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Nietzsche and Nishitani on the Self through Time

GRAHAM PARKES

Precisely the least, the softest, lightest, a lizard's rustling, a breath, a flash, a moment—a *little* makes the way of the *best* happiness. Still!

What happened to me? Listen! Didn't time just fly away? Am I not falling? Didn't I fall—listen! into the well of eternity?

Zarathustra, "Midday"

BOTH NIETZSCHE and the Buddha effected profound revolutions in the way the self and the world and their interrelations are to be understood. Not only was Nietzsche aware of the transvaluation of metaphysical values of some two-and-a-half millennia earlier, but he also realized that the movement of his own thought in many ways paralleled the previous "paradigm shift." He frequently draws attention to the analogy between the spiritual and intellectual crises that arose in sixth-century B.C. India and nineteenth-century Europe, and expresses admiration for the Buddha's rejection of prevailing metaphysics, especially as manifest in his denial of the Upanishadic notion of the eternal and immutable self. A recent study by Freny Mistry, entitled *Nietzsche and Buddhism*,¹ pro-

¹ Freny Mistry, *Nietzsche and Buddhism* (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1981)—henceforth referred to as "NB" followed by the page number. The author does an excellent job of documenting the sources of Nietzsche's acquaintance with Buddhist thought, distinguishing his references to Buddhism based on genuine understanding from those based on misunderstanding, suggesting possible influences on the development of Nietzsche's ideas, and drawing the significant parallels between the two philosophies against the background of the (relatively minor) differences. An insightful and sensitive treatment of the topic of the self's relation to time (on which the final part of the present essay leans rather heavily) is to be found in Joan Stambaugh's *Nietzsche's Thought of*

vides a comprehensive and perceptive comparison of Nietzsche's thought with the ideas of Theravada and Hinayana Buddhism; it would be instructive to pursue the parallels through the Mahayana tradition to its culmination in Zen.

Such a comparison finds much of the ground already prepared by the work of Nishitani Keiji. While Professor Nishitani's thought is rooted in the study and practice of Zen, he has also been influenced by a number of Western thinkers: primarily Eckhart, Schelling, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and Heidegger—amongst whom Nietzsche's thought has exerted the most power.² Given the difference in "atmosphere" between Nietzsche and Zen—the extreme, crazed, and often violent passion of the former, and the calm serenity of the latter—the congruence in other respects, and the fact that a thinker such as Nishitani has found Nietzsche's thought so congenial, should perhaps surprise us more than they do.

While there is considerable agreement between Nietzsche and Buddhism with respect to all three "characteristics of existence"—*duhkha* (suffering, frustration, unsatisfactoriness), *anitya* (impermanence), and *anātman* (no-self)—our major concern will be with this last. But since the self cannot legitimately be considered in isolation from existence in general, I shall begin with a brief consideration of *anitya*, followed by a general sketch of *anātman*, before proceeding to the question of time. It is this last move that motivates the comparison: both inquiries into the nature of the self, stemming from quite different cultural and intellectual traditions, find it to be essentially insubstantial, and are thus drawn into the problem of the self's relation to time. Since this has been a central and perplexing issue throughout the course of both traditions, a comparative approach may serve to effect some bilateral illumination.

Eternal Return (Baltimore and London: the Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972)—henceforth "*NER*." Professor Stambaugh hints at the congruence of her interpretation of Nietzsche's view of time and eternity with later Buddhist ideas, but does not articulate it.

² Keiji Nishitani, *Was Ist Religion?*, trans. Dora Fischer-Barnicol (Frankfurt: Insel, 1982); *Religion and Nothingness*, trans. Jan Van Bragt (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1982). Because only the German edition was available to me in writing the initial draft of this paper, and since it was completely proofed by the author and in the process considerably expanded, I shall cite the text by way of my own translations from the German edition, referring to it as "G" followed by the page number, adding references to the English translation, abbreviated as "E," where possible.

Further, while Nishitani sees his thought as corresponding to Nietzsche's to a considerable extent, he appears also to think that they ultimately diverge—on the problematic of temporality. Since I have some doubts about this, a subsidiary intention here is to see how much farther the parallels can be drawn.

SELF WITHOUT SUBSTANCE

Given the split between self and world on the conventional level of understanding, both Nietzsche and Buddhism hold that false views of the self arise concomitantly with distortions of the true nature of the world. On the conventional view, the world, while admittedly changing over time, consists at least in part of certain stable, self-identical entities. But this is to be seen through as an illusion, a fabrication on the part of the self in an effort to shore up the shaky belief in its own substantiality. The true nature of the world is that everything is *anitya*, impermanent, in a state of constant flux. The self-identical thing is a fiction, a construction, a calculated petrification of the incessant flow of ever-changing *dharmas*—or, in terms of a different kind of philosophy, a synthesis of a serial multiplicity of “sense data” at different times from various perspectives.

Not only, on the basis of craving and attachment to the self, do we project the illusion of unitary, self-identical things, but we also, in a further attempt to maintain our discrete individuality, phantasize the figment of the separate, isolated and independent thing. Opposed to this are the idea of dependent arising (*pratitya-samutpāda*) in Buddhism and Nietzsche's conception of the universe as a field of interrelated forces (cf. *NB* 74–9). Both views, of *dharmas* continually flashing in and out of existence, and of a protean flux of quanta of energy (will to power), stand in radical opposition to the conventional “substance” view of reality as grounded in some kind of material substratum that persists through time.³

Two such alternative ways of seeing the world imply two “phases” to the self, an authentic and an inauthentic, and that the true self is a

³ One of Nietzsche's most satisfying attacks on the obsession with substance is aphorism 12 of *Beyond Good and Evil*.

task to be accomplished rather something simply given. As Nietzsche frequently puts it, we have to “become what we are”; or, as Nishitani says in talking of the Buddha-way: “[Man] is a task for himself” and has to “become himself” and “make himself into himself” (G 391, E 261). The inauthentic self, the self as substance, is a construct fabricated in response to the *duhkha*, or uneasiness, generated by our finding ourselves afloat in a ocean of impermanence. Nietzsche writes: “I take the *I itself to be a thought construction* of the same rank as ‘matter,’ ‘thing,’ ‘substance,’ etc. . . . so only as a *regulative fiction* with the help of which a kind of constancy, and therefore ‘knowability,’ is placed or *invented into a world of becoming*.”⁴

The task of self-overcoming is difficult and never-ending, since the “I” is a hard nut to crack, having (as the practice of zazen makes painfully clear) an uncanny ability continually to re-assert itself, just when its dissolution appears to have been consummated. The task is painful because it involves the death of the former self: Zen texts speak frequently of the “Great Death” to be undergone before the true self can be realized. The theme of death, and of its inseparability from life, is central to Nishitani’s work (though his treatment is reminiscent of Heidegger’s perhaps more than of Nietzsche’s): he speaks often of the need to “die to ourselves . . . in order to re-awaken to our self” (G 81).

Nietzsche’s *Zarathustra* offers an account of the arduous process of self-overcoming (*überwinden*), in which the transition to the true self involves the self’s going under (*untergehen*), dying away from itself, in order to go over, or across (*übergehen*), to the condition of the overman (*Übermensch*), for whom “all things become his death [*Untergang*].”⁵ When the task is creation, and especially creation of a new self, “there must be much bitter dying in your lives, you creators!” (Z II, 2). The task of self-transformation is often envisioned elementally, especially in

⁴ The *Kritische Gesamtausgabe* of Nietzsche’s *Werke* edited by Colli and Montinari (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1967–82), vol. VII, 3; 35 [35] 248. (This and all subsequent translations from the original German are my own.) Nietzsche’s most mature formulations of this idea are to be found in *Twilight of the Idols* III, 5 and VI, 3; cf. also *The Will to Power* (hereafter “WP” followed by the section number), sections 485, 558, 561 and 635.

⁵ *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Prologue section 4. References to *Zarathustra* will be abbreviated “Z” and followed by the book and section number.

images of water (as we shall see shortly) and fire. Just as fire is a recurring image in the Buddhist tradition for the self-engendered power that burns out the calcified and desiccated self, thus recommends Zarathustra in an alchemical vein: "You must want to consume yourself in your own flame: how could you want to become new unless you had first become ashes!" (Z I, 17).

The strength of egoism derives in part from the substantial self's being considered *unitary*: a self dissolved into a multiplicity has far less chance of maintaining its self-identity over time. Against the idea of the unitary, indivisible *ātman* (albeit a unity capable of uniting with the greater Unity of Brahman), the Buddha's analysis of the self dissolved it into a variety of groups of *dharmas*, *samskāras*, *skandhas*, and so forth—all of which he held to be *anātman*, all impermanent, all empty of self-nature. Further, these various groups of multiplicities are to be understood as forms, arrangements or relationships, rather than as substantial entities.

However, given their frequency, it is surprising that Nietzsche's corresponding analyses of the self have been so little commented on. Working alchemically away under the crazed eye of Dionysos, patron *par excellence* of dissolution, Nietzsche patiently deconstructs the self variously into multiplicities of *persons* or souls, *drives* or instincts, and *energies* or interpretations.⁶ In *The Birth of Tragedy* he paints a vivid picture of the personality of the literary artist (and, by extension, of the "non-inspired" person too) as consisting of a multiplicity of "alive persons . . . bodies and souls."⁷ And when he later speaks approvingly of one who "in contrast to the metaphysicians, is glad to harbour within himself not 'one immortal soul' but *many mortal souls*," we should take those italics

⁶ For a detailed account of these analyses see of my essay "Many Mortal Souls: Nietzsche, Freud and Jung on the Multiple Psyche" (forthcoming); cf. also Mistry, *NB* ch. II, and J. Hillis Miller, "The Disarticulation of the Self in Nietzsche," *The Monist*, vol. 64, no. 2, 1981.

⁷ *The Birth of Tragedy*, section 8. I have suggested in the essay mentioned in the preceding note that the multiple souls or subjects or persons of which Nietzsche speaks (and of which the text of *Zarathustra* provides the consummate exemplification) can fruitfully be understood as prefiguring the autonomous "counter-wills" (*Gegenwillen*) of the early Freud and the "splinter-psyches," feeling-toned complexes and archetypal personalities discussed by Jung.

seriously.⁸

In his account of the genesis of these intra-psychic personalities, Nietzsche (anticipating the genealogies offered by Freud and Jung) suggests that they arise from the operations of the imagination upon drives (*Triebe*) that have been retroflected upon the self as a result of having been denied discharge: "The thirst for enmity, cruelty, revenge, violence, turns back . . . and [in concert with the imagination] the drives are transformed into demons whom one fights" (*WP* 376). One is reminded of the Buddha's struggle with the hordes of Māra just prior to recollecting his manifold past lives and attaining enlightenment; also of the ways in which certain schools of Vajrayāna Buddhism advocate dealing with the daemonic personalities encountered on the path of meditation, as personifications of the meditator's drives.

A further step back in Nietzsche's genealogical account understands the drives as flows of energies, which are de-substantialized even further through being understood as perspectival interpretations. Consonant with the Buddhist understanding of the falsifying power of cravings and attachments, Nietzsche writes: "It is our needs that interpret the world; our drives and their for and against. Every drive is a kind of lust to rule, each one has its perspective . . ." (*WP* 481). Since it is ultimately will to power that interprets, Nietzsche's picture of the self is of a force-field of interpretations interfused with the oceanic flux of interpretative energies that constitutes the universe as a whole.

The dissolution of the self into multiplicity has the effect of breaking down its encapsulation and opening up its isolation from the outside world. In the West, the paradigm of the self-centred, encapsulated self is the Cartesian ego, which, as *res cogitans* in splendid isolation from *res extensa* outside, observes in dispassionate detachment a realm utterly separate and different in nature from itself, and is thereby able to exert control over a world of dead, inanimate objects.

Nishitani frequently discusses this conception of the self, and sees it as symptomatic also (though to a lesser degree) of a false understanding of the self in the Eastern tradition. He talks of our "contemplating things from within the fortress of the self . . . seeing things merely as objects." This results in a self "alienated from things . . . encapsulated in itself . . .

⁸ *Human, All-Too-Human*, II, 1, 17.

a self that is always *object-like*." He contrasts this "self-enclosed" self with a condition in which we forget the self and "ourselves become the things that we perceive" (G 49–57, E 9–13). He interprets the haiku poet Bashō's injunction, "What goes on with the fir-tree, learn from the fir; what goes on with the bamboo, learn from the bamboo" as meaning: "Transpose yourself into the way of being in which the fir is the fir itself and the bamboo the bamboo itself" (G 212, E 128). Dōgen describes such self-transformation by saying: "To learn the Buddha-way is to learn one's self. To learn one's self is to forget one's self. To forget one's self is to be corroborated by all things [*dharmas*]. To be corroborated by all things is to let one's own 'body/soul' as well as the selves of others fall away" (*Genjōkōan*: quoted in G 306, E 107–108).

In Western terms we could describe the dissolution of the Cartesian ego as a move away from detached observation that re-opens the self to a reflective *participation* in the world.⁹ Nietzsche's *Zarathustra* is on one level a depiction of this process, imagined as the psyche's being stimulated by *erōs*, love or passion, to open up to involvement with the entire cosmos. As I have indicated elsewhere, this transformation is seen predominantly through images of water, as the lacustrine soul's overflowing its shores and rushing down to pour itself into the cosmic ocean of will to power.¹⁰ In section 4 of the Prologue, Zarathustra proclaims his love for "him whose soul is overfull, so that he forgets himself and all things are in him: thus all things become his going under [death]." Later he speaks of the soul that loves itself most, "in which all things have their flow and counterflow, their ebb and flood." "Oh my soul," he exults, "nowhere is there a soul more loving and embracing and comprehensive than you!" (Z III, 12 and 14).

As in Buddhism, dispassion is a preliminary means for attaining compassion. Nishitani assimilates *agape* as non-differentiating love to the

⁹ This idea has its roots in the "*participation mystique*" discussed by the French anthropologist Lévy-Bruhl, referring to the so-called "primitive's" identification with his environment. For an excellent account of the vicissitudes of this idea in the Western philosophical tradition, see Owen Barfield's *Saving the Appearances* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World).

¹⁰ Cf. part I of "The Overflowing Soul: Images of Transformation in Nietzsche's *Zarathustra*," in *Man and World*, vol. 16, no. 4, 1983. Imagery of waves and ocean is also of central importance in Buddhist characterizations of the relations between self and world (cf. Nishitani, G 178, E 103).

Buddhist ideal of great compassion (*mahākarunā*): Christ's love, as *ekkenōsis*, an emptying out of the self into selflessness, would be equivalent to the great compassion of the Buddha, a realization of *śūnyatā* in the transition from *ātman* to *anātman* (G 116–120, E 58–61). If we do not insist on thinking of *erōs* and *agape* as always opposed, then the love which opens up Zarathustra's self would correspond well with *ekkenōsis* and *karunā*.

The breakdown of the self into various multiplicities, while a theme common to Nietzsche and earlier Buddhism, is not as prominent in Zen. Zen is less interested in retracing the genealogy of the false self, and instead goes straight back to the source—*śūnyatā*, *kū*, the *nihilum*, emptiness, Nothing. "Behind the person," writes Nishitani, "is absolutely nothing" (G 132, E 70). Emptiness and nothing are central topics in this work and are treated in a tone that is as Nietzschean as it is Heideggerian. "Where does man not stand at the edge of abysses?" asks Zarathustra (Z III, 2). "Constantly at the edge of an abyss," responds Nishitani, "[our lives] can be annihilated any moment. . . . Our existence . . . vibrates over empty nothingness" (G 42, E 4). The conversion of the false to the true self requires a realization—in the sense of both an understanding and an actualization—of the nothing that is the ground of the self: "Becoming aware of nothing is nothing other than becoming aware of the self." And as one becomes aware of this nothing of the self, one realizes that it is one with the nothing that is the (abysmal) basis of the entire universe: "We become aware of [death and nothing] as concealed in the ground of all beings, in the ground of the world itself" (G 59, E 16).

While "*das Nichts*" is more prominent in Heidegger's texts than in Nietzsche's (in *Being and Time* explicitly understood as the ground of self and world), the idea of nothing is of course central to Nietzsche's nihilism. Just as there is no substance to the persons, drives and interpretative energies that comprise the self, nothing behind the protean multiplicity of masks that make up the *persona*, so there is no substratum of reality behind the appearances—only a plethora of perspectival interpretations; no core or centre; nothing the perspectives are interpretations of. "Behind every ground," we read in aphorism 289 of *Beyond Good and Evil*, "an abyss."

As Nishitani develops his idea of the field of emptiness (*das Feld der*

Leere), it comes to sound more and more like the cosmic play-ground of Nietzsche's will to power. While all things are unified in the field of emptiness, this does not signify a collapse into a One "in which all multiplicity and differentiation is eliminated"; rather, as with Nietzsche's polycentrism, "in the field of emptiness there are centres everywhere" (G 235, E 146). Nishitani's subsequent elaboration of the idea of each thing's being an absolute centre mirroring the entire universe admittedly sounds more like (and no doubt owes more to) the Hua-yen Buddhist conception of the world than Nietzsche's. But in a later discussion of the mutual interpenetration of all things, Nishitani writes that this interrelationship is due to "the 'force' that gathers all things and lets them become one; the force which makes the world the world. The field of emptiness is a force-field" (G 240-241, E 150). Although the author has presumably approved the use of term "force" (*Kraft*) rather than "power" (*Macht*), his talk of "the 'force' that enables each individual thing to exist" (G 252, E 159) is strongly reminiscent of will to power.

Now this is a point at which the comparative approach can throw light on a somewhat inconspicuous yet important aspect of Nietzsche's thought. While the idea of the interrelatedness of all things is central to most Buddhist thought (Nishitani calls it "*wechselseitige Durchdringung*" or, in the English translation, "circumincessional interpenetration"), it does not immediately appear to have a counterpart in Nietzsche's philosophy. However, Mistry has drawn attention to a series of passages in the *Nachlaß* in which the account of the workings of will to power corresponds closely to the idea of *pratītya-samutpāda*. In the first of these four notes we read, "There is no 'being-in-itself' (it is the relationships that first constitute beings)"; and in the last: "... every displacement of power at one place [would] condition the whole system—so that besides causal sequence there would be contiguous and cooperative dependence."¹¹ The same idea plays a crucial role in *Zarathustra* (which we shall look at later in connexion with the "moment"), culminating in the ecstatic jubilation of "The Night-Wanderer Song": "All things are linked together, intertwined, enamoured!" (Z IV, 19).

Nevertheless, one might still insist on a divergence here, in as far as Zen enlightenment appears to realize an intrinsic harmony to the world,

¹¹ WP 625 and 638; cf. 631 and 635 (cited in NB 74-75).

whereas Nietzsche argues against there being any order to the world that human beings have not projected into it, characterizing it instead as "chaos."¹² But I think his use of this word harks back to its original Greek meaning of "abysmal gap," since other formulations stress the co-presence of order and disorder. Although Mistry quotes the following well known passage from the *Nachlaß* at some length (NB 64–65), parts of it are worth re-quoting here, since it mirrors the Zen world-view even more closely than that of early Buddhism.

[The world is] a monster of energy, without beginning, without end . . . enclosed by "nothing" as by a boundary . . . in a definite space, and not a space which is "empty" somewhere but rather as energy throughout, as a play of energy and energy-waves, at once one and many . . . a sea of flowing and rushing energies, eternally changing . . . [returning] out of the play of contradictions back to the joy of harmony . . . (WP 1067)

And just as Nishitani writes that the force-field of emptiness "opens up in the self, when the self is truly in its own primordial ground . . . [and] . . . is always already to be found in the self" (G 252, E 159), so Nietzsche concludes the passage just quoted with the sentences: "*This world is will to power—and nothing besides! And you yourselves are also this will to power—and nothing besides!*"

We have seen that for both Nietzsche and Zen the authentic self, rather than being encapsulated as the ego within the confines of the body, is an openness that participates in the world. But as well as being a matrix of relationships in space, the self is also—and more importantly—extended through *time*. It is a significant feature of Nietzsche's and Nishitani's philosophies (which they share with Heidegger's) that once the self is "de-substantialized" its essential nature turns out to be radically temporal.¹³

¹² WP 711. Cf., however, Nishitani: "In the field of emptiness original disharmony and original harmony are essentially one" (G 395, E 264).

¹³ One of the virtues of Nishitani's book is its emphasis (with frequent reference to the idea of eternal recurrence) on the temporal/historical dimension of Buddhist thought, since Buddhism has generally been regarded as a particularly un- or a-historical religion.

UNDER THE MOMENT—THE ABYSS OF ETERNITY

For both Nietzsche and Nishitani the true self is to be thought of in its relation to time and eternity. If the Zen understanding of time and *śūnyatā* and Nietzsche's thought of eternal recurrence have still not been well understood, one reason is that they are both grounded in views of eternity that are quite different from the traditional conceptions. The topic of time and eternity is abysmally deep, but perhaps we can venture into it through two sets of texts in the alchemical spirit of hoping to illuminate *obscurum per obscurius*. Since neither philosopher elaborates an explicit theory of time, I shall bring the final focus to bear on a specific image that appears central to both discussions—the image of a “vertical” eternity directly beneath the *moment* (*Augenblick*) extending down into limitless depth.

The idea of time on both sides is ambiguous. In Nietzsche, the thought of the eternal recurrence of the same, which underlies the authentic understanding of time, has as it were two “faces”—a nihilistic and an affirmative. Similarly, for Nishitani, time presents “on the one hand the aspect of the creative, of freedom and of infinite possibility, and on the other the aspect of infinite burden, of ineluctable necessity” (G 335–337, E 220–222). Let us look at time first from the perspective of nihilism/*karma*, and then from the perspective of affirmation/*śūnyatā*.

The first published expression of the thought of eternal recurrence is aphorism 341 of *The Gay Science*. The reader is there confronted with the possibility of having to re-live his or her life so far—everything will return in precisely the *same* way and sequence again and again, innumerable times. A thought so heavy (the aphorism's title is “The Greatest Weight”), if it did not crush us, would transform us as we now are. In a note from the *Nachlaß* Nietzsche calls the first alternative the thought in its most “paralyzing” and “terrible” form: “existence, as it is, without meaning or aim, but inevitably recurring, without a finale into nothingness” (WP 55). Combined with the idea of the irreversibility of time, the will's impotence with respect to the “it was,” and the rigid predetermination of the present by the past so that nothing original can occur, this idea of recurrence indeed becomes crushingly nihilistic.

A corollary to a self encapsulated in space is a self centred upon one point at a time in linear time: Buddhism, with its notion of *karma*, explodes the punctilinear self into a matrix of relationships extending

infinitely back into the past (and forward into the future). If we avoid taking the notion of reincarnation literally—we are helped in this by the self's being *anātman*, which means that there is nothing substantial to be reincarnated, only a configuration of relationships or energies—and if we heed Nishitani's injunction to understand the idea of the endless cycle of births and rebirths existentially, as bearing upon our present existence here and now (G 367, E 243), we shall find this understanding of the self through time remarkably similar to Nietzsche's.

A recurrent theme in Nishitani's book is that of "*karma* from beginningless time," which imposes upon us "a tremendous weight, or infinite burden." The question then is: What would correspond in Nietzsche's thought to such an understanding of *karma*? Since Professor Ōkōchi has already given a comprehensive answer in terms of Nietzsche's *amor fati*,¹⁴ I shall restrict myself here to pointing up another aspect of the historical dimension of the self in Nietzsche that has not received much attention in the secondary literature, and which corresponds to Nishitani's idea of "historical" (*ge-schicht-lich*) *karma*.

Although the idea of *metempsychosis*, or transmigration of the soul, is central to much of ancient Greek thought, subsequent Western philosophy has mostly taken the position that the individual begins with his or her present birth. However, with Kierkegaard the idea resurfaces that "what is essential to human existence [is] that man is *individuum* and as such simultaneously himself and the whole race, and in such a way that the whole race participates in the individual and the individual in the whole race."¹⁵ This idea is echoed a few decades later by numerous passages in Nietzsche, of which the following two are typical: "We are *more* than individuals: we are the whole chain as well, with the task of all the futures of that chain." Again: "Every individual consists of the whole course of evolution (and not, as morality imagines, only of

¹⁴ Ryōgi Ōkōchi, "*Nietzsches Amor Fati im Lichte des Karma des Buddhismus*," *Nietzsche Studien*, vol. 1, 1972.

¹⁵ Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, trans. Reidar Thomte (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), section 1. One finds a similar idea in such thinkers as Eckhart, Vico, and some of the German *Naturphilosophen*, but it is not until Kierkegaard that it leads to a central and comprehensive inquiry into the relationships of the self to time and eternity, in which, significantly, the idea of the moment (*Øjeblikket*) is also crucial.

something that begins at birth).”¹⁶

Nietzsche has a quasi-Lamarckian understanding of the self as an agglomeration of layers of the past experience of one’s ancestors, which implies that we live not only at one particular point in (present) time, but also, by virtue of a kind of vertical extension down through the layers, at many levels and times simultaneously. And so, all the time, “the entire human and animal past continues [in us] to invent, to love, to hate and to infer.”¹⁷ The medium for this archaic inheritance (and here the psychological Lamarckism acquires a physiological turn) is the body, “where the entire past of all organic becoming, the most distant and the closest, is again vitally embodied . . .”¹⁸ When, thanks to this medium, one learns “to feel the entire history of mankind as *one’s own (hi)story*,” one becomes “[a] human being with a horizon of millennia before and behind him, the [responsible] heir of all nobility of the whole of past spirit . . .”¹⁹ Such a sense of our responsibility to our heritage is surely consonant with Nishitani’s understanding of the karmic weight placed on us by the tradition into which we are born.

Moving to the second, “affirmative” understanding of the temporality of the self, let us begin with the Zen understanding of the moment as articulated in the last two chapters of Nishitani’s book. At the begin-

¹⁶ *WP* 687 and 373; the latter assertion obviously pertains only to moralities *not* based on the idea of *karma*. Cf. also *WP* 585, 678 and 686–687, and *Beyond Good and Evil*, aph. 264. This is also a central idea in Jung’s psychology, for whom “Every man, in a sense, represents the whole of man and his history” (*Collected Works*, vol. 8, section 483).

¹⁷ *The Gay Science*, aph. 54; cf. also aph. 337.

¹⁸ *WP* 659. Many forms of Buddhism place a corresponding importance on the body. Anticipating Zarathustra’s claim that the body is “the true self” is the Buddha’s remark that it is better to regard “this body, child of the four great elements, as the self, rather than the mind . . .” (*Samyukta Nikāya*, ii, 94; cited in *NB* 59). Nishitani similarly emphasizes that self-realization in Zen involves “a ‘somatic [*leibhaft*]’ understanding” (G 450).

¹⁹ *The Gay Science*, aph. 337. The theme of the heavy responsibility imposed on us as heirs of the past is echoed by Heidegger’s discussion of “disposition” [*Befindlichkeit*] in *Being and Time* (section 29), which discloses our “thrownness” [*Geworfenheit*] to us as “a burden.” Nishitani’s interpretation of karma makes frequent reference to the burden of our continual “indebtedness” [*Schuld*] to our past *karma* (see, especially, chapter six).

ning of his discussion of "Emptiness and Time" Nishitani gives expression to the idea of "momentariness" (*ksānavāda*), an idea fundamental to much Buddhist thought from the beginning, in the following way: "We are . . . at every moment abysmally in time, and in embracing groundlessly the boundless future, we let 'time' temporalize itself in every single moment" (G 283, E 181). When one thinks away rectilinear time as the "frame" for the arising and passing away of all things, the idea of absolute duration (and also of the irreversibility of the "flow" of time) collapses—in such a way that birth and death as happening "in time" must be radically re-thought. Writing of "true" time and eternity, Nishitani says of life that it "consists of a chain of 'births and deaths' [and] in every moment arises anew and again perishes" (*ibid.*).²⁰

At the beginning of the book's final chapter, "Emptiness and History," Nishitani returns to the question of the moment in the context of the idea of *kalpas*. He explains the Buddhist conception of "an agglomeration of *kalpas*" partially in contradistinction to the thought of eternal recurrence: in the latter, "a before and after are still assumed, and in this succession time is simply represented as a straight line without beginning or end" (G 334, E 219). The *kalpa*-system on the other hand involves a multiplicity of "simultaneous" time-systems, and "in order to be able to speak of such as layering [Schichtung] of simultaneous time-systems (of "history" [*Ge-Schichte*]) one must assume at the ground of time an infinite openness, an immeasurable, sky-like emptiness."²¹ Owing to the agglomeration of simultaneous time-systems the moment assumes the peculiar characteristic that "at the ground of every 'now' an empty

²⁰ Nishitani's discussion of the continual "new arising of the 'now'" and the "non-durational" character of time comes into especially sharp focus around G 337–338, E 221–222. Stambaugh emphasizes Nietzsche's denial of duration on pp. 7–17 of *NER*, and her discussion of the moment's arising and perishing on pp. 114–115 is perfectly congruent with the Buddhist conception of "momentariness". For a discussion of earlier Buddhist theories of momentariness in the light of *pratītya-samutpāda*, see David J. Kalupahana, *Causality: The Central Philosophy of Buddhism* (Honolulu: The University Press of Hawaii, 1975), especially ch. VII.

²¹ G 334, E 219; cf. also G 252, 349, 368, 373; E 159, 230, 244, 247. Nishitani also doubts whether the moment in Nietzsche has "the groundlessness of the 'moment' in the true sense" (G 329, E 215–216); but we shall see shortly, I hope, that the thought of recurrence actually involves a remarkably similar view of the relation between the moment and eternity.

expanse opens up . . . so that every 'now' is essentially something that perishes *and* arises in every moment" (G 334, E 219).

If there is no duration, then time cannot be understood linearly, nor the relation between time and eternity "horizontally"—eternity as *nunc stans*, as the endless duration of a flow, or as the simultaneity of the "parts" of a time-line stretching from the past through the present to the future. Rather the relation will have to be understood "vertically" as an opening down of the moment into a dimension of limitless depth. This is a major theme of Nishitani's book:

And this means, as I have said before, that immediately under the present, in the ground which comes to presence vertically in the agglomerated layers of innumerable smaller and greater "world-" and "time-" cycles, the *nihilum* opens up as the place of the ek-static transcendence of world and time. This means that the abyss of the *nihilum*, above which the infinite recurrence runs, reveals itself as an infinite openness beneath the present. (G 348, E 229)

As a result of the denial of any kind of duration, eternity is transposed from the horizontal into the vertical dimension. It is furthermore clear from the above that the abyss of the *nihilum* which constantly breaks open under the moment is an opening not only into "the eternity of the transcendent *nothingness* . . . of *death*," but also into "the field of emptiness as the field of mutual interpenetration, . . . which is always situated in the self, at hand and underfoot" (G 349, E 230; cf. G 252, E 159).

This possibility of the opening into the field of emptiness arises from the aspect of time which Nishitani has characterized as "the aspect of the creative, of freedom and of infinite possibility." Let us now see how this corresponds to the second "face" of Nietzsche's thought of eternal recurrence, which is realized if the thought does not crush us but transforms us, in that we are able to say to the demon who intimates to us the possibility of recurrence: "You are a God and I never heard anything more divine" (GS 341). To experience the thought as "the highest formula of affirmation that can possibly be attained," it would be necessary to "take away the idea of a purpose from the process and nevertheless affirm the process. —This would be the case if something within the process were *attained* in every moment of it—and always the same" (WP 55). In order to understand how "the same" can be attained "in every moment" we must reflect upon the relationship bet-

ween the moment and the eternal recurrence. To paraphrase Joan Stambaugh's interpretation: if there is no duration, the self-identity of the self (*das Selbst*) cannot be thought of in relation to the usual sense of "the same" (*das Selbe*), but only with respect to a "same" (*das Gleiche*) that recurs.

The crucial importance of the moment is expressed in another passage from the *Nachlaß*:

But then [the individual] discovers that it is itself something changing . . . It discovers in its freedom the mystery that there is no individual, that in the smallest moment it is something other than in the next moment, and that the conditions for its existence are those of a huge number of individuals: the *infinitely small moment* is the higher reality and truth, a lightning-flash-image [*Blitzbild*] out of the eternal flux.²²

From *WP* 1052 we learn that "because nothing is subsistent in itself, neither in us nor in things, . . . if we say *yes* to a single moment, we have thereby affirmed not only ourselves but all things." This interdependence amongst all things lends to the moment the character of "immortality"²³—paradoxically, since it is precisely the essence of the moment to arise and perish simultaneously.

It is in *Zarathustra* that the moment proves to be crucial to the thought of recurrence. In "On the Vision and the Riddle" (the first attempt at presenting the thought) Zarathustra speaks of future and past as eternal lanes which come together "face-to-face" and "contradict one another" in the gateway of the "moment." Zarathustra asks the dwarf: "Do you think that these paths [of past and future] contradict one another eternally?"—"All that is straight lies," the dwarf mutters contemptuously, "time itself is a circle"—to which Zarathustra retorts: "Don't make it too easy for yourself!" One might be inclined to think that these long lanes do not in fact run "backwards" and "on out" into opposing eternities, but that the apparently straight line of time is rather the arc of a gigantic circle, and that the lanes therefore come together at an infinite vertical distance away. But that is too easy a solution, since the paths would still come together "face to face" out there, and thereby

²² *Gesammelte Werke, Großoktavausgabe, Nachlaß XII: 45.*

²³ *Nachlaß XII: 371 and XIV: 286 (cited in NER 23).*

still “contradict one another” (see figures 1 & 2).²⁴

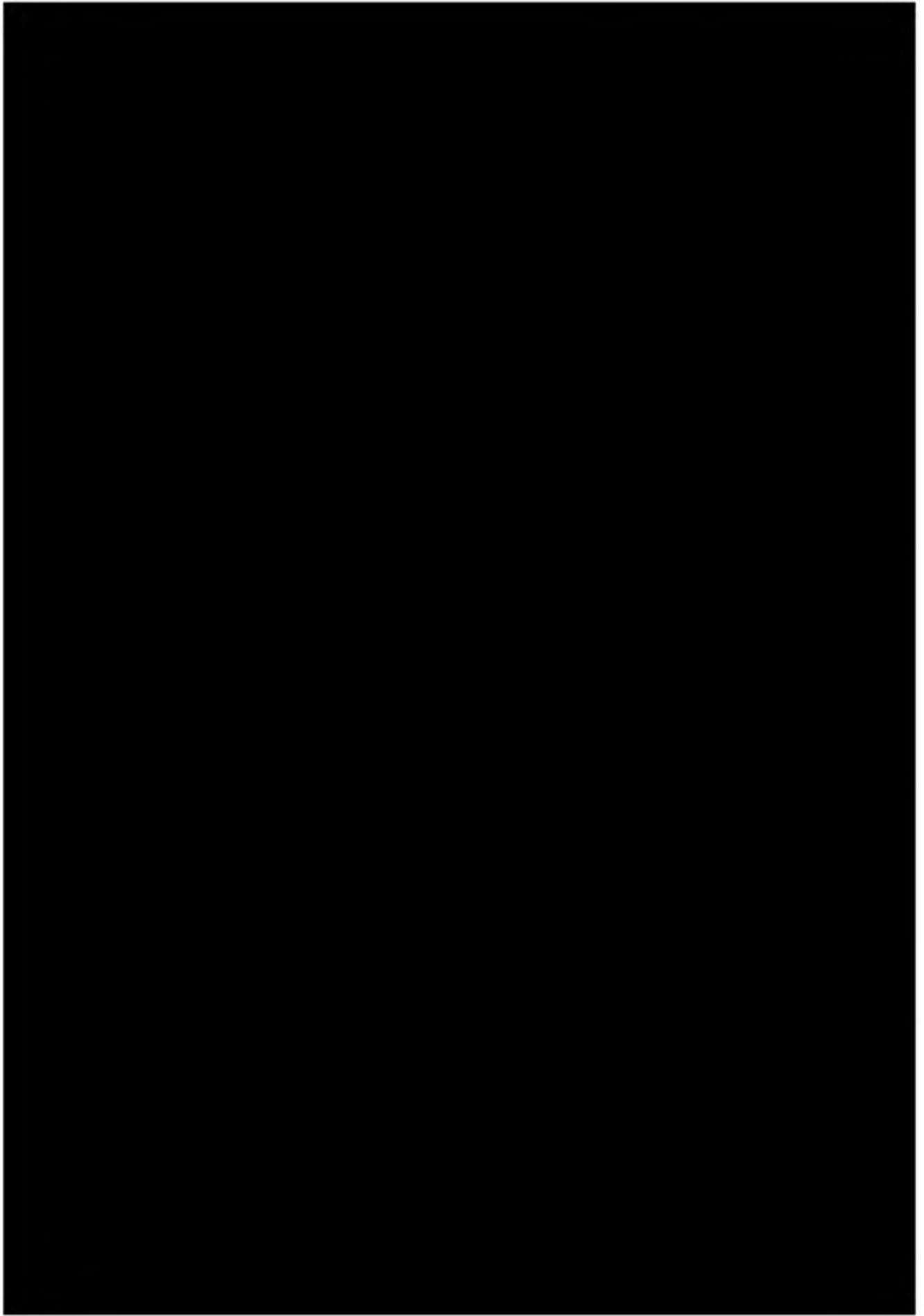
In the next chapter but one, “Before Sunrise,” the vertical dimension of eternity is introduced by a striking image which is reminiscent of Nishitani’s description of “the infinite openness . . . in the ground of time” as “an immeasurable, sky-like emptiness.” The chapter begins: “Oh heaven above me, pure! deep! You abyss of light!”: in this image the opposites come together—the height of heaven as the depth of the abyss. Shortly thereafter we hear: “For all things are baptized in the well of eternity,” which prefigures the culmination of the fourth book in “The Night-Wanderer Song.” There Zarathustra is addressed by the midnight-bell, whereupon he asks: “Where did time go?” Did I not sink into deep wells? . . . My world just became perfect, midnight is also midday.—”²⁵

What we need to do, then, is to understand time in such a way that past and future come together without contradicting one another and that the paths are transposed into the vertical dimension (fig. 3). Although one usually thinks of the directions of future and past as forward and back, there is a strange ambiguity to our idea of rectilinear time—between its flowing from the future into the past, or progressing from the past into the future. There is a corresponding ambiguity to the vertical metaphors we use to speak of past and future: things “come up” from the future, and are “handed down” from past tradition; and yet at the same time colloquial speech talks of things “coming down” from the future and of memories of the past “coming up.” Because of this the diagram can be mirrored above and below, producing a doubled image. The ring of recurrence then looks like two intersecting infinity signs—or, even more appropriately, like the butterfly of the soul (*psuche*), which “[wanders] like a heavy cloud between past and future” and of which

²⁴ Though believing with Heidegger that the problem with almost all Western theories of time is that they have conceived it “spatially,” I cannot resist the temptation to try to represent the idea of time and eternity in *Zarathustra* by means of a diagram. Sketches for these figures were first drawn on a paper napkin during a lunchtime conversation with Professor Abe Masao.

²⁵ Interestingly, there is a Zen saying concerning “striking the midnightbell at midday.” The German “*Brunnen*” means “spring” or “fountain” as well as “well”; in “The Night Song” Zarathustra calls his soul “a fountain” (*ein springender Brunnen*). Nishitani writes of “[our] self-awareness welling up from the *Brunnen* of beginningless and endless time” (G 373, E 248).

FIGURES



Zarathustra inquires: "Where would future and past be closer together than in you?" (Z III, 16 and 14). Nietzsche even speaks of the "butterfly moment" in *The Gay Science* (aphorism 83).

Because Nietzsche denies any kind of horizontal duration these circles need to be turned through 90° into the absolutely vertical (fig. 4). Further: by the gateway of the moment Zarathustra asks the dwarf: "And are all things not so firmly knotted together that this moment draws *all* coming things after it?" Later, in "The Convalescent," the eagle and serpent, speaking for Zarathustra, say: "But the knot of causes in which I am entangled returns—and will create me again. I myself belong to the causes of the recurrence." Because midnight is also midday (the way up and the way down—one and the same), when one steps into the gateway of the moment (as the dwarf did not have the courage to do), one realizes that eternal return does not simply mean that time is cyclical, but rather that *everything*—past, future, the whole of time, and the eternal recurrence itself—is in the moment (cf. *NER* 41). This is represented by the point in figure 5. And if the moment is an abysmal opening of time into the emptiness of eternity, it is best not imaged at all, as in figure 6.

To appreciate the existential impact of the thought of recurrence, let us think back to its first presentation, in *The Gay Science*. We should now have a better sense of how "The question in each and every thing, 'Do you want this once more and innumerable times more?' would weigh upon [our] actions as the greatest weight." And *if* we could bear to let this weight inform every single choosing of ourselves, it would introduce—by annihilating all extraneous and exogenous pressures on our decisions—an unprecedented lightness and clarity (paradoxically) into our choice of course. In this sense, the thought of recurrence would work as an existential guide in much the same way as the confrontation with death effected by *Angst* does in *Being and Time*.

To gather the major themes together for a final *coda*: on one hand, the heaviness of *karma*, *Befindlichkeit* as burden, the greatest weight; on the other, the creative openness of *śūnyatā*, understanding as free projection, the light innocence of becoming; and in between, always under the way, the abyss of death, which discloses Being *sive* Nothing. So, from the occidental as well as the oriental perspective, our opening our selves to the abysmal field of emptiness does not afford absolute freedom. The momentum of the burden of our thrownness, the weight of tradition which takes the camel's strength to bear and the power of the lion to

throw off, the pressure constantly exerted by *karma* from beginningless time—in short, the heavy weight of fate—this constricts and restricts even as it impels us continually to create our selves anew in every moment, in the light of our ever-present death and the prospect of eternal return.

But within such a prescribed field we are free to catch up the throw, carry that weight, dance under it over the abyss, project the play of possibilities on the openness of world and time—and let the responsible bearing of the burden of *karma* become innocent play, deadly serious, and love of fate. Time is the key here, the *kairos* the opening into eternity, the moment the way back down to the ring of return, the high ground that falls away into the creative well-springs of the deep self.

Let me close the circle by concluding the quotation which opens this essay:

Oh heaven above me, . . . are you looking at me? You are listening to my wonderful soul?

When will you drink this drop of dew, which fell upon all earthly things,—when will you drink this wonderful soul—

—when, well of eternity! you serene and ghastly midday-abyss!
When will you drink my soul back into you?

Zarathustra IV, "Midday"