

# *Becoming a Knower Through Apory: Taking Inspiration from Nishida in Working with Yolngu Aboriginal Australians in Northern Australia*

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*Located in a settler-Australian tertiary education institution we develop a worldly or mundane approach to working in and between institutions enacting two distinct world philosophies. We engage with the epistemics embedded and expressed in the functioning of modern institutions committed to a naturalistic scientific world. And albeit to a more limited extent we engage with epistemics embedded in and expressed by institutions framed and ordered by collectively enacting intentions of Eternal World-Making Beings of Yolngu Aboriginal Australian lands and peoples.*

**Key words:** ontology of language; naturalist linguistic science; Eternal World-Making Beings of Yolngu Aboriginal Australia; avoiding epistemic injustice

## 1 Introduction

Our paper concerns working in and between knowledge traditions where practitioners on both sides are prepared to go-on epistemically together in doing disparities in metaphysical commitments in explicit enough good faith. Such an ‘in and between’ positioning requires explicit commitment to metaphysical under-determination and intra-epistemic reflexivity. These epistemic dispositions induce a modest epistemic demeanor. The epistemic traditions we are working in and between are here glossed as on the one hand modern naturalistic science, and on the other as the epistemic traditions which Yolngu Aboriginal Australians count as expression of the intentions and actions of many founding Ancestral Beings. The concept in contention is language: scientific linguists are strongly committed to language as symbolic code and as ontologically singular; Yolngu knowledge authorities place great value on practices that care for languages as expressions of an ontological plurality eternally bestowed as the present by Ancestral Beings.

The claim we are making in this paper is that becoming a knower comfortable in the complexities of working within and between radically distinct knowledge communities in situations where members of those epistemic communities wish to simultaneously remain distinct, and yet connect well enough to go on together, requires explicit recognition of the need to ‘know otherwise.’ This has a beginning in an experiential apory, and a going-on to making passage through (re)experiencing experience in ‘wording it.’ Ours is a claim concerning normative configuration of an authoritative knower in the midst of epistemic confusion. In this paper we are approaching the issue through first ‘fleshing-out’ an exemplar of this normative figure of the knower. In this exemplification, we present a narrative written by author Hayashi Yasunori, ‘Hayashi Yasunori’s Passage out of Apory’ (section 3). Author Helen Verran has previously published a paper articulating her passage out of apory where the concept of number was at issue (Verran 2015).<sup>1</sup> Among other things these are stories of becoming competent as an authoritative knower, albeit one expressing a thoroughly unconventional paradoxical relationality between knowers and knowns.

In developing this claim, we are taking our cues from Nishida Kitarō (西田幾多郎, 1870-1945). At the end of the narrative account of passage out of apory presented here, the author in the text (Hayashi Yasunori) claims to know the concept of ‘language’ paradoxically as neither and both the known of scientific linguistics and as the known of Yolngu language authorities. We interpret this complicated and complex situated known in terms of the Nishidan phrase *shu-kyaku*, “host”-“guest,” by which we recognize that Nishida is setting off in a quite different direction than the static epistemic dualism of Kant, in postulating four logically possible ways wherein knowers and knowns interact in each being neither and both (Nishida 2012: 118).<sup>2</sup> Following the story we consider in more general terms, the passage out of apory which has been demonstrated. Finally, we briefly describe our method of progressing from experiencing to judgement (in the form of making a knowledge claim), justifying the method as iteratively constituted in four steps and proposing the claim as one made in epistemic good faith and which avoids epistemic injustice.

## 2 Taking Inspiration from Nishida Kitarō

Often claimed as the originator of modern philosophy in Japan (Maraldo 2019),<sup>3</sup> Nishida was born four years after a short but destructive civil war which had been precipitated among other things by the increasing interference in Japan’s political and economic sovereignty by western imperial powers. The outcome of the civil war was a radical change in government and restoration of Emperor Meiji Tokugawa Yoshinobu (1837-1913) as ruler. Only sixteen years before Nishida’s birth, American naval power had successfully deployed gun-boat diplomacy in challenging the ruling Tokugawa Shogunate, a hereditary military dictatorship which had ruled Japan for seven centuries. In that many established institutions of late nineteenth century Japanese life, along with the epistemic regimes that sustained them, were under extreme pressure, many on the way to extinction, Nishida’s philosophy can be thought of as emergent in, and expressive of a collective experience of modern western imperialistic colonization. As modern European-inspired Japanese institutions proliferated, modern knowers and their distinct modern knowns emerged as an epistemic regime affording modern institutions, gradually solidifying and establishing new norms of governance.

Inquiring into the phenomenon of the collective epistemic shift that was sweeping through Japanese institutions, as he participated in it and was shaped as a knower by it, Nishida was working within and between epistemic communities who think and know ‘otherwise’ than each other. Broadly speaking we can characterize the tension he engaged with, as that of a philosophical tradition informed by Zen Buddhist and Shintoism on the one hand, and western philosophy on the other. He began by problematizing the figure of the knower making readings of Bergson and James (Knauth 1965)<sup>4</sup> in interrogating Japanese and western traditions. He would go on to develop a claim that knowers should be conceived as essentially self-contradictory, a continuity of non-continuity, a continuing negotiation of present vis-à-vis past-future. An absolute dialectic, or paradoxical logic would come to characterize Nishida’s philosophy, including his figure of the knower.

Why begin this paper by briefly describing the philosophy of a Japanese scholar who lived through, and thought within happenings of a time and place far removed from the conditions within which we work and think? Our embodied inquiry is situated in northern Australia in working with Yolngu Aboriginal Australians whose institutions are currently being remade under pressure from the internally colonizing Australian state challenging the never-ceded sovereignty of Indigenous Australian polities. As we see things, it is unsurprising that we will find inspiration in Nishida’s work.

Here we are ‘taking inspiration’ for a form of philosophical inquiry—making a knowledge claim concerning what is involved in working amongst and between epistemic communities who think and know ‘otherwise’ than each other. In this case we work within and between the epistemic communities of Yolngu Aboriginal Australians and linguistic scientists, openly admitting that being pragmatic and broadly naturalistic in our approach, we belong in neither group. Taking inspiration involves making partial readings, and some ‘reading into.’ We recognize that in all likelihood we are putting ‘words into Nishida’s mouth,’ so to say. Perhaps these are ‘sins’ in contemporary philosophy? If so, we are confessing. Retrospectively and anachronistically, we identify Nishida as a philosopher of his time and place, and in imagining him as an embodied knower we assume he valued apory. We see him as setting himself the task of unearthing aspects of ‘happenings’ as the time and place he was living through, including epistemic happenings, in articulating ‘the good.’ Perhaps surprisingly for some readers, we find the events and episodes of Nishida’s time and place analogous to contemporary northern Australia where we work.

Nishida is often, rightly in our view, considered the philosopher who brought to life modern Japanese thought in the first half of the twentieth century, both in terms of the topics considered to be proper to philosophical inquiry, and in terms of method, in how philosophical inquiry is conducted. However, Nishida’s writings and thought are not usually presented in the context of institutional life and its epistemic aspects, which is the way we have contextualized him in linking his work to ours. Indeed, Nishida himself identified that his work remained ‘outside’ Japan’s emerging modern institutions. In his last writing Nishida regretted his method had never been understood by his academic colleagues.

My logic [...] has not been understood by the academic world—indeed I may say it has not yet been given the slightest serious consideration [...]. I seek, above all, an understanding of what I am saying from my own standpoint.

Some people will say that my logic of contradictory identity is not a logic [...]. I ask them however—what is logic? [...] Logic is the discursive form of our thinking. And we will only be

able to clarify what logic is by reflecting on the form of our own thinking (Nishida 1949/1987: 126).<sup>5</sup>

One way to think about becoming a knower through apory, is to see apory the way Nishida does in the above quotation. In these final written words Nishida tells those who will listen, that he felt that first and foremost he had struggled to understand what he himself is saying in his discourse. He tells us that he sought to do so from the standpoint of his own pre-linguaged experiencing. In the very beginning of his life as philosopher over thirty years previously, Nishida had named this pre-linguaged experiencing as “direct, pure experience that is the cause of all mental phenomena” (Nishida 1911/1990: 5).<sup>6</sup> As we read the above quotation, Nishida employs aporetic approaches in recognizing the situated complexity of the knower. In the quotation we see the paradoxical doubledness of the Nishidian knower, what in 1939 he will name as the “absolutely contradictory self-identity” of the knower (Nishida 1939).<sup>7</sup> Mobilizing the concept of apory as naming an experiential beginning-point in our method, we imagine passage out of apory as involving ‘wordless experiencing,’ contrasted with ‘the wordy experience,’ terms we have devised in drawing inspiration from Dewey (1934)<sup>8</sup> since it seems Nishida is silent on the role of language in working from experiencing to judgement, although we remain open to correction on that point.

Agreeing with Nishida, we claim that in becoming knowers first and foremost we struggle to ‘understand what we are saying from our own standpoint.’ But as Nishida implies, and as we elaborate below, it can take some time to think this through—and that experience of stuckness, of not knowing how to *start* thinking discursively, we name as apory. It is Nishida’s identification of performativity as knowing linked to recognizing paradox, that inspires us. This attitude imbues his description of what is involved emerging from apory to certain enough knowing in the here and now. We see this as captured in his coining of the term “*kōi-teki chokkan*” (Maraldo 2019) which we translate as “performative intuition.” This certain enough embedded performativity emerges from Nishida’s use of paradox as logical operator in analysis, but apory is where it begins experientially.

To experience apory is to recognize that passage, going on, is blocked; we are epistemically disconcerted, suffering negative affect when it comes to epistemics. Experientially apory is singular, particular and situated; one begins off balance, on the back foot, and differently each time. Knowing experiential aporetics is a first step towards knowing otherwise. The *aporia* of the Meno in Plato’s Socratic dialogue is an epistemic emptiness; at that moment, a knower knows nothing, does not know what to think or say or do next; a paralysis, numbness results. There is no path in sight. There are other nuances too. A different kind of felt aporia, or apory to simplify the English term, is to recognize that one has lost one’s way, and is confused. It may be there are too many paths from which to choose. Different still is apory experienced when one cannot see a path but acknowledges that others do. Of course, there is also apory in which the path is apparent, but knowers are not willing to follow it, perhaps because the destination is unknown, perhaps because it is unappealing.

The claim we are making in this paper is that becoming a knower comfortable in the complexities of working within and between radically distinct knowledge communities in situations where members of those epistemic communities wish to simultaneously remain distinct, and yet connect well enough to go on together, requires beginning as a knower in apory, and going on to making passage through (re)experiencing experience in ‘wording it.’ It is a claim concerning a normative configuration of an

authoritative knower in the midst of epistemic confusion. In this paper we are approaching the issue through first ‘fleshing-out’ an exemplar of this normative figure of the knower.

### 3 Hayashi Yasunori’s Passage out of Apory

In 1999 I was travelling in Turkey as I wanted to experience that country, seeing it on the ordinary world map, as located between Eastern Europe and Western Asia. I thoroughly enjoyed learning the history of people and places, playing backgammon and chess in local markets, and being fascinated with the melodious reading of the Quran I heard elsewhere. Those travels were the beginning of the series of experiences I attend to in this paper, since subsequently it brought me to Aboriginal Australia. The slightly bizarre experience happened unexpectedly. One evening on a street in Istanbul I found myself hearing and being immediately captivated by the sound of the didgeridoo played by a street performer. The didgeridoo, one of several names for this Aboriginal Australian musical instrument, is a wooden musical pipe instrument and the music making it affords has been perfected by Aboriginal Australians over millennia.

Why was I enthralled with the sound of a didgeridoo in Turkey? I still do not have an answer. Nevertheless, after two months of travel in Turkey, and back in Japan, I along with other Japanese friends and world-music enthusiasts, devoted years to collecting and appreciating LP records, cassette tapes and compact discs featuring Australian Aboriginal music accompanied by the didgeridoo. With the hope of being able to play a good sound on the didgeridoo, we devoured the liner notes accompanying those music resources prepared by academics such as ethnomusicologists and anthropologists. These notes introduced us to some playing techniques like buzzing lips, imitating animal sounds, and circular breezing techniques, we experienced and tried to emulate the extraordinary classical music we listened to. Captivated by the sound of the didgeridoo floating through the narrow streets of Istanbul, I simply could not put a lid on a growing enthusiasm for meeting with Aboriginal players and directly learning from them.

#### *Experiencing Apory 1—Music is Language*

A year or so after my trip to Turkey, I arrived in that part of Aboriginal northern Australia named as Bininj Country. Bininj is the people and the language of West Arnhem Land. After a four-hour bus ride from Larrakia Country (Darwin) on reaching a Bininj community, Gunbalanya, I was fortunate to encounter a group of Bininj elders gathered near a local art center. I introduced myself and modestly confessed my passion for the didgeridoo over several years back in Japan. The group took kindly to my interest in their performative capacities, taking me in as a learner. I tried but was always rather disappointed in my capacities.

Then one day I was taken aback when I was gruffly admonished by one of the Elders addressing me with what I heard as an aphorism “You gotta speak my lingo before playing *mako*.” *Mako* is a word for didgeridoo in the Bininj language. It just did not make any sense, I could not figure out the connection between words and music. How does the act of speaking, and the act of playing the didgeridoo connect at all? I could find no way to ground the aphorism in bodily reference, but I did have a vague sense that it contained some truth. I still vividly recall the moments when this aphoristic statement arrested me and made me deeply confused in being unable to logically connect it with what I knew the didgeridoo to be and how to play it. Despite my discomfort, nevertheless, I was comfortable with staying with my problems becoming as I would later recognize them as a knower who begins puzzling in an experiential apory, in not knowing how to know. I accepted that it would take time to nurture my capacity and I should NOT reason or explain away the problems in a hurry.

### *Experiencing Apory 2—as a Language Learner Studying and Embedded in the Community*

While searching for a connection between the performance of playing the didgeridoo and speaking in words, albeit without much success, I spent several years building a solid foundation to become fluent in the language of Yolngu (Aboriginal traditional owners of East Arnhem Land). Working in various capacities in the Yolngu community I set about learning the language systematically in the usual modern way through first studying the ways in which the language is grammatically structured. As part of this I taxonomically classed, and phonetically parsed, and learned spoken and written language simultaneously. At the same time with my Yolngu friends, I was spending long periods of time playing the musical instrument, which they call *yidaki*, that seemed to be choreographing my life. Listening among other things to stories they told about various words and language in general. A passionate concern for and with words seemed pervasive among my friends.

I found myself quite intrigued by the evident mismatch between the logical complexities by which Yolngu people knew their words and languages and speak their world, and the logic of modern linguistics as presented in the university curriculum with which I was studying. This was when I started sensing a metaphysical disparity between how the speakers of Yolngu Aboriginal languages account the phenomenon of language, and how speakers of English account it. Again, I did not know how to name this, but nevertheless I just stayed closely with aporetic naiveness, beginning to accept that as somehow ‘normal.’

### *Experiencing Apory 3—As a Classroom Teacher*

Passing now to the present. While still feeling immersed in the unknowing in juggling logics of words and languages as I routinely translate between Yolngu and English, while recognizing that my thought proceeds in the ‘language world’ effected in Japanese predications and designations. Albeit still thinking

within the language world of Japanese, I now find myself as a co-director of the newly established First Nations Diplomacy Centre at Charles Darwin University in northern Australia.

One day in our office I was interrogated in a kindly manner by my co-director, a Yolngu Aboriginal Elder, Mr. Gawura Waṇambi, concerning the working concept of language that informs the university's language curriculum. Mr. Waṇambi is a senior ceremonial leader in his clan and a recognized knowledge authority in his Country of East Arnhem Land, also an educationalist, lecturer and researcher at university and an executive member of Aboriginal organizations, certainly wearing very many political 'hats.' We were discussing language pedagogy, and he was gazing at a widely-known 'standard' scientific linguistic diagram depicting the diversity of Yolngu languages

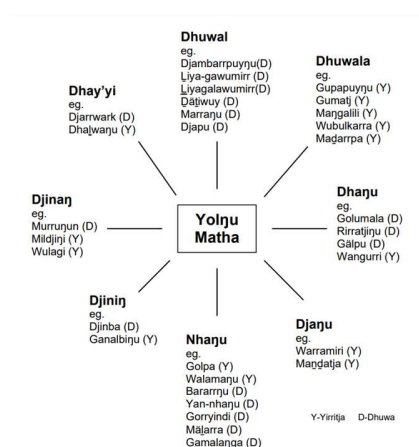


Figure 1. Standard scientific linguistic typological groups based on terms for 'demonstratives'

The diagram is centered with a label in bold letters saying 'Yolngu Matha (tongue),' with radially diverging lines stretching towards the names of various clans taxonomized by the label of 'Dhuwala,' 'Djanu,' 'Djiniṅ' and 'Dhay'i'—all these words mean 'this, here' in English (Christie 2001).<sup>9</sup> This is categorization based on standard scientific linguistic theory.

The criteria of this typology might seem arbitrary, but actually it expresses modern linguistic assumptions about the nature of language, about what language is, ontologically speaking. With some research, I establish that this language diversity chart emerged from the linguistic work of trained missionary linguists who arrived in Yolngu country starting in the 1950s. Adopting the differing terms by which a common meaning 'this, here' is rendered, the terms used in various Yolngu languages are utilized in devising a typology. In modern linguistic terminology 'this, here' is a 'demonstrative.' Demonstratives are assumed among linguists as "language universals" (Dissel and Coventry 2020).<sup>10</sup> These terms are seen as ties between words and the stuff of the 'real' world. They are assumed as the initiating vocabulary in every world language.

Mr. Wanambi was registering a pained facial expression, and clearly displaying his confusion on *why* his and other Yolngu languages are separated under the seemingly arbitrary ‘this, here’ label. Mr Wanambi asked me:

Can you explain how [the linguists place] Wangurri and Gälpu under the same language category? Wangurri is my mother, of Yirritja moiety from Dhälinbuy. And Gälpu is Dhuwa moiety from Daypinya! How could two such different languages [expressing the life of] different places and in with different moiety, be under the same label ‘Dhaṇu’ in this chart?

I paused for moments to find words to respond, yet in vain; so awkwardly, I kept silent. Reading my sad face expressing the feeling of inadequacy that was momentarily overwhelming me, Mr Wanambi comforted me with saying: “No worries, in many situations there’s no common bridging between Balanda (non-Indigenous) and Yolngu. Language in our Yolngu way is *dhä-manapanawuy* (standing strong together with the land and water) and *garrpïyumanawuy* (entangled with the land and water).”

Taking my lead from Mr. Wanambi, and recognizing the truth of his claim that sometimes ‘there is no bridging,’ I determined that my role must be one of generatively bringing to the fore the on-going tensions between the radically different concepts of language that sit side by side in our curriculum. I saw that sometimes in the classroom the Yolngu concept of language predominates, at other times the linguists’ language will fill the communicative space, and there is no bridging them. I also recognized that momentarily sometimes a partial bridging becomes possible: the Yolngu notion of language will include aspects of the linguists’ concept, and that at other times the linguists will be happy to adopt aspects of the Yolngu. Such is the wonder of language.

Finding my way out of apory I recognized I had experienced what Nishida named as “*kōi-teki chokkan*.” I felt enough certainty in knowing as performative intuition, that my role as a language teacher is one of staying true to the tensions evoked in the disparate concepts of language as knowns, in publicly witnessing them, in the language teaching curriculum. Thus, I began to propose myself as a philologist (Hayashi 2023),<sup>11</sup> one who loves language in all its variety, rather than as a linguist. I see it as my role to promote a modern philology as the proper frame for working with Indigenous Australian languages in the academy.

#### 4 The Knowledge Claim

Hayashi Yasunori’s story tells of epistemically experiencing an unknowing blankness and nevertheless going on with inquiry within that experience. The story can be understood as accounting the making of particular passage out of apory. Our consideration of this phenomenon takes aporetics as affective expression of the Nishidan vision of the knower as one of “contradictory self-identity.” Hayashi Yasunori—the knower in the text of this narrative, tells of this as a felt infernal chaotic confusion; an epistemic disconcertment. This epistemic disconcertment beset the author again and again across the years. It is a story of a figure who prefers to defer any move to judgement in favor of insisting that it is necessary to articulate one’s experience only when one has assembled the words to describe it. In his choosing to first understand what he himself could say in coming to know as a language pedagogue,



what he will name as a philologist, Hayashi Yasunori chose this path, notwithstanding that institutionally, as a teacher in a modern institution, as a university language lecturer, it is difficult to insist that knowledge of language begins in apory and ends in the glimpsing of paradox. This amounts to insisting on beginning of inquiry in a ‘not knowing,’ in the experience of apory, and recognizing the ignorance and confusion resulting from that as generative.

At the end of this narrative the figure of the knower, in recognizing himself as an emerging authoritative knower, as witness and teacher in the complex epistemic landscape of a university in northern Australia, notes that as teachers of language he and his senior Yolngu collaborator find that they are constantly dealing with and managing the different ways that Yolngu speakers and owners of the various language groups, conceptualize Yolngu language as an object of study, and the ways linguists conceptualize those languages as an object of study. This is not a new insight (Watson et al 1989; Christie 2007)<sup>12,13</sup> in the context of developing Yolngu studies in the Australian academy.

Mr Wanambi proposed a strategy for dealing with difference in the classroom. His proposal can be glossed this way. Authoritative speakers of Yolngu languages see language as literally materialized in the situated and every-day sociomaterial lives of speakers. Here embodied speaker and language are ontologically inseparable. Yolngu metaphysical commitments have them as one and the same, and to begin to speak the language is to begin to express the Yolngu world with all its complications and complexities. In contrast, scientific linguists take a psychological view of language seeing it as expressing the mental state of a speaker. The metaphysical disparity in conceptualizing language as a concept that can be known as such, of course also points to profound difference in conceptualizing knowers in and between the partially engaging epistemic communities of Yolngu Aboriginal language authorities and expert scientific linguists.

We might say Hayashi Yasunori as knower in this text, and also as the embodied knower who in future will in part take his cues from the complex paradoxical discursive figure who has been linguistically configured in English in the wordy work of this paper, is simultaneously neither and both: a Yolngu knower of language in taking language as a configured known in the ways Yolngu speakers do, and a scientific knower working with language as an ‘objective’ epistemic object that is core in the mind’s abstract knowing.

In eventually being certain enough as a performatively intuitive knower enacting “*kōi-teki chokkan*” in any teaching learning situation, in language classes, the figure of the knower who has come to discursive life here in this text negotiates the dynamic flows and shifts between ontologically distinct sorts of knowers and knowns, in learning to work with sometimes rapid ontological shifts that elsewhere has been called “doing metaphysics on the run” (Verran 2007: 39)<sup>14</sup>. Experiencing and working through apory, is to come to certain enough judgement concerning the ontological multiplicity of language as known. This is a knowledge claim made in epistemic good faith which avoids inflicting epistemic injustice by explaining away one account of language or the other (Verran 2001: 19).<sup>15</sup>

## 5 Accounting Our Method

In this final section we account our method which we propose as consistent with the Nishidan approach to analysis. We characterize it as mundane in the sense that arises from being worldly (named with the Latin term *mundus*). This is a method by which a philosopher beginning in wordless bodily experiencing, might arrive at the possibility of making a judgement which philosophically is expressed as an epistemically good faith knowledge claim. Our mundane method offers a way of moving from embedded and embodied experiencing to offering judgement concerning the ontological multiplicity of knowns.

In proposing Nishida's writing as inspirational in offering a beginning we have presented him as accounting experiencing in attending to the relation knower-known, rendering situated knowing as 'enacted intuition' (*"kōi-teki chokkan"*). The relationality is emergent, complicated and complex in involving recognizing temporality as paradoxical, and it is radically institutionally situated in that it is composed in the world in particular collective practices. Compared to the banal simplicity of the abstracted subject-object relation which is how the relation of knower-known is proposed in modern European philosophical traditions, this formulation of the relation necessarily in some degree begins in a felt relation.

We have made an ontological claim about the multiplicity of knowns in situations where knowledge traditions abut and abrade in doing the collective lives of institutions. In turning now from considering Nishida's proposal of knowing through enacted intuition, here understood as outcome of acceptance and recognition of apory as symptom of the impulse to know otherwise, we move now to offering a brief account of our method as invested in and as experience.

We have considered naming our method as 'field philosophy' (Wiley 2023),<sup>16</sup> but prefer to propose it as philosophy through 'experientially constituting a case' (Verran forthcoming).<sup>17</sup> This should not be confused with 'case-method' in philosophy. Despite the likelihood that we will be misread as using 'case method,' we have settled on naming our mundane method by using the term case in the manner that some ethnographers, but certainly not all, use the term to convey the meaning that 'a case' is generated in participation, and is not something that is 'found' (Geertz 1973:26).<sup>18</sup> And while this might justify us in naming our method as 'autoethnographic,' in insisting that our focus is epistemic practice rather than practice which generates 'the ethnos,' we prefer to drop the 'ethno' element and propose the narratives that are a core element in our method as 'auto-graphs,' as tellings of experiencing. Experientialism as method here takes the form of a gathering-together in the form of narrative which reveals epistemic characteristics of a happening, a 'befalling as a case' (from the Greek term for 'a befalling' via the Latin term *casus*). We recognize the usefulness of the term 'field' for describing our method but worry that it brings an unwanted entanglement with the concept of spatiality, carried in the English word 'field.' Instead, in staying true to Nishida's paradoxical articulation of temporality, we favor 'case' in recognizing that our method is intimately entangled with the temporality implicit in the English word 'case' understood as a befalling as a now-here.

Doing a mundane philosophy beginning in constituting an 'auto-graphic' case originating in experiencing involves four steps. Inchoate experiencing; generating an articulated account of experience as narrative in explicitly recognizing the partiality involved in this story-telling; making a

claim concerning the workings of an epistemic community in explicitly recognizing the sheer ordinariness of the collective practice that effects epistemicity; and explicitly recognizing that what matters is responsiveness and responsibility in the now-here of the knowledge claim rendering it partial and situated, albeit a platform for the next iteration of the method's steps.

Experiencing can be named as *aconceptual* perception of happening as embodied knower albeit within a particular language world. To begin here with epistemics is to do philosophy through contextualized experiencing, here articulated as the emergent, infernally chaotic yet generative confusion of apory. The method of going on from experiencing to making a knowledge claim can be imagined as practised in the form of four-moves; a dance—perhaps a collectively circular flowing smooth waltz or a rumba, based in a four-point box dance step. A first move with one foot forward is followed by a forward and sideways move by the other foot, followed by a back step combined with 90 degree pivot, and a further back step which has the first-moved foot landing in a place from whence the four-step move begins again, this time in a sideways direction: a sequential four-move pivot mirrored between dance partners that executes a 90 degree turn from experiencing to knowledge claim making.

In this method, the narrative performs the work of knitting together the experiencing, the (re)experiencing of an experience and naming a known as concept—here in this paper, the concept of language, and of contextualizing institutionally. Contextualization and narration as ‘an experience,’ sets up the possibility of making a knowledge claim in epistemic good faith in the complex epistemic landscape of a university course teaching an Indigenous Australian language to settler Australian students. The claim is that concepts, as ‘knowns’ in any and every now-here, are knowable as emergent ontological multiples—and normatively articulating practices to ‘reflexively do’ particular concepts as ontologically multiple responsively and responsibly is required in enacting ourselves as authoritative knowers.

In concluding, we propose our mundane method as offering possibilities for abductively making valid arguments supporting philosophically certain enough claims, and doing so in epistemic good faith in that reflexively we recognize that we remain within the radically under-determined metaphysically explicit limits of a naturalistic pragmatism. Recognizing philosophical knowledge claims as normative, we propose the method as attending to what ‘the good’ is in the context of teaching in a northern Australian university, and as having a capacity to offer a partial answer to the question of how we should live in that situation.

### Hayashi Yasunori

I was born in Osaka, Japan. I received a Bachelor of Policy Studies degree in international relations and cultural studies from Chuo University, Japan. Moving to the Northern Territory, Australia, I completed the Diploma of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies at Northern Territory University. During my candidature for a Master by Research, I lived and studied on Milingimbi Island in East Arnhem Land and submitted my thesis titled *An Indigenous Knowledge Representation of the Gupapuyngu Clan* to Charles Darwin University. In my doctoral degree (2017-ongoing) I have become interested in the possibilities of escaping European epistemic traditions still prevailing in both international relations and cultural studies. In this standard progression of my scholarship, I discovered Nishida Kitarō (1870-1945) had been engaged in quite the same sort of project in the early twentieth century. Taking Nishida's writing as inspiration for thinking and puzzling, I see myself working in world philosophy. My recent academic/professional work in the First Nations

Sovereignty and Diplomacy Centre (est. in 2022) at Charles Darwin University where I work as a co-director, has involved working with Aboriginal language and cultural authorities writing from and later about the pure experience of Yolngu Aboriginal languages.

### Helen Verran

I am the youngest member of the second generation of a settler-Australian family and began working with members of the Yolngu Aboriginal Australian polity in 1988. I had previously worked with Yorùbá teachers in Nigeria, and many years before that with Enga landholders in the highlands of Papua New Guinea. I currently hold the position of Professorial Research Fellow in the Northern Institute, Charles Darwin University. Before taking up this position I taught history and philosophy of science at University of Melbourne for nearly twenty-five years.

- 1 Helen Verran, "Comparative Philosophy and 'I'," *Confluence: Online Journal of World Philosophies* 3 (2015): 171-188 (URL: <https://scholarworks.iu.edu/iupjournals/index.php/confluence/article/view/548>).
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