

The Personal and The Impersonal in Religion

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(concluded)

IV

Now I should like to look into the thought of Eckhart as the most thoroughgoing case in the tradition of negative theology. As is well known, Eckhart distinguishes between God and "Godhead" (*Gottbeit*) which he calls the "essence" of God. Even while making this distinction, however, he did not, of course, think in terms of two Gods. Godhead means God being in Himself. Eckhart spoke of this Godhead as absolute nothingness.

Absolute nothingness means here the place where every mode of being is transcended, not only the various modes of creatural being, but even the modes of Divine being, such as the Creator or Divine Love. According to Eckhart, the Creator is the aspect of God revealed to creatures, an aspect seen from the standpoint of the creatures, and as such it ought to be distinguished from God-in-Himself, that is, from the essence of God. It is the same when God is said to be Love or to be Good. This essence of God, which transcends every mode of being or every aspect, cannot be expressed except by absolute nothingness. Strictly speaking, even to say "essence" is already inadequate.

Now, when man is said to have been given the image of God, he has been given an image of God in which God includes His own essence as this absolute nothingness. When the image of that "God" comes to action in the soul of man (through the working of the Holy Spirit), it is said that man becomes the 'son of God.' Eckhart calls this the birth of God in the soul.

The incarnation of God in Christ was, as an historical event, the 'birth of God' in the human world. Eckhart, however, transferred that event to the

interior of man's soul. When man becomes in the above way the living image of God, the path for him to penetrate unto the essence of God opens in his soul. This is because in the God which is born within him (the living Christ within his soul) there is included not only the whole of God, the so-called Trinity, but also the Godhead. Therefore, to ascend that opened path is for the soul gradually to enter deep within God, and finally to attain unification with God.

But this unification does not simply mean the two externally approaching, meeting, and combining with each other. The whole process rather means that the soul comes to have its selfness broken through more and more deeply from within the soul itself. What was called the birth of God in the soul is already a procedure in which the 'selfness' or 'self-will' of the soul, the soul's ego-centered mode of being, is broken. But this is only the first step. The soul, proceeding further, penetrates into God that was born in the soul. And this means no other than that the depth of God, breaking through the soul, comes to reveal itself from the innermost recess of the soul. By this, however, the soul returns more and more deeply to itself and becomes more and more truly itself.

Eckhart thought of this as the soul's 'breaking through' God. At the ultimate consummation of this break-through, the soul reaches absolute nothingness which is the essence of God. It reaches the place where there is not a single thing, what Eckhart calls the 'desert' of Godhead.

While this is the place where the soul is completely deprived of its selfness, it is, nevertheless, the final ground of the soul, its bottomless ground, so to speak; only when the soul returns here can it truly be itself. At the same time, it is the place where God is in Himself: it is the ground of God.

"As God breaks through me, so I, in turn, break through Him. God leads my spirit into the desert and into His self-identity, where He is a pure One, springing up within Himself."¹

Here one can no longer speak even of unification or union. Eckhart stressed that this does not mean to be unified with God (*Deo unitum esse*), but to be One with God (*unum esse cum Deo*). (If I may, it is the self-identity of the soul which is self-identical with the self-identity of God.) This is for the soul absolute death,

¹ *Also, als er mich durchbricht, also durchbriche ich in wider. Got leitet disen geist in die wüestunge und in die eimekeit sin selbes, dâ er ein lüter ein und in sich selber quellende ist.* (Deutsche Mystiker, ed. Franz Pfeiffer, vol. II. p. 232. 1857)

a desert; at the same time, it is absolute life, life 'springing up within itself.'² That fountainhead is the fountainhead simultaneously of the eternal life of God and of the eternal life of the soul. There God and the soul are the living "pure One." Eckhart expressed this in these well-known words:

"God's ground is my soul's ground; my soul's ground is God's ground." "Here I live from my own genuine nature (*Eigenschaft*), just as God lives from His."

"The eye with which I see God is the eye with which God sees me."

Eckhart's thought is unique in several respects. First, the "essence" of God is thought to be found only where the personal "God" which stands in confrontation to created beings is transcended. Second, the "essence" of God or "Godhead" is discovered as absolute nothingness, which presents itself to us moreover as the place of our absolute death-*in*-life. Third, in the "Godhead" alone

² Life and death are contradictorily opposite in their natures. Seen basically upon the ground where each of them presents itself genuinely in its own nature, they stand in absolute distinction, as "eternal" or "absolute" life and death. To that extent the matter is logically clear and easy to understand conceptually. But then, at the same time with that absolute distinction, there appears the absolute inseparability of life and death. It becomes manifest that life and death, though contradictorily opposite in their natures and conceptually distinguishable as such, are not two separate things, but rather make one inseparable entity, where there is overall distinction but no separation at all. The self-identity of this oneness cannot be self-identity in the objective sense, as here it has not to do with the oneness of something objective, of some "thing" or some "being," for nothing can be constituted out of factors contradicting each other. If any were so constituted, they would be meaningless, mere chimeras or fantasies without reality. The oneness in question here is absolutely non-objective and absolutely non-objectifiable. Were it taken into any field of objectification, it would immediately cease being absolute oneness, and would become an object of conceptual thinking, thus falling into the duality of subject and object. The *essential* inseparability of what are essentially or in their natures contradictory, such as life and death—their "absolute" oneness—cannot be understood apart from its non-objective character. Its understanding is only possible existentially, through immediate experience in our existence, and above all through that experience in the domain of religion. In order to express the oneness of the above-mentioned kind, the terms "life-*in*-death," "affirmation-*in*-negation," etc., are here used.

is it possible for man to be truly himself, and only in the openness of absolute nothingness is the consummation of man's freedom and independence (man's subjectivity) to be found.

Of course, although we say subjectivity, this is not the subjectivity of the ego. On the contrary, it is the subjectivity which arises from the absolute death of ego (what Eckhart calls *Abgeschiedenheit*); the subjectivity which arises from pure Oneness with God, "pure" in this case indicating the sheerly non-objective character of the Oneness here spoken of. For Eckhart, even the so-called *unio mystica*, which in the tradition of mysticism had been regarded as the final stage of perfection in mystical experience and which had been assumed to be the unification with God (*Deo unitum esse*), still presupposes God's Being as the object to be united with. There still lies hidden in the background the duality of subject and object. The perfect achievement in mystical union is not yet wholly free from the eggshell it has broken through. To attain it does not yet mean to return to and become aware of the true self. Rather, it means to lose oneself in God, in the absolute One. It is from the thoroughgoing pursuit of the subjectivity that the very distinction of God and Godhead is made requisite.

Only when "God" is transcended in reaching the absolute nothingness in Godhead is the ground of subjectivity found. *This* is the place of the "uncreated *I am*." Eckhart says that the self has been standing there eternally from even before the creation of the world and that the self is standing in the Godhead even before God speaks his Word. He further considers that it is in the soul's ground that God makes Himself manifest most essentially and that it is there that the soul bears witness to God in the actual existence of the soul itself.

However, even though all this is said, the absolute nothingness and the "uncreated *I am*" in that absolute nothingness are not thought of by Eckhart as some kind of self-intoxication in some "imagined" place far removed or isolated from reality. On the contrary, Eckhart strongly warns against such tendencies. He highly praises the daily life of practical activity. Even though absolute nothingness is spoken of, it is to be lived in the midst of practical life, as that which is always open directly within this life. Again, even though speaking of an uncreated *I am* or of the source of eternal life, it is not to be sought in some place apart from the "created" self and temporal life, as if it were something other than *oneself*.

In *I am*, uncreatedness and createdness are subjectively one; in life, eternity

and temporality are a living one. Further, this is not the contemplation of God; it is beyond all intellectual understanding, including even the intuitive intellection in the contemplation of God. As was said above, the very distinction between God and Godhead is connected with the opening up of this way of *I am*.

Eckhart says, "I flee from God for the sake of God." "I beg of God that He may cause me to be rid of God." This is probably because "to flee from God for the sake of God" means that it is through man's being truly himself in the nothingness of Godhead that man's present here-now existence attests "essentially" to God.

Eckhart says, further, "In the breaking-through, when I stand emptied of my own will, the will of God, all the works of God, and of God Himself, there I am beyond all creatures and neither God nor creature but am what I was and what I should remain now and forever more."

With Eckhart, the confrontation between man's subjectivity (man's freedom and independence) and God, which confrontation is the basic concern of present day existentialism, appears in an extremely sharp form. His thought is not, however, either the atheism of Nietzsche or the theism of Kierkegaard. In his awareness of the "nothingness" of Godhead at the base of the personal "God", he is standing and developing his thought at the "other shore," beyond both theism and atheism, at the place where, conversely, the independence of the "soul" is grounded in essential oneness with God's essence. It will thus be worth while to turn our attention now to the difference between this position and the position of modern atheistic existentialism.

As mentioned before, Christianity speaks of *creatio ex nihilo*, beyond which *nibilum*—the ground of *ens creatum*—is located the abode of God. In atheistic existentialism, the existence of such a transcendent God is negated and *nibilum* takes His place. Moreover, that *nibilum* comes to be realized in the ground of man's subjectivity as the place of the "ecstatic" transcendence of his own existence, the place of his self-awareness. Thus the *nibilum* of *creatio ex nihilo* extends right to the abode of God and there becomes abyssal. *Nibilum* appears in atheistic existentialism as an abyss within man's subjectivity.

But in the case of Eckhart, when the "nothingness" of Godhead in the very ground of God is seen, this "nothingness" must be said to be even more thoroughgoing than the *nibilum* which contemporary existentialism sees in

God's stead. It may further be said that with Eckhart, man's subjective self-awareness also appears in a more thoroughgoing realization. This can be seen in Eckhart's view that subjective self-awareness arises as absolute affirmation coming into being only through absolute negation. The subjectivity of the uncreated *I am* appears only through the complete negation (*Abgeschiedenheit* or detachment) of the subjectivity of selfness. But the subjectivity of the uncreated *I am* is not something different or apart from the *I am* of a "creature" living in the actual world. At all times, *I am* is only possible as one *I am*; and it is just in *I am* at its ultimate oneness that absolute affirmation can be found. While in Eckhart, man's true self-awareness is what establishes itself only as absolute "negation-*sive*-affirmation", absolute "death-*sive*-life," it figures in the context of contemporary existentialism without passing through an absolute negation. Here, too, the *nihilum* appears at the ground of man's existential being, making it the place of ecstatic self-awareness. But the self-transcending character of existential being alone is not yet the absolute negation of being as being, that is, the absolute nothingness.

Thus Sartre, for example, while taking existence as an ecstatic "project" which establishes itself on nothingness, can still view that existence as consciousness. For him, nothingness is not the place where the ego of self-consciousness is negated, the place of the negation of ego itself. Insofar as Sartre speaks of the existence of the self as an existence which is chosen and posited by the self on the ground of nothingness, in that subjectivity freely positing itself we see the self-affirmation of the subject appear. But this is not yet a self-affirmation which has come through, broken through, the bottom of nothingness.

Nietzsche, on the other hand, already from the time of his *The Birth of Tragedy*, stood on a point which completely transcends the standpoint of the ego. In the latter period of his thought the standpoint of absolute "negation-*sive*-affirmation" is fairly clear. But with Nietzsche absolute affirmation—what he calls *Ja-sagen* (Yea-saying)—is established upon something like "life" or "the will to power." In that case it is not sufficiently clear just to what extent the return to that basis includes the meaning of the subjective awakening in which the self truly becomes itself.

At any rate, Nietzsche does not seem to attain Eckhart's position of standing on the absolute nothingness that is directly beneath actual life. This may be taken to mirror the difference between the nothingness of the "God is dead"

nihilism and the absolute nothingness transcending even "God" as well as the difference between life which gushes out of the breaking of the nothingness of nihilism and life as absolute 'death-*in*-life.'

If the nothingness of *creatio ex nihilo*, as a negative standing against the relative existence of created being, may be called relative nothingness, and if the nothingness of Godhead in Eckhart, as the place where all beings—including even subject-beings—stand in reality, means absolute nothingness, then it may be said that the nothingness of Nietzsche's nihilism is to be called a relative "absolute nothingness."

It is hoped that even the simple comparison and contrast given above provides a glimpse into the significance of Eckhart's thought. Of course, this thought is markedly different from the faith of orthodox Christianity. It was not without reason that in his time Eckhart's thought was regarded as heresy in spite of its deep influence. I think, however, that today when man's subjectivity and the confrontation between that subjectivity and God have become great problems, Eckhart's thought is worthy of a new reconsideration.

To make this a little clearer, let us now compare Eckhart's thought with the thought of present-day christian theology.

For example, according to Emil Brunner in his *Wahrheit als Begegnung* (*Truth as Encounter*), God is always treated in the Bible as God-toward-man (*Gott-zum-Menschen-bin*) and man always as man-from-God (*Menschen-von-Gott-her*). For Brunner there is contained in the Bible absolutely no doctrine of God in Himself or of man in himself. The relationship between God and man is completely personal. In this personal relationship man is a free, self-sustaining being, "a real standing-against" (*ein reales Gegenüber*), confronting God.

Brunner declares (page 38) that "God creates a real standing-against. . . . God wills an actual standing-against. He creates this such that this is not God Himself. But God wills that this is so. . . . The world—above all, man—is a real standing-against-God. God Himself so wills it; God Himself has so arranged it. Thereby He will stay in all eternity. He Himself gives to His creature a being against Himself, a being which is indeed not independent, but which is self-sustaining in His dependence. He furnishes the creature with the ability to be that which stands against Him—its own self standing against Him"

Such a view expresses in general the accepted notion of Christianity. But

I think that therein still remains a problem. When it is said that God wills the existence of free, self-sustaining creatures as that which really stands against God himself, where can the setting up of this free existence occur?

Brunner also says that God inlays into nothingness man's *imago Dei* or that God "calls" man out of nothingness into being. And just because of this, man is thought to be absolutely dependent on God. When, however, *creatio ex nihilo* is spoken of, is that *nihilum* the place where the free, self-sustaining existence is set up? If so, then since that existence is one which is made at every instant to return to *nihilum* at God's will, even though one speaks of its freedom or self-sustainment, these are at root *nihilum*.

As mentioned before, in contemporary existentialism *nihilum* is subjectified as the place of the self-transcendence of existence. Accordingly, *nihilum* comes to belong to the side of the subject itself. The freedom or independence of the subject is thought to belong to an existence which steps over itself into such a *nihilum*.

In contemporary theology, however, *nihilum* belongs to the side of Divine will. Hence, creaturely existence is seen simply as existence, without any self-transcendence into *nihilum*. Therefore, though one speaks of the freedom or self-sustainment of that existence, these are not rooted within the subject itself. They come, after all, to be no more than an apparant or seeming freedom and self-sustainment.

To the extent *nihilum* which depends on God's will is their base, freedom and self-sustainment are not real. Consequently it cannot truly be said that man is a "real" standing-against, confronting God, that he is that which is really "not God Himself," and "that which *is itself*, opposite God." I think that here the problems of man's subjectivization and confrontation with God have not, after all, been thought out thoroughly.

When there is posited something which is not God, something which is itself by standing against God, then the place where this is posited, *i.e.*, the ground of its existence, must be a place which is rather to be characterized as the place within God where God is not God Himself. In other words, it must be a place which is to be characterized not as the *nihilum* of *creatio ex nihilo* but, as was seen before in Eckhart, as the Godhead as absolute nothingness. Godhead is the place within God where God is not God Himself.

When it is said that God wills an free existence which stands against God, the

place where that will unfolds itself must be thought of as this absolute nothingness. Only in this way does it become possible for the first time to think that creatures which are free beings, which are not God, which are themselves by standing against God, are nevertheless posited within God.

I have further said that Godhead is where God is not God within God Himself. This may seem to contradict what I said before about Godhead being that place where God is in Himself. But in fact these two statements say the same thing. God is God in and by Himself in the absolute nothingness in which God is not God Himself. This is no other than to think of *ekstasis* as applying to the existence of God also.

Just as man's existence can be thought of as subject-existence only when it is thought of as ecstatic, so it is only possible to consider the existence of God as subject-existence and, moreover, as absolute subject-existence in absolute nothingness, when it is thought of as ecstatic.

If we thus take it in a strictly ontological sense that the existence in the case of God as well as of man is subject-existence and that this is possible only in *ekstasis*, then it is probably natural to conclude also that, as with Eckhart, the place where the consummation of man's subjectivity reaches finality lies in the subjective "Oneness" with God's subjectivity. This is because the subjective coming together of subject and subject can no longer be called "union."

In short, the *nihilum* of *creatio ex nihilo* is also to be characterized as simply relative nothingness. The existence which is established on this *nihilum* can never be truly self-existence. Absolute nothingness can be the sole ground upon which to posit truly free existence. This, I think, must be the kind of nothingness Eckhart meant when he said, "God's ground is my ground; my ground is God's ground."

As I have just said, subjective existence is established in *ekstasis*; that is, it is established in the mode of being in which the self has within itself the place where it has stepped beyond itself. If we proceed a step further, however, such a standpoint—*ekstasis* in this sense—proves to be still insufficient. There remains the more inclusive, more thorough position referred to before, that of absolute negation-*vis*-affirmation. *Ekstasis* consists in the direction from self to the "ground" of self, from God to the ground of God; that is, from being to nothingness. Negation-*vis*-affirmation consists in the direction from nothing-

ness to being. The difference in the direction indicates a reversal in standpoint. (Heidegger's present thinking of *ekstasis* from the direction of the "ground", in direct contrast to the direction he thought formerly, also is not without reason). Up to now the matter has been considered chiefly from the direction of *ekstasis*; and so, too, with the problem of personality and impersonality. But if these issues are to be delved into more deeply, the reverse position just referred to is necessary.

V

There is no doubt that the idea of man as a personal being is the highest idea of man which has thus far appeared. The same may be said as regards the idea of God as personal being. Since subjectivity with its self-consciousness came to the fore in modern times, the idea of man as a personal being became practically self-evident. But is the way of thinking about "person" which has been generally prevalent up to now really the only possible way to think about "person"?

In the way of thinking up to now, "person" has been viewed from the standpoint of person itself. It has been a person-centered idea of person. As has already been pointed out, in an ontologically more basic sense, even the self was viewed in the modern period from the self-centered perspective of the self, and was grasped, in Descartes for example, from the viewpoint of *ego cogito*. It is the same with person. Since ego or person involves by its very nature its own inward self-reflection, and can exist as ego or person only in that way, it is only natural this way of self-comprehension from within should come about. So long as the necessity for a more fundamental reflection does not arise, people automatically entertain such a mode of comprehending ego or person.

Person-centered self-interpretation of personal being, however, is never so self-evident. It can even be said that such a mode of the person's grasping of itself is already a bias, rooted in the depth of man's self-consciousness. More basically, modern man's conception of his ego, his ego-centered interpretation of his ego, is also a bias, and similarly is never so self-evident as the ego assumes it to be. What then does this bias mean? It means that the self-immanence, in the perspective of which man catches his ego or his own personality, necessarily signifies a sort of confinement, in which his self-being is caught; a confinement where lingers inevitably the mode of man's being captured in and by himself,

or even of his self-captivation, so-called narcissism.

Person is rather an appearance or phenomenon that appears from that which cannot be itself called "personal" and, moreover, contains in its nature no form of confinement. Although I have said phenomenon, it does not mean that which stands in contrast to the thing-in-itself, as in Kant. Here it would be a mistake to think that there is some thing-in-itself existing apart from the phenomenon, or that this thing-in-itself would make an appearance in some form different from its own, like an actor who puts on a mask. The interpretation of the person as a phenomenon does not mean that "person" is an interim guise similar to a mask which one can arbitrarily wear for a while and then put aside. To think of person in such a way is to lose sight of the subjectivity which makes the core of being personal, and which involves the subject always determining itself.

It is said that the old concept of *persona* originally implied such a mask. When I say that person is a phenomenon, however, I do not mean that there is some different "thing"—like an actor behind a mask—behind personal being. Person is an appearance with nothing behind it which might make an appearance. Behind person there is nothing at all; that is, behind it lies absolute nothingness.

While this absolute nothingness is wholly other to the person and means the absolute negation of the person, it is not *something* different from the person. Absolute nothingness is that which, becoming one with that "being" called person, brings into being that person. Accordingly, the previously used expressions, "there is absolute nothingness," and "it is behind," are, in fact, inaccurate. Nothingness is not a thing which *is* nothingness. Also, to say "behind the person" is already to set up a duality. Again, although I said that this absolute nothingness is something wholly other, this does not mean that there is something which is wholly other. Rather, there not being even any nothingness is true nothingness, absolute nothingness.

Generally, "nothingness" is made to stand in contrast of "being", functioning as negativity in that relationship, and is thus conceived as something which "is" nothingness. In Western thinking, this seems to be especially conspicuous. It is even so as regards what is thought of as nihility in the so-called nihilism. Insofar as one stops at such a way of thinking, nothingness is only a concept, a nothingness merely in thought. Absolute nothingness, in which even that which "is" nothingness is negated, is not nothingness merely thought but

nothingness which can only be lived. I said previously that behind the person there is nothing at all, and that absolute nothingness lies behind it, but this can never be simply a conceptual negation. It rather means the opening up of absolute nothingness as an existential turn-about, away from the mode of being of the person-centered person. If it is admitted that the person-centered grasp of person is, as I stated above, intertwined at the very source of the mode of personal being with the essence of the "person," then the negation of person-centeredness must mean an existential self-negation of man as "person." The shift of man as person from person-centered self-apprehension to self-opening as the realization of absolute nothingness (of which I shall speak next) ought to be an existential turn-about, a kind of conversion, within man himself.

Such an existential turning-about involves extricating oneself and coming out from the person-centered mode of being, finding oneself on the hither shore of that mode of personal being, close to the immediacy of the actual self. Then the "nothing" that was found behind the person comes to open up on the side of one's self, or, rather, as one's original self.

If person is regarded as the *ultimate* mode of man's being, "behind" which there is nothing, that is because the matter is seen from the side of the person. Seen from this side, nothingness remains an envisioned nothing, a nothing which is a matter of thought. When, however, "there is not anything" opens up on the hither shore of the personal self as the sheer self, then nothingness comes to be really realized in the self as the true self. Then it is experienced bodily in the self. Self-being in the sense spoken of above comes to be the realization of nothingness. "Bodily experiencing" is not envisioning. It is, if I may, as is expressed in the phrase "unseeing seeing," to see without seeing. The true nothingness is a living nothingness, and a living nothingness can only be self-attested.

In such an existential turn-about, however, the self does not cease to be a personal being. What is left behind is only the person-centered mode of seizing the person, that is, the mode of the person in which it is caught in itself. But in that very turn-about the personal mode of being becomes more real and more close to the self, and appears as it really and truly is. When the person-centered grasp of the person is broken and nothingness comes to be real, realizing itself actually in the self, then personal existence also comes to true realization in the self. This is what is meant by absolute "negation-*not*-affirmation." Here, what

is called one's personality is established in oneness with absolute nothingness. Without a living nothingness and an existential turn-about, this cannot be understood.

This is what I meant when I stated above that person is an appearance without anything behind it to take that appearance. Person comes into being in oneness with absolute nothingness, as that in which absolute nothingness presents itself. It comes into being as "formless form."

It can also be said that person in this sense is a mask, as in the old notion of *persona*, a "face" that an actor puts on, thereby indicating the role he is about to play on the stage. However, it is a mask worn by absolute nothingness. It may even be said to be a mask in the ordinary sense, a guise or semblance borrowed or assumed, temporary or provisional.

To say, however, that person is a mask does not mean that there is something "true" or "real" separate from it, that it is something artificially contrived for deception, or that person is a mere illusory appearance. Person is thoroughly real; it is the realest reality. It comes into being alone as man's real mode of being which does not contain the slightest deception or artificiality. But, at the same time, it is fundamentally temporary and provisional. This is because personal being is the highest being, which comes into being in oneness with absolute nothingness, which then presents itself. Man thus comes into being as absolute nothingness-*si*-being at the root of the personal way of being. In Buddhistic terms (in the Tendai school), it can probably be said that man comes into being as the "Middle" of "Temporary-provisory being" and the "Void."

Dostoevsky often speaks of "face". In his usage "face" seems to mean man's mystical aspect which lies hidden in the depths of his personality. Nietzsche also, in *Beyond Good and Evil* and elsewhere, frequently speaks of "mask". "Everything deep loves masks. . . All of deep spirit need a mask; even more, around everyone of deep spirit a mask constantly grows."³ This is a deep insight, pregnant with subtleties, and characteristic of Nietzsche. The face or mask they speak of has something in common with the meaning of mask in the afore-mentioned standpoint of absolute nothingness-*si*-being, being-*si*-nothingness; still, it is different.

Personality is, unconditionally, something living. Even though we regard

³ *Beyond Good and Evil*, Second Art., 40.

it as "spirit", it is as such—without thereby ceasing to be a living spirit—a mask of absolute nothingness. Were nothingness thought of apart from its mask, it would become an idea. Were we to deal with the mask apart from nothingness, personality would invariably be self-centered. The living activity of personality is, just as it is, a realization of absolute nothingness. And spirit is, just as it is, in oneness with the supra- and non-spiritual, a manifestation of the latter. In such a way alone does personality truly come to establish itself as *reality*.

This is no longer the subjectivity usually attributed to personality. Rather, it is the very negation of that subjectivity ascribed to personality, or, more fundamentally, of that subjectivity a person ascribes to itself in its person-centered interpretation. This negation signifies a turn-about that occurs in that self-confined person, an egress of a life power that is entirely new. It is the very key to the door of the cell, closed since the beginning ("beginningless beginning") of personal being, lying hidden in the innermost depth of our personality. It is through this negation that the person is broken through from within and personal being comes to reveal itself as subjectivity in its authentic and original character, as the truly absolute Selfhood.

For instance, Gasan Jōseki (1275–1365), a Sōtō Zen master of Japan five generations after Dōgen, wrote this inscription over a portrait of himself:

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

The self as human existence, the self as a real being in the actual world, the whole self ranging from personality to the bodily flesh, is here called a "shadowy man." The conscious mind of this man, that is, the various activities of personality and consciousness, from thinking, feeling, and will, to sensations and actions, are all equally shadows.

"Shadow" here is used in the same sense as the aforementioned "temporary-provisional," meaning what is entirely unreal. All those activities are unreal, because they present themselves as they are only in oneness with absolute nothingness. But, precisely in that they are at the same time ultimately real, because they are no other than the realization of absolute Selfhood. The ab-

solite Selfhood opens up as a non-objectifiable nothingness through the turn-about which occurs from within the personal self. With that turn-about every bodily, mental, and spiritual activity that belongs to a person appears as a shadowy act of a phantom player on the now opened stage of nothingness.

This stage is opened on the hither shore of the personal self. What kind of place does this suggest? It is the outermost place the personal self commonly sees outside itself and calls the external world; it is the outermost world, actually present here and now, ever changing. At the same time it is the place of nothingness burst out from within the innermost depth of the personal self; it is the ultimate realization and expression of the non-objectifiable—and in that sense fundamentally subjective—nothingness. It is the place beyond the innermost depth, where it transcends itself and turns into the outermost. It is the place of de-internalization, so to speak. Here, the “outer” is more “inner” than the inmost. The so-called “outer world” emerges here as a self-realization of the non-objectifiable nothingness, or rather it comes to appear, as it is, in oneness with the nothingness.

At any rate, beyond the outer and the inner the place of man’s true existence opens up, man being there a shadowy man in oneness with the absolute Selfhood. There is here an absolute self-identity. While thinking, feeling and action are, in every actual occasion, entirely temporary and provisional, an appearance with nothing behind it, or a shadowy consciousness of a shadowy man, yet they are, at each occasion, one with the selfhood which is aware of itself as the absolute, non-objectifiable nothingness beyond all time. This oneness is a self-identity. To one’s self which stands in the absolute Selfhood, those activities of consciousness are “most familiar.”

Still, the place where the self here stands is not the standpoint of mere personality or of mere consciousness. It is the place of nothingness. It is not the standpoint of personality dwelling merely in itself, nor that of consciousness merely self-immanent. Insofar as the place of nothingness is totally one with personality or consciousness, the whole of this oneness is present inside personality or consciousness. But, conversely, insofar as personality and consciousness can be what they are only in oneness with absolute nothingness, the same whole oneness stands ecstatically outside personality and consciousness. And that absolute “inside” and this absolute “outside” are also one and the same. What renders this possible is that the ground of personal being is no other than absolute

nothingness, i.e. absolute nothingness-*since*-being, absolute being-*since*-nothingness. Because personal being and its conscious mind are wholly one with absolute Selfhood, they are utterly real in their true suchness. Because they are wholly different from it, they are utterly provisional and shadow-like. For this reason, the utterly unreal conscious mind of the shadowy man, although it arises at every instant, being thus entirely temporary and entirely in the world of Time, yet at the same time, it is, just as it is in its temporality, ecstatically outside Time at each instant. It is entirely "eternal" in its being entirely "temporal." Arising and vanishing now, at this very instant, the conscious mind of the shadow-figure is, as such, at each time and place at all occasions, "from long ago mysteriously wondrous."

The self in this absolute Selfhood is not what is ordinarily termed the personal or conscious self, the so-called ego. Still, at the same time, it *is* that very personal or conscious self. It is not another man; it is not another, and it is not man. For, while the self and the other as "men" are entirely different from each other, "man" (that is, conscious personality) is, in spite of all his living activities and modes of being, fundamentally an appearance which is presenting itself as "man" in oneness with what is not "man", i.e. with absolute nothingness. Looked at from that aspect, every "man" is, just as he is in his real suchness, not "man", i.e. he is impersonal. In other words, he is "man" as an appearance with "nothing" behind it, of which he is an appearance.

As we ordinarily exist in the form of personally conscious self-being, we take the self and the other—as "men"—for two absolute existences. But viewed on the plane which is more immediate than that of personal self-being, the self and the other, though absolutely two as "persons", yet at the same time are, in their very duality, absolutely non-dual in their impersonality. It is only from such a standpoint that we can say the conscious mind of the shadowy person is, just as it is, "neither I nor other." This is the standpoint of absolute selfhood, of the true self. This true self is personal-*since*-impersonal, impersonal-*since*-personal.

Here is Gasan Jōseki's death poem:

It is ninety-one years
 Since my skin and bones were composed;
 This midnight, as always,

I lay myself down in the Yellow Springs.⁴

The absolute Selfhood which is described in terms of "neither I nor other" is the self of man into which "skin and flesh were composed;" it is man's actual existence itself, and his personal and conscious activities themselves. But at the same time, it is, in the midst of these activities, always ecstatic and always remaining intact, always "laying itself down in the Yellow Springs." On all occasions of man's life, it is absolutely death-*sive*-life, life-*sive*-death; absolutely being-*sive*-nothingness, nothingness-*sive*-being. Eckhart also said that man's soul finds in the desert of Godhead, in the Nothingness beyond even God's Being, which is the place of the soul's absolute death, the spring of eternal Life, the soul's own eternal life, incessantly gushing up of Itself.⁵

From the standpoint of absolute Selfhood, however, not only life, but death also belongs to the self. Life and death are both aspects of the absolute Selfhood; each aspect being an actual occurrence of that Selfhood. Of course, life and death always arise entirely in Time. Or rather, they are essentially temporal through and through. But at the same time, life and death are, at every instant, just as they are in their temporality, ecstatic in their is-ness; they *are* ecstatically. Basically, viewed from the absolute Selfhood, there is no change at the time of death. That is why in the previously quoted death verse, we find the words, "This midnight, as always."

This reminds us of Nietzsche's "midnight and noon have become one." In fact, that the absolute life-*sive*-death, death-*sive*-life presents itself at every instant of man's life can be said to signify that, although midnight, yet it falls at noon, at a time of shining sunlight. When Baso, the Chinese Zen master of the eighth century, lay seriously ill in bed and was asked of his condition, he replied, "sun-faced Buddha, moon-faced Buddha." Groaning with pain, breathing one's last, are, as they are, "sun-faced Buddha, moon-faced Buddha."

It is entirely the same with the remark of Vimalakirti in the *Vimalakirti Sutra*, that he suffers illness because all sentient beings suffer illness. His illness is indeed an actual illness. Although it is true that his is an illness of

⁴ Yellow Springs—the Underworld; Hades.

⁵ As, according to Eckhart, the ground of God's Being (*Gottesgrund*) is the ground of my being (*Seelengrund*) and vice versa, the self of this "of Itself" is at once the soul's true Selfhood.

Great Compassion in response to that of all living beings, there must not be in that interpretation even the slightest implication of pretended illness. Also, it must never be understood in a metaphorical or symbolic sense. So long as the illness all living beings suffer is real, the suffering which Vimalakirti, standing on the plane of absolute non-duality of self and other, undergoes should be no less real. He suffers from an illness which is thoroughly real.

Nevertheless, his suffering is said to be "empty." This does not mean that somewhere "behind" or "at the ground of" the real illness and apart from it there is health. This means that the absolutely real illness is, just as it is, "emptiness." There is a saying that water does not make water wet and fire does not burn fire. This suggests the central meaning of emptiness. So long as water cannot make something wet, water is not water; and so long as fire cannot burn something, fire is not fire. But to say that water does not make water wet does not mean that water is in fact not water; on the contrary, it means that water is really water, that is, water in its suchness. The suchness and the real form of water is "emptiness." Only in formlessness does a thing truly make its appearance. This is precisely what Vimalakirti means when he says, "My illness has no form and is invisible."

I said previously that the real form of all things inclusive of human beings is established in the so-called double exposure of life and death; all living beings can as well be seen under the aspect of death without thereby being apart from that of life. Such a real feature of things must, fundamentally speaking, be comprehended from the base of the absolute being-*śūnyā*-nothingness, nothingness-*śūnyā*-being, or of the absolute non-duality of life and death I have just described. Only on this base would it be possible to pursue the problem of science and religion.

Translated by Rev. Jan Van Bragt and Yamamoto Seisaku

Errata. Please note the following corrections in the first part of this article (Vol. III No. 1).

Page 7, last line: *For* reality is what has heretofore been termed "life" by the religions.
read reality is the so-called "materiality," and the sectional cut which reveals the life aspect is what has heretofore been termed "life" by religions.

Page 11, line 28: *For* Dionysius *read* Dionysos

Page 15, footnote line 5: *For* Dharma *read* Dharma-body.