

# Nihilism and Śūnyatā

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## I

ONE of the greatest and most fundamental problems all religions are now confronted with is their relation to science. The world-view prevalent in science, the scientific way of thinking in general, shows itself as absolutely incompatible with the world-view or ontology which the traditional religions have, by and large, regarded as their basis. The objection might here be raised, that such a world-view or ontology is a so-called metaphysics or philosophy, but is not a religion, nor has anything to do with the essential life of religion. An objection of this sort has a half-truth, to be sure. But it cannot be said to be the whole truth.

When a religion comes into being concretely, that is, as a historical fact, it always has as its basis a world-view or ontology of one sort or another, even though it may be in a form in which it is not yet fully conscious of itself. For a religion, such a "philosophy" is not like clothes that one can change whenever he pleases. It is to religion just what water is to fish. It is the indispensable condition by virtue of which religion can actually come into existence. Water is neither the life of the fish as such nor its body, yet it is fundamentally linked with them. A change of the world-view or ontology is a matter no less fatal to religion than a change of salt water to fresh is to a fish.

Hence, the view that religion and science never come into conflict with each other if they remain confined within their proper limits, because each has its own proper realm and task, is not adequate for the purpose of solving the problem. A limit between two realms, a borderline, separates them from each other. But at the same time, it belongs to both of them. The crux of the

problem we are now confronted with lies precisely in this borderline. In fact, it can be said that metaphysics and philosophy have been since ancient times a research of this borderline between science and religion. No neutral zone can exist between them, standing detached from them.

Moreover, it has now come to pass that the question has become one of whether a borderline, in fact, exists. For at present, science does not feel it necessary to take up the question of its own limits. In other words, the standpoint of science perhaps essentially has a tendency to overlook religion as well as philosophy—except perhaps the “scientific” philosophy which translates without ado the philosophical standpoint into the scientific one. This amounts to saying that science appears as something which regards as its own a standpoint of unquestionable truth, that can assert itself over all. Hence, again, the character of absoluteness that always accompanies scientific knowledge.

For this reason, we can now no longer content ourselves with setting respective limits to science and religion, as we have become accustomed to do. The problem is more critical than the so-called theology of crisis thought it to be.

We can say that the reason science is able to conceive its own standpoint as that of unquestionable truth lies in the pure objectivity of the laws of nature, which are the presupposition and the content of scientific knowledge. No one is allowed to interfere with a scientific explanation of the laws of nature except scientifically. Science always requires that the criticism and correction of this explanation should be made only from its own standpoint. Because of this, although a scientific explanation has, properly speaking, a hypothetical character, its contents are, nevertheless, each time presented as objective facts. In the fact that science renders this possible is found the power unique to science, the authority inherent in science.

If this is true, does it follow that the contents of religion, philosophy, and art, if compared with the absolute character of scientifically objective knowledge, are nothing but mere productions of subjective conception or imagination? Is the scientific truth the whole truth due to its absoluteness? Or, is it not possible to think that, besides the absoluteness of scientific truth, in other realms truths would also exist, which are absolute in their respective spheres?

At first glance, it seems not possible that a variety of absolute truth obtains. The general opinion is that “two absolute truths” is a contradiction in terms

and that only one or the other can be true. But is this opinion after all self-evident? Is it not rather based upon a certain fixed and merely particular idea of the absolute or of the relative? Is the possibility of some new way of thinking about the absolute and the relative according to which two absolutes obtain entirely out of question? In attempting to think about the relative, is there no other alternative for us but to set a limit in the manner of dividing a sheet of paper by drawing a line across it? Would it not be incorrect for us to put aside the possibility of an entirely new mode of thinking about the absolute and the relative, according to which, as with a single sheet of paper seen from both front and back, two things, in spite of, or rather by reason of, their both being absolute, turn out to be all the more relative?

In order to account for these problems, I would like to approach the question of the relationship between science and philosophy from a little different angle than that hitherto ordinarily employed.

If the aforementioned objectivity of the laws of nature is taken for granted, the first question to be here posed is: in what horizon or on what level are the laws encountered and accepted? For instance, when a dog jumps at a piece of bread thrown by a man and catches it in the air, such "beings" as a piece of bread, a man, a dog, as well as their respective movements, are all subject to physico-chemical laws. Seen from this point of view, these "beings" and their respective movements, deprived of their particular concreteness, will be reduced to the homogeneous relationship of atoms and particles. It is in this relationship and the various laws holding sway over it that the true and real aspect of the concrete things and their movements I have just spoken of is thought to consist.

Of course, on top of the physico-chemical realm, are supposed to exist the biological, the psychological, and eventually the realm of "spirit" or "personality." But various phenomena in these realms will all be regarded as capable of reduction in one way or another to the physico-chemical relations or laws and capable of being explained from them.

However, looking at it from another angle, it is undeniable that such "beings" as a piece of bread, a dog, and a human being exist each with its proper mode of being and with its proper "*eidos*." What is more, these "beings" make together a particular connection: for the dog, for example, the piece

of bread and the man are in its "environment"; the same can be said with the man in his relationship to the piece of bread and the dog. The respective properties, manners of movement, and bodily structures inherent in the human being and the dog cannot be comprehended apart from the special characteristic of the environment each of them possesses.

Moreover, in this relation of "beings" to their environments, the way whereby the laws of nature are "accepted" varies according to the different levels on which they are accepted. As for the case I have just mentioned, the dog and the human being *live*, so to speak, the laws of nature in their respective behaviors. Here, the laws of nature are the laws which are lived. They appear in all living "beings" as the laws which are lived in their respective lives.

Moreover, when, in the case of a dog and a human being, the laws are lived in their respective lives—for instance, in the behaviors of man's throwing a piece of bread and of the dog's jumping at it—these behaviors involve at the same time a sort of bodily realization of the laws of nature; an understanding which is generally denoted by the vague term "instinct," or, to put it inversely, an understanding anterior to the understanding proper.

We cannot here embark upon detailed consideration of the "instinct" Bergson and other thinkers pursued very deeply. All that we can say is that "instinct" is based, on the one hand, on a particular relation of individuals and their environments—this relation is particular, because it determines the properties, movements, bodily structures, and so forth of living beings—and on the other, upon the "specific" mode of being which is inherited as the "*eidōs*" of individuals from the parent individual to the child individual. "Instinct" can rather be said to come into play at the dynamic intersection of these two directions. Of course, such a general argument regarding instinct is not adequate even for making a basic distinction between plants and animals. But, for the time being, I will set aside further discussion of this problem.

From the standpoint of natural science, the laws of nature must be "at work" as dominant forces also in the afore-mentioned behaviors of living beings. But the point here is that these dominant laws reveal themselves in living beings as the laws lived and acted out with a sort of "instinctive" bodily realization. Here, the laws of nature reveal themselves only when living beings live and act them and thus embody and bodily understand them. In the world of concrete

“being,” the laws manifest their dominance only when the beings actualize them. This means that the domination of the laws is, in the case of living beings, encountered on the instinct level. Or, it can be said that the very way whereby the laws are encountered in living beings, the way through which the laws are established in the afore-mentioned fashion, that is, the fact itself that the laws become the laws which are lived and acted, is none other than what is termed “instinct.” Instinctive behaviors are the actualization of the laws of nature. That living beings’ acts occur only in accordance with these laws means that the laws are “at work,” so to speak, in and as these acts. The rational law of being (*ratio essendi*), on the level of living “beings,” comes into its own reality as the law which is embodied and bodily realized.

Generally speaking, such a way of actualization of the rational law has a “purposive” (teleological) character. The field wherein living beings arise and instinct comes into play is the field wherein the rational law of being acquires a teleological character. Here, physico-chemical laws are brought into synthesis in a purposive construction, supplying the material for this construction.

Let us look now at man. What characterizes man is technique. In his comprehension of the relation between a definite purpose aimed at and definite means required for its actualization is involved a knowledge of the laws of nature.

In contrast with mere instinct, technique involves some sort of intellectual comprehension of these laws. When primitive men made an instrument and learned how to make fire by its use, this understanding may be said to have implied the knowledge, even if in an embryonic form, of the laws of nature as laws. To use instruments and act technically comes about only through the knowledge thus implied.

To put it the other way round, knowledge advances only through man acting technically, and the advancement of knowledge, in its turn, develops technique. Here the laws become the known laws; the laws which, while being known, are lived and acted in instrumental techniques.

In this case, too, man’s working in accordance with the laws of nature in technical actions means that the laws are “at work” in and as his working, and that, in this way, they become manifest and come to be realized as laws.

The only thing in this case that differs from the case of instinct is that the laws are actualized into actions through being reflected upon knowledge.

And that knowing actualization is nothing else than the technique. Here, the laws appear and come into their own reality on the field wherein knowledge advances parallel to action. The dominance of the laws is accepted and encountered on such a field.

The same can be said of the case in which knowledge becomes scientific and technique also becomes scientific in its train. In the natural sciences, laws are known purely as laws in their abstractedness and universality. Technique also becomes mechanical, which implies such a knowledge of the laws. In this case also, the development of technique advances the apparatus of observation and experiment so that it gives impetus to the progress of scientific knowledge. And the progress of knowledge, in its turn, promotes the development of technique. Since the mechanization of technique the tempo of this reciprocal development of knowledge and technique has accelerated rapidly.

The meaning of man's always acting in accordance with the laws of nature is disclosed most thoroughly in mechanical technique. At the same time, that the laws of nature are actualized in and as man's actions reveals its meaning most radically in the same mechanical technique. It is in precisely this area of mechanical technique, wherein knowledge and purposive action go their way to a further development in ever-increasing reciprocal acceleration, that the laws of nature come to appear in their character as law. The laws are encountered most intimately in this area. Mechanical technique and machines are the ultimate embodiment and bodily understanding in man of the laws of nature.

In this way, the laws of nature appear and come into their own reality on various levels and various fields, and we encounter them on all these levels. We encounter them no less on the field of instinct, where we are on the same level as a dog, and on that of material inertia where we are on a par with a piece of bread, than on that of technical activity where we make use of instruments and machines.

Besides, it has generally been held that the developments of distinctions of these various levels sums up concisely the history of human "progress." In other words, the tendency in which, with insistent rationalization of man's knowledge of nature through science and technology, his intellect itself and even the whole of his everyday life are rationalized, has been given enthusiastic glorification.

Now, in the context of what I have just spoken of, we find two things being united into one. One is that the laws of nature hold sway over all things, ranging from inanimate things to human beings, according to different modes of being on their respective levels. We can here recognize that the dominating power of laws over beings has come to extend its domain by permeating the various levels of things. While inanimate things are merely made up of matter, living beings are composed of matter and, at the same time, provided with life, and human beings are endowed with intellect in addition to their being composed of matter and provided with life. That the laws of nature rule, to the very end, throughout the various levels which unfold themselves one after another within the domain of beingness reveals a gradual increase of the rule of laws over the things.

The rational law of being exhibits a perspective with multiple levels. Its "teleological" (purposive) character ascends accordingly as the level of being is elevated and eventually comes to its complete realization in the machine, in which man's purposive actions are put in motion in a purely "mechanical" manner. There is here, we can say, the rule of the laws of nature carried to its extremity.

Now, the other thing to be noticed here is that, in proportion to such an ascent of the ruling power of the laws, there appears a gradual penetration of the power of beings over the laws as they use them. This second aspect shows that the release of "beings" from the laws of nature through their use of them, their emancipation from the bondage of laws, and hence their freedom, is manifested in beings more and more deeply.

It is a matter of course that these two aspects connect into one. The higher the level of being ascends, the deeper the rule of laws reaches out into beingness. But, at the same time, the freedom of beings in using them comes to be realized all the more.

As for inanimate things, since they are wholly passive toward the rule of laws, the rule is to that extent direct, but to the same extent shallow and superficial. In the instinctive behaviors of living things, however, the laws appear as laws which are lived and acted. This signifies that the rule of laws here makes its appearance in a more intimately intensified and internalized form than in inanimate things. Even the life and behavior of living things cannot stray a step from the laws of nature. On the other side, however, in

that they live them they already take a step forward in the direction of the riddance of laws.

In short, already in their mode of being (as “living” beings) we can get a glimpse, however vague, of the fact that subordination to the laws is at once emancipation from their bondage. In the “instinctive” life and behavior, the actualization of the laws of nature and the use which is made of them are directly united. It is only to be noted here that, insofar as this connection is direct, the world of living things is still tied down to the laws.

When man acts technically with instruments, however, the rule of nature’s laws comes to light in a still more internalized form, and at the same time, the fact that the laws are made use of manifests itself all the more lucidly. This is because the laws come to realize themselves in man’s actions through intellect. It is only in man’s actions that we are able clearly to recognize that the subordination to laws means at once freedom from their bondage. And the most radical manifestation of this relation can be seen on the level wherein technique becomes mechanized.

Looking at it from one side, the appearance of machines implies the laws of nature appearing and coming into their own reality in and through man’s actions in the most penetrating and most apparent form. In machines, man’s action, we can say, has objectified itself even beyond the mode of being man’s action and taken on the character of being the direct operation of the laws of nature themselves.

Machines are pure products of human intellect. Man constructed them for his own purposes. They can be found nowhere in the world of nature, as the products of nature. In spite of this, they give expression to the operation of natural laws most purely—more purely than any of the products of nature themselves do. The laws of nature directly operate in machines with a directness indiscernible in any of the products of nature. We can say that in machines nature was brought back to itself in a more purified (or abstracted) form than is possible in nature itself.

As such, the operation of the machine has become an expression of man’s action. The expression of the laws of nature in a form so purely abstract that it is to be found in none of nature’s products and is in fact impossible as a natural occurrence, has become in the machine an expression of man’s action.

This indicates the profundity of the rule of the laws of nature. They have



come to reveal the working of their rule most deeply by permeating man's action and life—so deeply that nature again goes back to nature itself (brought to its abstract form) beyond the pale of the "human". There is here the aspect of the laws of nature making the most of their rule over beings in general.

Looking at it from another side, however, the coming into being of machines was an epoch-making emancipation of man from the rule of the laws of nature, the greatest embodiment of his freedom in using the laws. In machines, man's activity is wholly objectified and human artifice with certain purposes is inserted, so to speak, into nature as a part of natural things. In this way, man's rule over nature is radicalized. This is a rule over nature more radical than nature rules itself.

Thus, the relation in which subordination to the rule of laws is at once emancipation from them here comes to light most clearly. The field of this relation as such finds expression in machines and appears in the form of machines.

## II

Of utmost significance for us, however, is that there has arisen a great problematic ever since the afore-mentioned relation of the laws of nature and and "beings" reached the last stage of its development, the stage of the appearance of machines. The new problem lies in the fact that the very reversal of the relation is now in process, a reversal in which the ruling becomes itself the ruled.

In what I have said above, the fact that the laws of nature gradually intensify their rule over the being as the level of beingness ascends, means precisely that the being at the same time frees itself gradually from the rule of laws, rather making use of them for its own "purpose." In this sense, we here find the rule-relationship on both sides; the laws ruling over "beings" and the "beings" ruling over the laws. With the appearance of machines, the extreme point of this relationship was reached. But now there arises a new situation.

On the one hand, man's activity and life itself is becoming, as a whole, gradually mechanized and impersonalized on the field where the machine came into being, the field wherein the rule of the laws of nature came to establish itself deeply in man's activity and life. The field in which man found

himself when he had produced the machine and which has ever since come to the fore, intensifying its strength, was one in which two things—one of which is, on man's side, abstract intellect looking after scientific rationality, and the other is, on the side of nature, "de-naturalized" nature, so to speak, which I have above described in terms of "purer than nature itself"—stood in correspondence to one another. But this same field is now gradually emerging as something which deprives man of his own human nature.

The relation I have above mentioned, where the rule of natural laws over beings give way to beings ruling over the laws, brought to a peak with the debut of the machine, has turned out to be a relation lying beyond the authentic and natural connection between man and the world of nature; a field which transcends the limits of man's human nature and of nature's natural character. Herein the relation attains its most thorough radicalization. But, at the same time, we see here a profound reversal of such a relation now emerging in this limit-situation. It can be described as a relation wherein the rule of natural laws over man's action and life that directly engendered man's rule over the laws of nature is reversed from a more fundamental position to a relation in which the laws of nature once more come to rule man who hitherto has held sway over them. This is none other than what is called the tendency towards man's mechanization, towards the loss of human nature; the situation, needless to say, now constituting one of the basic features of the "culture crisis."

On the other hand, there appears in this reversed relation another issue in connection with man's mechanization. Just as man's mechanization is a reversal of his rule over the laws of nature, a reversal likewise arises in the rule of natural laws over man. The rule of natural laws, pushed to the limit-situation in their profound internal rule over man, opens up a mode of being in which man behaves as if he stood entirely outside the laws of nature.

Such is, briefly speaking, man's mode of being, at the bottom of which *nihilum* opens up. Eventually, the place where the machine comes into being—the field in which, as I said before, the correspondence of abstract intellect demanding scientific rationality with denaturalized nature obtains—opens up *nihilum* at the bottom both of man who relies on that intellect and of the world of nature as well.

It is now only in standing on this *nihilum* that man is able to find himself detached and completely free from the radical and thoroughgoing rule of the

laws of nature. This is a standpoint in which man looks at the laws of nature as if they were entirely external to him. Here, the mode of man's being whereby he lives in keeping with the natural order or natural laws, as has been advocated from ancient times, is completely broken through. In place of it, there comes into view a mode of being wherein man behaves as if he, while standing on the freedom of *nihilum*, makes use of the laws of nature entirely from without. This mode of being is characteristic of man as a subject that adapts itself to impulsive and desire-driven life; that means, in other words, man's subjectivity establishing itself on the plane of life in its natural and raw state, of life's own naked vitality. In this sense, it appears to show similarities to "instinct." But the fact is that it is a mode of being diametrically opposite to "instinct," as a mode of being of a subject standing steadfastly on *nihilum*.

This mode of being of a subject that, grounded on *nihilum*, adapts itself to raw life, exhibits its images according to the depth or shallowness of its adaptation. For instance, *nihilum* lies hidden even behind the tendency in which the average person in the contemporary world passionately devotes himself to sports, cycling races, or other amusements. Here *nihilum* is only floating in the atmosphere of man's life without clearly coming to his consciousness. Yet there is at work a masked nihilism. On the other hand, there is a nihilism which, wholly antagonistic to the condition of the average person in mass society, assumes the form of existential solitude, in which *nihilum* is chosen as the ground of one's own being with clear consciousness and decision. Between these two, there are nihilisms of all shades. These various kinds of nihilism have something in common in a mode of being, a nakedly-living subjectivity which stands steadfast on *nihilum*. It is a mode of man's being wherein he uses the laws of nature by behaving as if he stood entirely outside them. The rule of natural laws over man was reversed at its ultimate extremity into such a mode of man's being.

That the laws of nature, while coming into their own reality through man's acts rule over man, implies the rationalization of human life and thought. This rationalization has from the eighteenth century Age of Enlightenment even up to the present been conceived as man's progress. But, in fact, from the ground of that rationalized life is gradually emerging a naked life entirely anterior to rationalization—the naked life of a man whose being is grounded

on *nihilium* which opens up in a place inaccessible to any kind of rationalization.

Behind and in parallel with the advancement of the rationalization of life, man's affirmation of his own entirely ir-rational, un-spiritual—or rather entirely “pre-reflective”—mode of being, that is, the status of a subject that, while standing steadfast on *nihilium*, pursues its desire unrestrictedly, is increasing in potency. This circumstance also constitutes one of the basic aspects of what is usually called the contemporary culture crisis.

Thus, from whichever side one looks at it, there comes into view a reversal in which the ruling becomes itself the ruled. At the extremity of his freedom in ruling over the laws of nature, man shows a tendency to be deprived of his human nature and be mechanized. At the extremity of their permeating and totally ruling man's life, the laws of nature come to be ruled by man who, as a subject of desire-driven freedom, behaves as if he stood outside all the laws and their controls. The mechanization of man's life and his change into a completely ir-rational subject arise as a fundamental whole. As I said before, it is in the mechanical technique, in the fact that the realm in which the machine comes into existence is opened up within man's life, that the situation in which the subordination to the laws is at once emancipation from them assumes its most radical form. But at the same time, the real aspect of this situation now appears as an inverted image that hides most secretly its real form. The authentic relation that naturally ought to be between man and the world of nature even in the situation of technology shows an image in actuality of human life as if it were fallen into a state of perversion. This is what we usually mean by saying that man is dragged along by the machines he himself constructs. This is also the matter underlying the problem of imbalance between the progress of science and the progress of man's morality. The crux of the matter is not so much their imbalance as their movement in contrary directions. It goes without saying that this problematic pointedly takes one shape in the problem of nuclear weapons.

Furthermore, if we extend our argument from man's mechanization and his change into a desire-driven subject to historical and social problems, the various forms of political institutions in the contemporary world, for instance, will also fall under this same problematic. In the communist countries, the political institution exhibits a tendency towards totalitarianism which implies direction to the mechanization of institutions as well as of man. In the

liberalistic countries, the freedom of individuals in democracy is apt to change into that of the merely desire-driven subject. These two different directions are derived then from the same root and converge into the same problematic. Lastly, viewed as a whole, the problem of mechanical civilization and of political institution reverts to one and the same ultimate root, which is the site whence the contemporary version of nihilism is emerging, either in a camouflaged form or in a form brought to consciousness of itself.

Nihilism in the present world begins, as was said before, with the sense of meaninglessness that has come to be perceived from the depths of both man himself and the world, in parallel with the appearance of the mechanistic world-image of modern science and in parallel with an increasing tendency man's mechanization which has gradually permeated not only the social structures in the modern world but also man's inner life.

In the midst of the tendency of human life to be in fact mechanized socially as well as psychologically and taken itself for a kind of mechanism, man has rendered himself capable of escaping from being dissolved into a mechanism, inner or outer, only as a desire-driven subject that places itself (with or without towards self-consciousness) on the *nihilum* that opens up at the ground of that mechanism.

As was noted before, the reversal which occurred between the authentic relation of natural laws and man has taken the shape of a basic intertwining of man's mechanization and his change into a desire-driven subject. At the bottom of this intertwining, *nihilum* has opened up as a sense of the meaninglessness of the whole affair. This *nihilum* has come to reveal itself precisely as what ought to have emerged from the basic situation in which man finds himself in the contemporary world. Hence, it is something which cannot remain unperceived. It eventually has to come to man's self-awareness, if he but fixes his sight upon his own existence without delusions of any kind.

This is why many contemporary existentialists, by virtue of honesty to their own existence, have decided of themselves to stand steadfastly on *nihilum*. Such a positive nihilism in existentialism reveals an intent to step outside man's mechanization as well as his degeneration to a desire-driven mode of being, both inherent in the nihilism which is not yet brought to consciousness of itself. In other words, it shows an effort to avoid the pitfall of the perversion into which man falls victim at present.

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But at the same time, man cannot manage to escape the perversion as long as he places himself on *nibilum*, because the *nibilum* opened up precisely through that perversion, and the pitfall which opened up at the bottom of that perversion is none other than *nibilum*. *Nibilum* cannot escape *nibilum* by itself. Nihilism is prevented from actualizing its afore-mentioned intention through the very *nibilum* on which it stands so steadfastly. Nihilism and the consciousness of *nibilum* therein involves such a dilemma.

Moreover, if this nihilism can be said to have arisen from the rule of natural laws, from the influential role played by science and technique in the manner in which man is concerned with the world and with himself, we can say also that in this nihilism and in the dilemma involved therein, the problem of science and religion comes into question in its most concentrated and fundamental form.

### III

In the preceding paragraph, I spoke of the rule of science and scientific technique, or more fundamentally, of the field wherein they arise: the opening up of the sphere in which abstract, impersonal intellect and the mechanistic world-image correspond with each other. I also spoke of the emergence, owing to this new situation, of a two-sided tendency towards the mechanization of man's inner life and social relations on the one hand and man's transformation into a desire-driven subject on the other: in a word, a tendency towards the loss of humanity. As for these problems in our contemporary world, the traditional religions which, in favor of the concept of God and man as personal, have based themselves on the personal relation between them, find themselves confronted with one fundamental and difficult question.

To emphasize the meaning of man's personality or spirit is, of course, indispensable for man's right mode of being, which goes in the direction diametrically opposed to the loss of humanity. This is also why ethics, art, and philosophy are of great significance. From the realm of these realities, it is even possible for us to draw a definite line of demarcation, in one way or another, against the domination of science.

What's more, at the base of that personal-spiritual realm, the relation to God as absolute personality (or absolute spirit) was speculated and man's per-

sonality or spirit was thought to be firmly grounded only on this religious relation. The direction opposite to the rule of science has drawn, in most cases, its motive power from this realm of religion. Hence, resistance against a tendency towards loss of humanity has, till now, assumed the form of setting limits to the standpoint of science from a basic religious realm. Also we can trace the ever recurring mark of such repeated efforts of resistance in the history of philosophy since Descartes. These efforts were made with good reason, because personality or spirit constitutes the core of genuine humanity.

As was noted before, however, due to natural science the image of the natural world has undergone a complete change since the Renaissance. The world has emerged as entirely inhuman and wholly indifferent to human affairs. It has severed the personal relation of God and man horizontally. As a result, the ordering the world through God, the divine providence in history, and even the existence of God have become notions alien to the human mind. Man has become gradually indifferent to these notions and eventually to his own human nature. Man's dehumanization and mechanization is in progress.

Face to face with such a situation, we cannot help but think that there has appeared something that is absolutely beyond our solution, insofar as we keep our footing only on the idea of personality or spirit, or on the idea of the personal relation of God and man. Here arises the claim, as I referred to before,<sup>1</sup> that a trans-personal field should be opened up beyond the domain of so-called personality or spirit—the precise and the only field, however, in which personality and spirit come into their own reality and appear in their true figure as personality and spirit.

Before,<sup>2</sup> I thought it possible to recognize a “personal-impersonal” character in so-called God's omnipresence, in non-differentiating divine “Love,” or “God's perfection,” which causes the sun to rise equally on both the good and the evil. The reason thereof is that I recognize in the Christian concept of “God” a facet of trans-personality. Eckhart indicates the same thing when he speaks of absolute nothingness as the “ground” of the personal God. He conceives it as the plane of absolute negativity, in which subjectivity as “per-

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1. “The Personal and the Impersonal in Religion,” *The Eastern Buddhist*, vol. III, no. 1 and no. 2.

2. “The Personal and the Impersonal in Religion,” *The Eastern Buddhist*, vol. III, no. 1.

sonality” is broken through directly underfoot of itself. At the same time, he conceives it as the plane of absolute affirmation on which our personality reappears and comes into its own reality; in a word, the plane of absolute death-size-life.

Such a plane must not be on the yonder-side of “*this* world,” of “*this* earthly life,” etc. It must not be merely “transcendent”. On the contrary, it must be, in truth, *radically* on this-side, be even more this-sided than our lives and ourselves here and now are ordinarily supposed to be. Eckhart’s “detachment,” that is to say, transcendence not only from the self and the world but also even from God—as he says, he flees from God for God’s sake—must be, so to speak, the absolutely transcendent this-side. He himself says that the ground of God is, within the self, more intimately near the self than the self itself.

It is in the Buddhist standpoint of sunyata (emptiness) that such a point comes to light more clearly. Sunyata is the place where each of us realizes himself in his own true reality (suchness)—himself taken as a concrete and whole man involving not only his personality but also his body—and is at the same time the place where all things around us present themselves in their own true reality (suchness). As we said before,<sup>3</sup> it can also be said to be the place where the words, “once the Great Death, then heaven and earth become new,” can at once signify the resurrection of one’s self.

“Resurrection” here means that the original face of one’s self comes to appear as such; that one goes back to his authentic self as it really is.

Would it miss the mark to say that it is only when one returns to such a standpoint that the afore-mentioned relation—in which subordination to the rule of law is at once emancipation from it—can truly be established; that moreover, it is with the real possibility of that relation that the possibility of man’s existence can also truly be established? Would it be too much to say that only there can we find a standpoint that can truly overcome the situation wherein, as a result of the rule of science, that relation has undergone reversal and wherein the loss of humanity is in rapid progress; the standpoint which can truly overcome the nihilism which that reversal has caused? In the following, I would like to discuss how these problems can be approached.

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3. In Chapter I of “What is Religion?” *Philosophical Studies of Japan* II.



## IV

In the preceding paragraph, I argued that sunyata is the absolutely transcendent plane which is opened up not on the yonder-side of us, but on the genuine this-side which is more this-side than we to ourselves, and that this opening-up means a turn-about that should be described in terms of absolute death-*sive*-life. And it belongs to the nature of this death-*sive*-life that it must be taken up seriously and honestly, and that means, as radically as possible.

Up to the present, "to die and be reborn" has been spoken of in various religions. For instance, the admonition that one must die to finite life and be reborn to eternal life, that one must die to the world and to oneself and be reborn in God. In these cases emphasis is laid upon the life side. "Soul," "spirit," and "personality" have in most cases been treated from the viewpoint of life. (Even in the case of the dead; the soul or spirit as a ghost.) In this life direction, with one step beyond the level of inanimate things the level of living things was seen, and from there an ascending direction to the stories of soul and spirit (or personality) was considered, and finally on top of this, in a kind of leap, the field of religion was conceived of as the personal relation of God and man. But, on the other hand, the death direction goes back through personality, spirit, soul, and life, and eventually arrives at inanimate things. Here, all things are conceived as based upon and reducible to materiality. The scientific way of thinking is fundamentally established in this direction. And again, in a kind of leap, at the limit of this direction, *nihilum* and meaninglessness is opened up at the base of all things and of life itself. Consciousness of this *nihilum* and meaninglessness gives rise to nihilism, as mentioned above.

It goes without saying that such a simple diagram as just described is, in fact, inadequate to fully express the matter involved here. For instance, insofar as all things are thought, as in the case of Christianity, to have been created out of *nihilum*, the so-called personal relation of God and man occurs as the grace of salvation through which eternal life is granted from beyond by breaking through that *nihilum*. Since a salvation of this sort has the implication of "to die and be reborn," it contains something which cannot simply be disposed of as belonging to the life direction.

Besides, if a man, without God and without ceasing to be a finite being,

intends uncompromisely to be himself, *nibilum* or death that absolutely separates him from God comes to his self-consciousness as a sin that makes him revolt against God. Sin is, as it were, *nibilum* or death in a sublimated form, which has come in sight on the scene of self-conscious existence. The root of this "original sin" spreads out even into the soul or the animal life of "natural" man, not to speak of his spirit or personality. Hence salvation as the forgiveness of that sin consists in overcoming the *nibilum* or death in its basic, sublimated and comprehensive form. "To die and be reborn" can also be spoken of in such a more fundamental sense. The life direction, of which I spoke above, can open up the realm of religion only by profoundly overcoming death; as I said before, here there is a leap.

Conversely, when it is said that in the death direction meaninglessness and *nibilum* is opened up at the base of all things and at the base of life itself, it does not simply mean that God is lost sight of, so that only *nibilum* in the so-called *creatio ex nihilo* is left behind, or that *nibilum* is perceived behind the beingness of finite being. If so, the nihilism we are here concerned with could not be distinguished from the old, ordinary type of nihilism.

In the modern version of nihilism, however, *nibilum* extends, as I said before,<sup>4</sup> even into the place of God's existence and thus becomes an abyss. On that abysmal, Godless *nibilum*, all life whatsoever, that is, even spiritual-personal life, not to speak of animal life and the soul, reveals the feature of meaninglessness at its base.

But at the same time, according to a nihilist way of thinking, man attains his true subjectivity and becomes truly free and independent only when he decides of himself to stand steadfastly on the abysmal *nibilum*. *Nibilum* is here conceived as the field of ecstatic transcendence of man's self-being, i.e., the field wherein the human "existence" is established. The existence placing itself on this field, from the point at which the meaninglessness and *nibilum* of life and being is radicalized, tries to make its own responsibility to re-create their meaning; or, from the unreservedly passionate desire to take its ground in the absurdity of life, it tries to draw a force able to affirm an absurd life as it is. In place of the "image of God," the image of "super-man" or the image of really human "man" is here set forth as an intentional objective inherent inman.

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4. *The Eastern Buddhist*, vol. III, no. 1, pp. 6-8.

However this may be, in nihilism as existence there is something we cannot describe only in terms of death direction. There is the point where *nihilum* becomes the basis of a new, real mode of being, where death becomes the basis of a new, different way of living. This is why I stated before that nihilism appears as a leap on top of the death direction in which the scientific point of view originates. No less in the life direction than in the death direction, the real situation is never pure and simple.

In spite of all this, however, I think it possible to conclude that the traditional religions have come into being, by and large, with the life direction as their axis, and that the line connecting the scientific viewpoint and nihilism has originated with the death direction as its axis. This can be made clearer if compared with the standpoint of sunyata mentioned before.

As was once mentioned, we can see everything as established in its true reality as the point of intersection between the direction of life and the direction of death. Everything can be seen as a kind of "double exposure" of life and death, of being and *nihilum*. With this, however, I do not advance a way of viewing things similar to that Plato inaugurated: that the things in the sensible world are transient beings undergoing a constant change because of their being a "mixture" of being and non-being. I do not also mean that being and non-being mingle together in something as if they were its quantitative parts, or, needless to say, that death arises where life comes to exhaustion, or that *nihilum* appears when being disappears. My point is, that life remains life to the end, and death always death, but that they together constitute a "thing" in its reality, bringing it to appearance as a certain thing, and that the life aspect and the death aspect of a thing can be superposed upon each other and things can be seen in both aspects at once. In this sense, such a mode of being can be called life-*sive*-death, death-*sive*-life. Thus a way is possible, I think, of viewing things directly in their own reality which is their mode of being life-*sive*-death or death-*sive*-life, therefore with no need for us to look away from the actual appearance of things.

Of the two directions of viewing things I spoke of before, the one tried to grasp the actual appearance of things with the life direction as its axis, and the other with the death direction as its axis. Thus there arises, on the one hand, an upward-moving viewpoint ascending from life and soul to spirit or personality. In the extremity of this movement the "death", which is implied

throughout spirit, personality, soul, and life, comes to awareness as sin (in Christianity, as "original sin") in the sense of disobedience or rebellion against God as absolute life. And at the same time, by passing through the bottom of that death, as a religious conquest of death, the standpoint of a personal communion with God appears as a leap.

On the other, there arises an opposite direction of reducing everything to material relationships. In the extremity of this movement the "life" which is implied throughout life, soul, personality and spirit, comes to awareness as meaninglessness. And in this case, as a conquest of this meaninglessness by passing through its bottom, the standpoint of ecstatic existence in the midst of nihilism appears as a leap. However, what becomes of the matter when we proceed to see things directly as they are in accordance with their mode of being *life-sive-death*, *death-sive-life*?

Possibly, a sort of leap may be even found here, yet it would not be by ascending along the line of development towards personality or by descending along the line of reduction towards materiality. Rather, it must be a leap which takes place in the direction of its own ground, directly underfoot that mode of being called *life-sive-death*, *death-sive-life*. There should arise a new viewpoint with a completely different perspective from the ones whereby we make various distinctions of stages or levels in between materiality and personality and hence wherein we speak of "ascending" to a higher stage or of "reducing" to a lower. One could conceive of a standpoint in which personality and materiality, usually considered as wholly exclusive of each other, can be seen in a sort of "double exposure," apart from the fixed notions attached to them. This could be described as the standpoint of absolute "equality" in which personality, while retaining its suchness, is nevertheless seen as equal to material things, and in which material things, without ceasing to present themselves as such, are nevertheless seen as equal to personality. It is precisely the standpoint of sunyata that makes possible the arising of such a viewpoint.

But what does this view mean? Why should it be the standpoint of sunyata? In order to answer these questions, it is necessary to give attention above all to the difference between the idea of *nihilum* upon which nihilism is based and the idea of sunyata.

(To be continued)