Logic, Emotion and the World
— On Nishitani’s Haiku

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Abstract

Many philosophical traditions seem to presuppose a picture that has ‘the mind’ on one side, ‘the world’ on the other and where these two sides are separated by a thick wall. This ‘dualistic’ picture seems to be presupposed not only in the ‘Western’ traditions but also in the Indian-Tibetan traditions (though there are, of course, exceptions). Being inspired by the Zen Buddhist fascination with ‘the world’ as it is, Nishitani Keiji tries to overcome ‘dualism’ and replace it with a non-dualistic picture. He claims that the dualistic picture has the tendency to lead us to over-emphasise the importance of logic and unduly focus on ‘the mind’. According to Nishitani, Japanese poetry, in particular haikai (or haiku), overcomes the problematic implications of this dualistic picture. He argues that it is through our emotions expressed in haiku that ‘the mind’ can access the world as it is.

I do not think that Nishitani’s ultimate position on the issue is terribly coherent. Nonetheless, he seems to be intimating a way of dissolving the divide between ‘the mind’ and ‘the world’. Though I do not strictly follow Nishitani’s discussion, I shall try to excavate his insight on the issue. I shall argue that once we properly understand the nature of logic and emotions in relation to ‘the world’, we can come to see what it is to presuppose a non-dualistic picture.