

Nihilism and Śūnyatā

(continued)

NISHITANI KEIJI

V

As was stated before, in the traditional view personality has been seen from the point of view of personality itself, or rather, personality has grasped itself from itself. Hitherto, the view of personality is thus established with a self-centered grasp of personality as its nucleus. This way of grasping personality, personality's own self-capture of itself, can also be said to be already a captivity, a kind of self-attachment.

This is why in the preceding chapter I spoke of the standpoint of absolute nothingness or emptiness which breaks through this self-attachment, which negates the self-centered grasp of personality, and also why I spoke of personality manifesting itself in its true Reality only when it appears in being one with, or self-identical with, absolute nothingness, which is its original mode of being. This standpoint of absolute nothingness is not, however, on the yonder side of what we are accustomed to calling our personality or self; rather it opens up this side of it, as the absolute this-side, so to speak. This emptiness (*śūnyatā*) is not the same as *nihilum* in nihilism.

I said before that *nihilum* has become abysmal in modern nihilism. This means the *nihilum* realized at the base of the world as well as of the self has extended even into the place of God. Nihilism asserts that man can be genuinely free and independent only by grounding his subjectivity on that *nihilum*. With this subjectivization of the abyss of *nihilum*, there has opened at the base of man's self-being a plane beyond the pale of the divine order hitherto considered essentially ruling the self, a plane which does not allow anything, even God, to be above it. It is only here, according to modern nihilism, that man's independence can be established in the true sense.

The anxiety of having nothing to rely upon, the sense of instability at being

deprived of all basis for settling down and dwelling peacefully, has become at once, just as it is, a standpoint of creative freedom which does not fasten on any existing thing. For man's self-existence, *nibilum* has become a realm of "ecstatic" self-detachment. Nihilism has become existential.

In spite of this, however, there still remains in that nihilistic way of understanding nothingness a characteristic not wholly free from the bias of objectification, of taking nothingness as a "thing" which is nothingness. Of course, this comment does not amount to a denial of modern nihilism being an existential standpoint wherein the *nibilum* is essentially subjectivized. This nihilism finds itself unalterably upon the real experience of the *nibilum* which is realized at the base of all things, our own existence as well. It is a standpoint in which we ourselves become the *nibilum*, a standpoint which can itself be called the realization of *nibilum*. It has nothing to do with the concept of nothingness or the representation of nothingness.

Nevertheless, here the *nibilum* is seen at the ground of one's own self-being as the groundlessness of that being; that is seen from the side of the self-being. Therefore, it is seen outside one's "being," is found lying at the other side of, as an entity other than, the "being." For instance, even in Heidegger's statement that self-being is "held suspended out into nothingness"—although his standpoint is fundamentally different from contemporary types of existentialism or nihilism—traces of such a viewpoint still remain. Already the fact that he speaks of the "abyss" of nothingness can be said to indicate this viewpoint. Here vestiges, however faint, still remain of nothingness being represented as an entity which is nothingness.

As I said, this does not mean that here the representation of nothingness is being called in question. Rather, when standing on self-being we come into contact with *nibilum* opening up at its ground, *nibilum* comes to appear, in fact, as an abyss into which, as Heidegger points out, our self-being is held suspended out. But the point here is that the *nibilum* in this case is always a *nibilum*-for-us, that is, a *nibilum* encountered by us, we ourselves standing on the side of "being." From this it follows that the *nibilum* is seen outside "being" of all things as well as of ourselves (outside beingness, so to speak), as something which is nothingness, as an entity absolutely other than beingness. It is the same with the common view that simply sets nothingness against beingness as its mere negation. The idea of nothingness in the West traditionally has

never been freed from such a view. But as for the sunyata (emptiness) we spoke of, there is a fundamental difference.

Emptiness in the sense of sunyata is emptiness only where it empties even the standpoint that represents it as something which is emptiness. It is originally self-emptying. This meaning of true emptiness signifies that true emptiness is not to be posited as an entity outside of and other than "being;" that rather it is to be realized at one with and as self-identical with "being."

When it is said that "being is nothingness" or that "form is emptiness," that does not mean that "being" and nothingness, taken first separately as two entities, are subsequently brought to connection. Viewed in the context of Mahayana thought, the primary principle of which is to transcend all duality emerging from logical analysis, the phrase "being *sive* nothingness" implies the demand that, in order to realize truly its meaning, one should place himself initially on the basis of this *sive* and see from there being as being and nothingness as nothingness. Of course, in our daily life we live in a situation in which being is viewed solely as being, a situation shackled by being. Once such a standpoint is broken through and negated, *nihilum* arises. The standpoint of *nihilum* is, in its turn, a standpoint of viewing nothingness solely as nothingness, a standpoint which is shackled by nothingness; it is a position to be negated in its turn. It is then that emptiness, as a standpoint of absolute non-attachment free of this twofold attachment, makes its appearance.

Seen through such a process, emptiness is the completion in the direction of negation and can be called the absolute negativity, for it is a standpoint which has negated and thereby transcended *nihilum*, which was itself the negating transcendence of all being. It can also be called an absolute transcendence of being, the transcendence here meaning the negation of, and emancipation from, a standpoint shackled in any way by being. And whenever a spotlight is thrown upon this aspect of negativity or transcendence alone, emptiness can always be described as outside of and absolutely other than the standpoint tied to being; although this should not mislead us into the aforementioned conception that emptiness is an entity subsisting outside of and different from being.

In spite of its transcendence of the standpoint entrapped by being, or rather for this very reason, emptiness can reveal itself only under the character of self-identity with being, both presenting themselves originally together, and

as structurally inseparable from each other, in the *sive*. Therefore, the transcendence just spoken of does not entail going away to something transcendently subsisting, called emptiness or nothingness. This is the reason as well I said before that emptiness is absolutely this-side, more this-side than what each person usually regards as his own "self." Emptiness or nothingness is not something we can proceed to; not something we can find existing in front of us; it cannot, generally speaking, be represented objectively. No sooner have we assumed such an attitude than it withdraws.

It has often been pointed out about the ego-self that its subjectivity entirely refuses to be viewed objectively. Nevertheless, the self has a constant tendency to grasp itself emblematically as "something" which is called the ego. This tendency is inherent in the very making of the ego-self, which consists of self-consciousness. It was therefore a great progress when the standpoint of "existence," with its mode of being "ecstatic," that is, of being held suspended out into nothingness, appeared. It meant the opening up of a stance appropriate to self-being in its true subjectivity. But, then, we must also recall what we said before: that there are still even in this standpoint traces of nothingness represented or posited as an entity which is nothingness. The standpoint of emptiness is one which transcends this subjectivistic *nibilum*, transcends it to the plane which is more this-side than the subjectivity of existential nihilism. Emptiness is the very standpoint which is unable to be objectified in any way whatsoever.

For this reason, what is called the abyss of *nibilum* originates, in fact, only in emptiness. For it to be represented as such an abyss is possible only in emptiness. In this sense, just as *nibilum* is an abyss to anything that exists, so emptiness may be said to be an abyss to the abyss of *nibilum*. Just as a chasm on the earth, no matter how unfathomably deep it may be, can be said to lie in fact in the boundlessly vast sky, so it is with *nibilum* and emptiness. Only by sky is not meant merely that which spreads out vastly over the chasm, rather that cosmic sky in which the earth, we human beings on it, and countless stars and planets exist and move; that which also underlies every place we tread, and lies at the bottom beyond the chasm's bottom. If the place wherein omnipresent God resides is called Heaven, Heaven would also be found open at the bottom of bottomless Hell, and that Heaven would be an abyss in the same sense that emptiness is an abyss to the abyss of *nibilum*.

Moreover, it is something which opens up more intimately this-side, something more directly and immediately here-and-now than we usually deem our ego-self or subjectivity to be. But just as while moving in the sky in the above sense, we usually forget this fact and look up at the sky only over our heads, we also fail to realize that we are, in fact, moving in emptiness, are, in fact, where we are more nearly this-side ourselves than we are in self-consciousness.

From the basic difference discussed hitherto between the standpoint of emptiness and modern nihilism, the former is not an atheism in the same sense in which the latter is. Still less is it akin to the atheism of positivism or materialism, which are oriented altogether differently from nihilism. The standpoint of emptiness, expressed in such phrases as "being *sive* emptiness," or "form is emptiness; emptiness is form," transcends negatively nihilism on the one hand and materialism and positivism on the other. But, at the same time, this standpoint seems to imply a possibility to bring into some higher synthesis the truthful factors that are contained in the basic intentions and motives of these two opposite standpoints. This problem will be touched upon later. Furthermore, if it is not an atheism in the word's usual sense, it goes without saying that the standpoint of emptiness is not a type of so-called theism.

In the preceding chapter,¹ Eckhart was given as an example in the West of a standpoint which does not belong to the sphere of the either-or of theism and atheism. Grasping the personal relation of God and man as a living relation between *imago Dei* in the soul and its archetype, Eckhart at last dares to call "nothingness" the entirely "formless" (*bildlos*) Godhead, a plane that transcends all forms, and considers the soul to return to itself and acquire absolute freedom only when it absolutely becomes one with the nothingness of Godhead. This is not mere theism, and of course neither is it mere atheism. (For this reason, it was often mistakenly called pantheism.) This nothingness as the "ground" of personal God, while constituting the yonder-side background of God, is realized by man immediately as his "soul's ground," on the this-side foreground of his own self. We are able to perceive in this that the conversion to the standpoint I have described as absolute this-side is also comprised in Eckhart. Then, however, the standpoint of emptiness is one which appears when such a conversion has been achieved with definite clarity.

¹ "The Personal and the Impersonal in Religion" *Eastern Buddhist*, Vol. III No. 2, pp. 71-79.

Of course, even in Buddhism, which expounds the standpoint of emptiness, a transcendence to the yonder-side, or "other-shore," is spoken of. But in this case the transcendence is realized as a disclosure of a horizon which may be called absolute this-side in the sense that it has transcended the opposition between yonder-side and this-side. The essential characteristic of Buddhism can be said to consist in its being the religion of the absolute this-side.

In Eckhart's case it is nothingness, in which, as he says, God's ground is the soul's ground and the soul's ground is God's ground, that holds the plane where arises the personal relation of God and man. It is on the basis of nothingness that the actual form of being of all entities including God comes to appear as such. It is also only on the basis of nothingness that entities being represented as God, soul, and their relation is made possible.

It is the same with the standpoint of emptiness. As I said before, only in emptiness does the abyss of *nihilum* come to appear, and only in emptiness is it represented as an abyss. And this same emptiness is the only area where God and man in their personal form of being and their relation to each other, respectively, come into being; the only field where their representations are made possible. And yet, this field of emptiness opens up on the absolute this-side of what is deemed our ego-self or subjectivity.

VI

It may perhaps sound highly curious, almost fantastically absurd, to say that emptiness is the only field upon which such things as what modern nihilism calls the abyss of nothingness, and what older religions have called the personal relation of God and man, come to be present and represented; that, moreover, this emptiness is absolute this-side. This is no doubt true according to ordinary reasoning or to current philosophical or theological ways of thinking.

But is it really so strange? Is it not rather the opposite, that a character of "fantasy" in the original sense of the word, that is, the image-drawing and representative character, still lingers in what is termed the abyss of nothingness and the personal relation of God and man? Of course, though I say the image-construing and representative character remains, I do not mean that they are solely mental images, mere products of imagination in the sense in which Feuerbach and other critics of religion would hold them to be. The *nihil* or nihility is not a merely subjective feeling, fantasy, or idea. It is a reality as

real as the fact that we really exist. It is not, moreover, something remote from our everyday life. It is that in which we constantly live and move. It is just because our everydayness is so much everyday, because we are so much wedded to everydayness, that we fail to perceive the reality of *nibilum*.

For instance, we like to think that we feel close familiarity with our family or friends, that we are intimately acquainted with them. But after all, do we really know essentially even those with whom we are most intimately acquainted? The usage here of the word "essentially" should not be thought to connote the idea, for example, of our not knowing another's inmost thoughts, regardless of his closeness to us, or the idea of there being always something inaccessible between even the closest of friends. Were the word used in this sense, we would have to say that neither the secrets of our own heart nor our own personal character is adequately known even to ourselves. Rather, I used the word "essentially" in connection with the immediately present home-ground on which a person with whom we are familiar appears directly before us. We no more know whence comes and whither goes our most intimate friend than we know whence we ourselves come and whither we go. We do not know the home-ground of this person's existence who is actually standing face to face with us. He is, originally and essentially, a stranger to us.

Of course, my friend is not a stranger in the sense of a person I happen to encounter by the roadside on a trip; in that sense he is one with whom I am most intimately acquainted. Nevertheless, this sort of familiarity is in truth a familiarity with the absolute abyss in between. Compared to this essential distance in between, even a stranger in the street is infinitely more familiar. Essentially, all men, whether close to us or remote from us, are "strangers" to us in absolutely the same degree.

This does not hold true only of human beings. For example, the small flowers that bloom before me in my garden grow from seeds, will return to the earth before long and never reappear as long as this world exists. Again, man does not know whence these small blooming faces come and whither they go. Behind them there lies absolute *nibilum*, which lies equally behind us and between these flowers and me. Separated from me by the abyss of that *nibilum*, the flowers in front of me remain unknown to me.

Yet man gives names to persons and things, and then believes that if he knows their names he knows the things themselves; that because he has once

seen something somewhere, he therefore is acquainted with it. The more intimately we associate with them, talk with them, and have contact with them, the more they become known to us and the closer we are to them. They become *our* acquaintances, *our* family members, *our* primroses.

Seen essentially, that is, there where they originate as they are in *nibilum*, all things are nameless, unnameable, and unknowable. But in the everyday world, whose element is no other than names, the reality of *nibilum* is covered and hidden; the ground of being, the home-ground of the existence of all things, is thoroughly buried and forgotten. The world around us thus becomes a world which consists only of things already known or able to become known to us: that is to say, it becomes an all too "everyday" world, in which we forget the essence of things even while concerning ourselves with them.

But then what is it like, the aforesaid "abyss of *nibilum*" which separates us even from those most familiar to us? It lies behind everything in the world. Even the Milky Way, the galaxies and nebulas, cannot be apart from it. And this cosmically omnipresent *nibilum* is the same *nibilum* that separates us by making us essentially unknown to each other. We can say that the Milky Way's planets spread out and the galaxies and nebulas whirl about in that bottomless rupture between us even as we are engaged in friendly conversation. This means that we who are sitting face to face in the same room are both standing outside the whole universe; that we are sitting face to face as bodies and minds immediately manifesting themselves on *nibilum*, wholly unknowable of whence or whither. This is the abyss of *nibilum*.

If emptiness is an abyss even to that abyss of *nibilum*, then what has just been said of the latter can apply equally to the former, now in a truly absolute sense. In the mode of being where form is emptiness and emptiness is form, the "forms" (i.e., all things) are each absolutely nameless, unknown, unknowable, and separated from each other by an absolute rupture. However, in contrast with the field of *nibilum* in which the desolate and bottomless abyss opens up the essential distance even between us and those who are most familiar to us, the field of emptiness is one in which the absolute severance signifies in turn the most intimate encounter with all beings. Emptiness is where we are originally in the same essential contact with what ordinarily is to be called totally unrelated to us, even with our enemies, as we are with what is closest to us.

NIHILISM AND SUNYATA

As used here, “essential encounter” means an encounter taking place on the ground where originates both our own being and that of what we encounter, where self and other are, in togetherness, each truly their own respective selves. And here, all things can encounter one another within the equality beyond distinctions of gratitude and revenge, hatred and love. No, the word encounter is already inadequate here. For just as a ray of light that manifests various distinct colors in a prism is a beam of white light, so where self and other are each truly in and by themselves, they are at once absolutely separated and absolutely united, or rather, absolutely self-identical. They are an absolute *two*, and at the same time, an absolute *one*. The Zen master Daitō Kokushi once said: “Separated from one another by 100 million kalpas, yet not apart a single moment: sitting face to face all day long, yet not opposed for an instant.” I would like later to enter into more detailed discussion regarding such a mode of being in emptiness.

VII

The absolute this-side referred to above is entirely at one and self-identical with our self as body and mind. I tried earlier to give expression to this by quoting a poem by Gasan Jōseki:

The conscious mind of this shadowy man
At all occasions is to me most familiar—
From long ago mysteriously wondrous,
It is neither I nor other.

This has also been given frequent expression in the illustration of waves and water. The incessantly rising and falling waves revert to water as a whole, and the water in turn enters into the waves. Therefore, authentically, both must be negated: “the waves” apart from water and “the water” apart from waves. And yet just where the water and the waves are self-identical (as water-waves), is the place where the very thing (that is, this fluid with its wetness) is presenting itself in its own reality, water being there truly water and waves truly waves. This may serve to illustrate the place of sunyata as the absolute this-side.

However, insofar as we ourselves do not turn to and enter into this-side, insofar as we remain simply as beings of body and mind or even as rational or

personal beings, the absolute this-side is for us always the absolute yonder-side. This is just the situation that basically determines our ordinary mode of being.

In our ordinary mode of being, that is, insofar as we simply remain as beings of body and mind, rational or personal beings, our body-mind with its self-centered consciousness grasps itself from itself; our reason grasps itself by being based upon reason, and our personality grasps itself from within the personality. Each of these (i.e., the body-mind, reason, personality) is established with an inherent self-grasp as its core; is thereby established as something confined within itself and complete, as something well-defined which is called the self with body and mind (or body and soul), reason, or personality. Moreover, the self-grasp which constitutes their core is always, as was stated before, a state of captivity, including basically a sort of narcissism. It entails self-captivation; it is the essential self-attachment. Even reason and personality do not arise without being accompanied by self-attachment in this essential (that is, ontological) sense.

The self-grasping in this sense is ever an act we ourselves perform. As beings with body and mind, we grasp ourselves and are captured by ourselves in our own body-mind. As rational or personal beings, we grasp ourselves and are captured by ourselves in our own reason or personality. Here, however, our own act does not mean an act we perform by our wanting to do it. It is not an act which depends on our arbitrary will that we might stop any time we wanted to. It is an act we are performing long before we intend to do it.

We can possibly say that a kind of destiny is here at work, a force causing us to act and be this way. All possible rational, personal beings, beings of body and mind, that appear in this world appear as beings with such a mode of existence, performing in such a way. It seems as if when life, consciousness, personality, or reason, each as a whole, appears from the depths of the world so as to become individualized and immanent in each individual being, they betray an essential characteristic of falling into a sort of narcissistic self-attachment. Here we see a kind of necessity, very much like the force of destiny. But it is not destiny in the ordinary sense in which it simply rules over us and moves us from without. It is not merely blind will. It is a destiny which appears only under the guise of our own acts, and only at one with our own acts.

And yet insofar as we remain simply as beings of body and mind, rational or personal beings, we are in confinement. And to that extent, we are essentially

attached to self. In other words, we ourselves shut out the standpoint of emptiness which is our absolute this-side. Again, to that extent, the absolute this-side must forever remain for us the absolute yonder-side. This essential self-attachment and self-confinement, however, is none other than the situation that basically determines our ordinary mode of being.

It is, in my opinion, in the abovementioned case that the yonder-side truly comes to possess its absoluteness for us. In comparison, in other cases the yonder-side is not yet absolute. For example, when Plato conceives of a world of Ideas as the yonder-side of this sensory world, its beyondness is so only similar to that of a celestial world "high above" and beyond the terrestrial world. It is a yonder-side that is looked up to perpendicularly from the "earth." It arises solely with a ninety-degree turn from the ordinary, everyday life in which men are absorbed. This would be yonder-side for those located on the "earth" as set forth in a Ptolemaic point of view. But for those located on a field analogous to cosmic space, the field of emptiness in which "heaven" and "earth" are established on the same level, it would be no longer the yonder-side.

When, as in the common representation of Christianity, a personal God is considered to reveal Himself vertically from Heaven to earth, God's place is also conceived as the yonder-side. Since here it is revelation from beyond, the yonder-side is much more genuinely yonder-side than in the case of Plato. It is a yonder-side vertically revealed from Heaven to earth. Still, even this must be said to be fundamentally the same as the former. The same nature of "yonder-side" obtains: heaven standing against the earth. The only difference is that in Plato the direction from earth to heaven (the direction of *eros*) predominates, while in Christianity it is, conversely, from Heaven to earth (the direction of *agape*). They tally exactly in the respect that in both cases the yonder-side arises in making a ninety degree turn.

Even though an absolute break is posited between God and man in Christianity, it still allows room for God, man, and the break between them to be represented within the same scenery, so to speak. In fact, from long ago in Western *Geistesgeschichte* we see that philosophy, in its competency of metaphysics, has incessantly presented the domain of reason or *logos* as the stage for their ontological representation. Reason develops a horizon of "thought," in which yonder-side and this-side, God and man, which are usually held not to belong to the same level, can be represented side by side. Even when an

absolute break or unrelatedness is supposed to exist between them, philosophical reason unfolds the horizon of "dialectical" thought, in which such an unrelatedness can also be conceived of as a sort of relation in the form of unrelatedness, that is, as a dialectical relationship.

If we turn next to the "abyss" of *nihilum*, we can say that here the yonder-side in its original sense is not present as it is in the aforementioned two cases, for this abyss belongs to this-side. But insofar as the abyss is represented as something coming in sight right at the ground of our own existence, a yonder-side character still clings to it. It is also a yonder-side that appears at the right angle turn, although in this case, contrary to the former, the turn is directed from the earth into its own depths. Therefore, the depth of the earth is still something that can be represented within the same scenery as the earth; that is, the "nothingness" of the nihilism can be represented philosophically on the same level as "being."

The standpoint of emptiness is completely different: here what I mean by emptiness is absolute openness in the sense that, while presenting itself as the field in which the yonder-side in the direction of heaven as well as the beyond in the direction of the depths of the earth can both be established and representatively conceived, it is in itself sheerly unable to be represented in any way whatsoever and so is always present as the absolute this-side. This is why I said before that both the abyss of *nihilum* and the personal relation of God and man can arise and be represented in emptiness.

Thus we may say the standpoint of emptiness is manifested in a one hundred and eighty degree turn, as the field in which two ninety degree turns are involved, one taking place in a heavenward direction and the other earthward to the earth's depths. It is comparable to passing from the front to the back of a canvas depicting various scenes of heaven and earth. In other cases, e.g., in the relation of Ideas and sense objects, God and man, being and *nihilum*, the yonder-side appears as something drawn on the surface of a canvas, no matter how resolute a separation is supposed to exist between them.

Further, when the standpoint of emptiness is thoroughly penetrated—and the direction of this penetration is, as was said before, one in which "emptiness" itself is also emptied—then the standpoint of emptiness appears in a three hundred and sixty degree about-face: that means in a manifestation of the self-identity of the front and the reverse. The field wherein emptiness is

emptied to become true emptiness is none other than the place where each and every thing appears in its own reality, in its true suchness. It is the field where in the zero degree means at once three hundred and sixty degrees. Therefore in spite of, or rather because of it being essentially absolute this-side, it can also be absolute yonder-side. This is because only zero degree can also be three hundred and sixty degrees.

That is, this absolute this-side is on the one hand a place where beings, rational, personal, or with body and mind, essentially die to themselves, a place where man extricates himself from the essential self-attachment mentioned before; in brief, the place of emancipation in the Buddhist sense, or what Eckhart calls *Abgeschiedenheit* (detachment). On the other hand, the same absolute this-side is the place of the essential life of beings that are rational, personal, or with body and mind; the place where beings absolutely unnameable have their names and live in the everyday world whose element is names. In short, it means the place of man's death *sive* life and life *sive* death, man here being taken as a whole, including his body and mind, his rational and personal modes of being.

Emptiness as the absolute this-side cannot, of course, be said to be something that exists somewhere. Something represented as emptiness, or posited as emptiness, is not genuine emptiness. What is genuine emptiness is none other than what comes to man's self-awareness as his own absolute selfhood. This emptiness at the same time is the field wherein each and every being comes into its own reality and appears truly as and in itself. It is the field wherein the awakening of our true selfhood—or, what is the same, our selfhood as true self-awareness—and the suchness of each and every thing as it is arise simultaneously, as one or self-identically.

In this case, however, the term self-awareness does not simply mean self-consciousness, nor the term selfhood the ego or the subjectivity of an ego-self. Neither is reality or real "suchness" used here in the sense it is in ordinary realism or materialism. In that interpretation, things are already objectified and represented in opposition to and outside of the ego. No matter how emphatically they are said to be "outside" of consciousness, they cannot escape the implication that insofar as they are conceived as being "outside" they are still seen from the field of consciousness.

Reality as suchness means the manner of something's being beyond all

representation or thought, of its being inaccessible to the ego's grasping: and therefore, its manner of being "ungettable" in the specifically Buddhist sense. This is the mode of being of something when, on its own home-ground, it is as it really is. For this reason, even though the term thing as and in itself is here applied to such a mode of being, it has nothing to do with Kant's concept of "thing in itself." Also, even if it is here said that our own selfhood in its true self-awareness and the suchness of things come into being as *one*, self-identically, this is not the same as the standpoint of the "unity" of subject and object that appears in various guises in the history of philosophic thought both East and West, whose basic characteristic lies in starting from the presupposed dualism of subject and object so as to induce them to a subsequent unification where they will vanish. The absolute this-side, contrarily, is not some unification brought forth as a result, but the originally selfsame place of absolute openness or emptiness which nevertheless is at once our own home-ground, each of us being here in his true selfhood and self-awareness, as well as things' own home-ground, each thing being here truly in and as itself. This standpoint is neither monism or dualism of any kind. It is the absolute self-identical One which is, as it is, the absolute Two.

But the question will inevitably arise whether this is possible, and if so, how. What is the mode of being of things, when we say that it is only in emptiness that they are on their own home-ground? To put it the other way around: what does "in emptiness" mean, when we say it is only in emptiness that things are disclosed in their own reality? After all, when we say "form is emptiness, emptiness is form," what is the mode of being of "form" (existing things), and the meaning of emptiness? In emptiness, moreover, that things are really on their own home-ground in their suchness and beyond all representation or conception, that they are there in themselves, means precisely that there our individual selfhood opens up on and as the absolute this-side, that our selfhood is realized in its true self-awareness. How can this be possible?

The problem is revealed, for example, in words from Dōgen's *Genjōkōan*: "That one's self conveys itself to and practices and confirms all things, is illusion. That all things advance forward and practice and confirm the self, is enlightenment." And, from the same work: "To learn the way of the Buddha is to learn one's self. To learn one's self is to forget one's self. To forget one's

NIHILISM AND SUNYATA

self is to be confirmed by all things. To be confirmed by all things is to make the mind and body of one's own self as well as the body and mind of other selves drop away."

What mode of being of things renders it possible for them to come and practice and confirm one's self, or for one's self to be confirmed by them? Why is this at once the dropping away of the body and mind of one's own self and the body and mind of other selves?

To give another example. Musō Kokushi says in his *Muchū Mondō* ("Questions and Answers in a Dream"): "Hills and rivers, the earth, plants and trees, tiles and stones, all of these are the self's own original part." Again: "It is not that the field of that original part lies in body and mind, or that it lies outside body and mind, or that body and mind are precisely the place of the original part, or that the original part is sentient or non-sentient, or that it is the wisdom of Buddhas and saints. Out of the realm of the original part have arisen all things: from the wisdom of Buddhas and saints, to the body and mind of every sentient being, and all lands and worlds."

What does this "original part of the self" indicate? What does it mean, that hills and rivers, the earth, plants and trees, tiles and stones, all constitute the original part of the self, that they all have arisen out of the realm of that original part?

(To be continued)

Translated by Yamamoto Seisaku