

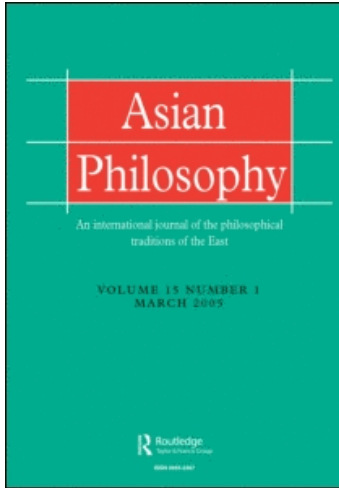
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Later Nishida on Self-awareness: *Have I lost myself yet?*

Yuko Ishihara

In this paper, I argue that later Nishida's analysis of self-awareness (jikaku) provides a new perspective on the nature of self-awareness as understood in the philosophical literature today. I argue that the contemporary literature deals with two kinds of self-awareness; the higher-order theory understands self-awareness to be an objectified awareness and the phenomenological tradition generally understands self-awareness to be, at least primarily, a non-objectified awareness. In light of this, I first give an account of Nishida's 'acting-intuition' with reference to the 'historical body.' Then I argue that later Nishida's analysis of self-awareness depicts the inadequacy of the two kinds of self-awareness as both being stuck in the subject-object dichotomy which, according to Nishida, is but one mode of experience, namely the mode of difference. Nishida provides an account that ultimately foregrounds the experiential mode of unity that negates any sense of differentiation between the subject and object.

Introduction

In this paper, I argue that later Nishida's analysis of self-awareness (*jikaku* 自覚) provides a new perspective on the nature of self-awareness (or self-consciousness—I take these terms to be synonymous for my purposes in this paper) as understood in the philosophical literature today. I will be particularly interested in how self-awareness is construed by the higher-order theory of consciousness and by the phenomenological tradition. I will argue that the contemporary literature deals with two kinds of self-awareness: *objectified awareness* (awareness of oneself as an object) and *non-objectified awareness* (awareness of having a point-of-view on one's experience). I argue that the higher-order theory understands self-awareness to be an objectified awareness and that the phenomenological tradition generally understands self-awareness to be, at least primarily, a non-objectified awareness.

In light of this, I will first give an account of Nishida's 'acting-intuition' with reference to the 'historical body,' both concepts of which are central to later Nishida Philosophy. Then I will argue that later Nishida's analysis of self-awareness

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depicts the *inadequacy* of the two kinds of self-awareness as both being stuck in the subject-object dichotomy which, according to Nishida, is but one mode of experience, namely the *mode of difference*. Nishida provides an account that ultimately foregrounds the experiential *mode of unity* that negates any sense of differentiation between the subject and object. It is this experiential mode of unity that characterizes Nishida's understanding of self-awareness, not as an awareness of a differentiation or a unity, but as a realization of the *infinite process* of unity and differentiation. Therefore, Nishida's analysis of the nature of self-awareness allows us to reexamine the validity for taking self-awareness to be something that arises only upon differentiation, which apparently is a distorted view if we come to acknowledge the existence of the moment of unity in our experience.

Higher-order Theory of Consciousness

The higher-order theory of consciousness was initially proposed by David Rosenthal (1986) and others have developed different variations of the theory ever since. As Gallagher and Zahavi affirm (2010), the higher-order theory of consciousness has been the dominant theory in cognitive science and analytical philosophy for the past two or three decades, i.e. ever since Rosenthal proposed the theory. Despite its variations, the general idea of the theory is unequivocal and quite simple: a mental state is conscious only when there is a higher-order state about the first-order state. The higher-order theory purports to account for the distinctness of conscious states as opposed to unconscious states. In order to understand their theory, it is important to understand the two uses of the term 'conscious' that the proponents of the higher-order theory employ: intransitive and transitive. To be intransitively conscious is to be conscious *simpliciter* as opposed to being unconscious. On the other hand, to be transitively conscious is to be conscious *of something*. The higher-order theory accounts for intransitive consciousness in terms of transitive consciousness. This is to say that a mental state is intransitively conscious if and only if there is a higher-order mental state that is transitively conscious of the first-order mental state. The picture is simple. Conscious states are constituted of two levels: the first-order lower mental state and the second-order higher mental state (which is either a perception or a thought). Now, importantly, they say, the second-order mental states themselves are usually unconscious. Only in introspection, when a third-order mental state takes up the second-order state, does the second-order perception or thought become conscious. This point is crucial for the higher-order theory in order to avoid an infinite regress. For, if the second-order state is itself intransitively conscious, then *ex hypothesi*, there must be a third-order state that is transitively conscious of the second-order state, and so on *ad infinitum*.

Now, the question of interest for my purpose in this paper is how the higher-order theory accounts for self-awareness. Because a conscious state necessarily consists of the transitive state taking the intransitive state as its object, and because it would be absurd to say that one is self-aware *unconsciously*, proponents of the theory must

say that self-awareness is a transitive consciousness. When I am conscious of the table in front of me, I am also self-conscious, i.e. conscious that it is *myself* who is conscious of the table. According to Rosenthal's higher-order thought theory, when the first-order state is taken up by a suitable higher-order thought about an object as being present, one is not only conscious of the mental state being thought but also conscious of the self to which the thought represents as belonging (Rosenthal, 2004, pp. 160–161). So, for example, if I have a thought 'I am now thinking about the table in front of me,' I am conscious of two things: the thought (the table in front of me) and the thinker of the thought (myself).

I would like to identify this kind of self-awareness as the *objectified* awareness. According to such understanding, self-awareness is the awareness of the self as an *object*, i.e. when the self is given as an object to consciousness. Bermudez (1998) has argued for an embodied objectified self-awareness. He argues that exteroceptive awareness of objects—say of touching a book—is always accompanied by proprioceptive awareness, of the feeling of the movement of my fingers. In other words, the awareness of the object is accompanied by the awareness of myself. Moreover, the awareness of the book and the awareness of my fingers are the same *sort* of awareness. The difference merely consists in whether the object is given *thematically* (when it is focally aware) or if it is given *only marginally* (when it is peripherally aware). Hence Bermudez (p. 139) states that, 'Attention can be directed either proprioceptively or exteroceptively, and it can be shifted from one to the other, but this should be viewed as an alteration of the balance between focal and peripheral awareness.'

Gallagher (2003, p. 57) criticizes Bermudez's observation through phenomenological analysis. He argues that:

when my attention is directed at the book, my awareness of my body is precisely not an *identifying* awareness of it *as an object*, that is, it is not a perceptual awareness. As I keep track of the book, I do not have to keep track of my hands.

However, to say that proprioceptive awareness is not an awareness of the body as object in the sense that it is not a *perceptual* awareness is not equivalent to saying that it is not any kind of objectified awareness. In other words, it could well be that proprioceptive awareness is an objectified awareness of *some sort*, just not of the perceptual kind.¹ In fact, such understanding is what motivates Rosenthal's construal of self-awareness. He criticizes the perceptual or quasi-perceptual model of self-awareness (a position he attributes to Hume) and instead, relies on the higher-order *thought* to entail self-awareness as non-perceptually *objectively* given (cf. Rosenthal, 2004).

Zahavi (2002), too, criticizes Bermudez for endorsing the view that self-awareness is an objectified awareness. In fact, he points out that much of analytical philosophy operates with this view (p. 22). Consequently, the debate concentrates on whether the awareness of the self is given as an object focally or peripherally (or for that matter not given at all). Zahavi proceeds to criticize the view that self-awareness is primarily an objectified awareness on phenomenological grounds. Whenever I perceive an apple, we can all supposedly agree that I am aware that I am doing so.

More generally, whenever one is in a conscious state, one is more or less aware that one is in it. The debatable question is *in what way* one is aware of oneself. Both Zahavi and Gallagher argue that this awareness is not an objectified awareness. Whenever I perceive an apple, I am not thematically aware of myself. When I *do* attend to myself, I am attending to it as an object. But this objectified awareness is *not* present whenever my consciousness is directed at the apple. As Gallagher (2003, p. 57) observes, 'Indeed, it [the objectified awareness of myself] interrupts that perception.' Hence, phenomenological analysis suggests that in conscious states, the awareness of the self is not present peripherally as a potential to be thematically given. Self-awareness, that is present whenever one is conscious, is not an objectified awareness.

The next question to ask is, what *do* the phenomenologist understand self-awareness to be? In the following section, I will discuss the phenomenological approach to self-awareness.

Phenomenological Approach to Self-awareness

The fundamental disagreement between the higher-order theory and the phenomenological approach is that the latter understands conscious states on a one-level account. In other words, intransitive consciousness is not explained in terms of transitive consciousness but rather, mental states are *intrinsically* intransitively conscious. Such disagreement may be illustrated by an example. Say that I am feeling an abdominal pain. According to the higher-order theory, this conscious state is constitutive of two levels: the lower-order mental state (presumably identified or associated to some neural activity n_1) and the higher-order thought or perception (another neural activity n_2) about the pain (i.e. the n_1). It is by virtue of the higher-order thought or perception that the lower-order mental state becomes conscious. Hence, the sensation of pain, which is the lower-order mental state, does not itself amount to the conscious awareness of the pain. Consequently, according to this theory, it is perfectly reasonable for one to have an unconscious sensation of pain, i.e. to merely have an unconscious neural activity n_1 . On the other hand, because phenomenologists argue that conscious states are one-leveled, i.e. that intransitive consciousness is not a relational property but an intrinsic quality of experience, according to the phenomenologist, a pain is *necessarily* painful (cf. Zahavi, 2002, p. 13; p. 17). An unconscious sensation of pain is no sensation at all. Moreover, this is true for all experiences. As Sartre (2003, p. 10) claims: 'Just as an extended object is compelled to exist according to three dimensions, so an intention, a pleasure, a grief can exist only as immediate self-consciousness.'²

Phenomenologists give a specific term for the intransitive consciousness that is intrinsic to experience: *pre-reflective consciousness*. Hence, conscious states are fundamentally pre-reflectively conscious. When I perceive the apple, I am pre-reflectively conscious of perceiving the apple. Importantly, when I am in a pre-reflective conscious state, I am not conscious of myself as the perceiver of the

apple in the sense that I take myself as an object. I take myself as an object only in *reflective consciousness*, which takes the pre-reflective consciousness as an object. The structure of pre-reflective and reflective consciousness both consists of two aspects: *positional* (or *thetic*) awareness and *non-positional* (or *non-thetic*) awareness. Positional awareness is an aspect of the doctrine of intentionality which states that every consciousness is conscious of something. Hence every act of consciousness, whether pre-reflective or reflective, posits an object. When I am conscious of perceiving the apple, the object of the positional awareness is the apple. Furthermore, I am more or less *aware* that I am in a conscious state. As we have already seen, for the phenomenologist, such awareness is not an objectified awareness. I do not have a positional awareness of the apple *and myself*; the apple is posited but I am not. Rather, the awareness that I am in a conscious state is *non-positional* awareness. What is the nature of this non-positional awareness?

It is helpful here to turn to Sartre's claim that 'every positional consciousness of an object is at the same time a non-positional consciousness of itself' (2003, p. 9). It is not the case that the positional and the non-positional awareness are two distinct acts of consciousness. Rather, they are two aspects of a single act of consciousness. It may even be better understood if we say that every act of consciousness *is* a positional consciousness *that is* non-positionally aware of itself. Hence, importantly, although positional awareness and non-positional awareness are distinguishable aspects of consciousness, they do not form a lower-higher level relation. We are speaking of a single level by which we can pick out different aspects of the consciousness. Now, let us return to our example with the apple. When there is a positional awareness of the apple, what other sort of aspect does this conscious act have? The idea is that even when I am completely absorbed with the positional object (i.e. the apple), I am still aware that *I am not the apple*. There is a sense of differentiation, a certain distance to the apple. In other words, I have a *point-of-view* to the act of consciousness. Having a point-of-view is not equivalent to *seeing* the point-of-view itself. The point-of-view is given in a way that is not posited, but merely given. This point-of-view is necessary for the positional awareness *and* the positional awareness is necessary for having the point-of-view. Hence every act of consciousness is positionally aware of its object and non-positionally aware of taking the point-of-view.

Now, pre-reflective consciousness is always positionally aware of its object (e.g. the apple) and non-positionally aware of the point-of-view. Reflective consciousness, on the other hand, has the same structure as pre-reflective consciousness but what it posits is not an object in the world as such. It is positionally aware of the previous act of consciousness and, of course, non-positionally aware of having a point-of-view. Consequently, every act of consciousness has non-positional awareness (i.e. takes a point-of-view) and positional awareness, and the object of the positional awareness determines whether it is pre-reflective or reflective consciousness. It is obvious by now that according to this understanding of consciousness, the awareness of oneself *whenever one is conscious* is not the objectified awareness but the non-objectified awareness, i.e. the non-positional awareness. Hence, according to the above analysis,

self-awareness, in the above sense, is understood to be the non-positional awareness, i.e. given as the point-of-view.

What we have seen so far is the basic structure of consciousness put forth by Sartre. Gallagher (2003, 2010) and Zahavi (2002, 2010) have treated the Sartrean analysis as being widely applicable to the phenomenological tradition in general. Hence, following their lead, I will do the same. Both Gallagher and Zahavi, when they give an analysis of the phenomenological understanding of self-awareness, identify the phenomenological approach as the *pre-reflective* self-awareness and contrast it to the *reflective* self-awareness. But as we have seen, the phenomenological approach to self-awareness is characterized by the *non-positional awareness* which is present in *both* the pre-reflective and reflective consciousness. Yet I believe this is not a consequence of a misunderstanding on either part. To be exact, what they mean by pre-reflective self-awareness is, as far as I understand, pre-reflective *non-positional* awareness. This is obvious when they say, ‘That pre-reflective self-awareness is implicit, then, means that I am not confronted with a thematic or explicit awareness of the experience as belonging to myself. Rather we are dealing with a non-observational self-acquaintance’ (Gallagher and Zahavi, 2010, section 1). Or when they say, ‘All the experiences are given (at least tacitly) as *my* experiences, as experiences *I* am undergoing or living through’ (*ibid*). On the other hand, what they refer to as the reflective self-awareness is the reflective *positional* awareness. It is only in reflection, when one takes a step back to observe the act of consciousness, that the explicit I (what they also refer to as being thematic, conceptual and mediated) appear. *Prima facie*, it seems like they are failing to acknowledge the distinction between non-positional and positional awareness and only attending to the pre-reflective and reflective distinction. However, a closer look at the matter would reveal that this is not the case.

The only way we can speak of self-awareness on the pre-reflective level is to say that it is non-positional. On the reflective level, however, there are two ways we can speak of self-awareness: as the non-positional (which would be of the same kind as the pre-reflective) and as the positional. It is this positional awareness (which takes as the object the previous pre-reflective consciousness) that is distinct to the reflective consciousness. Hence, one could identify the second type of self-awareness—the reflective positional awareness—as the reflective self-awareness since it is not present in the pre-reflective consciousness. And this is exactly what Gallagher and Zahavi seem to be doing.

Their motives for drawing the distinction between the pre-reflective and the reflective self-awareness presumably comes from identifying the existence of a primitive form of self-awareness prior to language and conceptual mediation. As Zahavi (2002, p. 17) claims, ‘*reflective* self-awareness (or ‘higher-order representation’) is derivative, and . . . it always presupposes the existence of a prior unthematic, non-objectifying, *prereflective* self-awareness as its condition of possibility.’ It is not that Gallagher and Zahavi deny reflective self-awareness to be any kind of self-awareness. Reflective self-awareness is a kind of self-awareness but only of a derivative kind. Hence as Gallagher and Zahavi (2010, section 6) affirm, ‘The

recognition of the existence of a primitive form of pre-reflective self-consciousness is an important starting point for an understanding of more elaborate forms of self-consciousness that are concept- and language-dependent.'

It is important to emphasize that the all-pervasive non-positional awareness and the reflective positional (self-) awareness are of a different *kind* of self-awareness. Simply put, non-positional awareness is a *non-objectified* awareness and the reflective positional (self-) awareness is an *objectified* awareness. It is commonplace for the former awareness to be characterized as being 'implicit' and the latter as being 'explicit.' Although the expressions are not completely misplaced, such characterization does not quite suit the picture. For one could get the impression that the implicit awareness is a potential to become explicit, or in other words, that the explicit awareness *replaces* the implicit awareness. Yet, as we have seen, the non-positional (non-objectified) awareness is never replaced by the objectified awareness but rather is presupposed by the objectified awareness. Hence to avoid misunderstanding, rather than referring to the non-positional awareness as being 'implicit,' I would like to refer to it as the *point-of-view*.

Now that we have seen the phenomenological approach to self-awareness, I would like to make a few remarks about the discussion of self-awareness in general before we go into later Nishida's analysis of self-awareness.

Two Kinds of Self-awareness

One of the major obstacles for philosophers questioning the nature of self-awareness is that there is no general agreement regarding *what to look for*. This is just the case with the problem of consciousness today and the two problems are obviously closely related. However, in terms of self-awareness, we do seem to at least have a general consensus on what to *not* look for. Ever since Hume's observation that we are not aware of an unchanging self but only particular perceptions or feelings, most philosophers seem to agree that we are not self-aware in the sense that we are conscious of a *self-qua-substance*. Yet, the general agreement seems to end there. As Gennaro (2002, p. 298) rightly observes, the meaning of 'self-awareness' is somewhat open because 'the term does not wear its meaning on its sleeve.'

Zahavi (2002, p. 10) shares his concern with Bermudez that the 'deflationary language-philosophical account of self-awareness,' which basically focuses on the study of the mechanisms of linguistic self-reference and the use of first-person pronoun, does not amount to an adequate understanding of self-awareness (cf. Bermudez, 1998). What they have in mind here is, I believe, the account endorsed by many of the analytic philosophers today. Both Zahavi and Bermudez then endeavor to broaden the scope to include 'non-conceptual' and 'pre-linguistic' forms of self-awareness. Moreover, Zahavi shows his affinity for Bermudez's concern and states that while linguistic self-reference *articulates* self-awareness, 'it doesn't bring it about' (2002, p. 10). In other words, whereas such account clarifies the epistemic and semantic peculiarities of the 'I' that figures in 'I'-thoughts, it does not

give an account of the most basic form of self-awareness that presumably comes prior to linguistic mediation. Consequently, he proceeds to broaden the definition of self-awareness in order to accommodate discussions provided by the ‘classical philosophical theories of self-awareness’ which he attributes to Brentano, Husserl, Sartre, Henry, Henrich, Frank, etc. (*ibid.*, p. 14). Such concern for ‘broadening’ the definition of self-awareness just illustrates the fact that the philosophical literature on self-awareness today does not sit on a ready-made conception of self-awareness. In light of this situation, I would like to provide a brief analysis on what the nature of self-awareness is largely understood to be in the current literature.

As we have seen, there are basically two ways one can account for the *awareness* one has when one consciously perceives the apple which amounts to two different *kinds of awareness*: as an objectified awareness or as a non-objectified awareness (what I call the *point-of-view*). We have seen that Rosenthal and Bermudez construe self-awareness as an objectified awareness whereas the phenomenological tradition generally understands self-awareness as a non-objectified awareness. But is this to say that the two views are exclusive of each other? Gallagher and Zahavi’s (2010, section 6) approach is to call for recognition of the ‘primitive form’ of self-awareness. This is identified as the non-objectified self-awareness as opposed to the ‘more elaborate forms’ of self-awareness by which I presume they mean objectified self-awareness. According to their reading, it is not as if they are two models of self-awareness which are exclusive of each other. Rather, as already seen, the non-objectified sort is presupposed by the objectified sort. To use the term I have introduced, the objectified awareness presupposes the *point-of-view*.

Now, the point I wish to make here is that whereas Rosenthal and Bermudez only recognize one *kind* of self-awareness, namely the *objectified* self-awareness (whether it is the full-fledged conceptual sort or not), the phenomenological tradition recognizes a more primitive *kind* of self-awareness, namely a *non-objectified* self-awareness. Such observation suggests that there are at least two kinds of self-awareness that have been recognized in the literature: objectified self-awareness and non-objectified self-awareness. Having said this, one question we should consider in clarifying later Nishida’s analysis of self-awareness is whether Nishida agrees with Rosenthal and Bermudez that self-awareness is necessarily of an objectified kind or if he admits of a non-objectified kind of self-awareness together with the phenomenological tradition. It is to later Nishida’s analysis of self-awareness that we shall now turn to.

Later Nishida on Self-awareness

For the purpose of this paper, I will concentrate exclusively on the *later* Nishida’s analysis of ‘self-awareness’ (*jikaku*).³ Self-awareness is one of the prominent themes throughout Nishida Philosophy and as his thought developed, so did his understanding of self-awareness. But because ‘*jikaku*’ is one of the central themes of Nishida Philosophy, one cannot expect to understand its meaning without delving into the depths of his philosophy. Hence it will not be as easy as simply applying the

findings in the contemporary literature on self-awareness to Nishida Philosophy. I will first give an analysis of ‘acting-intuition,’ what Nishida refers to as the ‘form of self-awareness’ (Nishida, 2004c, p. 465),⁴ with reference to the ‘historical body.’ Then, in light of the analysis, I will attempt to provide an answer to the question raised above, namely whether Nishida understood self-awareness as necessarily an objectified awareness or if he admitted of a non-objectified sort.

Before we go into the analysis of acting-intuition, I would like to briefly point out, together with others,⁵ the distinct meaning that the Japanese word ‘*jikaku*’ carries as compared to the English word ‘self-awareness’ or ‘self-consciousness.’ As Feenberg notes, whereas the word ‘self-awareness’ is employed in English and German to refer to ‘the purely contemplative self-directed awareness,’ the word ‘*jikaku*’ in the Japanese denotes ‘the achievement of a deep realization or understanding of a matter, with the implication that such understanding affects and alters the self’ (1999, p. 34). I believe that such difference is not merely a difference in the meaning of the word nor should the whole comparison be dismissed insisting that they are two quite distinct concepts. Rather, I believe that Nishida’s analysis of ‘*jikaku*’ opens the gateway for a more adequate understanding of self-awareness. I hope to clarify this point through the analysis of acting-intuition and the historical body below.

Acting-intuition and the Historical Body

In the beginning of his 1937 essay titled ‘Acting-intuition,’ Nishida defends his thesis against the impression that ‘acting-intuition’ is an ‘empty concept’ or just outright ‘mystical’:

[M]y acting-intuition is not the intuition of Plotinus nor is it the pure duration of Bergson. It is rather the opposite. It is the standpoint of the thoroughly real knowledge. It is the basis for all empirical knowledge. It is the standpoint of the empirical—all to empirical—knowledge. (Nishida, 2003a, p. 215)

Nishida here emphasizes that acting-intuition is in no way to be understood as *opposing* knowledge. Instead, acting-intuition—the form of self-awareness—is the basis for all knowledge.⁶ The term denotes the dialectical relation between our ‘acting’ and ‘intuiting’ and consequently between the individual(s) and the things that we relate to in the world. Nishida’s intention here is to argue that such dialectical relation lie at the basis of all our knowledge and that *it is what constitutes self-awareness*.

Acting and intuiting are two quite different ways of relating to the world. Acting is usually seen as an active engagement with the world, and intuiting a passive event. However, Nishida argues that ‘seeing is not merely a passive event’; those who believe that seeing is merely passive assume that ‘I am passive qua my senses and active qua my will’ (Nishida, 2003b, p. 57).⁷ Nishida fundamentally questions such basic assumption that has reigned over traditional Western thought. Nishida admits that our experience has an ambivalent character constitutive of a receptive and a spontaneous component. However, to designate passivity and activity to separate

faculties and attribute rationality to the active faculty is to completely mistake the peculiarity of human experience. Nishida does not deny that animals too perceive and act. Yet, what differentiates human action from non-human behavior is not that humans have rationality as an active faculty *separate from* and *on top of* the passive faculty of perception. When Nishida claims that humans *intuit*, this is not to be equated to animal perception. When we see, *already* we see things differently from non-human animals: we intuit rationally.

My purpose here is not to go into the details of Nishida's analysis on the peculiarity of human action as opposed to animal behavior. Rather, it is to give an account of Nishida's acting-intuition in order to elucidate his analysis of self-awareness. Hence suffice it to say that acting-intuition, as the form of self-awareness, is an analysis of human (presumably *adult* human) involvement with the world and not of all conscious creatures. But does this observation already have implications for what we are trying to explain? For let us recall that Gallagher and Zahavi were interested in broadening the scope of the study on self-awareness to include the pre-linguistic, pre-conceptual kind of self-awareness found in the phenomenological tradition. It seems that Nishida's analysis, since acting-intuition presumably only applies to adult humans, would only be concerned with the full-fledged conceptual kind of self-awareness and consequently is already narrow in its scope. Yet I believe that this conclusion is too quick to draw. In order to justify this claim, let us examine Nishida's concern in his analysis of self-awareness.

First of all, Nishida is not concerned with accounting for the difference between conscious states and non-conscious states as with the higher-order theory of consciousness. On this point, I believe that Nishida is in agreement with the phenomenological tradition. Namely that intransitive consciousness is not a relational property but an intrinsic quality of experience.⁸ But on my interpretation, Nishida fundamentally disagrees with the phenomenological tradition that consciousness *necessarily* has the dual aspect of a positional and a non-positional awareness. Rather, according to Nishida, consciousness is characterized by two *modes* of experience: one characterized by *difference* and another characterized by *unity*. Nishida is concerned with accounting for the dialectical relation between these two modes of experience. The relevant question concerning self-awareness is how acting-intuition is supposed to be the *form* of self-awareness. I will argue below that Nishida is not merely concerned with the full-fledged conceptual kind of self-awareness nor is he concerned with the more primitive sort. Nishida's understanding on the nature of self-awareness renders the objectified awareness and the non-objectified awareness as both inadequate descriptions of self-awareness.

Many phenomenologists argue that self-awareness is a *bodily* self-awareness. For example, when I pick up the fork in order to begin eating, the act of picking up the fork is accompanied by the bodily awareness of my orientation toward the fork, e.g. that the perceived fork is to the left of me (cf. Zahavi, 2002, pp. 19–20). This bodily awareness is not given as an objectified awareness but it is the 'condition of possibility for the perception of and interaction with spatial objects' (*ibid.*, p. 20). In other words, according to the phenomenologist, the non-objectified awareness,

or the point-of-view, is *necessarily embodied*. Nishida's observation is similar but 'intuition,' for Nishida, is not equivalent to perception. For example, when I intuit the fork as a fork, not only do I perceive the thing in relation to the physical position of my body. What enables me to pick up the fork is the fact that I see it *as a fork* and not as a meaningless object. Intuition, according to Nishida, is embodied *and embedded* in the social, cultural and historical situation. Hence a botanist may see a plant differently from an artist or from a person who simply appreciates it for its aesthetic beauty. Nishida's point of emphasis is that we intuit things as expressions endowed with *historical* connotations that solicit our actions in infinitely different ways. For humans, 'seeing' is to intuit the past activity within the thing that we are intuiting in the present. Consequently, as opposed to a mere biological body, Nishida argues that we have a *historical* body, or to be precise, that we *are* a historical body. To say that the historical body intuitively is to say that the historical body is *intentional*, in the sense used by the phenomenologists: it is conscious *of* something. But contrary to the phenomenologists, the historical body is not always intentional; intentionality only constitutes one dimension of our conscious being.

Now, what makes me capable of picking up the fork is not only that I see the fork *as a fork*, i.e. the sort of thing that is capable of being picked up and used to eat with. At the same time, my fingers are oriented around the handle to grip and my hand and arm accordingly stiffen up in order to carry out my action. Such bodily form and the form of the fork together allow me to pick up the fork. It is this aspect of the historical body, namely its *instrumentality* (i.e. its tool-likeness) that constitutes the other dimension of our conscious being. As Nishida repeatedly says, 'humans are not only bodily beings but we have the body as a tool' (Nishida, 2003b, p. 22). In this way the historical body may be characterized by its intentional and instrumental binary nature.⁹

Nishida's notion of acting-intuition consists of another important element: *the object that is created*. Because Nishida is primarily concerned with the act of *creating* things, whether it is artwork or a state, it is rather obvious in creative activity that there is an end product. Yet Nishida suggests that this is the case for all human actions, as when he says, 'acting does not denote mere will—it is to create things outside' (Nishida, 2003b, p. 58). But what is created objectively in the case of *picking up a fork*? 'Picking up a fork' is a practical concept that is realized in action but it is a concept that can also be reflected upon. In this way I believe that it is the fact that we are capable of taking a perspective, or that we can speak of the activity, or that we can reflect on the activity that allows the activity to be manifested objectively.

Our practical concepts, or any concepts for that matter, are formed by the social and cultural activities of the people. For example, *hanami* ('flower viewing' in Japanese) denotes a cultural activity that means much more than what 'flower viewing' could possibly mean for someone unacquainted with Japanese culture. For the Japanese, it signifies the joy of viewing the *sakura* (cherry blossoms) blossoming in the sky in early April, as friends and family gather underneath the countless numbers of cherry trees, enjoying the radiant atmosphere that surrounds the scenery. Whether it is the conceptualized activity (e.g. picking up the fork,

cycling, *hanami*) or the actualized activity in a physical form (e.g. artwork, poem, house), the objective manifestation of our activities is what is seen by myself *and others*. As Nishida affirms, ‘when a carpenter builds a house, even though it is the carpenter who has built the house, the house is not merely of the carpenter’s, but it is public’ (Nishida, 2004a, p. 347).¹⁰ Seeing the completed house, the carpenter will see himself *as a carpenter* and whoever buys the house will see himself *as the landlord*.

In this way, acting and intuiting, together with the created object, illustrate the dialectical process of acting-intuition with the historical body as the medium.¹¹ In order to see how such a process designates self-awareness, let me illustrate a description of acting-intuition with a concrete example:

I, a jeweler, see a beautiful chunk of stone. I see it as a potential piece of jewelry, to be shaped into a desirable figure and nicely polished. At this moment, my body is *intentional*; I am conscious of the stone as it expressively appears to me. Consequently, it solicits my action to break it. I thus take a chisel to carry out my task. As I start chiseling, my body comes to figure as a tool: my hands gripping the end of the handle and my whole body therein are oriented in a particular way to figure in the chisel’s movements. Thus my body becomes *instrumental*, i.e. it obtains its tool-like feature as an extension of the chisel. The body is at one moment intentional and at another instrumental. In this way, the *intentionality* and the *instrumentality* of the body together constitute the act of chiseling. Once the act is completed, the chiseled stone, detached from the act, becomes a created object capable of taking up infinite different meanings. I will see myself the creator of the jewel and insofar as the jewel is detached from my body, it will in turn determine myself and others.

What I wish to clarify here is that in the act of chiseling, we can identify two modes of experience: one of difference and one of unity. When the body is intentional, consciousness is positionally aware of the object, namely of the stone. Such positional awareness (i.e. intentionality) characterizes the experiential mode of *difference*. Namely, I experience a distance between the stone and myself which enables me to see the stone *as a stone*. Then, as the body figures as the tool (i.e. becomes instrumental), the positional awareness of the stone gradually dissolves and consciousness is no more characterized by intentionality. When Nishida states that, ‘when we use a tool, the thing becomes our body and our body, on the contrary, becomes the thing. *I become the thing*’ (Nishida, 2003b, p. 31, my italics), I suggest that he is referring to an experiential mode of *unity*. No longer do I experience a distance between the stone and myself, but alternatively I experience myself (the bodily form) in unity with the form of the stone, which enables the act of chiseling to be carried out smoothly. Hence when Nishida claims of the states ‘seeing as the thing, acting as the thing’ (Nishida, 2004c, p. 498) or ‘thinking as the thing, acting as the thing’ (Nishida, 2004b, p. 303),¹² he seems to be referring to a state in which we are *merely* intransitively conscious and *not* positionally aware.

Therefore, according to Nishida, self-awareness is the dialectical process between the experiential mode of difference characterized by *intentionality* and the mode of unity

characterized by *instrumentality*. Importantly, the two modes of experience cannot be reduced to either mode and consequently, acting-intuition is depicted as an infinite process.¹³ Moreover, there is another feature of self-awareness that is significant in understanding Nishida's analysis of self-awareness. Nishida repeatedly states that self-awareness is a *negating* self-awareness (*hitei-teki jikaku* 否定的自覚).¹⁴ Here, one should understand the two moments of negating: that which *negates* and that which is *negated*. That which negates is the acting and the activity thereof. On the other hand, that which is negated is, I suggest, not the act of intuition *per se* but the difference involved in intuiting. Hence, although Nishida claims the irreducibility of the two modes of experience, it seems that Nishida tended to emphasize the mode of unity entailed in acting, over the mode of difference involved in intuiting. Such prioritizing of the moment of unity leads to the suggestion that self-awareness, according to Nishida, is a process of *realization* that the mode of unity in experience is more fundamental or more ontologically real than that of difference. Therefore, we can read *negating* self-awareness to be suggesting that self-awareness is the process of negating, or to be exact, the infinite process of our *activity* negating the difference.¹⁵

The above analysis of acting-intuition and Nishida's characterization of self-awareness as negating self-awareness suggests that Nishida understood self-awareness to be a process of the realization of our fundamental mode of being. I can foresee a possible objection here that Nishida's definition of self-awareness is too different from what we normally understand as 'self-awareness.' However, as I have mentioned in the above section (where I noted the difference in the meaning of the word '*jikaku*' to 'self-awareness' in English and German), I will argue below that the difference should not be dismissed as *irrelevant* or *incomparable* but rather it should shed light on the nature of self-awareness. Let us now examine how the nature of self-awareness understood by Nishida is comparable to the contemporary understanding on self-awareness.

Nishida's Analysis of Self-awareness vs. the Contemporary Understanding

In the previous sections where I discussed the analysis of self-awareness in the contemporary literature, the primary issue that interested us was to account for the sort of awareness when one is, say, consciously perceiving an apple. We subsequently found that there are two kinds of self-awareness that have been taken into account: objectified self-awareness and non-objectified self-awareness. Now that we have seen Nishida's account of self-awareness as an infinite process of realization, we are in a position to compare Nishida's view with the others. Yet, it is already obvious that there is something intrinsically different about Nishida's account that seems to make it incomparable to the two kinds of self-awareness given. I will attempt to spell out this intuition below and further argue that Nishida's account is not incomparable but only more complete in an important sense.

First of all, for Nishida, to ask what sort of awareness one has when one consciously perceives an apple is not particularly an interesting question. Unless one *acts* on the perception (e.g. eat the apple, speak of or reflect on 'perceiving an apple'),

the conscious state by itself has not much to offer. However, when one *does* choose to act on her perception, then that conscious state will be characterized by the mode of *difference*. In fact, one could suggest that, unless the conscious state is characterized by the mode of difference, the conscious state cannot really be conscious at all. For even for the phenomenologist (and I say ‘even’ because higher-order theory explains intransitive consciousness in terms of transitive consciousness, and hence is necessarily characterized by a difference), intransitive consciousness is characterized by the positional awareness of an object and the non-positional awareness of itself. The question that arises here is whether the mode of difference, for Nishida, amounts to an awareness of the self *as an object* (i.e. objectified awareness) or if it merely signifies a minimal sense of differentiation (i.e. non-objectified awareness). However, even before contemplating this question, by now we should realize that the two kinds of self-awareness given by the contemporary literature only constitute but one mode of experience explicated by Nishida, namely the *mode of difference*. In other words, as long as consciousness is characterized by intentionality (or positional awareness) and hence some sense of distance and differentiation between the subject and object, self-awareness is forever stuck in the subject-object dichotomy, whether it is understood as the objectified awareness or the non-objectified awareness. For let us recall that to have a *point-of-view* is only to say that however much I am absorbed in perceiving the apple, I am still aware that I am not the apple, i.e. that I always experience from a point-of-view that is not itself seen but is given. Nishida’s observation that consciousness is characterized by two modes of experience (the mode of difference and the mode of unity) fundamentally challenges the phenomenological analysis that consciousness is necessarily positionally aware of an object and non-positionally aware of itself. According to Nishida, in the experiential *mode of unity*, one is *merely* intransitively conscious and *not* positionally aware of anything.

Now, it is apparent that *this* mode of experience is ultimately very important for Nishida’s account and for understanding its difference to the contemporary understanding of self-awareness. This experiential mode of unity may be identified, somewhat cautiously, with what Nishida calls ‘pure experience’ in his earlier years. Pure experience, a term borrowed from William James, was defined in his first work as ‘the state of experience just as it is without the least addition of deliberative discrimination’ (Nishida, 1990, p. 3).¹⁶ In his earlier works, it is clear that it was Nishida’s intention to postulate pure experience as the fundamental reality and it was rather unclear what the dualistic mode of experience had to offer. As his thoughts developed, however, Nishida eventually did come to appreciate the dualistic moment of experience. Despite this change on emphasis, and although he later dispelled the term ‘pure experience,’ I believe that Nishida’s main conviction is still prevalent in his later works—namely his conviction that there *is* a mode of experience devoid of any sense of differentiation, even of a minimal sort.

The obvious objection to Nishida’s picture is that such ‘conviction’ is unfortunately a false conviction. In other words, it does not fit the descriptive analysis of our everyday experience. Yet as Carter (2009, p. 8, my italics) rightly observes, ‘while Husserl, and many of us in the West, would deny that there is such non-dual

experience, it is taken as *experienced fact* by Nishida and his followers.’ Moreover, Carter points out that the assessment of whether or not such experience exists is a ‘perpetually unresolved philosophical problem to be examined and reexamined, as it has been for centuries’ (*ibid.*). Now, because Carter focuses on Nishida’s notion of *pure experience* and understands it to be an ‘extraordinary experience’ by which it is reached by various forms of meditation in the Zen tradition, ranging from *zazen*, tea ceremony, martial arts, etc., the question about the existence of the experiential mode of unity is a question about the validity of such ‘extraordinary experience.’ However, I want to argue that the experiential mode of unity in *acting-intuition* is not any sort of extraordinary experience as such, but rather that it is ordinary experience *in its most cultivated form*. Let us return to our example with the jeweler creating the piece of jewelry out of stone.

As the body becomes an extension of the tool and the positional awareness of the stone gradually dissolves, Nishida’s observation suggests that *at some moment* we lose all sort of differentiation from the object and become purely conscious without intentionality, i.e. we literally *lose oneself*. Phenomenologists would argue that in such *absorbed* activity, we are pre-reflectively conscious. In other words, we do not have an objectified awareness but we still have awareness of having the point-of-view; it would be wrong to say that there is not even a minimal sense of differentiation (which is identified as non-positional awareness). Hence the controversy is whether absorbed activity is characterized by *pure* unity or by a minimal sense of differentiation. Such disagreement will only be settled by taking a closer look at the descriptive analyses of different kinds of absorbed activity. However, such examination will require much scrutiny and it is not the scope of this paper to do so. The point I wish to make here is that Nishida’s observation on the existence of the experiential mode of unity suggests that self-awareness is not constrained to being aware of oneself either in a minimal sense (i.e. non-objectified awareness) or as an object (i.e. objectified awareness). Moreover, I believe that Nishida does not suggest that the mode of unity provides an alternative that should *replace* self-awareness construed by the others who take self-awareness to be characterized by the experiential mode of difference. Rather, the acknowledgment of the two modes of experience suggests that self-awareness is inherently a dialectical process of realization between the two modes, i.e. of differentiation and unity.

Perhaps one advantage of construing self-awareness as a dialectical process is that it captures the paradoxical nature of self-awareness. As Nishida nicely puts it, ‘the eye cannot see itself’ (Nishida, 2004b, p. 336). Acknowledging such a paradoxical nature of self-awareness, phenomenologists supposedly attempt to resolve the paradox by attending to self-awareness as the non-positional awareness, i.e. as the *point-of-view* that cannot see itself but is *merely given*. Hence by virtue of being non-objectifiable, they accept that the ‘eye’ is given yet *unknowable*. On the contrary, for Nishida, by acknowledging the mode of experience that has no point-of-view *as such*, i.e. where one merely lives through the experience without *any* objectification of the ‘eye’, the givenness of the non-objectifiable ‘eye’ becomes *the*

knowable through experience. In this way, the ‘eye’ sees itself in the sense that one comes to *realize* the true nature of this ‘eye’.¹⁷ Although I could see possible objections to this view that it is overly ‘religious’ in its character, before dismissing it too quickly, we should examine the descriptive analysis of experience for further scrutiny—and not of religious experience as such but of our much more familiar, absorbed activity.

Conclusion

It is not my intention to conclude that we should adapt Nishida’s understanding of the nature of self-awareness and completely do away with the contemporary understandings as inadequate descriptions of self-awareness. The purpose of this paper was only to show that although Nishida’s understanding differs quite radically from the accustomed understanding, rather than dismissing it as ‘too different,’ we should seriously confront his analysis since it sheds light on the possible existence of an experiential mode of unity. Therefore, Nishida’s analysis of the nature of self-awareness allows us to re-examine the validity of taking self-awareness to be something that arises only upon differentiation, which apparently is a distorted view if we come to acknowledge the existence of the moment of unity in our experience.

I will close this paper by lastly addressing the question as to the scope of Nishida’s understanding on self-awareness: is it too narrow or perhaps too broad? As we have seen, his analysis is anything but narrow in its scope since it addresses the important relevance that the experiential mode of unity has for the nature of self-awareness. If we do come to accept the moment of unity as an accurate description of absorbed activity, we will see that neither an objectified nor non-objectified awareness, independently or taken together, can account for the true nature of self-awareness. Even so, the inadequacy of the two kinds of self-awareness will not prove to be unimportant since it *is* an important depiction of the kinds of self-awareness *upon* differentiation. And because Nishida did not discuss the two kinds of self-awareness, the objectified and the non-objectified awareness, and their difference, the contemporary literature has much to offer to Nishida as well. Now, whether or not Nishida’s understanding of self-awareness as a dialectical process is too broad is a much more difficult question. For what would it mean to say that a concept is too broad in scope? Perhaps if we want to demarcate the philosophical concept of self-awareness from the religious conception and constrain the discussion to the former, Nishida’s notion of ‘*jikaku*’ may prove to be ‘too religious’ and hence out of the picture. However, I believe that such demarcation is ultimately not applicable to Nishida’s notion of ‘*jikaku*’ since it is at once both philosophical and religious in its character.¹⁸ Unless one is prepared to completely eradicate the importance of Nishida Philosophy, which would be completely absurd, Nishida’s analysis of self-awareness deserves closer attention.

Notes

- [1] Gallagher (2003) argues that proprioceptive awareness is primarily a form of non-perceptual awareness that is immune to error through misidentification. And he states that this is precisely because ‘it does not take the body as an object’ (p. 61) Hence I believe what he is in fact arguing for is the claim that proprioceptive awareness, as a pre-reflective awareness, is not *any sort* of objectified awareness.
- [2] *Being and Nothingness* was originally published in 1943.
- [3] By ‘later Nishida,’ I will be referring to the most mature period of Nishida’s thought, namely around the time Nishida develops his notion of ‘dialectical world’ and the ‘absolute contradictory self-identity.’ In terms of his works, I concentrate from his 1936 work, ‘Logic and Life,’ onward. While I realize that the demarcation between the time periods of Nishida Philosophy are controversial, I do not wish to go into the debate in this paper.
- [4] ‘On Self-awareness’ was originally published in 1943. In this paper, I have referenced the new edition of the *Nishida Kitaro zenshū* [Complete works of *Nishida Kitarō*] (2002–2009, 24 volumes). All translations of Nishida’s works and other Japanese references are mine unless stated otherwise.
- [5] See Feenberg (1999) and Ohashi (1995, pp. 55–57).
- [6] Later on in the essay, Nishida states that, ‘Knowledge is constituted individually via acting-intuition, i.e. via experience’ (Nishida, 2003a, p. 235). This point will not be discussed in this paper but Nishida expands on his idea of knowledge as a dialectical developmental process in his other later works, e.g. see ‘Practice and Object Cognition—The Standpoint of Cognition in the Historical World’ (1937) and ‘On the Objectivity of Knowledge’ (1943).
- [7] ‘Logic and Life’ was originally published in 1936.
- [8] This point is perhaps debatable for one could argue for the claim that when one is purely aware without positional awareness of any object (what I refer to as *absorbed* activity later in this paper), one is not conscious but unconscious. For if there is no positional awareness, and one wants to argue that consciousness necessarily has this character, then by definition it cannot be conscious. But without going into the further discussions, I will only state that I favor the view that absorbed activity is a conscious event for the (somewhat obvious) reason that absorbed activities are cultivated forms of activity by which we are *fully aware*. To say that such activities are unconscious would leave us with a serious difficulty in understanding the difference between a supposedly unconscious behavior of a robot and the fully conscious absorbed activity of a human.
- [9] Kosaka (1995, p. 166) describes the situation as ‘the mentalization of the body’ (身体の精神化) and ‘the somatization of the mind’ (精神の身体化).
- [10] ‘The Historical Body’ was originally published in 1937.
- [11] As Itabashi (2008, p. 72) states, ‘the body is none other than the mediating form wherein conscious-ness and physical-ness (biological-ness) are one via negation.’ For further discussion of the historical body as the *medium*, see, Noe (1994) and Takehara (1981).
- [12] ‘The Logic of the Place and the Religious Worldview’ was originally published in 1945.
- [13] Perhaps it is important to note that not all conscious activities are constitutive of the dialectical process of the two modes of experience. For example, when one is merely a novice at playing the piano, it will take time to actually experience the mode of unity that is necessary for one to have self-awareness in Nishida’s sense. Yet that is exactly the point. Self-awareness is a process of *realization*, and it is a *practice*. Once the practitioner starts to get ‘better at’ playing the piano, and she experiences the two modes of experience, the dialectic unfolds.
- [14] In fact, in his 1944 essay, ‘On the Cartesian Philosophy’, Nishida introduces this term as the *method* of philosophy, as when he says, ‘I think that the method of philosophy should be negating self-awareness, [and] analysis via self-awareness (*jikakuteki bunseki* 自覚的分析)’ (Nishida, 2004d, p. 121). For Nishida, philosophizing *is* the process of becoming self-aware:

- 'Philosophy is the study of negating the self, forgetting the self' (*ibid.*, p. 137). Hence the method of philosophy can be translated as the feature of self-awareness, as I have done here.
- [15] In Nishida's last finished work, 'The Logic of the Place and the Religious Worldview' (1945), Nishida expands on the religious dimension of self-awareness and the self. For example, drawing upon the Zen notion of *kensho* 見性 (the word *kensho* comprises of two characters that literally read, *seeing-one's nature*) and *mayoi* 迷い (translated as illusion or delusion), Nishida explains that *mayoi* is thinking that the self is the objectified and that *kensho* is to see the true nature of the self as the non-objectifiable (Nishida, 2004b, p. 326, pp. 352–353). Such reading suggests that in order to realize one's true nature, one must thoroughly *negate* the objectified self (and not just the objectified awareness of oneself but also the *point-of-view*) entailed in the mode of difference. And this realization of one's true nature is what Nishida calls 'true self-awareness.' However, such 'true self-awareness,' i.e. the thorough negation of the mode of difference, is reserved for religious experience and Nishida employs a different term to 'acting-intuition,' namely 'self-aware intuition' (*jikakuteki chokkan* 自覚的直観) in order to account for this religious self-awareness (Nishida, 2004c, p. 530). Therefore, except for the exceptional case of religious experience, self-awareness qua acting-intuition necessitates the mode of difference as that which is negated. Hence *acting-intuition* is characterized as an infinite process. We can see here that the notion of self-awareness for Nishida is inherently religious in its character.
- [16] Zen no kenkyū 善の研究 [*An Inquiry into the Good*] was originally published in 1911.
- [17] We are reminded here of the metaphorical yet somewhat revealing expression by Jakob Boehme of the 'reversed eye' that Nishida himself refers to in his first work, *An Inquiry into the Good* (1990, p. 81). Again, such choice of expression suggests the inherently religious character of Nishida's analysis and his whole philosophy, for that matter.
- [18] I may add a note here that in this paper, I did not fully develop the religious dimension of Nishida's analysis of self-awareness. For example, I did not discuss in detail what Nishida refers to as the 'true self-awareness' realized only through religious experience (see note 15). My reasons for restraining from delving into the religious dimension is because I believe that we could, in some ways and with great care, distinguish the more philosophical from the religious dimensions of Nishida Philosophy and for the purposes of this paper, I chose to only focus on the philosophical dimension. However, it is quite impossible to clearly draw the line and hence I acknowledge that in order to appreciate Nishida Philosophy to the full, the philosophical and the religious dimension should be taken on board together. For discussions on the religious dimension of Nishida's analysis of self-awareness, see for example, Carter (2009) and for a comprehensive analysis on Nishida's '*jikaku*' throughout Nishida Philosophy, see Ohashi (1995).

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