

The Standpoint of Śūnyatā

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I

In the preceding chapter, *Nihilism and Śūnyatā*, I discussed the notion of substance. Ordinarily, it is substance that is thought to make a thing exist as itself. "Substance" is used to indicate the essence of the thing, the self-identity whereby the thing is as this very thing; in other words, the *being* of a being. All beings possess "attributes" and "*accidentia*," various qualities, size, shape, etc.; but what constitutes their basis and unity has been called substance.

To speak more concretely, the term "substance" expresses what a thing is, what *kind* of thing it is. Supposing, for example, that a certain reality is a human being, then "substance" would denote the "beingness" of this reality in its mode of being man.

It is generally believed that this substance cannot be perceived by the senses but that, as the being-itself at the back of the various sensory appearances, it can only be grasped through thinking. As such, the concept of "substance" has been the central moment of all ontology up to now.

However, the question remains as to whether that which makes something be something—where it "is" as itself—in short, whether its "selfness" is really grasped, is truly expressed by the concept of substance.

Indeed, the concept of substance brings to the surface the in-itself mode of being of the "thing" itself. However, this is forever the selfness of the thing as it appears to us on the field of reason (reason taken in a broad sense).

* "The Standpoint of Śūnyatā" is a translation of "*Kū no tachiba*," the fourth chapter of the author's *Shūkyō to wa nanika* ("What is Religion?"). The second half of this chapter will appear in the next issue of the *Eastern Buddhist*.

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The function of thinking, as an operation of reason in us, is to open up a field beyond the field of sense perception where "things" are made to reveal their selfness. Therein lies the proper significance of thinking.

But just for that reason the "substance" grasped on this field of reason, can never be anything but the in-itself mode of being of the thing as it appears to us; thus, insofar as it is seen by us. It is hard to maintain that this shows directly the thing in a mode of being whereby it is truly on its own home-ground. The original itself-ness of the "thing" must lie beyond the reach of reason and be impervious to thinking.

However, this does not mean that a thing, like the "reality of the object" in the sense of the traditional realisms or materialisms (reality as materiality), reveals the original itself-ness of the thing. Such reality as that which, within the thing as it appears on the field of the senses, transcends direct perception—such reality is represented as something on the yonder side of the perceiving subject. However, it is represented as such from the standpoint of the opposition of subject and object; from the standpoint of the object and its representation. It is thus only the beyond of the opposition of subject and object as it is seen from the side of the object.

It pretends to be beyond the opposition of subject and object but is, in fact, still seen within the perspective of one of the opposing directions. Insofar, it cannot escape the objection of still being thought from the standpoint of the opposition of subject and object. In general, no matter how definitely one conceives of a reality within things beyond our consciousness and representation—as long as these things are envisaged as "things" in the ordinary sense, namely, looked on objectively as objects, their objective reality does not avoid the contradiction of being represented as a reality beyond representation.

Herein, the mode of being which is said to escape the relation with the subject, still, when looked at from its hidden side, only exists by containing a tacit relation to the subject; and it does not, after all, avoid being a mode of being manifesting itself in our direction. This is precisely the state of affairs which I called above "the paradox of representation."

Again, one might think that we can only come in touch with the reality of things in our action or *praxis*, and that therein the standpoint of representation is already transcended. But, in this case also, the problem remains: in what field does this ability to come into immediate contact with the reality of things

in our praxis (individual or social) obtain; in what kind of field is such an action fundamentally possible?

It is related that on hearing Berkeley's theory that for things "to be" means "to be perceived," Dr Johnson tried to show how absurd this doctrine was by kicking a pebble. However, no matter how much truth there lies in this counter-evidence-in-action, this alone does not constitute a real proof to the contrary, because it remains problematic on what kind of field Dr Johnson's action arose. For example, did it arise on the field of mere sense perception, the like of which is also found in animals; or on the field of the mode of being of man with his clear consciousness and intellect; or again, on a field transcending consciousness and intellect?

Supposing for a moment that it falls in the first category, the action cannot be said to touch the "be" of things or their reality. In comparison, the theory which, in regard to the pebble or the foot or the act of kicking itself, asserts that their "being" is "being perceived," can be considered to be a standpoint entering deeper into the inner reality of things.

But, of course, this standpoint itself belongs to the second category mentioned above, and is nothing else than the convergence of the field of the opposition of subject and object in the direction of the subject. If, on the contrary, the field where activity originates would be thought of as the area of the reality (*viz.* materiality) of things as objects (the supposition I considered above), this would amount to converging the field of the opposition of subject and object in the direction of the object; and, unavoidably, a hidden relationship to the subject would already be implied.

This means that materialism, as well as idealism, fails to open up a field where, in a praxis, immediate contact with the reality itself of things would be possible. Both materialism and idealism lose sight of the basic field where the reality of things and human praxis come into being; they lose sight of the field where "things" come into their own and reveal their reality as it is, and where our every slightest action finds its origin.

This is the field which transcends consciousness and intellect—the third possibility I mentioned above. It is bound to be, in the sense I shall explain later on, the "field of emptiness." This appears as the field of a wisdom which could be called the "knowing of unknowing." Looking back from that standpoint, conscious knowledge (or intellectual cognition) also is, in the final

analysis, no other than “knowing of unknowing” (*muchi no chi* 無知の知).

Similarly, this is the field of a praxis which should be called “action of non-action” (*musa no wa* 無作の作). Looking back from there, our every behaviour would be, as it is, nothing but “action of non-action.”

And lastly, this is the field where knowledge and praxis are one, and the field where things come into their own and reveal their reality as it is.

However, I shall touch on this subject later. Now I only want it to be understood that the fact in itself of speaking of action or praxis does not solve the problem as regards the field on which, fundamentally, this praxis arises; and that this problem remains intact even when this praxis is called a social praxis.

As I have said above, the transcendence of the whole field of opposition of subject and object—the field of sense perception and equally the field of intellectual thinking—comes about through the fact that at the base of those fields *nibilum* appears and both subject and object are “nihilized” from their roots up. In the point that *both* subject and object are an-nihil-ated, the field of *nibilum* differs from the “field of materiality” and the “field of Ideas.”

Materiality is represented as transcending the opposition of subject and object in the direction of the “matter” of things, which appears on the field of the senses or is, at least, reached through the field of the senses. On the other hand, the Idea is represented as transcending the opposition of subject and object in the direction of the “form” of things, which appears on the field of reason, namely in the direction of the “substance.”

These two are identical in that they both are conceived of *via* the thing as it appears as an “object” in the field of opposition of subject and object. Conversely, both are conceived of on the basis of the aspect of things under which things reveal themselves to us as subjects.

The field of *nibilum*, on the other hand, appears when such an entanglement of subject and object has been thoroughly overcome. In the field of *nibilum*, all that is ordinarily said to exist or to be real, on the fields of the senses and of reason, is unmasked as having *nibilum* at its base, as being from the outset without any roots.

The concentration in which every being assembles itself within itself, namely its “beingness,” is like being suspended out into an abyss, like vanishing into a bottomless pit. From the depths of all things, things come floating up under their dispersing, dissolving aspect. No matter how gigantic

a mountain mass is, how robust a man, how solid a person, all are in the same boat.

Nihilum is a problem which concerns the fundamental quality of all existing things. That all beings show their fundamental "illusion" aspect, means precisely their "nihilization." All things return to *nihilum* without leaving a trace. From olden times people have spoken of the transiency of things. Indeed, a *nihilum* which does not even permit "things" to leave any traces, lies from the outset at the base of all things. That is the meaning of transiency.

But as I have said in a previous chapter, to *nihilum*, as lying at the base of existence, remains attached the feature of being considered as something besides existence, and thus finally from the standpoint of existence. It is a nothingness represented from the side of being, a nothingness in opposition to being, a relative nothingness. Therein appears the necessity furthermore of making *nihilum* convert into "emptiness" (*śūnyatā*).

This emptiness is not an emptiness represented as something besides being, apart from being. It is not simply an "empty nothing" (*kūmu* 空無). It is an absolute emptiness which has emptied also these kinds of represented emptiness. Moreover, and for that reason, it is from the beginning at one with being. Being also is from the beginning one with emptiness. At the root of being, where being appears as originally one with emptiness, in the home-ground of being, emptiness appears as originally at one with being.

When we speak of the root of being, this should not be imagined as existing somewhere far behind the things which we see with our eyes and think of with our minds. Rather, it is extremely near, within the reach, so to speak, of things themselves. And the "thing"-itself at the base of the thing itself, the thing in its suchness, is one with emptiness. Where a thing comes into existence, there the field of emptiness too lies opened up.

However, we usually represent things as objects on the fields of the senses and of reason; i.e. we put them at a distance from ourselves. And this distance means that we are drawn to things and that we draw things to us. In this sense we can speak of "will" or desire and attachment at the base of "representation." As long as we stand in such a relation to things, we imagine that "things" are forever far from us and out of reach; and that we cannot even know the "things"-themselves.

That "being" appears from the first at one with emptiness, or that in the

field of emptiness every being comes into its own and reveals itself in its in-itself mode of being—means that all these beings, which in *nihilum* showed an image of dispersion and dissolution, are once more restored to “being”; that all beings are again returned to the concentrating force which gathers them inside themselves, to the possibility of existence; or again, that they are returned each to its own “virtus” (*toku* 徳), to the individual capacity which each of them possesses as a manifestation of that possibility of existence. The pine returns to its pine-*virtus*, the bamboo to its bamboo-*virtus*, man to his own human *virtus*.

In that sense, and in contradistinction with *nihilum*, which is the field of nihilization (*Nichtung*), emptiness could be called the field of “be-ification” (*Ichtung*). This field of be-ification is, to speak in Nietzschean terms, the field of the great affirmation, where we can say “yes” to all things. (We shall come back to this later.)

That all beings are restored to “being” means that all beings appear again as possessing substance. The substance of things which appear on the field of reason dissipate, so to speak, in a bottomless abyss, on the field of *nihilum*. The essential forms of things are dissolved in the *nihilum* whereon nothing leaves a trace. The question of what things are—and, most of all, what I myself am—does not find an answer any more. Man ordinarily grasps himself on the field of reason as a rational being. But on the field of *nihilum*, man becomes unable to express “what” this *himself* is. The self and things both turn into a big question mark.

On the field of emptiness all things appear again as substances, each possessing its own individual self-hood (*jisbō* 自性), though of course, not in the same sense as on the field of reason. The “tunnel of *nihilum*” which has been gone through, accounts for an essential difference; the difference between what is grasped as the selfness of the “thing” on the field of reason and the selfness of the thing as it is on its own home-ground.

On the field of reason the in-itself of a thing is expressed by: “It is this thing or that thing, it exists as this thing or as that thing.” For example, “This is a human being, he is there as a human being.” Here the concept of substance is connoted in the thinking process. On this occasion, some philosophers will consider as substance the universal form, “human being,” and others the “this-here” of the individual man.

On the field of emptiness, however, the in-itself of a thing cannot be expressed simply as "being this thing or that thing." Here it is revealed precisely as something which cannot find its expression in that way. We can say in general that the selfness now manifests itself as that which cannot be expressed in the language of reason, in a language with a logical form; or as that which, if one wants to put it into words anyway, can only be expressed in the form of a paradox, such as, "It is not this thing or that thing, therefore it is this thing or that thing."

Being is only being if it is one with emptiness. It is only on the field of emptiness that beings are on their own home-ground, that they are truly as they are, abiding in their own selfness. One may say that the thing appears again as substantial, but this substantiality does not consist in its logical self-identity, but only paradoxically, in its self-identity with emptiness. It is an absolutely unsubstantial substantiality. If one wants to use the language of reason, the concepts of our intellectual thinking (to which substance belongs), one has to express the thing-itself as we did. That is to say, it is essentially inexpressible in words.

The "what" of a thing is a real "what" only there where it is absolutely no "what" whatsoever. The form of a thing is truly form only at one with absolute formlessness. For example, the form "human being" of "this is a human being" originates where it sheds all forms. Within every human being there is opened up a field of absolute formlessness, a field of non-determinability as "human being" or some other "what." The fact that man reveals himself as man from such a field constitutes precisely the most original meaning of his existence as man.

II

That being is only being at one with emptiness is said, in its fullest meaning, in regard to the idea of the substance of "things." I was referring to that viewpoint when I said above that the mode of being of things as in-themselves is not substance but something that may be called unsubstantial substance.

As I said before,¹ the ancients expressed the selfness of things in expressions

¹ *The Eastern Buddhist*, Vol. V, no. 2, p. 103.

like: "Fire does not burn fire," "A sword does not cut a sword," "The eye does not see the eye." Fire does not burn itself in its actual burning activity. In the very fact that fire preserves itself in the midst of its burning there is non-burning. Burning is non-burning and non-burning is burning. Precisely that paradox expresses the itself-ness whereby the fire in the process of burning is on its own home-ground.

However, such remarks cannot only be made about the idea of substance, but equally about all the various "attributes" of things. When one says, for example, that fire is hot, there is reason to say that the heat itself is not hot. Of course, this does not mean that, apart from the reality, "hot," there would be another and distinct reality, "not-hot." And when we say "not-hot" we are not pointing to a fact, e.g., a temperature some degrees below zero. When something is hot, and no matter to what a high degree it is hot, there is "no heat" in perfect unity with the very fact that the heat is there.

The "no" of that "no heat" is not a nothing relative to the being of "there is heat." It is a nothingness completely beyond the sphere of the relativity of being and nothingness. It is a non-heat spoken of on a completely different field, which transcends completely the field where the distinction between hot and cold and the opposition (as contrariness) of heat and cold obtain, and which means the absolute negation of that discriminative field.

When it comes to the fact of "being cold," this field of non-heat is the field of non-cold. The distinction between hot and cold lies in the field of the sense perceptions. Our everyday judgments implied in perception and in concepts, and also our scientific and philosophical conceptions are based on this field. The field of non-heat and non-cold is a completely different field, the absolute negation of all those standpoints, the field of absolute nothingness.

Thus non-heat signifies nothing else than the original reality of heat. Heat and non-heat are self-identically one reality. Only in self-identity with that field of non-heat (and non-cold) can the fact of heat arise and the field of that fact even exist. This non-heat is nothing other than an expression of the fact that the reality of heat comes into its own and reveals itself on a field of absolute nothingness, which transcends both the realm of the senses and that of reason. It points to the place where the reality of heat realizes itself, as it were, in clear relief.

That fire is hot is a datum of the senses and, ontologically, belongs to the

category of "quality." One can also say that heat, as something measurable by a thermometer, belongs to the category of "quantity." But the fact of heat, where it comes into its own, is an original fact which cannot be captured by the categories of quality and quantity. That the hotness of fire is "not hot" does not signify the quality of hot and cold; this non-heat is a non-heat which cannot be measured by a thermometer. In short, it means that the fact of heat comes into its own and reveals itself in the clear-cut relief of is-ness as an original reality on the yonder side (or on the hither side) of the categories of quality and quantity.

Of course, when I say that hotness as such is not hot, I do not mean that the concept of "heat" is not hot. I am calling into question, on a field which transcends also the realm of reason where concepts are at home, a fact that reveals itself in its suchness as a reality. If one considered the transcendent character alone, a realm of Ideas such as Plato was thinking of might come near to what I mean. If something like the "Idea" of heat can be conceived of, it would be something beyond the heat of the senses, something that is not hot. However, if one considers the transcendent non-heat as some "thing" called the Idea "heat," if one conceives of a world of Ideas as of true realities apart from the sensory world, one still remains on the standpoint of contemplating reason. The transcendent non-heat should be self-identical with the reality of heat.

The field of non-heat is not a world apart, an "intelligible world" of Ideas, but should be, as the field of absolute nothingness, at one with the world of original reality. But, on the other hand, the world of original reality is not simply the "sensory world." The original reality as self-identity of non-heat and heat is neither the heat of the senses nor heat as an Idea. This reality pervades, as it were, both the realm of the senses and that of reason, but does not, as such, belong to either of them. Of course, from a standpoint where one would cut "heat" off from all else and experience it exclusively, heat would be a sense datum. If we set non-heat apart and think solely of it alone, then that would be something like the Idea of heat. However, the reality of heat itself is neither of them.

There is only one "world" of that original reality. There are not two worlds, a sensory one and a super-sensory one, or—in the line of Kant—a world of phenomena and a world of "things-in-themselves" as *noumena*. We usually

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consider as world the environment-world which spreads out around us and is the field of our behaviour. And it happens that, going on from there, we imagine an invisible world in the background of the first one and apart from it. But neither of them is the world in its suchness. Neither of them is the world wherein we really live. For us to consider our environment as a world and imagine a super-sensory world is made possible only by the fact that we are actually living in the world of original reality. So much for the "heat" of a hot "thing."

To sum up, a "hot" thing comes into its own and reveals itself as a hot thing, beyond all categories of substance, quality, quantity, etc., on the field of emptiness, *viz.* the field of absolute nothingness. Here a "thing" is master of itself. This could be called the autonomous mode of being of things. "Autonomous" is not the mode of being the revelation of which is directed at us, the "front-side" of things; their surface so to speak, or things turning their "face" to us. It points to the mode of being of things which has nothing to do with our representations or judgments.

However, we cannot call that the backside or the hidden aspect of things. For such expressions imply already a looking at things from our viewpoint. "Things" on their own home-ground have no front or backsides; they are purely and simply themselves, they are exclusively in-themselves.

Of course, when we call such a mode of being autonomous or self-relying, we are not thinking of "subjectivity" in the sense that this refers to a self-conscious "ego." We are not thinking things anthropomorphically. Insofar as things can be called "in-themselves," they possess a characteristic which brings them in the orbit of the concept of substance; insofar as a thing can be called "autonomous," it contains a quality which relates it to the concept of subject. But it is neither substance nor subject.

We have to attribute to it a completely different concept of existence, one which up to now has not occurred to people in their daily lives, and which even philosophers in their ontology have not considered. The haiku poet Bashō, however, seems to hint at it when he says: "Learn about the pine tree from the pine tree. Learn about the bamboo from the bamboo."

This does not simply mean "observe the pine tree carefully." Still less does it mean "study the pine tree scientifically." It means get yourself into the mode of being where the pine tree is the pine tree itself and the bamboo is

the bamboo itself, and there look at the pine tree, there look at the bamboo. It requests you to go and enter into the dimension where they come into their own and reveal themselves in their suchness, to allow yourself to accord with the pine tree's "self" or the bamboo's "self." The Japanese word for *learn* (*narau*) means precisely: to make efforts to stand essentially in the same mode of being as the thing you want to learn about. What renders this possible is the field of emptiness.

The in-itself mode of being of things means that things stand on themselves and are settled in their own position; that they are centering in themselves and are not scattering. From olden times, men have called *samadhi* (jō 定) the mental state wherein man gathers his own mind in himself, thereby goes as it were one step beyond the sphere of his ordinary conscious and self-conscious mind and, in that sense, forgets his own ego. This word thus refers in the first place to a mental state, but it would also apply to the in-itself mode of being whereby a "thing" is settled in its own position. In such a sense one could call that in-itself mode of being : *samadhi-being*. That things are in their own home-ground is, as it were, their reality as in a state of *samadhi*. So to indicate the fact that a fire is burning we could say that the fire is in the midst of its fire-*samadhi*.

Of course this is not different and apart from the fact that a thing is a determined (definite) thing; that it is this specific thing and nothing else. Only, the place where a thing is itself is ordinarily defined from the outside of the thing itself. For example, on the standpoint of reason this is expressed as a "form," in a "definition." Or one may think that this peculiar individual originates as a union of form and matter, in which matter works as the so-called principle of individuation.

In either case, it is a way of looking at the thing from the outside. In contrast with these views, the selfness of the thing away from such outside views and in its direct and simple determination, could be expressed as *samadhi-being* in the above sense, that is, a mode of its being settled in its own original position, in natural quietude determined as itself.

In such a mode of being, the fact that a thing *is* establishes itself with the significance of an absolute fact. Even a fact like "it is hot," which now arises and soon disappears, is absolute as a fact; as absolute as if it were the only fact in heaven and earth. In that sense it has been said of a period of hot weather: "It

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is hot over all heaven and earth." It is a "bottomless" heat (not, of course, in the sense of thermometer degrees).

The expression: "A single falling leaf betokens autumn" is not only a poetical figure of speech. It is a word that is spoken out on the field where the fall of one leaf is considered as an absolute fact: in it the *samadhi*-appearance of the falling leaf is felt and touched. One could say that poetical truth, and true poetry too, involves the expressing of facts on that field.

III

That being is only being at one with emptiness means that being has fundamentally an "unreal" character, that all beings are essentially provisional phenomena; but also that their being is more truly real than what is usually expressed as the reality or the realness of things (e.g. their substance). It signifies namely the fundamental mode of being of the "thing" on its own home-ground, and that this is the thing itself as it is.

Therefore, this original mode of being is an unreal phenomenon. The thing-itself is as such the appearance. Consequently, when we speak of an unreal phenomenon, we do not mean that behind it there exists a real being, which appears in illusory shapes. Precisely because it is appearance without any appearing "being," this "appearance" is fundamentally illusory in its reality itself, and reality in its illusion itself.

In my opinion, this can be expressed by the term "middle" (*cbū* 中) of the ancients, because the in-itself mode of being of things is appropriately characterized by that term. As I said before, the various "shapes" which things show on the field of the senses (the various sense-determined modes), as well as the various "shapes" which things show on the field of reason (whether considered as forms of things or as categories in the sense of "forms" of understanding) are all aspects of things insofar as they appear to us and are only modes of things in that respect, the "front" of things.

They are nothing but shapes of things, projected on the screen of a relationship to us. They do not show the mode of being whereby "things" are on their own home-ground; they are aspects of things insofar as these things are removed from their own home-ground and are projected into our "consciousness," into our senses and our intellect. These shapes are, so to speak, radiations

from the thing-itself, like light rays issuing from a source of light. Or, to use another metaphor, they are aspects of things appearing on the circumference. That is, we are usually seeing the in-itself of things from their circumference, while skirting the outside of things. There things do not display their own being-in-itself.

The "thing"-in-itself cannot be revealed to us, except when we leap from the circumference to the center, into that in-itself. This "leap" is the opening up in ourselves of the field of emptiness as the absolute this-side and is thus more intimately this-side than our own selves. That "center" is where the being of things originates as a being at one with emptiness; the place where things posit themselves, affirm themselves; the place where things are in their "position."

There things are settled in their position, are within their "settled-being" (*samadhi*-being). Over against this, the shapes of things appearing on the fields of the senses and of reason are nothing more than a mere negative of the thing-itself. Even the substance is nothing more than that. These shapes are a negation of the "position" (positing itself) of a thing, transferring it into a mere projection; they are a removal of a thing from its position to a different place.

This is also the reason why the later Schelling characterized all philosophy of reason up to Hegel as negative philosophy, and designated his own a positive philosophy. (The content of what I am saying here is, of course, completely different from Schelling's philosophy.)

Be this as it may, in a center different from their circumference, things are positing themselves as they are and in such a way as not to permit any approach from the outside. Above I have called such an in-itself mode of being "the middle." There is a saying: "If you try to explain something by comparing it with anything whatsoever, you fail to hit the middle."² This expression can be used also in connection with the thing-itself. For example, if, on the standpoint of reason, one conceives of the in-itself being of a thing as a substance and explains "what" this thing substantially is, one will not find thereby the thing-itself, only a form "comparable to" the thing-itself. One has already missed the thing-itself when one even thinks to determine it as "this thing"

² Nangaku Ejo's answer to the Sixth Patriarch's question: "What is it that thus comes?"

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or "that thing" by thought. The thing itself goes on positing itself as it is; it goes on being in its own "middle," where it is shapeless shape, formless form.

Looking at it from the circumference, the various shapes of a "thing" do not fit its in-itself. However, looking back from the in-itself, i.e. from the center, the "middle" mode of being pervades all shapes. In a word, all sensory modes and all super-sensory forms of a thing are not apart from the "position" (the positing-itself mode of being) of the thing. They are all self-revelation of the thing-itself, its self revelation even then in the mode of being shapeless shape, formless form, in the mode of being "the middle."

When an ancient philosopher stated,³ "All things are in attainment of themselves," he pointed, one could say, to such a mode of being. There, the visible appearances of a thing too are the self-possessing form of the thing, its self-affirming form. And the place where all things are acquiring themselves is precisely the field of emptiness, the field that opens up as absolutely this-side, beyond the standpoint of senses and reason, behind the tunnel of *nihilum*.

On that field of emptiness, each thing comes into its own and reveals itself in a self-affirmation, each in its own possibility and *virtus* of being, each in its own shape. The conversion to and entrance into that field means, for us men, the fundamental affirmation of the being of all things (of the world), and at the same time, of our own existence. The field of emptiness is nothing but the field of the great affirmation.

IV

Parallel to the concept of substance, developed in regard to "things," the concept of subject has been used in the history of thought particularly in regard to our human existence. "Substance" expresses something existing at the base of the various attributes; it expresses the mode of being whereby a thing exists as itself. Similarly, "subject" expresses something which exists, in a human being, at the basis of his various faculties as their unifying factor, the mode of being whereby a human being appears as himself.

However, does this concept of subject after all truly express man in himself as he is on his own home-ground? Is not it rather true that this concept,

³ Ch'eng Hao, one of the founders of Sung Neo-Confucianism.

just like its parallel, substance, merely signifies man in himself insofar as he appears to himself within himself, in the sphere of his own consciousness?

Of course, it is almost universally taken for granted that the concept of subject expresses the essence of human existence. This is particularly the case in modern times, because in modern times human existence has essentially become self-conscious.

The self-interpretation of modern man can already be seen in Descartes and the *cogito* as the fundamental principle of his philosophy, and it manifests itself most deeply in Kant who radicalized the same direction. In both his theoretical and his practical philosophy, Kant probes deeply into the standpoint of the subject. In his theoretical philosophy, this is shown by what he himself called the "Copernican Revolution." Cognition of an object, namely experience, is not effected by our sensations and concepts concerning that object modelling themselves after that object, but on the contrary, through the fact that the object fits in the *a priori* characteristics of our faculty of sense perception and in the *a priori* concepts of our understanding.

By thus looking for the basis of cognition in exactly the opposite direction of the entire tradition before him, Kant opened his critical standpoint halfway between the former metaphysics, which tried to grasp the thing-itself dogmatically by purely rational thinking, and Humean scepticism, which shook this metaphysics severely—down to its very roots. It is generally known, however, that he arrived hereby at the theses that the range of possibility of our knowledge is limited to the phenomenal world, the thing-in-itself lying beyond the phenomena as what is actual reality by itself alone, but cannot be known by us.

At any rate, nature as the totality of all objects of experience, or the world of phenomena, appears clearly as constructed by the *a priori* forms of our senses and our understanding. And in this self-awareness of man as the bearer of such powers is clearly recognizable the self-awareness of modern man as "subject."

One can say that here the subject, which lies at the basis of all faculties of consciousness, appears as lying, at the same time—through the *a priori* forms of its various faculties—at the ground of the visible world and all things therein. We can see this especially in Kant's concept of "transcendental apperception of self-consciousness," in which the link with Cartesian *cogito* is also to be perceived.

In Kant's case, however, this self-awareness has two aspects. On the one hand, the investigation of what is *a priori* in the various faculties of man's consciousness involves a deep penetration into the existence of the object and a clarification of its foundations. Herein the awareness of man's prerogative as a subject has reached its extreme point. But, on the other hand, precisely this radical awareness of the powers of man entails an awareness of the limits of these powers which appears in the sharp distinction between the phenomenal world and the world of things-in-themselves.

The concept of the thing-in-itself that called forth the distinction between these two worlds is full of difficult problems and has evoked attempts to overcome them. Beginning with Fichte, German Idealism tried to step over, beyond this distinction, to the standpoint of metaphysical reason, and produced finally Hegel's philosophy of absolute reason. This philosophy induced a total turnabout to Kierkegaard's standpoint of radical subjectivity and "existence," to the historical materialism of Marx and to the active nihilism and "the will to power" of Nietzsche; a development which reaches to the present day.

But if we try to go back along the line of these thought fluctuations and consider more fundamentally in which point of the Kantian philosophy, in the final analysis, the problem has its roots, one point soon draws our attention. Namely, Kant sees "things" right from the beginning as objects; or, to put it the other way around, Kant stands on the standpoint of representation. In his theoretical philosophy, the objective representational viewpoint is always presupposed as the base.

The problem of the thing-in-itself developed, in fact, from that basic presupposition. To view things as objects is after all to grasp things on the field of consciousness, insofar as they turn to us and appear to us. In that case, of course, all objects are taken as representations. From that direction, that is, when pursuing that mode of being of things, the concept of substance as I explained it above arises too.

In the old metaphysics, one thinks that the substance, grasped by reason, signifies the objective "being" of the thing-in-itself. But even then, from the moment a "thing" is taken as an object and is seen as "outside" the subject, it is in fact already represented by the subject as an "outside" thing. The fact that the concept of "substance" is established as the "being" of the thing-in-itself entails as its necessary reverse that one has the standpoint of representation as one's basis.

The old metaphysics did not delve deeply into that paradox. It believed uncritically in the power of reason and thought that the "being" of the thing-itself can be grasped by the activity of reason. It considered that knowledge consists in the perfect "correspondence" (*adequatio*) between a concept and a "thing." The paradox that, when a thing-in-itself is posited objectively "outside" the subject, this means that in fact it is represented as such by the subject—and the dialectics contained therein—are covered up and hidden by the one-dimensional relationship of "correspondence" between thing and concept. However, when the hidden basis of that metaphysics was laid bare by Hume and the simple belief in reason had crumbled, it was only natural that the said paradox became an object of reflection and that Kant's standpoint of self-examination of reason appeared.

As a result, one accepted the idea that all objects are representations and, on that basis, one interpreted the substance as not revealing the "being" of the thing in itself, but as one *a priori* concept (category) of pure reason (in this case, pure understanding), as something which the subject "thinks into" (*bineindenken*) the thing. In other words, the substance became an element in the construction of things insofar as they appear. And at the same time there came into being a sharp distinction between the phenomenal world and the world of things-in-themselves.

In short, in the old metaphysics the concept of substance, as revealing the being of the thing-itself, constituted the center of ontology. Now, on the contrary, as a result of the clarification of the real situation underlying its origin, this concept of substance turned into a "form" of pure understanding, a norm of its cognitive activity. And the standpoint of the subject and its self-consciousness emerged as the center of the system of the critique of knowledge which replaced the former ontology.

However, what I have tried to say in this all too crude outline is that the old metaphysics and Kant's critical philosophy do not differ fundamentally at all in that the standpoint of the object and its representation is taken as basis and presupposition. The evolution is only that the object-representation relation, which formerly was the hidden foundation, in the latter is brought to light and has become the acknowledged foundation.

The old metaphysics thought in the general direction that our representations fashion themselves after the object, and it considered, therefore, that

the concept expressing "what a thing is" (in other words, the substance concept), can adequately match the object as thing in itself. Kant, on the other hand, discovered the opposite direction: objects fashion themselves after our representation. Therefore, the object of our knowledge is not the thing-in-itself, and "substance" becomes one "form" of the understanding which construes the object insofar as it appears to us.

Of course, the difference in direction of these two standpoints is not simply a case of opposite directions on the same plane. As I said before, Kant's standpoint that the object follows our representation implicitly underlies the standpoint of the old metaphysics, according to which our representations follow the object. In Kant this hidden presence is brought to light. If we interpreted this as an opposite direction on the same plane, we would identify Kant's transcendental criticism with Berkeley's idealism.

However, in spite of all this, or rather because of it, we can say that the same objective-representative viewpoint is fundamental to both conceptions as a common presupposition. Kant's revolution of thought, which turned the standpoint of the old metaphysics upside down, is, more basically, seen still dependent on the same presupposition, precisely by virtue of the fact that it is only the reversal of the old metaphysics.

The concept of "substance," the central idea of the old metaphysics, and the concept of "subject," the core of Kant's philosophy, have the same foundation. On the strength of that foundation, what he himself called his "Copernican Revolution" brought about the awakening of the subject to its rights over against the world as the encompassing totality of objects of experience. In that sense, Kant's theoretical philosophy, as well as his practical philosophy (to which we shall come later), reveals profoundly the essential mode of being of modern man.

After Kant, the subject standpoint of modern man ran its precipitous course up to the very end. Soon it reached the standpoint of reason, of absolute reason, and further, breaking through even that standpoint, laid bare the *nihilum* at its own root.

It is permitted to say that the standpoint of the subject manifested its real roots only when it advanced to its ecstatic self-transcendence into the field of *nihilum*. This means also that at the same time the *nihilum* is discovered at the roots of the existence of things.

For Kant, knowledge of nature by reason is possible only if reason follows what reason itself *a priori* thinks into (*bineindenken*) nature. In the same way, we could say that the *nihilum* which reveals itself at the ground roots of the subject when it breaks through the field of reason is at the same time "inserted into" (*bineinlegen*) the bottom of "things" as a totality.

However, when the concept of substance, which was supposed to express the in-itself of things, and the concept of subject, which was supposed to express the in-itself of the self, collide at their roots with *nihilum* and are negated on the spot, they make a leap forward into the field where "thing" and the self (which they tried to grasp) come into their own and reveal their in-itself. This means that, on the field of *nihilum*, "things" and the self are not objects of cognition, and cannot be grasped or expressed conceptually (as *logos*). They are no longer determined as substance or subject, and appear indefinable as "this" or "that."

Therefore, when we say that the *nihilum* which opens up at the bottom of the subject is already inserted into the bottom of things, this cannot be conceived in the same way as when, in the case of object-knowledge, it is said that reason inserts or thinks its own principles into nature. On the contrary, that *nihilum* is inserted into the bottom of things means, in fact, that from the bottom of all existing things *nihilum* looms up, leaps at us, and inserts itself into the roots of our existence. Then, the existence of things and the existence of the self both turn into something utterly ungraspable and indefinable, and appear as "Doubt" in the quality of great reality, of which I treated above.⁴

Herein, this standpoint of *nihilum* shows a fundamental point of difference with all forms of scepticism up to the present (for example Hume's scepticism). In scepticism we doubt a certain matter; on the standpoint of *nihilum*, all things and we ourselves become together a real doubt. And this, in turn, means coming a step nearer to the true self-realization of the real itself-ness of "things" and of the self; or rather, coming a step nearer to the field where their in-itself is originally and from the beginning realized, to the field of emptiness as the absolute this-side.

On the field of *nihilum*, where the field of reason is broken through, cognition is not the question. Here "things" and the self are no longer objects of cogni-

⁴ The *Eastern Buddhist*, Vol. V, no. 2, p. 98.

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tion. The field of *nibilum* is precisely the appearance of the realization that things-themselves and the self-itself are utterly ungraspable by cognition. On the field of *nibilum*, objects ("things" and the self as objects) and their cognition cease to be the question; the question is already about the *reality* of things and of the self.

Now, their reality and the understanding thereof is possible, not by going back from the field of *nibilum* to the field of reason, but only by going on from the field of *nibilum* to arrive at the field where things and the self originally and really realize and manifest themselves; in other words, it is only possible by their *realization*.

The field of *nibilum* appears when one breaks out of the field of consciousness and reason, and advances a step further in the direction of such a field, the field of emptiness.

In the above, I have touched from time to time on the conversion from the standpoint of *nibilum* to the standpoint of emptiness. Therefore, we shall not enter into this discussion now.

The standpoint of *nibilum* is not, of course, a beyond in the sense that is usual when one thinks of God or of the world of Ideas. All the same, it transcends the standpoint of our everyday understanding of the "being" of things and of the self—the standpoint which straddles sensibility and reason. In that sense, it is not simply a this-world standpoint: it transcends this-world but in the direction of a more intimately this-side position than our everyday this-side.

However, *nibilum* still stands over against being; it is posited alone, by itself, "outside of" being. It is still considered as a *nibilum*-"thing." It is not an object of consciousness but still shows a remainder of objective consideration; it is not the standpoint of consciousness, but, nevertheless, has not completely relinquished all representational consideration of *nibilum* as *nibilum*. In a word, *nibilum* is still, to a certain degree, seen as a beyond; or, conversely, it still clings to the standpoint of the this-side looking at the beyond. It has essentially a transitional character.

Nibilum is the absolute negation of all "being," and is, therefore, relative to being. The essence of *nibilum* lies in a merely negative (denying) negativity. This standpoint contains the self-contradiction that it can neither remain in being nor get away from being. It is a standpoint divided in itself.

Therein lies its transitional character. We call it the standpoint of *nibilum* but, in fact, it is not a point whereon we can really stand. It is nothing more than a spot we have to "run across quickly."⁵ In its essential transitionality, in its negative negativity as such, it is radically real and actual, but the standpoint itself of *nibilum* is essentially void. Only in such a capacity is this standpoint the standpoint of *nibilum*. The standpoint of emptiness is a completely different position. This is not a standpoint of merely negative negativity, not an essentially transitional standpoint. It is the standpoint where, in the sense explained above, absolute negation is at the same time a great affirmation. It is not a standpoint which only states that the self and things are empty. If so, it would not be different from the position wherein at the basis of "things" and of the self *nibilum* opens up.

The basis of the standpoint of emptiness is: rather than the self being empty, emptiness is self; rather than "things" being empty, emptiness is "things." Only in this conversion do we transcend the standpoint where *nibilum* is seen as the beyond of being; only in this dimension does the standpoint appear where we stand not merely "in" the beyond facing it, but in the beyond having reached it. Only on this standpoint do we really transcend the standpoint (still hidden at the back of the field of *nibilum*) of a this-side looking at the beyond. Such a "reached beyond"⁶ is the realization of the beyond, and is an absolute conversion not only from the mere this-side—which is a matter of course—but also from a this-side looking at the beyond. The "reached beyond" is nothing else but absolute this-side.

On the field of emptiness, the actual being of things is not "phenomenon" in the Kantian sense, namely, the mode of being of things insofar as they appear to us. It is the mode of being as reality-in-itself, wherein "things" are really on their own home-ground. This, however, is not the Kantian *Ding an sich* either, namely, that mode of being of things sharply distinguished from "phenomenon" and forever agnostic to us. It is the authentic thing-itself, which in fact actually exists. Here, we know no distinction of thing-in-itself and its appearance. The authentic "thing" is the "thing"-itself as it appears, without front or back.

⁵ From a saying of the Chinese Zen master Jōshū: "Don't remain where the Buddha is; run across quickly where the Buddha is not."

⁶ A Buddhist term: to reach the yonder shore (of the sea of Life and Death).

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However, this is not the “thing” in the sense of objective “reality,” such as all kinds of realism have come to conceive it on the field of the senses or on the field of reason. Instead, things are all illusory in their true itself-ness as such. I have explained above how a dogmatical standpoint, which simply considers the so-called “outer” objective reality to be the thing-itself, hides a self-contradiction behind its back and how, from there, Kant’s critical philosophy and the split into two completely irreconcilable modes of being, “phenomenon” and “*Ding an sich*,” were called into being. The standpoint of emptiness is a standpoint where these two irreconcilable modes of being, precisely at the point where both are radicalized, originate as one and the same mode of being of the thing.

On the one hand, the thing-itself is, on this field, truly the “thing”-itself because here, in contrast with what is called objective reality, it is freed from all hidden links with a subject. However, this does not mean that it is utterly agnostic. With respect to reason it is, indeed, agnostic, but its realization can be obtained by our turning to and entering into the field of emptiness, where the thing-itself realizes itself.

On the other hand, on this field, the being of a thing, as being at one with emptiness, is radically unreal. It is not, however, semblance in the sense wherein dogmatism uses the word : what is no objective reality. It is not “phenomenon” either, apart from which (as in critical philosophy) a thing-in-itself would exist. Things are truly unreal in the precise point where they are truly things-themselves.

As the saying goes, “A bird flies and it is like a bird; a fish moves and it seems to be a fish.” The in-itself of the flying bird is “like a bird,” the moving fish-itself is “resembling a fish.” Or conversely, the “like” (*gotosbi* 如) of the bird is no other than “like true reality” (suchness, *nyojitsu* 如眞). Speaking about this mode of being, wherein a thing is on its own home-ground, I have used expressions like “being in the middle” or “being in its own position”; I have also called it “*samadbi*-being.”

On this field of emptiness, the standpoint of subjective self-consciousness of modern man, which was opened up by Kant’s Copernican Revolution, has to be revolutionized again. The relationship in knowledge whereby the object has to follow the *a priori* behaviour of our perception and thought, has to be

turned upside down once more, so that again it appears that, in a sense, the self follows and fashions itself after "things."

However, since this field transcends both the fields of sense perception and of rational thinking, this does not mean, as in sensual realism or in dogmatic metaphysics, that the subject turns to the object and accords with it. It means the realization (manifestation and coming to itself-comprehension) of the "thing"-itself, which cannot be grasped by senses or by reason. This is not cognition of an object, but non-cognitive knowing of a non-objective thing-itself, a knowing in unknowing, a kind of *docta ignorantia*.

Since this is a field where the subject too in its usual sense (the self, established over against an object) is negated and transcended in the direction of its absolute this-side, we cannot say, "the self knows." We cannot say, "I know," and, thus, we cannot say, "I *know*" either. Strictly speaking, it is no longer satisfactory to speak, as I did above borrowing Kant's expression, about the self "following" or "taking its direction" (*sich richten*) from things; in other words, we cannot even say that the self, taking things as its standard, straightens itself out in the direction of "things."

To speak about a directing thing and a directed thing, to speak about a direction, belongs to the standpoint of cognitive knowledge. Only if we transcend all that are we entitled to speak about knowing of unknowing. The thing-itself, when we try to direct ourselves to it, immediately turns into an object, and its knowledge (knowledge of no-knowledge) immediately turns into cognition.

The thing-itself originally realizes itself as it is, in its own "middle" which can never be objectified; and its non-objective knowledge, the knowledge of no-knowledge, means that we convert and enter into the "middle" of the thing itself. It means that we straighten ourselves out, turning to where none of our turnings obtains, in the direction of what negates all our directions.

A single stone, even a blade of grass, requires this from us. The pine demands that we "learn to be" a pine, the bamboo demands that we "accord with" bamboo. Escaping our ordinary self-centered mode of being, where we are captured by our self while grasping our self, and comprehending things in the point where things obtain themselves—that is to convert and enter into the "middle" of things themselves. (Of course, "middle" does not mean here an "inside" over against an outside. I stressed this point in the above.)

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From olden times, the cognitive power of reason has been called "the natural light." However, the real "natural light" is not the light of reason. It is, rather, if I may so designate it, the light of all "things." What we called the knowledge of no-knowledge is, as it were, the focusing, the concentration into one point, of the light of all things. Or, better still, it is converting and entering into the place where all things-in-themselves are gathered into one.

As all this is the opposite of the ordinary way of thinking, it may sound strange. But, to make its meaning clear, we shall have to go deeper into the question and examine again some expressions which I have used above: first, "Being is only being at one with emptiness," second, "emptiness is self." In the following, with the help of a comparison, I hope to throw some light on the meaning of these expressions.

(To be continued)

Translated by Jan van Bragt and Yamamoto Seisaku