m]any different philosophical theories have been built upon logic, but I would like to build [my own] upon psychology. I have recently found things like William James' theory [説] of pure experience to be quite interesting. Do you know if he has finished working on his metaphysics yet?" (Nishida, 1966c, p. 76) While this is just one example, what is most important is that there is plenty of evidence to suggest that Nishida did not only read James, but was infatuated with his writings in the years leading up to *Inquiry*.

[2] See Takahashi (1912/2001, p. 311). As a disclaimer, we should note that Takahashi does not mention James specifically by name, instead offering those like Ernst Mach as examples of the empiricist elements in Nishida's philosophy of pure experience. However, as one of Nishida's earliest and sharpest critics, Takahashi's observation is certainly worthy of our attention.

[3] This includes also multiple contributions from the literature written in Japanese, like Shimomura (1990) and Ishida (2013), who seem to agree that it would be more appropriate to say Nishida was sympathetic to James' position, rather than saying that they are discussing the same thing. Moreover, we think we could also safely include

Heisig (1997) and Kozyra (2008), who claim that Nishida either missed out on crucial aspects of James' thought or otherwise took only hints needed to further his own project.

[4] Perhaps the most enthusiastic proponent of Nishida "radicalizing" James' thought is Abe Nobuhiko (Abe, 1993), who argues that Nishida took pure experience as far as it goes, all the way to a radical notion of "inner-transcendence" that remains present throughout his entire career. See also Shimizu (2016), who looks at Nishida as developing ideas that originally "evolved" in James' work as looked at specifically from the relationship between the one and the many, or Kazashi (1993), who notes that Jamesian affinities with Buddhist nonsubstantialism would have offered Nishida an appealing platform to build off of throughout his career. Included also in this category are authors like Friedl (2001) and Osaki (2015), who emphasize that Nishida's attempt to go beyond James either ended in failure or as the cause of Nishida somehow losing the elements that made James' work interesting.

[5] For clarity's sake, we should recognize that the word "stuff" may sound like a form of neutral monism, but that is not necessarily the case. Indeed, when pressed for precisely what pure experience is, James stated this clearly the article, "Does Consciousness Exist," that we "[…] have now to say that there is no general stuff of which experience at large is made. There are as many stuffs as there are 'natures' in the things experienced." (James, 1904a, p. 487). Thus, pure experience is not something "tangible," but rather appears to be a *phenomenological* description of experience as it is lived through. It is for this reason that the ontological status of pure experience is left purposefully vague throughout his writings. For a similar view to ours, see Siegfried (1990) and Krueger (2022). For a summary of alternative views of James as a pan-psychist or neutral monist, see Cooper (1990).

[6] As clear as this may sound at first blush, James' principle is not entirely unproblematic. After all, it is not obvious what would fall under the umbrella of "the rest" in this case.

[7] See Krueger (2022) for a more detailed explanation of how meanings and concepts help tie experiences together in James' system.

[8] As a tool for understanding how "sensuous relations" are possible in the first place, consider James' disagreements with another philosopher to whom Nishida is often compared, T. H. Green. James states, "[y]ears ago, when T. H. Green's ideas were most influential, I was much troubled by his criticisms of English sensationalism. One of his disciples in particular would always say to me, 'Yes! TERMS may indeed be possibly sensational in origin; but RELATIONS, what are they but pure acts of the intellect coming upon the sensations from above, and of a higher nature?' I well remember the sudden relief it gave me to perceive one day that SPACE relations at any rate were homogeneous with the terms between which they mediated. The terms were spaces, and the relations were other intervening spaces. For the Greenites space relations had been saltatory, for me they became thenceforward ambulatory." [James, 1885/1987, p. 898]

[9] Now, if the opposite is also true (i.e., it is impossible to have an experience of confusion or nonmeaning without first having an experience of something as meaningful) it is not properly thematized by James, so we shall leave the issue aside for now.

[10] As examples, Nishida provides to musicians, artists, and rock climbers who have mastered their craft as persons who have overcome the subject–object dichotomy and see true reality as it "actually" appears.

[11] While exploring this point goes beyond the scope of our paper, there are likely two ideas that need to be kept in mind when discussing the scope of Nishida's ontological claims regarding pure experience. First, it seems Nishida could have (or perhaps, should have) taken the agnostic stance on the ontology of pure experience that James had. After all, he explicitly reminds us that pure experience is "more radical" than authors like Berkeley (Nishida, 1911/1990, p. 43), implying that he is not interested in validating a world "external" to perspectival experiences, but is rather interested in how these various perspectival moments form a meaningful system. The second is that Nishida may not be fully coherent in denying any reality beyond these perspectival moments, granted that he also likens pure experience-as-reality to the entirety of the universe throughout the work.

[12] Dilworth's (1969) specific claim is that Nishida never quite grasped James' approximation of consciousness as a function (p. 99) and that this ability to understand consciousness as a function of lived experience ultimately ended with Nishida returning to precisely the kind of Berkeley-ian idealism that James disavowed (p. 108). Perhaps a more diplomatic way of approaching this is the way that Shimomura (1990) phrases the matter who, instead of discussing whether or not Nishida grasped James' idea, rather argues that Nishida was indeed sympathetic with James, but ultimately insists they were pursuing different projects. Importantly, this also reflects Nishida's own assessment of his

relationship with James after the writing of *Inquiry* (Nishida, 1966a, p. 39), wherein he states that he has sympathy for James' attempt to break through the subject/object and mind/matter distinctions, but ultimately finds James to over-emphasize disunity in experience.

[13] Nishida (1911/1990, p. 33); For further qualification, James uses this example to show how words in a sentence are not taken atomistically, but rather draw the flow of consciousness in a particular direction. Once we have stated "the pack of cards," our attention is drawn to the object on the table. As Nishida affirms, the subject implies the predicate somehow. In this sense, for both thinkers, we cannot reduce experience to an atomistic snapshot of how things "really" are. Rather, pure experience is always unfolding and putting different moments into relation with one another. What is important is that Nishida seemed to take James as sharing his view of development through differentiation, wherein it is the variety between different moments that allow us to identify different meanings in experience.

[14] Nishida (1911/1990, p. 10). See also "[…] as James said in 'The World of Pure Experience,' even the consciousness of relations is a kind of experience—so we realize that the activity of thinking constitutes a kind of pure experience." (Nishida, 1911/1990, p. 13)

[15] For instance, consider Nishida's claim that "[c]onsciousness does not arise from the consolidation of what psychologists call simple mental elements; it constitutes a single system at the start. The consciousness of a newborn infant is most likely a chaotic unity in which even the distinction between light and dark is unclear." (Nishida, 1911/1990, p. 6). Otherwise, Nishida states in his notes, "[t]he kind of clear sensations (明了なる感覚) we have today come as a result of various experiences. A newborn cannot even distinguish between light (明) and dark (暗). At the beginning, consciousness is always confused." (Nishida, 1966b, p. 294; authors' translation)

[16] Hirayama (1997) specifically organizes Nishida's pure experience into five different meanings that interacted with one another in different ways. First, as a kind of nonconceptual "sense data," that is, experiences without any conceptual content (a primitive mental state). Second, as the whole of the systematic development of consciousness. Third, as the fundamental form of experience. Fourth as an ontological claim that experience was the one true reality and, finally, as God. While we do not have time to see how Hirayama arranges which aspects of Nishida's pure experience developed when, at this point we should merely note that one could also profit from a historiographic approach to thinking through seeming inconsistencies in Nishida's writings.

[17] While many have overlooked this point, authors like Heisig (2001) and Morino (2015) have pointed out that Nishida spent time in his youth researching Thomas Hill Green and, hence, the influence of British Idealism can be felt even in his earliest philosophy when looking at terms like the concrete universal.

[18] Naturally, this has raised the question of how and why unity must be pursued if subject and object are initially given as one. While the answer may depend upon one's reading of Nishida, Nishida himself (in response to Takahashi Satomi's posing of this question) clearly states that this is the wrong way of looking at things, given that the difference between subject and object is a matter of degree (see Nishida, 1965, especially pp. 300 ~ 302). In other words, subject and object are different aspects of pure experience that become more "distant" from one another over the course of experience's development, but ultimately belong to the same domain of consciousness. A useful image would be to think of subject and object as the two handles of an accordion: they are distinguishable elements belonging to the same whole, whose dynamic separation and unification makes music happen (both literally and figuratively).

[19] As Itabashi (2021) argues, the one-ness implied here may not also necessarily imply the elimination of multiplicity. Instead, to use a phrase from Itabashi, we could refer to pure experience as the "one place (一なる場)" where "different elements" meet. This interpretation is backed up in particular by passages like "The fundamental mode of reality is such that reality is one while it is many and many while it is one; in the midst of equality it maintains distinctions and in the midst of distinctions it maintains equality." (Nishida, 1911/1990, p. 57)

[20] As one more point to explain why James would probably not admit concrete universals into pure experience, we could follow Krueger (2022) has argued, James' notion of pure experience was also meant as a means to show how conceptual content could never fully grasp the *particularity* of any given experience. In the end, this seems to go somewhat against Nishida's attempts to argue that the content of consciousness is somehow general.

[21] Krueger, 2007, pp. 158 ~ 165 in particular for an explanation of this point with regards to Nishida.

[22] See, for instance, Nishitani (1991).

[23] Conversely, Nishida also claims that "[a]ll of our demands are differentiations that emerge from the religious demand, and their development results in a return to it." (Nishida, 1911/1990, p. 152)

[24] See James' lectures on mysticism in chapters XVI and XVII in particular. Therein, James defends those who do not necessarily feel the same religious compulsion that Nishida seems to. "But I now proceed to add that mystics have no right to claim that we ought to accept the deliverance of their peculiar experiences, if we are ourselves outsiders and feel no private call thereto. The utmost they can ever ask of us in this life is to admit that they establish a presumption. They form a consensus and have an unequivocal outcome; and it would be odd, mystics might say, if such a unanimous type of experience should prove to be altogether wrong. At bottom, however, this would only be an appeal to numbers, like the appeal of rationalism the other way; and the appeal to numbers has no logical force. If we acknowledge it, it is for 'suggestive,' not for logical reasons: we follow the majority because to do so suits our life." (James, 1902/1987, p. 420)

[25] For example, see Feenberg and Arisaka (1996, pp. 32–36).

[26] The best explanation we have for how Nishida can justify this assumption is found in his discussions of illusions and dreaming, when he states "[f]or example, a lamp is before me. If I am the only one who can it, it might be deemed a subjective hallucination. But when each of us acknowledges it in the same way it becomes an objective fact. The objective independent world arises from such a character" (Nishida, 1911/1990, p. 54). The implication is that there is no discernible distinction between different types of experiences beyond their coherency within the broader context of different experiences. Hence, leaving the matter of whether it is persuasive or not aside, one could potentially argue that our capacity to distinguish between different forms of experience comes not from a difference in phenomenology or ontology, but rather only from context that stems from comparing a current moment to what others are experiencing or what one has previously experienced.

[27] A nuanced view of how Nishida's ethics matured alongside of his logical foundations can be found in Taguchi's (2006) exploration free will and the problem of evil throughout Nishida's career.

[28] See, for instance, Bermúdez (1998) and Baker (2012), who attempt to tackle the question of how self-consciousness can arise from nonconceptual conscious states (or if we need to suppose such conscious states at all), or Dainton (2008) and his attempt to articulate a "phenomenal self" outgoing from observations on the stream of consciousness. There are many other potential examples, but the point is that questions of how we concretely become aware of ourselves as individuals are still quite relevant and Nishida seems to offer a unique answer to such questions.

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