

Logos, Non-Conceptual Experience, and Philosophy

**LOGOS AND NON-CONCEPTUAL EXPERIENCE:
OR, WHY PHILOSOPHERS SHOULD CARE ABOUT MEDITATION**

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Abstract

Philosophy in the West, by and large, has been an attempt to show that the language of reason (logos) is adequate to reality – that it can accomplish what experience alone cannot. Indeed, this is the central presupposition of philosophical analysis as it is usually carried out. The question I would like to address is this one: By what rights do we maintain this presupposition? What would it mean to take experience itself seriously, without allowing logos to colonize it? The philosophical traditions of the West have not in general taken this question as seriously as it deserves. For when we set aside the demands of logos, we likewise set aside the assumption that reality itself must be unified, static, and immediately answerable to conceptual description. The question thus becomes: What ways might we investigate reality without assuming the immediate legitimacy of reason, language, and conceptual distinctions? In what follows, I will defend the relevance of meditation (and meditative states) to exploring these philosophical questions.

Key Words: *Samadhi, Phenomenology of Meditation, Non-dual Consciousness, non-conceptual experience*

§1. Introduction

It is an astonishing fact that most people claim not to believe their experience. When one asks the standard questions about what is real, the stock answers are returned: matter is real, or sub-atomic particles, or energy. When one presses for more, the list of laws may well be rounded-out: natural selection, diminishing marginal utility, confirmation bias, supply and demand. When one turns away from the scientifically-minded metaphysicians, toward the more devout, answers are surprisingly similar: God is real, or God's love, or sin. In both cases, we see a rather strange tendency: definitions of the real turn away from immediate experience and toward some *explanation* of immediate experience that shows why it cannot be basic. 'God made the world, which enabled my experience' is not all that structurally different from the claim that 'atoms

create the world, which enabled my experience'.¹ Both claims involve, fundamentally, the idea that ordinary experience is not itself adequate to the phenomena of reality – there must be some 'deeper' or 'more profound' thing in virtue of which we can make sense of what is, after all, immediately before our eyes.

Of course, an irony pervades the turn away from experience. For any account of what is fundamentally real, one will *inevitably* appeal to a certain *kind* of experience in order to justify the thing being discussed: the physicist and chemist will focus on the set of experiences surrounding repeatable experimentation and scientific method. The theist will appeal to the immediacy of religious experience, or the experience of faith, or encountering the world in the mode of wonder; the philosopher might appeal to the normativity felt in the reach of argumentation. The irony is not subtle: one must appeal to *something* to show that regular experience is not to be regarded as fundamental – and appeals to anything will, of necessity, involve some mode of *experience*.

And so the philosophical dog must chase its tail. One requires a *reason* for claiming that one mode of experience is better – more veridical – than another. Already, however, the appeal to reason runs *against* the appeal to experience: reasoning is never concerned with the immediacy of an experience. Its very *modus operandi* is to move beyond itself – to hypothesize things that are not present to explain things that are, or to deduce things that are not present from those things that are. Reason is, like language, essentially ek-static²: to infer something from another thing is *by definition* to move from what is immediate to what is not. In this respect, neither reason nor language more generally can be true to the immediacy of experience – to utilize reason is to declare that a particular experience is not adequately intelligible on its own merits.

Philosophy in the West, by and large, has been an attempt to show that the language of reason (*logos*) is adequate to reality – that it can accomplish what experience alone cannot. Indeed, this is the central presupposition of philosophical analysis as it is usually carried out. The question I would like to address is this one: by what rights do we maintain this presupposition? What would it mean to take experience itself seriously, without allowing *logos* to colonize it? The philosophical traditions of the West have not in general taken this question as seriously as it deserves. For when we set aside the demands of *logos*, we likewise set aside the assumption that reality itself must be unified, static, and immediately answerable to conceptual description. The question thus becomes: In what ways might we investigate reality *without* assuming the immediate legitimacy of reason, language, and conceptual distinctions?

The argument I will make in reply to these questions is this:

1. We should take experience seriously. Experience is the only possible foundation for our understanding of the world, as it is only through experience that the world is disclosed to us.

¹ Of course, there are *non-structural* differences between the claims.

² That is, it is essentially outside of itself. I borrow the term from Division II of Martin Heidegger's, *Being and Time*, translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1962).

2. There are distinct modes of experience, some conceptual and others not. There is, however, no *a priori* ground for privileging conceptual modes of experience over non-conceptual ones.³ To put this otherwise: *logos* is not more primordial than unmediated experience.
3. One form of non-conceptual (unmediated) experience is found in the state of *Samādhi* (concentration), a well-documented mode of experience discussed and analyzed in various Indic philosophical traditions, often in association with forms of meditation such as *samatha* and *vipassana bhavana* and their various descendants.

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4. Therefore, we should take *Samādhi* seriously as a mode of investigation into experience as it is given.

There are undoubtedly a set of initial objections that present themselves. First, one might claim that we *should not* take experience seriously, at least until we have sorted out its relationship to the world. This roughly Cartesian objection, of course, is a confused one: it suggests we can both pose and answer such questions in a way that *does not* take experience seriously to begin with. Second, one might claim that there *are* a priori reasons for privileging certain modes of experience – particularly those that have been structured by *logos*. As we will see (§2, below), a defense of this view faces significant – perhaps insurmountable – challenges. Third, one might deny that there is such a thing as unmediated experience. Moreover, even if there is such a thing, one might deny that it has any relevance to our metaphysical questions. I regard the existence of non-conceptual experience as an essentially empirical question. Whether or not such states are relevant to metaphysical questions is itself a metaphysical question. I see no benefit in deciding the issue by fiat. I would offer essentially the same response to one who denied the relevance of *Samādhi* (or the meditative practices that cultivate it) more generally.⁴

In what follows, I will defend the relevance of *Samādhi* (and meditation⁵) to philosophical questions against these (and other) objections. I will utilize thinkers where appropriate – William James and Nishida Kitaro loom large in what follows, as will the phenomenologists, albeit mostly implicitly – but I do not intend what follows to be a scholarly inquiry into any one thinker’s particular view (or views) of an issue. I refer to such

³ Though there is an *explanation* for the privileging of *logos* – an explanation that has to do with the very nature of conceptual argumentation: it favors what can be articulated precisely.

⁴ This objection might take several forms: one might set meditation aside as a merely religious practice, and thereby claim it to be inappropriate to proper philosophical reflection. One might claim that there is simply no means by which to approach meditative states in a properly scientific way, and hence what is disclosed within such states is in a fundamental way closed off from those who do not experience them. As will become clear, I think such objections ultimately presuppose the superiority of *logos*, and hence beg the question against other modes of experience.

⁵ There is no single Sanskrit word that gets translated as ‘meditation.’ The terms *yoga*, *bhavana*, and *dhyana* can all be so translated. There are likewise a diversity of practices captured by each of these terms. When I refer to ‘meditation’ generally, I have in mind *samatha bhavana* and *vipassana bhavana*. *Samatha bhavana* is sometimes described as the practice that develops *samādhi*, eventually allowing the practice of *vipassana* (insight). In other cases, however, *samādhi* is said to develop *with vipassana*. For an accessible discussion of the controversies surrounding the Pali sources, see Richard Shankman, *The Experience of Samādhi* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2008).

philosophers' views only as a means to actively address the question at stake. My aim is *not* to establish that all philosophers ought to be cultivating *Samādhi*. My aim, rather, is to provide an argument that such modes of experience cannot simply be ignored by those interested in the core questions of metaphysics.

§2 *Logos*

The core question of philosophy, in some ways, is whether or not one can articulate the structure of things in a way that makes them intelligible – that *reveals* or *uncovers* a latent structure already present. In certain respects, the debates between rationalists and empiricists from the 17th-century onwards have been debates about what tools would best be suited to uncovering this structure.⁶ On the one hand, appeals to things like clear and distinct ideas, combined with the laws of thought they allegedly justify, were offered up as a means to reconcile the world of experience with the world of thought. In brief, the world of thought was to be made master of the world of experience – deciding in advance what elements of experience could be grounded in the categories of rational activity. The world of experience was made handmaiden to the world of thought.⁷

On the other hand, appeals to immediate experience, supplemented by a reasoning that would be used to make the most general sense of this experience, emerged to counter the claim that thought ought to have any proprietary say over experience. Thus Berkeley was willing to defend the idea that ‘matter’ was in effect a simple abstraction forced on experience by thought. If thought is to play second-fiddle to experience, however, such abstractions can be simply jettisoned.⁸

Both approaches, strangely enough, presuppose the same thing: namely, that there is a structure to be captured by the relative rankings of reason and experience. The issue is *not* whether the world has a structure, but rather how to get *at* that structure – what might be the surest guide. In this respect, the importance of experience was *still* in some ways subordinated to reason, even in empiricism. As everyone knows, the sense-data theory of perception says almost nothing about what experience is *like*. Instead, it *explains* experience in terms of logically-derived sensory ‘atoms.’ In this respect, even the empiricist theory gives pride of place to rationality: rationality is what will determine how to understand experience, and thus the laws of thought, now a tool to organize and explain experience, still wind up trumping it. The rationalists and the empiricists, for whatever their differences, still share a basic orientation

⁶ One might also read the debates over the primacy of either the universal or particular in just these terms: as a debate about how best to fulfill the demands of *logos* – a debate that of necessity presupposes the legitimacy of *logos*' demands. The textbook disagreement between Plato and Aristotle (i.e. is the particular or the universal more ‘real’?) is fundamentally a disagreement about how best to express the *logos* of things. The relation of the particular to *logos* in Aristotle is obviously very complicated (as is the relation of the universal to *logos* in Plato) – and the textbook reading certainly misses much.

⁷ Again, this is in no way unique to the philosophical efforts of the 17th-century. In some ways, Aristotle's problem with Plato is precisely this one: Plato makes the thought more basic than the thing. In some ways, Aristotle wants to reverse this, but the notion of ‘thing’ that Aristotle ultimately defends in his treatment of the particular (what Aristotle calls ‘primary substance’) still seems to be ultimately a function of our capacity to discriminate things in accordance with *logos*.

⁸ Moreover, this mirrors the Aristotelian reply to Plato: a form apart from a thing is simply an abstraction.

towards *logos*. Methodologically, reason still gives all marching orders. In the empiricist camp, however, reason is constrained to organize what is given in experience – but it may do so by whatever means necessary – including, crucially, explaining experience in terms foreign to experience itself.⁹

In certain respects, then, run-of-the-mill empiricism is just not empirical enough to *actually* take experience seriously. In its modern form, such empiricism is essentially an apology for the scientific method – and it is only the scientific method that really counts. Standard empiricism presupposes, above all else, that the world has an intelligible structure, and that this structure can be limned with language. But this is, after all, really a presupposition. *Must* the world have a structure? Our urge is to say ‘yes’, and then to appeal to the standard panoply of philosophical positions: Plato’s forms, Hume’s impressions, Kant’s pure intuitions and the categories. Might it not be the case that the structure we find in the world is but the structure of the language we think and speak? What if, rather than simply assuming that the world must have some pre-defined structure that we access *through* experience, we were to allow experience to speak for itself? What if we *did not* immediately assume that experience was in fact translatable into expository and assertoric language?

The Greek term *logos* captures one form of world-disclosure. It is the kind of disclosure that occurs when we read a compelling description of a thing – something that makes a thing stand out as intelligible in a system of concepts that enable us to navigate the world. ‘*Logos*’ has the sense both of reason and of language in general – and this is precisely the way I should like to understand it. It is a kind of conceptual order that we are capable of bringing to bear on our experience – and which, it must be admitted, can come to constitute our natural attitude about the events around us. To explain an experience is precisely to articulate that experience in conceptual terms – terms that both collect the event and display it to those with whom we share a language.¹⁰

Implicit in *logos* is a sense of order – that things stand a particular way, that they are organized and conceptually available to us.¹¹ *Logos*, as I am using the term here, discloses the

⁹ Aristotle is an interesting case here – and he may in fact be an exception. In *Categories*, the ultimacy of the particular is best expressed demonstratively: “*that*.” Is a demonstrative pronoun ‘foreign to experience’? It seems like a stretch to say so. Aristotle’s view comes closer to one that would allow experience to speak for itself, at any rate, than Plato’s written view does. Of course, any claims about Plato’s thought must be tempered with a recognition of Plato’s views on the inability of written language to adequately express truth. See, in particular, *Phaedrus* and the 7th letter.

¹⁰ On Gadamer’s view, this is also what’s required to *understand* an experience. In this respect, *logos* and understanding are intimately linked. To give up on *logos* altogether would be to give up on understanding. For my own part, I am inclined to distinguish *kinds* of understanding – the conceptual and the non-conceptual. I am open to the idea that the conceptual can *elucidate* the non-conceptual, but this is a rather weaker claim than saying that conceptualization is *required* for understanding. Unfortunately, I do not currently have the space to consider Gadamer’s view with the thoroughness it deserves. In brief, I contend that Gadamer thinks *logos* is a prerequisite for any understanding *rather than an element within an instance of understanding*. I think this is compatible with the existence of non-conceptual experiences that can be understood. To put this another way: it is impossible to realize the cessation of subject/object duality without first experiencing subject/object duality. See Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, translated by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, 2nd Revised Edition (New York: Continuum Press, 2004).

¹¹ In many ways, the history of philosophy is a history of excavating the structure of *logos* (and, occasionally, its limitations).

world as a set of discrete entities, having or failing to have particular properties.¹² The a priori structure of *logos* is crucial to understanding what it is that is actually disclosed *within logos*. Every language – every *logos* – consists in a set of distinctions along with rules for arranging, hierarchically even, these sets of distinctions.¹³

The logic of *logos* was, in many respects, first systematically treated by Aristotle in the *Categories*. The categories, at bottom, present a taxonomy of kinds of being – of the ways in which things can be said to be. Something can be an animal, but it can also be red, or sad, or here, or tomorrow, and so on. The arrangement of possible predications into types organizes the implicit structure of *logos* – into the ways in which it can gather and display the world. Implicit within this set of distinctions, however, are rules for how such distinctions can be organized. Four rules are worth mentioning explicitly: identity, non-contradiction, excluded middle, and the principle of sufficient reason.¹⁴ These are *not* empirical rules derived from long-term work with concepts in a language. They are, rather, the very condition for the possibility of an expository and explanatory language at all. If non-contradiction does not hold, for example, then no predication actually manages to *assert* anything. To say that ‘s is p’ in the absence of non-contradiction is *not* to say that ‘s is not ~p.’ In other words, saying that ‘s is p’ doesn’t *exclude* any other possibilities. But the function of predication *just is* to preclude other possibilities – if s is p, then it’s impossible for it also to be ~p. Excluded middle follows directly from non-contradiction by DeMorgan’s Law, and something like the Principle of Sufficient Reason can be derived from this in a few short steps.¹⁵

Logos, then, has a structure. It consists in making exclusive distinctions between things, and then mapping the relations between such things in possible predicates, according to basic logical principles. Some of these principles (Identity, Sufficient Reason, Excluded Middle, and Non-Contradiction) are more basic than others.

§3 *Why Logos Can Not Be Automatically Privileged*

The ground of knowledge has, in one way or another, always been claimed to be experience. The rationalists, as Husserl so skillfully shows in the *Crisis*, ultimately took for granted the legitimacy of the experiences made possible by the mathematization of nature – namely, the

¹² As I am using the term, *logos* is thus intimately connected to excavating the structure of what Heidegger calls presence-at-hand (*Vorhandenheit*) in *Being and Time*.

¹³ On this view, a concept is just such a set of distinctions – ‘this, not that or that.’

¹⁴ Aristotle identifies non-contradiction as *the* fundamental principle of human thought in his *Metaphysics*, where he formulates the principle several times: “It is impossible for anyone to believe the same thing to be and not be.” (Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 2nd Revised Edition, trans. W. D. Ross (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1924), IV.3.1005b23-24). “The same attribute cannot at the same time belong and not belong to the same subject in the same respect.” (Ibid., IV.3.1005b19-20.) “The most indisputable of all beliefs is that contradictory statements are not at the same time true.” (Ibid., IV.6.1011b13-14.)

¹⁵ Excluded middle follows because $\sim(p \ \& \ \sim p)$ is logically equivalent to $(p \vee \sim p)$ [DeMorgan]. One can derive a form of the principle of sufficient reason as follows: if p is given, $p \vee \sim q$ follows (rule of addition). If $(p \vee \sim q)$, we then have, via commutativity, double negation, and material implication, $q \rightarrow p$. This entails that, for any p, there is some q that, if it obtains, will guarantee p. (Of course, the derivation of the principle of sufficient reason from excluded middle is a logic trick. On the ground, we accept these principles well before we have ever shown that they can be derived.)

experience of structural-mathematical *precision* when modeling nature.¹⁶ The empiricists, as the name obviously suggests, took the *very same* experience of logical precision as a model for trying to provide the *logic* of empirical perception. As is well known, this resulted in an account of experience that had relatively little to do with experience – ideas, sense-data, secondary qualities were presented as a means of modeling experience only to come, via the power of conceptual thinking, to replace the very thing they aimed to describe. In an astonishing turnabout in modern philosophy, the primacy of experience, in both empiricist and rationalist camps, gives way to its unavailability: each model for experience blinds us to *experience itself*.

If we take seriously the claim, implicit in the history of philosophy, that knowledge must be grounded in experience, we find ourselves yet again needing to return to that basic ground: to what is encountered in living experience. To do this, of course, it is not sufficient to simply grab hold of our favorite models and then apply them, for in a very real sense the experience we aim to conceptualize is at least sometimes not in itself conceptual (a point I hope to demonstrate below).

In fact, the dialectic of rationalism and empiricism, as well as its alleged overcoming in Kant's logical reconstruction of experience, displays the way in which *logos* undermines our capacity to see experience for what it is. The move to analysis is *always* a move *away* from the object of experience: any account of *x* must involve terms *other than x*. Indeed, reason, explanation, *logos*, analysis – this entire family of concepts is essentially ek-statical and mediated: To reason about *x*, or to explain *x*, or to analyze *x*, requires *abandoning* *x* as self-sufficient. This is evidenced by the obvious fact that all explanations need to appeal to something *other than* the thing being explained, all arguments move away from what is immediate to what is inferred if they bother with the immediate at all, and all analysis appeals to more than is present in an immediate experience.¹⁷

The idea that *logos* is inadequate to experience has been championed in divergent philosophical schools,¹⁸ but it is an idea that remains at the periphery of mainstream philosophical work as it is routinely carried out today. Indeed, on the face of it both philosophy and the sciences more generally are necessarily hostile to the notion that *logos* is insufficient to what it describes. All of the discursive sciences (*logoi*) seem rather to *require* that the adequacy of *logos* – and *logos* itself, as I am using the term – involve a move from the unmediated to the mediated.¹⁹

¹⁶ Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, translated by David Carr (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970).

¹⁷ This move is what James calls the 'Psychologist's Fallacy.' See William James, *Principles of Psychology, Two Volumes* (New York: Dover Publications 1950). It is also what Wittgenstein refers to as a 'grammatical illusion.' See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 4th edition (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009). For an illuminating discussion of the connection between these two ideas, see Russell Goodman's impressive *Wittgenstein and William James* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

¹⁸ This view can be found in Meister Eckhart, *Selected Writings* (New York: Penguin Books, 1995), in William James, *Writings, 1902-1910*, (New Work: The Library of America, 1988), in Nishida Kitaro, *An Inquiry Into the Good*, translated by Masao Abe and C. Ives (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992) and in the later work of Martin Heidegger, see for example, Martin Heidegger, *The Event [Ereignis]*, translated by Richard Rojewicz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012).

¹⁹ This is true even when *logos* is concerned with itself.

In disputing the exclusive authority of *logos*, I do not intend thereby to say that every experience is as good as every other. I only intend to dispute that *logos* is the *only* way to investigate philosophical questions. As nearly everyone concedes, not all experiences are identical. There are hallucinations, religious visions, contemplations, scenic vistas, disappointments, frustrations, movie-goings, proof-completions, and so much more. The major objection to taking experience as such seriously follows directly from these considerations. One might well insist that only *veridical* experience should count, and then note that it is reason that enables us to distinguish the veridical from the non-veridical. In this respect, then, *logos* must take precedence over experience (or, more precisely, those experiences structured by *logos* should trump those *not* structured by *logos*).

Implicit in this objection, of course, is the presumed legitimacy of *logos*: the objection does not establish that *logos* can distinguish between the veridical and the non-veridical; it simply asserts it. If we *knew* that reason was sufficient to make such distinctions, no one could possibly disagree with the claim that *logos* ought to trump other forms of experience, given that these were known to be non-veridical. But the entire issue at stake is precisely whether or not the distinction between *logos*-experience and non-*logos* experience tracks the difference between the veridical and the non-veridical. To establish that these distinctions are in fact the same would require demonstrating that *logos* itself was justifiably regarded as truth-tracking – and not just truth-tracking, but *exclusively* truth-tracking. If other forms of experience could also be shown to be truth-tracking, in other words, we would have no basis for our exclusive reliance on *logos*. If *logos* itself *cannot* be shown to be truth-tracking – if it inevitably involves the presupposition of its own legitimacy – we likewise have no convincing reason to limit our trust in experience to a trust in the discriminations of conceptual thinking.

Is an exclusive focus on *logos* justified? The question is perhaps more vexing than it initially appears. The question itself, in one respect, presupposes the legitimacy of the very thing it asks after. For whatever the faults of positivism, this much seems right: questions are only legitimate if they are (in principle at least) answerable. To ask about the *legitimacy* of our presupposition that reason and language are adequate to the description of reality – be it physical, metaphysical, or moral reality – is already to speak in the language of reasons. To demonstrate the legitimacy of reason would be, presumably, to offer *reasons for* the presuppositions that could perform a legitimating function. But this is precisely what is at issue: we want to know if reason *can* be legitimate, and addressing this question seems to require that we use the very thing we are trying to assess.

The point can be made with a simple illustration of the circular thinking required: imagine an argument designed to show that arguments are legitimate. Any such argument – it really doesn't matter the form – will necessarily rely on the presupposition that arguments have normative force. If it did not rely on this presupposition, one could never take a conclusion to have been warranted by the premises leading to it. If we do make the presupposition, then the argument cannot be said to have *established* the legitimacy of reasons so much as illustrated it. But this entails that an argument aimed to justify reason will be no better at achieving its task than any argument: for us to take the argument seriously, we must already be committed to the legitimacy of argument. And this entails something rather serious for philosophers: reason is

and must be ungrounded. There is nothing outside of reason itself that ever *could* justify reason.²⁰

This is not a problem that has been lost on philosophers, of course. From Kant's project of using reason to discover reason's limitations to the Habermasian attempt to ground reason in the structure of language-use, philosophers have attempted to show that, although reason cannot justify itself, we can nevertheless rest easy – reason *must* be taken for granted, for its foundation is built into our linguistic endeavors. Alternatively, some argue that we are justified in accepting reason's legitimacy given what we have accomplished through its use.

As I hope is obvious, none of these three attempts are ultimately successful:

1. Kant's claim that we can discover the limitations of reason *with reason itself* has been criticized from a number of different perspectives. Kant himself saw, in the antinomies, that reason necessarily tried to exceed itself.²¹ Later, Tanabe Hajime, with some help from Hegel, more powerfully argued that if reason was inadequate, it could not possibly be trusted to determine its own limits.²² The very admission that reason has limits suggests that we should not trust it to discover and demarcate those limitations. (Indeed, Tanabe saw Kant's critical philosophy as yet more subject-centered hubris requiring *metanoesis* (Japanese: *zange*)).²³
2. Habermas's claim that reason was grounded in those discursive rules implicit in all of language-use faces similar self-referential difficulties: by offering the attempt to 'discursively redeem' reason by an analysis of the legitimacy conditions of assertoric speech-acts, Habermas essentially tries to *evade* the question of the legitimacy of reason.²⁴ An assertoric speech act, by definition, is one that is capable of being judged true or false in terms of the evidence available. One might well concede that Habermas has got the structure of assertoric language right without thereby conceding that reason is sufficient for determining the structure of the world, or of experience. Habermas' theory of communicative action essentially *restates* the claim that reason is self-legitimizing. For those who worry that reason is not adequate to experience, claiming that language legitimates reason is rather similar to claiming that the existence of bachelors legitimates the existence of unmarried men. Language itself (at least

²⁰ Compare the character Elizabeth Costello in J.M. Coetzee's work: "For, seen from the outside, from a being alien to it, reason is simply a vast tautology. Of course reason will validate reason as the first principle of the universe – what else should it do? Dethrone itself? Reasoning systems, as systems of totality, do not have that power. If there were a position from which reason could attack and dethrone itself, reason would already have occupied that position; otherwise it would not be total." (J. M. Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), p. 25).

²¹ See, of course, Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, translated by Paul Guyer and Allen Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

²² See Tanabe Hajime, *Philosophy as Metanoetics*, translated by Tekeuchi Yoshinori (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

²³ This is a dominant theme in Tanabe Hajime, *Philosophy as Metanoetics*, where Tanabe laments his earlier infatuation with Kant's critical philosophy in light of his own actions on behalf of imperial Japan during World War II.

²⁴ See, for example, Jürgen Habermas *The Theory of Communicative Action, Vol 1*, translated by Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984).

assertoric language) presupposes the structure of reason, and hence cannot be used to *justify* that structure.

3. The instrumentalist defense of reason fares no better. If the legitimacy of reason can be inferred from what we are able to accomplish with reason, two points of response can be made: first, even the astonishing success of reason would only justify the claim that reason is instrumentally true, not that it *actually* captured the structure of experience or of the world.²⁵ Second, reason in fact seems ill-equipped in multiple domains. For any experience that is non-conceptual, reason will be unable to capture the phenomena in question.

In my view, these quick arguments provide at the very least some antecedent plausibility for the claim that, if there *are* non-conceptual modes of experience, then these experiences have just as much *prima facie* legitimacy as do those experiences structured by *logos*. While I think the claim that we should take *all* experience seriously – even what *logos* demands we call ‘unreal’ – can be plausibly defended,²⁶ I will limit myself to those experiences that we can characterize as non-conceptual. In particular, I am interested in the experience of *samādhi*. Before discussing this ‘one-pointedness of mind,’ however, it will be useful to get clearer on the notion of the non-conceptual I am employing.

§4 The non-conceptual

What is the notion of ‘experience’ that escapes the net of *logos*? The sort of thing in question here can be found in several places. The beginnings of this idea are clearly articulated, for example, in William James’ *Principles*, as well as some later papers on radical empiricism.²⁷ It is also present in Nishida Kitaro, of the Kyoto School, who first came across the idea of ‘pure experience’, treated conceptually, in James’ work.²⁸ (Nishida undoubtedly came across this experientially in his study of Zen).²⁹

As early as *The Principles of Psychology*, William James was already calling into question the idea that consciousness was best captured in terms of a knowing ego intentionally directed toward the world. The evidence for this ‘egological’ view, according to James, was simply not present *within* experience. Or, to put the point more precisely, the idea of a knowing ego grasping experiential content could only capture certain kinds of consciousness:

²⁵ This form of argument parallels Arthur Fine’s arguments against scientific realism: Fine notes that the success of science is only evidence for the claim that it is *instrumentally* true, not that it is true *tout court*. See Arthur Fine, “The Natural Ontological Attitude” *Noûs* 18 (1984), pp. 51-65.

For a comparison of Fine’s views on the realism/antirealism debate with Heidegger’s similar views, see my “Heidegger, Arthur Fine, and the Natural Ontological Attitude,” *Prolegomena* 12 (2013).

²⁶ This claim *has* been defended, in different ways, by numerous philosophers, as we will see.

²⁷ See “Does ‘Consciousness’ Exist?” and “A World of Pure Experience,” both in William James, *Writings, 1902-1910*.

²⁸ See his *An Inquiry into the Good*. Carter makes the plausible claim that the notion of ‘pure experience’ is present throughout Nishida’s writing, even when he later turns his attention to the core idea of ‘topos.’ See Robert Carter, *The Kyoto School* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2013).

²⁹ See Michiko Yusa, *Zen and Philosophy: An Intellectual Biography of Nishida Kitaro* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002).

But this *condition* of the experience is not one of the things experienced at the moment; this knowing is not immediately known. It is only known in subsequent reflection. Instead, then, of the stream of thought being one of *con*-sciousness...it might be better called a stream of *Sciouness* pure and simple, thinking objects of some of which it makes what it calls a 'Me,' and only aware of its 'pure' Self in an abstract, hypothetic or conceptual way.³⁰

On James' view in *Principles*, the root of our core idea of the self comes, ultimately, from motor intentionality – from the fact that we *move* in the world. The idea of a centrally located 'agent' is one that we *feel*, and that forces itself upon us when we reflect on things like the nature of conscious experience. What is fascinating about this account, then, is that the very idea of a self is an idea found in reflection upon experience rather than in experience itself. This means that any account of experience that invokes a model of a knowing ego set over against a content of awareness will necessarily *depart* from experience as it is immediately given, and will do so precisely *because* of the demands placed upon us by the structure of thought itself (*logos*).

As James was well aware, when we come to the idea of a 'self' in our reflections, the idea that we consider is necessarily different from the activity of consideration itself. While it is true that a thought-content has no reality apart from the act of thinking that produces it, and that thinking has no reality apart from the particular thought-content it thinks, it is still the case that one cannot simply identify the thought-content with the activity of thinking. This is so for relatively familiar reasons: the activity of consciousness – despite always being tied to an intentional object – acts as a *condition for* being aware of the thought-content in question. What kind of condition is this? If James is right, it is a *logical* condition – a condition of *logos*. If we are to account for consciousness in terms of the categories of logic, we will need to postulate, as a transcendental condition of experience, a *subject* of experience. What I find innovative about James' treatment here, however, is his flat-out refusal to assume that logical conditions are also metaphysical conditions. Accepting that, in the realm of *logos*, we must *postulate* a subject as a condition for the possibility of experience does not entail that there are such subjects. Moreover, granting that *logos* demands a subject does not entail that we must *accept* this demand in our account of experience.

In this respect, perhaps strangely, James is far more radical than Kant. As is well known, Kant too thought of the subject as a necessary *theoretical* postulate, but recognized that only the empirical ego was accessible to any acting agent. Thus, in Kant, the subject becomes a transcendental requirement for experience, but one that we can never really know. For James, a recognition that something is a necessary postulate of thought is sufficient to show that we need not necessarily postulate it. To put this less cryptically: as soon as we recognize a compulsion to postulate something in addition to what is immediately given in experience, that compulsion can be seen for what it is: an urge rather than a necessity. For someone like Kant, responding to the urge is required to bring a systematic philosophy to fruition; for James, seeing the urge is enough to give up on the prospect of a systematic philosophy all together.

In later writings, the initial notion of 'sciousness' comes to play a much more central role in James' thinking:

³⁰ Willian James, *The Princiles of Psychology* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1890), Vol. I, p. 304.

the stream of thinking...is only a careless name for what, when scrutinized, reveals itself to consist chiefly of the stream of my breathing. The 'I think' which Kant said must be able to accompany all my objects, is the 'I breathe' which actually does accompany them...breath, which was ever the original of spirit, breath moving outwards, between the glottis and the nostrils, is, I am persuaded, the essence out of which philosophers have constructed the entity known to them as consciousness. *That entity is fictitious, while thoughts in the concrete are fully real. But thoughts in the concrete are made of the same stuff as things are.*³¹

The idea of consciousness emerges out of reflection on experience, *not* out of experience. In the act of experience, there is no thing called 'consciousness' that is experienced: consciousness is exhausted by its object. In this respect, Sartre is right: consciousness is what it is not, and it is not what it is.³² The thought being thought is real enough – present – but there is not a 'thing' *to which* it is present. Consciousness, in other words, is nothing other than the simply-being-present-of-the-intentional.³³ Indeed, this is the fundamental truth of intentionality itself: consciousness without an object simply *does not exist*.³⁴ Consciousness without directedness is unintelligible. It follows that consciousness is, well, *nothing* – at least when we construe it as something other than an event, or a relation, or an occurrence.

To take experience seriously, then, we must take this mode of experience seriously. We have chased out one conception of the world by developing scientific thinking and powerful conceptual maps. We have been hounded by what Husserl calls, at one point, the 'ghosts of logic.'³⁵ What happens when we turn our attention to this 'nothing', rather than simply allowing the rules of *logos* to determine what we *must say* about the logical 'structure' of experience? And how can we turn our attention to such experience – how can we deliberately access the non-conceptual experiential bedrock?

§5 Why meditation should be taken seriously: Samādhi

In Indic and other Asian philosophical traditions, it is widely recognized that one can develop certain perceptual and experiential capacities in such a way that they are *more* disclosive than they would otherwise be.³⁶ This is the essential role played by vipassana meditation and its descendants. Within these meditative traditions, various modes of conscious awareness are distinguished. A central experiential state involves intense levels of 'concentration' (*samādhi*). This mode provides us with one access point to the notion of non-conceptual experience.³⁷ In states of *samādhi*, many of the standard assumptions we utilize to organize our experience are

³¹ William James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), p. 37.

³² Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, translated by Hazel Barnes (New York: Harper Collins Press, 1993).

³³ For an interesting take on how this relates to some forms of meditation, see Wolfgang Fasching, "Consciousness, Self-consciousness, and Meditation," *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 7 (2008), pp. 462-483.

³⁴ We are misled to the extent that we take talk of an 'object' here – one set over against a 'subject' – to be referential. It is simply convenient. As T.S. Eliot once remarked: I have to use language to talk.

³⁵ See Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, translated by David Carr (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970).

³⁶ This notion is likewise at the core of Aristotle's account of *phronesis* as a form of perception. See in particular *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 4, collected in J.L. Ackrill, ed., *A New Aristotle Reader* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987).

³⁷ Or what is called, in some literatures, 'non-conceptual content'.

in fact called into question. The most significant of these are subject/object duality, on the one hand, and the very idea of structure, on the other.

Saying these things are ‘called into question,’ however, is a bit misleading. It is *not* the case that while one is in a state of *samādhi*, one therein *raises* a question about what one is experiencing. In a certain respect, the instant one raises a question, one is no longer in the absorptive states of *samādhi*. Questions themselves take one out of the immediate experiential present – they indicate an absence in the field of the present – something that is sought.³⁸ In *samādhi*, there is nothing that is ‘sought after.’ There is not even an experiential self that *could* raise a question about itself, let alone about what was being experienced. In this respect, raising such questions is always retrospective: one thinks back on the state of experience one was immersed in, and then attempts to characterize it utilizing the very concepts that were, within said experience, set aside. The issue of how to characterize *samādhi* is thus a complicated one. In one respect, any characterization must be inadequate, as it will be couched within a set of concepts that are foreign to the experience itself; *samādhi* is *essentially* non-conceptual.³⁹ Nevertheless, given that we are navigating discursive waters, some sort of characterizations must be used. The trick, as the old Zen proverb has it, is not to mistake the finger pointing at the moon for the moon itself.

Samādhi, it should be noted, does not really pick out a *single* state of awareness. It is commonly distinguished into several different levels.⁴⁰ For our purposes, it will be sufficient to pick out the basic features of *samādhi* without reference to its various modes or levels. The aim of doing this is to articulate a mode of experience that is non-conceptual, and that can be cultivated.

The most general rendering of the term *samādhi* is ‘concentration’ or ‘unification.’ A common metaphor used to describe *samādhi* is ‘one-pointedness of mind’ [Sanskrit: *cittass’ ekaggata*], or ‘unification of mind.’⁴¹ As Shankman characterizes it: “*samādhi* entails the unifying of the mind in a steady, undistracted awareness” (4).⁴² This is accomplished through *practice*, and can be developed well beyond what someone is initially capable of:

Fixed concentration is cultivated, concentration on a fixed object so intense that awareness of no other experience can arise, resulting in one-pointed focus and states of tranquility and peace where all experience of changing physical and mental activity ceases. Subtle states of steady, undistracted

³⁸ See Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, Section 2.

³⁹ This is the case because concepts inherently imply subject/object duality. To utilize a concept, at least in regular assertoric language, is to specify a thing *other than* oneself – even when the concept is ‘self.’ This is a point that has been made by numerous philosophers, not the least of whom are Nishida Kitaro and Nishitani Keiji. Gadamer also makes the point when he claims, in *Truth and Method*, that intelligible assertion depends on a distance between what is said and who is saying it (See, e.g., 442).

⁴⁰ For an account of the treatment of *samādhi* in the Pali texts, see Richard Shankman, *The Experience of Samadhi* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2008).

⁴¹ The etymology of the term “is derived from the Pali prefix *sam*, meaning ‘together,’ and the root *dha*, meaning to ‘to put’ or ‘place’” (Shankman, 3). The sense of the term thus involves something like unification, or a ‘placing together.’

⁴² Richard Shankman, *The Experience of Samadhi* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2008).

awareness can ultimately be achieved, but awareness of changing phenomena is lost as the mind is fixed or absorbed into its meditation object and mental activity becomes still.⁴³

In *samādhi*, then, we see something like the disappearance of subject/object duality: the object of awareness and the act of awareness are no longer experientially distinguished. No judgments are made. The self that we pre-reflectively regard as a necessary partner in the perceptual act recedes into oblivion. There is no ‘naming’ of the object of our awareness – there is simply awareness. The state picked out by the term *samādhi* is thus an instance of what Nishida Kitaro, following William James, calls ‘pure experience’: “When one directly experiences one’s own state of consciousness, there is not yet a subject or an object, and knowing and object are completely unified.”⁴⁴ This *is not* the same as the cool contemplation of some object in thought. “The present of pure experience is not the present in thought, for once one thinks about the present, it is no longer present.”⁴⁵ In other words, the addition of any conceptual labels to one’s immediate experience essentially moves one’s attention away *from* that experience and *toward* the labels one is utilizing: “when one makes judgments about it, it ceases to be pure experience.”⁴⁶ This is so because “pure experience coincides with the sphere of attention.”⁴⁷ Both the general notion of *samādhi* and Nishida’s notion of pure experience (which I read as encompassing *samādhi*) provide us with examples of one type of non-conceptual experience.⁴⁸

There are those who would claim that all experience is conceptual. I deny this claim, but regard the matter as essentially an empirical one. It *is* true that experience is *informed by* concepts in many ways – concepts organize both the perception of the workaday world as well as our descriptions of it. Nevertheless, there are states of consciousness – ways of relating to intentional objects – that essentially break down the distinction between the intentional object and the consciousness that is aware of it. To put this another way: there are states of consciousness in which any awareness of ‘I’ is completely recessed – in which the content and the act of consciousness are identical.

The Zen tradition sometimes characterizes this in terms of ‘just sitting.’ The practice of *vipassana bhavana* anchors itself in breathing – just breathing. In the state of *samādhi*, there is not an object of consciousness (the act of breathing) set over against a subject engaged in that activity (the ego, or self, or *atman*). Instead, there is pure activity: just breathing.

It should be admitted immediately that our descriptions of such experience seem to insist on attributing the activity to an agent – if there is pain, it must belong to someone; if there is breathing, there must be an organism doing it; if there are thoughts, there must be a thinker. Such descriptions may, in the end, be true. What is important for our purposes here, however, is to see that these claims are the results of *inference*. They are not immediately present in the experience itself. We *infer* that there is a ‘self’ that experiences the pain, or does the breathing,

⁴³ Ibid, p. 55.

⁴⁴ Nishida Kitaro, *An Inquiry into the Good*, pp. 3-4.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 5.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 4.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 6.

⁴⁸ There are of course other forms of non-conceptual experience. Indeed, much absorptive experience strikes me as non-conceptual in ways similar to the sense articulated above. The difference between *Samādhi* and other non-conceptual experiences is an important issue, but not one I have time to explore here.

or thinks the thought. If we stick to what is present in experience, we find no such thing – or, perhaps better, we find no such thing that is permanent.

Can there be pain without someone experiencing it? If pain is intrinsically phenomenological, one will be tempted to say ‘no’ here. But, again, it really depends on how we parse the question. Let us grant that pain is intrinsically phenomenological: whenever there is pain, there is awareness of pain. This is *not* the equivalent, however, of saying that there must be someone who is *being aware of pain* whenever there is pain.

There is no reason to deny that we *think* about pain in terms of subjects and intentional objects. That much is certainly true. But to say that we think of x in a certain way is not yet to demonstrate that x is in fact really captured in this way of thinking about it, nor is it to demonstrate any kind of metaphysical necessity.

In *samādhi*, pain is just pain. It is not my pain.⁴⁹ Awareness fuses with its object in such a way that there is really no experiential distinction to be made. Interestingly, this changes the very way pain is encountered within experience: it is no longer something to be avoided. It is just pain.

The example of pain is a telling one for the larger point I want to make here. It is very easy – completely natural, in fact, to think that any pain I feel must be *my* pain. And yet the experience of *samādhi* calls this into question in a fundamental way: pain is simply pain, there is no ‘me’ apart from the awareness of pain: what I call ‘me’ is exhausted when we simply describe the experience: ‘there is being aware of pain now.’⁵⁰ Nothing else is required by the experience, though thinking longs to build up a conceptual structure around this experience – to note subjects and objects, to engage in the language of substance.

If *samādhi* involves the fusion of subject and object – the unity of consciousness and its object – then there is at least one experience that suggests that the entire edifice upon which we have built science, philosophy, and the discursive sciences (*logoi*) more generally is inherently problematic. It suggests that the discursive sciences (*logoi*) will only ever be able to gesture toward certain modes of experience. This also suggests an explanation for the routine rejection of some modes of experience by the sciences: the assertoric, propositional nature of scientific discovery (as currently conceived) fundamentally limits what science itself can legitimately investigate (namely, only those things with propositional or conceptual structure). The instant something can be put into words only inexactly (or metaphorically), it ceases to be regarded as falling within the domain of ‘science.’⁵¹

When I say that the discursive sciences (*logoi*) are ‘problematic,’ I mean that we should not assume that the experiences corresponding to (and issuing in) science, philosophy, and subject/object thinking are self-justifying. I do *not* mean that these things are false. Taking experience seriously requires us to take seriously even common sense experience – and it is obviously true that sometimes we do experience things like the idea of a self, or of cause and effect, or of straightforward distinctions among objects. This must be taken seriously, but it

⁴⁹ For a wonderfully written account of how one comes to realize, in meditative states, that pain is not personal, see Tim Parks, *Teach Us to Sit Still* (New York: Rodale Press, 2010).

⁵⁰ Or even: “It’s like this right now.”

⁵¹ I think a plausible case can be made that *all* language is metaphorical. I do not mean to suggest otherwise with my remarks. My above point should be read in terms of what we self-consciously *regard* as metaphor.

cannot be the final word. It cannot be the final word precisely because there are other modes of experience that reveal things in a fundamentally different way.⁵²

If we compare these modes of experience in the realm of *logos*, the results are given before we even get them: *logos* demands structure – and this structure is usually given in terms of subjects and objects, substances and their predicates. It is in the nature of *logos* to account for things in these terms. It is precisely for this reason, however, that *logos* is not a sure guide to the organization of every possible experience – *logos* gathers the world in one way: by sorting it into categories, by making distinctions. It is true that many *different* distinctions can be made – and that there are many ways of organizing things conceptually – but this is itself further evidence of the point: *logos* thrives on distinctions. Indeed, reasoning and language-use more generally exist precisely as sets of distinctions and the relations between them. To demand that experience conform to *logos* is thus to rule out the possibility that the world is itself unstructured. More specifically, it is to rule out the possibility that subject/object duality is inadequate to certain kinds of experience.

§6 Some implications for philosophical problems

Nothing I have argued so far in any way indicates that non-conceptual experience should be *privileged* over conceptual experience. Indeed, the view I have been articulating is at least compatible with the claim that, after investigation, we will *decide* that the structure of *logos* is the one worth pursuing. My primary contention here has only been that we ought not dismiss non-conceptual experience prior to its investigation – that we ought not presume the superiority of *logos* simply by fiat.

I have tried to make the case that a commitment to experience is in general a hallmark of inquiry, that this commitment has too regularly been read as simply a commitment to conceptual experience, and that there is no compelling *a priori* reason to privilege such experience. Indeed, a focus on *non-conceptual* experience seems to support a particular *type* of answer to the traditional questions of metaphysics in much the same way that a focus on conceptual experience does. The obvious relevance of things like *samādhi* for those interested in the questions of metaphysics, broadly construed, is that such experiences seem to challenge standard assumptions in an immediate and direct way. If experiential states like *samādhi* are taken seriously, then, as a source of experiential evidence – something that seems to be demanded even by *logos* – we might well expect a different set of responses to some standard philosophical questions. By way of conclusion, I'd like to suggest some of the possible implications of regarding *samādhi* and similar experiential states as fundamental ones – that is, as states that disclose things in a primordial way. While there is much that might be said to elaborate the claims I will make, my current intention is only to highlight the general shape of such responses.

1. Privileging *samādhi* suggests that language is essentially metaphorical, despite the fact that in the workaday world it may be perfectly adequate to its task. If the unification of mind present in *samādhi* is regarded as reality-disclosing, then any description of that

⁵² Hence, openness to the non-conceptual seems to involve a kind of ontological pluralism, as William James certainly knew.

reality will rely on distinctions that either function well or do not function well for the tasks at hand. Language, then, will enable us to articulate particular conventional truths, but it will only ever be able to indicate the metaphysical structure of things through sets of metaphors – metaphors that will mark distinctions that must ultimately be real only conventionally.⁵³

2. *Samādhi* likewise suggests the priority of the particular over the universal. After all, in the state of *samādhi* one is completely absorbed in the particular. The instant the universal intervenes, we are functioning at the level of *logos* – at the level of conceptual thinking, attaching predicates to subjects. Given that this is mediated experience, it is in certain respects metaphysically derivative (at least from a point of view that privileges non-dual experience). This means that universals are likely best construed as abstractions, and particulars are best regarded as metaphysically fundamental.
3. *Samādhi* likewise seems to suggest the superiority of an event ontology as opposed to a substance ontology. The very notion of a substance is, for reasons just given, connected to the idea of enduring things to which particular predicates attach. This language is inescapably fraught with subject/object duality, and tied, perhaps inextricably, to the notion that universals will best capture the reality of a thing. In *samādhi*, however, experience cannot adequately be described in these terms: it is always immediate, fluid, and particular.
4. Our standard philosophical positions in metaphysics are structured in a way that ignores the reality of non-dual experience. To recognize such experience will involve the recognition that positions like realism and antirealism are in some ways both *false* and in some ways both *true* (if language is metaphorical, and we can distinguish between ‘conventional truth’ and ‘ultimate truth,’ then both realism and antirealism fail to capture the nature of things at one level of analysis, while managing to capture it at another).
5. Our attitude toward the law of non-contradiction may be forced to change. Such laws do not actually describe some aspects of reality – i.e. non-dual experience. This means that the limits of language *may not be* the limits of the world. It also means that we may need to take deviant logics more seriously, both traditional dialectical logic, as found in folks like Hegel, Nishida, Tanabe, and Nishitani, and more formal logics that deny certain axioms of traditional logic (specifically: the law of non-contradiction).
6. An ability to stop doing philosophy when we want to, to show the fly the way out of the fly bottle, etc. also seems to follow from the recognition of *samādhi* (or other non-conceptual experiences) as potentially reality-disclosing. After all, if our philosophical debates all occur at the level of the conceptual – at the level of *logos* and the conventional reality we share simply in virtue of sharing a common language – we will always have recourse to the non-conceptual when we want to step away from such disputes.

⁵³ The phrase ‘conventionally real’ should not be read to mean ‘less real.’ Things routinely regarded as merely conventionally real (marriage, the rules of games, etc) are not *therefore* less real, despite having an ontological status we regard as different from what we conventionally call ‘non-conventional reality.’

7. *Samādhi*, given what has so far been said, will also allow us to see many disputes in philosophy (and perhaps all of them) precisely as disputes about metaphors – about what set of metaphors will most fruitfully allow us to describe the world given the interests we have. This seems to indicate that a pragmatic conception of belief-acceptance will likely be the best epistemological stance at the level of *logos*.

§8 Concluding Remarks

Perhaps the days of systematic philosophy are over. They are certainly on the wane. If we ever hope to return to fundamental questions, however, it seems to me that the *logos*-driven traditions of Greco-European philosophy must address the presumptive privileging of *Logos* that has characterized its multi-faceted history. I have tried to provide an argument that this is a question worth examining, and that the answers we get will depend in part on the openness with which we approach the question of experience.