

Emptiness and History

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TO BEGIN WITH, it seems to me questionable that the Buddhist concept of time is merely cyclical as Toynbee has stated. A cyclical world process, as a recurring sequence with no beginning or end, implies infinity. Insofar as it does come to an end, however, in the sense it returns back to its beginning, its cyclical character implies finiteness. A cyclical recurrence has thus a kind of infinite finitude. It is finitude of a higher order. This finitude can through the "repetition," the cyclical movement recurring without end, come to be a higher infinite finitude, which has been called "eternal repetition." But since this endlessly repeated cycle is an eternal return of the same events and phenomena, its endlessness is a total abstraction. It is, after all, a meaningless endlessness, Nietzsche's *umsonst* ("in vain").

Would not what Buddhism indicates in a phrase such as "since the beginningless past" belong to a different dimension? It is true Buddhism has, in the kalpa, its own closed temporal system complete in itself. From a recurring succession of kalpas, it conceives a higher-level time system and, in that way, of ever higher-level systems, all complete in themselves. From an accumulation of smaller kalpas a greater one is conceived; from the gathering of these a still larger one, and so on.

In this case, all the time systems imagined one after another in an ever more comprehensive conception are simultaneous. It may be compared to the earth's rotation around the sun while the entire solar system, in turn, moves around some other center. If we can conceive an ever-

* "Emptiness and History" is the sixth chapter of *Shūkyō to wa nanika* ("What is Religion?"), published by Sōbunsha in 1961. The second installment will appear in the next issue.

widening circularity of this kind continuing out to infinity, then it could be said that at each moment of time, each "now," the earth is making all those movements at once. The Buddhist system of kalpas is something like this. It is different from the endlessly recurring cycle of a system of identical time, in which the same world process makes an eternal return.

In the eternal return, a before and after is supposed in the successive repetitions of the same world-time, and in that recurrence time is represented by a mere straight-line with no beginning or end. But in Buddhism, time is circular because all its cyclic systems are simultaneous; and, as a vertical continuum of individual "nows" in which the systems are simultaneous, it is simultaneously rectilinear as well. Here time is not merely rectilinear. It is at once circular and rectilinear.

To predicate a stratified formation of simultaneous time systems necessitates that an infinite openness be conceived at the ground of time, a vast sky-like emptiness which cannot be confined within any systematic enclosure whatever. Having such a void at its bottom, every "now," even while participating in each of all the accumulated layers stretching throughout the total time system, is itself something new, with its own individuality each time and not allowing repetition in any sense. Here, the sequence of "nows" is really irreversible. Each "now" is thus, in a true sense, something perishing and originating at every instant. It is, in other words, transitory in the fullest sense of the word.

As such a succession of "nows" with an underlying abyss of openness, time can only be conceived as beginningless and endless. Stated conversely, only when it is so conceived is it possible for every "now" to be a new "now" and also to be impermanent. Moreover, in time this "newness" and "impermanency" have an inseparable connection. In that interrelation, as I will explain, there appears an equivocality essential to time.

It may be said that to view kalpas (which find an equivalent in the word aeon, meaning both world and world-time) as a great multi-layered time system suggests a mythological representation of time. But we can ascribe the "meaning" of this view to its recognition of the existence of an openness at the ground of time. Likewise, it may be said the idea of "existing since the beginningless past" is a vague and primitive one belonging to a pre-Kantian stage lacking critical examination into the antinomy implied in the question of whether there is a beginning in time or not. It is also possible, however, to say that there, on the contrary, appears the true nature of time.

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By the true nature of time I mean its essential ambiguity. I have pointed out as one aspect of that ambiguity the inseparable connection between the element of the novelty or newness inherent in the "now" and the element of transitoriness. Time's ambiguity, however, extends to all its aspects.

As I said, only as something without beginning and end within an infinite openness does time become something which is perpetually new at each point of time. But the significance of this newness is equivocal. The unceasing emergence of newness can, on the one hand, have the positive significance of genesis or creation. In such a sense, time is the field of the unlimited possibility in creative freedom, or rather, it is this possibility itself. A beginningless, endless time within an infinite openness enunciates an infinity of possibility. It signifies that the intrinsic possibility harbored in our nature as time-being (or being-time) always maintains a character of indefiniteness.

On the other hand, this same ceaseless emergence is something we could not put a stop to even if we wanted to. It ceaselessly makes us go forward to do things, forcing us from within to ever new changes. This obligation to interminable newness makes our existence an infinite burden lying on us with a heavy weight. It means also that time itself comes to appear to us as infinitely burdensome as well. Time and our very existence show themselves to be saddled from the start with an inexhaustible debt. It lies in the nature of our existence that we are unable to sustain ourselves except as we are endlessly engaged in doing something. Or, conversely, our life is such that we must be redeeming without rest the burden upon our shoulders. Essentially, then, time and our being have the nature of a debt or liability for us, the essential nature of which is revealed in the fact that we have no choice but to be continuously involved in doing something.

Moreover, anything we do invariably results in a new liability and creates for us the necessity of doing something new once again. In the very act of the task involved in constantly redeeming the debt we are presented with yet another task. The act by which we exhaust one debt is the seed of a new one. Within this causal linkage there emerges the infinite character of our "being" and "time" as an interminable encumbrance.

In any case, having always to be doing something, or to be contriving some project, belongs to the essential form of our life. Our existence can be said to imply an essential mode of self-"pro-jecting." Here, it goes without saying, even rest, doing nothing at all, is essentially "causal being"

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(*samskṛta*), a case of being entangled in the net of causal conditions. Rather, and this has often been pointed out in connection with the experience of ennui, our own "being" and "time" show the weight of their burden best precisely when we are doing nothing.

To summarize, then, that we "are" in "time" means we are condemned incessantly to "do" something; and in that ceaseless "doing" our being is incessantly established as "becoming." Existence in time obtains as a ceaseless becoming and changing.

What constitutes the problem here, however, is the endlessness implied in the burden. The unavoidability or intrinsic necessity of our having always to be engaged in doing something has this oppressive character because of its sheer interminableness; because that necessity looms to our self-consciousness as a restless and infinite impulse driving our existence onward. Although our life is finite, the essence of that life comes to self-consciousness as this sort of infinite urge spurring us endlessly on from our most inner part. Then, the finitude of our life comes to show its own essence as infinite finitude. (In this context, as I said before,¹ can be found the original sense of the mythological notion of transmigration.) There our existence and time appear to us as an endless and heavy load of debt.

What I have termed "infinite impulse" has since early times been envisaged as "greed" or "desire" (*cupiditas* and *concupiscentia* are the Western equivalents). In our mode of existence as beings driven by an infinite impulse and unable to refrain from doing something new at each instant—in the mode of being which constitutes the essence of our life or our "being-in-the-world," together with the causal linkage it implies—was conceived what is called *karma*. The term *karma* expresses an awareness of existence in which being and time constitute an infinite burden for us and, at the same time, an awareness of the essential nature of time itself.

To restate the essential point, in the incessant newness of time two aspects are simultaneously implied: one of creation, of freedom and infinite possibility, and one of infinite burden, inextricable necessity. The significance of "newness" is essentially equivocal; that means the significance of "time" is, after all, essentially equivocal too.

I stated before that it is only through its becoming beginningless and

¹ *EB IX*, 1, p. 47 ff.

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endless within an infinite openness that time can manifest simultaneously the meaning of an incessantly new "now" and the meaning of impermanence. But this impermanence has its own ambiguity. On the one hand, it indicates the volatility of time, in which each "now," ultimately containing an infinite openness at its bottom and thus having no base on which to fix itself and safely stand, arises and vanishes at each instant. In this sense, every now is a place where time is, so to speak, constantly vanishing into thin air.

From this comes those expressions of the swiftness of fragile, transitory existence which liken it to a flash of lightning or to a galloping horse glimpsed through a chink in a door, and describe all phenomena of the world as being like phantoms or like dewdrops in the morning sun.² Time is always on the verge of vanishing and all things are displaying the frailty of "being" always at the brink of collapse. "Time" and "being" are revealing a constant pull toward nihilization that begins from their ground up. Such is the nature of impermanence.

But, at the same time, impermanence is, from another side, the negation of "permanence," taken in the sense of something remaining stagnantly within a fixed mode of being. Transiency is non-permanence, meaning that a determinate mode of being does not become a hindrance for the thus determined being itself. Here "time" and "nonbeingness" as the nihilization of all things, signify the freedom and effortlessness of a bird in flight, riding the open sky without lingering anywhere even a moment. It is a lightness free of any weight or burden. Or, again, it is non-hindrance, not being conditioned by previous modes of being or encumbered by one's own past, just like a bird that leaves no traces in the path it flies.

Therefore, just as in the case of "newness" and of the "being" and "time" it implies, so also in the case of impermanence and of the "non-beingness" and "time" it implies, the meaning of its impermanence and the nothingness (or nihilization) must be said to be essentially ambiguous; and consequently the significance of "time" displayed there has a double significance as well.

Lastly, I said time only comes into its own through its having an infinite openness at its bottom. This "infinite openness" is equivocal too: it can mean both *nihilum* and "emptiness" in its original sense. According to the

² The well-known verse in the final chapter of the *Diamond Sutra*.

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meaning it takes on, time and all matters related to time will assume essentially opposite significances. The real truth of time lies in the simultaneous possibility of these opposing meanings. The ambiguity in the meaning of "time" and the equivocalness of its significance indicate that time is existentially the place and field of the fundamental turnabout, of the "conversion" of mind or heart, or the "transmutation of consciousness" (*pravṛtti-vijñāna*). I shall examine this a bit further in the following.

II

I said previously that time, having an indefinite openness at its ground, displays a feature characterized as "since the beginningless past." It emerges from a past that leads back to infinity and proceeds forward into a future that expands into endlessly farther reaches. In connection with man's existence within that time, I spoke of karma as an endlessly infinite impulse.

Time, while being insolubly linked with all things existing and emerging in this "world," envelops the "being" (and consequently the "nothingness") of all things in a deep enigma. The ground of our actual existence—Where do we come from? Where do we go?—is shrouded in mist. This makes for an uneasiness in our being. Our actual existence tends essentially to groundlessness. It is connected essentially with anxiety. This self-awareness of our own existence reveals the enigma and anxiety in the best possible relief there where "time" appears to us as something that is beginningless and endless. My birth originates with my parents, their birth with theirs. We can trace back in this way indefinitely into the past. Ultimately, we must reach a time before the appearance of the human race and living beings, a time before the appearance of the earth and the solar system, and so on without end. Likewise, we can go infinitely forward into the future, from father to son, to grandson, and so on until we come to the disappearance of the human race, the disappearance of living beings, of the earth and the solar system, losing ourselves equally in the blank vastness of an endless future.

It is, however, not a question of only chronological or vertical relationships. One has brothers, sisters, and relatives; one's parents and their parents had similar affiliations of their own. When we follow these horizontal or spatial relations in conjunction with the chronological ones, we find they diffuse eventually into a nebulous web of relationships

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beyond measure. My existence is established on the background of such a beginningless and endless network of relationships. There it has its origin. Questions regarding the source of my existence must from this point of view remain unanswerable. No matter what progress is achieved in the scientific explanation of the "history" of living beings, of the earth, or of the universe as a whole, the same history will still retreat backward endlessly toward the past and open endlessly into the future, making it impossible to exhaust the secrets of its beginning or end.

In spite of all this, it is also an unshakable fact that I am actually existing here and now. No matter how beginningless and endless time may be, this existence which is here, is here. Its presence is beyond any doubt. And, as said before, even the ability of time to reveal itself as beginningless and endless is possible because in the self-awareness of my being which takes place in this actual existence, an infinite openness comes to my awareness in the same existence from the bottom of time. The disclosure of time as beginningless and endless is inseparable from the disclosure of the infinite openness beneath actual existence. Only in that openness does "time" emerge as something of infinite regression and infinite progression without beginning or end.

Therefore, although it is a self-contradictory task, impossible from the outset, to seek the beginning or the end of "time" (and also the beginning or end of our "being" as actually existing beings) within beginningless and endless time, the beginning and end of that "time-in-itself" can be sought right at hand within the very surroundings of actual existence. This is a pursuit of the beginning and end of "time" and "being" at a more radical level, their more fundamental "homeground." It is a more radical quest for the essence of time and being.

While the beginning and the end of beginningless and endless "time-in-itself" can be sought within our present existence, the present implies something which cannot be reached no matter how far back or how far forward we go. It involves something of a different dimension, like the relation of a solid body to a two-dimensional plane, or like true infinity which can never be attained no matter how much something finite is enlarged. From this point of view, it is only natural that the beginning and end of "time" and of "being" cannot be found inside time. Just as there is no way the three-dimensional can ever be reduced to the two-dimensional (the visual angle at which a mountaintop is seen by someone from the plain below never reaches zero no matter how far one draws away

from the mountain), we never encounter the beginning or the end of time no matter how deeply we step back into the past or how far we reach out into the future. The reason lies in the original nature of "time" itself.

The beginning and end of time-in-itself lie directly beneath the present, at its ground, where, essentially, they should be sought from the beginning. To look for the homeground of "time" (and of "being") by tracing time back infinitely or pursuing it ahead infinitely is to suffer, as it were, from an optical illusion, to be a victim of a confusion of dimensions. It is an error in the orientation of the pursuit of the homeground.³

There is also good reason in this sense for Christianity's considering time itself as a creation of God and regarding, in particular, the time of mankind's history, its origin and final end, as a judgment and punishment, that is, as the will of God. It is also natural for Christianity to regard God's creative and punitive activities as still being at work at the basic ground of the present, and to regard his coming judgment also as already at work directly underfoot in the present time.

It is likewise not without cause that Nietzsche arrived at his idea of Eternal Return when he saw, in a kind of philosophical vision, the time retreating endlessly backward into the past and the time marching endlessly forward into the future meeting at the apex of their extremities, thus causing him to proclaim that "time curves." In this vision also the meeting of both times and the manifestation of the world-time (aeon) as an eternal return must be occurrences taking place just beneath the "now" of the present instant, as Nietzsche himself pointed out in *Zarathustra*.⁴

In both cases, the above optical illusion is, in a sense, possibly overcome. Only, as I indicated before, the respective directions of transcendence run counter to each other, and therefore their problematical points come to appear in opposite forms. In Christianity, it is God's will that bestows beginning and end to the time of the world and the time of man, governing these times from their ground up and working ceaselessly in the depths of the present. The optical illusion which endlessly retraces or endlessly pursues time in search of the homeground of "time" and "being" is thereby overcome from the outset. Moreover, with the origin of historical time being put on this supra-historical level, historical time becomes all the more historical—becomes history from its source. Religious realities, which

³ *EB* vi, 1, 2; ix, 1, p. 65 ff.

⁴ See the author's *Nihilism* (in Japanese), Tokyo, 1949, p. 112.

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are linked to the supra-historical level of the relationship between God's will and man, all become historical events.

However, in this case—and this is the other side of the coin—ordinary secular “world history,” which requires an immanent understanding of history, cannot avoid being drawn completely into the framework of a beginning and an end posited in the power of an absolutely yonder God. It has been explained above that the secularization of the concept of history, that is, a conception of history based on the idea of “progress,” has emerged as a revolt against this view.

In Nietzsche's atheistic Nihilism, on the contrary, any beginning or end posited into history out of a supra-historical dimension is excluded, and history is allowed to promote its own evolution limitlessly and without end. Here, secularization of the conception of history is presupposed from the start. Consequently, the standpoint of the optical illusion, which as I shall explain is essentially linked to that secularization (for example, to the idea of “progress”), also is accepted more or less as it is.

But when the time characterized as “from the infinite past to the infinite future” becomes circular as a single whole, and when this “time-circle” is depicted in a meaningless repetition on the canvas of *nihilum*; when, moreover, all “being” in time is “nihilized” from the ground up and turns into an endless, pure “Becoming,” then the optical illusion or confusion of dimensions that seeks the original ground of time (and being) within time is brought out of its illusion and into proper focus in what Nietzsche calls a “radical Nihilism.” There is no homeground at all to be sought in the world of that pure Becoming, a circular world-time turning eternally within itself. And where all things are to be endlessly repeated in exactly the same form, where everything is robbed of meaning and reduced to *nihilum*, any search for basic and original reality loses its meaning.

Science which goes persistently backward in time to look for the “causes” of present phenomenon, scientific philosophy and its positivism, and also the idealism of “progress,” which as the antipode of that positivism turns to the future seeking the idea as a *telos*—these are robbed of all ground of meaning, deracinated within the radical Nihilism. What is more, on a more fundamental level, even Platonic contemplation, which in its search for the homeground of temporal things goes back to a supra-temporal past (the so-called “pre-existence”) and brings the eternal Ideas seen there to recollection in the present life, and also Christian faith, which in its quest of the same homeground turns to a supra-temporal future (the

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so-called *eschaton*) to await the coming of the Son of God—these too become in the eyes of that Nihilism just so many objects of radical negation. All the conceptions mentioned here are reduced eventually, each in its own way, to nothing more than another manner of optical illusion. Since this radical view seems to me to be pregnant with a grave problematic, I shall examine it in a little more depth.

Natural science, social science, and science of history represent the standpoint of positivistic theory in their persistent turning to the past in search of a "cause," the original ground as "beginning." The standpoint of "progress," in turning persistently to the future in search of the *telos*, the final ground as end, represents the attitude of idealistic practice. Their common foundation, however, lies in the self-affirming independence of intellect and will within human reason, or, stated differently, in the "secularization" of that reason. But seen more basically, at the ground of this emancipation lies hidden an urge to stand alone as one's master; an impulse within human being to establish itself and to push through by itself to total self-reliance. And again at the deepest roots of this urge is the will to persist in being itself in spite of all, a will that forever wills to see its own way through. In that sense, it is the "self-will" or, as Heidegger puts it, "the will to will." This hidden self-will has manifested itself, in the case above, as the emancipation and "secularization" of man's reason or, rather, as secularization in its eminent sense.

Why in its eminent sense? This standpoint looks for the homeground of all that exists and emerges in time only within time, and tries to forge, solely inside time, the necessary causal relations, whether mechanistic or teleological, between the actually existing things and their ground. It has no concern whatever with any ground beyond time. Although this maneuver is understandable, it still remains unaware that the time in which it is taking its stand, time which is infinitely open to both past and future, can only exist due to the infinite openness lying at the ground of the present. This total lack of perspective for any ground beyond time denotes secularization in the eminent sense which characterizes the age and world dominated by science and technology. So far, the standpoints of natural as well as social and historical sciences, scientific philosophy, positivistic realism, and idealism of "progress" can all be said essentially to contain the possibility of optical illusion. And when they become self-satisfied, each with their own scientific, positivistic, rational, and progressive character, and go on to see the "secularization" as something unquestionable

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and to reject all the searches of religion and metaphysics for a supra-temporal ground as so many fancies—in sum, when they fall into an “anthropocentric” attitude of conceit and perversion—the latent possibility of optical illusion implied in those standpoints becomes an actuality. Whether or not it comes to that, at all events this secularized standpoint inclusive of natural, social, and historical sciences is unable to escape challenge about its own ground of meaning from the standpoint which delves into the ground of “time” and “being” and penetrates radically the basic, infinite openness all the way to *nihilum*, reaching an ec-static transcendence in the bottom of time.

Opposed to that secularized standpoint, Christianity and metaphysics represented by Platonism claim to find the original homeground of temporal things in something dwelling in an eternal immutability beyond time. The Christian God is even the origin of time itself. Here, the things of this world do not contain the ground of their own “being” within themselves; their “being” is based on a transcendent Being somewhere beyond. No temporal thing as such can have any meaning or value of its own; its meaning and value is obtained only from a supra-temporal region.

Especially in modern times, however, science persists in discovering the causes of temporal things strictly within the temporal things themselves, and ethics and culture pursue the aims of secular life exclusively inside secular life. The things of this world have recovered their own basis of existence as well as their own meaning and value solely from within the world. As I pointed out earlier, Christianity itself, by its intolerance, and above all through its internal splits and conflicts, has been induced to relativize its own claim to absoluteness. Thus the authority of the transcendent “being” has beaten a gradual retreat and in its place secularism in the highest sense has become dominant.

In short, the standpoint which Nietzsche characterized as “Platonico-Christian,” just because it sought the ground of “time” and “being”—in-time in a transcendent “being,” could not manage to allot a valid place to the open-ended view of secularized time in which time is allowed to stretch back endlessly and open up endlessly, to possess an infinite openness in both directions, and to contain in itself a kind of infinity (or rather, an infinite finitude). As a result, time by its intrinsic infinity became, as it were, independent from “eternity,” and temporal things, the “things of this world,” became capable of being considered from inside this world alone.

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But as I said before, this standpoint of secularism on the contrary loses sight of the direction of the transcendence of time or ignores it altogether. This, in spite of the crucial fact that while the standpoint of secularism rests on the time of this world, the distinguishing feature of that time, the infinity (or infinite finitude) opened in both directions, is in reality only a projection of the trans-temporal infinite openness (or emptiness) opening up directly beneath the present and can appear only on such a "supposition" (in the sense of underlying ground).

Thus it can be said that the two standpoints, the "theocentric" as is represented by Christianity, and the "anthropocentric" of secularism, are with regard to the problem of time as well now finding themselves in a situation of mutual cancellation. Nietzsche's "philosophy" could not have come into being except from within such a situation.

III

"God is dead" means all is dead. It means the ground of origination of all things has turned into *nihilum* and the "being" of all things has been nihilized from the roots up. Things, their unity around a transcendent center lost and with no homeground to return to, are being scattered to the four winds in a "time" which has changed into something without end or limit. The nihilization of the being of all things converts them into a flow of becoming-and-change. At the same time, the very ground of meaning which is being given to all existence is lost, transforming the whole into a mass of meaninglessness.

But death thus carried to its farthest possible extreme in the death of "God," that is, the radicalness of "radical Nihilism," is at once the turning point into life. The idea of eternal return implies such a meaning. On the one hand, with the "World-time" assuming the character of eternal return, "Becoming" comes to be an utterly pure and transparent becoming. The transitoriness of "time" is radicalized into sheer transitoriness and the meaninglessness into an *Ungrund* of meaninglessness. This is the extreme point of the shift into *nihilum*. At first sight all this may seem an utter phantasy. But, in fact, if seen on the level of "world-view" as a whole and in all its consequences, a "secularized" world and a world-time both bereft of God should necessarily show such an overall configuration.

On the other hand, when in the "time" that is infinitely open in both directions both extremes again meet, when the time becomes a circle, then

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time as a total whole returns to its homeground of the "now," the instant where time itself is always present as a single whole. Then all beings scattered limitlessly throughout time are, without ceasing to be pure "becoming," again gathered together into one and appear in the homeground of the present. The vision of "world-time" as an eternal return is inseparable from the return to the homeground of the present.

And this means, as I have been saying, that directly beneath the present in the bottom which penetrates vertically through the stratified accumulation of endless numbers of lesser and greater cycles of "world" and "time," *nihilum* opens up as the place of the ec-static transcendence of world and time. It means the abyss of *nihilum* on which the endless return is established manifests itself as an infinite openness immediately beneath the present.

For example, when Nietzsche says in *Twilight of the Gods* that "The very fact there is nothing outside the whole" (*Es gibt Nichts ausser dem Ganzen*) is a great emancipation, it means, of course, that outside the world as a whole there is no "God," no world of the "yonder shore," nothing is seen outside this world as "the whole"; but at the same time it means that precisely there where this view comes to awake, the field of *nihilum* (the "Nothing") opens up as a place of great emancipation. This opening up means *nihilum* comes to participate in "time," the participation always taking place on the homeground of the present. It brings the "world" back to the world's own ground. The "Nothing" and "the whole" present themselves together simultaneously in the homeground of the present. This signifies a great emancipation.

When "time" becomes circular and the "world" becomes something eternally returning, this world-time (or time-world) presents itself in the homeground of the present, opening up the abyssal *nihilum* directly beneath it. In this case, too, infinite openness as transcendence over world and time takes on the character of eternity. It is not, however, the eternity of a transcendent "Being" but something which could be called the eternity of transcendent "Nothingness," or the eternity, so to speak, of "Death" itself. This opens up directly beneath the present: there and only there can it open up. When the field of eternity, that is, the field of transcendence—which "gives" (*es gibt*) to the world-time the possibility of presenting itself as the world-time—opens up, it must do so only in such a manner that the world-time returns in its wholeness to the homeground of the present. This return then means the ground of the present directly underfoot is "cleared up" and the present at its own ground opens itself to the

infinite openness, to the field of eternity; which means, after all, that the present returns to the homeground of the present itself.

From the standpoint of the existential self-awareness of our own "being in the present time," this all means the above so-called abyss of *nihilum* or eternity of "Death" comes to project itself from the ground of our very being, so that it becomes our own utter "Death." When I said that in general the field of eternity or transcendence can be opened only at the bottom of the present, it was because what is called eternity or transcendence can neither be truly inquired into nor truly opened up except as our own "affair." It is the same with *nihilum* and death. When I said the fountainhead of all beings changes into *nihilum*, or the world turns into a world of death, that was not to indicate a merely objective event or a "matter" or affair possibly relevant to anybody else other than ourselves. What I meant is that all things in the world and our own self turn into *nihilum* as a simultaneous whole, and the Great Death presents itself out of the bottom where world and self are one.⁵ It is something that "matters" essentially to each one's being-in-the-world; it is his own affair. Furthermore, it is not our own affair as it is viewed from the standpoint of contemplation, a standpoint where it can only be considered in a merely general way as if it had to do with somebody else. What "matters" here is nothing we can consider or discuss as a *logos* on the dimension of reason. It is a matter that manifests itself only where an actual "presence" in its real significance is really present. It is the matter of our own self as *ek-sistence*.

It is also for the sake of the same matter that the "eternity of nothingness" presenting itself from the ground of the world as the Great Death becomes, in turn, the existential self-awareness awakened in our actual existence. When I said the infinite openness of *nihilum* appearing beneath the present is none other than the return of the present to its own homeground, it was another way of expressing this existential self-awareness.

We find something similar in Nietzsche's vision of eternal return. This vision, inseparably connected with the now-instant and emerging directly from beneath it, bears the mark of a present and instant-by-instant existential awareness, an awakening to the "eternal" presence of the whole world-time and with it the field of *nihilum*. The appearance of the "world-time" as an eternal return means *nihilum* which constitutes its field, or what

⁵ *EB* vi, 1, 2.

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is the same here, the eternity of death, comes to manifestation in an existential self-awareness. Thus Nietzsche's eternal return implied that we are led or guided to an existence which is the manifestation of what Zen calls the "Great Death": one's own existential death that has in its "greatness" a cosmic scale. The eternal return of the world-time meant the *realization* of that Great Death. (What I am saying here is related to a problematic which is seen, for example, running beneath the surface in *Zarathustra*, beginning at the section "On Great Events" in the Second Part and continuing on to the end of the Third Part. But I will not be able to go into that here.) *Nihilum's* realizing itself as such an existential death, as our own Great Death, is an occurrence fated *a priori* on the way to the state which finds expression, for example, in Nietzsche's words: "When you gaze long into an abyss, the abyss starts gazing back into you." That is the self-presentation of *nihilum*, what I have called above the participation of *nihilum*.

Only when such an extreme is reached, however, does the fundamental turnabout take place from the great death to the great life. We cannot ask the Why of this conversion. No conceivable reason for it can exist, and no ground for it to occur can be conceived; for it is an event taking place at a far more fundamental level than any where events occur for which reasons exist or grounds may be conceived. Any possible reason can only be sought, as the traditional religions all have sought it, in an "other" side, in God or in Buddha; in, for example, God's Providence or Love, or in the Original Vow of Amida Buddha. A reason from the side of God or Buddha, however, is never one which is able to satisfy man's cries of Why. The *Book of Job* gives penetrating documentation of this. Ultimately we can do no other than say: That is so. There is no room for What or Why, even the What or Why appearing from the Hegelian "absolute reason." All that is left is That or Thus. All we can say is, existence is thus. And existence is indeed thus: something where, as existentialism's first apostle Kierkegaard said, a leap and "qualitative dialectic" alone are possible.

Needless to say, in Nietzsche, what appeared in the turnabout from the great death to the great life was the so-called Will to Power. In this Will, all that has hitherto exhibited a fundamental physiognomy of death now presents a fundamental face of life. The field of ec-static transcendence from "world" and "time," the field of "eternity," now appears in its original and authentic guise as the field of the great life. And the Will to Power

is none other than that which cuts open this same field of Life for its own place, realizing itself in that field, or rather as that field—because that too belongs to the self-realization of the Will to Power. We could compare it to something that irradiates light and thus opens up a field of light around it, while appearing there itself as the center of its own circumference.

The eternal rotating world, in its *Unschuld des Werdens* (the undefiledness and artlessness of its becoming), is the manifestation of this Will. Eternal Return is its innocent play, its aimless (or supra-teleological) activity. This Will is immanent in the world as the impetus in the world's endless movements. It is likewise immanent in every single thing in the world as its essence or its "in-itself." There is nothing that is not a manifestation of the Will to Power.

In this standpoint, we find a clear and striking antithesis to the standpoints of secularism and Christianity, which have been treated together above. In contrast with secularism's "anthropocentricity," its declaring the self-sufficiency of human reason, here man is something to be overcome. In "secularization" man became his own center and the murderer of God. Nietzsche says in *The Gay Science* that we have thus come to be drifting in an infinite *nihilum*, and that we are a race unworthy yet by far of the sublimity of the act of deicide. Man to be truly himself has to bid farewell to the merely "human" or "anthropocentric" mode of being, and has to overcome himself ec-statically toward the field of the Will to Power. He must die the Great Death in the abyss of *nihilum* and come to Life again; in revival, he is to divest himself of the "human being" in his existence, the "human" mode of being.

The world view of Eternal Return which was, as we shall see later, the culmination of Nietzschean nihilism, was characterized as an iron hammer to crush all man's optical illusions. And the "anthropocentric" illusion is no exception: man in the age of "secularization" has to undergo purgation under the blows of that hammer. Seen from the standpoint of the great Will, human "reason," the principle of secularism, is nothing more than an instrument of the body, or rather, the body itself is great reason. The body is more fundamental than reason, and, as such, belongs to the whole man.

The contrast of the standpoint of the Will to Power with that of Christianity is clear enough to require little further explanation. I said earlier that the essence of secularism contains an oblivion which signifies the loss of the transcendental dimension, and that there was perceived in this

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an optical illusion. But in the essence of the Platonico-Christian standpoint, too, an optical illusion seems to be involved. It appears, however, in the opposite direction from the preceding one. In the place of transcendental "nothingness" connected with a "world" which is pure becoming, it conceives transcendent "being," that is, a world of the beyond of supra-temporal beings quite apart from this world and, further, an eternal, transcendent God as Being. This world is then depreciated as a world of sin, death, and transitoriness.

But from the standpoint of Will to Power which sees in this world, instead of sin, the innocence of becoming, and instead of death and transitoriness, "this life"—this eternal life—the Christian view is nothing more than an optical illusion. Not only the anthropocentric but also the theocentric mode of being has to be smashed, Nietzsche claims, under the iron hammer of the idea of eternal return. Only when optical illusions of all sorts are demolished through an extreme nihilism does the standpoint of the great affirmation of Great Life appear.

All these optical illusions have their origin in the weakness of being unable to stand firm in the Will that is the true essence of the world and the self; in the weakness of being unable to give up one's mind to pursue with steadfast will the standpoint of the Will to Power, the standpoint which is no other than one's own Self affirming itself. From another point of view, this weakness is the fear of the various negations and self-negations required in the willful carrying through of this Will as one's Self, that is, the fear of all the demanded "deaths." Because of this weakness, man sets up all kinds of "ideals" outside of himself, entities apart from him, and looks to them for support. They are all products of wishful thinking growing out of that essential weakness of will of not really wishing to be and become oneself. Consequently, in this sense, all optical illusions can be said to be essentially unconscious self-deceptions. And the breaking up of these illusions through the idea of eternal return means a purgation of all those desires that divert man from the will to be and become himself through and through. It is his self-overcoming and his self-purification. It is the awakening from all desires, their consequent illusion and unconscious self-deception. It is the return to the essential self-Will.

From the standpoint of the Will to Power all things are manifestations of that Will, even the desires stemming from the above-mentioned weakness and the products of those desires. The Will to Power is at work at their core even though unbeknownst to them. In the case, for example, of being

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able to live in peace and assurance only in sheer dependence on an absolute Being, inasmuch as the assurance implies an affirmative self-appreciation of one's own way of life, it is, after all, an expression of the Will pursuing Itself as man's will to self-affirmation. Only here—and that makes the particularity of this case—the Will appears indirectly, taking a roundabout path through an Absolute Other. Considered in this way, all optical illusions and self-deceptions are, in their essence, of which they themselves are unaware, appearances of the Will to Power. As indicated above,⁶ all interpretations and evaluations of the world come to be seen as so many perspectives opened up from within the Will to Power itself. The various world-interpretations smashed by the hammer of the idea of the eternal return are granted a re-interpretation from the standpoint of the Will to Power. From the standpoint of a perspectivism that sees all historical processes as an attempt by the Will to Power to return to itself, they are all incorporated into the process of that "Will to Will."

But while granting Nietzsche's "philosophy" provided a profound exposition of the fundamental barriers which man is encountering in modern times, and tried to open a possible path to surmount them, I have to repeat what I said before: Nietzsche's standpoint of the eternal return and Will to Power could not fully realize the meaning of the historicity of historical things. The fundamental reason for this lies in the fact (also mentioned before) that the "Will to Power," Nietzsche's final standpoint, is still conceived as some-"thing" called "will." As long as it is regarded as an entity named "will," it does not completely lose its connotation of being something "other" to us, and thus cannot become something wherein we can find and truly and originally become aware of ourselves.

There is no need to enter into that now. What I am concerned with here is that in all the Western standpoints I have mentioned, "will" is interpreted as the basic ground, and this interpretation is essentially linked to problems such as time and eternity, history and the supra-historical.

I have on several occasions said that God's Will in Christianity and the Will to Power in Nietzsche are inseparably connected with the problems of time, eternity, history, and the like. With regard to the standpoint of secularism as found in the view of history as progress, we can say also its conception of time and history is essentially linked to the idea of man as will. This is because at the bottom of human reason's establishment of

⁶ See *EB* x, 2, p. 23 ff.

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autonomy, which serves as the basis for secularization's great conversion, extending to all the affairs of culture, society, and man himself, not to speak of the "world" bereft of God, is found hidden the presence of a special event: man's grasp of his own "being" as will, and of his own "will" as self-will.

When I touched on the subject of "modern" secularization (p. 58), which is secularization in its eminent sense, I said that at the ground of the establishment of human reason's independence lies what could be called the urge to self-rule of existence itself, and moreover, that in the deepest ground of that urge "self-will," what Heidegger calls the "will to will," is at work. In early Christian theology this was considered to be the mode of being of the human spirit, which tried to usurp the throne of omnipotence from God and fell victim to the wiles of Satan's seduction. Modern scholars have called this the demoniac (*das Dämonische*). Of course, in characterizing the standpoint of secularism as I have, I do not imply the standpoint itself has been aware of all this. I wish merely to point out that in modern secularism man's life, completely freed from a divine world-order, gradually shows in all its facets something which may be called an infinite impulse. May we not say that in such realms as science's study of nature, in technology's technical revolutions, in the pursuit of social progress, and even in the areas of sexuality, sports, and the like, an impulsivity of "endless" direction has come to the fore. In all of them slumbers a specific "heat" or passion. The fact is, with secularization, each of various aspects of man's existence becomes an end in itself and "each" turns into its own master. Each begins to carry within it a kind of infinity. This I characterized previously as infinite finitude.

In becoming their own ends in this way all the fields of human endeavor became aimless. Ceased was the situation whereby they were subordinate to something higher than themselves, found in that higher reality their end, and got satisfaction in acting as its substratum. With the collapse of the teleological system of a divine world-order the hierarchy of values implied in it also crumbled. Thereafter, the various human exertions dispersed, and each became its own end and its own master, turning thus into something without any limit to bring it to a halt. In other words, infinite impulsivity appeared as something without a *telos*. This corresponds to the situation, in a world devoid of God, in which "time" became open-ended in both directions. The "time" that lost its beginning and end imposed by God's Will is the "time" of the "world" in secularization;

within that time, every function of life, as something that is its own end and, is, as such, without end, endlessly pursues itself. In this may be seen an infinite impulsivity, or what may be termed "self-will."

In the West, then, the problems of time and eternity, of history and the supra-historical come finally always to be combined with the concept of will. The reason for this is probably that the problem of world and man, or rather the problem of the "being-in-the-world," is one which must ultimately be considered not *sub specie aeternitatis*, but under the aspect of "infinity." We can approach the same circumstance differently from another point of view: the being-in-the-world is invariably involved with the matter implied in concepts such as "providence," "destiny," or "fate." None of the ideas I have been discussing, God's will, eschatology, eternal return, Will to Power, beginningless and endless time, infinite impulse, and so on, give expression simply to a view of being-in-the-world under an aspect of eternity. Rather, they originated from viewing it under the dynamic aspect of infinity, from a point where time and eternity, or history and the supra-historical, are intersecting. From there, the meaning of "fate" and the rest naturally join themselves to the problem of being-in-the-world. It is quite understandable, then, how the will comes to be regarded as the essence of "being."

We are reminded by this interpretation, however, that a similar characteristic is found in the Eastern concept of karma. I think in karma, too, the being-in-the-world is seen under its aspect of infinity in the above dynamic sense, the sense of "fate" appearing with it, and that there, too, the essence of "being" is grasped in the form of "will." Moreover, what is most problematic here is that karma is considered on the field of a beginningless and endless time; such is the connotation in such an expression as "karma since the beginningless past."

As I said before, in the West it has been with the establishment of the standpoint of "secularization" in its eminent sense that the idea of a time with no beginning or end has come to be conceived. This idea appeared in modern times and is still influential. I also stated that although the essential limitation this standpoint implies has been critically exposed from various sides, especially and most fundamentally from the points of view of Christianity and radical nihilism, its true sublation (*Aufhebung*) remains yet unachieved.

Above, I said the standpoint of modern secularism conceals an infinite impulse in its fundamental ground, though secularism itself is not aware

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of this. When it does emerge into its own awareness, the standpoint of secularism begins to crumble. The standpoint of the concept of karma, on the contrary, implies this self-awareness. Beginningless and endless "time" and infinite impulse are characteristic elements of karma from the first. This means that in karma, being-in-the-world within modern secularization appears after having already passed scrutiny under the aspect of infinity. At least, it seems possible to say that the idea of karma contains in it an essential meaning which allows such an interpretation. If we interpret it that way, however, this old, almost "mythological" idea appears as something with a rather unexpected bearing on the problematic of our contemporary situation. With this, after long and intricate wanderings, our inquiry returns to its starting point.

IV

We have no need here to go into the various thoughts bearing on the idea of karma which have developed through Buddhism's history. What we need is the basic content of that idea as it is found, for example, in the Buddhist Verse of Repentance: "All the evil karma created by me from long in the past stems from beginningless greed, anger, and foolishness. It all is born from my body, mouth, and mind. I now repent it." In this basic sense, too, the idea of karma comes to have a bearing on the problematic situation of our age as it was explained above.

I have been stressing two points in connection with the beginningless and endless time implied in the expression "since the beginningless past." First, beginningless and endless time gives to existence simultaneously the character of a burden or imposed task and the character of creativity and freedom, while, in the background, there is found at work a kind of infinite impulse. Second, time without beginning or end can exist only if it contains at its ground the presence of an infinite openness.

I have said also that in our being compelled incessantly to do something our "being" and "time" present the character of an infinite burden. The character of "pro-jecting" or "throwing forward" (*entwerfen*) inherent in man's actual existence means his own being is a burden to itself. Time being infinitely open in both directions, without beginning or end, makes "time" itself, as well as our being in time, a load interminably saddling our existence. Or, it means we are impelled to ever new becoming and limitless change within a "time" where we originate and vanish at every

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instant. An infinite urge drives us on without a moment's rest.

At the same time, however, this infinite impulse signifies the unrestricted nature of the possibility implied in ourselves, its very boundlessness. Thus the activity of perpetually doing something, the total activity of our "body, mouth, and mind," always appears, its inner necessity notwithstanding, as our free activity creating something new.

"Time" that is in such a sense beginningless and endless and our "being" in that time cannot be thought of apart from the totality of relationships which is our "world." As mentioned before, our existence stands within an infinite nexus, going back into the past from our parents to their parents, back before the appearance of the human race, the establishment of the earth and solar system, and so on *ad infinitum*; and this extends equally endlessly out toward the future. This temporal nexus, combining with infinitely large spatial relationships, makes our world.

Consequently, all we do in beginningless and endless time, our "being-doing" (*samskṛta*) of each moment as the becoming of time itself, originates vertically out of the whole nexus of relationships subsisting since the beginningless past and lying at the background of our own being in the world and time, and also horizontally, in connection with all things which are existing simultaneously with us. The existence in which we *are* ceaselessly doing something, is established on a dynamic, limitless "world"-nexus. "Time" without beginning or end, "being" in such a time, or what I have called infinite impulse, have to be regarded in such a perspective. That is what I meant when I said the being-in-the-world has to be seen under the "aspect of infinity." The same perspective appears in the Verse of Repentance's confession that all evil karma issues from the workings of our body, mouth, and mind (deeds, words, and thoughts), and that, moreover, this karma springs from "beginningless greed, anger, and foolishness." But what does it all mean?

As I said, the beginningless and endless time and our "being" in that time present themselves to us with the character of an interminable task imposed on us; which means we can maintain our existence in "time" only in the form of constant doing. To "be" in time consists essentially in being necessitated to be always "doing" something. We are like the feudal serf compelled to toil year in and year out to dispose of the taskwork imparted to him, or like an inmate in some penitentiary serving at hard labor to pay off his debt to society and expiate his guilt.

For us to assure our existence we have to work off the burden which is

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imposed on it. Our only difference from the serf or convict is, the burdensomeness of our existence cannot be attributed to somebody or something else but is from the very beginning included in the essence of "being"-in-the-world which is time. (Of course, when we seek the origin of that mode of being in "time," then it is conceivable an answer can be given that the origin lies in one's own sin and the punishment for it by someone else. The Christian doctrine of Adam's "original sin" is an example; being-in-"time," that is, being as something that is born and dies, something that must, moreover, work by the sweat of its brow, begins with "original sin." This concept is one of the mythological representations of "fate" in which human existence was understood under the aspect of infinity. The idea of the "burden" [or guilt] of existence appears often in ancient myth. When it comes to the essence of human existence, one could say that mythological man saw things rational man fails to see.)

To say this "burden" is an essential part of being-in-"time" means the burden is characterized by an interminableness. There are limits to tasks imposed by social or legal regulation, but the burden essential to existence is as fundamental as existence itself. It is limitless because doing something, as such, or the very act whereby we exhaust our debt, creates the seed of a new one.

Through the same works by which we unburden and lighten ourselves, through the very activity of freeing ourselves of our own "being"-in-time which is constantly weighing heavily upon us, or, eventually through our own "free" activity—but in the sense, as I shall soon explain, of coming out of the infinite openness of "*nihilum*" at the ground of the present—our very "being"-in-time itself is preserved anew. Ceaseless redemption creates the burden anew in the *samskṛta* (being-at-work) of the redemption; a process in which we see the basic pattern of karma. This *samskṛta* mode of "being" condemned to be incessantly at work "doing" something holds in its essence the trait of infinite or illimitable burdensomeness. The homeground that gives rise to the burden is the homeground of the karmic activity that works to remove it. Each of the activities that effect the disburdening invariably return, each time, to the burden's homeground, where they establish, each time, another burden. This return to the homeground is at the same time the projecting start for a new karmic act to redeem the new burden. In this way, our actual existence, while endlessly stepping out of itself, goes back by that very act to its own homeground and shuts itself infinitely up in itself. It is always infinitely itself, which means

here that it is permanently tied up within itself.

This self-contradictory dynamicity—"binding oneself with one's own rope," so to speak—forms the essence of our existence. The Consciousness-Only school (*Vijñaptimātratā*; *Yuishiki*) in this connection spoke of a "store-consciousness" (*ālaya-vijñāna*). It conceived on the basis of this store-consciousness a dynamic nexus in which "seeds" lead to actual deeds, words, and thoughts, and the influence of this actual working, in turn, "perfumes" the seeds with a lingering aroma (*vāsanā*). The ideas developed there are expectedly rich in insights, though I will not be able to take them up here.

The essence of our being-in-time thus has been conceived in a dynamic, spontaneously self-developing, "causal" framework which is infinitely open to both directions of time. The conception of "time" mentioned above as something without beginning and end is essentially inseparable from such an understanding of being-in-time.

The essence of our present existence as being-in-the-world lies within the infinite "world"-nexus described previously. The burdensome character of our existence and the karmic character of our activities beset us only as they are conditioned by that world-nexus. This conditioning is an essential moment of our *samskrta* (being-at-work) mode of existence. The world-nexus is intimately woven into our being-in-time (or our being *as* time) which is developing itself spontaneously and is ceaselessly "becoming" and changing as if chased from within by an infinite urge. This "being"-in-time constituted as a ceaseless "becoming" (genesis and transmutation) has its cause in its own destiny for ceaseless "doing," and this doing cannot be *in actu* except as doing something, which, in turn, does not occur without the world-nexus.

Generally speaking, in actual existence in "time," the two elements of self-determination and determination by something else are inseparably combined, so existence always consists in mutual determination. Basically, for an existence to be determined by something else means it determines itself into the form of being thus determined. Determination at the hands of another is at every moment a self-determination, and the existence having thus determined itself now proceeds in turn to determine the other. It can receive determination by the other only as something that determines itself. If we use the term *innen* (*hetu-pratyaya*), referring to the world-nexus woven of inner and outer causes, to express such an inseparable union of those two aspects, we can say that all beings in the world exist by *innen*.

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If we grant that my "being" in time, or my being myself, consists in ceaselessly "becoming" something, or becoming at every moment the determined self of that moment—and all as a ceaseless "doing"—it can be said that in this existence of mine the whole world-nexus, linked together though interdependence and mutual reliance by *innen*, manifests itself every moment. While giving my existence its actual determination, this infinite connexus is linked to it in the above causal fashion. This makes it necessary to consider all of mankind, all living beings, the whole world, as something united by "fate" with my existence and working. This whole is at work at the ground of my actual existence, directly beneath my doing and working, as that which makes this actual existence what it is, as that which "determines" it. My various activities always realize themselves in oneness with the wavelike undulation of the whole nexus ceaselessly arising since the beginningless past, as a focus, as it were, of that total undulation. Every one of my acts can be seen as having appeared out of the background of that infinite whole. When my own "being" as being-in-the-world "becomes" itself through its being condemned to "do" something, it does so in a determination of this kind.

Regarding the matter just treated, it is also necessary to consider, besides the element of "determination," the second element: the infinite openness as the field of freedom in "doing" things, or the nothingness which is at one with beingness and thus constitutes the becoming and genesis-and-transmutation in "time." But I will defer that for the moment.

Although in this way being-in-the-world is viewed within the infinite world-nexus and under the aspect of the reciprocal causal relationships of the whole "all in all" world-nexus, it is not merely a view from the standpoint of theoretical conception or metaphysical speculation. Here, the "to be" and "to become" of the being-in-the-world cannot be separated from "to do"; they cannot be thought of apart from the karmic working of "body, mouth, and mind." Here, however, the crux of the view is that those works of deed, word, and thought come to awareness, on the field of beginningless and endless "time" and within the infinite world-nexus, as works which are infinitely weaving the world-web of causality.

As I have said, all the karmic activity of "doing," by the act of removing the burden which is our "being," returns every moment to the home-ground of this burden, and that return results in the establishment of a

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new burden. On the same homeground, every activity as a redemption of the imposed task brings about in its turn the arising of the newly determined existence. "To do" "becomes" again "to be." "Doing" sets up "being" anew in time. Or, "doing" creates new being-in-time, establishes it anew.

Then, however, the "being" that has become a new load of debt is brought back once more to its homeground by the karmic activity that is there arising to exhaust the debt. Thus, our actual existence, which is ceaselessly doing something, is becoming and changing in "time" and as "time." There, our actual existence is ceaselessly rising from and at the same time ceaselessly returning to its homeground. While ceaselessly escaping from itself it nonetheless in the very escape is ceaselessly returning to its homeground. Thus, we "are" endlessly doing something, associating with others, and becoming-and-changing, all within "time"; or rather, we ourselves "are" producing "time" as the field of our own genesis and transmutation.

To that extent, our "being" can never escape itself. While being a debt that we must continually redeem, an imposition that we must continuously make lighter, our being is nonetheless being endlessly reborn out of our own homeground. In this way, an infinite impulsivity comes to reveal itself to our self-consciousness at the ground of our own "being" and "doing," the ground of our actual existence.

At that ground we become aware also of the wellspring of that infinite impulse, that is, the mode of "being-infinitely-enclosed-within-oneself," or what Toynbee called "self-centeredness." The ancients understood this infinite self-enclosure or self-centeredness, the wellspring of endless karmic activity, as the fundamental *avidyā* (*mumyō*), the basic ignorance which is complete darkness and blindness. There, all acts of our body, mouth, and mind are viewed under the aspect of infinity, as something existing on the field of a "time" infinitely open in both directions and infinitely forming the "causal" nexus. By and large, such a situation, of being condemned by the infinite impulse arising out of the ground of our self and pushing us endlessly on to do something, of consequently being compelled endlessly to enter into mutual relations and mutual determinations with others, and moreover of being unable, no matter how far we go, to get away from our self that presses onerously down upon us—such is the situation which seems to have come to self-awareness in the concept of "karma." In short, it can be termed the self-awareness of the essence of existence in time, which can be conceived as a dynamic

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connection of "being," "doing," and "becoming."

The concept of karma normally is linked with those of "metempsychosis" and "transmigration." In that connection, discussions have also taken place about such things as a "previous world" and "after-world," or a "previous life" and "after-life," and various theories have been proposed from different angles (even the biological) about the causality of karma extending over the "three world-times," including the present. The reason for this is not hard to arrive at. Our being-in-time is essentially entangled with an infinity of impulsivity in which we inmates of the world-nexus are urged endlessly to do something and to enter into relations with others. And, further, this infinity comes to manifest itself within the awareness that we in the world-nexus of reciprocal causality can never leave our basic homeground of the self. It is easy to understand, then, that this self-awareness partaking of that infinity of perspective naturally goes beyond the short-term framework of the life of "this world" to embrace also the endlessly open period before and after.

But, as I said before in connection with the concept of "metempsychosis,"⁷ the essential meaning of a "mythological" representation can only be grasped when we interpret it so as to bring the content of that representation back to the homeground of our present existence. It can be said, in fact, that mythological representations in general spring from a desire to grasp the basic ground of man's present existence, and that they contain a kind of intuition of the essence (*Wesensschau*) of being-in-the-world. Above, in my interpretation of the existential meaning of "metempsychosis," I said that there the finitude of man is existentially grasped as an infinite finitude, and that, moreover, it is grasped in the comprehensive horizon of a "world" that also embraces all kinds of sentient beings other than man, and, simultaneously, on the most basic depth of sheer "being-in-the-world" stripped of all specific differences whatever.

It is the same with the idea of karma in the "three world-times." The essential significance of that idea lies, first, in the fact that our activity as human beings is grasped in the "homeground" of the present (and grasped, moreover, from a level where it drops even human form) as an infinite finitude; in the fact, further, that our "being" is grasped as something which, while actually existing as human being, nevertheless infinitely extends its roots throughout the limitless world-nexus; finally, in

⁷ *EB* IX, 1, p. 43 ff.

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the fact that our "being"-*"doing"*-*"becoming"* in time is grasped at one with the world-nexus and in the mode of *innen* (*hetu-pratyaya*), the reciprocal relationship of all inner and outer causes. This *innen*-like grasp of our actual existence at its homeground means, as I said before,⁸ an act of bringing the actual existence radically back to its homeground, or the actual existence returning there itself. When the causality of karma was conceived as extending over "three world-times," when, in the large scope of previous, present, and future lives a transmigration of human being was conceived to the effect that we might possibly have come from and be going to another kind of sentient being, this signified that the "ground" of actual karmic activity has been fathomed, directly beneath actual existence, down to that depth and range of perspective.

And when that causality is viewed in the openness of the perspective of beginningless and endless time, whereby one is endlessly re-born and endlessly re-dies in the "wheel of reincarnation," this means the homeground of the actual karmic activity is looked for and recovered in the direction of an infinite openness beyond all time, in the direction of the openness of *nihilum*—all this occurring directly beneath the present. It signifies thus a deepening of existential awareness toward its own origin directly beneath the present.

V

Now we come to the second point mentioned above in connection with beginningless and endless time, that beginningless and endless time is established in connection with the appearance from the ground of the present of an infinite openness which transcends all time.

Here, the openness appears as a "*nihilum*" which is beyond existence and all its forms. The endless "reincarnation" that has been conceived mythologically, the "kalpas" and "great kalpas" within it, Nietzsche's "eternal return," numberless worlds succeeding one another in time or coexisting in space, or whatever, all come into being within the openness of the field of *nihilum*. This field is always yawning right underfoot our present existence. In fact, without this "nothingness" our "being" in time as described above would not be possible. In saying this "being" consists in ceaselessly doing something, I explained that the "doing," which is

⁸ See above, pp. 61-2.

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moved from within by an infinite impulse, is at the same time a totally free activity. It is karmic-active work that is creating hitherto non-existent "being." It is our existence making a completely new determination of its own.

In the above, I have conceived these determinations coming into being in a karmic-causal (*innen*) fashion, that is, at one with the world-nexus where our "being" is limitlessly sending out its roots. But the fact that these determinations make always a new mode of self-being and therefore must be self-determinations, implies that in the karmic-causal origination of the determinations freedom of karmic activity is partaking too. When our "being"-in-time exists in a ceaseless "doing," this "doing" has to have its ultimate ground in the infinitely open field of *nihilum* which transcends "being" in general and all the karmic-causal relations within the world-nexus that constitute its determination.

Of course, this does not mean there is some thing called *nihilum*. However, for "being" ceaselessly to originate anew in time, for existence to come into being in the form of a ceaselessly new becoming, there must be a freedom that renders a new determination possible. In other words, in order that "being" not freeze into permanent immobility, there must be an impermanence, a transitoriness of changes and shiftings unhampered by "being." And this is possible only if "doing," if "being-at-work," is grounded in *nihilum*. Only then can "being"-in-time as an essentially limitless and continuously new becoming, as well as beginningless, endless "time," both with the character of infinite finitude, be simultaneously established. *Samskrta* (being-doing) is essentially linked in unity with *nihilum*.

From that viewpoint, the world of karma is one where each individual is determined by its karmic-causal relations within an infinite world-nexus and where, nevertheless, everyone's existence and behavior, as well as every instant of their time, arises as something totally new and bearing traces of freedom and creativity.

Although the undulation of the total nexus since the "beginningless past" is conceived as an infinite chain of causal necessity, its having no beginning implies on the other hand a "before" prior to any and all conceivable pasts. Such a "time" can have no end, which means it has an "after" which is future even to the remotest possible future. And this "before" and "after" (which are beyond any definite "before" and "after") lies in every man's present. In this way, every man's presence at

the present instant is free and creative activity.

The infinite openness in both directions of time is nothing other than a projection into time of the supra-temporal openness or ec-static transcendence directly beneath the present; a projection achieved by karmic activity at the ever-present occasion it is enacted. When "doing" establishes "being"-in-time, it establishes that being-*qua*-becoming as a "being" in beginningless and endless time. And karmic activity which is each time a realization of this ceaseless genesis and transmutation always returns thereby to the ultimate ground of karma lying beneath the present. In other words, it opens itself up, every moment, to the openness of *nihilum* and thus keeps the dimension of ec-static transcendence open.

This means the self never leaves itself. In my karmic-active work I continuously establish my existence as becoming-*qua*-being, but, at the same time, at the ground of that activity I am always in my homeground. I am always myself. That is why the ceaseless genesis and transmutation in "time" is always "my" existence. Karma is inevitably "my" karma, "my" doing and working. This means it is free activity, that is, it implies an ec-static transcendence towards *nihilum*.

Of course, though we call it freedom or creativity, it is not, at this point, true freedom or creativity. Here, freedom comes together with an endless inner necessity compelling us to do something. It is at one with the infinite impulse and, conversely, the infinite impulse is at one with freedom. To be in the infinite undulations of the world-nexus, to enter continuously into relation with things, and to be conditioned and determined in these relations infinitely by the world-nexus, is—seen from the opposite side—to determine oneself. Here, our present karma appears as the free activity of the self but at the same time is possessed of a character of "fate"; or, "fate" comes to awareness in unison with that freedom. Here, the present karma is realized under its aspect of infinity, as infinite impulse, in its "will"-ful essence.

The self's relation with something else, seen in its aspect of self-determination, is the setting in motion of the self's free "will." Of its own will, the self accepts a thing as good or rejects it as bad. But so far as it is determined in a causal fashion within the total connexus, this free will is "*fatum*," a "causal necessity," without ceasing to be free will. To choose or reject something implies a simultaneous "attachment" to it. The karmic activity which has to do with doing something in "greed" is at once spontaneous and compulsory. The "being" of the self that originates in

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that karma is free yet a burden nevertheless. Here, even spontaneity becomes a liability, a "guilty" debt. Moreover, the spontaneous activity that erases the debt becomes a new start of desire, and the joy of that desire becomes a new shackle of attachment. Within karma, joy and heaviness of heart (*Schwermut*) are basically intertwined in unity. That is our existence in time, which is, as I have said, essentially ambiguous.

In the "creativity" mentioned above, the activity of creating something new is identical with being continuously exposed to *nihilum*. The self's "being-in-the-world," its actual existence, our self and the various matters that arise from our having to do with other things, implies essentially the transitoriness in which the self gains and loses "being" at every instant, that is, our actual activity consists in returning to the openness of *nihilum* in the present. Our "being"-in-the-world maintaining itself by ceaseless doing is always suspended out over *nihilum* and is enveloped in constant nihilization without any reliable place where it can stand assured. Our existence lies from the first in danger of collapse.

Seen under the aspect of infinity, our activity shows at every moment spontaneous freedom, desire, joy of life, and beneath them all, the deep roots of attachment (the infinite impulse); but it is likewise originally shadowed by an equally deep-rooted sense of transitoriness, the vanity and nihility of things. This is the same ambiguity of actual existence seen from a different angle.

What Japanese call *mono no aware* (the pathos of things) may be said to indicate this place where desire and joy are one with the sadness of the feeling of the transitoriness of things. In other words, it signifies that at the place where man's self-being, induced into relationship with "things" and "perfumed" with the feeling of "world" and "time," comes to self-awareness under its aspect of infinity, there also the transitoriness as the essence of all things, or the quintessence of sheer being-in-the-world, is "aesthetically" felt to the quick—"aesthetic" in the Kierkegaardian sense of "aesthetic existence." It means that all the "things" of the world and the self itself are aesthetically realized together in their original self-presentation, or in their authentic "appearance."

As I said before, when freedom of activity and the *fatum* character of determination present themselves in an inseparable oneness at every moment, the ultimate ground of the self's existence in time, the infinite self-centeredness, or the self's infinite confinement in itself, comes to emerge to self-awareness at one with a supra-temporal, "eternal" *nihilum*, exposing

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its position on that ground of nothingness. This infinite self-centeredness is the fundamental *avidyā*. It is the fontal origin of the infinite impulse that lurks within the essence of being-*qua*-becoming and makes it being-*qua*-becoming in limitless time or rather as that time. That limitless time, however, infinitely open in both directions past and future, is a projection in "time" of the "eternal" *nihilum* which is yawning up from the depths underlying the present now; a projection that occurs at every instant when a karmic action—and every action of the self is karma—is performed. This is, by and large, the reason why the self-centeredness that is the origin of "being"-in-time was said to exist and subsist only at one with *nihilum*, as something always positioned on "eternal" *nihilum*.

This indicates how deep-rooted the self-centeredness is. So deeply underground do the roots of the self reach they can be approached by no karmic activity whatever. The karmic activity of the self always returns to its homeground, the self itself, but it cannot go back to the self's homeground. Karma can do no more than go back to itself, the homeground of karma, and there reproduce its burdensome existence anew. In karma-activity, our self continuously moves in a direction toward the homeground of the self. Nevertheless, the only thing it achieves by this is to ceaselessly establish being-*qua*-being in time without beginning or end. To wander endlessly throughout time while looking for the homeground of our self is the true image of our being-in-"time," of all our activity and life.

"Karma originating from the beginningless past" designates the true feature of our life, and implies a sense of fundamental despair. Karma is what Kierkegaard calls "sickness unto death." That despair now comes to our self-awareness directly underfoot in our present activities of deed, word, and thought, welling from the fountainhead of beginningless and endless "time" and "being"-in-time, that is, issuing from our own self-centeredness. We can see an awareness of that despair also underlying the confession of the Buddhist Verse of Repentance when it says that all evil karma arises from the workings of our body, mouth, and mind, and this karma springs from beginningless greed, anger, and foolishness.

Thus, although the self-centeredness basically combined with *nihilum* and forming the roots of "being" lies directly beneath human existence, there the "human" form of existence is dropped. As *nihilum* is absolutely formless, that is, the place where all forms return into nothingness, "being" reveals at its root where it is inseparably one with nothingness a mode of having dropped all form. It is sheer "being-in-the-world" as such,

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in the above-mentioned sense.

In its ultimate "ground," the self-being of man is not human. We can say his actual existence comes into being as something where the form of existence as "man" and the form-transcending sheer "being" merge into a single wholeness. The ground of our existence as man implies a level of "pure" being prior to any definite form as "man." Yet our actual existence, our concrete "being-in-the-world," consists in existing as a "human" being, which comprises in it the form of man as well as the dimension of sheer "being-in-the-world." It is due to this basic constitution of our existence that it enters into mutual, karmic-causal relationship with all other things in the limitless world-nexus. The ground of all the activities we engage in as human beings contains a horizon where we stand in basic communication with the "being" of all beings, a horizon where we are pure "being-in-the-world," where we sheerly *are* prior to all particular determinations.

This means all things in their "being" are brought back into one sheer beingness by being gathered to the ground of our self-centeredness. Although our actual existence in karmic-causal relationship with other things goes continuously out of itself and attaches itself to them, and yet is habitually present at their homeground, it is at the same time—when seen in the essence of its existence and on the horizon of pure "being-in-the-world"—gathering the "being" of all other things into its own self-being. This means also that in its self-centeredness the self-being is making itself the center of the world.

This is what I meant when I called the mode of being in the field of *nihilum* an absolute self-enclosure or an abysmal solitude. For the "being"-in-the-world (which has been the main object of our discussion here), its solitude is revealed as utterly abysmal because its self-enclosure occurs on the horizon of the deepest intercommunication with other things.

Here, karma comes to include the character of guilt and sin. It has, in a sense, the character of original sin, that is, sin which is as original as man's free activity and existence. Karma is freedom basically determined by causal necessity within the whole infinite connexus; as spontaneity, it is a freedom of "attachment" and therefore is totally bound by fate. At the same time, it is an utterly unfettered freedom that reduces the whole causal connexus into its own center. Those two features of freedom and causal necessity are interwoven, in and as karma, into one.

Consequently, as a freedom that derives completely from a force of

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causal determination, as a freedom hunted out and driven forward, the karma spontaneously fetters itself in its attachment to other things, but at the same time, as a boundless freedom, it gathers them all into the center of the self. This freedom has the characteristic of original sin.

But self-being in its true sense, the self-centeredness of the true self-being, is totally different. True self-centeredness is a selfless self-centeredness, the self-centeredness of "the self that is not self." It consists in what I called in Chapter IV the "circuminsessional interpenetration" on the field of emptiness.⁹ I stated there that the gathering of the being of all things toward the homeground of the self-being can truly be effected only when it comes to pass at one with the subordination of the self-being to the being of all things at their homeground. But in the self-centeredness on the standpoint of karma, which rests on *nihilum*, to assemble the being of all things to the homeground of one's self cannot be possible except so as to establish a self-confinement in oneself.

In the same chapter, I assigned the term "nature" to the force which acts to gather all things together and bring about their interconnectedness. In karma, "nature" can be conceived as the fundamental force at work when the self connects all things by gathering them, "self-enclosingly," to the self's being; when, while thus connecting all other things, the self itself enters into "being" in beginningless and endless time; or, in a word, when the self's being, becoming self-centered, becomes the center of the world. Man's karmic activity of "body, mouth, and mind," by the force of this same "nature," comes to emerge originally from the horizon of what I have called sheer being-in-the-world.

(To be continued)

TRANSLATED BY REV. JAN VAN BRAGT

⁹ *EB* vi, 2, p. 65.