

**Lost in Place:  
Nearing Homelessness as Boundlessness in Heidegger, Nishida, Daoism, and Zen**

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**Abstract**

This essay brings together the perspectives of phenomenology and East Asian philosophies through an engagement with thinkers such as Dōgen, Heidegger, Nishida, and Nishitani to address the concept of *place* in relation to the concept and feeling of *homelessness*. With respect to the notion of dwelling and finding one's place in the world and with oneself, the phenomenon of being and feeling *lost* psychologically will be considered as a way (*dao*) toward overcoming nihilism and as an opening to attaining an awakened mind.

**Keywords**

Heidegger, Nishida, Kyoto School, Zen Buddhism, Daoism, Homelessness, Place

It is the homeless condition of Being itself into which we are all born—the boundless *dao* 道.<sup>1</sup> Is it possible to be truly at home in this ontological homeless state and, if so, then how? The sense of being at home is generally connected with a sense of being in a place. Even if that place may not be wholly familiar, it is usually preferable to not having a specific place to where one can go, if only to rest for a short time. It is analogous to Friedrich Nietzsche's declaration that we “would rather will nothingness than not will at all.”<sup>2</sup> Being at home is a matter of feeling at home, which relates to a sense of willing one's place and not just physically being there. It is not simply a matter of will, however; it is also a matter of knowing. Being at home entails knowing it is one's home. One usually feels *intimately* connected with one's home, if by “home” we mean more than just a familiar setting where

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<sup>1</sup> Meaning “way,” “path,” or “road,” *dao* is the foundational term for Daoism although Ruism 儒家 (Confucianism), Zen 禪 (Ch. Chan), and other forms of Buddhism also employ it. In the latter, *dao* became somewhat synonymous with the Buddha Dharma and the Buddha Way.

The following abbreviations will be used to designate the etymological origin of various important Asian terms: Ch. for Chinese, Sk. for Sanskrit, and, when needed to distinguish it from the Chinese, Jp. for Japanese. For the sake of accuracy and consistency, in most cases macrons have been placed over Japanese long vowels (for example, Dōgen and not Dogen). For Chinese and Japanese names and terms, *kanji* is also noted. An exception has been made for persons or institutions who use their Japanese names but do not customarily employ macrons or wish to employ them.

<sup>2</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. with commentary Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1967), Third Essay §28, 163.

one resides or periodically frequents. This intimacy implies a sense of nearness, not just geographically but also in relation to one’s mind and heart, terms that are often thought together in Chinese and Japanese philosophy as “heart-mind” (Ch. *xin*; Jp. *shin* 心).

A *kōan* from the thirteenth-century Chinese Chan Buddhist *Book of Serenity* [or *Equanimity*] (Ch. *Congrong lu* 從容錄; Jp. *Shōyōroku*) offers a different perspective on the feeling of intimacy/nearness as expressed in this early tenth-century exchange between two masters:<sup>3</sup>

Dizang 地藏 asked Fayen 法眼, “Where are you going?”

Fayen said, “Around on pilgrimage.”

Dizang said, “What is the purpose of pilgrimage?”

Fayen said, “I don’t know.”

Dizang said, “Not knowing is nearest [or ‘most intimate’].”<sup>4</sup>

Here nearness/intimacy is the experience that comes from *not* knowing—and more importantly, not being concerned about whether one knows. But this not knowing is more than just the privative of knowing; it is the transformation into *non*-knowing, which is a knowing beyond conventional knowing. A clue for understanding this is found in the thirteenth-century Zen master and philosopher Eihei Dōgen 永平道元 who, in describing *zazen* 座禪 as *shikantaza* 只管打坐 (“just sitting”), writes that one should “think not-thinking,” which is “*non*-thinking” (*hi-shiryō* 非思量), or “beyond” or “beneath” thinking.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, this involves also a *non*-willing, which brings one to a space-place that leaves one in a sort of intellectual darkness or opaqueness and affective limbo.

The founding figure of the Japanese so-called Kyoto School of comparative philosophy, Nishida Kitarō 西田幾多郎, whose philosophical development was influenced by Zen practice, argues that everything exists in a *basho* 場所, which is generally translated as “place” though sometimes also as “locus” or *topos*. Nishida’s early epistemological concerns

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<sup>3</sup> Japanese names will be written in the conventional order of family name first, except in cases where authors of works in English have used the Western order; in such cases, the family name will be given in small caps the first time it appears (for example, Keiji NISHITANI). Chinese names are given in Pinyin romanization unless appearing in print in the older Wade-Giles transliteration.

<sup>4</sup> *Book of Serenity: One Hundred Zen Dialogues*, trans. and introduced Thomas Cleary (Hudson, NY: Lindisfarne Press, 1990), Case 20, 86; also, *The Book of Equanimity*, trans. Gerry Shishin Wick (Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2005), 63. This work was compiled and published in 1224 CE by Wansong Xingxiu 萬松行秀, a Chinese monk of the Caodong 曹洞 (Jp. Sōtō) sect of Chan (Zen) Buddhism.

<sup>5</sup> Dōgen, “*Fukanzazengi* (Universally Recommended Instructions for Zazen),” in *Engaging Dōgen’s Zen: The Philosophy of Practice as Awakening*, ed. Tetsuzen Jason M. Wirth, Shūdō Brian Schroeder, and Kanpū Bret W. Davis (Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2016), 195–98.

constitute an attempt to overcome or move beyond the subject-object dualism characteristic of so much Western philosophy. In his 1926 essay “*Basbo*,”<sup>6</sup> Nishida begins to formulate his original and important philosophical contribution, the concept of the “logic of *basbo*” (*basbo no ronri* 場所の論理), which he continued to develop up until his death in 1945.<sup>7</sup> He argues that in its very formlessness, its boundlessness, *basbo* transforms itself into the groundless ground of self-formation thereby leading to the redefinition of the terms that we use to think about knowing. According to Nishida, the knower *is* a place, not just *in* a place, and that which is known is what is *implaced*. Stated otherwise, the knower is not another object or thing *implaced* in space but rather is the “field of consciousness” (*ishiki no ba* 意識の場) itself. As a place itself, the subjective consciousness can be considered what Heidegger refers to as an *indwelling*.

In *Country Path Conversations*, which is in many respects a critique of his earlier thinking in *Being and Time*, Martin Heidegger directs us toward the concept of *die Gegnet*, “the open-region,” wherein horizons are surrounded or encompassed but not necessarily encased since that would limit the open-region, in which case it would no longer be open. Therefore, the matter becomes not that of transcendently positing the horizon, but rather of *moving toward* “an indwelling releasement [*inständige Gelassenheit*] to the worlding of the world.”<sup>8</sup> This *indwelling* is a listening, a corresponding with that to, or in, which we belong.

In moving away from his earlier language of ontological transcendence and toward that of indwelling, Heidegger advocates a “step back” (*Schritt zurück*) to return to where we already are in the *first place*, not to transcend and arrive at an entirely new and different place. Although this stepping back is not part of Nishida’s philosophical lexicon, his student and fellow co-founding member of the Kyoto School, Nishitani Keiji 西谷啓治, employs the term “step back” (*taiho* 退歩), which he draws on from his own Zen Buddhist background and likely also because of his influence by Heidegger, with whom he studied and met with during his time in Germany from 1937–39.<sup>9</sup> The “place” where this stepping back leads is

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<sup>6</sup> Nishida Kitarō, “*Basbo*,” in *Place and Dialectic*, trans. John W. M. Krummel and Shigenori NAGATOMO (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 49–102.

<sup>7</sup> Nishida Kitarō, “The Logic of the Place of Nothingness and the Religious Worldview,” in *Last Writings: Nothingness and the Religious Worldview*, trans. David A. Dilworth (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 1993), 47–123; “The Logic of *Topos* and the Religious Worldview,” trans. Michiko YUSA, *The Eastern Buddhist* 19, no. 2 (Autumn 1986): 1–29 and *The Eastern Buddhist* 20, no. 1 (Spring 1987): 81–119.

<sup>8</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Country Path Conversations*, trans. Bret W. Davis (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2010), 99. For an in-depth analysis of this and the related concept of *die Gegnet*, see Bret W. Davis, “Returning the World to Nature: Heidegger’s Turn from a Transcendental-Horizontal Projection of World to an Indwelling Releasement to the Open-Region,” *Continental Philosophy Review* 47, nos. 3–4 (2014): 373–97.

<sup>9</sup> See Bret W. Davis, “The Step Back Through Nihilism: The Radical Orientation of Nishitani Keiji’s Philosophy of Zen,” *Synthesis Philosophica* 37 (2004): 139–59.

for Nishitani, like Heidegger, an originary “standpoint” (*tachiba* 立場), signified by the Sanskrit term *śūnyatā* (Jp. *kū* 空; Ch. *wu* 無; boundlessness, emptiness) or, to use the language of a different though in many respects related tradition, *dao*.

This essay brings together the perspectives of phenomenology and East Asian philosophies through an engagement with thinkers such as Dōgen, Heidegger, Nishida, and Nishitani to address the concept of *place* in relation to the concept and feeling of *homelessness*. With respect to the notion of dwelling and finding one’s place in the world and with oneself, the phenomenon of being and feeling *lost* psychologically will be considered as a way (*dao*) toward overcoming nihilism and as an opening to attaining what Zen refers to as an awakened or enlightened mind.

## I Placing the Nearness of Non-Knowing

In Zen practice one becomes accustomed to the darkness, the seeming nothingness of not-knowing. Contemplation or introspection on a *kōan*<sup>10</sup> can enable one to better handle that darkness, not as one might expect by clearing it away, but rather by exasperating one, making one feel lost, to the point of losing all sense of direction and orientation. Although able to see, one is simultaneously blinded by the open horizon. Throwing one into the abyss of despair, the *kōan* strips away both knowledge and intuition, thus forcing a reliance on something else—non-thinking—to get to the “other shore.” This stripping away of the intellect is not a falling into madness but rather, to the degree that one is questioning, a freeing of the thoughts and emotions that bind and restrict at the very moment of that questioning. In short, the primary role of the *kōan* is not to lead one easily to *satori* 悟り, that is, to a sudden and complete awakening<sup>11</sup> (though that can indeed occur) but, on the contrary, to make one *lose* one’s way and confront despair.

Yet, it is in the depth or darkness of despair that a certain insight—a sense of intimacy or nearness—arises that does not necessarily bring one into the light of knowledge but instead gives a sense of calm and even laughing resolve to move *within* the obscure and mysterious.<sup>12</sup> Here one may realize the profundity of true self-awareness, and from that perspective be able to better address whatever the situation may be.

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<sup>10</sup> *Kōan* is the Japanese translation of the Chinese term *gong’an* 公案, which originally meant “public record [or case].” In Zen practice, it is a narrative, question, or statement that challenges conventional thinking because of its generally paradoxical nature. It is used to assist the practitioner in breaking through the strictures of purely rational thinking to free the mind of conceptual attachments. It helps to produce what in Zen is referred to as the “great doubt” (*daigo* 大疑), which is a stage toward reaching awakening.

<sup>11</sup> The gerund form “awakening” is used here to highlight the aspect of *process* as opposed to the more static and thus potentially essentializing sense of the frequently used term “enlightenment.”

<sup>12</sup> See my “Dancing Through Nothing: Nietzsche, the Kyoto School, and Transcendence,” *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 37 (2009): 44–65, esp. 56–60.

When one is wandering—and when one is lost—the mind can open (although not necessarily) to the world more fully; objects, events, and others are seen and experienced in a wholly different perspective, thus enabling the experience of oneself in new and perhaps unexpected ways. Intimacy is the highest wisdom; it is *prajñā* (literally in Sanskrit: attainment of knowing) itself, being awake to what is as it is by dispelling the veil of ignorance (Sk. *avidyā*). It is the realization of the fundamental reality that the human mind is essentially free. Only from this standpoint, according to Zen, is it possible to see one’s true nature, which is to say, Buddha-nature—boundless emptiness that envelops all dharmas (teachings, events, objects, people).

Who we are is inseparable from our environment, our body, and our interconnectedness with other sentient and insentient beings. Seeing into our boundless nature opens us to this profound intimacy or nearness. It is to be near with where and what we are at this very moment (*nikon* 而今). This is awakening to the Buddha-nature of all things, which is the transient, impermanent, interconnectedness of all *natural* things. This awakening is not first a matter of rationally knowing this to be reality; it is an experience. As such, it is intimately connected with the faculty of imagination. John Sallis captures this when he writes, “Only through the coming of imagination is it possible to apprehend natural things . . . as well as things fabricated from nature.”<sup>13</sup> This is not imagination as fantasy but rather closer in meaning to Plato’s sense of *εἰκασία*, of image-making.<sup>14</sup>

Imagination is the power of transformation. It is the stepping back or away from the certitude that is sought in the “home-ground” (*moto* もと), as Nishitani phrases it, of knowledge.<sup>15</sup> This transformative power of imagination blurs the demarcation between wakefulness and dreaming, as shown in what is arguably the most celebrated passage of the Daoist classic *Zhuangzi* 莊子, namely, Zhuang Zhou’s 莊周 dream of being a butterfly and not knowing for sure whether it was he or the butterfly having the dream.<sup>16</sup>

The uncanniness of not knowing is a form of being homeless. Surely this is what was experienced by Zhuang Zhou. But both the Daoist sage and the Zen master are unperturbed by this. In fact, they seek out this feeling, this place of ungroundedness, looking to lose the seemingly stable ground of the ego, of self-identity. They seek their way (*dao*) in a “free and easy wandering.” But this wandering is not an aimless, carefree, hapless meandering, in which one ultimately *needs* to return to the home-ground, as this passage from the *Zhuangzi* illustrates:

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<sup>13</sup> John Sallis, *The Return of Nature: On the Beyond of Sense* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2016), 2.

<sup>14</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 511e, 534a.

<sup>15</sup> This term appears throughout Keiji NISHITANI, *Religion and Nothingness*, trans. with introduction Jan Van Bragt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

<sup>16</sup> Zhuangzi, *The Complete Works of Zhuangzi*, trans. with commentary Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 18.

Liezi [列子; Lie Yukou 列圉寇 / 列禦寇] could ride the wind and go soaring around with cool and breezy skill, but after fifteen days he came back to earth. . . . He escaped the trouble of walking, but he still had to depend on something to get around. If he had only mounted on the truth of Heaven and Earth, ridden the changes of the six breaths, and thus wandered through the boundless, then what would he have had to depend on?<sup>17</sup>

The truly free and easy wandering is experienced when one feels lost, either literally or figuratively, as though adrift in the vast sea, in the middle of the desert, or in the thick of a dense forest, where there is just pure horizon (or no horizon) without any orienting point. This disorientation can certainly provoke anxiety and dread, but it can also lead one to become open to new vistas and perspectives. The wandering that describes being lost draws one into a state of *wonder-ing*, which is the point where it is possible to lose the grasping, clinging sense of the ego-self and become released into the emptiness of an emancipatory and potentially transformative freedom. This insight about the power of wonder is, of course, not something that is confined to Daoism and Zen. Plato and Aristotle also realized that wisdom begins in wonder.

In Daoism, dualistic concepts—for example, right and wrong, good and evil, happiness and unhappiness, home and homeless—are ambiguous from the start since they are situated in a world of objects or in a shadow world of objective valuation, thus they lead to alienation and delusion. Attachment to dualisms produces a *loss* of wonder. Truth and meaning become ends rather than means, nouns rather than verbs, places rather than journeys. One can also apply this realization to the desire to be at home, to be in a familiar and secure place, to have somewhere to which one can return. But are we deluding ourselves in thinking we know that there is such a home-ground? Is existence perhaps a perpetual wandering, a veritable state of homelessness?

The concept of home should not be associated *only* with stillness and non-movement. Place is *dynamic*. Place is an *event*. One moves within it—and *place moves within oneself*. Dōgen captures this when he enigmatically writes, quoting the Chan master Furong Daokai 芙蓉道楷 in the *Shobōgenzō* 正法眼藏 fascicle “*Sansuikyō*” 山水經 (Mountains and Waters Sutra), that “green mountains are constantly walking.”<sup>18</sup> And in the *Zhuangzi* it is written:

It is the way of Heaven to keep moving and to allow no piling up—hence the ten thousand things come to completion. . . . Emptiness, stillness, limpidity, silence, inaction—these are the level of Heaven and earth, the substance of the Way [*Dao* 道] and its Virtue [or Power; *De* 德]. . . . Resting, they may be empty; empty, they may be

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>18</sup> Dōgen, *Treasury of the True Dharma Eye: Zen Master Dogen's Shobo Genzo*, Vol. 1, ed. Kazuaki TANAHASHI and trans. Kazuaki TANAHASHI, et al. (Boston and London: Shambala, 2010), 155f.

full; and fullness is completion. Empty, they may be still; still, they may move; moving, they may acquire. Still, they may rest in inaction; resting in inaction, they may demand success from those who are charged with activities.<sup>19</sup>

In short, place is both movement and stillness. It is the perpetual oscillation between movement and stillness that is disorienting, from which one can be released when “seeing” the absolute complementarity opposites, which is *dao*—and then *beyond* that standpoint.

It is in the depths or darkness of despair that an intimacy, or nearness, arises that does not necessarily bring one into a light but instead gives a sense of calm resolve to move within the obscure and mysterious. Here one may realize the profundity of true self-awareness, and from that standpoint be able to address better whatever the situation may be.

Becoming lost lies at the heart of Zen practice. Zen delivers the practitioner from the known to the unknown, from what is perceived to be the light of knowledge and understanding into the darkness of doubt. In the *Daodejing* 道德經 Laozi 老子 writes, “Darkness and even darker / The door to all hidden mysteries” (*xuan shi you xuan / zhong miao zhi men* 玄之又玄 / 众妙之门).<sup>20</sup> The word for darkness in Chinese is *xuan* 玄, which can also be translated as darkness or mystery, but also as hidden, profound, secret, deep, obscure, and depth.

In a parallel vein, John of the Cross writes, “If a person wants to be sure of the road on which they tread, they must close their eyes and walk in the dark.”<sup>21</sup> Henry David Thoreau describes the condition of being lost as a door into understanding one’s place in the world: “Not till we are completely lost, or turned around,—for a man needs only to be turned round once with his eyes shut in this world to be lost,—do we appreciate the vastness and strangeness of Nature. . . . Not till we are lost, in other words, not till we have lost the world, do we begin to find ourselves, and realize where we are and the infinite extent of our relations.”<sup>22</sup> Still, not all lostness results in finding oneself, either figuratively or literally.

The value of lostness has been known throughout the world since antiquity, although perhaps it is more hidden in the contemporary, technological world. In numerous cultures it assumes a ritualistic form. There are multiple examples, but some more familiar ones include the Native American practice of the vision quest, in which a member of some peoples willfully goes wandering in the wilderness to connect with their spirit guide to find their true path; and the Australian Aboriginal dreamtime, during which one loses a sense of personal identity and orientation. Other examples include Jesus and the Buddha wandering off into

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<sup>19</sup> Zhuangzi, *The Complete Works of Zhuangzi*, 98–99.

<sup>20</sup> Laozi, *The Tao Te Ching: A New Translation with Commentary*, trans. Ellen M. Chen (New York: Paragon House, 1989), 51.

<sup>21</sup> John of the Cross, *The Dark Night of the Soul*, trans. David Lewis, with corrections and introductory essay Benedict Zimmerman, O.C.D. (London: Thomas Baker, 1958), 140.

<sup>22</sup> Henry D. Thoreau, *Walden*, ed. Jeffrey S. Cramer (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), 166.

the wilderness without any expectation about what they might encounter, or certainty about whether they would return or even survive. And labyrinths, found throughout the world, are still employed today as meditation aids for the walking sojourner to focus on their spiritual quest or appointed task. One recalls the myth of Theseus entering the labyrinth in Crete to slay the Minotaur thus transforming himself into a hero.

Being unintentionally lost, whether physically or psychologically, can be a terrifying experience. Even the voluntary act of giving oneself over to becoming lost and disorientated can produce a deep despair, or perhaps madness. Whether intentional or not, such experiences can result in a heightened feeling of power and awakened sense of self, such as what occurs when the quest seeker returns to the people as a shaman, holy person, or hero, or in the more mundane but equally powerful sense of seeing what is meaningful and important in life from a new perspective of profound gratitude for simply remaining alive. All the instances mentioned above exhibit an aspect of transformation that accompanies the experience of lostness, bringing one to the liminal standpoint of disorientation.

## II Opening the Place of Homelessness

In being lost, feeling homeless, one experiences a certain sense of nothingness, perhaps as a complete disorientation wherein nothing points to the desired direction, or as the nothingness that attends the inevitability of death, “*the possibility of the absolute impossibility of any existence at all.*”<sup>23</sup> In the latter, the totality or whole of being manifests itself in what is an unsettling, if not at times terrifying, *anonymity*. Emmanuel Levinas refers to this as the *il y a*, the “there is” of existence that is the pure elemental.<sup>24</sup> But according to Heidegger, it is rather our confrontation with nothingness (*die Nichtigkeit*) that unsettles us as *Angst*. The disclosure of the totality of being in the moods (*Stimmungen*) of boredom and joy, as the horizon of the world, is the “ground-phenomenon” of Dasein in which the whole becomes prominent and manifests itself. While one cannot comprehend or experience the totality of being, it is possible to experience not only things and events but also the nothing as well within the whole. Nothing hides itself in the disclosure of the totality. One is brought “face to face” with nothingness itself in the fundamental mood of *Angst*,<sup>25</sup> which is a retreat from

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<sup>23</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 307.

<sup>24</sup> See Emmanuel Levinas, “Il y a,” in *Deucalion 1* (Paris: Cahiers de Philosophie, 1946); reprinted with some modifications as the Introduction and Chapter 3, §2 of *Existence and Existents*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1978); “There is: existence without existents,” trans. Richard Cohen, in *The Levinas Reader*, ed. Sean Hand (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 30–58; *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 190–91; *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1978), 3–4, 162–65.

<sup>25</sup> Martin Heidegger, “What is Metaphysics?” in *Basic Writings*, ed. and trans. David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1977), 102f.



something and has its source in nothing. The nature of the nothing is to repel this departure. The oneness of nothingness as it slips away from totality is the essence and activity of nothing, which is neither the annihilation of what-is nor something that emerges from negation. The disclosure of nothingness brings one face to face with the sheer immediacy and finitude of being.

Dasein's projection into nothingness reveals the radical finitude of subjective existence. In projection (*Entwurf*) one experiences *Angst* in the face of the world which, for Heidegger, is the radical other. So important is this concept of projection, nearly two decades after he presented his inaugural lecture "What is Metaphysics?" Heidegger writes in the "Letter on Humanism":

Moreover, the projection is essentially a thrown projection [*geworfener Entwurf*]. What throws in projection is not the human being but Being itself, which sends the human being into the ek-sistence of Da-sein that is its essence. This destiny comes to pass as the lighting of Being, as which it is. The lighting grants nearness to Being. In this nearness, in the lighting of the Da, the human being dwells as the ek-sisting one without yet being able properly to experience and take over this dwelling.<sup>26</sup>

Not only is it precisely the projection into nothing that overcomes the totality of what-is and discloses our fundamental modality of existence as *Sein zum Tode*, the projection also throws the human being into the ek-sistence of Dasein that dwells in a state of radical solitude, of homelessness (*Heimatlosigkeit*).<sup>27</sup> In the human being's relation with death, Dasein is revealed or disclosed as unique and individual. Death is the ultimate other; but it is not the death of the other that constitutes the horizon of the human being. One always dies alone. Since no one can take up another's death, this is what discloses the radical solitude of human existence.

The challenge or task becomes, for Heidegger, one of overcoming or transcending this condition of being not at home. "[T]he overcoming of homelessness begins from Being, a homelessness in which not only the human being but the essence of being human stumbles aimlessly about. Homelessness so understood consists in the abandonment of Being by beings. Homelessness is the symptom of the oblivion [or abandonment] of Being

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<sup>26</sup> Martin Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism," trans. Frank A. Capuzzi with J. Glenn Gray, in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 217; translation slightly modified.

<sup>27</sup> On this see Martin Weiss, "Heideggers unheimliche Heimat. Bemerkungen zum Zusammengehören von Denken und Sein," *Colloquium: New Philologies* 6, no. 1 (2021): 100–13; Megan Altman, "Heidegger on the Struggle for Belongingness and Being at Home," *Frontiers of Philosophy in China* 11, no. 3 (September 2016): 444–62; Franco Volpi, "We Homeless Ones": Heidegger and the 'Homelessness' of Modern Man," in *The New Yearbook for Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy*, Vol. 3, ed. Burt Hopkins and Steven Crowell (London: Routledge, 2020); Peter Tijmes, "Home and Homelessness: Heidegger and Levinas on Dwelling," *Worldviews* 2, No. 3 (1998): 201–13.

[*Seinverlassenheit*].”<sup>28</sup> Moreover, “[h]omelessness is coming to be the destiny of the world.”<sup>29</sup> This is tantamount to nihilism and is, for Heidegger, the unfolding of the history and internal logic of metaphysics, a teaching he learns from Nietzsche, who was “the last to experience this homelessness. From within metaphysics he [Nietzsche] was unable to find any other way out than a reversal of metaphysics. But that is the height of futility.”<sup>30</sup> The overcoming of homelessness is through thinking (*Denken*), according to Heidegger; it is achieved by overcoming metaphysics. Yet, “[t]hinking does not overcome metaphysics by climbing still higher, surmounting it, transcending it somehow or other; thinking overcomes metaphysics by climbing back down into the nearness of the nearest.”<sup>31</sup> But what is this nearness, and how and where is it to be found?

The nearness is to Being and is granted in the lighting of Being, which occurs in open *place* of the *Lichtung*. There are two senses of the word *open* in Heidegger: the *open-region*, which is so radical in its openness that it is closed to us, and the *horizon*, which, because it is a closure, is open.<sup>32</sup> Heidegger’s use of this distinction is ambiguous at times, and this is also the case with the notion of the *Lichtung*. The example he gives is a clearing in the forest, an opening that allows us to move freely about and see the forest with the perspective of distance thus enabling us to make sense of our placiality, of being in a place. But the clearing in the forest is the horizon. The forest itself is the open-region precisely because of its openness, because it has no boundary, no limit, no  $\pi\acute{\epsilon}\rho\alpha\varsigma$ . The forest is not open to us; it is closed because of its radical openness. It is like the feeling of being *lost* that one has in the middle of the desert where the surrounding openness pulls away any sense of bearing, so that the only focal point is the immediate space that one is in. One is disoriented because there is no horizon. There is in a sense no world because there are no fixed reference points. It is paradoxically a claustrophobic infinite expanse, but with *infinite* understood also as *in-the-finite*.

There is a horizon within the open-region. Both world (*Welt*) and earth (*Erde*), terms whose meaning Heidegger distinguishes in “The Origin of the Work of Art,”<sup>33</sup> are horizons in the open-region. Human beings always dwell within horizons. But how are these horizons established? That is the question of the difference between, on the one hand, existence

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<sup>28</sup> Heidegger, “Letter on Humanism,” 218.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 219.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 217–18.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 231.

<sup>32</sup> Davis points out that there are also two corresponding senses of non-willing at play in this “transformation of thinking” about the open-region (“Returning the World to Nature,” 377).

<sup>33</sup> Martin Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 1971). See also Kelly Oliver, *Earth & World: Philosophy After the Apollo Missions* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 111–61, for an extended treatment of these concepts in Heidegger.

understood in terms of willing, and on the other in terms of “non-willing” (*Nicht-Wollen*),<sup>34</sup> or what Meister Eckhart terms *Gelassenheit*, a term that has great resonance for several Kyoto School thinkers, such as Nishitani and his successor Ueda Shizuteru 上田閑照. How are our habitations established within nature? In one sense, it is all within nature. One can dwell willfully, that is, try to bend nature and the horizon to our own sense of what is “*in each case mine*” (*je mein*),<sup>35</sup> and thus set up the landmarks that will delimit the horizon—or, one can dwell in a different way, in which one walks like and with the mountains, flowing like and with the waters of *dao*.

The open-region contains that from which it also draws. The open-region in which one always is exceeds one’s own sense of place, and therefore withdraws from one’s grasp. This is a withdrawing of the will as transcendental positing of horizon. This is the transcendental thinking of *Being and Time* that Heidegger is trying to think beyond in *Contributions to Philosophy*<sup>36</sup> and, more radically so, in *Country Path Conversations*. One posits a horizon so that one can think of oneself as human, understand the human itself. But then one needs to understand that positing, and so another horizon is established that will make sense. Thus, all these horizons are encased in one another. One therefore must change one’s mode of thinking: Instead of the transcendental positing of horizon, which will always be anthropocentric and thus tied to the will, one needs to think in terms of indwelling to the open-region. This is what is meant by *Gelassenheit*.<sup>37</sup>

Astute and penetrating as it is, it could be argued that Heidegger’s position leaves one within the liminal state of being lost. Yet Heidegger comes very close, as he does in numerous places in this thinking, with several East Asian perspectives to breaking away from that perspective. Early in his career he was familiar with the *Daodjing* even if, to the best of my knowledge, the word *dao* does not appear until the third of three lectures given in 1957–58 under the title “The Nature of Language.”<sup>38</sup> There he writes:

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<sup>34</sup> See Davis, “Returning the World to Nature,” 374, 377–78, 382.

<sup>35</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 67.

<sup>36</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy (Of the Event)*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz and Daniela Vallega-Neu (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2012).

<sup>37</sup> The parallels between *Gelassenheit* and the Daoist concept of *wuwei* (Ch. 無爲; nondoing or nonaction), which also is often wrongly interpreted as a radical passivity, are worth noting. More accurately, *wuwei* is *wei wuwei*, that is, doing without doing, acting in a non-forceful way. This is the activity of *dao*, which is “originally perfect and all pervading” (Dōgen, “*Fukanzazengi*,” in *Engaging Dōgen’s Zen*, 195).

<sup>38</sup> There have been numerous studies on Heidegger’s relation to East Asian thinking, many of which are in the ground-breaking anthology *Heidegger and Asian Thought*, ed. Graham Parkes (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987) and recently in *Daoist Resonances in Heidegger: Exploring a Forgotten Debt*, ed. David Chai (New York: Bloomsbury, 2022).

*Dao* could be the way that gives all ways, the very source of our power to think what reason, mind, meaning, λόγος properly mean to say—properly, by their proper nature. Perhaps the mystery of mysteries of thoughtful Saying conceals itself in the word “way,” *Dao*, if only we let these names return to what they leave unspoken, if only we are capable of this, to allow them to do so. *All is way*.<sup>39</sup>

Heidegger is at once both near and distant in ascertaining the meaning of *dao*. He seems to oscillate between the nameability and ineffability of *dao*. The famous first line of the *Daodejing* reads, “*Dao* that can be named is not *dao*.” Yet Heidegger, bound to the λόγος and the saying-sending of Being, interprets the ineffable *dao* as conceivably nameable and, moreover, able to “return” to a disclosed saying or to the nearness of Being.

But if the human being is to find their way once again into the nearness of Being they must first *learn to exist in the nameless*. . . . Before they speak the human being must first let themselves be claimed again by Being, taking the risk that under this claim they will seldom have much to say. Only thus will the preciousness of its essence be once more bestowed upon the word, and upon the human being a home for dwelling in the truth of Being.”<sup>40</sup>

What is this “nameless” to which Heidegger refers? Is *dao* the impossible name for it? His negative view of homelessness and his openness to existing in the nameless/*dao* stands both in contrast to and in harmony with the Daoist and Zen standpoints for which *dao* is paradoxically both being and nonbeing and yet beyond that dichotomy. Nonbeing or nothingness is clearly not the nearest, according to Heidegger; rather it is Being (*Sein*).

Yet Being—what is Being? It is It itself. The thinking that is to come must learn to experience that and to say it. “Being”—that is not God and not a cosmic ground. Being is farther than all beings and is yet nearer to human beings than every being, be it a rock, a beast, a work of art, a machine, be it an angel or God. Being is the nearest. Yet the near remains farthest from human beings. Humans at first cling always and only to beings.<sup>41</sup>

Here Heidegger is resonating though not completely in accord with the East Asian view of *dao*. According to Nishitani, whose own thinking is deeply influenced by Eckhart, Nietzsche, and Heidegger, the problem is that those thinkers only partially grasp the full radical meaning of such concepts as *dao*, *śūnyatā*, and “absolute nothingness” (*zettai mu* 絶対無) because their perspectives see everything in relation to Being. This is why the problem of nihilism, argues Nishitani, is never able to be overcome by Western philosophy. As far as Nietzsche is

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<sup>39</sup> Martin Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, trans. Peter D. Hertz (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 92; translation modified; emphasis added.

<sup>40</sup> Heidegger, “Letter on Humanism,” 199; translation modified; emphasis added.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 210–11; translation modified.

concerned, he draws close to the absolute nothingness of Zen Buddhism, but even his apprehension of the nothing is that of a “*relative absolute nothingness*” insofar as he remains tied to a perspective of will.<sup>42</sup> Nishitani states that we must proceed from the “field of nihility” (*kyomu no ba* 虚無の場)<sup>43</sup> to advance the relative nihilism of existential atheism in order to arrive at a fundamentally nontheistic religious standpoint. While he maintains that the idea of absolute nothingness has never been truly grasped by the Western philosophical tradition, Nishitani acknowledges the advancements of both Nietzsche and Heidegger on this question. Closer still are the mystical theologies of Eckhart and Jakob Böhme, who were indirect influences on Nietzsche and Heidegger, which apprehend (not comprehend) the standpoint of “absolute nothingness,” or put in Western metaphysical terms, the Godhead (*Gottheit*) of God (*Gott*) expressed as the groundless (*Ungrund*) or abyss (*Abgrund*).<sup>44</sup> The original universal has long eluded the efforts of metaphysics to grasp it through thinking alone.

### III Finding the Place of the Universal

What is at stake is finding the *place* of what Nishida refers to as the “true universal,” namely, the concept of *basbo*, which serves to displace our zones of familiarity in which we all too often immerse ourselves in our various discourses.<sup>45</sup> The “true universal” is “the place of absolute nothingness” (*zettai mu no basbo* 絶対無の場所) or the “place of true nothing” (*shin no mu no basbo* 心の無の場所) as opposed to that of Being (*Sein*). Nishida writes, “True nothing must be that which envelops such being and nothing; it must be a *basbo* in which such being and nothing are established. The nothing that opposes being by negating is not

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<sup>42</sup> Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, 66.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 108f. For an analysis of the “field of nihility,” see Graham Parkes, “Nishitani Keiji: Practicing Philosophy as a Matter of Life and Death,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Japanese Philosophy*, ed. Bret W. Davis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), esp. 473–79. According to Parkes, for Nishitani the field of nihility is a place of death rather than life that turns us toward the “field of emptiness” (*kū no ba* 空の場) when we authentically confront our finitude.

<sup>44</sup> See Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, 67. What stands out in Eckhart for Nishitani is that nothingness is accorded a salvific and not an ontological function. This point cannot be sufficiently underscored, as it is essential for Nishitani’s own attempt to reconcile the differences between Asian and European thinking, a reconciliation that engages not only philosophy but religion as well. On Eckhart’s relationship to Zen, see Ueda Shizuteru, “‘Nothingness’ in Meister Eckhart and Zen Buddhism with Particular Reference to the Borderlands of Philosophy and Theology,” trans. James W. Heisig, in *The Buddha Eye*, ed. Frederick Frank (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, Inc., 2004), 157–69.

<sup>45</sup> Nishida, “*Basbo*,” in *Place and Dialectic*, 64–65, 81, 94. Nishida describes three kinds of *basbo*: of being, of relative nothingness, and of absolute nothingness, which he employs at times in a logical sense and at other times in an ontological sense.

true nothing. Rather true nothing must be that which forms the background of being.”<sup>46</sup> Absolute, or true, nothingness is Nishida’s partial reframing of the Buddhist idea of *śūnyatā* (emptiness or boundlessness), which was informed by his personal experience with Zen practice but expanded in the horizon of its meaning beyond the context of Buddhist ontology.<sup>47</sup>

According to Nishida, “The universal concept is nothing but the mirroring of the *basho* of being upon the *basho* of nothing. The world of concepts is established where the *basho* of being and the *basho* of nothing are in contact.”<sup>48</sup> This point of contact is itself a *basho* that is neither the unity of being and nothing nor the maintenance of their particularity. That is because the logic of *basho* subverts its very determination even as it posits it. Thus, its absoluteness is that of an *Abgrund*, which resists form even as it gives rise to form. It is important to note that, for Nishida, *basho* is not a concept at its most concrete or existential level. The *basho* of absolute nothingness does not mean nonbeing but rather the place of the dialectic of being and nonbeing, as well as the dialectic of consciousness (*ishiki* 意識) and history that enables the creative emergence of both individual and communal existence, thereby making possible the actuality of a new conception of a non-totalizing universal. It is critical also to note that “the *basho* of true nothing must be that which transcends the opposition of being and nothing in every sense and enables them to be established within. It is at the place where we thoroughly breakthrough species concepts, that we see true consciousness.”<sup>49</sup> *Basho* signifies the relation between two terms that is always determined in relation to a third term, namely, the *basho* wherein the relation occurs. “The so-called subject-object opposition is established within it as the true I—that which endlessly mirrors itself within and which contains infinite beings by becoming nothing. We can say neither that it is the same nor that it is different. Nor can we call it being or nothing. We cannot determine *basho* by means of so-called logical form. Instead, it is *basho* that establishes logical form.”<sup>50</sup> Here Nishida inverts the traditional epistemological view, actually a prejudice, that truth is fundamentally logical and, moreover, that it is only through logic one can reach truth and the object of its investigation, which is here *basho*. Heidegger resonates with this viewpoint: “With the assistance of logic and ratio—so often invoked—people come to believe that whatever is not positive is negative and thus that it seeks to degrade reason—and therefore deserves to be branded as depravity. We are so filled with ‘logic’ that anything that disturbs the habitual somnolence of prevailing opinion is automatically registered as a despicable

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>47</sup> For a discussion of the relation between *basho* and absolute nothingness and reference to other treatments of it, see my “Hiding Between *Basho* and *Chōra*: Re-placing and Re-imagining the Elemental,” *Research in Phenomenology* 49 (2019): 335–61, esp. 340, 350–51.

<sup>48</sup> Nishida, “*Basho*,” in *Place and Dialectic*, 87.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 52.

contradiction.”<sup>51</sup> This is the common view of formal or Aristotelian-based logic, which dominates Western philosophy, when it comes to understanding the paradoxical thinking of Daoism and Zen, which the Kyoto School takes up in its efforts to address and advance that thinking using the very language of Western philosophy.

According to Nishida, consciousness is the *basho* wherein knowledge is made possible. He demonstrates this by taking recourse to the logical structure of substantive judgments. The example he uses is the judgment “red is a color.”<sup>52</sup> Here the grammatical subject and particular “red” is subsumed by the predicate and universal “color.” Contra Aristotle, who defines substance as what is subject but not predicate, and which can be identified with or found in the particular or individual thing, Nishida posits the universal as that which is predicate but not subject. This Nishida calls the “transcendent predicate-plane” (*jutsugomen* 超越的述語面) wherein all knowledge and judgments are founded.<sup>53</sup> This plane is paradoxically what cannot be predicated and objectified and yet is precisely the place or locus of predication and objectification—namely, the conscious self, which is *no-thing*. As such, it constitutes what Nishida terms “the place of absolute nothingness” (*zettai mu no basho* 絶対無の場所), which has nothing to do with either the concept of the nothing (*das Nicht*) or nihilism.

Nishida’s theory of *basho* attempts to overcome or stand outside the traditional epistemological framework of dualistic terminological pairings such as subject and object, self and other, idealism and materialism, even truth and error. Contrary to the thinking of Kant and the neo-Kantians, Nishida wants to displace the epistemic subject or knowing consciousness with the *place* that makes knowing possible. In his first major writing, *An Inquiry into the Good*, Nishida referred to this as “pure experience.”<sup>54</sup> The concept of *basho* accomplishes this by indicating a dynamism that concretely precedes all conceptual dualisms and dichotomies by positing a standpoint (not a *Grund*) prior to any determinative distinction between experience and reality. In other words, before the ‘I’ or subject takes an experience as its own, there is simply the experience of an object or event. The self or consciousness is the *basho* of the experience. The logic of *basho* establishes this preconceptual standpoint as a “turn” (*itten* 転) away from the will (*ishi* 意志) toward intuition (*chokkan* 直感), from

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<sup>51</sup> Heidegger, “Letter on Humanism,” 226.

<sup>52</sup> Nishida, “*Basho*,” in *Place and Dialectic*, 55, 61, 63, 86, 152–53.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 84, 93, 95–102. John W. M. Krummel provides helpful reflections on the meaning and role of the predicate-plane in his “*Basho*, World, and Dialectics: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Nishida Kitarō,” in Nishida, *Place and Dialectic*, 5–17, 19, 22. See also the translators’ notes to Nishida’s essay “*Basho*,” 212n261, 213n262–67, 272, 214n278–80, 215n284, 287, 216n299, 217n306.

<sup>54</sup> Kitarō NISHIDA, *An Inquiry into the Good*, trans. Masao ABE and Christopher Ives (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990).

voluntarism to “intuitionism” (*chokkanshugi* 直観主義).<sup>55</sup> Although the concept of intuition is present in his writings prior to the “*Basho*” essay, the significant move that Nishida makes is this reversal with the notion of willing. “While it is thought that in knowing we mirror being by becoming nothing, in willing being as generated out of nothing. Behind the will is a creative nothing. The nothing that generates must be an even deeper nothing than the nothing that mirrors.”<sup>56</sup> This generating nothing is absolute nothingness.

Nishida understands knowledge in terms of a self-mirroring self-awareness (*jikaku* 自覚) in which “the self mirrors itself within itself.”<sup>57</sup> Moreover, both intuition (which, for Nishida, is more important than the will) and thinking are implaced and are thereby identical. Regarding how this relates to the formation of the universal concept, he writes:

The *basho* wherein objects are implaced must be the *basho* wherein so-called consciousness is also implaced. . . . This *basho* is accordingly identical with the *basho* wherein thinking is implaced. When intuition is mirrored in the *basho* wherein it is implaced, it becomes the content of thought. Within so-called concrete thinking, intuition must also be included. . . . The universal concept always plays the role of a mirroring mirror. . . . What becomes the so-called universal concept is the *basho*'s determination of itself, its objectification.<sup>58</sup>

It is important to keep in mind that, for Nishida, mirroring is neither representation nor causation. Moreover, one might also here include the faculty of imagination along with thinking and intuition to grasp the place of boundless emptiness, of *dao*. In any case, it is clear for both Nishida and Heidegger that reason or formal logic does not lead to an adequate grasping of the *basho* of absolute nothingness. Nishida writes:

To deepen intuition means to come closer to the *basho* of true nothing. Speaking in phenomenological terms this may mean the grounding of an act. But acts can only be grounded upon “the act of acts.” The standpoint of the act of acts would then have to be the *basho* of true nothing. One might say that this is to rationalize the nonrational. It means that the substance that becomes the grammatical subject, but not the predicate, is made into a predicate.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> The notion of intuition is developed in Nishida's later thinking (1935). See Nishida Kitarō, “The Standpoint of Active Intuition,” in *Ontology of Production: Three Essays*, trans. with introduction William Haver (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2012), 64–143.

<sup>56</sup> Nishida, “*Basho*,” in *Place and Dialectic*, 69.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 58–59.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.



A decade later (1936) Nishida will frame this in terms of “acting-intuition” (“active intuition”; “enactive intuition”; “action-oriented intuition”) (*koiteki chokkan* 行為的直感),<sup>60</sup> which is his positive recasting of his more negatively phrased “*basbo* of nothing.”<sup>61</sup> Acting-intuition is the way human beings interact dialectically with the logos of the world through implacement in the world.

Establishing the place of the true universal means “going beyond universal concepts,” which does not mean they disappear but rather that they are no longer bound to an ultimately *relative* determined position based on their relation to the *basbo* of being.<sup>62</sup> This is what produces the sense of disorientation because one also sees events and oneself in the context of an oscillation between the *basbo* of being and the *basbo* of nothing. The place of lostness, freedom, and awakening is the same. It is not an a posteriori physical space-place; rather, it is a priori. Perceptual space is implaced within a priori space, according to Nishida: “Because consciousness signifies implacement in the *basbo* of nothing, we can say that it is implaced in a priori consciousness. Thus to go beyond universal concepts is in turn to truly see thereby the universal. A priori space is what expresses the universal in this way. To see with this sort of standpoint is not simply to describe but to constitute. True intuition would have to entail seeing while implaced in the *basbo* of nothing.”<sup>63</sup> Although it means more than this, the non-thinking, non-willing standpoint of Zen expresses going beyond universal concepts as “going beyond buddha” (*bukkōjōji* 佛向上事).

#### IV Minding the Place of the Way

The non-thinking, non-willing standpoint of Zen moves one beyond the debilitating, confrontation with nothingness and nihilism, which is to say, with metaphysics. What is the relation between Zen non-thinking and Heideggerian thinking (*Denken*)? Here is yet another close relation, but do these two modes of reaching toward the originary intersect or do they remain parallel? Heidegger writes, “The thinking that is to come is no longer philosophy,

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<sup>60</sup> See Nishida Kitarō, “The Standpoint of Active Intuition,” in *Ontology of Production*, 64–143; “Logic and Life,” in *Place and Dialectic*, 103–74; also, *Intuition and Reflection in Self-Consciousness*, trans. Valdo Viglielmo with Takeuchi Toshinori and Joseph S. O’Leary (Albany: State University for New York Press, 1986). For secondary readings see Matteo Cestari, “The Knowing Body: Nishida’s Philosophy of Active Intuition (*Koiteki chokkan*),” *The Eastern Buddhist* 31, no. 2 (1998): 179–208; Elizabeth McManaman Grosz, “Nishida and the Historical World: An Examination of Active Intuition, the Body, and Time,” *Comparative and Continental Philosophy* 6, no. 2 (2014): 143–57; James W. Heisig, *Philosophers of Nothingness: An Essay on the Kyoto School* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2001), esp. 53, 55–56, 58–59, 79–80.

<sup>61</sup> Krummel, “Basho, World, and Dialectics: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Nishida Kitarō,” in Nishida, *Place and Dialectic*, 29.

<sup>62</sup> Nishida, “*Basbo*,” in *Place and Dialectic*, 79.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

because it thinks more originally than metaphysics—a name identical to philosophy. . . . Thinking is on the descent to the poverty of its provisional essence. Thinking gathers language into simple saying. In this way language is the language of Being, as clouds are the clouds of the sky.”<sup>64</sup> This last sentence is telling. Heidegger correctly notes the inseparability of the clouds and sky and language and Being. While Zen and Daoism also affirm this, they go beyond Heidegger’s perspective in thinking the releasement of thinking from thinking and therefore from the relative relation between Being and nothingness, or nonbeing. This is what is meant by Dōgen when he writes about non-thinking (*bi-shiryō*).

In what seems to be a purely circular and nonsensical path, Zen practice is a proceeding *from* the obscure and unknown *toward* the obscure and unknown. If one clings to what is simply familiar and known, then one cannot make new discoveries. There is an old Zen saying, “Let go of your hold on the cliff, die completely, and then come back to life—after that you cannot be deceived.”<sup>65</sup> One’s true nature is discovered not by searching around wildly for the solid ground, or, to use the analogy of a shipwreck, for the flotsam and jetsam that may serve as a life-preserver, but rather in the experience of being lost, of being ungrounded. It is found in the experience of the releasement (*Gelassenheit*) from the oscillation between being and nothing, which brings one to the *basho* of absolute nothingness. This experience is neither intellectual nor volitional; it is the non-thinking, non-willing conjoining of intuition and imagination.

Nishitani notes that Buddhism speaks of “‘the sea of samsāric suffering,’ likening the world, with all its six ways and its unending turnover from one form of existence to another, to an unfathomable sea and identifying the essential form of beings made to roll with the restless motion as suffering.”<sup>66</sup> In other words, the spiraling waves, which is to say, the clinging and grasping movements of ego-consciousness, are caught in their own churning self-centeredness, in a *delusional place* where borders are viewed as firm and absolute, and thoughts and feelings as being only one’s own. But the reality is quite different. One cannot discover new lands—that is, oneself—unless one is willing to let go of the seemingly stable shore (of philosophy or rationalization) and allow oneself to be carried away by the incessant waves of the sea, which is the releasement (*Gelassenheit*) of oneself to the movement of *dao*.

Case 19 in the *The Gateless Gate* (Ch. *Wumenguan* 無門關; Jp. *Mumonkan*), expands the understanding of *dao*, in this exchange between two of Zen’s most famous figures:

Zhaozhou 趙州 [Jp. Jōshū] asked Nanquan 南泉 [Jp. Nansen], “What is *dao*?”

Nanquan said, “Ordinary mind is *dao*.”

Zhaozhou asked, “Should I try to direct myself toward it?”

Nanquan said, “If you try to direct yourself you betray your own practice.”

<sup>64</sup> Heidegger, “Letter on Humanism,” 242.

<sup>65</sup> Cited in Gerry Shishin Wick’s commentary on case 63, “Joshu [Ch. Zhaozhou] Asks About Death,” in *The Book of Equanimity*, 197.

<sup>66</sup> Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, 169.

Zhaozhou asked, “How can I know *dao* if I don’t direct myself?”

Nanquan said, “Dao is not subject to knowing or not knowing. Knowing is delusion; not knowing is blankness. If you really want to reach genuine *dao* beyond all doubt, you will find it as vast and boundless as outer space. How can this be discussed at the level of affirmation and negation?”

With these words, Zhaozhou had sudden realization.<sup>67</sup>

When Zhaozhou asks Nanquan what *dao* is, he is really asking, ‘What is the Buddha way?’ or ‘What is the Dharma?’ Nanquan’s answer aims to simultaneously displace and implace Zhaozhou’s desire to have a fixed idea, a place for the mind to rest, a knowing about the truth. As Nishida teaches, *basbo* is always where the relation occurs, which follows the logic of neither-nor.

What does “ordinary mind” mean here? It is simply mind as it is right *now*, at this very moment—nothing more, nothing less. But the common-place conception of ordinary mind is that of the conscious or discursive mind which gets caught up in thoughts and ideas, in language. This is normally what one thinks but it is not what Nanquan says. *Dao* is not that ordinary mind. Nanquan says knowing is illusion and blankness (blank consciousness). How does one realize this? In Sōtō Zen this is realized in the practice of *shikantaza*, which is a sitting outside or beyond thought, beyond the conscious mind, beyond the conventionally understood ordinary mind.

The fourteenth-century Rinzai Zen master Bassui Tokushō 拔隊得勝, who also trained with Sōtō masters, said that the conscious or discriminating mind is the false mind; the true, authentic mind is the buddha mind, the awakened mind that is non-attached to the ego-self and all its aspirations, desires, fears, and hopes. Bassui also said that the root of life and death is the conscious mind.<sup>68</sup> *Dao* is not seen by the conscious mind, which is the ego, or rather, the seat of the ego. In other words, the conscious mind is where the ego rests, where it feels secure. If one cannot get beyond this conscious mind, if it is not vanquished, then one remains in *samsāra*, rooted in the cycle of birth and death (or rebirth). Yet as the second-century Indian Buddhist ancestor and dialectician Nāgārjuna argues, and what subsequent Zen thinking affirms, *samsāra* and *nirvāna* form a nondual relation that cannot positively or negatively predicate existence to either.<sup>69</sup> This nondual unity occurs for the awakened mind

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<sup>67</sup> *The Gateless Barrier: The Wu-men Kuan (Mumonkan)*, trans. with commentary Robert Aitken (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1990), 126; translation slightly modified. The *Wumenguan* was compiled and published in the early thirteenth century by the Chinese Chan master Wumen Huikai 無門慧開 (Jp. Mumon Ekai).

<sup>68</sup> Bassui Tokushō, *Mud and Water: The Collected Teachings of Zen Master Bassui*, trans. Arthur Braverman (Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2002).

<sup>69</sup> Nāgārjuna, *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way: Nāgārjuna’s Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, trans. and commentary Jay L. Garfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), Ch. 25 “Examination of *Nirvāna*,” 72–76.

here and now, in this place, this world, and not in any beyond or realm of transcendence. In Nishida's words, "The world is whither we go dying and whence we are born. Life is established as a determination in *basho*, wherein time is space and space is time. Historical life that contains absolute negation within itself, the world—wherein in one aspect as absolute negation we encounter our absolute death—is the world of death. Biological life and the world of species are established as the affirmation of such absolute negation."<sup>70</sup> In Zen, birthing-and-dying (*shoji* 生死) is considered the "one great matter" (*ichi daiji* 一大事).<sup>71</sup> Understanding *dao* as ordinary mind is at the heart of Zen.

In the *Daodejing* (ch. 25), what is identified as great (Ch. *da* 大) is returning, inversion, or reversal (Ch. *fan* 反), which is the very movement of *dao* (ch. 40). The great is the ordinary. To return to the opening question of this essay: Is it possible to be truly at home by being homeless, and if so, then how? According to Dōgen, this is realized in the practice of *shikantaza*. The thinking, discursive mind is like a double-edged sword: Without it, humanity would not be where it is at today in terms of its positive development; and yet, from a Zen perspective, the discursive mind is a hindrance, perhaps the biggest to awakening. The way to the Way (*dao*) is *wuwei* 無爲. Often translated as "nondoing" or "inaction," which inaccurately invokes a sense of quietism, *wuwei* is the natural, effortless activity of letting things be as they are, which includes oneself. The ordinary mind is the edge that needs to be gone beyond. It is a matter of going beyond buddha to realize the ordinary mind. It is easy to feel lost in the ordinary because it is fundamentally without orientation. It is the place of no place. Its nearness is paradoxically both its terror and its potential comfort. With the intimacy of that nearness comes exposure and vulnerability. Finding one's way, being at home in that homeless place is the Way.

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<sup>70</sup> Nishida Kitarō, "Logic and Life," in *Place and Dialectic*, 120–21.

<sup>71</sup> On this, and with reference to Dōgen, Heidegger, and Nishitani, see my "Recurrence and the Great Death," in *Phenomenology and Japanese Philosophy*, ed. Shigeru TAGUCHI and Andrea Altobrando (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2019), 247–62.