In this paper, my principal question is the following: How and to what extent – if at all – can Nishida’s basho (“place”), as it is outlined in his famous treatise Basho (1926), taken together with the “adjoining” essay The Unsolved Issue of Consciousness (1927), be understood and interpreted from Plato’s and/or Plotinus’ (i.e. Neoplatonic) philosophical viewpoint – and, possibly, also vice versa? Otherwise said, this is the question what have in common Nishida’s conception (or rather intuition) of basho on the one hand, and Plato’s quite “vague” concept of chóra in Timaeus or Plotinus’ first hypóstasis “the One” on the other. I assume and argue that there are some strong similarities between them, but also several important differences.

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

For a Western philosopher like me, a comparative approach proves itself quite difficult – maybe contrary to expectations – also in the research of the greatest Japanese modern philosopher, Nishida Kitarō, in spite of the fact that he was very receptive and creative in his studies of Western philosophies. There are several reasons why this comparison is difficult.

1 In this tendency, Jacques Derrida’s concept of differance has been particularly influential (see David A. Dilworth, “Nishida’s Logic of the East”, in the postscript to Nishida 1993, 136–140).
First, Nishida is a very deep and complex thinker, so that he can be paired up with his greatest European contemporaries (Husserl, Heidegger, Cassirer, Bergson et al.). Secondly, Nishida endeavoured to construct a most comprehensive philosophical system, a synthesis extending from the classical Greek philosophers (especially Aristotle) to many Western philosophers of the Modern Age, from Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz to Kant, Fichte, Schelling and Hegel, Schopenhauer and Lotze, Emil Lask and others; we might state that, in the Western philosophy, the last such a comprehensive philosophical synthesis, as Nishida tried to develop, was the great system of Hegel. It is surely an extremely hard task to think “together” and include in a single consistent system so many different philosophical paradigms, and at the same time to remain sensitive to all subtle differences among them.

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

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

1. Nishida’s basho and Plato’s chóra

In Nishida’s treatise Basho (1926), we cannot find a unique and exhaustive definition of the key concept basho – such a definition indeed cannot be expected, since basho is considered as the highest “transcendent predicate” and therefore not positively definable. But, of course, we find several outlining “descriptions” of basho and its different epistemic levels, from
basho as physical space of material objects, basho as the "place" of various mental acts and entities, up to the "highest" (or "deepest") "basho of nothing" (mu no basho). Yet, the interpreters of Nishida try to formulate a more comprehensive definition of basho, among them we may quote here John W. M. Krummel, one of the principal English translators and Western commentators of Nishida's works: "So what then is basho? [...] It would be a 'place' enveloping and encompassing all mental acts and their objects, all perspectival horizons of intentionality that constitute the world of objects" (Krummel, in Nishida 2012, 9). Of course, this is only a preliminary and non-compulsive "definition" of Nishida's "middle period" basho – nevertheless, it is enough adequate for our present investigation.2

Notwithstanding the sophisticated development of Nishida's concept(s) of basho(s), his original idea of the universal "place" where all differences are "implaced" has been unique (and, of course, also his "deepest" intuition of mu no basho) – as we can see already from the first page of his treatise:

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

In spite of the fact that Nishida's original concept of basho was inspired by Plato's chôra, we have to state that the latter is quite far from the former, as already Nishida himself pointed out in the last sentence of the quoted passage – but, unfortunately, he has not articulated this distinction clearly enough. Later, in the "adjoining" essay The Unsolved Issue of Consciousness (1927), he repeated the above quoted formulation of basho as "the receptacle of the ideas". We read at the beginning of this essay: "In the Timaeus Plato regarded the hypodoché [i.e. chôra] to be the receptacle of the ideas. But this was nothing but a material principle called space" etc. (Nishida 2012a, 51). At the end of the same essay, he sketches (rather casually) his critique of Plato's conception of chôra: "In Greek philosophy, the Platonist school arrived at the idea of 'the place of ideas'. But having conceived the forms as

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2 We may supplement this "definition" of basho with Krummel's further explications, for example: basho is the "pre-objective environing background for determining acts and determined content, the plane of potentials (predicates) allowing for the foreground emergence of beings qua objects or qua grammatical subjects" (ibid. 16) – or, in short, basho is "the place of implantation" (ibid.) of (all) existing entities and/or acts; it is "behind all objectifying or determining acts" (ibid. 12); basho is "the un-objectifiable, the indeterminate, the non-differentiated, i.e. 'nothing' (mu)" (ibid.) etc.
through and through being, Greek philosophy ultimately failed to render any logical independence to place. It conceived place as matter vis-à-vis being” (ibid. 56). (Obviously, Nishida had in mind here also Aristotle, not only Plato.) – In his notes to Nishida’s essay, Krummel adds an explanation: “See Plato Timaeus 52a. Nishida has in mind here Plato’s notion of chóra, which he touched upon above as the receptacle of the ideas” (ibid. 59, note 26). In the introduction to this essay, Krummel also speaks of Plato’s chóra as the inspiration for Nishida’s concept of basho: “Nishida states how he was inspired by Plato’s notion of chóra in the Timaeus and took it as a clue in developing his own concept ob basho or ‘place’” (ibid. 45). – I think that it is important to bear in mind that Nishida’s basho is actually his own concept, which is much more refined and enhanced concept of “place” than Plato’s chóra was, so that we may ascertain that the latter was only a preliminary motivation for Nishida. In the following, we shall look into some important aspects of this comparison.

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

“… And the same argument (lógos) applies to the universal nature which receives all bodies – that must be always called the same, for, inasmuch as she [...] always receives all things, she never departs at all from her own nature, and never, in any way or at any time, assumes a form (morphé) like that of any of the things which enter into her; she is the natural recipient of all impressions (ekmageîon), and is stirred and informed by them, and appears different from time to time by reason of them. But the forms which enter into and go out of her are the likenesses of eternal realities modelled after their patterns in a wonderful and mysterious manner, which we will hereafter investigate. [...] Wherefore the mother and receptacle (hypodoché) of all created and visible and in any way sensible things is not to be termed earth or air or fire or water, or any of their compounds, or any of the elements from which these are derived, but is an invisible and formless being which receives all things and in some mysterious way partakes of the intelligible, and is most incomprehensible. [... that is /next to the Forms and the sensory world/] a third nature, which is space (chóra) and is eternal, and admits not of destruction and provides a home for all created things, and is apprehended, when all sense is absent (anaisthesía), by a kind of spurious reason (logismós nóthos), and is hardly real – which we, beholding as in a dream, say of all existence that it must of necessity be in some place (tópos) and occupy a space (chóra), but that what is neither in heaven nor in earth has no existence.” (Plato, Timaeus, 50b…52b)

3 The literal meaning of the Greek term ekmageîon, which occurs in Timaeus (in our quoted passage), and also in a rather different, epistemological sense in Plato’s Theaetetus (194d), is the “impression” of a form in some matter/material, for example in wax (cf. also the famous “wax analogy” of Descartes in his second meditation).
As we may see from the last sentence of this passage, Plato would probably agree with Nishida’s statement: “That which is must be impled in something” (see the quotation from Nishida 2012, above). However, chóra as the Platonic primordial place where demiurges creates and therefore “implaces” sensory things as eídola of the paradigmatic Forms (i.e. as their “impressions” which “enter into and go out of” chóra) does not “implace” ideas themselves in the sense as Nishida’s basho implaces (also) ideal entities and/or cognitive acts. Nishida was, of course, conscious of this difference, when he remarked: “Needless to say, I am not suggesting that what I call basho is the same as Plato’s ‘space’ or ‘receptacle place’” (ibid.). However, in order to be clearer about Plato’s chóra, it would be better to refer to this “receptacle” as the place for ideas to be “impressed” in it (or in Her, i.e. in the cosmic “Mother”), not to denote it as the place of ideas, since in Plato’s philosophy the place of ideas is considered as the transcendent tópos hyperouraníos, mentioned in Phaedrus (247c), which is surely not the same with chóra in Timaeus. Moreover, Plato in his dialogues does not explicitly (i.e. with theoretical concepts) define a place of ideas, except in the very abstract sense of their conceptual tópoi, for example in Parmenides or in The Sophist. Only in the later development of Platonism, especially in the Neoplatonism of Plotinus and his followers, the Intellect (nous) is explicitly considered and much discussed in the sense of the place of ideas (and/or of intellectual acts), as we shall point out more clearly in the next section.

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

Nishida distinguishes several levels of space, especially the following three, presented in Krummel’s note 180 to the Basho treatise: “Again we see here a three-tiered sequence of deepening but in terms of space: (1) perceptual space or the basho of beings; (2) a priori space in the basho of consciousness (or oppositional nothing); and (3) true nothing [i.e. mu

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4 Plotinus, Enn. III 6(26).7.25–42 and 9.17–19. In this and the following references to the Enneads of Plotinus, the numbers in brackets – here 26 – denote the chronological order of his 54 treatises.
no basho)" (Krummel, in Nishida 2012, 206). It is evident that Nishida’s basho is not only the space of sensory beings, equivalent to Plato’s chóra or Descartes’s res extensa, it is much more (or paradoxically, “less”, namely as the ultimate mu no basho). Nevertheless, the notions of “space” (i.e. chóra in Plato and/or tópos in Aristotle) and “place” (in the sense of Nishida’s basho) are closely intertwined, as we can see also in the following passage, where Nishida distinguishes three levels of basho in relation to the levels of being, and each of these levels is “implaced” in its own (level of) basho:

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

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

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

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

In this point, namely that there must be a basho of ideas themselves, we can surely agree with Nishida, also from the Neo-Platonic point of view. However, in order to consider explicitly the “place” of the Intellect (of nous in Greek) we have to pass from Plato to Plotinus. I suppose that Nishida – at least in his treatises we discuss here – did not consider enough carefully some relevant distinctions between Plato and Plotinus, and therefore he did not realize that the Intellect as the “place of ideas” in Plotinus was much closer to his own philosophy of basho than the concept of chóra in Plato’s Timaeus. But before going into more details of this crucial point of the present comparative study, we have to remind of some important differences between Plato in Plotinus themselves.

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

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

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

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

In some of his treatises, Plotinus mentions chóra, but mostly just as a reference to his great master Plato, not as a theoretical concept of his own system, which is radically monistic. Plotinus does not need chóra, since his ontology strictly applies the concept of méthexis (or métalepsis), which he has taken over from his master. In Plotinus’ monism, all beings “participate” in the “one-many” reality of three primordial “hypostases”: the Soul (psyché), the Intellect (or Spirit, noûs), and the One (tò hén). We have to point out again that matter (hýle) is considered by Plotinus as the complete “privation” (stéresis) of any form (eîdos), as the ultimate absence of the Light of being, of the One or the Good (tò agáthos). Plotinus does not even need the figure of demiurge, since the process of “emanation” (the term itself was coined later) replaces demiurge in the evolution of the world from three hypostases.

⁸ Nishida was, of course, very well aware of the importance of méthexis in Plato’s philosophical system – however, he was not satisfied with Plato’s solution. At the beginning of the treatise The Unsolved Issue of Consciousness, he wrote: “Toward the end of Phaedo Plato conceives the nature of things as depending upon their participation in the ideas. He thinks that the beautiful is beautiful, the large is large, the small is small, et cetera, by means of participation in the idea of beauty, the idea of largeness, the idea of smallness, et cetera. […] But how can the ideas join individual things when they remain eternally unchanged without any association with the opposing nature?” (Nishida 2012a, 51) Nishida assumed that, in Platonism, chóra was a joining medium of things, but this assumption is valid only for physical things, since chóra as the “receptacle” (hypodoché) “was nothing but a material principle called space” (ibid.). In order to join together also higher entities, like thoughts and acts, Nishida “upgraded” Platonic chóra to his concept of basho …
For our context, it is especially important to understand properly how Plotinus conceived of the place of ideas, in order to establish its correspondence with Nishida’s basho of consciousness. Following Plotinus, ideas are “implaced” in the Intellect itself. The Intellect as the second hypostasis – after the One that “reflects” itself in the Intellect (by the internal division into nóesis and nóema, which are dual even in the Intellect’s own pure self-reflection) – is conceived by Plotinus as the transcendent “world of ideas” (and further on, by emanation of the world Soul, ideas as lógoi are immanent in the world, which is a unique cosmos). Concerning the true “place” of ideas, Plotinus’ principal point is that they are not outside the Intellect (as it might be argued from some passages of Timaeus about the ideas as paradigmatic “archetypes” for Plato’s demiurge), since they constitute, as spiritual “living beings”, the Intellect’s own “one-many” structure. Again: Plotinus’ ideas are within the Intellect, not somewhere “high up”, in some distant “heaven”. Let us look at a relevant passage from the treatise That the intelligibles are not outside the Intellect, and on the Good:

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

At the end of this passage, it is particularly fascinating that the ideas (“intelligibles”), which are “implaced” (by using Nishida’s term again) in the inner “place” of the Intellect, are themselves – as well as the Intellect as a whole – living and thinking beings. We have to understand them not only as intelligible “objective” entities, i.e. as archetypal paradigms, but also as intelligent “subjective” acts of the eternally living Intellect itself. Of course, the “living eternity” is a paradox, but philosophy has to accept paradoxes as “contradictory identities”, if we use Nishida’s term from his late writings. However, we shall leave these fine metaphysical enigmas of Plotinus for some later discussion, lest we turn too far away from the main topic of the present paper.

Now let us look at another famous passage from Plotinus’ tractate On the intelligible beauty (Enn. V 8(31).4), where it is evident that the Intellect, which “implaces” in itself the ideas (or the “intelligibles”) as living entities and/or acts, is not only a transcendently real “place”, but it is also a very beautiful, sublime tópos, the Platonic tópos hyperouraníos, shining in the supreme Light of the One or the Good. The apex of this Plotinus’ vision is the overall reflecting or “mirroring” world of shining entities, of “true realities”, which can be visualized also as immortal “gods” (or later, in the Christian Platonism, as angels). ⁹ In the context of our

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⁹ Concerning the transcendent “world of ideas”, the question can be raised of what kind of matter this “place” and its “implaced” entities (“intelligible realities”) are constituted. Does something as the “intelligible matter” exist, independently of the ideal entities themselves, but also quite different from the “dark” matter as the complete “privation” (stéresis) of being? Plotinus discusses this question in two treatises: On (the two kinds of) matter (Enn. II 4(12)) and On the impassibility of things without body (Enn. III 6(26)), however, he does not come to a definite conclusion about that. (The question of the “heavenly matter” was later extensively discussed in the Christian scholasticism.) Here I just add my opinion that the problem of the “intelligible matter” and the issue of the “place of ideas” are in spite of their metaphysical connection two different questions, or otherwise said, if we assume the existence of the “place of ideas”, this assumption does not necessarily imply the existence of some other kind of matter, at least not such which would be akin to the sensory matter.
comparative study, the vision of mirroring has an important role also in Nishida’s philosophy, particularly in considering the *basho* of consciousness, as we shall see – I hope so – in the next “circle” of this research. Beside that, the following passage from the treatise *On the intelligible beauty* is also very interesting because it reminds of “Indra’s net”, a famous metaphor from the Mahāyāna Buddhist *Avatamsaka Sūtra*, which is mentioned also in some interpretations of Nishida’s philosophy (see Krummel’s note 203, in Nishida 2012, 208). As I have already said, Plotinus speaks in this passage about the “true realities” (i.e. ideas) as gods who “are gods because of their intellect [...since] their thinking is always right in the calm and stability and purity of Intellect […as] they continually contemplate” (Plotinus, *Enn.* V 8(31).3ff.). In the next chapter of this treatise, we come to the metaphor of the resplendent light in which each being is transparent to every other, “and each star is the sun and all the others”:

“For it is ‘the easy life’ [i.e. a Homeric phrase for the gods] there, and truth is their mother and nurse and being and food – and they see all things, not those to which coming to be, but those to which real being belongs, and they see themselves in other things; for all things there [in the Intellect] are transparent, and there is nothing dark or opaque; everything and all things are clear to the inmost part to everything; for light is transparent to light. Each there has everything in itself and sees all things in every other, so that all are everywhere and each and every one is all and the glory is unbounded; for each of them is great, because even the small is great; the sun there is all the stars (*hēlios ekeî pánta ástra*), and each star is the sun and all the others. A different kind of being stands out in each, but in each all are manifest.” (Plotinus, *Enn.* V 8(31).4.1–12)

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

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point of the entire series of concentric circles that constitute the “predicate-plain” of/for all possible cognition.

Plotinus repeatedly emphasizes in his treatises\(^{11}\) that the One itself is not a being, not even the “highest” (or the “first”) Being – that is namely the Intellect, not the One, although it is named “the first hypostasis”. The One is, we may say, the most “inner point” of the Intellect, and thereby of the Soul, and consequently of the whole world of emanated beings. But even if the One does not exist as other beings (ideas, sensory objects, their shadows etc.), it is not nothing, not even the “true nothing” (shin no mu) in Nishida’s sense. In Plotinus, the One is “beyond” being and nothing. In order to comprehend this “transcendence” of transcendence, we have to bear in mind Plato’s famous phrase that the Good is “beyond all substances/essences” (epékeina tès ousiàs, Plato, Rep. VI, 509b9): that means that the Good (or the One, in Plotinus) is not just an idea (a substance/essence) among other ideas, not even the “highest” Idea, but it might be metaphorically visualized as the all-present Light which illuminates all beings, all ideas and all the sensory objects which “participate” in their reality (in the famous Plato’s “ Allegory of the Cave”, the Good is likened to the Sun, perhaps more accurately: to the all-present “Sunshine”). Therefore, the supreme Light has two transcending “names” in Platonism: “the One or the Good”, whereby the “meaning” of these two “names” indicates the absolute identity: the One = the Good. Both “names” evoke the same absolutely “transcendent predicate” (as Nishida would say), but do not predicate each other. Platonic “the One or the Good” – as Nishida’s basho – cannot be in the position of the Aristotelian grammatical “subject” (hypokeímenon), since it is not a substance. And here we are already in the topic of the third section of the present paper.

3. Nishida’s basho in comparison with the One of Plotinus

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

\(^{11}\) Enn. III 8(30), V 1(10), V 3(49), V 6(24), VI 7(38), VI 9(9) et al.
the sequence of predicates (universals), which cannot be itself predicated by anything else – and (also) in this sense, the deepest basho “is” nothing. Something similar, mutatis mutandis, can be stated about Plato’s “the Good” and/or Plotinus’ “the One”. From the logical point of view (needless to say, we take here the term “logic” in a broad sense, as Nishida), the emphasis on the “predicate-plane” is common to both Nishida and Platonism – and later, of course, to Kant, but we do not enter here into the very complicated relations between Nishida and Kant – whereas the “predicate-plane” is not Aristotle’s approach in ontology.\textsuperscript{12} Let us look at several important details by considering some Nishida’s passages.

In the treatise \textit{Basho}, Nishida writes: “This predicate-plane is what we may conceive to be the world of our consciousness. To be that what I am conscious of means to be implaced in such a predicate-plane. The object of thought is implaced in it as well and so is the object of perception” (Nishida 2012, 96). However, basho itself as the “transcendent predicate” can never become neither the object of thought nor of perception, at the utmost it might be present-in-absence in the philosophical intuition.\textsuperscript{13} For if we tried to approach “basho of true nothing” (shin no mu no basho) from the merely logical (i.e. cognitive in the Aristotelian sense) point of view, Nishida would teach us the following: “By driving forward in the direction of the predicate of judgement towards its culmination, that is, by continually transcending predicated in the predicate-direction, we see the mirror that simply mirrors. Upon it is mirrored the world of infinite possibilities as well as the world of meanings” (ibid. 90). Krummel adds to this passage the following note: “I.e., what Nishida elsewhere calls the transcendent predicate or the basho of absolute or true nothing” (ibid. note 241, p. 211). And Nishida continues on the same page: “In the foregoing, I have explained that breaking through the basho of being enclosed by universal concepts, there is the basho of nothing, which we may regard as a mirror that simply mirrors and which we can see the will in the relationships of that basho to the basho of being. […] At the basho of true nothing, the will itself must be negated as well” (ibid. 90). – In the last page of the treatise \textit{Basho}, Nishida resumes his main point(s):

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

\textsuperscript{13} In the introduction to his English translation of \textit{An Inquiry into the Good}, Masao Abe, an eminent professor of the “Kyoto School”, points out the following question: “How did Nishida develop the standpoint of self-consciousness into the standpoint of basho, place? With the notion of place Nishida moved from voluntarism to a sort of intuitionism” (Abe, in Nishida 1990, xxii). As a part of his answer to this question, Abe refers to Nishida’s statement from the preface to \textit{From the Acting to the Seeing} (1927): “Since [the book] \textit{Intuition and Reflection in Self-Consciousness} [1917] I have considered the intuition at the base of the will. I have had an idea, like Plotinus’ idea, that to act is to see. For this reason I have regarded the absolute will as the ultimate” (ibid.). It seems to me important that Nishida mentioned Plotinus in this context; compare, for example, Plotinus’ treatise \textit{On Nature and Contemplation and the One} (Enn. III 8(30)). See also Nishida’s preface to the third edition (1936) of \textit{An Inquiry into the Good} (Nishida 1990, xxxii). Obviously, Nishida’s reading of Plotinus was important for the formation of his “intuitionistic” logic of basho.
“… for the predicate-plane to see itself in the subject-plane means that the predicate-plane itself becomes the basho of true nothing. It means that the will destroys itself and that everything implaced in it becomes intuition. As the predicate-plane becomes infinitely expansive, basho itself becomes truly nothing and what is implaced in it simply becomes an intuition of the self. That the universal predicate reaches its extremity means that the particular subject reaches its extremity and become itself.” (Nishida 2012, 102)

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

“One Aristotle, however, once defined substance (ousía) as that which becomes the grammatical subject of judgement but not the predicate [in Metaphysics 1028b36–37, see Krummel’s note 19]. As a definition of substance I find this sufficient […] however, can we not conceive of what is in a still deeper sense by putting this in reverse as that which becomes the predicate but not the grammatical subject. Aristotle sought the transcendent basis of judgement merely in the direction of the grammatical subject. The transcendent that truly founds judgement, however, is not in the direction of the grammatical subject but instead in the direction of the predicate. […] As we conceive the predicate to be completely transcendent in the above sense, it must be something that cannot be stated to be a being [i.e. a substance] in the sense of a grammatical subject. As opposed to a being qua grammatical subject, it must be completely nothing.” (Nishida 2012a, 54–55)

When reading these and similar passages of Nishida, it seems rather surprising (at least to me) that Nishida himself did not refer in his works more to Plotinus (and also to Plato), because the similarities between his concept of basho and the concept of the Intellect as “the place of ideas” in Plotinus is (almost) evident, in spite of some important differences to which we will come later. Of course, there is a large historic (not only cultural) distance between Plotinus and Nishida, and it is comprehensible that Nishida directed his philosophical “dialogues” more to the modern than to the ancient Western philosophers, however, this is not the whole explanation of Nishida relative “silence” about Plotinus, especially if we have in mind that both philosophers strived for philosophia perennis. It is even more surprising that in those few passages from Nishida’s middle period, where he mentions Plotinus, he does not mention this late Greek sage with so much respect as he actually deserved, almost on the contrary. For example, in Basho Nishida mentions Plotinus only once, as he expresses the following quite sharp judgement: “The Greeks with their intellectualism, even with Plotinus’ ‘the One’ (tò hén), were unable to thoroughly exhaust this significance of true nothing”

Krummel adds to this passage the following note: “We may say that this refers to the experience of emptiness in the Buddhist significance. […] This is Nishida’s rendering, in modern philosophical terminology, of the middle standpoint of Mahāyāna Buddhism” (ibid., note 315, pp. 217–18).
(Nishida 2012, 94). – In spite of the fact that we surely could discuss to what extent or if at all Nishida’s judgement of “the Greeks” concerning the understanding of “true nothing” is justified (but I will not go here into this direction), it is at least rather odd that Nishida placed also Plotinus into the Greek “intellectualism”, as if “the One” in Plotinus were something only conceptual, abstract, as it was in the debates of Sophists, or even in the discussion about the one and many etc. in Plato’s dialogues Parmenides and/or Sophist. Nevertheless, I think that Nishida knew perfectly well that “the One” of Plotinus was much more than just an “intellectualist” idea.

Similar as in the treatise Basho, although a little more explained and moderate opinion about Plotinus can be found in Nishida’s “adjoining” paper The Unsolved Issue of Consciousness, in the context of the discussion about Plato’s chōra: “The One in Plotinus is conceived as what transcends nous and furthermore envelopes it within. And yet it still tends in the direction of the father in Plato’s Timaeus and not in the direction of the mother. Pure matter, without form, is conceived simply as that which mirrors, as [in itself] nothing. Greek philosophy failed to discover the deep and true significance of nothing” (Nishida 2012a, 51). A disputable point of this quite general judgement is already in the fact that the “mirroring” is not even mentioned by Plato in the context of chōra, while the “pure matter” in Plotinus is not something that mirrors, but at the utmost the “privation” of being is like a “false mirror”. – In the last paragraph of the same paper, Nishida repeats his, we may say, premature judgements about Plotinus and the Greek philosophy in general:

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

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

From Nishida’s cursory references to Plotinus (at least in the two treatises that we discuss in this essay), it seems that he considered Plotinus mainly as an interpreter of Plato – like many
important Western philosophers of the Modern Age, following the enormous influence of Hegel’s history of philosophy. However, today we know (again, after many centuries) that Plotinus was not only a very lucid interpreter of Plato’s philosophy, but that his “Neoplatonism” was indeed a new, enhanced variant of the Greek idealism, which was based, of course, in the perennial philosophical insights of the “divine” Plato himself. In the last few decades, a new Plotinus’ “renaissance” has been going on. We may guess that these historical turns in evaluations of the history of philosophy and the shifts concerning the importance of its principal representatives are probably the main reason for Nishida’s “overlooking” of the deep similarities between his own philosophy and Plotinus. One of the main motives for our present comparative project is also to correct this “lapse” and to fill the gap between two historically and culturally distant, yet in their very depths much related philosophical systems and/or ways.

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

Here I would like to emphasise again my conviction that the deep similarities between Nishida and Plotinus are greater and much more important for the comparative philosophical investigations than the differences between them – and this is also my main motive in this research project: the highest (or the deepest) points of Western and Eastern philosophies converge, since we are all members of the same global human “family”. In addition, I have to remark that my aim in this comparative study is absolutely not the intention to “correct”

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15 Nishida’s closeness to the “(Neo)Platonic Way” in philosophy is evident also in his last treatise *Nothingness and the Religious Worldview* (1945). In the first chapter of this treatise, where Nishida endeavoured to develop further his “logic of *basho*” in the direction of the historical-cultural (Buddhist) “background”, he returned to the explanation of the “logic of the predicate”, especially to the difference between Aristotle’s “objective” ontology and Kant’s (later also Husserl’s) “subjective”, i.e. transcendental method. In this essay, he states again that “in contrast to Aristotle’s subject that cannot be predicate, the conscious self has its being as predicate that cannot be subject”, and adds “I think I can grasp the true meaning of Kant’s contribution to philosophy from the perspective of my logic of the predicate” (Nishida 1993, 59). For our present context, it is especially relevant that Nishida in his last treatise explicitly assigns the “logic of the predicate” also to Plato, when he remarks that “Plato’s ‘essences’ [i.e. ideas, the Forms] would seem to pertain to this latter assumption” (ibid. 57), namely to the predicate-plane philosophy, in contrast to the Aristotelian “objective” ontology of the grammatical subject (*hypokeimenon*). This Nishida’s ascertainment would apply even more to Plotinus, cf. the above quoted passage from the *Enn. V* 5(32), titled *That the intelligibles are not outside the Intellect, and on the Good.*
Nishida’s understanding of (Neo)Platonism, since every philosopher, especially such a great thinker as Nishida, has right to understand and develop the philosophies of his predecessors in his own way (like Aristotle in his understanding of Plato, Hegel towards Kant, Heidegger towards Husserl etc.) – maybe just these “misunderstandings” are essential for the historical development of philosophy – and that is why my principal intention in the present comparative project is just to analyse and elucidate similarities as well as differences between two great thinkers, Plotinus and Nishida, not to judge which of their ways is more “right”.

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

At the end of this paper as my first contribution to the comparison between Nishida in Plotinus, I venture to ask a question which seems very essential to me, but it is surely too difficult for a finite human mind to answer: Is the “true” nothing of Nishida (and, in several “variants” of philosophical and/or religious formulations, also of the whole Buddhist spiritual tradition) indeed so much different from “the One” in the ancient Greek wisdom? Or, if I ask otherwise: Is the “pure” being different from the “pure” nothing? (Not only in the abstract sense of Hegel’s dialectical logic, but also in the “experiential” sense of great mystics of East and West.) Or, if I ask the same question inside the ancient Indian (and consequently overall Asian) religious wisdom: Is Buddha’s nibbana indeed different from the Upanishadic moksha? Or, saying in the spirit of the great Christian mystics Dionysus the Areopagite and/or Master Eckhart: Is the deepest divine Gloom different from the supreme Light? Of course, I cannot answer to any variant of this “final” question, however, we philosophers must raise also such questions that cannot hope to be answered, at least not “here”, not “yet”. The question of nothing vs. being is surely one of the very basic philosophical questions.
Bibliography


